

214-Transcript

Jay Kim: Surrendering to Christ in a Material World

James Early:

Hey there, and welcome again to The Bible Speaks To You Podcast. I'm so grateful you've tuned in to listen today. I've got a wonderful guest for you this week. His name is Jay Kim. Jay, welcome to the podcast.

Jay Kim:

Thank you so much for having me.

James Early:

Yeah. It's great to have you here. Let me tell you a little bit about Jay. Jay is the lead pastor at Westgate Church in the Silicon Valley in California, and he's on the leadership team of the Regeneration Project. Jay and his wife have 2 young children, and they live in California. Jay has authored several books, *The Analog Church* and *Analog Christian* and, more recently, *40 days through the book of Colossians, One Jesus, One People*, and we're gonna dive into that in just a bit. You're also the host on a couple of podcasts. Is that right?

Jay Kim:

Yeah. Yeah. So quite a bit going on.

James Early:

Yeah. Busy guy here. Well, I'm so grateful you're here today, and I just wanna say I've recently read your book about Colossians, and we're gonna get into that. And I was really quite moved by the message there that, I mean, I'm familiar with the book, but the way you put it all together really spoke to my heart, and I really appreciate the earnestness you bring to that. And there's so many things I would hope we talk about. We probably won't have time, but before we jump into that, I'd love to hear what got you started in your ministry and maybe, more importantly, really, in addition to that is, how has following Christ changed your life and gotten to you where you are today, and where's it gonna take you as you go forward?

Jay Kim:

That's a wonderful question. I'll move my way backward. I mean, following Christ has changed everything, you know. I think the writer is a secular writer, David Foster Wallace. He, you know, passed away several years ago, but he's got this famous speech he gave, a commencement speech at the graduation of of Kenyon College many years ago. It's a YouTube video of it where he says, I'm paraphrasing him here, but he basically says, everybody is a worshiper. Everyone worship something. He's a secular writer. I mean, utterly secular writer talking about worship.

Jay Kim:

He says everyone's a worshiper, you know, there are no atheists. Everybody worship something, and I think that's totally true, you know. So the way following Jesus has changed things is, my life used to be oriented before Christ, and my life, my life was oriented around essentially myself, you know, my own desires, my own comforts, conveniences

James Early:

Right.

Jay Kim:

My preferences, my own plans and dreams, hopes for a preferred ideal future, and as I gave my life to Jesus, you know, more than two decades ago at least in a real meaningful way, everything changed, you know. The direction and the trajectory of my life, my value systems, what mattered, what didn't matter, those things all got upended. I think about, you know, the apostle Paul's words, "to live is Christ and to die is gain," and to follow Jesus is to undergo a certain type of death. That's what baptism symbolizes. We are, you know, baptized into the waters of death and resurrected again.

James Early:

Yeah. Would you just elaborate it on that a little bit because that's an image that I think some people don't really quite get. What are we dying to? I mean, Paul talks about that in various ways, but I'd love you to elaborate on that a little bit.

Jay Kim:

Yeah. I mean, it's dying to our old selves. Right? It's dying to the things that we believed would make us whole, you know, that failed us time and time again.

James Early:

Yeah. Totally. Yeah. So, well, then what got you to the point of being in the ministry?

Jay Kim:

Yeah. It's a good question. I grew up in the church and then I walked away early on in college for a variety of reasons and, went through what is, you know, now sadly a very common sort of deconstruction of faith season in my life, but there was a small group of guys, three guys in particular from the church where I grew up. They were a few years older than me. They, you know, never gave up on me, kept inviting me to hang out and spend time with them. They were faithful followers of Jesus. And, so I started hanging out with them every Monday night for this sort of, like, little guys group, and mostly it was eating dinner and, you know, playing video games and watching Monday Night Football and stuff, but, eventually, those those long nights

together would give way to meaningful conversation about life and about faith and about, you know, pursuing the stuff of real joy and peace. And, essentially, long story short, I encountered the risen Christ in a real way in that small group of guys, and, they were all volunteering as, small group leaders in the youth ministry, and so because they were doing it, I eventually jumped in, fell in love with it.

Jay Kim:

I was a middle school, 7th grade, boys small group leader, and, and that led me to youth ministry and Bible College and, here we are, you know, 20 years later.

James Early:

You know, what I hear from that story is the importance of community. Yeah. Because what if those guys hadn't kept you in their circle? You know, what would have happened?

Jay Kim:

Yeah. That's right. Right.

James Early:

Right. That makes me think, you know, what can you and I do to be inclusive to someone that may be struggling, maybe have questions, that sort of thing. That's just that's what the church is all about, really.

Jay Kim:

Yeah. That's right. Yeah.

