Introduction to the Study of Christ

A. The identity of Christ is the central pillar of orthodox Christianity. A wrong conclusion to the question of “Who do you say I am?” can have major implication and consequences now and eternally.

B. Jesus was not just another religious teacher, prophet or moral figure who gives us an example. There is one major distinctive characteristic that separates Him from every other leader of any religion or any person in history—He was God.

C. Paul declares in 1 Timothy 3:16 “Great is the mystery of godliness, that God was manifested in the flesh.”

D. Jesus is not just another representative of God showing us the way to God or declaring the message of God, but He was/is God Himself. When you see Him you see the Father.

E. This is the great divider of humanity and history, this Man and what you believe about Him.

Current condition: where are we now?

1. Stance on truth in our culture
   A. We live in a humanistic, pluralist culture that approaches truth with relativism [meaning what is true for you is true, what is true for me is true] and exalts tolerance as the highest virtue. [we must love everyone, but that does not mean we must discard our conviction based upon truth for the sake of false peace]
   B. Many scoff at the idea that there is absolute truth and propagate that every path leads to “god”, salvation or paradise.
   C. Somehow we have exalted human opinions to the place of “truth” and redefined God, the biblical witness of truth etc

2. Knowledge of God
   A. We live in the midst of a generation that holds many opinions but few convictions based on truth. We live in a Judges 2 hour.
   B. We have adopted the mindset that it is somewhat irrelevant what you believe as long as you hold some confession of “faith” in a “god” or religion. This couldn’t be further from the truth and the biblical revelation of God and His word
   C. It is no wonder that in a culture that knows so little about Christ we see the height of sin, compromise, powerlessness in our churches and from our pulpits.
   D. Currently we focus almost primarily upon the work of Christ and rarely on the person and identity of Christ. You cannot separate His work and His person. There is no salvation without the Savior.

3. Condition of the church
   A. There are more churches that are closing each day then are opening. The church is slowly dying Estimates vary concerning the number of
churches that close each year, but its roughly 3,500–9,000 annually, which equals 10–25 a day.

B. Our generation consists of around 2–4% that claims to possess and walk in a biblical worldview. We are in the midst of a crisis

C. Currently there are many various issues crippling the church: the embracing of the “seeker friendly” model of church growth, the acceptance of unbiblical lifestyles, the merging of various faiths and beliefs etc. [sin, false teachers, false gospel]

D. The central beliefs or pillars of the faith are being pushed to the periphery while non-essential things are being focused upon.

Religion begins with man and his need. Christianity begins with Christ and His glory, worth and identity.

Somehow the church has reduced Jesus to a symbol, icon or mascot of our faith instead of the very heart and foundation of our faith. Christianity is Christ, yet our pulpits and messages consist of everything but Jesus. We simply use His name or reference Him in passing instead of giving ourselves to the deep study and understanding of this Man.

A. 2 Timothy 3 says many in the last days will be lovers of self instead of lovers of God. This will position their hearts to drift from truth and seek messages to soothe their itching ears. This is one reason why our pulpits and churches are filled with “self-help” messages and principles for financial gain. We really are preaching a Jesus who is the medium to self-improvement or gain instead of the risen Son of God.

B. Our current condition and lack of revelation concerning Christ is preparing hearts to receive “another Jesus” [2 Cor 11]

C. This very issue is what the apostles and the early church fathers fought to preserve. They sacrificed all to preserve a faithful witness of Christ.

D. We have no truth or revelation of God and therefore deception creeps in, sin is rampant, hearts are dull and we hold a powerless form of godliness

E. God’s answer and cure for our condition is simply His Son. We must behold Him in His glory, and as we do this we will be transformed. [2 Cor 3:18] This was Jesus’ desire and prayer prior to the cross. [John 17]

F. The contention of the hour and the pressures to come is centered around the question: who is Jesus?

Christianity is a relation to a person. It is not essentially an idea or institution. He is the One to whom faith relates and in whom faith trusts. Being a Christian does not mean, first and foremost, believing a message. It means believing in a person. Christian teaching is therefore personally grounded. It lives in response to a personal life yet alive. Christian teaching only serves to show the way that leads to faith in this person.

