

# Parkview Leadership Track

## Session 2 - Jesus and Leadership

### Head: Know Jesus, His Person and Work

#### Fully God: Deity

- Scriptures teach His Deity: Colossians 1:15-20; 2:9; John 1:1-4, 14; Hebrews 1:1-4; Isaiah 9:6-7
- Jesus claimed to be God: John 5, John 8:58-59; John 10:30; Mark 14:61-64

#### *Why Jesus' Deity is essential?*

- To be a mediator between God and man...He had to be God.
- To be the savior of humanity—to bear the weight of our sin—He had to be God.
- For salvation to come from God, and not people—He had to be God.

#### Fully Man: Humanity

- Scriptures teach His Humanity: I Timothy 2:5; John 1:14; Philippians 2:5-8.
- Jesus possessed human qualities: body, soul, emotions.

#### *Why is Jesus' Humanity essential?*

- Representative obedience: Romans 5:18-19
- Substitutional sacrifice: Hebrews 2:16-17
- To be a mediator between God and man...He had to be man: I Timothy 2:5

#### The mystery of Christ: How can one person have two natures—human and divine?

- Colossians 2:9: For in Christ all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.
- John 1:14: And the Word became flesh and lived among us.

#### *An illustration: The God Card*

Jesus demonstrates for us how we can live our lives fully surrendered to the Father's will. Jesus fully submitted Himself to the Father's will. Mark 14:36: Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will but what you will.

#### GODLY AMBITION

Initiated by God  
About advancing God's Kingdom  
Honors others  
Other focused  
Produces humility  
Prefers others  
Involves dying to self  
Longs to please God

#### SELFISH AMBITION

Driven by self  
About building a personal kingdom  
Competes with others  
Self focused  
Prideful  
Uses others  
Gratifies self  
Pleases man

**Response – Read these passages and use them to guide your prayer time, praising Jesus.**

- Colossians 1:15-20, Philippians 2:5-11, Hebrews 1:1-4, and Isaiah 9:6-7.

## **Heart: Live Like Jesus, Obedience and Surrender**

### **OUR POSITION BEFORE JESUS**

1. *SAVIOR—Our position before Jesus as Savior is recipients of His grace—justified, adopted, redeemed—and given a new identity. As Dave mentioned, his life and death have been attributed to us and we have peace with God (Rom. 5:1).*
2. *LORD—Our position before Jesus as Lord is servants of His Kingship. Standing before the Savior King, our position is to bow to His authority and leadership offering our entire lives to serve Him.*

“Scripture never speaks of anyone “making” Christ Lord, except God Himself, who has “made Him both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2: 36). He is Lord of all, and the biblical mandate for both sinners and saints is not to “make” Christ Lord, but rather to bow to His lordship.” 203

### **OUR RESPONSE TO JESUS’ CALL TO SURRENDER AND OBEY**

<sup>34</sup> *And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.*

Mark 8:34-35

**The right response to Jesus is surrender.** He describes it as, “denying self and following Him.” It is a losing of one’s life.

We see Jesus calling for this kind of surrender throughout his entire ministry because it is the heart of following Jesus. He says in John 12, “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

So there is a surrender, a death of self, a submission to Christ at the expense of everything else...because out of this surrender comes life. And we see that personally and impacting others!

Now this call to surrender to Jesus is largely missing from our ministries in the American church. David Platt has written about this anemic gospel call so prevalent in our churches.

All you need to do is make a decision, pray a prayer, sign a card, become a Christian and keep your life as you know it. IT'S NOT TRUE! You become a follower of Jesus and you lose your life." –Platt

Platt tells the story of a family they recently sent out as a church to be missionaries in the Middle East, to bring the gospel to an extremely difficult and dangerous people group. And the husband was speaking to the church one Sunday morning, and he said, "Some of you think we are being reckless, and he's sitting there with his wife and two young kids, going into the heart of the Muslim Middle East, and he looked at the church and said I think we are in far greater danger of being safe than we are reckless."

Platt goes on to say "As followers of Jesus, we do NOT bow to the altar of safety."

We are live in a time when we are in great danger of giving ourselves to the idols safety, idols of comfort, and idols of certainty, instead of losing our lives in complete surrender to our Savior King.

Biblically speaking, this is the posture of every disciple of Jesus:

**One of complete and total surrender.**

**Because of who Jesus is (Lord) and what Jesus has done (Savior).**

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Personal reflection: what areas of your own discipleship need to change to obey Jesus' call to surrender?
2. Ministry reflection: how can you help others understand who Jesus is as Savior and Lord? How will you then help them understand and respond to Jesus' call to surrender?

## **Hands: Lead Like Jesus, Servant Leadership and Prayer**

**Topic: servant leadership in the workplace**

### **Key Questions**

1. What comes first, servant or leader?
2. What's the ultimate goal of a servant leader?

### **Anchor Scripture**

1. Matthew 23:11 – Jesus on servant leadership
2. Mark 10:42-45 – Jesus on servant leadership
3. John 13:13-17 – Jesus sets example for servant leadership
4. Daniel Chapter 3 – example of servant leaders “in the workplace”

### **What Servant Leaders in the Workplace Look Like... Generally**

1. Servant leaders ask God to direct their steps, pursue opps to serve, take action
2. Servant leaders model servant leadership – are humble, act with humility
3. Servant leaders walk the walk – they do it, even when no one is looking
4. Servant leaders are all about the team – stand up for team, team > sum of individual parts
5. Servant leaders prefer others (overtly, genuinely) to selves
6. Servant leaders care deeply about people – have compassion, are supportive, empower, align, put culture before short-term results, give others confidence to act, bring people up
7. Servant leaders make people (and developing people) a high priority
8. Servant leaders set vision, values, goals – and walk alongside others to achieve together
9. Servant leaders communicate – clearly, often, in plain English, with all types
10. Servant leaders deflect praise – up or back
11. Servant leaders follow through – do what they say (or communicate if change), acknowledge when they miss, and give others permission to take risk, accept failure and move on

### **Examples of Servant Leadership in the Workplace**

1. Bryan Mullins – customer visit story
2. Jess Correll – video

### **Prayers**

1. That we would put God 1<sup>st</sup> place in the workplace, with passion and conviction
2. That God would ignite a revolution in the workplace through us and our servant leadership

## Survey of Jesus' Prayer Life

- **Prayer was the essence of his relationship with the Father and demonstrated his desire to do the Father's will.** (Based on Spader "Walking" Video)
- He prayed regularly *"often withdrew to lonely places"* (Luke 5:16).
- He often prayed alone (Mark 1:35; Matthew 14:23).
- He prayed at major points in his life: At his baptism (Luke 3:21-22), before choosing the disciples (Luke 6:12-13), before the transfiguration (Luke 9:28-29), before his death (Garden), and on the cross (Mt. 26:36-46; Mt. 27:46).
- Content: He prayed to commune with his Father, to continually submit to Father's will, and to give praise and thanks (Mt. 11:27; Heb. 5:7; Mt. 11:25-26). We also get a glimpse into the topics of Jesus' prayers looking at the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:9-13).
- The Bible records 33 different instances in which Jesus took time to pray.
- Jesus' ministry began with prayer (Luke 3:21, *baptism*) and ended with prayers (Mark 15:38-39 *on cross*)
- Jesus prayed before major turning points in his life and before a major crisis. Matt 14 R.C. Sproul,

*"I have always been amazed that the disciples didn't ask Jesus how to walk on water, how to still the tempest, or how to do any of his other miracles. They did, however, ask Jesus to teach them about prayer. Note that they did not ask Jesus to teach them how to pray; instead they begged, "Teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). I'm certain that the disciples clearly saw the inseparable relationship between the power Jesus manifested and the hours he spent in solitude, conversing with his Father."*

Paul Miller says,

*"Jesus' example teaches us that prayer is about relationship. When he prays, he is not performing a duty; he is getting close to his Father. Any relationship, if it is going to grow, needs private space, time together without agenda, where you can get to know each other... You don't create intimacy, you make room for it."*

**Big Idea:** Jesus needed to be with the Father, so do we!

- **Point of this survey of Jesus?** Jesus needed the Father, he wanted to be with the Father. This serves as an awesome example to walk as Jesus walked, coming to him as our Heavenly Father who loves us and delights when we want to spend time with him.

## Questions

1. When you think of Jesus' prayer life, what stands out to you?
2. How can you practically follow Jesus' example of prayer in your life and ministry?

## Growth Projects for April: Jesus Christ and Leadership

Work on these from April 2 to May 7 (until our next meeting)

<https://equipthepeople.com/leadership-track/jesus-and-leadership-session-2/>

### Head: KNOW JESUS, HIS PERSON AND WORK

- ✓ **Read Scripture** – John 1:1-18; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-4; *memorize* John 1:14 and Mark 10:45.
- ✓ **Read** – Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, chapters 14-16 (person, atonement, resurrection).
- ✓ **Write** – your summary paragraph explaining Jesus' person and work. Try to include important Scripture references.

### Heart: LIVE LIKE JESUS, OBEDIENCE AND SURRENDER

- ✓ **Read** – Mark 14:32-42 about Jesus' surrender to the Father's will.
- ✓ **Read** – "Joyful Surrender: Christian Submission" in *Seeking the Face of God* by Gary Thomas.
- ✓ **Watch** – David Platt teaching on Following Jesus on Youtube "Follow Me Session 1 by David Platt."

### Hands: LEAD LIKE JESUS: PRAYER AND SERVANT LEADERSHIP

- ✓ **Watch** – Dann Spader teaching on Jesus' prayer life on Youtube "Week 4: Praying as Jesus Prayed."
- ✓ **Write** – how you will apply the ideas in this hands section and the heart section to your life and ministry.

### DISCUSSION IDEAS FOR COHORT TIME

1. What are a couple ideas that stood out to you as important or meaningful from the readings and videos for this month?
2. Share your summary paragraph explaining Jesus' person and work.
3. Discuss some of the questions for discussion scattered throughout this notes sheet.
4. Share ideas about areas of your life that need further submission to God's will or ideas on how you can follow Jesus' example of prayer.

### FOR FURTHER STUDY (optional)

- *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ* by John Piper.
- *The Man Christ Jesus* by Bruce Ware.
- Servant Leadership in workplace: *The Servant* by Hunter, *It's My Pleasure* by Turner, *The Secret* by Blanchard.
- *Follow Me* by David Platt.
- *Cost of Discipleship* by Bonhoeffer.

## Jesus' Work

### 1. Discipling His Disciples

- Approximately 1 ½ years

Calls His disciples (an invitation for a purpose)

- a. "Come and see"
- b. "Follow Me"

He establishes 7 foundations:

- Identity of Christ
- Word of God
- The calls
- His humanity and deity
- Passion
- Faith
- Joy

- c. "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men"

- He takes them on fishing trips

(1) Synagogue

(2) Peter's House

(3) Peter's Boat

(4) City Street

(5) Jesus' house

(6) Matthew's house

### 2. Training His Leaders

- Approximately 1 ½ years

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- a. Spend an extra night in prayer with the Father, deciding who to choose (Lk 6:12-19)

- b. Calls out His 12 apostles from among His disciples.

- c. Teaches them the Father's plan for leadership

- Love
- Expectations (8)
- Obedience to the Father
- Your leadership will be misunderstood

- Forgive
- Have faith
- You will be sent
- Lead even when grieving
- We are to be servants
- We will be asked by God to step out in faith doing the uncomfortable or new
- Go on retreats and evaluate your ministry

d. Training the leaders of leaders

- Jesus takes them on His own retreat
- Compassion
- Jesus the light of the world
- Multiplication
- Leadership expected by the Father
- Stewardship

e. Jesus models leadership qualities (Last week)

- Passion (at temple)
- Servant (wash feet)
- Submissive (your will, not mine)
- Crucified (Gal 2:20)
- Resurrected (New life in Christ – empowered by the H.S. )
- Shepherd (those God brings to us)
- Obedient – Pray and listen to the Father

3. Work on the Cross/Resurrection

4. What is Jesus doing today?

- Sits at the right hand of God – Acts 7:55-56; Rom 8:24; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3;8:1
- Is present with us through His Holy Spirit – John 15:26; Rom 8:9-10.
- He intercedes for His followers – Heb 7:25 (praying for us)
- He advocates for us when the accuser appears before the Father – I John 2:1-2
- He went to prepare a place for us – John 14:1-3
- He is perfecting us for our ultimate position with Him – Eph 2:10

*What [God] asks is a will which will no longer be divided between him and any creature, a will pliant in his hands, which neither desires anything nor refuses anything, which wants without reservation everything which he wants, and which never, under any pretext, wants anything which he does not want.*

FÉNELON

*I should like to persuade spiritual persons that the road leading to God does not entail a multiplicity of considerations, methods, manners, and experiences...but demands only the one thing necessary: true self-denial, exterior and interior, through surrender of self both to suffering for Christ and to annihilation in all things.*

JOHN OF THE CROSS

## 5

# JOYFUL SURRENDER

## *Christian Submission*



In 1654 Blaise Pascal faced his life's greatest test. His friendship with a duke had brought him into the highest levels of society, but the attractions and amusements of high society threatened his burgeoning spirituality. A letter Pascal wrote to his sister at this time reveals his inner crisis.

On the night of November 23, Pascal had an ecstatic experience that affected him for the rest of his life. In fact, he wrote down the insights he gained that night and sewed them into his jacket, transferring them from garment to garment as the jacket wore out. While he maintained some of his former relationships after the experience, he no longer felt any ambivalence about his call to surrender to God's will for his life and work.

About two years later, Pascal began making notes for what he hoped would become a full-scale apology of the Christian religion. He wanted to use the brilliant mathematical mind God had given him to defend the faith.

Pascal's notes now fill up several hundred pages in the book we know as *Pensées*. The scope of what Pascal intended must have been enormous because he stated that it would take ten years of good health to bring the book to completion—this

from a man who had already accomplished more in his first thirty-five years than most people accomplish in a lifetime.

The notes were made in 1657 and 1658, but in 1659 Pascal entered a period of serious illness from which he never fully recovered. In the midst of his illness he wrote, "*Priere pour demander a Dieu le bon usage des maladies*" ("Prayer asking God for the right use of illnesses") in which he tried to find a Christian meaning for his suffering so he could discern God's will and submit to it wholly and trustfully. In the prayer, Pascal asked God to dispose of his health and his sickness, his life and his death, first for the glory of God, then for his salvation and for the good of the church.<sup>1</sup>

Pascal could have been bitter. He could have argued that God was treating him unfairly. He could have said, "God, I gave up everything to serve You in this, and now I'm too sick to complete it. How can You allow this to happen?" Instead he again changed his direction. Because he was too ill to work hard on the apology, he devoted his final years to ministering to the poor. He didn't go back to the world; he simply found a new way to carry out his desire to serve God.

During his life, Pascal argued against the theology of the Roman Catholic Jesuits and the Protestant Calvinists, so there are, no doubt, plenty of traditions that could find fault with him, but when I read his biography I am virtually moved to tears by the heart of this man who was so surrendered to God. He surrendered not only the temptations of the world—this I can understand—but also the glory of a particular service to God—and this is what humbles me. *Everything* was placed upon the altar, and there was no bitterness at all when God decided to keep it. Pascal just kept serving the Lord.

God, make me like that man!

Surrender doesn't come easy to me. As a third-born child, by disposition and perhaps by birth-order I've grown to be somewhat of a striver. Call me to sacrifice for Jesus, and I'll

quickly raise my hand. Tell me to take a risk for the Lord, and I'm willing. But ask me to surrender?

No thanks.

It has taken me some time to learn that the real test of true faith is not how successful we are, but how surrendered we are. The Christian faith is a faith in which we are called to die daily (Luke 9:23, among others). A Christian with his or her own agenda is like a horse with a head on both ends. There will be nothing but a "push-me/pull-you" struggle between this person and God. We die to our own will in order to follow God and His will.

The most Christian prayer we can ever pray is the prayer Jesus prayed in Gethsemane—"Lord, Thy will, not mine, be done." So it should be no surprise that when Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He first blessed God, "Hallowed be Thy name," and then began with "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done."

Christian health is not defined by how happy we are, how prosperous or healthy we are, or even by how many people we have led to the Lord in the last year. Christian health is ultimately defined by how sincerely we wave our flag of surrender.

The questions leading to spiritual growth and health, then, are: What is God's will for me in this hour and day? Where is God leading me? How can I surrender to Him?

Law provided a clue: "He therefore is the devout man who lives no longer to his own will, or the way and spirit of the world, but to the sole will of God, who considers God in everything, who serves God in everything, who makes all the parts of his common life parts of piety by doing everything in the name of God and under such rules as are conformable to His glory."<sup>2</sup>

We want to baptize our old nature rather than trade it in. We're not told to wash the old nature, however, but to kill it. True Christianity is a state in which we are utterly, absolutely, and completely surrendered to God.