James Early:

I wanna jump right in to this book you've written about Colossians. I'm really intrigued by it. It's really kind of a workbook study guide, which I think is a nice format. It's designed to be read and used in a group setting. It's clear, obviously, you really have dissected the book of Colossians so carefully to get all at all the little nuggets in there. I'm curious what got you interested in the book of Colossians to do this study, and why is the book of Colossians so important? I mean, obviously, it's important because it's in the Bible, but, I mean, what is its unique place, and what is its unique message to us today?

Jay Kim:

I mean, Colossians is, you know, Paul writes it probably around the year 60, 62 AD, something like that. He's under house arrest, but what was so interesting to me about this particular the letter was that the city, Colossae, reflected in so many ways some of the challenges to following Jesus that we face today in our world. So Colossae was, a really pluralistic society, that struggled it

was it was prone to syncretism, which syncretism is just a fancy word to describe the sort of melding or fusing of various beliefs and practices from, you know, diverse religious traditions. You can think about it as a sort of like, you know, buffet style approach to religion or to faith. A little bit of this, a little bit of that, sort of thing. But, really, what you get to in such a culture, you know, syncretism really is about the self.

Jay Kim:

Syncretism is a way of picking and choosing, customizing, and curating a faith that suits you. You know? I like this from this tradition, and I like a little bit of that from that tradition, and I'm gonna sort of jam it all together and create this thing that is my own faith, and that feels really nice. It sounds really good. It sounds really, you know, inclusive in a sort of my truth is my truth and your truth is your truth type of world. The only problem, and it is a tremendous problem, is that Jesus seems to indicate that that's not how it works. You know? When he says in the gospel of John, Jesus's words, "I am the way and the truth and the life," and then he says, "no one comes to the Father, no one gets to God, except through me," and so Jesus seems to indicate that a relationship with God, a life of genuine faith doesn't work like a buffet line. You don't take a little bit of this and a little bit of that.

Jay Kim:

It's just 100% Jesus, And that really is in many ways, it was offensive in a culture like Colossae. Just like it's quite offensive in our pluralistic, syncretistic culture today, and so that's what piqued my interest. I thought that were some really strong parallels, and then Paul's words in Colossians, I thought, were so so profoundly helpful for the cultural moment we find ourselves in today.

James Early:

What was it in Colossians that personally was meaningful to you? Obviously, it applies to the situation as a whole, but specifically to you. Was there anything that really was helpful or eye opening or nudging in the right direction or anything?

Jay Kim:

Yeah. I mean, there isn't one particular verse that I would say is, like, there was that one verse. I would actually say It's Paul's underlying one of his underlying themes throughout the letter, which is again that Jesus is the center of it all, that Jesus is the one and only way through whom we get to God, you know, and experience life and life to the full, both now and on into eternity, you know, the way Jesus promised in John 10:10. So, Yeah. In basically every chapter of this letter, Paul makes it pretty abundantly clear Jesus is the one and he's the only one, You know. So in chapter 1, you have this beautiful poem or song about Christ's identity that he is the image of the invisible God. He's the firstborn over all creation. Everything was created, you know, through him.

Jay Kim:

He was before all things. Later on, Paul will say, you know, that Jesus is the head of the church, is the beginning, the firstborn. He holds, you know, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. So, like, on and on and on, that theme was really what was most helpful for me and the primary driver for why I thought a deeper look at this beautiful letter would be important for us today.

James Early:

Yeah. So do you think the book of Colossians was written and was a letter, obviously, at first, do you think it was written in response to certain things that were going on? I mean, there are indications of that in the letter in places. Don't you think he was kind of responding to, like, I know these are the things you're struggling with and here are the solutions? What were some of those issues that they were dealing with?

Jay Kim:

Yeah. I mean, most scholars agree that Paul is writing for a number of reasons, but that he's primarily writing to the early Christians and Colossae to confront and address what scholars call the Colossian heresy. There seems to be very strong indication that in the city of Colossae, the early Christians there had somehow been infiltrated by this sort of strange, again, syncretistic philosophy that was undoing their understanding of what it really meant to follow Jesus as the one and only way to God and to life.

James Early:

Can you give some examples of that? Do we know specifically what some of those things were?

Jay Kim:

Yeah. You know, the scholars, if you're asking what the Colossian heresy actually was, scholars debate it quite a bit, Oh. Some scholars would say it was an early form of gnosticism, although there's a lot that's been written lately that that's probably not the case, But it was probably something like gnosticism maybe or it could have been a wide variety of things. So, Yeah. There's a lot of debate about what the Colossian heresy specifically was, but Paul does make it really clear. For example, in the 2nd chapter, he says very powerfully, he says, "Listen. Make sure nobody takes you captive. That word means, like, slave."

Jay Kim:

Make sure nobody enslaves you through, and then he uses these words, hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and elemental spiritual forces of the world, rather than on Christ. So that's, like, one of the strongest indicators and there's others where Paul is just very seriously and very clearly confronting some hollow and deceptive philosophy that was undoing the Colossian Christians' allegiance to Jesus and Jesus alone, and that's what scholars call the Colossian heresy.