A. The New Testament seems to either be declaring who Jesus is, what He has done or our response to Him in righteousness [right living and relationship with Him]
B. To truly understand the message of the gospels and epistles we must see an empty tomb. This is the context of all that was written—Jesus is the awaited Messiah, Savior, Redeemer and He is God [in flesh]
C. Neutrality in your stance concerning Jesus is impossible. You are either for Him or against Him. You either agree with who He claimed to be or you deny it.
D. The beginning point of understanding Jesus is His divinity. This is the beginning point of the gospels and the message of the New Testament.

The centrality of Jesus in the life of a believer

Salvation
  A. Salvation is accomplished by Christ alone and is possible through faith in Christ alone.
  B. It is by the body and blood of Christ that the New Covenant is established
  C. When a sinner repents he believes upon the name of Jesus for salvation
  D. When someone is baptized they die with Christ and are raised with Him in newness of life, and they are baptized in His name. [into Christ]

Indwelling
  A. We receive the indwelling of the spirit of Christ

Sanctification
  A. We are pursuing Christlikeness
  B. By beholding Him we are becoming like Him
  C. It is our fascination with Christ that empowers us to costly discipleship

Prayer
  A. When we pray, we pray in the name of Jesus
  B. We approach the throne of God by His blood and in His name
  C. We have access alone through Christ
  D. Christ is our Great Intercessor and the teacher of prayer, our example of prayerfulness
  E. He is the One who answers prayer

Communal life
  A. The church [or community of believers] is known as the body of Christ
  B. He is the head of the church
  C. Unity is only possible in Him and divisions come as He is marginalized or places to the periphery

Eternal destiny
  A. When a believer dies they go to be with Jesus
  B. We will dwell in the city of God with Him forever
  C. We will be joined to Jesus at the marriage supper of the Lamb

Joy
  A. Jesus is our chief joy and our deepest delight
  B. Our joy comes from His joy

Hope
  A. Christ and His return is our one true and everlasting hope.
  B. This is the hope that is the anchor for the soul
Life
A. Our life is in Him and His Word alone
B. Eternal life is determined by our response to His personhood and His word

Suffering
A. We are called to follow Christ in suffering
B. Our suffering displays Christ and His worth

Spiritual Warfare
A. The issue of spiritual warfare is Christ and His glory.
B. The opposition and warfare in our lives is to take us from the place of devotion to Christ.

Theology
A. God is seen and understood in Christ
B. He is the image, likeness, and fullness of God in flesh. When we see Him we see the Father

Intimacy
A. Jesus is our Bridegroom
B. The substance of intimacy is Christology, our knowledge of Him fuels love.

Preaching
A. The New Testament preaching consisted of and was centered around Christ
B. The apostles had one message—Christ and Him crucified

Missions
A. All missionary work is in His name, for His glory
B. It is to deliver people from the darkness of ignorance concerning Christ and into the light/revelation of Christ

Eschatology
A. The issue at the end of the age is the knowledge of Jesus
B. He will release judgments
C. From the wrath of the Lamb the wicked will flee
D. He will reign King of Kings and Lord of Lords

A. How is it that we have focused on everything but Jesus? We preach on everything but Jesus Christ
B. We have wrongly presented the gospel as solely the forgiveness of sins. It contains the message of the forgiveness of sins, but only in light of the understanding and truth that Jesus is God.
C. Christianity has been molded into a “moral code” or a life of rules. Christianity is the belief that God has acted in history on behalf of men in the person of Christ, bringing us back to Himself and saving us from our sins. The entirety of our faith rests upon our understanding of Christ and our response toward Him.