

MESSAGE FROM THE MASTER

This is Pastor Wayne Mueller. The following is the Message from the Master sermon broadcast February 24, 2008. The sermon theme is "Christ is Supreme and Sufficient in Redemption" based on Colossians 1:18-13. Part of series: "The Supremacy and Sufficiency of Christ."

The devil is a master at uncertainty. Uncertainty destroys faith. The last thing the devil wants is for anybody to be sure of anything, especially God.

The devil packages his invitations to uncertainty in many ways these days. One of those packages is the politically correct encouragement to inclusiveness and acceptance. Now, nobody should be more desirous of inclusiveness than the Christian. We are the ones who sit at ball games holding up signs of John 3:16, proclaiming that God's love includes the whole world. The Bible teaches that Jesus died for all, even for those who never come to faith in him. Scripture says that God includes everyone in his desire and efforts to draw people to faith. God wants everybody to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

But it is not that gospel-holy inclusiveness that the devil is promoting. Satan defines inclusiveness as toleration of evil and immorality. He wants to dull the consciences of believers by suggesting that one lifestyle is as good and acceptable as another. The devil is nothing but evil with a "d" on the front. But demonic acceptance of immoral activity destroys Christian certainty in two ways. It leads Christians to a false sense of guilty for not accepting people who are not like they are. It also leads moral people to weaken in their personal moral commitment. Hey, the devil argues, if you can tolerate other people's immorality, you may as well indulge a little immorality of your own.

Another brand of Satan's uncertainty policy is the idea that there is no such thing as truth. Think of how illogical that idea is. If there is no such thing as absolute truth, that categorical statement itself cannot be true. Pontius Pilate epitomizes such inane skeptical thinking in his rhetorical question to Jesus during his trial: "What is *truth*?!" But Jesus responded to Pilate that his very purpose for coming to earth was to bear witness to the truth. Jesus said he is the way, the truth, and the life.

Christians freely admit that in many areas of life it is foolish and even dangerous to claim you have a corner on the truth. This holds in areas of science, philosophy, politics, and social manners. But, when the devil takes the legitimate uncertainty we have in the areas of human knowledge and forcibly applies it to divine knowledge, he tears the heart out of Jesus, the Bible, and Christian truth.

We pity ourselves too much, however, if we believed that this is the first time in history the devil attacked our faith by insinuating uncertainty. Two thousand years ago, the Apostle Paul faced the same kind of uncertainty and skepticism among the believers in the city of Colossae. So, in the first chapter of his letter to the Colossians, he counterattacks the uncertainty with the rock solid confidence of Christ. Looking at verses 18-23 today, we will talk about the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ in our redemption.

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The best way to describe what was happening among the Colossians is to say they had given in to eclecticism. Eclecticism is a fancy word for picking and choosing what you believe from here, there, and everywhere. The Colossians were at one time grounded in their faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ. But when the latest religious fads came into town, they picked and chose from the new stuff what they liked and tried to merge it with what they had been taught about Jesus.

Paul had warned both the Corinthians and Galatians that a little yeast works its way through the whole loaf. And that's exactly what happened at Colossae. It might at first have seemed harmless to pick up a few new religious ideas and add them with what they had been taught from Scriptures about Jesus. But false teaching is like yeast, or leaven. It eventually makes its way through the whole batch and affects and infects everything. So, instead of simply adding things to what they knew about Jesus, the new things the Colossians picked and chose had the effect of ruining what they already knew about Jesus.

Paul addresses the problem with these words to the Colossians: “[Jesus] is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things... by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Colossians 1:17-20).

Paul's argument is that you can't have Jesus *and*. It has to be Jesus *or*. In other words, since Jesus is the Supreme Being in our salvation, he is also the exclusive Savior of mankind. When it comes to Jesus, you cannot have your cake and eat it too. The Colossians had been infiltrated by Gnosticism, a religious movement that claimed to be “in the know.” Very shrewdly, Gnostics did not ask people to give up their religious beliefs; they only asked to add greater knowledge to them. They introduced to Christianity a mishmash of eastern mysticism and strange ideas about middle lever deities who governed various aspects of life. Gnostics claimed to have the inside track

on spirituality, and suggested that the poor Christians were not being all they could be. In the next chapter Paul describes their conceit: “He does into great details about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puff him up with idle notions. He has lost contact with the Head [Jesus].”