## THE TWO ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

My journey to surrender to God led me to two fundamental questions. The first question was: Is God good? Only if we truly believe in the goodness of God can we entrust ourselves so completely to His care.

The second question was: Is God Lord? That is, does God actually and truly rule over the affairs of His world?

Both the goodness and providence of God are well established in Scripture,<sup>3</sup> but both are questioned today: "If God is so good, why does He allow evil things to happen?" and "If God is in control, why is the world such a mess?" Until we resolve these two questions in our own minds, we will find ourselves at virtual war with God.

I am not suggesting it is inappropriate to wrestle with the questions. They are fair questions, and we need to be honest about our inhibitions if we are ever to enter into a new intimacy with the Father. However, maturity will eventually require that we come to this conclusion: "Yes, God is good, and yes, God is Lord." Until we have done that, the intimacy of surrender simply will not be possible.

How can we ask ourselves to surrender to a God of whom we're suspicious? And even if we convince ourselves He's good, how can we surrender to Him if we think He's unaware, inactive, or powerless to make a difference?

The men and women who wrote the classics of Christian devotion believed in God's goodness and His lordship. Thomas à Kempis had this to say about the goodness of God—notice how this was the foundation for his call to surrender:

Do with me whatever it shall please thee. For it can not be anything but good, whatever thou shalt do with me. If it be thy will I should be in darkness, be thou blessed; and if it be thy will I should be in light, be thou again blessed. If thou grant me comfort, be thou blessed; and

if thou will have me afflicted, be thou still equally blessed. My son, such as this ought to be thy state, if thou desire to walk with Me. Thou must be as ready to suffer as to rejoice. Thou must cheerfully be as destitute and poor, as full and rich.<sup>4</sup>

William Law wrote this about God's providence:

Every man is to consider himself as a particular object of God's providence, under the same care and protection of God as if the world had been made for him alone. It is not by chance that any man is born at such a time, of such parents, and in such place and condition.... Every soul comes into the body at such a time and in such circumstances by the express designment of God, according to some purposes of His will and for some particular ends.<sup>5</sup>

We will find it impossible to move forward in surrender if we do not find ourselves agreeing with Thomas à Kempis regarding God's goodness and William Law regarding God's providence. Many of us carry wounds that need to be healed before we can embrace these two truths. Since surrender is fundamental to the Christian faith, we need to do the soul work that is necessary to arrive at an understanding of God's goodness and God's providence. Others of us may have some intellectual mountains to climb before we can wave our white flags of surrender. Whatever the case, we should do what we must do so we can resolve these two fundamental questions without delay.

The scrapper in each of us must be retired.

## THE SURRENDERED HEART

Testimony to the surrendered heart is the hallmark of a Christian classic. It is not a coincidence that so many of the ancients have written about it. Consider just these examples:

Ignatius Loyola: "We do not for our part wish for health rather than sickness, for wealth rather than poverty, for honor rather than dishonor, for a long life rather than a short one; and so in all other things, desiring and choosing only those which most lead us to the end for which we were created."<sup>6</sup>

Thomas à Kempis: "Lord how often shall I resign myself, and wherein shall I forsake myself? Always, and every hour; as well in small things as in great. I except nothing, but do desire that thou be found divested in all things. Otherwise how canst thou be mine, and I thine, unless thou be stripped of all self-will, both within and without?"<sup>7</sup>

Teresa of Avila: "The whole aim of any person who is beginning prayer—and don't forget this, because it's very important—should be that he work and prepare himself with determination and every possible effort to bring his will into conformity with God's will.... It is the person who lives in more perfect conformity who will receive more from the Lord and be more advanced on this road."<sup>8</sup>

And my favorite, by John of the Cross: "I should like to persuade spiritual persons that the road leading to God does not entail a multiplicity of considerations, methods, manners, and experiences—though in their own way these may be a requirement for beginners—but demand only the one thing necessary: true self-denial, exterior and interior, through surrender of self both to suffering for Christ and to annihilation in all things.... If one fails in this exercise, the root and sum total of all the virtues, the other methods would amount to no more than going about in circles without any progress, even if they result in considerations and communications as lofty as those of the angels."<sup>9</sup>

I quote all of these saints in length to purposefully overwhelm you with the surrendered heart of those who have already walked the Christian journey. They went far in the Christian life because they surrendered to God and resolved to

cooperate with Him rather than fight and question Him throughout their entire lives.

There will likely be a time in our Christian journeys when, like Jacob, we will wrestle with God all night long. That night may last for months or even years. But there must eventually come a dawn when we say, "OK, God, You win. You've broken me and I'm Yours. No more fighting. No more complaining. Lead me where You will. Not my will but Thine be done."

### ***The Biggest Block***

The biggest block to our surrender is not our appetites and wayward desires, but our addiction to running our own lives. Surrender would be easy if it allowed us to merely sacrifice a few leaves, a few choice sins. But God wants more. God's ax hits the trunk.

Pascal, who knew the heartrending call of surrender, wrote, "True conversion consists in self-annihilation before the universal being whom we have so often vexed and who is perfectly entitled to destroy us at any moment, in recognizing that we can do nothing without him and that we have deserved nothing but his disfavor."<sup>10</sup>

The failure to truly die to ourselves is devastating to our spiritual health. Thomas à Kempis said, "the love of thyself doth hurt thee more than anything in the world."<sup>11</sup> This is because without the resignation of self, we will be involved in petty turf wars every time God tries to break in. Do you ever find yourself bargaining with God? I do. "God, I'll do this if You'll do that." When I read Thomas à Kempis, however, I realized there can be no conditions to our true surrender. God is Lord of the universe—He is not a used-car salesman. Here are the words that challenged me:

Some there are who resign themselves, but with certain exceptions: for they put not their whole trust in God,

therefore, they study how to provide for themselves. Some also at first offer all, but afterward being assailed with temptation, they return again to their own place, and therefore they make no progress in the path of virtue. These shall not attain to the true liberty of a pure heart, nor to the grace of my sweetest familiarity, unless they first make an entire resignation and a daily sacrifice of themselves unto me. For without this, there neither is nor can be a fruitful union with me.<sup>12</sup>

An equally difficult lesson for me to learn was that surrender is never a once-in-a-lifetime activity; it is the continual worship of a growing Christian. This means that I must be willing to part with anything on a regular basis, even those good things that come from God. As part of our discipline of surrender, God will often ask us to let go of something very precious, even something He has given us. This is because, as Fénelon wrote, "There is not a single gift, noble as it may be, which, after having been a means of advancement, does not generally become, later on, a trap and an obstacle, by the return of self which soils the soul. For this reason God takes away what he has given. But he does not take it away to deprive us of it forever. He takes it away so that he can better give it, so that he can give it back without the impurity of this evil sense of ownership which we mingle with it without noticing it in ourselves. The loss of the gift takes away our ownership.... Then the gift is no longer the gift of God. It is God himself in the soul. It is no more a gift of God, because we consider it no longer as something apart from him, and something which the soul can possess."<sup>13</sup>

Just months before my wife and I became engaged, Lisa was in Mexico on a short-term missions trip. She sent me a letter explaining that she was considering staying in Mexico for another year. A close friend, sensing my anxiety over Lisa's plans, wrote me a letter after he had spent some time praying

for us. Rob said I had to hold Lisa like I held sand—with an open palm. If I closed my fist too tightly, the sand would run through my fingers.

I knew Rob had heard God correctly, but his words were the last words I wanted to hear. As I said before, surrender has never been easy for me; but this time, I let go. Lisa ended up coming back, and we were engaged just a couple of months later.

How many Christians have wondered why a precious relationship has seemed to go sour, a powerful ministry appears to be drying up, or a healthy business seems to be disintegrating? Could it be that we have taken what is good and begun worshipping the created rather than the Creator? It would be simplistic to suggest this is always the case but presumptuous to assume it is never the case. God blesses us, and we become so enamored with the blessing that we lose sight of the One who blesses.

Surrender is thus the daily worship of a true Christian—and not just in the big things either. If we gladly relinquish the "small little sacrifices," our growth will be great, for any small surrender is a great victory; any refusal of surrender is a great defeat.

We need to understand the seriousness of rebellion. When we refuse God in the big things, He will move to the small. When we refuse to give God even these, what else can He ask? We have then approached the land of apostasy, and all the spiritual disciplines in the world, all the beautiful songs we sing, and all the money we give away won't excuse the fact that our hearts are in rebellion. One of the surest symptoms of rebellion and a lack of submission to God's will is in the act of complaining.

Christian surrender means the death of complaining.

## THE DEATH OF COMPLAINING

When my son was just three years old, he fell on a fireplace mantel and cut himself just above his left eye. I rushed him to the hospital and stayed with him as the nurses put him in a stretcher

designed to keep his arms pinned to his side. As the doctor began putting stitches in Graham's head, I held his hand and almost lost my composure when Graham whimpered, "Please Daddy, he's hurting me. Make him stop. Please, Daddy, please."

It broke my heart; I could barely stand up. Graham saw me as his protector, and he wanted to know why I wasn't protecting him.

I *was* protecting him, of course, only this time, I was protecting him from himself. In the long run, he needed the stitches. I had to let him go through the pain.

Now, imagine if another man was on the other side of Graham during the stitches, whispering in his ear, "See, Graham, your dad doesn't really love you; otherwise, he wouldn't make you go through all this pain. If you were my son—if you followed me—I wouldn't make you go through this."

That's a true spiritual picture of what often happens when we go through difficulties. God knows what is best for us, but our spiritual adversary often tempts us with thoughts that if God *really* loved us, He would spare us the ordeal.

This is shortsighted thinking, and it can be crippling, spiritually, if we pay heed to that lie.

Sometimes, I have to remind myself on virtually a daily basis: "*God knows best.*" And when I accept the fact that God knows best, there is no room for complaining in my life. William Law pointed out that "resignation to the divine will signifies a cheerful approbation and thankful acceptance of everything that comes from God. It is not enough patiently to submit, but we must thankfully receive and fully approve of everything that by the order of God's providence happens to us...."

"It is very common for people to allow themselves great liberty in finding fault with such things as have only God for their cause.... It sounds indeed much better to murmur at the course of the world or the state of things than to murmur at providence,

to complain of the seasons and weather, than to complain of God, but if these have no other cause but God and His providence it is a poor distinction to say that you are only angry at the things but not at the cause and director of them."<sup>14</sup>

It will be hard for many of us to admit we are complaining about God, but honesty is essential if we are to be delivered from this sin. We can't gripe about every decision a coach or a politician makes and then pretend we support him or her. At a particularly frustrating time in my life, when it felt as if God had kept me in a hole for eight long years, I found myself going through the motions of worship but continually asking, "God, why are You doing this to me?" The problem with this is that we can't worship someone we don't trust. I couldn't learn my lesson until I was broken enough to surrender, for my questioning came very close to crossing the line separating honest pain from prideful blasphemy.

I learned that faith isn't tested by how often God answers my prayers with a yes, but by my willingness to continue serving Him and *thanking* Him, even when I don't have a clue as to what He is doing. This required a radical shift in my thinking; I had to become convinced of God's oversight in my life.

When we complain, what we are really saying is, "I could have done a better job than God in this instance. If I had made the choice, I would have done this and so..." This is blasphemy.

When I looked back on the difficulty of those eight long years, I saw their necessity in a new light.

Had you been anything else than what you are, you had, all things considered, been less wisely provided for than you are now; you had wanted some circumstances and conditions that are best fitted to make you happy yourself and serviceable to the glory of God.

Could you see all that which God sees, all that happy chain of causes and motives which are to move

and invite you to a right course of life, you would see something to make you like that state you are in as fitter for you than any other.

But as you cannot see this, so it is here that your Christian faith and trust in God is to exercise itself and render you as grateful and thankful for the happiness of your state as if you saw everything that contributes to it with your own eyes.<sup>15</sup>

So there was no more room for me to complain. I found that the most potent weapon against complaining or even questioning is the gift of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving became my doorway to a more mature surrender.

### THANKSGIVING: THE DOORWAY TO SURRENDER

When I began to fight my sin of complaining with thanksgiving, the opposing virtue, this was a struggle for me. But God in His mercy placed gratitude in my heart, and like a snowball rolling down a hill, that gift of gratitude grew until the complaining was wiped out.

I then reached a crossroad where I was able to thank God even for the eight-year desert. I saw that I had so much inner sin in me then that there was no other way for me to be healed. If God had answered my prayers for an earlier reprieve, He wouldn't have been acting out of love; He would have left me in immaturity, and I would have continued to make a mess out of my life. Law wrote.

For if [a Christian] cannot thank and praise God as well in calamities and sufferings as in prosperity and happiness, he is as far from the piety of a Christian as he that only loves them that love him is from the charity of a Christian. For to thank God only for such

things as you like is no more a proper act of piety than to believe only what you see is an act of faith.

Resignation and thanksgiving to God are only acts of piety when they are acts of faith, trust, and confidence in the divine goodness.<sup>16</sup>

My only hope of salvation was if God could pull me away from the steering wheel of my life. The difficult period I endured was God's way of doing that, and as I realized the effectiveness of it I became thankful for it. This is when I learned that thanksgiving is a discipline, and like all the disciplines, it requires practice.

Law taught me to begin by practicing thanksgiving in the small things.

Don't...please yourself with thinking how piously you would act and submit to God in a plague, a famine, or persecution, but be intent upon the perfection of the present day, and be assured that the best way of showing a true zeal is to make little things the occasions of great piety.

Begin, therefore, in the smallest matters and most ordinary occasions, and accustom your mind to the daily exercise of this pious temper in the lowest occurrences of life. And when a contempt, an affront, a little injury, loss, or disappointment, or the smallest events of every day continually raise your mind to God in proper acts of resignation, then you may justly hope that you shall be numbered amongst those that are resigned and thankful to God in the greatest trials and afflictions.<sup>17</sup>

Prayers of thanksgiving can be mixed with prayers of surrender for even greater effect. Thomas à Kempis provided us

with a great model: "My son, say thou thus in everything: 'Lord, if this be pleasing unto thee, let it be so. Lord, if it be to thy honor, in thy name let this be done. Lord, if thou seest it good, and allowest it to be profitable for me, then grant unto me that I may use this to thine honor. But if thou knowest it will be harmful unto me, and no profit to the health of my soul, take away any such desire from me.'" <sup>18</sup>

### CONFORMED TO HIS IMAGE

If our hearts are going to truly surrender to God, we must be willing to allow God to define good and evil and shape us according to His will. We must be willing, not only to do what is right, but to let God define what is right. Good is whatever God desires; evil is whatever God prohibits.

At first, conforming may simply be an act of the will. We may obey God, not necessarily because we want to, but because we know we should. However, if we are faithful in surrendering our will to God, over time we will soon begin wanting to obey. Law said, "When you love that which God loves, you act with Him, you join yourself to Him, and when you love what He dislikes, then you oppose Him and separate yourself from Him." <sup>19</sup>

This is why it is so spiritually debilitating to ever willfully rebel against God. Obedience and disobedience are both habitual. Our appetites and passions are like our tastebuds—we crave what we grow used to. To experience true surrender, we must die to our own desires so God can give us new desires.

When God birthed thanksgiving in my heart, my purest cry was simply, "God I want to be on Your side." My only request was to be wherever God was. If God was in riches or poverty, sickness or health, at home or far away, I wanted to be there. Whatever God was doing, that's what I wanted to be doing. Nothing else mattered.

### THE JOY AND PEACE OF SURRENDER

At its root, however, surrender becomes not so much a discipline as a cry of the heart. It is a joy, and it brings great peace. Fénelon wrote, "O bridegroom of souls, thou lettest the souls which do not resist thee experience in this life an advance taste of that felicity." <sup>20</sup>

This "taste of felicity," however, is dependent upon true surrender. Fénelon told us our hearts, not just our wills, must be changed. "If we are...faithful in breaking internally with creatures, that is, stopping them from entering the depths of our hearts, which our Lord has kept to dwell in and to be respected, worshipped and loved in, we shall soon taste the pure joy which God will not fail to give to a soul which is free and detached from all human affection." <sup>21</sup>

The glory of the Christian life is found in the fact that God doesn't ask us to surrender to just difficult things. At first it may seem like that, but eventually, if we don't hold back, we'll find that God's will is for us to surrender to many very wonderful things. Again, it all comes back to trusting in His goodness. When we surrender to a good God, we shouldn't be surprised that we must surrender to good things. Sin tastes sweet but turns bitter in our stomachs. Holiness often tastes bitter initially but later turns sweet. It's like a fine wine which seasons over time.