James Early:

Okay. Well, you know, we are struggling with that today too. There are so many things in the world. Yeah. We are invited every day, multiple times a day to follow the ways of the world, and and it's very alluring sometimes. So Paul is really dealing with that same kind of tendency back then. That's what you're saying.

Jay Kim:

Yeah.

Jay Kim:

Absolutely.

James Early:

One thing I wanna ask you about, we say Jesus is our Lord and Savior. We use that word Lord. Sometimes I hear people just using the word and it's a word. What does it mean for Jesus to be Lord? And I'll give you a little background where I'm coming from. I took a class in college many years ago. It was the history, medieval history of the world, Western Europe, medieval history.

Jay Kim:

Mhmm.

James Early:

We learned about the lord of the manor and his obligations to the servants on his land and the obligation of the serfs or the servants to protect the master and and that sort of thing. There was this deep bond of obligation both ways

Jay Kim:

Mhmm.

James Early:

Between a lord and his servants or his his, people under him. You get that a little bit from the Bible, especially like the guy that comes to Jesus and says, well, I have people under me and I'm under people, and so all you have to do is say the word because I understand authority.

Jay Kim:

Yeah.

James Early:

But I think we we just use that word Lord, Jesus as our Lord. What does that really mean, what is Paul getting at in the book of Colossians?

Jay Kim:

Yeah. I mean, it means surrender. It's an invitation to surrender. Lordship is never partial. Right? We have a hard time understanding this, and this is a good thing, socially speaking and historically. We don't live in, the same sort of sort of social hierarchy that Paul was writing to in the 1st century world where there were, like actual masters and actual slaves. Now, 1st century slavery in the Greco-Roman world was a little bit different than what we think of slavery today.

Jay Kim:

When we hear that word, We think of, like, the transatlantic slave trade.

James Early:

Right.

Jay Kim:

Slavery in the 1st century Greco Roman world wasn't that exactly, But it still wasn't God's ultimate design for human flourishing. This is why later Paul will write, You know, "there is no Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free. We are all one in Jesus." But All of that to say, I think where that sort of broken human system where it is helpful is that Today, we think about sort of you know, the closest we come to that that understanding of a lord would be like our boss. But when we think about our boss at work, we think about somebody who, because of the organizational structure, has a certain amount of authority in our lives, but with very clear delineating limits to that authority. So we are paid a particular salary or wage to do a particular job within the parameters of that job that we are called to to do and we are paid to do, then that boss has authority within that structure. But the boss has no authority in our lives when it comes to like, when we clock out at 5 o'clock and whatever I choose to do with my life, who I go spend time with, how I spend the money that I earn, how I spend my time.

Jay Kim:

It would be like, you know, it would be such a gross HR violation if a boss came to you and said, hey. You know, I I saw you bought that Tesla, and I don't think that's a wise Expenditure of your finances. I you need to return it. We'd be like, HR...

James Early:

You know? Yeah.

Jay Kim:

So we don't quite get it, but a lord or a master in the 1st century world, there would be no limits to their authority in somebody's life, and that's what that's what the biblical writers, the new testament writers have in mind when they talk about Jesus being our Lord. There is no limit to his authority. So for us to call Jesus Lord means to surrender the entirety of our lives to him. The entire thing. Everything. Our calendars, our finances, our time, our energy, our thought life, our desires, our longings, our motivations, all of those things. That's what it means to make Jesus Lord. Now we'll struggle to do that perfectly.

Jay Kim:

We'll never do it perfectly on this side of eternity, but the calling is to pursue a life that is wholly, completely 100% surrendered to Christ as Lord, and that's, you know, that's the bar that's been set for us.

James Early:

You know, I love that word surrender. I was thinking about this not too long ago, and I realized I'd always sort of thought surrender meant give up the bad things I'd done or give up my selfish desires, and then I realized, you know, it is, it's complete. It's like I had to give up even the good things I've done thinking, "Look at me. I've done something good." I have to surrender that and realize only reason I could do anything good was because God empowered me to. It was a full surrender to to God of everything I am, my hopes, my fears, the good, the bad, the mistakes, you know, the hidden secret things, all that stuff. And yeah. When you let Christ be Lord in your life, it brings a freedom though.

Jay Kim:

Yes.

James Early:

It brings such a freedom of you're not in charge. The human mind, we wanna be in charge, But when we resign, when we surrender to Christ, there's a freedom there of life that I don't think can be found any other way. Anyway, I love that word surrender.

Jay Kim:

Yeah. You know, it reminds me of what Jesus says, like "those who," you know, "find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." That's the upside down kingdom of God for sure.

James Early:

In this conversation, I'm just now thinking of what Jesus says. I think it's Matthew 7 something where he says it's not enough just to call me Lord. You have to do the will of my Father. So, Lord, it doesn't mean just saying the words. It means actually living your life in accord with what that means.

