

In Christ Alone

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Introduction.

- A. We aren't terribly aware of it in the Lord's church at this time, but in the denominational world outside our doors, there is a huge battle going on about what sort of songs should be sung in worship. On one side of this struggle are the traditionalists. They favor the use of older hymns out of hymnals, hymns like "Holy, Holy, Holy" and "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" that are equally familiar to us. On the other side of this battlefield are the innovators. They reject the older repertoire in favor of the newer style of praise-and-worship hymns. This style hasn't really fully caught on in the church yet, but it commonly appears in places like church camps. It includes hymns like "We Will Glorify" and "I Stand in Awe of You."
- B. The day may come when many in the church attempt to take up arms in this struggle, but when that happens we need to remember that it's not a battle we can Scripturally fight. A hymn is not good simply because it is old, nor is a hymn good simply because it is new. A hymn is good because it contains a rich indwelling of the word of Christ, and we need to select our hymns on that basis. It doesn't matter whether a hymn is two years old or two hundred years old, as long as it follows the pattern God has set down in His word.
- C. It is with this mindset that we need to consider the current influx of praise-and-worship songs. Our concern cannot be with musical style or with modern popularity, but with pleasing God. Just as is true of hymns from any genre, many of these new hymns fail to meet that standard. They don't have the Scriptural depth of content that God's word requires. However, just as is also true of hymns from any previous time period, some modern hymns do stand up to this test. Let's look at one of these hymns this evening. Let's see how the word of God speaks through the words of the hymn, "In Christ Alone."

I. Verses 1 and 2.

- A. Interestingly enough, the first time I myself ever saw this hymn was when I was poking around in a sheaf of papers inside our Lord's Supper table. Inside that stack were a number of copies of this hymn. You may well be familiar with it anyway, but here are the words of **THE FIRST VERSE**. Even if we don't know anything about the Bible, we quickly realize that this is an extremely eloquent verse. It does a wonderful job of describing the security that we have in Jesus, sentiments with which any child of God can identify.
- B. What makes this verse so special, though, is that many of these descriptions of Jesus are obviously taken from particular passages of Scripture. For instance, when Jesus is described as our "strength and song" in the second line, that idea is actually taken from Exodus 15:2. Contextually, this is part of the song of rejoicing the children of Israel sing after Pharaoh and his army have been drowned by God in the Red Sea, so when we sing it, it should recall to our minds God's care for His people on that occasion. Similarly, we need to realize that this word pair has a progression of thought in it. God will be our strength to get us through whatever trials lie before us, and then He will be our song as we praise Him for the victory we have gained through Him.
- C. The description of Jesus as a "cornerstone" is equally filled with Scriptural meaning. We don't have time to look at all the verses in which Christ is called the cornerstone, nor to explain their meaning, but one such verse is Ephesians 2:20. In a real stone building, the cornerstone is the most important part of the edifice. It is the piece upon which everything else rests. In the same way, Jesus in the church is the most important piece. It is He who supports us, and without His aid, everything and everyone else would collapse.
- D. Also, the idea of God being a protector from drought and storm in the fourth line is a Scriptural one. It arises from Isaiah 25:4. Because most of us aren't farmers today, this metaphor loses a lot of its original clarity, but when we put ourselves in the places of God's people 2500 years ago, we quickly see what a big deal this is. The Israelites depended for their livelihood on the crops they grew, and in many years, the success of that growing season determined whether there would be anything to eat the next winter or not. Two of the big obstacles in that process were drought and storms. Drought burned up the crops, and storms knocked them flat. If God protected His people from both, they would be assured of a good harvest. Likewise, when God protects us from the spiritual disasters that plague us, we can be assured of reaping eternal life.
- E. We see yet another Scriptural idea when Jesus is called "the comforter" in the seventh line. At first glance, this seems strange. We're only used to hearing the Holy Spirit described as the Comforter in John 14-16. However, the description applies to Christ too. Look with me at 1 John 2:1. The word here that is translated "Advocate" is actually the Greek word *parakletos*, which is exactly the same word that is translated "comforter" in John. The point is that we can be sure that Jesus will be beside us always, helping us however He can.
- F. One last line that cites Scripture in this verse is when Jesus is described as our "all in all." That description is pulled from Colossians 3:11. The point of the statement is that Christ is everything in us, just as He is everything in every other Christian. When we can truly claim that is when we are truly His disciples.