One of the joys of surrender is a deep peace. Rebellion means war, so it is no surprise that surrender means peace. This peace gives us a new freedom in our relationships. As always, true Christian spirituality has implications for community living in families and churches. Thomas à Kempis said if we are not surrendered to God, we will be at war with others. "He that is well in peace, is not suspicious of any man. But he that is discontented and troubled, is tossed with divers suspicions: he is neither at rest himself nor suffereth others to be at rest....He

considereth what others are bound to do, and neglecteth that which is bound to himself.”<sup>22</sup>

I suspect that a thousand years from now I'll have a pretty good understanding of why my life has gone the way it has; for now, I'm content to trust that God knows what He is doing.

Our model in this is Christ, à Kempis wrote. He imagined Christ saying, “Of My own will did I offer up Myself unto God the Father for thy sins, My hands being stretched forth on the cross, and My body laid bare, so that nothing remained in Me that was not wholly turned into a sacrifice for the appeasing of the divine Majesty. In like manner oughtest thou also to offer thyself willingly unto Me every day...with all thy strength and affections, and to the utmost stretch of thine inward faculties. What do I require of thee more, than that thou study to resign thyself entirely unto Me?”<sup>23</sup>

God will not lay down His arms. He has declared war on all who stand in rebellion. The vanquished receive eternal life; the obstinate are condemned by their own foolishness. But there will be no peace until we surrender. Surrender to God is the essence—and the greatest blessing—of the Christian life.

## REFLECTIONS

Copy the following prayer, written by Francis de Sales:

And, turning myself towards my most gracious and merciful God, I desire, purpose, and am irrevocably resolved to serve and love him now and forever; and to this end, I give and consecrate to him my soul with all its powers, my heart with all its affections, and my body with all its sense, protesting that I will never more abuse any part of my being against his divine will and sovereign majesty, to whom I offer up and sacrifice myself in spirit, to be forever his loyal, obedient, and faithful creature, without ever revoking or repenting of this my act and deed.

But if, alas! I should chance, through the suggestion of the enemy, or through human frailty, to transgress in any point, or fail in adhering to this my resolution and dedication, I protest from this moment and am determined, with the assistance of the Holy Ghost, to rise as soon as I shall perceive my fall, and return again to the divine mercy, without any delay whatsoever. This is my inviolable and irrevocable will, intention, and resolution, which I declare and confirm without reservation or exception, in the sacred presence of God.<sup>24</sup>

If you can, in good conscience, sign the paper on which you've copied this prayer, claiming it as the prayer of your heart, do so and mark the date. Then carry this prayer with you. When God's Spirit prompts your heart to surrender and you feel yourself resisting, take the prayer out of your purse or wallet and read it, reminding yourself of the pledge you have made by the grace of God.

## JESUS IS THE GLORY OF GOD

*The Deity of Jesus Christ*



Christ does not exist in order to make much of us. We exist in order to enjoy making much of him. The assumption of this book is that to know the glories of Christ is an end, not a means. Christ is not glorious so that we get wealthy or healthy. Christ is glorious so that rich or poor, sick or sound, we might be satisfied in him.

The first particular glory that upholds all the rest is the mere eternal existence of Christ. If we will simply ponder this as we ought, a great ballast will come into the tipping ship of our soul. Sheer existence is, perhaps, the greatest mystery of all. Ponder the absoluteness of reality. There had to be something that never came into being. Back, back, back we peer into endless ages, yet there never was nothing. Someone has the honor of being there first and always. He never became or developed. He simply was. To whom belongs this singular, absolute glory?

The answer is Christ, the person whom the world knows as Jesus of Nazareth.

The apostle John, who wrote the last book of the Bible, received the decisive revelation. He quotes God: “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty’” (Revelation 1:8). This is not Christ talking. This is the Almighty God. He calls himself “Alpha and Omega”—the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. In the alphabet, one cannot speak of anything (or nothing) before alpha. There is no “before” alpha in the alphabet. Nor can one speak of anything (or nothing) after omega. There is no “after” omega in the alphabet.

So it is with God and reality. There is no “before” God and no “after” God. He is absolutely there, no matter how far back or how far forward you go. He is the absolute Reality. He has the honor of being there first and always. To him belongs this singular glory.

This is the essential meaning of his Old Testament name Yahweh (or Jehovah). It is built on the verb “to be.” When Moses asked God his name, “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. . . Say this to the people of Israel, “I AM has sent me to you”’” (Exodus 3:14). This “I am” is unfolded by God in Isaiah as implying absolute, eternal Reality—past and future. “‘You are my witnesses,’ declares the LORD . . . ‘that you may know and believe me and understand that *I am* he. *Before me* no God was formed, nor shall there be any *after me*’” (Isaiah 43:10). To be “I am” is to be absolutely the first and the last. No “before” and no “after.” Simply “I am.”

God makes this explicit in Isaiah 44:6, “Thus says the

LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am *the first* and I am *the last*; besides me there is no God.'" And again in Isaiah 48:12, "Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! I am he, I am *the first*, and I am *the last*." This is his name: *Yahweh*—the one who absolutely, eternally, and invincibly is. He has the unique honor and singular glory of *always having been*, when nothing else was. Nor will he be outlasted by anything. This is what it means to be God.

What, then, does this have to do with Christ, whom we know as Jesus of Nazareth?

Everything. The apostle John quoted Christ near the end of his Revelation: "Behold, I am coming soon. . . . *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end*. . . . I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches" (Revelation 22:12-13, 16). This is Christ talking, not God the Father. Now, two cannot be "Alpha and Omega" unless they are one. Two cannot be absolutely "first and last" unless they are one. Yet Christ (who calls himself Jesus) claims for himself the same honor and glory belonging to God the Almighty (see also Revelation 1:17-18; 2:8).

Christ even took to himself the uniquely glorious name of God, "*I am*." "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am'" (John 8:58). "I am telling you this now," Jesus says to his disciples near the end of his life, "before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that *I am*" (John 13:19, author's translation; see John 8:24). Nothing greater can any man

say of himself. It is true, or it is blasphemy. Christ was God or godless.

John knew which. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God*. . . . And the Word became flesh . . . the only Son [some translations, "begotten"] from the Father" (John 1:1, 14). Jesus Christ, the "Word," was "begotten," not made—and not at any point in time, but eternally. Two Persons standing forth as one God, not two Gods—the "Son" begotten from the "Father," one essential deity. This is a great mystery, as we would expect it to be. But it is what God has revealed about himself.

The apostle Paul also knew the unique glory that belonged to Christ. He is "according to the flesh . . . the Christ, who is *God* over all, blessed forever. Amen" (Romans 9:5). Nevertheless, "though he was *in the form of God*, [he] did not count *equality with God* a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:6-7). Therefore, "in him *the whole fullness of deity* dwells bodily" (Colossians 2:9; see 1:19). And we Christians are now waiting not for a mere man, but for "the appearing of the glory of our great *God and Savior Jesus Christ*" (Titus 2:13; see also 2 Peter 1:1).

This is why the writer to the Hebrews is so bold as to say all the angels *worship* Christ. He is not the chief among angels who worship God. He is *worshiped* by all angels as God. "And again, when [God] brings the firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him'" (Hebrews 1:6). For he is the Creator of all that is, and

is himself God: “Of the Son [God] says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. . . . You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning’” (Hebrews 1:8, 10). Thus the Father bears witness to the deity of the Son. He “is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3).

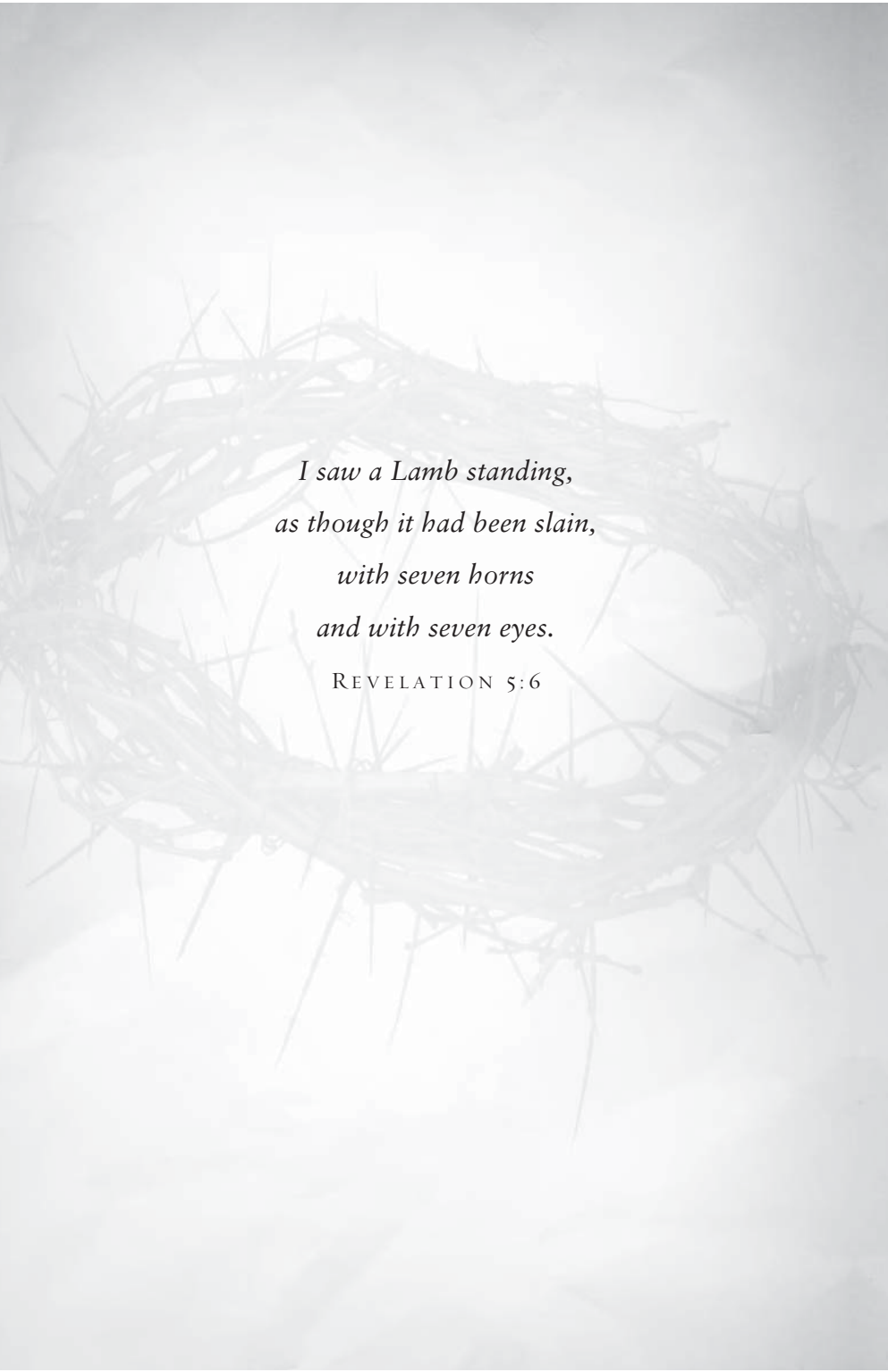
Jesus Christ is the Creator of the universe. Jesus Christ is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. Jesus Christ, the Person, never had a beginning. He is absolute Reality. He has the unparalleled honor and unique glory of being there first and always. He never came into being. He was eternally begotten. The Father has eternally enjoyed “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Hebrews 1:3) in the Person of his Son.

Seeing and savoring this glory is the goal of our salvation. “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, be with me where I am, *to see my glory* that you have given me” (John 17:24). To feast on this forever is the aim of our being created and our being redeemed.

#### A P R A Y E R

*Eternal Father, you never had a beginning. You will never have an ending. You are the Alpha and the Omega. This we believe, because you have revealed it to us. Our hearts leap up with gratitude that you have opened our eyes to see and know that Jesus Christ is your eternal, divine Son, begotten, not made, and that*

*you, O Father, and he, your Son, are one God. We tremble even to take such glorious truths on our lips for fear of dishonoring you with withering and inadequate words. But we must speak, because we must praise you. Silence would shame us, and the rocks themselves would cry out. You must be praised for who you are in the world you have made. And we must thank you because you have made us taste and see the glory of Jesus Christ, your Son. Oh, to know him! Father, we long to know him. Banish from our minds low thoughts of Christ. Saturate our souls with the Spirit of Christ and all his greatness. Enlarge our capacities to be satisfied in all that you are for us in him. Where flesh and blood are impotent, reveal to us the Christ, and rivet our attention and our affections on the truth and beauty of your all-glorious Son. And grant that whether rich or poor, sick or sound, we might be transformed by him and become an echo of his excellence in the world. In Jesus’ name we pray, amen.*



*I saw a Lamb standing,  
as though it had been slain,  
with seven horns  
and with seven eyes.*

REVELATION 5:6

3

## THE LION AND THE LAMB

*The Excellence of Jesus Christ*



A lion is admirable for its ferocious strength and imperial appearance. A lamb is admirable for its meekness and servant-like provision of wool for our clothing. But even more admirable is a lion-like lamb and a lamb-like lion. What makes Christ glorious, as Jonathan Edwards observed over 250 years ago, is “an admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies.”

For example, we admire Christ for his transcendence, but even more because the transcendence of his greatness is mixed with submission to God. We marvel at him because his uncompromising justice is tempered with mercy. His majesty is sweetened by meekness. In his equality *with* God he has a deep reverence *for* God. Though he is worthy of all good, he was patient to suffer evil. His sovereign dominion over the world was clothed with a spirit of obedience and submission. He baffled the proud scribes with his wisdom, but was simple enough to be loved by children. He could

still the storm with a word, but would not strike the Samaritans with lightning or take himself down from the cross.

The glory of Christ is not a simple thing. It is a coming together in one person of extremely diverse qualities. We see it in the New Testament book of Revelation: “The *Lion* of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals” (5:5). Here is the triumphant lion-like Christ ready to unroll the scroll of history.

But what do we see in the next verse? “And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a *Lamb* standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth” (verse 6). So the Lion is a Lamb—an animal that is weak and harmless and lowly and easily preyed upon, and sheared naked for clothes, and killed for our food. So Christ is a lamb-like Lion.

The Lion of Judah conquered because he was willing to act the part of a lamb. He came into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday like a king on the way to a throne, and he went out of Jerusalem on Good Friday like a lamb on the way to the slaughter. He drove out the robbers from the Temple like a lion devouring its prey. And then at the end of the week he gave his majestic neck to the knife, and they slaughtered the Lion of Judah like a sacrificial lamb.

But what sort of lamb? Revelation 5:6 says, the “Lamb [was] standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns.” Notice two things. First, the Lamb is “standing.” It is not slumped in a bloody heap on the ground as it once

was. Yes, it had been slain. But now it is standing—standing in the innermost circle next to the throne.

Second, the Lamb has seven horns. A horn is a symbol of strength and power throughout the book of Revelation (12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 12), as well as in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 33:17; Psalm 18:2; 112:9). And the number seven signifies fullness and completeness. So this is no ordinary lamb. He is alive from the dead, and he is completely mighty in his sevenfold strength. He is, in fact, a lion-like Lamb.

We see this with trembling in Revelation 6:16, where men call to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from . . . the wrath of the Lamb.” And we see it in Revelation 17:14, “They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings.”

So Christ is a lamb-like Lion and a lion-like Lamb. That is his glory—“an admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies.”

This glorious conjunction shines all the brighter because it corresponds perfectly with our personal weariness and our longing for greatness. Jesus said, “Come to me, all who are labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart” (Matthew 11:28-29). The lamb-like gentleness and humility of this Lion woos us in our weariness. And we love him for it. If he only recruited like the Marines, who want strength, we would despair of coming.

But this quality of meekness alone would not be glori-

ous. The gentleness and humility of the lamb-like Lion become brilliant alongside the limitless and everlasting authority of the lion-like Lamb. Only this fits our longing for greatness. Yes, we are weak and weary and heavy-laden. But there burns in every heart, at least from time to time, a dream that our lives will count for something great. To this dream Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. . . . And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

The lion-like Lamb calls us to take heart from his absolute authority over all reality. And he reminds us that, in all that authority, he will be with us to the end of the age. This is what we long for—a champion, an invincible leader. We mere mortals are not simple either. We are pitiful, yet we have mighty passions. We are weak, yet we dream of doing wonders. We are transient, but eternity is written on our hearts. The glory of Christ shines all the brighter because the conjunction of his diverse excellencies corresponds perfectly to our complexity.