There is such a thing as absolute truth, Paul is arguing, and that truth is Jesus. If you think you can have Jesus *and* other goofy ideas, you will lose Jesus. It is Jesus or. You can either trust Christ for your eternal salvation, or you can choose some other path, but you cannot have both.

This exclusiveness about the divine saving message is the constant theme of Scripture. Elijah called on the people of Israel at Mt. Carmel and said, “How long will you halt between two opinions. If the Lord is God, follow him. But if Baal, then follow him.” Jesus said it so clearly when he said, “He who is not with me is against me.” In another place Paul wrote, “Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved.”

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In the politically correct world today there is no room for the Christianity’s claim that Jesus is the only way to God. You’ve heard all the nonsensical arguments: “It doesn’t make any difference what you believe, as long as you believe something; All religions are the same, they just have different names for God; Let’s just put all this talk about doctrine aside and agree to disagree.”

Apart from what the Bible tells us, there is not even any logical honesty in such arguments. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “What agreement does light have with darkness?!” Some things are diametrically opposed and cannot both be true. Jesus stated the matter unequivocally when he told his disciples, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

People misunderstand the Christian faith when they quote only the first half of John 3:16. Yes, God says he loves the whole world. Yes, God’s love and ours are universal. But Jesus goes on to explain how God demonstrated his love and distributes it. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believe in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” God loves the world and wants all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. But the truth is that Jesus is the way to come to God.

How can the believer in Jesus get along in a world that demands inclusiveness and acceptance, even of perversion and immorality? How can believers respond when people accuse them being sure of something nobody should be sure of? How can we

demonstrate in a concrete way the universal grace of God to all without condoning or ignoring the false paths that people are picking and choosing for eternity?

The answer to that question is what Jesus described as the narrow path which, he said, few people choose. Unfortunately, some Christians veer off to the right side of this narrow path. They become uptight and defensive about Bible truth and refuse to have any contact with those who do not believe what they do. They become openly abusive and derisive of those who are caught in their sins, and self-righteously thank God that they are not like those others. Such Christians become parochial and reclusive. Although they may feel that this is the path to piety, they don't realize that they are not at all reflecting the love which God has for the whole world of sinners.

Just as unfortunately there are those like the Colossians and like many Christians today who veer off Jesus' path to the left side. They profess to believe in Jesus but are eclectic in adding whatever religious fad seems to be attractive at the time. They don't realize that a little leaven leavens the whole loaf. They may lead moral lives themselves, but tolerate and accept the most egregious forms of immorality and perversion. They are too timid and uncertain about their own faith to take a stand, and they would rather stand on the sidelines and watch rather than witness.

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The narrow path is the path of God. God is at the same time the most inclusive and exclusive being. God sincerely includes all in his grace and love. But God also excludes every path to his love outside of Jesus Christ. The narrow path of Christian life is to reflect at all times both God's inclusive and his exclusive nature. His universal love will lead us to love all people. Openness, grace, tenderness, and a sincere interest in others is a reflection of God himself. Paul described this path for the believer to the Corinthians: We must, he said, live in the world, but not be a part of it.

As the children of a loving God, we want to display love to all people, regardless of what they believe or how they do or don't live their lives. But we will do that without compromising the absolute truth about Jesus. We will love all people without sharing in or condoning their immorality of ungodly believes.

There is an old saying that you cannot pass along to others what you do not have a good hold on yourself. How well that applies to the absolute truth of Jesus Christ. To the extent that we dilute what we know about Jesus, we have that much less to share with

the world. St. Peter wrote, "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (1 Peter 2:12). Peter is only repeating what the Lord Jesus told him: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." That's the narrow path, widely and lovingly shared. Amen.

PRAYER

Dear Lord Jesus, you are the way the truth, and the life. Hold on to me through your Word so that I may live my life with confidence and a desire to share. Keep me on the narrow path, and by your sacrificial death forgive me when I stray. Move my heart so that my hands and mouth display the same kind of love for all that you demonstrated in your perfect life and your innocent suffering and death. Keep me strong by your Holy Spirit when the devil tries to shake my confidence and when the world undermines your truth. Give me a heart of mercy so that my life and my words may draw many others to you. In your name I ask this and pray as you taught me:

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and ever. Amen.**