- G. With that, we shift to the Scriptural content of **THE SECOND VERSE**. This verse isn't quite as full of direct Scriptural quotations and phrases as the first, but we shouldn't hold that against it. Although it is certainly most desirable in a hymn to use as much Scriptural language as possible, it's nearly as good when the hymnist uses his own words to teach important Scriptural concepts. That's what we see here. It isn't like the hymnist just pulled all of these descriptions of the life and death of Jesus out of his head or out of pop Christianity. Instead, it's obvious that this verse reflects a great deal of Scriptural study and understanding.
- H. Having said that, there are still two places in this verse where our grasp of the underlying Scripture will add to our appreciation of the hymn's meaning and depth. The first one appears in the second line, which is actually a reference to Colossians 2:9. This is actually quite a difficult concept for us to get our minds around. God is infinite, and yet, when we consider Christ, we are forced to recognize that somehow, all of that infinity was contained within a finite human form. There are lots of folks out there who contend that Jesus was just a wise man or a skilled teacher, but that's simply not true. When He walked the earth, He was literally God with us.
- I. Similarly, when we glance down to the seventh line, we see the hymnist commenting that every sin was laid on Christ. This too is a paraphrase of Scripture, in this case of Isaiah 53:6. The point is that Jesus satisfied God's wrath, not by some plea for an unjust pardon, but by taking the guilt for our sins on Himself. When He died, all this sins of every Christian who ever would be died with Him too. That's why His death was necessary.

II. Verses 3 and 4.

- A. Yet more Scriptural content reveals itself when we consider **THE THIRD VERSE**. The first verse was about what we have in Christ now, the second verse was about the life and death of Christ, and this verse spends half its time on each of these. It begins by describing His resurrection, then the meaning of this resurrection to us. Once again, the content here is both doctrinal in nature and laced with Scriptural references.
- B. The first of these references shows up in the second line, when Christ is described as the light of the world. This is actually a quotation of Jesus' own words in John 8:12. As we saw in a sermon I preached about three months ago, this means that He is the only one who reveals the path to God, and yet, because of the evil and envy that lurked in the hearts of His enemies, He was unjustly condemned and killed.
- C. Despite this execution, Jesus, of course, didn't stay dead, and one of the results of His resurrection is described in the sixth line. This line clearly draws its content from Galatians 3:13. Before we come to God, all of us stand accursed because of our sin, but Jesus took that curse upon Himself by dying upon the tree of the cross for us. Thus, if we are in Christ, that ancient curse no longer has power over us. We don't have to worry about paying the price for our sin, which God could rightly claim, because Christ has already paid it.
- D. The next line, Line 7, is itself another quotation that's being used in an interesting way. It comes from Song of Solomon 2:16. For thousands of years, students of the Bible contended that Song of Solomon was a complex allegory about the relationship of Christ and the church, and that's why we see this apparently unrelated verse being applied to Jesus. Today, we aren't quite so stuffy and are willing to concede that Song of Solomon is about the physical relationship between a husband and wife, but we can still rightly make this application. It is still true that Jesus is the bridegroom of the church, and it is still true that each belongs wholly to the other.
- E. Finally, when we consider the last line of this verse, we also recognize the use of Scripture here. Now, this is not necessarily the case every time we see the words "precious blood" in a hymn. Writers have been using that phrase in their hymns since English hymnody began, and it's become something of a cliché, something that some hymnists toss in to fill three syllables without thinking about it. That's not the case here, and we can tell because of the way that the phrase is used. We are described as being BOUGHT with the precious blood of Christ, and that shows that the hymnist here has been reading 1 Peter 1:18-19. Jesus didn't buy us out of the slavery of sin and death with anything so worthless as silver or gold. Instead, we have been redeemed with His blood, the most valuable thing ever to exist on the earth. That's the price of our souls, and the next time we start getting down on ourselves, we need to remember what we're worth to Him.
- F. Finally, this hymn concludes with **THE FOURTH VERSE**, which, actually, makes this one of the longer offerings in our new supplement. As has been true with the preceding three verses, we see excellent content here about the safety with which Jesus provides us. It describes the things that He does for us. All of these are Scriptural ideas, and two of them use Scriptural words. The first of these shows up in the tail end of the first line. How do we know we need have no fear in death? Simple! Hebrews 2:14-15 tells us so. Without Christ, we would be enslaved to the fear of death, just like all the unbelievers around us. We too would live our lives in the shadow of the knowledge of coming oblivion. In Christ, though, we don't have to be afraid anymore, because we know what will happen to us after we die. Not only is it not bad, it's better than anything we have seen on earth, indeed, better than anything we can imagine.
- G. We see the final Scriptural paraphrase of the hymn in Lines 5-6. This is quite evidently taken from the words of Jesus in John 10:27-28. Here, He promises us that as our Shepherd, He is going to be more than enough to take care of us. Once He has us in His arms, there is nothing that can take us away. We don't have to fear anything in the natural or supernatural world. With Jesus, we are safe forever.

Conclusion. If you want to claim all of these blessings in Jesus for your own, come to Him tonight.