Once, this lamb-like Lion was oppressed and afflicted. He was led to the slaughter. Like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, he did not open his mouth (Isaiah 53:7). But at the last day it will not be so. The lamb-like Lion will become a lion-like Lamb, and with imperial aplomb he will take his stand on the shore of the lake of fire, where his impenitent enemies will “be tormented . . . in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb . . . forever and ever” (Revelation 14:10-11).

## A P R A Y E R

*Almighty and merciful God, we exult in the reflection of your might and mercy in your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. We rejoice in the strength of his lion-like power and in the tenderness of his lamb-like meekness. We take heart from his incomparable combination of excellencies. It reassures us that there is none like him, and that he is not a mere man like others. O grant us, in our brash indifference, to tremble before the Lion of Judah and to humble ourselves under his fierce holiness. And grant us, in our brokenness and fear, to gather courage from the lion-like Lamb. Oh, how we need the whole Christ! Open our eyes to see the fullness of his excellence. Remove the lopsided and distorted images of your Son that weaken our worship and lame our obedience. May the power of the Lion and the love of the Lamb make our faith in Christ unshakable. So deliver us from small dreams and timid ventures and halting plans. Embolden us. Strengthen us. Make us love with fierce and humble love. Let us share the confidence of the Lion of Judah that gave him the will to die like a Lamb and rise in everlasting joy. And in it all, grant that all might see the glory of Christ and that you might be honored through him. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.*

*But God, being rich in mercy,  
because of the great love with which he loved us,  
even when we were dead in our trespasses,  
made us alive together with Christ.*

EPHESIANS 2:4-5

*Let us then with confidence draw near  
to the throne of grace,  
that we may receive mercy  
and find grace to help in time of need.*

HEBREWS 4:16

10

## THE INCARNATE WEALTH OF THE COMPASSION OF GOD

*The Mercies of Jesus Christ*



God is the wealthiest person in the universe. He not only owns more than anyone else. He owns everyone else and everything everyone else owns. When you create something, it belongs to you. And God created everything—including us. “It is he who made us, and not we ourselves [marginal reading]; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture” (Psalm 100:3). There is one ultimate owner in the universe, God. All others are trustees. Neither we nor what we have is finally our own. It is all a trust to be used for the aims of the owner. In a sense, therefore, all sin is embezzling.

But, strikingly, the New Testament describes the wealth of God not mainly in terms of what he created and owns, but mainly in terms of the glory he has from all eternity. Repeatedly we read of “the riches of his glory” or “his riches in glory” (for example, Ephesians 3:16; Philippians 4:19;

Colossians 1:27). If God were only rich because he made and owns all things, he would have been poor before creation. But that means he would have created out of need and would be dependent on his creation. But that is not the picture of God we find in the Bible. God did not create to get wealth; he created to display wealth—the wealth of his glory for the enjoyment of his people (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14).

But even more specifically, the focus of the New Testament is that the wealth of God's glory is, at its apex, the wealth of his mercy. This is something the world takes very lightly: "the riches of [God's] kindness and forbearance and patience" (Romans 2:4). God created and redeemed the world so that he might "make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory" (Romans 9:23). Or, to put it another way, he creates and saves his people "so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7). The universe exists primarily to display the wealth of the glory of the mercy of God for the enjoyment of his redeemed people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

Justice is essential among the perfections of God's glory. But mercy is paramount. "He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD" (Proverbs 17:15). Yes. Therefore justice is essential. But something else is also true: "It is [a man's] glory to overlook an offense" (Proverbs 19:11). Therefore, if justice can be preserved, it is the apex of glory to show mercy.

For this reason Jesus Christ came into the world. Jesus is the mercy of God incarnate and visible. He is also the justice of God incarnate; but justice was subordinate: "God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17). God the Father offered up his Son in death "so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). The substitutionary death of Jesus Christ created the backdrop of justice where justifying mercy would shine with unparalleled glory. Therefore, the glory of God's mercy is the aim of Christ's coming. This is explicit in Romans 15:8-9: Christ came into the world "to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and *in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.*" The aim of the incarnation was to magnify the mercy of God for the enjoyment of the nations.

In Mary's *Magnificat*, and in Zechariah's prophetic song at the birth of John the Baptist, the reason given for the coming of Jesus was "in remembrance of [God's] mercy" (Luke 1:54), and "because of the tender mercy of our God" (Luke 1:78). Or as the apostle Paul put it, the work of Christ is due to God's being "rich in mercy" (Ephesians 2:4). It is all "according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7). He bestows "his riches on all who call on him" (Romans 10:12).

This mercy that Jesus embodies and brings is utterly free. Not that there was no cost. Jesus paid the price at the cost of his own life. "In him we have redemption *through his blood*, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to

the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7). But now, to broken and needy sinners, it is absolutely free. Thus God says, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. . . . So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills” (Romans 9:14-16, 18). We do not earn mercy. We receive it as a free gift by faith, not by works. “He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy” (Titus 3:5).

Even the faith to receive this mercy is itself a gift of mercy. “To you it has been freely given for Christ’s sake to believe” (Philippians 1:29, author’s translation). And what about others? Let us correct “our opponents with gentleness. *God may perhaps grant them repentance* leading to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 2:25; see also Ephesians 2:8; John 6:44; Acts 13:48). From start to finish, God saves us “not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began” (2 Timothy 1:9). His triumphant mercy is utterly free.

Since Christ is the incarnate display of the wealth of the mercies of God, it is not surprising that his life on earth was a lavish exhibit of mercies to all kinds of people. Every kind of need and pain was touched by the mercies of Jesus in his few years on earth.

When the blind beggar cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” many were embarrassed and indignant.

But “Jesus said to him, ‘Recover your sight; your faith has made you well’” (Luke 18:38, 42).

When the revolting and feared lepers raised their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us,” he stopped and took pity on them and said, “‘Go and show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went they were cleansed” (Luke 17:13-14). Even more remarkably, Mark recalls the time another dreaded leper fell on his knees pleading with Jesus to make him clean, and Jesus not only spoke to him, but also touched him: “Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, ‘I will; be clean’” (Mark 1:41).

When Jesus saw a widow who had not only lost her husband but now her only son as well, Luke tells us, “[Jesus] had compassion on her and said to her, ‘Do not weep’” (Luke 7:13). Then he raised her son from the dead. And in this case, not a word was said about her faith. It was a free and lavish overflow of divine mercy, even before faith.

Mercy also drew Jesus to those who were made miserable by demons. One man brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus after years of sorrow. The boy was unable to speak, and the evil spirit often threw the boy into the fire. The father pleaded with Jesus, “Have compassion on us and help us” (Mark 9:22). And even though the grieving father could only manage a mustard seed of faith—“I believe; help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24)—Jesus responded to the cry for pity and rebuked the spirit and cast it out.

Even when a demon-possessed man had no one to be his advocate and could not believe or submit to Jesus—as in the

case of the Gerasene demoniac—the Lord delivered him and then explained that it was sheer mercy: “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you” (Mark 5:19). And don’t miss the added mercy that this man was not a Jew, but a foreigner just like the “Canaanite woman” who cried out, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon” (Matthew 15:22). Neither the demons nor the Gentile distance from Israel stopped the mercy of Jesus.

Not only was the mercy of Jesus kindled by suffering, but also by sin. When Jesus ate with “tax collectors and sinners,” the Pharisees and scribes criticized him. But Jesus told three parables to explain what he was doing. One was the parable of the prodigal son. The climax of this parable pictures God, filled with compassion for his sin-soaked, home-coming son: “While [the son] was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). In other words, Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners because he was the incarnate display of the Father’s tender compassion for sinners.

Jesus showed this compassion not only for individuals who sin and suffer, but also for whole multitudes. He did not look on masses with contempt or with impersonal indifference. Once when great crowds had followed him and had not planned well for their food, Jesus looked on them and said, “I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat” (Mark 8:2). On another occasion, it was not their hunger

but their spiritual need for truth that filled him with compassion for the crowds: “He saw a great crowd, and he felt compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things” (Mark 6:34).

One of the most sweeping statements about God’s mercy that Jesus ever made came from Hosea 6:6. It was Jesus’ way of putting the whole Old Testament ceremonial law under the banner of mercy instead of meticulous rules. When he was criticized for going to dinner at Matthew’s house with unclean tax collectors, he turned the criticism around and said, “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice’ [Hosea 6:6]. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matthew 9:13). And when his disciples were rebuked by the Pharisees for picking grain and eating it on the Sabbath, Jesus said, “If you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless” (Matthew 12:7). In other words, Jesus’ entire ministry was shaped by the insight that mercy is the ultimate meaning of God’s law. And since Jesus came not to abolish but to fulfill that law (Matthew 5:17), he was the incarnation and manifestation of the wealth of the mercy of God.

The same is true of Jesus today. In this regard “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). This is why God, who is called “the Father of mercies” (2 Corinthians 1:3), beckons us to come boldly to his throne through Jesus Christ who can “sympathize with our weaknesses” (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus is our sinless,

## SEEING AND SAVORING JESUS CHRIST

all-sufficient High Priest. He has offered himself as our substitute in perfect obedience and perfect sacrifice. All the Father's mercies belong to those who come to God through faith in Jesus. "Let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

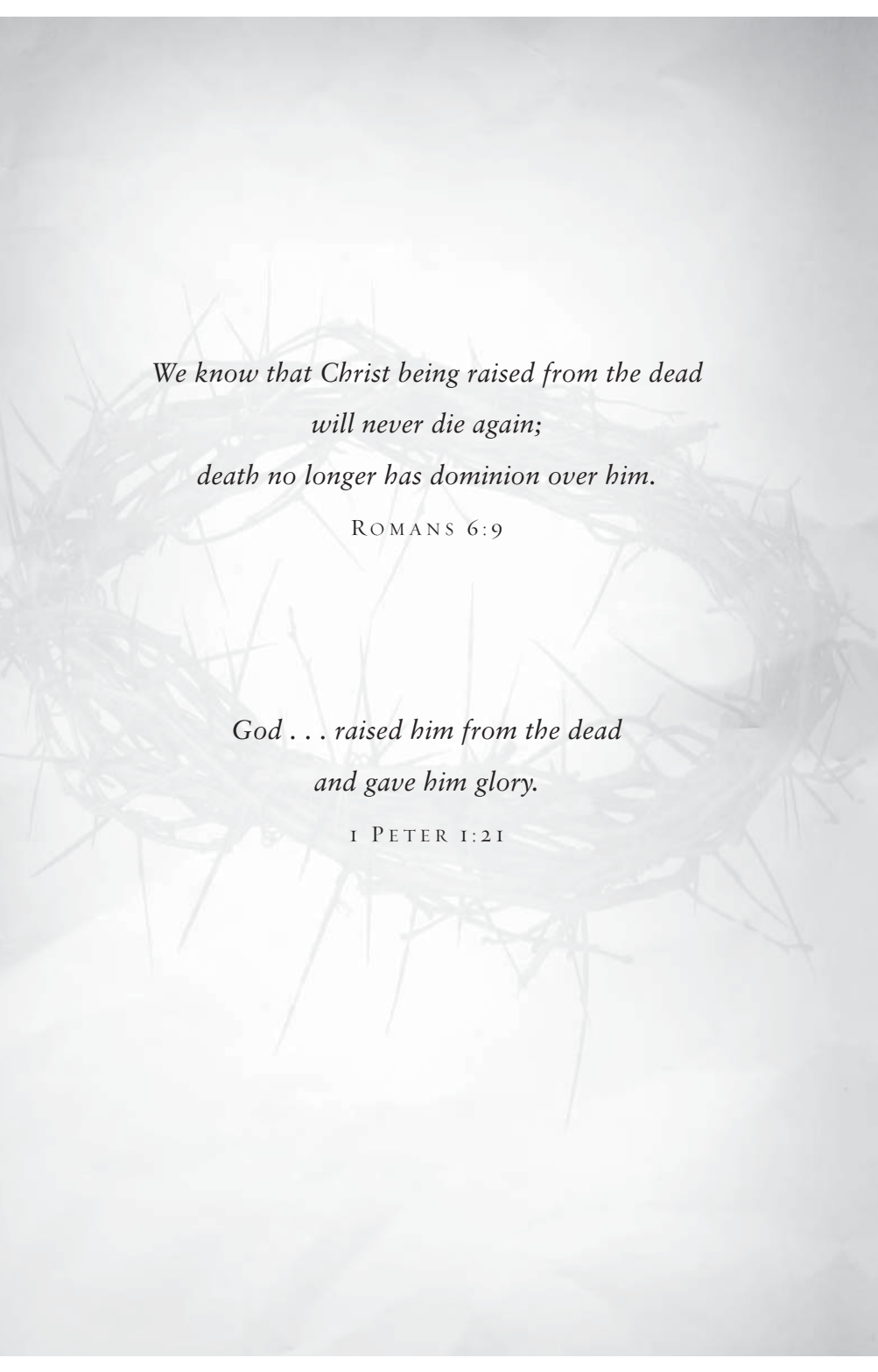
The place where mercies are kept is at the throne of God. Here is infinite wealth and infinite power and infinite wisdom. And all this stands ready in the service of mercy, because of Jesus Christ, the mercy of God incarnate. Whether you learn this through pleasure, or learn it through pain, like Job, whatever you do, learn it: "The Lord is compassionate and merciful" (James 5:11).

## A P R A Y E R

*O Father, how we need mercy. We sin every day. We fall short of your command to love you with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. We are lukewarm in our affections. All our motives, even at their best, are mixed. We murmur. We are anxious about tomorrow. We get angry too quickly. We desire what ought not be desired. We get irritated at the very attitudes in others that we ourselves displayed five minutes before. If you do not show mercy to us, we are undone. O God, let us see the mercy of Christ and savor it for what it is. Grant us power to comprehend his love. Incline us to read and ponder the stories of the mercy of Jesus in the Gospels. Let us so admire what he did*

## *The Incarnate Wealth of the Compassion of God*

*that we imitate him. But let it be much more than external imitation. Let it come from the heart where we have been broken for our sin and where we have come to cherish mercy and live by mercy and hope in mercy and long for mercy. Make the mercy of Jesus the greatest beauty of the Savior in our eyes. Let us behold, and beholding, become like him. And bend this taste for mercy outward so that we show it. Make us full of his mercy that we might show mercy. Fulfill in us the command to do justice and love mercy. Let us love showing mercy. Make it so much a part of us that it is who we are. So unite us to Christ that his mercy is our mercy, and our mercy is a presenting of Christ. He is all we have to give in the end. Glorify his mercy, Father, in our faith and in our patience. Thank you, oh, thank you, for Christ and your mercy to us in him. In his name we pray, amen.*



*We know that Christ being raised from the dead  
will never die again;  
death no longer has dominion over him.*

ROMANS 6:9

*God . . . raised him from the dead  
and gave him glory.*

1 PETER 1:21

12

## INVINCIBLE LIFE

### *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ*



God raised Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:4; 1 Peter 1:21). Everybody knew he was dead, from the governor to the executing soldiers to the women who buried him to the adversaries who feared a conspiracy of resurrection rumor. They all knew he was dead. That is why the fabrication concocted to explain the empty tomb was not that he wasn't really dead, but that the disciples stole the body (Matthew 28:13). But it didn't work, because people don't risk their lives for a self-made falsehood. The body was not in the tomb, otherwise the enemies would have put a stop to Christianity with Jesus' remains. The disciples were ablaze with boldness, risking their lives by preaching that Jesus was alive (Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15). The evangelist Stephen and the apostle James lost their lives (Acts 7:60; 12:2). And for forty days Jesus was appearing to individuals and groups, some as large as five hundred (Acts 1:3; 1 Corinthians 15:6).

Most of these were not gullible, but hard to convince (Luke 24:11, 38; John 20:25, 27).

As the possibility dawned on the skeptical disciples that the resurrection might be true, the first speculation was that the Jesus they saw was a ghost or apparition of some kind. But Jesus was ruthless to abolish this speculation immediately. To doubting Thomas he said, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe” (John 20:27). And before the stunned disciples on another occasion, Jesus insisted on eating fish to show them that he was not a ghost. “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.’ . . . And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish; and he took it and ate before them” (Luke 24:39-43).

But Jesus’ resurrection body was more than a merely resuscitated mortal body. It was the same and yet not the same. He could be recognized as the one he always was. His body was a physical body. But it was also a transformed body. When the apostle Paul described the future resurrection body of Christians, he was describing the resurrection body of Jesus too, because Christ was raised as “the firstfruits” of the rest of the dead who belong to him (1 Corinthians 15:20). In other words, the body of the risen Christ is part of the same harvest of all the other bodies that he will raise in glory at the last day. Christ, Paul says, “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body”

(Philippians 3:21). Therefore this description of our future resurrection bodies applies to Jesus’ body too: “What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). It is the same and yet gloriously superior.