Jay Kim:

Yeah. Absolutely. Yep.

James Early:

What do you think in reading the book of Colossians, and you kinda touched on this, we're easily influenced by the culture we're in, as the Colossians were. How do we become aware if we're not aware that the culture, the world's materialism is influencing us? How do we sort those tares from the wheat when we don't even realize that we're doing it?

Jay Kim:

Yeah. That's a great that's a great question. Gosh. There's so much to say about that. I feel like that could be an hour long conversation in and of itself. I think maybe to connect it to Colossians and and to keep it succinct, maybe one practically helpful place would be the 3rd chapter. Paul says, as "God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved," he says, "clothe yourselves with" and then he names all of these different characteristics of Christ likeness. He says, "clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience," and then he says "bear with each other, forgive one another."

Jay Kim:

He says, you know, "overall these virtues put on love, which works toward perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, be thankful." So I think one, and this is not the only, but I think one practical way to approach it is to ask yourself, in whatever is happening culturally and personally in my life, one way to measure if Jesus is truly Lord, and if I am, by God's spirit, really becoming formed into his likeness, is to ask yourself the question: As I read the Jesus stories in the gospels, as I reflect on who Jesus is and and how he interacted with people, am I reflecting, am I embodying the compassion and the kindness and humility that he embodied? Am I gentle and patient the way Jesus was? Am I as forgiving, or am I pursuing radical forgiveness the way Jesus has forgiven. Am I a person of love, you know, in the way the scriptures define love? Is the peace of Christ ruling and reigning in my heart and in my life? Am I thankful? Am I a person of gratitude? You know? On and on. So so that would be a way, I think, a practical way to ask that question, which I think is such an important question.

James Early:

I love that. What I hear you saying is that because there may be things that we don't realize that we're influenced by the world, but the more we follow Christ to the best of our ability, that

shines light on the areas in our life where we need to do a better job. That's kinda what I hear you saying.

Jay Kim:

Yes.

James Early:

Start with focusing on being more loving, being more forgiving. You brought out something in your book in Colossians or maybe, Oh, and by the way, just for the everybody listening, there's, an accompanying six videos where Jay talks about the ideas in the book that I found very, very helpful. One thing in there you said this is in Colossians 3:13 and you alluded to this. Paul says to forgive others as Christ forgave you. And you said something really startling. You said that is an incredibly startling statement, and if it doesn't startle you, you don't get it or something like that.

James Early:

Could you elaborate on that? I've heard people say, oh, well, Jesus is the one that forgave me, but I I don't have to forgive the way he did. I mean, they don't really step up to the plate the way Paul is asking us to, telling us that we need to. Could you talk about the little bit? How do we forgive the way Christ forgave us? That's a tall order. I'm not talking about obviously, we're not atoning for everyone's sins.

James Early:

But what does that really mean? What is Paul getting at here?

Jay Kim:

Well, Paul writes elsewhere, "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us," which is an act of forgiveness. His crucifixion and death is him embodying forgiveness. So in large part, that means going first, you know, and I do wanna make a distinction here though. Forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same. So what I'm not condoning is to sort of, like, forgive and forget. You know, this is really important for in the case of, like, for example, in situations of abuse. A lot of times, abusers will mangle the biblical teaching, and they'll say to the abused, "Hey, just forgive me."

Jay Kim:

You're supposed to forgive me

James Early:

Oh, yeah.

Jay Kim:

And just forget about it, you know. Reconciliation is a two way street. The victim of abuse has to offer and extend a loving hand, but also the abuser needs to do the same. And if the abuser is not willing to do that through repentance and confession and, you know, all of those things, then there's no reconciliation. But forgiveness is a one way street. It's something we can give to others before they ever reciprocate, and that's what Jesus does for us. He dies for us while we're still sinners, you know, before we ever even knew to ask, and I think that's the way we're called to forgive. Is to not hold it over people, to not allow the power of, vengeance and, you know, revenge.

Jay Kim:

The desire to get even, to not let those things overcome us or overwhelm us, but instead to extend love even if it costs us, even if it hurts us.

James Early:

Can you think of a a time in your life where you were able to do that?

Jay Kim:

Sure. But I think I could think of more times in my life where people were able to do that for me, and I think that's that's what's left the greatest imprint on my life. I think about my mother and you know, she's a single mom trying to raise a hellion of a kid when I was a teenager, and, I mean, I broke I broke her heart so many times, but time and time again, she forgave me when I was so undeserving of it. I wouldn't be here today had she not done that, had she not embodied the way of Jesus in that way. So that's not just true of my mom. So many people have forgiven me

James Early:

Right. Right.

Jay Kim:

Even in in you know, before I even knew to ask. So yeah.

James Early:

Well, then I would say maybe the times you've forgiven somebody, that's blessed them the way your mom blessed you.

