**Renewed Vision for 2020 Series**

**“Renewed Vision for Devotion to Christ”**

**Introduction**

As I mentioned last Sunday 2020 marks thirty years of ministry here at Christ Covenant. As I prayerfully considered a preaching series for the New Year my thoughts continued to return to a renewed vision for the elements of worship and ministry the Lord has ordained for His Church. These elements of worship and ministry aren’t flashy or trendy but they are the things the Lord has appointed for His church to walk in. The fact is if you do what God has ordained you will be blessed.

This morning we will consider “A Renewed Vision for Devotion to Christ.” The book of Acts records that the first Christian converts, “*were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”* (Acts 2.42) Biblical teaching, fellowship, the Lord’s Supper, and prayer have always been consider means of grace or means of growth for the Christian life. But I want to draw your attention to the fact that the first element listed about these first Christians is that they were “*continually devoting themselves.”* Yes, these early Christians grew in their understanding of God’s Word, enjoy fellowship with one another, partook of the Lord’s Supper, and humbled themselves in prayer. But the overarching characteristic was that they were continually devoted to Christ.

To be continually devoted means more that just being devoted to a list of religious obligations and rituals out of a sense of duty. Those who are continually devoted to Christ are motivated out of a sense of love and devotion to Christ. Christ is their highest affection and therefore they are continually devoted to Him. To be continually devoted means that you are not a “wishy washy,” or an “on again – off again” Christian. You are faithful follower of Christ continually devoted to His lordship in your life. Becoming a Christian is more than just “accepting Jesus into your heart” it is surrendering your life to Jesus Christ as Lord. Being a Christian is more that a religious classification that you check on a census report. A Christian is one whose life is characterized by continually surrendering to Lordship of Christ.

I believe we should begin this series of sermons by first considering our devotion to Christ. Having a clear vision for the supremacy of Christ in our lives is the only way these other elements of worship and ministry will have full effect. To learn God’s Word without a clear vision for devotion to Christ will only lead to becoming puff up with knowledge. To gather for worship without a clear vision for devotion to Christ will only lead to participating in a religious observance. To be involved in helping the needy without a clear vision of devotion to Christ will only lead to a reliance on good works. Having a clear vision for devotion to Christ is the only way we will hit the target of glorifying God.

On this first Lord’s Day of 2020 we will return to a familiar verse for many. I believe Romans 12.1-2 gives us the spiritual insight needed to gain a renewed vision for devotion to Christ.

*Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.* (Rom.12.1-2)

I believe this passage tells us that to be continually devoted to Christ we must have a renewed vision for the mercies of God, a renewed vision for spiritual worship, and a renewed vision for continual renewal.

**We Must have a Renewed Vision for the Mercies of God**

*I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God*

Paul presents God’s mercies as his strongest argument for giving ourselves completely to God. “*I urge you,”* Paul said, *“by the mercies of God . . . to present your bodies”* (Rom. 12:1). When we recognize what God has done for us through His Son Jesus Christ, the only response is to give ourselves completely to Him. Jesus told us that He did not *come to call the righteous but the sinner to repentance*. (Lk.5.31) Jesus said these words to the Pharisees who considered themselves to be righteous because of their observance to religious rules and regulations. Jesus did not come for people who claim self-righteousness but He came for those who recognize that they are sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope except for God’s sovereign mercy through Christ. (BOCO 57.5.1) Jesus told the parable about *two men who went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector,*

*standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other.* (Lk.18.10-14) This tax collector had a clear vision of God’s mercies and willingly surrendered his life to God.

If we are going to have a renewed vision for devotion to Christ we must continually remind ourselves who we are and who God is. Who are we? Sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope except for God’s sovereign mercy through Christ. Who is God? God is merciful, gracious and kind. *Not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance*. (2Pt.3.9) In the middle of the book of Lamentations, the book of sorrow and shame, the Prophet writes, “*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.”* (Lam.3.22-23)The Prophet had a clear vision of God’s mercies even in the midst of extreme sorrow and shame.

God’s mercies should motivate us to give our whole lives to Him. If reflecting on God’s mercies doesn’t move us, then we are in trouble? Where would we be without God’s love and forgiveness? Where would we be without God’s presence in our lives? What kind of hope would we have without Him? Let’s think for a moment about our situations. Consider our family, our friends, our job, and our church. Do we deserve those because we deserved them? If we are honest with ourselves about who we are and who God is then we will begin to realize that we have what we have because God’s mercies have been poured out on our lives.

If our desire is to be continually devoted to Christ we must have a renewed vision for the mercies of God and also a renewed vision for spiritual worship.