Tremendous divine power preceded, accompanied, and followed the resurrection of Jesus. Leading up to his resurrection, Jesus was utterly in charge of his living and dying. “I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again” (John 10:17-18). Jesus scoffed at threats that he could be brought to death before his hour, much less that he could be held in the tomb beyond his own will. When warned that Herod wanted to kill him, Jesus said, “Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course’” (Luke 13:32). He predicted the details of his death and resurrection as one who was following his own unstoppable plan: “Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day’” (Matthew 17:22-23).

In the very act of resurrection, divine power held complete sway. Paul referred to “the working of [God’s] great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead” (Ephesians 1:19-20). And Peter said, “It was not possible for him to be held by [death’s power]” (Acts 2:24).

Coming through death with sovereign power, Christ entered into an imperishable, never-ending life. Jesus has become an ever-living High Priest according to “the power of an indestructible life” (Hebrews 7:16). “Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him” (Romans 6:9). “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name” (Philippians 2:9). “God . . . raised him from the dead and gave him glory” (1 Peter 1:21). Before, during, and afterwards, the resurrection of Jesus was a glorious manifestation of divine power.

Therefore the resurrection of Jesus assures all his future work on behalf of his people: his authority and rule over everything in the universe (Matthew 28:18); his priestly intercession on our behalf (Romans 8:34); his advocacy with God the Father (1 John 2:1); his protecting, comforting presence with us to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20); and his final coming to earth in glory to give rest to us and retribution to all who “do not know God and on those do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8).

And the resurrection of Jesus therefore secures all the blessings he obtained for us in his death. The resurrection vindicates the sufficiency of the cross and seals the certainty and finality of our justification by faith. “[Jesus] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Romans 4:25). All the promises of God, purchased by the blood of Christ, become ours in everlasting perpetuity because of the resurrection of Jesus. Forgiveness, for example: “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and

you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17). But he has been raised, and so forgiveness is real and permanent. “He always lives to make intercession for [us]” (Hebrews 7:25).

In the end, the risen Christ will raise us up with him. “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you” (Romans 8:11). “If we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Romans 6:5). Just as Jesus took back his own life from the fangs of death, so he will raise from the dead those who are his. He makes this promise for all who believe: “I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:40). Thus his resurrection guarantees theirs. They are secure in glory as he is. “They cannot die anymore . . . being sons of the resurrection” (Luke 20:36). “Over such the second death has no power” (Revelation 20:6).

The glory of Christ in the power of his resurrection into invincible life and omnipotent authority will be reflected back to him in the joyful worship of his risen and perfected saints. Who shall enjoy this eternal gift of life? Jesus answers: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me . . . shall never die” (John 11:25-26).

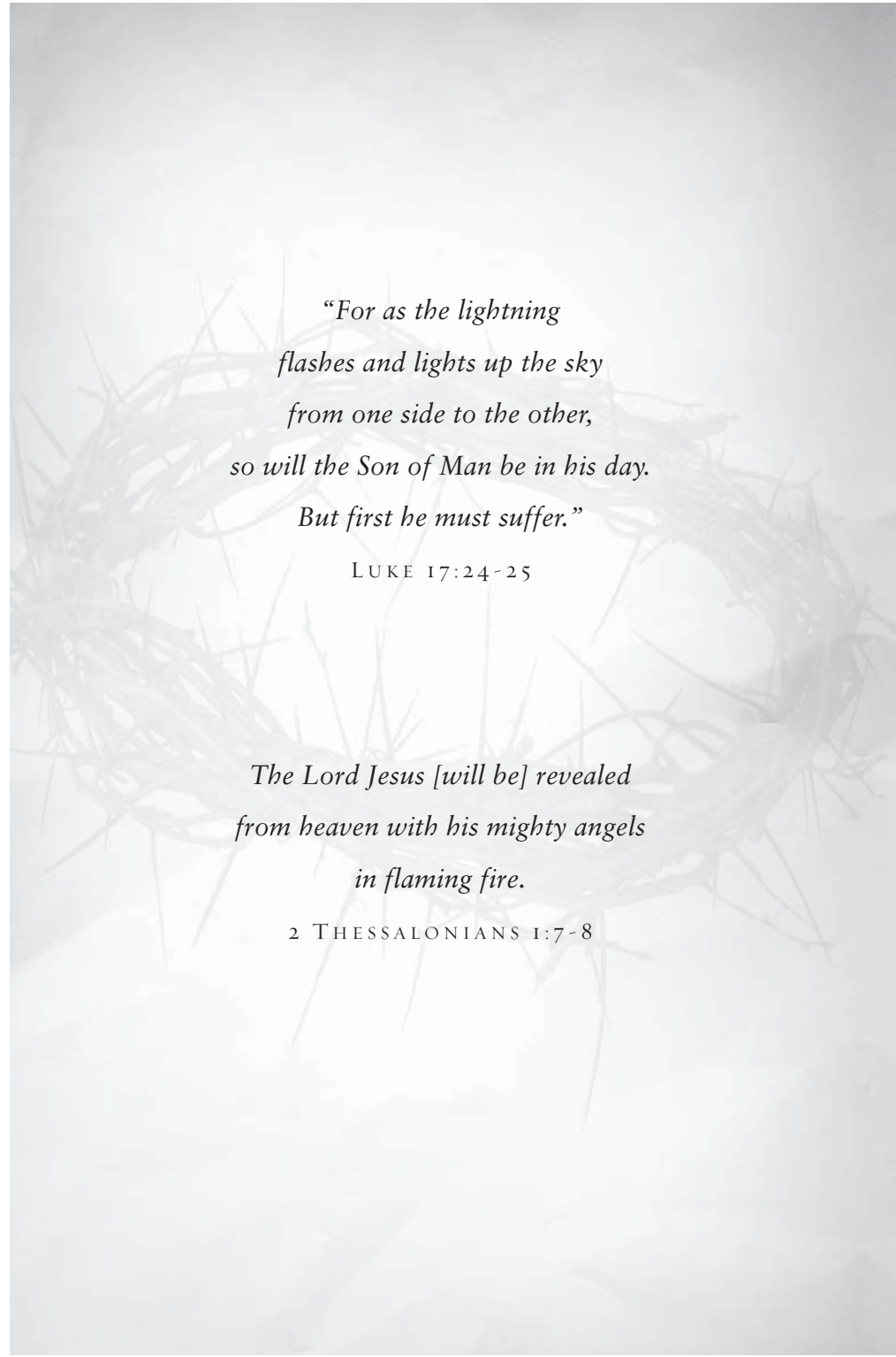
Like every historical fact, the resurrection of Jesus can be doubted. But when God takes in hand the reliability of the witnesses, the courage of their preaching, the futility of the opposition, the effects of the Gospel, the coherence of the message, the all-embracing sufficiency of the Christian worldview, and the spiritual glory of Jesus Christ—when God takes

all this and more in hand, he is able to open the mind of the most resistant skeptic. When God wakens us from the stupor of unbelief and shines into our mind with “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:4, 6), what we see, along with the terrible splendor of his suffering, is the grandeur of his resurrection.

### A P R A Y E R

*Father of glory, we praise you that you mightily raised your Son, Jesus, from the dead. We praise you that the stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is your doing and it is marvelous in our eyes. Death could not hold him! Our last enemy has fallen before your power in the triumph of Jesus over death, and we have been freed from fear of this ancient enemy. And now, O God, grant us to live in the riches of all that Jesus' resurrection means. All authority belongs to him in heaven and on earth. No power and no enemy can prevail against him. Only good can come to us in the end as we trust in him. The best is always yet to come. So, Father, banish fear and fretting and discouragement and moodiness from our lives. Rivet our attention on the ultimate reality of Christ's final triumph over death. Never let us forget or fail to feel universal glory that you have given Jesus a name that is above every name. Make this practical in our daily lives as we see every person, great and small, facing someday the risen and triumphant Judge of all the*

*nations. Give us a brokenhearted boldness in the mercy and the might of Jesus. O Father, we want our lives to count for the display of his greatness. Work in us to this end with all your might, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen.*



*“For as the lightning  
flashes and lights up the sky  
from one side to the other,  
so will the Son of Man be in his day.*

*But first he must suffer.”*

LUKE 17:24-25

*The Lord Jesus [will be] revealed  
from heaven with his mighty angels  
in flaming fire.*

2 THESSALONIANS 1:7-8

13

## THE APPEARING OF THE GLORY OF OUR GREAT GOD AND SAVIOR

*The Second Coming of Jesus Christ*



At his first coming, Christ partook of flesh and blood so that “through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death . . . and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Hebrews 2:14-15). He will appear a second time to save those who are eagerly waiting for him (Hebrews 9:28).

The time is coming when faith will be swallowed up by sight. For now, “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). But at the last trumpet, when the dead are raised and we are changed in the blink of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:52), spiritual and physical seeing will coalesce into one overwhelming apprehension of the glory of Christ.

For now, we see Christ with the “eyes of [our] hearts”

(Ephesians 1:18). God shines in our hearts to give us the “light of the gospel of the *glory* of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:4, 6). “No one knows the Son except the Father” (Matthew 11:27). So if we see the glory of the Son, what Jesus said to Peter is true of us as well: “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17). When that happens, we are “beholding the glory of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

But there is a glory to come that we do not now see. Paul calls it “our blessed hope”—“the appearing of the *glory* of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). *First* there was the suffering of the Son of Man and the revelation of its glory only to the eyes of faith (1 Corinthians 1:18, 23). *Then*, at the end of the age, comes a glory for all to see with the natural eyes. “As the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day. But first he must suffer” (Luke 17:24-25).

Glory—this is the way the inspired writers speak of that event again and again. “The Son of Man comes in his *glory*, and all the angels with him” (Matthew 25:31). Not just some of the angels. *All* of them, “numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands” (Revelation 5:11). Heaven will be left without a single angel.

And when the Son of Man comes, “he will sit on his *glorious* throne” (Matthew 25:31). And from that glorious throne he will reign. “The government shall be on his shoulder. . . . Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end . . . with justice and with righteousness . . . forevermore” (Isaiah 9:6-7).

That glory will be the glory of the Son of Man (Matthew 25:31). But because the Son of Man is also the Son of God and he and the Father are one, it will also be “the glory of his Father” (Matthew 16:27). His coming is simply called the revelation of “his *glory*” (1 Peter 4:13), and every saint, Peter says, will be “a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed” (1 Peter 5:1).

The joy of the saints, who “rejoice and [are] glad” at his coming (1 Peter 4:13), will be the joy of prizing and praising the unclouded glory of Christ. This is why he is coming—“to be *glorified* in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed” (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

And what will the display of all this glory be? It will be “the voice of an archangel, and . . . the trumpet of God. . . . The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place” (1 Thessalonians 4:16; Revelation 6:14). It will be the fire of judgment. “The Lord Jesus [will be] revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire” (2 Thessalonians 1:7). All nations will be gathered before him, and every unbeliever “will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (2 Thessalonians 1:9). Kings of the earth and lowly slaves will hide themselves “in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains” and will cry out to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from . . . the wrath of the Lamb” (Revelation 6:15-16). “The lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will kill with the breath of his mouth” (2 Thessalonians 2:8). “Every eye will see him, even those

who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him" (Revelation 1:7).

But the glory of the coming of the Lord will also be salvation. "Christ . . . will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but *to save* those who are eagerly waiting for him" (Hebrews 9:28). At "the voice of an archangel, and . . . the trumpet of God . . . the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

"By the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself" he will "transform" our disease-ridden, decaying bodies into the likeness of "his glorious body" (Philippians 3:21). "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye . . . we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:52). "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore" (Revelation 21:4).

And perhaps most glorious of all is the jealousy with which he will magnify his grace. He will not share the glory of being the grace-giver. Peter tells us simply, "Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13). And what will that grace look like? Jesus pictured it in a parable: "Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them" (Luke 12:37). It is the grace of God's being our "Servant"—the Giver—even to eternity.

Jesus asked at the Last Supper, "Who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves" (Luke 22:27). And so it will be to all eternity. Why? Because the giver gets the glory. Christ will never surrender the glory of his sovereign grace. "Nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything" (Acts 17:25). He created in order to have beneficiaries who magnify his bounty. And he will bring history to an end as the everlasting Giver. From beginning to end his aim is the same: "the praise of his glorious grace" (Ephesians 1:6). Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us love his appearing. "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to *all who have loved his appearing*" (2 Timothy 4:8).

## A P R A Y E R

*Forgive us, Father, for our indifference to the coming of your Son. We have not kept our lamps of expectation burning or bought the oil of eagerness in hope for the Bridegroom to return. We have bought a field and gone to look at it. We have bought oxen and spent time ooling and aahing over their height and weight. We have married a wife and desired her more than the coming of your Son. O Lord, forgive us. We are sorry for the dishonor that our wandering affections show to you and your servant, Jesus. But, Lord, we are eager to*

SEEING AND SAVORING JESUS CHRIST

*change. And we come to you for help. Incline our hearts to Christ. Open our eyes to the glory of Christ. Make the appearing of our great God and Savior a “blessed hope” in our hearts—a happy hope, a satisfying hope. Break our addiction to this world. Cause us to set our minds on things that are above where Christ is seated at your right hand. Work in us the command of Peter to “hope fully in the grace of God that is coming at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Free us from the anxieties that come from too much dependence on earthly circumstances. Form us into a radical band of risk-takers in the cause of love because we know that this mortal flesh will put on immortality and this body of lowliness will be transformed into a body like Christ’s glorious body. We love you, Father. We love your Son’s appearing. Grant us to live out this hope in the freedom of self-sacrifice to the glory of your great grace. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

# 19

## The Cost of Discipleship

In previous chapters we have touched on Jesus' call to discipleship. Here we will examine it more closely. Let me say again unequivocally that Jesus' summons to deny self and follow Him was an invitation to salvation, not an offer of a "higher life," or a second step of faith following salvation. The contemporary teaching that separates discipleship from salvation springs from ideas that are foreign to Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

Every Christian is a disciple.<sup>2</sup> The Lord's Great Commission was to go into all the world and "make disciples . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19–20). That means the mission of the church, and the goal of evangelism, is to make disciples. Disciples are people who believe, those whose faith motivates them to obey all Jesus commanded. The word *disciple* is used consistently as a synonym for *believer* throughout the book of Acts (6:1, 2, 7; 11:26; 14:20, 22; 15:10). Any distinction between the two words is purely artificial. Though introduced by sincere and well-meaning men, it has given birth to a theology of easy-believism that disposes of the hard demands of Jesus.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Zane C. Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit* (Portland: Multnomah, 1980), pp. 83–84, where Hodges writes, "How fortunate that one's entrance into the kingdom of God [does] not depend on his discipleship. If it did, how few would ever enter that kingdom!" Yet isn't that exactly what Jesus Himself taught, by saying that the gate was small and the road narrow? "Few are those who find it" (Matthew 7:14).

<sup>2</sup>It is apparent that not every disciple is necessarily a true Christian (cf. John 6:66). The term *disciple* is sometimes used in Scripture in a general sense, to describe those who, like Judas, outwardly followed Christ. It certainly is not restricted to higher level believers. The disciple in Matthew 8:21–22, for example, was anything but committed.

When Jesus called disciples, He carefully instructed them about the cost of following Him. Half-hearted people unwilling to make the commitment did not respond. Thus He turned away those reluctant to pay the price—like the rich young ruler. He warned all who thought of becoming disciples to count the cost carefully. In Luke 14:28–30, He said, "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'"

About those verses, John Stott has written penetratingly, "The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict, half-built towers—the ruins of those who began to build and were unable to finish. For thousands of people still ignore Christ's warning and undertake to follow him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. The result is the great scandal of Christendom today, so-called 'nominal Christianity.' In countries to which Christian civilization has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent, but thin, veneer of Christianity. They have allowed themselves to become somewhat involved; enough to be respectable but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion is a great, soft cushion. It protects them from the hard unpleasantness of life, while changing its place and shape to suit their convenience. No wonder the cynics speak of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism."<sup>3</sup>

A Christian is not one who simply buys "fire insurance," who signs up just to avoid an unpleasant afterlife. A Christian, as we have seen repeatedly, is one whose faith expresses itself in submission and obedience. A Christian is one who follows Christ, one who is committed unquestionably to Christ as Lord and Savior, one who desires to please God. His basic aim is to be in every way a disciple of Jesus Christ. When he fails, he seeks forgiveness and wants to move forward. This is his spirit and his direction.