Jay Kim:

I would hope so.

James Early:

And you don't know. We don't always know, do we?

Jay Kim:

Yeah. That's right.

James Early:

One of the things you bring out from the book of Colossians, and you talked about this a little bit already in Chapter 3. Paul talks about the things we're supposed to wear, you know, the gentleness, the love, all those things. But in Chapter 2, he talks about the things we're supposed to not wear anymore. It's kind of like he says in Ephesians 4, "Put off the old man, the old self, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new self." Could you talk just a little bit about, I'd love to hear your thoughts on on that whole process of letting go of the old. I think sometimes people try to reform the old. They try to clean up the old dirty rotten soiled torn clothes of revenge and malice and all those things. We're not supposed to redeem those clothes.

James Early:

We're supposed to get rid of them. They're not part of who we really are as a child of God. We're supposed to put on the the gentleness, the peace, and and that stuff. So I'd just be interested in your thoughts on what Paul is really getting at there.

Jay Kim:

That's really well said. You know, in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, I think it's 2nd Corinthians 5:17, he says, You know, "the old is gone, the new is here." Yeah. Says "you are a new creation. The old is gone, the new is here."

James Early:

Yeah.

Jay Kim:

And I think that's really the the mark. What we would like that verse to say oftentimes is the old is kinda gone, but you can still keep a couple of the things that you like and sprinkle it into the new, but, you know, that's not how it works. That's just not how it works. I mean, he makes it pretty clear. The old, that's gone. It is no more because the new is here. So we we have a choice to make. You can't hold on to bits and pieces of the of the old and still experience new life in Jesus.

Jay Kim:

That that is not to say that Christians don't sin or falter or fail, not just from time to time, but all the time, and it is the grace of God that covers over those failings. But it's really about living with a sober awareness with the fact that when we fail, that's actually us living outside of our new identity in Jesus and coming back to who we really are in Jesus, which is a new creation. So, again, going back to an earlier question, that is one of the tremendous challenges of Jesus being Lord. There are no partial Lords. He either is Lord completely of your life or he's not. You know? And, yeah, we've gotta put off our old selves completely. We can't pick and choose.

James Early:

This is, kind of shifting gears here a little bit. We've been talking about the ways of the world and how we're so easily tempted and everything. I'm curious. You're a pastor, and you're not immune, just like none of us are immune, to these temptations. But do you think that sometimes pastors and church leaders are tempted in ways that regular church members aren't, or is it all is that just another part of the decoy? What would you say to a church leader who is maybe secretly struggling with some temptation and doesn't want anyone in the church to know about it or maybe they've even stepped over the line. What does Colossians have to say about this kind of thing going on in the church, especially with church leaders?

Jay Kim:

Yeah. Gosh. That's a great question. I mean, to the original question, I would say yes and no. I would say yes in that people who serve in vocational ministry are tempted in unique ways, but I would say no in that they are tempted in ways that are uniquely unique, if that makes sense, And what I mean by that is I think most people are tempted in unique ways, pastor or not, clergy or not. I think most people...

James Early:

Kinda where they are. Yeah.

Jay Kim:

...where they are, their own stories, their own brokenness, their own sort of vacillating, their own version of pride and shame. So, yes, I, as a pastor, I am uniquely tempted, But I'm uniquely tempted in the way that most of my congregants are uniquely tempted because of their own circumstances and stories and backstories and histories and on and on. At the same time though, I would say the New Testament seems to indicate Old Testament as well, seems that indicate very clearly that there is a very important, critically important, weight that we take on when we say yes to God's invitation to pastor our particular people. It's hard to quantify in just a brief sort of succinct statement, you know. In the book of James, the writer talks about not many of you guys should really desire to become teachers, because if you teach the gospel, you're gonna be judged more strictly.

Jay Kim:

Yeah. So there seems to be a sort of added weight. You know? Obviously, it doesn't sound like a good time to me to be judged more strictly. But yeah. So, yeah, it's an important question, I think. And then, you know, the more pastoral personal question you're asking for pastors who are out there who maybe are struggling with hidden sin, I would just encourage. I know it's frightening, but, you know, if you keep sin in the dark, the sin will keep you in the dark.

Jay Kim:

And you can fake it like you're living in the light. But darkness, even in physics, nothing beautiful can survive in the dark. Everything beautiful needs light, you know, to thrive and survive. And so, in the cold dark cave of your own hidden sin, you can fake it till you make it, but you'll never make it. You'll die in there, and the way, as scary as it is, the way to experience life, and life to the full, is to bring that hidden sin into the light because light kills the darkness, you know. And so I would encourage pastors and church leaders, you know, you don't have to... it's irresponsible to get up in front of your congregation, just spill all the details, you know, but I would say it is important to have a team of trusted confidants. Maybe it's some fellow pastors in the area or a spiritual director or a counselor or therapist who can kinda walk beside you as you begin to bring some of that sin into the light.

