

Christ and...

by Bernard Gabbott

Memory verse:

Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God,
I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and pleasing to God;
this is your spiritual worship.

² Do not be conformed to this age,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,
so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing,
and perfect will of God.

Romans 12:1-2

One of my favourite verses in the Bible is Romans 12:1-2. It introduces the 'so what?' of Romans 1-11 (which is the description of the 'mercies of God'). If this is the good news of Jesus, what does it look like in everyday life?

Behind this question lies this truth: in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God has enthroned the King of the universe (cf. Matt.28:16-20). In being saved by this man, Jesus' mob have changed postcode (Col.1:13-14), been granted new citizenship (Phil.3:20), been given a new manifesto for life (Matt.5:17-20), been made a new people (Eph.2:11-22), and have now had their lives 'hidden' above (Col.3:1-10).

In these three studies (which we will hand out each Sunday in the week before they are preached on), we will look at three areas where this impacts: Christ and crown, Christ and cash, Christ and conscience. We will look at what it means to be Christians, with Jesus as our King, in the areas of politics, money and ethics, respectively.

As studies of 'doctrine' (rather than a systematic working through a set text), we will jump around a bit in the Bible.

Christ and crown: Jesus and politics

This will be a tour of a number of passages... but not exhaustive!

1. Read Psalm 2
Who is God's King for the world?

What will he be like?

Read Matthew 3:13-17; 17:1-6; 28:16-20
Who is God's King for the world?

What is he like?

2. Read Matthew 22:15-22
What question is asked of God's King? Why?

What does Jesus ask for? Why?

What does Jesus say?

What do you think this means? (cf. Genesis 1:26-27)

3. Read Acts 4:13-22
How do Peter and John respond to the command to stop proclaiming the Gospel? What else do Peter and John say about political obedience?

4. Read Romans 13:1-7
What is the context for this? (cf. 12:1-2)

What does God command?

What does God install?

What does God reassure?

What does God expect?

5. Read 1 Timothy 2:1-7
What is striking about verse 1?

What does God command?

What is God's desire?

How do these two tie together?

6. Read 1 Peter 2:9-17
Who is Peter talking to?

What does he 'urge'?

What does he command? (look at vs.12)

And how do these three things converge in 'political' action?

What type of language does Peter use here? What is striking about it?

7. Looking back on everything we have covered, what can we conclude about:
- who is in charge of the world?
 - the 'temporary' arrangement for order in this world?
 - what Christians owe Jesus, and political authorities?

- the impact of the way Christians talk/behave in politics?
- the key way we can be politically active?
- the type of society we are to build/advocate for on earth?

Christ and cash: Jesus and money

1. Cast your mind back to the study/sermon on 'Christ and crown'. What is the command and goal of Romans 12:1-2?

What were the three building blocks for thinking through politics?

Those building blocks, I have found, are pretty useful for dealing with the topics of 'Christ and cash' and 'Christ and conscience'. So, store them in the back of your mind as we look at 'Christ and cash'...

2. Read Matthew 6:19-34.
What part of the Bible is this from? What is the purpose of this whole sermon?

Jesus starts this section with a 'don't' and a 'do', and an assertion—what are they? (vs.19-21)

Jesus then uses an illustration to make what point? (vs.22-23)

Jesus closes with a summary statement—what is it? (vs.24)

3. From this teaching about who God's mob serves, Jesus turns to a common area of struggle—what is it? (vs.25)

Jesus gives two illustrations—in vs.26-28—and he summarises them in verse 30. What are the illustrations, and what is the summary?

What is Jesus' conclusion, command and summary, in vs.31-34?

4. What does Jesus promise here?

Why is he able to make that promise?

What does this promise show about his concern?

How is such a 'seek-ing' and membership in such a kingdom made possible?

Looking at your answers, do you see how the three building blocks we remembered in question 1 are just as relevant for cash as they are for crown?

5. How, too, is this attitude towards possessions, wealth and worry an expression of Romans 12:1-2?

One thing we must do, then, is start thinking through what such an attitude might look like in the real world. So, given what we have seen, how might this affect our attitude and action towards:

- taxes?
- income?
- mortgages, and housing?
- the desire for 'things'?
- the way we use our cash and possessions?
- the way in which we balance our commitments to God's people, and our work/leisure/possessions?
- the things we worry about?
- the nature and character of God?

Christ and conscience: Jesus and ethics

1. Recap, again, the three building blocks that we have touched on in the last two studies...

Looking at Romans 12:1-2—remind yourself of the command God gives here, and how this intersects with the ‘age we live in’...

Ethics is, in simple terms, knowing and choosing ‘the good’. How are we to do that as God’s people? What, or who, defines ‘the good’ for us?

2. Read Colossians 3:1-10.
If ‘we have been raised with Christ’, then where must our thinking be, where must our desire be, where must our minds be?

What do you think this means?

3. If this is where our ‘minds/desires/thinking’ is, what practical implications does this have? (look from verse 5)
4. What is the positive practical result? (look from verse 8)
5. What is actually happening to God’s mob? (vs.9-10)
6. The end result is a completely new way of thinking—how is that described in verse 11?

7. Look back at those three building blocks—how are they expressed in this new way of thinking?

8. How might such a change in us affect our thinking about, and choosing 'the good' in these areas (and can you think of other Bible passages that might help?):
 - abortion?
 - sin?
 - medical issues?
 - welfare issues?
 - race issues?
 - marriage?