The call to Christian discipleship explicitly demands just that kind of total dedication. It is full commitment, with nothing knowingly or deliberately held back. No one can come to Christ on any other terms. Those who think they can simply affirm a list of gospel facts and continue to live any way they please should examine themselves to see if they are really in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5).

In Matthew 10:32–39, Jesus told His disciples: "Every one therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him

<sup>3</sup>John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (London: Inter-Varsity, 1958), p. 108.

before My father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. . . . He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it."

There is no more definitive statement on discipleship than this one from our Lord. He spells out in the clearest possible language the cost of discipleship. The words are addressed to the twelve in particular (Matthew 10:5), but they are principles of discipleship applicable to all of us. Verse 24 in Matthew 10 says, "A disciple is not above his teacher." "A disciple" here means any disciple, and the words that follow, to the end of the chapter, apply to discipleship in general.

Those who see disciples as a separate class of more dedicated believers will point out that the twelve—or at least eleven of them—were already believers in Christ. Thus they needed no instruction on what it means to come to Christ with saving faith. It is true that most of the disciples were undoubtedly already true believers, but that does not negate the impact of these words for them. The fact is, these men were already called *disciples*, too (10:1). This was not an invitation to a higher kind of relationship, but a reminder of what was already established when they believed. Our Lord still taught them the implications of their faith and salvation, and constantly reminded them of the commitment they had made when they chose to follow Him.

These words also apply to us. Luke 14:25–35 contains similar words—in even stronger language—which Jesus spoke not just to the twelve but to the multitudes that came to hear Him.

Matthew 10:2 refers to the twelve as "apostles." That means "sent ones." Their basic training being complete, Jesus sent them out to preach. In this parting charge to them, however, He uses the word *disciple*, not *apostle*. His words apply to every disciple, and they serve as a signpost as well to every potential follower of Jesus.

### *Confessing Christ Before Men*

Verses 32–33 are reminiscent of the awesome judgment scene in Matthew 7:21–23. "Every one therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven." Does that mean confession before men is a

condition of becoming a true Christian? No, but it means that a characteristic of every genuine believer is that he or she *will* confess Christ before men. Paul wrote, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation" (Romans 1:16).

The heart of real discipleship is a commitment to be like Jesus Christ. That means both acting as He did and being willing to accept the same treatment. It means facing a hostile world and doing it fearlessly. It means confessing before others that Jesus is Lord, and being confident that He will also speak on our behalf before the Father.

"Confess" means to affirm, to acknowledge, to agree. It is a statement of identification, faith, confidence, and trust. One can confess Christ with the mouth, as Romans 10:9 says, and also confess Him through righteous behavior, as Titus 1:16 implies. We are told to confess Christ "before men." This emphasizes the public character of the confession, and its meaning cannot be avoided. In Romans 10:10 we read, "For with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." If the heart truly believes, the mouth will be eager to confess. The confession is human work; it is prompted by God, subsequent to the act of believing but inseparable from it. Again, it is a characteristic of true faith, not an additional condition of salvation.

First John 4:15 says, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." What is the mark of a true Christian? He confesses Jesus as the Son of God.

This does not mean a disciple will always stand up for the Lord. Peter denied the Lord three times on the night He was betrayed. Then there was Timothy, perhaps the finest of Paul's disciples, the pastor of the church at Ephesus. This dedicated young man with such marvelous pastoral gifts was a model disciple. But he may have experienced a temporary spiritual malfunction, or perhaps he was susceptible to fear. Paul had to write to him, "Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord" (2 Timothy 1:8). A moment of failure does not invalidate a disciple's credentials. We have all failed to confess Christ before men more often than we would like to admit. But if we are true disciples, we will not purposely and in a calculated way keep our faith hidden from everyone all the time.

Christ says He will confess us before the Father in heaven (Matthew 10:32). What does that mean? Christ will say on the day of judgment, "This one belongs to Me." He will affirm His loyalty to those who have affirmed their loyalty to Him. The other side of it is also stated: "But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven" (10:33). This does not speak

primarily of open rejecters—people who would deny Christ flagrantly, despise and hate Him, speak against Him, or blaspheme His name. The truth certainly applies to people like that, but here our Lord is talking specifically about false disciples, people who claim to be Christians but are not.

When put to the test, they consistently deny the Lord either by their silence, by their actions, or by their words. In fact, the idea here encompasses all those things. It speaks of someone whose entire life is a denial of Christ. He may claim to believe, but everything about his way of living exudes denial (cf. Titus 1:16). Churches are filled with such people masquerading as disciples, but denying the Lord in some very disturbing ways. Christ will deny them before God.

Matthew 25:31–46 details what will happen in the judgment. This, of course, describes in particular the separation of the sheep and goats at the end of the Tribulation, the judgment of the nations. But its principle applies to individuals in every phase of God's judgment. Here the Lord puts the sheep (those who have confessed Him) on His right hand, and the goats (those who have denied Him) on His left, and ushers the sheep into the kingdom. These are the righteous people who have confessed Him, for He says, "I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me" (25:35–36). Once again, we see that the pattern of their lives reveals the reality of their claim to know Christ. Those who fail to live in a way that is consistent with faith in Christ are sent to eternal punishment (25:46).

### Getting the Priorities Straight

A second hallmark of a true disciple is that he loves Christ even more than his own family (Matthew 10:34–37). Verse 37 in particular is very strong: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." The parallel passage in Luke 14:26–27 is even more forceful: "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple."

To be a disciple, then, must we literally hate our family? Obviously this does not call for hatred in any sense that would violate the clear commandments of God such as, "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12), and, "Husbands, love your wives" (Ephesians 5:25). The key to this passage is the phrase "yes, and even his own life"

(Luke 14:26). The Lord is saying that we must be unquestioningly loyal to Him, even above our families—and especially above ourselves. Scripture teaches us to deny self (Matthew 16:24), consider ourselves dead (Romans 6:11), lay the old self aside (Ephesians 4:22), and in a sense, treat the selfish aspect of our beings with the utmost contempt (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:27). That is the same attitude we are to have toward our possessions and even toward our own family.

Why is this language so severe? Why does Christ use such offensive terms? Because He is eager to chase the uncommitted away and to draw true disciples to Himself. He does not want half-hearted people deceived into thinking they are in the kingdom. Unless He is the number one priority, He has not been given His rightful place.

### Taking up the Cross

One who is not willing to lose his life by taking Christ is not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:38). That person cannot be a disciple (Luke 14:27). These statements cannot be made to accommodate the kind of casual approach to conversion that is in vogue in our generation. Jesus does not ask people to add Him to the milieu of their lives. He wants disciples willing to forsake everything. This calls for total self-denial—to the point of willingly dying for His sake.

When Matthew 10:38 says, "He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me," it does not mean bearing the "cross" of a difficult situation, a chronic disease, or a nagging spouse. We have all heard devotional sermons spiritualize this passage to interpret the cross as everything from a cranky mother-in-law to a leaky roof to a 1957 Chevy. But that is not what the word *cross* meant to Jesus' first-century audience. It did not call to their minds the idea of long-term difficulties or troublesome burdens. It did not even evoke thoughts of Calvary, since the Lord had not yet gone to the cross and they did not understand that He would. When Jesus said, "take up your cross" to them, they thought of a cruel instrument of torture and death. They thought of dying in the most agonizing method known to man. They thought of poor, condemned criminals hanging on crosses by the roadside. Doubtless they had seen men executed in that fashion. They understood He was calling them to die for Him. They knew He was asking them to make the ultimate sacrifice, to surrender to Him as Lord in every sense.

Jesus adds a final paradoxical thought on the meaning of discipleship: "He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:39). "He who has found his

life" seems to refer to a person who has guaranteed his physical safety by denying Christ under pressure, or someone who clings to life rather than taking up the cross. Because his first concern is securing his physical life, this person loses his eternal soul. Conversely, those who are willing to forfeit their lives for Christ's sake will receive eternal life.

The Bible does not teach salvation by martyrdom. The Lord was not advising the disciples to *try* to get themselves killed for Him. He is referring again to a pattern, a direction. He simply says that genuine Christians do not shrink back, even in the face of death. To express it another way, the true disciple tends to follow the Lord, even at the expense of his own self.

Again, this is not absolute in the sense that it disallows temporary failures like that of Peter. But Peter did ultimately prove himself to be a true disciple. The time came when he willingly gave His life for Jesus' sake.

Luke 9:23 records similar words of Jesus: "If any one wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Notice the addition of the one word "daily." The life of a disciple invites persecution and therefore must be a life of daily self-denial. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "I protest, brethren, by the boasting in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily" (1 Corinthians 15:31).

The idea of daily self-denial does not jibe with the contemporary supposition that believing in Jesus is a momentary decision. A true believer is one who signs up for life. The bumper-sticker sentiment, "Try Jesus," is a mentality foreign to real discipleship—faith is not an experiment, but a lifelong commitment. It means taking up the cross daily, giving all for Christ each day with no reservations, no uncertainty, no hesitation. It means nothing is knowingly held back, nothing purposely shielded from His lordship, nothing stubbornly kept from His control. It calls for a painful severing of the tie with the world, a sealing of the escape hatches, a ridding oneself of any kind of security to fall back on in case of failure. A genuine believer *knows* he is going ahead with Christ until death. Having put his hand to the plow, he will not look back (Luke 9:62).<sup>4</sup>

That is how it is when you sign up to follow Jesus Christ. That is the stuff of true discipleship.

<sup>4</sup>Notice that in this same verse our Lord says the one who *does* look back is unfit for the kingdom of God.

## The Lordship of Christ

Recently I read a magazine article inveighing against lordship salvation. It began with the question "Must a person make Christ Lord as a condition for salvation?" No less than ten times in the brief two-page piece the author spoke of "making Christ Lord" of one's life.<sup>1</sup> That terminology has become so familiar in our generation that some Christians are tempted to think of it as biblical. It is not.

Scripture never speaks of anyone "making" Christ Lord, except God Himself, who has "made Him both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). He is Lord of all (Romans 14:9; Philippians 2:11), and the biblical mandate for both sinners and saints is not to "make" Christ Lord, but rather to bow to His lordship. Those who reject His lordship or give mere lip service to His sovereignty are not saved (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:3; Luke 6:46–49). We observed from Jesus' words in Matthew 7:22 that many who verbally or intellectually admit the lordship of Christ will be turned away from heaven, because they do not do the will of the Father in heaven. All who believe the Word of God will agree that Jesus is Lord. He is ever and always Lord, whether or not anyone acknowledges His lordship or surrenders to His authority.

Nevertheless, some contemporary evangelical writers have questioned the place of Christ's lordship in the gospel message. While not denying that Christ is Lord, they suggest it is a truth best kept out of the good news we proclaim to unbelievers. The article I referred to earlier said this: "It is imperative to trust Christ as personal Saviour and be born again. But this is only the first decision. Acknowledging Jesus as Lord is made by believers [sic]. . . . The decision to trust

<sup>1</sup>Rich Wager, "This So-Called 'Lordship Salvation,'" *Confident Living* (July–August 1987), pp. 54–55.

Christ as Saviour and then make Him Lord are two separate, distinct decisions [sic]. The first is made by nonbelievers, the second only by believers. The two decisions may be close or distant in time. But salvation must always precede lordship. It is possible, but miserable, to be saved without ever making Christ Lord of your life."<sup>2</sup>

Does that sound like the gospel according to Jesus? It certainly is not. We have seen that Jesus frequently made His lordship the central issue with unbelievers. Everything He said to the rich young ruler in Matthew 19, for example, demanded recognition of His lordship. In Matthew 7:21–22 and Luke 6:46–49, He challenged the bogus profession of those who called Him Lord but did not really know Him, and He made it clear that obedience to divine authority is a prerequisite of entry into the Kingdom. Clearly, His lordship is an integral part of the message of salvation.

Scripture reveals a number of eternal attributes encompassed in the name "Lord." They are all part of the body of truth to be believed for salvation.

### *Jesus Is God*

To say that Jesus is Lord is first of all to acknowledge that He is almighty God, the Creator and sustainer of all things (Colossians 1:16–17). This is a profound declaration of truth. There is little question that the Bible teaches that Jesus is God. Only cultists and unbelievers dispute this truth. Scripture declares Him to be God (John 1:1, cf. v. 14). God the Father addresses Him as God (Hebrews 1:8). He displays the attributes of deity—He is omnipresent (Matthew 18:20), omnipotent (Philippians 3:21), unchanging (Hebrews 13:8), He forgives sins (Matthew 9:2–7), receives worship (Matthew 28:17), and He has absolute authority over all things (v. 18). Christ encompasses the fullness of God in human flesh (Colossians 2:9). He is one with the Father. In John 10:30, He said plainly, "I and the Father are one."

We see God in action when we read of the works of Christ. When we hear His words as recorded in the New Testament, we hear the words of God. When we hear Christ express emotion, we listen to the heart of God. And when He gives a directive, it is the commandment of God. There is nothing He does not know, nothing He cannot do, and no way He can fail. He is God in the fullest possible sense.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

### *Jesus Is Sovereign*

As Lord God, Jesus Christ is sovereign. He claimed, for example, to be Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8), meaning that His authority as Lawgiver superseded even the authority of the law. In John 5:17, Jesus defended His right to violate the Pharisees' man-made Sabbath laws: "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working." He thus claimed equal authority with God, and the Jewish leaders were so incensed at Him for it that they tried to kill Him (5:18). When Jesus encountered opposition like that, He never engaged obstinate unbelievers in dialogue. He didn't bother to try to argue theology. He simply appealed again to His own inherent authority as God (vv. 19–47; cf. John 10:22–42).

The fact that the Jews could not kill Him before His time was further proof of His sovereignty: "I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again" (John 10:17–18). The influence of His authority extends to every person. In fact, all judgment has been committed to Him: "For not even the Father judges any one, but He has given all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22). Jesus is given all judgment "in order that *all* may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father" (5:23, emphasis added). Likewise, those who dishonor the Son also dishonor the Father.

In the final judgment every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:11–12). That does not mean, of course, that all will be saved, but that even those who die in unbelief will be forced to confess the lordship of Jesus. His sovereignty is limitless. Dr. Marc Mueller, of The Master's Seminary, has expressed the breadth of Jesus' sovereignty with these words: "He is the Almighty God, the Matchless Cosmic Sovereign, who as Creator and Redeemer (Jn. 1:9–13) has the right and power to demand compliance and submission to His imperial, veracious authority."<sup>3</sup>

### *Jesus Is Savior*

Although He is sovereign God, Jesus took on Himself the limitations of human flesh and dwelt personally among men (John 1:14). While on earth, He experienced all the sorrows and tribulations of humanity—except that He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). He walked on earth, showed His love, demonstrated His power, and

<sup>3</sup>Marc Mueller, "Jesus Is Lord," *Grace Today* 81 (August 1981): 6.

revealed in His behavior the righteousness of God. Yet His demeanor was that of a servant. Scripture says He "emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:7-8).

In other words, though He is sovereign Lord of all, He surrendered everything, even to the point where He willingly died the most painful, humiliating death known to man. He did it on our behalf. Though He was sinless, and therefore not worthy of death (cf. Romans 6:23), He suffered the guilt of *our* sin: "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24).

The death of Christ for us was the ultimate sacrifice. It paid the penalty of our sin in full, and opened the way for us to have peace with God. Romans 5:8 says, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. . . . Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him."

Even in death Christ was Lord. His resurrection was proof of that. Paul writes that Christ "was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). Philippians 2:9-11 describes the Father's response to the humility and death of Christ: "Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Therefore, when we invite men to receive Christ as Savior, we ask them to embrace One who is Lord and who was declared to be so by God the Father, who also demands that every knee bow to His sovereignty. Salvation belongs to those who receive Him (John 1:12), but they must receive Him for all that He is—"the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of Kings and Lord of lords" (1 Timothy 6:15).

### *Jesus Is Lord*

Jesus is Lord. Consistently Scripture affirms the lordship of Christ in every way. He is Lord in judgment. He is Lord over the Sabbath. He is Lord over all (Acts 10:36). He is called Lord (*kurios*) no less than 747 times in the New Testament.<sup>4</sup> The book of Acts alone refers

<sup>4</sup>For an excellent lexical analysis of the New Testament usage of *kurios*, see Kenneth L. Gentry, "The Great Option: A Study of the Lordship Controversy," *Baptist Reformation Review* 5 (Spring, 1976): 63-69.

to Him 92 times as Lord, while calling Him Savior only twice. Clearly in the early church's preaching, the lordship of Christ was the heart of the Christian message.