James Early:

That is so helpful. I think sometimes just regular church members, we don't want people to know what we're struggling with, and we don't tell anybody. And not to say you can't work that out just between you and God, but sometimes it's really helpful to have someone to confide in and to pray with you and that sort of thing. So one of the other struggles that a lot of churches are facing today, and I actually did a podcast episode on this just a few weeks ago, and I got more response than I was imagining was this whole issue of legalism in the church. What does the book of Colossians say about that? And on top of that, why is legalism so appealing to people?

Jay Kim:

Yeah. I mean, I think legalism is appealing just working my way backwards. Legalism is appealing because humans long for certainty. So when something is legalistic, when something is very clearly black and white. There's no need for nuance, and nuance by its nature is a sort of gray uncertainty. There's no need for, you know, ambiguity, and I would actually say that there are some things in Scripture where it's pretty clear. Like, I wouldn't say legalistic, but sort of black and white, you know, in terms of what it means to follow Jesus. But legalism, I think the way you're talking about it, I think has more to do with, you know, just as one example, Christian fundamentalism, you know, on the extreme end of things where it's like, a sort of, you know, the Bible says that I believe that that settles it, which sounds really simple and clean and easy, but it doesn't really work in people's real actual lives.

Jay Kim:

And I think where Paul, not just in Colossians, but throughout, you know, Colossians 3, he talks about, you were mentioning this earlier, you know, put to death your earthly nature, things like sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed, idolatry, anger, rage, malice, slander, on and on. But then he concludes that part and he says, "There is no gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free, But Christ is all and is in all," which I think smashes legalism. Legalism is the means by which we say, Oh, you're either a Jew or a gentile. I don't mean literally. I just mean within sort of, like, the way we see the paradigm through which we are observing and

James Early:

Right.

Jay Kim:

And judging other people. You know? Right. But Paul says, no. No. No. Christ is all and is in Oh, Jesus is everywhere, and the possibility of turning toward Christ and experiencing life in his kingdom It's available to everybody. You think about the, you know, in Luke's account of Jesus' crucifixion, you have the two criminals on Jesus' left and right, and there's the one criminal who he's being crucified because he's done unspeakable wrong. Those are the only types of people who are crucified in in the 1st century world.

Jay Kim:

And yet, In his last moments, he looks to Jesus and he says, "I see who you are. I recognize you. You're the Son of God," and "Will you remember me when you enter your kingdom?" You know, after probably a lifetime of just vile evil behavior, this man has received into the kingdom of God, and the legalists in our midst would say that's unfair. But the kingdom of God is not about fairness.

James Early:

Right.

Jay Kim:

It's about grace. Right. You know? And I think that's what upends legalism.

James Early:

I love that. I saw a video on YouTube, oh, several times now where this guy's giving a sermon and he's saying we've gotta revisit our version of what it means to be a Christian, or however he said it. He said, you know, here's this guy that was next to Jesus on the cross and he gets to heaven and Saint Peter says, "Well, why are you here?" And he says, "I don't know." "Well, did you say the sinner's prayer?" "No, what's the sinner's prayer?" Well, do you believe in the all

these different church doctrines? And he goes, "I never heard of any of that stuff." "Well, how did you get here?" "Well, the guy that was next to me on the cross said I could come."

Jay Kim:

Yep. That's right.

James Early:

So really, we have we have turned sometimes our faith into this doctrinal platform, and I don't think Jesus really intended that. He wanted us to...

Jay Kim:

Agreed.

James Early:

...follow His example. Love God with all your heart and mind and soul, and love your neighbors yourself. We just make it too complicated sometimes.

Jay Kim:

Agreed. Yeah.

James Early:

That's really helpful to me because I do have some friends that are struggling with that whole thing of legalism, and that idea of Christ is leveling the playing field you use that in your book. Christ is leveling the playing field. That takes away a lot of all these labels that we put on ourselves, on other people. I'm better than you. You're better than me. All that stuff. So, Yeah.

James Early:

I really I really appreciate that. This is gonna sound kind of an odd question. I don't know really quite how to say it, so try to take the spirit of what I'm saying here. This is in in responding to your comments and what Colossians, what Paul says in Colossians about Jesus being the center of everything. I mean, he goes on and on about that. Do you think though sometimes maybe we use Jesus as a crutch? Let me give you the context for what I mean by this question. Do you remember when Jesus was on the boat in the middle of a storm out on the lake, and his disciples are freaking out, and he's asleep on a pillow.?

James Early:

He's not worried. Here, Jesus is literally with them in the boat, and they still are afraid. They wake him up, and he rebukes the storm and stills the water, but he also rebukes their lack of

faith. I read that and I think, you know, he knew he was gonna be not there with them personally like that in the flesh forever and ever, and he wanted them to be able to use their own Faith, he wanted them to to rely directly on the Father just like he did. I hope I'm making sense here. Do you think sometimes we... Do you do you see where I'm going with this?