**We Must have a Renewed Vision for Spiritual Worship**

*to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*

Paul writes, *present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God.* The expression “*living sacrifice*” is set against the backdrop of the Old Testament sacrifices. While the Old Testament worshiper offered an animal, the New Testament worshiper offers himself or herself. The Old Testament sacrifices were bloody pointing to Jesus Christ who as God’s perfect sacrifice shed His blood for us. However, the New Testament believer’s sacrifice is bloodless pointing to Christ fulfillment for us. Out of celebration for what God has done for us through His Son, Jesus Christ, we give ourselves to Him. When Paul uses the term “*body*” he is implying the whole person. We offer our minds, our heart, our eyes, our ears, our hands, our feet, our emotions, our reasoning. We recognized that we have been brought with a price so we glorify God in our body. (ICor.6.20) We no longer present the members of our body as instruments of unrighteousness; but we present ourselves to God and the members of our body as instruments of righteousness. (Rom.6.13)

Jesus explained how this works. Jesus said, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’;**but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”* Jesus is saying to glorify God with your eyes by not lustfully looking at women. But Jesus continues, *“If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you* *to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.* *If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.”* (Mt.5.27-30) Jesus is not suggesting that we literally cut off body parts but He is suggesting that we allow the Holy Spirit to do radical surgery on our hearts as we offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God.This type of radical surgery is spiritual worship to God. And unlike physical amputations that are done once spiritual amputations need to been done on a regular basis. Those who belong to Christ Jesus crucify the flesh with its passions and desires. (Gal.5.24) This is our spiritual worship.

If our desire is to be continually devoted to Christ we must be willing to surrender ourselves as a living sacrifice as an act of spiritual worship. We must be willing to lay our life down. Like Abraham’s son, Isaac, willing yielded himself to God’s will by laying down on the altar, we must be willing to surrender ourselves to God’s will as an act of spiritual worship. (Gen.22.1-18)

It important not to romanticize the presenting our *bodies a living and holy sacrifice* because presenting a sacrifice can get messy. Like the Old Testament priest as a skilled butcher at the altar of God would get messy in preparing the sacrifice to God so presenting our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice can get messy. For the New Testament believer it is not an Old Testament priest but the Holy Spirit as a skilled surgeon uses the scalpel of God’s Word to cut through the thoughts and intentions of our heart to open our eyes to the truth about ourselves and the truth about God. (Heb.4.12-13) It is also important to understand that presenting our *bodies a living and holy sacrifice* is supposed to be costly. It’s called a “sacrifice” because it supposed to cost us something. The Apostle Paul willing poured out his life as a drink offering in service to Christ. (Phil.2.7; 2Tim.4.6) What the Lord is asking is not a small thing but the Lord promises that whoever loses his life will save it. (Mk.8.35) When was the last time that your service to the Lord really cost you something? Brothers and sisters, we should join the great cloud of witnesses who throughout the ages willingly surrender themselves as a living sacrifice out of devotion to their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

If our desire is to be continually devoted to Christ we must have a renewed vision for the mercies of God, a renewed vision for spiritual worship, and a renewed vision for continual renewal.

**We Must have a Renewed Vision for Continual Renewal**

*be transformed by the renewing of your mind*

Paul calls us to *be transformed by the renewing of your mind.* As we live in this fallen world we are often tempted to conform to this world. But those surrendered to Jesus Christ seek the Holy Spirit to renew of minds to conformity to God’s will. The challenge is not to reject fads, new styles of clothing, or even certain types of music. The challenge is to be experience an ongoing spiritual transformation of the mind that is in concert with God’s will and Word. You can listen to classical music and wear three-piece suits and still be in conformity to this world.

Our Church Fathers coined the phrase “Reformed and always reforming.” The fuller statement is “The church is reformed and always [in need of] being reformed according to the Word of God.” The phrase identifies the fact that we are a church that identifies with the Reformed faith but more than that the phrase emphasizes our need to always be reforming to the Word of God. To embrace the doctrines of the Reformed faith without a passion to be constantly reforming to God’s Word will only end up in dead orthodoxy. We must continually seek to be reformed, renewed according to the Word of God.

The Church is an organism that is never stagnant or dormant but growing and advancing. Brothers and sisters were are the church and we are to always be growing in our faith and advancing the kingdom of God in our hearts and through our lives. To accomplish this we are always in need of the reforming work of the Holy Spirit. We must experience spiritual transformed by the renewing of our mind so that we may prove what the will of God is. We must seek the Holy Spirit for a vision for continual renewal in Christ. Never to be stagnant and always seeking the advancement of the kingdom of God in our hearts and through our lives as individual Christians and as a church.

**Closing Thoughts**

This morning, this first Sunday of a New Year – a New Decade and I want to challenge you to have a renewed vision for devotion to Christ. Continually devoting themselves to Christ was the overarching characteristic of the Early Church and it must be the overarching characteristic in our lives today. We must seek the Lord for a renewed vision for His mercies, for spiritual worship, and for the passion for continual renewal.

Have you ever done the hokey pokey? It’s that little song and dance that tells us to put our left arm or right leg or some other part of our body into the circle, shake it, and then “turn yourself about.” It’s an active and sometimes tiring little exercise that ends with the command, “Put your whole self in ....” And what I am challenging us to do on this first Sunday of 2020 is to put you whole self in to Christ. Not just a part of you like the right arm or left foot but your whole self as a living sacrifice to God for the glory of Christ.

**Transition to the Lord’s Table**