The centrality of Jesus' lordship to the gospel message is clear from the way Scripture presents the terms of salvation. Those who dichotomize between believing on Christ as Savior and yielding to Him as Lord have a difficult time with many of the biblical invitations to faith, such as Acts 2:21: "Every one who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved"; or Acts 2:36: "Let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him *both Lord and Christ*—this Jesus whom you crucified"; or Acts 16:31: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved"; and particularly Romans 10:9-10: "That if you confess with your mouth *Jesus as Lord*, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved" (emphases added).

All of these passages include indisputably the lordship of Christ as part of the gospel to be believed for salvation. We saw that Jesus' lordship includes the ideas of dominion, authority, sovereignty, and the right to govern. If those things are implicit in the phrase "confess . . . Jesus as Lord" (Romans 10:9), then it is clear that people who come to Christ for salvation must do so in obedience to Him, that is, with a willingness to surrender to Him as Lord.

Not surprisingly, the opponents of lordship salvation have made Romans 10 a focus of their attack. Much has been written in recent years attempting to explain how one can confess Jesus as Lord, yet continue to rebel against His authority. Some take the position that the term *Lord* when used by Scripture in connection with the gospel does not mean "sovereign master," but rather "deity." Charles Ryrie is the most articulate of those who have used this argument. He writes,

To be sure, Lord does [often] mean Master, but in the New Testament it also means God (Acts 3:22), owner (Luke 19:33), sir (John 4:11), man-made idols (I Cor. 8:5), and even one's husband (I Peter 3:6). . . .

. . . In I Corinthians 12:3 Paul said, "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord [literally, Lord Jesus], but by the Holy Ghost." Lord in this sense must mean Jehovah-God for the simple reason that unsaved people can and do say Lord, meaning Sir, in reference to Christ, before they even have the Spirit of God. . . .

Why is Lord Jesus (meaning God-Man) such a significant statement that it can only be said by the Spirit of God guiding a person? It is because this is the essence of our salvation since it focuses on the uniqueness of the Saviour. Almost all "saviours" claim mastery over the lives of their followers. . . . But what religion, other than Christianity, has a saviour

who claimed to be both God and man in the same person? *If Lord in the phrase means Master, then the claim to uniqueness is absent.* If Lord in the phrase means Jehovah-God, then Jesus is unique, and this is the very heart of the message of salvation in Christianity. . . .

. . . This same emphasis is seen in Romans 10:9: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus . . . thou shalt be saved." It is the confession of Jesus as God and thus faith in the God-Man that saves from sin (emphasis added).<sup>5</sup>

In other words, Dr. Ryrie claims those who argue that "Lord" means "sovereign master" divest the call to faith of its significance with regard to the deity of Christ. But that is a straw argument. It is not necessary to eliminate the concept of deity from the word *Lord* in order to understand that it means "master." Ryrie is correct to say that when Scripture refers to Jesus as "Lord" it means He is God. But if anything, that only strengthens the view that absolute rulership is inherent in the word. "God" must mean sovereign Master. What kind of god would He be if He were not sovereign?

Certainly when Thomas said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28), he was using "Lord" as more than an expression of deity. He was not saying, "My God and my God"; he was affirming that Jesus is both God and Master.

Look, for example, at the context of Romans 10:9. Verse 12 uses the phrase "Lord of all" to describe the Savior. It means He is Lord over all, Jews and Gentiles, believers and non-believers alike. Any interpretation that attempts to rid the term of its meaning of sovereign dominion makes no sense at all. Reading that truth into verse 9 results in an even stronger statement: "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord [of all] . . . you shall be saved."<sup>6</sup>

Certainly the word *Lord* means deity wherever Scripture calls Jesus "Lord" in connection with the gospel message. That Christ is God is a fundamental component of the gospel message. No one who denies the deity of Christ could be saved (cf. 1 John 4:2-3). But inherent in the idea of deity is authority, dominion, and the right to

<sup>5</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody, 1969), pp. 173-175.

<sup>6</sup>This calls into question Darrell Bock's declaration that Romans 10 "provides no clear definition of Paul's understanding of the term 'Lord.'" Darrell L. Bock, "Jesus as Lord in Acts and in the Gospel Message," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 143 (April-June 1986): 147. On the contrary, it is clear from Romans 10:12 that Paul placed no limits on the extent of Christ's authority as Lord. Bock goes on to conclude that the term 'Lord' as it relates to the gospel means "the divine Dispenser of salvation" (Ibid., p. 151). In other words, "Lord" means little more than "Savior," except that it conveys the idea of deity. Thus Bock's view is very similar to Ryrie's.

command.<sup>7</sup> A person living in rebellion against Christ's authority does not acknowledge Him as Lord in any sense (cf. Titus 1:16).

The signature of saving faith is surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ. The definitive test of whether a person belongs to Christ is a willingness to bow to His authority. In 1 Corinthians 12:3, Paul wrote, "Therefore I make known to you, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is accursed'; and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."

This does not mean that it is impossible for unsaved people to utter the words, "Jesus is Lord," for obviously they can and do. Jesus Himself pointed out the paradox of those who called Him Lord but did not really believe it (Luke 6:46). Even the demons know and admit who He is (cf. James 2:19). Mark 1:24 records that as Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, a demon-possessed man stood and cried out, "What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" Mark 3:11 says that "whenever the unclean spirits beheld Him, they would fall down before Him and cry out, saying, 'You are the Son of God.'" One demon inside a man possessed by legions of unclean spirits called out, "What do I have to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" (Mark 5:7).

First Corinthians 12:3 cannot refer to just saying the words "Jesus is Lord." It must mean more. It includes acknowledging Him as Lord by obeying Him, by surrendering one's will to His lordship, by affirming Him with one's deeds as well as one's words (cf. Titus 1:16).

This in no way establishes a gospel of human works.<sup>8</sup> Notice that it is the Holy Spirit who enables a person to confess Jesus as Lord: "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." Surrender to Jesus as Lord is no more a meritorious human work than believing on Him as Savior. Neither act is a good deed done to earn favor with God. Both are the sovereign work of God in the heart of everyone who believes. And one is impossible without the other. Jesus could not be Savior if He were not Lord. Furthermore, if He were not Lord, He could not be King, or Messiah, or our great High Priest. Apart from His lordship, every aspect of His saving work is impossible.

When we come to Jesus for salvation, we come to the One who is Lord over all. Any message omitting this truth cannot be called the gospel according to Jesus. It is a crippled message that presents a

<sup>7</sup>See note 21, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Wager, p. 54: "But the lordship of Christ as a prerequisite for salvation places the emphasis on works rather than grace. God does not need anything from man. His salvation is an unconditional gift. Man's role can be no more than that of a recipient who believes the gift to be sufficient payment for his sins."

savior who is not Lord, a redeemer who does not demonstrate authority over sin, a weakened, sickly messiah who cannot command those he rescues.

The gospel according to Jesus is nothing like that. It represents Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and demands that those who would receive Him take Him for who He is. In the words of John Flavel, a 17th-century English Puritan, "The gospel offer of Christ includes all his offices, and gospel faith just so receives him; to submit to him, as well as to be redeemed by him; to imitate him in the holiness of his life, as well as to reap the purchases and fruits of his death. It must be an entire receiving of the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>9</sup>

A. W. Tozer wrote in the same vein, "To urge men and women to believe in a divided Christ is bad teaching for no one can receive half of Christ, or a third of Christ, or a quarter of the Person of Christ! We are not saved by believing in an office nor in a work."<sup>10</sup> Any message that presents a savior who is less than Lord of all cannot claim to be the gospel according to Jesus.

He is Lord, and those who refuse Him as Lord cannot use Him as Savior. Everyone who receives Him must surrender to His authority, for to say we receive Christ when in fact we reject His right to reign over us is utter absurdity. It is a futile attempt to hold onto sin with one hand and take Jesus with the other. What kind of salvation is it if we are left in bondage to sin?

This, then, is the gospel we are to proclaim: That Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate, humbled Himself to die on our behalf. Thus He became the sinless sacrifice to pay the penalty of our guilt. He rose from the dead to declare with power that He is Lord over all, and He offers eternal life freely to sinners who will surrender to Him in humble, repentant faith. This gospel promises nothing to the haughty rebel, but for broken, penitent sinners, it graciously offers everything that pertains to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3).

<sup>9</sup>John Flavel, *The Works of John Flavel* (London: Banner of Truth, reprint), 2:111.

<sup>10</sup>A. W. Tozer, *I Call It Heresy!* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1974), pp. 10–11.

## PART FIVE

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## APPENDIXES

**I** *"In Him is the answer to the human sin-problem. In Him is the answer to our race's heart cry after God and the basic truth of things. In Him is the answer to the groping and sighing of the soul after peace and joy and certainty and ultimate self-fulfillment. To know Christ as the Calvary Sin-Bearer, and as the risen Savior who personally indwells the heart, is of all knowledge the most blessed."*<sup>1</sup> –J. Sidlow Baxter

Soon after Lydia Muller, daughter of the famous George Muller passed away there was found by her bedside a verse which she had written shortly before:

*I have seen the face of Jesus;  
Tell me not of ought beside.  
I have heard the voice of Jesus;  
All my soul is satisfied.*<sup>2</sup>



### I. HIS PRE-EXISTENCE AND DEITY (BEFORE MEN)

*"If Jesus is not God, then there is no Christianity, and we who worship Him are nothing more than idolaters. Conversely, if He is God, those who say He was merely a good man, or even the best of men, are blasphemers. More serious still, if He is not God, then He is a blasphemer in the fullest sense of the word. If He is not God, He is not even good."*<sup>3</sup> –J. Oswald Sanders

#### A. PROVEN BY THE OLD TESTAMENT

® Who is the theme of all the Scripture—John 5:39?  
(Luke 24:27, 44-45; John 5:46-47)

® The New Testament uses identical descriptions for Jesus Christ as are used for YHWH (Jehovah or Lord) in the Old Testament. What correspondence do you see in these two examples?  
Isaiah 6:1 and John 12:41

Exodus 3:14 and John 8:58

*(Genesis 18:25 and 2 Timothy 4:1; Psalm 23:1 and John 10:11; Psalm 27:1 and John 8:12; Isaiah 42:8 and 1 Corinthians 2:8; Isaiah 62:5 and Mark 2:19; Jeremiah 31:34 and Luke 5:21; Daniel 7:13-14 and Matthew 26:63-64)*  
(Remember that throughout the study the verses in parenthesis and italics are for your further study)



## B. PROVEN BY PROPHECY

There are over 300 prophecies in the Old Testament which were fulfilled by Christ.<sup>4</sup>

® Which prophecy on the chart on page 95 would you want to remember in particular to share in proof of who Christ is?

## C. PROVEN BY THE NEW TESTAMENT

### 1. DIRECT STATEMENTS

® What is claimed for Christ in John 1:1-2? (*Romans 9:5; Colossians 2:9; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:1-3; 2 Peter 1:1*)

### 2. CHRIST'S NAMES

® What is Christ called in Hebrews 1:8? (*Matthew 16:16; Matthew 22:43-45; Revelation 19:16*)

### 3. CHRIST'S ATTRIBUTES

® What is attributed to Christ that is only true of Deity in Matthew 28:18, 20? (*Matthew 9:4; Luke 1:35; John 1:48; John 14:6; Hebrews 13:8; Revelation 21:6*)

### 4. CHRIST'S WORKS

® What has Christ done that can only be accomplished by Deity in John 1:3? (*Luke 7:48; John 5:25, 27; John 15:26; Colossians 1:17*)

### 5. CHRIST'S CLAIMS

® What did Christ claim for Himself—John 10:30? (*Matthew 26:63-64; Mark 14:61-64; John 14:10; John 17:5,24; Revelation 1:17-18*)

## For Further STUDY



The issue of Christ's deity historically is a fierce battleground. In the early church Ebionites and Arians, in the Reformation the Socinians and more recently Unitarians, liberal theologians (Schleiermacher, Ritschl and others), and many modern cults such as Christian Science and The Way deny the deity of Christ. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses teach, *"That the Father is greater and older than the Son is reasonable, easy to understand and is what the Bible teaches."*<sup>5</sup>

® How would you answer this from Isaiah 9:6?

® In light of His deity, how should we consider Jesus Christ—John 20:28?

® What area or areas in your life might you be most likely to say no to the Lord and God of the universe?



*"The statement 'Jesus is God' is an absolute statement and a test of historic orthodoxy."*<sup>6</sup>  
—John P. Hannah

## II. HIS INCARNATION (COMING TO MEN)

(See chart on page 96.)

*"No human mind can ever grasp the significance of the occurrence and consequence of the incarnation. That a Person of the God-head should become one of the human family—the sphere of His own creation—with a view to remaining in that form, though glorified, and throughout eternity must continue an insolvable mystery to the creatures of this world."*<sup>7</sup> —L. S. Chafer

### A. HIS EMPTYING

® How is the process of Jesus becoming a man described in Philippians 2:6-7?

This process is described by the term *"kenosis"*, a transliteration of the Greek word emptying. It means that He gave up *voluntary use* of His divine attributes and veiled His divine glory, leaving for a time His riches in glory. He did not give up His divinity!

## B. HIS HUMANITY

*"For Christ to be made flesh was more humility than for the angels to be made worms."*<sup>8</sup>

—Thomas Watson

® How was the incarnation accomplished—Matthew 1:23?  
(John 1:14; Isaiah 7:14)

® How do we know that Jesus was not just a spirit, appearance, or a vision—  
1 John 1:1-2? (Luke 2:52; John 11:35; John 20:27)

## C. HIS UNION

The technical term for the union of Deity and humanity is the *"hypo-static union"* or the union of two natures. He was 100% God and 100% man. The West Minster Shorter Catechism contains the following statement,

*"He continueth to be God and man, in two distinct natures and one person forever."*<sup>9</sup>

® How is the duality of His nature seen in contrast in these two passages—John 4:6 and Matthew 11:28?  
(Matthew 4:2 and John 6:35; John 19:28 and John 7:37)

® What made Christ unique from all other humanity—Hebrews 4:15?  
(John 8:46; 1 John 3:5; Hebrews 13:8)

® Describe in your own words who Jesus is from the concepts presented on the chart on page 96.

## For Further STUDY



® Some (such as the Unitarians) teach that Christ became God's son at some point in His life, such as His baptism. How would you answer this from Galatians 4:4?

## For Further STUDY CONTINUED



® Why is the virgin birth important in regard to Christ's sinlessness—Matthew 1:20?

® Christ is the only theanthropic person, the God Man. Why is it necessary that He be human and divine in order to carry out His ministry to us?

® Consider Christ in the light of 2 Corinthians 8:9. Write out impressions of what you think it was like for Christ in Glory (*Revelation 1:12-17*). Next, write out your impressions of what you think it was like for Him on earth (*Matthew 26:67-68; 27:28-44*) "*It is an unseemly sight to see God humbling Himself and man exalting himself.*"<sup>10</sup> How could you model Mark 10:45 this next week?



## III. HIS LIFE AND MINISTRY AMONG MEN

### A. HIS OFFICES

Jesus is a Prophet (*Matthew 13:57*) who represented God to the people. He is a Priest (*Hebrews 5:1-10*) who represented the people to God. He is the King (*Luke 1:31-33*) who has the right to rule for God to the people.

® What should be your response to each of Christ's offices?

1. Prophet

2. Priest

3. King



# JESUS CHRIST

I. His pre-existence-deity  
II. His incarnation  
III. His life & ministry  
    A. Offices  
    B. The events

## B. THE EVENTS



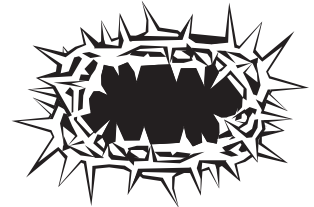
® Looking at the chart on page 97 what did Jesus do before His public ministry and how do you think this prepared Him?

® From the same chart why do you think that so much emphasis is given to the last week of Jesus life?

## IV. HIS DEATH (INSTEAD OF MEN)



*O sacred Head, now wounded,  
With grief and shame weighed down,  
Now scornfully surrounded  
With thorns, Thine only crown:  
How pale Thou art with anguish,  
With sore abuse and scorn!  
How does that visage languish  
Which once was bright as morn!"<sup>11</sup>*



### A. THE PURPOSE

® 2 Corinthians 5:21 has been described as the gospel in a nutshell. Rewrite this verse in your own words.

### B. THE PAYMENT

® Why was Christ's death necessary—Hebrews 9:22?  
(Leviticus 17:11; 1 Peter 1:18-19)

### C. THE PURCHASE

® Why did Christ give Himself for us—Titus 2:14?