Jay Kim:

I think so. Yeah. I think so to a certain extent. Yeah. I mean, I think there's a little nuance to it. I think in that story, Jesus's primary motivation is to indicate his own, essentially to imply his own identity, not necessarily to say, hey, "I trust God, why can't you trust God?" I mean, he is saying that, but I think essentially the bottom line is "I'm right here with you. What do you have to fear? The wind and the waves obey me, I've got it under control," but at the same time, I would totally agree with you, James.

Jay Kim:

I think that too often, followers of Jesus, Christians today in the modern west, especially, we misunderstand the word grace. We think that it means we get a golden ticket to heaven when we die, and the work has all been done, which it has. We could never have gotten there on our own, so it is grace. There's nothing we could've done to get into God's kingdom. It's Jesus who made the way, But we assume what that means is that nothing is demanded of us. Nothing's required of us. That we don't participate in the life of being formed in the Christ likeness, but Dallas Willard has this fantastic line. He says grace is opposed to earning, it is not opposed to effort, And I love that line.

Jay Kim:

It's been transformative in my own life. That as we receive the free gift of God's grace, what it does not mean is that we do nothing. It means that we respond to this incredible gift by participating with God as He forms us into His people. So the life of faith, you know, following Jesus is not inactive and passive. It's participatory, And I think we have to remember that.

James Early:

Yeah. I love that. There's a little bit way back in the original Strong's Concordance under the word grace, which is in Greek charis. I don't know how to you say it.

Jay Kim:

Charis. Yeah.

James Early:

Charis. Okay. There's a line that says something like grace is the manifestation of the divine ,or the divine made manifest in the daily life, or something like that. It's a sense of it's not just, "Well, you poor little thing. You don't deserve this, but I'm gonna love you anyway." It's like the

the showing forth of God's infinite glory and wonder and love in your daily life. And that's kinda what you're saying. We have to participate. We have to...

James Early:

...walk in the light. We can't just sit there on the sidelines.

Jay Kim:

That's right.

James Early:

Yeah. Yeah. I love that.

Jay Kim:

That's right.

James Early:

What do you think are some of the biggest challenges facing our churches today? I know some churches are struggling just to keep the doors open. COVID did a number on a lot of churches, but a lot of church have been struggling anyway. What do you think some of those challenges are and how do you see we kinda already talked about this, but how do you see the book of Colossians really coming to the rescue?

Jay Kim:

Yeah. I mean, so many challenges. There's so many. I think unity is probably one that comes to mind. You know, when I think about Colossians, Paul ends the letter, but with this random sort of thing about this guy named Onesimus. He says, hey, you know, he's doing final greetings kind of thing, final farewells, And he says, "I'm sending Onesimus. He's a faithful and dear brother. He's one of you."

Jay Kim:

And if you read the backstory, Onesimus was actually a slave who had been in the household of a guy named Philemon, and Philemon was the financial benefactor who essentially funded the Christian church in Colossae. He's really wealthy guy at the time, and Onesimus was one of his slaves. Long story short, if you read between the lines, it sounds like Onesimus stole from Philemon and ran away. He did this evil thing against his master who had actually treated him quite well and, by all indications, and then Onesimus meets Paul and he becomes a follower of Jesus, and he goes back to Colossae. He goes back to the master that he had wronged, And Paul, instead of saying, "Remember that guy who stole from you? I'm sending him back, so you can thank me later and punish him as you please." He doesn't say that. In fact, he doesn't even say,

like, "Hey, can you receive him back as your slave and just go easy on him?" He goes he one ups that and he says, "Hey, he's coming back. He's a faithful and dear brother."

Jay Kim:

He's one of you. He puts Onesimus on this level, even playing field, which is such a beautiful sort of image. It's beautiful vision of, the absolutely scandalous unity that the gospel invites us into. So, Yeah. That's one of the many things that comes to mind in terms of challenges facing the church. You know, unity that we're one in ways that maybe we don't want to admit, but God calls us to be one. As, you know, Jesus calls us to be one, he prays that we would be one as he and the father are one, which is a high bar.

James Early:

That's true, and I love your phrase scandalous unity. That's quite a phrase. It is scandalous to the human mind that always wants to divide. I mean, you think of the politics and even the religious field, all the stuff going on in the world right now, there's so much divisiveness. What if we could look through the eyes of Jesus and see God's love in everyone, even people that don't even believe in God? What if we could love everyone the way Jesus would have? We gotta start with our families. We gotta start with our churches.

James Early:

Maybe the church down the street that you don't agree with on everything. Yeah. What if, here's another thing. What if all Christians could see this oneness throughout all the body of Christ, all the different denominations, and there are some honest disagreements. I understand that. But what if we could just say, okay. You believe in Jesus? You believe Jesus was the son of God, crucified, resurrected, just that? What if we all could accept everyone as our brother or sister? I think the world would feel the difference overnight.

James Early:

We're fussing among ourselves. We need to up the ... You said the bar is set pretty high. I think you're right, and I wanna encourage everyone who's listening now. Let's take a step closer to that higher bar of feeling a sense of unity with all our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Jay Kim:

Yeah. Well said.

James Early:

We're coming up to the, end of our time together, Jay. I really wanna thank you so much for being here, and I wanna honor you for all you're doing to bring people back to what really matters, which is basically, I'll sum it up this way, following Christ on a daily basis is not just saying the words, but actually living the light, letting your light shine. You're teaching, you're

preaching, you're writing. You're breaking down a lot of these barriers and these walls of separation, kinda like Paul was doing in the book of Colossians. I love the subtitle of your book, One Jesus...?

Jay Kim:

One Jesus, One People. Yeah.

James Early:

One Jesus, One people. I just think that's so beautiful, and the more we can bear witness to that, I think we're blessed individually, but also collectively. How can people connect with you and find your books, your teachings? What's the best way for people to connect?

Jay Kim:

Yeah. Yeah. I have a little website. It's just jaykimthinks.com. All my work is there, and, my email's there. People can reach out if I can be helpful.

James Early:

Okay. I will put that in the show notes. Is there anything we could have talked for another hour like you said. Is there anything that I didn't ask you or that you'd like to add on to something that just you wanna share, before we close. No. That was great.

Jay Kim:

No. That was great. I enjoyed chatting with you. Yeah. It was wonderful.

James Early:

I've totally enjoyed this too. I have three final questions that I ask all my guests. The first one is, if you could talk to anyone in the Bible, other than Jesus, who would it be, and what would you ask them?

Jay Kim:

Oh, gosh. Putting me on the spot here. If I could ask, did you say one person? One person, and I can ask him anything? Oh my gosh.

James Early:

Yeah. Except for Jesus. What would you ask?

Jay Kim:

No. That's great. Holy smokes. What a question. So many. So many. I mean, I'd probably ask Peter what it felt like to walk on water. Like, what did it feel like under his feet kind of thing.

Jay Kim:

You know? Oh. Not a very deep question, but I'm just curious.

James Early:

That's alright. Sometimes those little questions lead to something bigger.

Jay Kim:

Yeah.

James Early:

Here's the second question. Is there any Bible character that you especially identify with?

Jay Kim:

Oh my goodness. Yeah. I mean, Peter, probably. Yeah. I identify with Peter quite a bit. Peter or Thomas, maybe, in some ways. Yeah. Why? Well, Peter, the sort of reckless zeal sometimes and Thomas because of the scene of his doubt.

James Early:

It's too bad we remember Thomas for that because they all doubted the first time too. You know? Yeah.

Jay Kim:

They did. Yeah.

James Early:

But we we sort of plugged Thomas in that in that box.

Jay Kim:

Right. Right.

James Early:

Oh, gosh. Okay. The third question is, The Bible Speaks to You Podcast is about getting back to the original message, or Christianity, of Jesus, embracing the mindset of Jesus in your daily life. How would you describe Jesus's original message and how he wanted us to live our lives?

Jay Kim:

Yeah. I think Jesus's original message is that he's Lord, and that any and all can have life and life to the full here and now and on into eternity if they would, surrender their lives to him. And that to learn and live his teachings is to learn and live the way of love toward God and toward one another and toward the world, toward our neighbors.

James Early:

Amen. Wow. Thank you so much. Jay, I wanna thank you so much for giving me part of your busy day. It's been a real pleasure to have you on the show.

Jay Kim:

Yeah. Thanks so much for having me. It was a joy.

Jay's books (these are affiliate links):

- [Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places, and Things in the Digital Age](#)
- [Analog Christian: Cultivating Contentment, Resilience, and Wisdom in the Digital Age](#)
- [Colossians Bible Study Guide: One Jesus, One People \(40 Days Through the Book\)](#) plus Streaming Video

Bible verses:

John 14:16 NIV

16 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

John 10:10 NIV

10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Colossians 1:15-18 NIV

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

18 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.

Colossians 2:2, 3 NIV

2 My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ,

3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Colossians 2:8 NIV

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

Matthew 8:8, 9 NIV

8 The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed.

9 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

Colossians 3:11 NIV

11 Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Matthew 10:39 NIV

39 Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

Matthew 7:21 NIV

21 Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Colossians 3:12-15 NIV

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Ephesians 4:22-24 NIV

22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;

23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds;

24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

James 3:1 NIV

1 Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

Colossians 3:5 NIV

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

Luke 23:43 NIV

43 Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Mark 4:38-40 NIV

38 Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”

39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

40 He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

Colossians 4:9 NIV

9 Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you.

John 17: 20-22 NIV

20 “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,

21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—