## V. HIS RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION (FROM MEN)

*"A living One within my heart this hour,  
Who now no longer lives from me apart,  
But shares His resurrection in my heart."<sup>12</sup>  
—J. Sidlow Baxter*

I. His pre-existence-deity  
II. His incarnation  
III. His life & ministry  
IV. His death  
V. Resurrection & ascension  
A. Physically dead

## A. HE WAS PHYSICALLY DEAD

® How do we know that Jesus was literally dead—John 19:33-34, 39-40?  
(Mark 15:44-45)

## B. HE WAS PHYSICALLY RAISED

® Some have promoted the idea that Christ was raised in the sense of living on in our memories or in some spiritual sense. How would you answer this from Luke 24:39? (Luke 24:42-43; John 2:27)

® If the resurrection is not true, then what else is not true—1 Corinthians 15:17-19?

## C. HE ASCENDED TO THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD

® Jesus Christ the Son of God and Servant is still serving today. What comfort can you draw from Christ's ministry as revealed in Hebrews 7:25? (Other ministries: Matthew 28:20; John 14:2; John 15:26; Ephesians 1:20-23; Ephesians 4:11-12; Hebrews 8:1-2; 1 John 2:1)



## For Further STUDY

® Imagine yourself to be a skeptic. How might you try to explain away these three proofs of the resurrection:

1. The empty tomb.

2. The numerous witnesses. (Matthew 28:9-10; Luke 24:13-35, 36-43; John 20:11-17, 26-29; 21:1-23; 1 Corinthians. 15:5-6)

3. The changed lives of the apostles and the fact that many of them died as martyrs for their faith.



# JESUS CHRIST



® What does your union with Christ in His death and resurrection imply about how you should conduct your life—Romans 6:3-4; 6:12-13? How can you apply this ?

I. His pre-existence-deity  
 II. His incarnation  
 III. His life & ministry  
 IV. His death  
 V. Resurrection & ascension  
     A. Physically dead  
     B. Physically raised  
     C. Ascended

## VI. HIS RETURN (FOR MEN)

J. Hudson Taylor wrote, *"Since He may come any day, it is well to be ready every day. I do not know of any truth that has been a greater blessing to me through life than this."*<sup>13</sup>

® What are three things Christ will do when He returns?  
 John 14:3

Revelation 19:11,15

Philippians 3:20-21

## VII. THE LORD OVER MEN

*"Oh, how I loved Him! Passing all loves except His own, was that love which I felt for Him then. If, beside the door of the place in which I met with Him, there had been a stake of blazing faggots, I would have stood upon them without chains, glad to give my flesh, and blood, and bones, to be ashes that should testify my love to Him."*<sup>14</sup>—C. H. Spurgeon

### A. PERSPECTIVE

*"If Jesus be God, and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him."*<sup>15</sup>—C. T. Studd

® In light of Christ's death for you, what perspective should you have on your life—2 Corinthians 5:14-17?

### B. PASSION



**M**Y utter love, nor more, nor less,  
 His royal heart demands;  
 My King of Love, all loveliness,  
 With nail-scars in His hands.  
 And dare I love Him but in part?  
 How can I but adore,  
 And love away my very heart  
 To Him for evermore.<sup>16</sup>

® What should your life passion be—Philippians 3:10?

# JESUS CHRIST

*I. His pre-existence-deity  
II. His incarnation  
III. His life & ministry  
IV. His death  
V. His resurrection & ascension  
VII. The Lord over men  
A. Perspective  
B. Passion  
C. Priority*

## C. PRIORITY

He is the summing up of all things, the supreme message of the Bible, the Lord of the Universe. We must not become goal, ministry, or method centered but, rather Christ centered.

® What does Satan attempt to do to believers–2 Corinthians 11:3



® What things in your life at this present time are keeping you from your main priority in life–Luke 10:39-42? What steps can you take for change?

## Quiet TIME

Over the next five days spend your devotional times in John 13-17, taking a chapter a day. This Upper Room Discourse is one of the great teaching passages of Christ. It is a seed plot for much of the rest of the New Testament. For each day, find and record:

- ® A promise to keep
- ® A command to obey
- ® An insight into the person of Christ
- ® A truth to apply



- ® What is one truth (it may be a verse or a thought) you want to share with another this week from this study?



**S**"Saviour, I love and adore Thee:  
Joy of all joys—Thou art mine!  
Whom should I treasure before Thee?  
Where is such beauty as Thine?  
How could I ever but love Thee?  
Who can with Thee compare?  
Who in all heav'n is above Thee?  
Who on the earth is so fair?"<sup>17</sup>

## For Further READING

- ® The Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ. 3 bks. Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1978.
- ® Baxter, J. Sidlow, Going Deeper. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959.
- ® Sanders, J. Oswald, The Incomparable Christ. Chicago: Moody Press, 1971.
- ® Swindoll, Charles R. "Glimpses of Golgotha." Cassette tape. Fullerton, Ca: Insight For Living, n.d.
- ® Walvoord, John F., Jesus Christ Our Lord. Chicago: Moody Press, 1969.

*Fulfilled prophecy helps verify the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Looking at prophecies which preceded Jesus by hundreds of years and seeing how Jesus fulfilled them in every detail reveals the authenticity of His claims. The chart below is a brief list of some of the prophecies made concerning the Christ and how Jesus fulfilled them.*

TOPIC	PROPHECY	FULFILLMENT
Place of birth	"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for Me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times" (Micah 5:2), 700 B.C.	"Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea" (Matthew 2:1).
Born of a virgin	"Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son" (Isaiah 7:14, KJV), 700 B.C.	"His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:18).
His triumphal entry	"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9), 500 B.C.	"They took palm branches and went out to meet Him, shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!' Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it" (John 12:13-14).
Betrayed by a friend	"Even My close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared My bread, has lifted up his heel against Me" (Psalm 41:9), 1000 B.C.	"Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them" (Mark 14:10).
His rejection	"He was despised and rejected by men . . . Like one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not" (Isaiah 53:3), 700 B.C.	"He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11).
Crucified with sinners	"He . . . was numbered with the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12), 700 B.C.	"Two robbers were crucified with Him, one on His right and one on His left" (Matthew 27:38).
Hands and feet pierced	"They have pierced My hands and My feet" (Psalm 22:16). 1000 B.C.	"Put your finger here; see My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side" (John 20:27).
His resurrection	"You will not abandon Me to the grave, nor will You let Your Holy One see decay" (Psalm 16:10), 1000 B.C.	"You killed the Author of life, but God raised Him from the dead" (Acts 3:15).
His ascension	"Thou hast ascended on high" (Psalm 68:18, KJV), 1000 B.C.	"He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid Him from their sight" (Acts 1:9).

<sup>18</sup>—Reprinted from Design for Discipleship, Book One. Copyright 1973, 1980 by The Navigators. Used by permission of Navpress, Colorado Springs, Colorado. All rights reserved.

FULLNESS OF DEITY

100% God – Colossians 2:9



UNION

Philippians 2:6-8



TRUE HUMANITY

100% Man – John 1:14

WITHOUT SIN

Hebrews 4:15

In One Person

**JESUS CHRIST**

*The Unique Theanthropic Person*

*The One & Only Mediator*

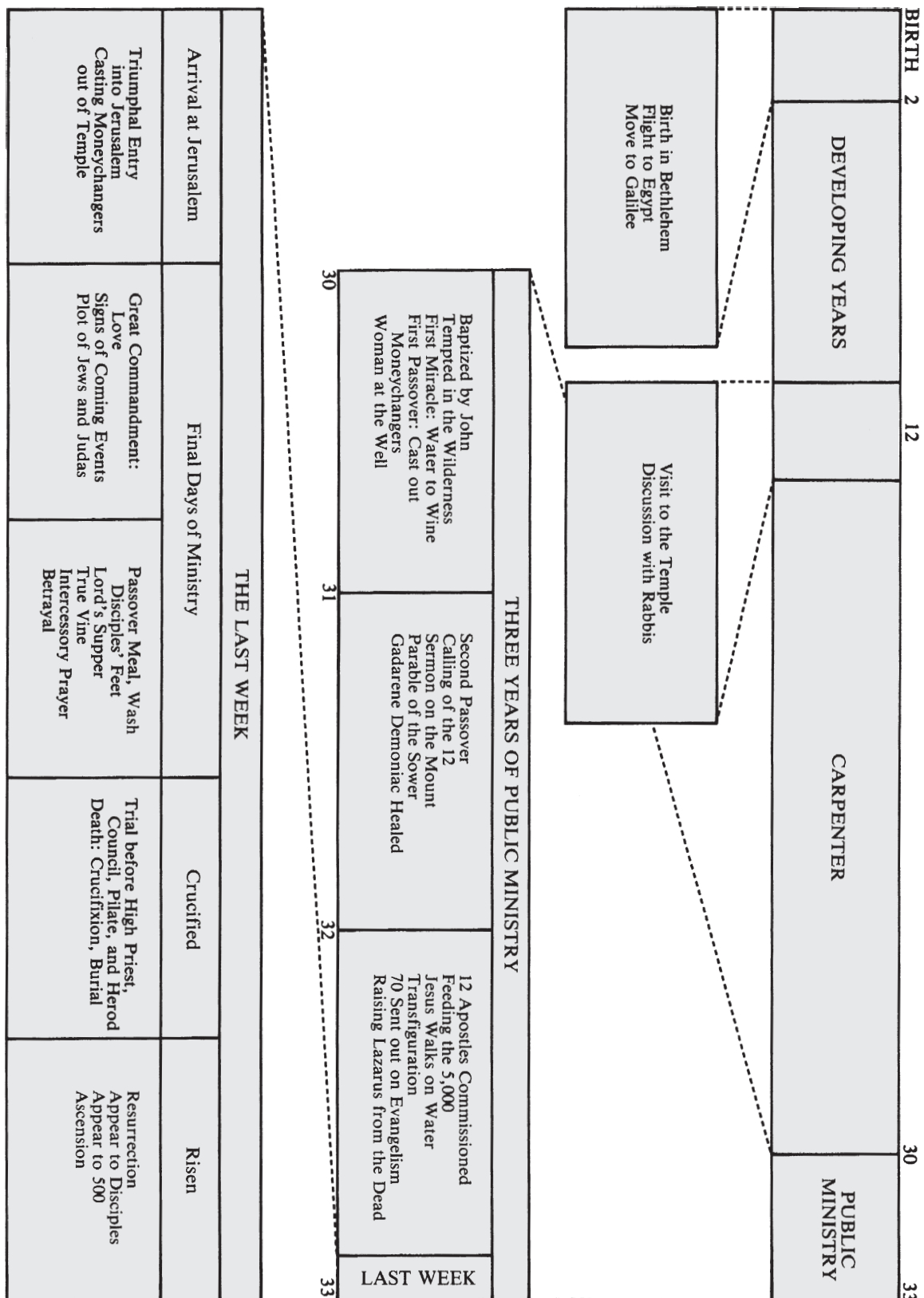
*Our Lord, God & Savior*

*John 20:28*



— **SIN**





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## NOTES

- 1 J. Sidlow Baxter, *Going Deeper*, p. 11.
- 2 Ibid., p. 118.
- 3 J. Oswald Sanders, *The Incomparable Christ*, p. 53.
- 4 Josh McDowell, *Evidence-That Demands A Verdict*, 2 vols. 1:150.
- 5 Walter R. Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, p. 47.
- 6 Donald K. Campbell, ed., *Walvoord: A Tribute*, pp. 140-141.
- 7 Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols., vol. 5: *Christology*, p. 42.
- 8 Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, p. 196.
- 9 Ibid., p. 197.
- 10 The Presbyterian Church in the United States, *The Confession of Faith*, (Question 21), p. 294.
- 11 Paul Gerhardt, Trans., "O Sacred Head", in *The Methodist Hymnal*, stanza 1, p. 141.
- 12 Baxter, p. 56.
- 13 Sanders, p. 245.
- 14 Susannah Spurgeon, Joseph Harrald, Comps., *C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography*, 2 vols., vol. 1: *The Early Years*, p. 93.
- 15 Baxter, p. 124.
- 16 Ibid., p. 132.
- 17 Ibid., p. 118.
- 18 *The Design For Discipleship Series*, 7 bks., bk. 1: *The Spirit-Filled Christian*, pp. 14-15.
- 19 Ibid., p. 20.

## THE MEANING OF THE CROSS

### SATISFACTION through SUBSTITUTION

*There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*

1 Timothy 2:5

*These words contain “the key, not merely to the New Testament, but to the whole Bible, for they crystallize into a phrase the sum and substance of its message.”*

J.I. Packer

### Divine SATISFACTION

*There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*

1 Timothy 2:5

- God must act at all times in absolute consistency with the perfection of His character.

*God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”*

Exodus 3:14

*I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.*

Malachi 3:6

*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*

James 1:17

- Consider the character of God...

- ▶ He is sovereign over all.

*The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.*

Psalms 24:1-2

- ♦ He created all things.

*You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them.*

*You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.*

Nehemiah 9:6

♦ He knows all things.

*Do you know how the clouds hang poised, those wonders  
of him who is perfect in knowledge?  
Job 37:16*

*For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.  
1 John 3:20*

♦ He sustains all things.

*Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep.  
O Lord, you preserve both man and beast.  
Psalm 36:6*

*How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your  
creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number—  
living things both large and small. There the ships go to and fro, and the leviathan,  
which you formed to frolic there. These all look to you to give them their food at the  
proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand,  
they are satisfied with good things. When you hide your face, they are terrified;  
when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you  
send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.  
Psalm 104:24-30*

♦ He owns all things.

*To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens,  
the earth and everything in it.  
Deuteronomy 10:14*

► He is holy above all.

*There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you;  
there is no Rock like our God.  
1 Samuel 2:2*

*And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the  
LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."  
Isaiah 6:3*

*Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even  
under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the  
Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."  
Revelation 4:8*

- He is righteous in all His ways.

*Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked,  
treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you!  
Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?*  
Genesis 18:25

*He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just.  
A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.*  
Deuteronomy 32:4

*The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made.*  
Psalm 145:17

- He is just in all His wrath.

*But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we  
say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.)  
Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?*  
Romans 3:5-6

*All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy  
of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble  
to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This  
will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful  
angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord  
Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence  
of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified  
in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.  
This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.*  
2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

- ♦ He is indignant toward sin.

*You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God,  
has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.*  
Psalm 45:7

*Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you  
tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked  
swallow up those more righteous than themselves?*  
Habakkuk 1:13

♦ He is intolerant of sinners.

*"The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong. You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the Lord abhors."*

Psalm 5:5-6

*But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.*

Genesis 19:26

*Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.*

Leviticus 10:1-2

*While the Israelites were in the desert, a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath day. Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and the whole assembly, and they kept him in custody, because it was not clear what should be done to him. Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp." So the assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the LORD commanded Moses.*

Numbers 15:32-36

*Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank. But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."*

Numbers 20:11-12

*Joshua said, "Why have you brought this trouble on us? The LORD will bring trouble on you today." Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them.*

Joshua 7:25

*When they came to the threshing floor of Nacón, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God.*

2 Samuel 6:6-7

*At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.*

Acts 5:10-11

- ▶ He is loving toward all His creation.

*And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love.  
Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.*

1 John 4:16

- Consider the sinfulness of man...

- ▶ We have denounced His sovereignty.

*When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye,  
and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to  
her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them  
were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed  
fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*

Genesis 3:6-7

*He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness  
and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat's head. He shall  
send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task.*

Leviticus 16:21

- ▶ We have dishonored His holiness.

*Therefore say to the house of Israel, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for  
your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy  
name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the  
holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have  
profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares  
the Sovereign LORD, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes."*

Ezekiel 36:22-23

*For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but  
their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed  
to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made  
to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over  
in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with  
one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served  
created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.*

Romans 1:21-25

- ▶ We have despised His righteousness.

*As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands,  
no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless;  
there is no one who does good, not even one."*

Romans 3:10-12

*When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.*

Romans 6:20

- ▶ We have disregarded His wrath.

*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.*

*Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.*

Ephesians 2:1-4

- ▶ We have denied His love.

*Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?*

Romans 2:4

#### ■ The Divine Dilemma

- ▶ The problem...

- ♦ How can a just God be kind to rebellious sinners who are due His wrath?

*Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent— the LORD detests them both.*  
Proverbs 17:15

- ▶ The tension...

- ♦ How can God express His holiness without consuming us in our sin?
- ♦ How can God express His love without condoning us in our sin?
- ♦ How can God judge sin and justify the sinner at the same time?
- ♦ How can God satisfy Himself and save us at the same time?

*How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man— the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath.*

Hosea 11:8-9

- ▶ The reality...

- ♦ First and foremost, the cross is concerned with a demonstration of the character of God.

*God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*

Romans 3:25-26

- God's forgiveness of our sin is a threat to His character.

*Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die."*

2 Samuel 12:13

- Before the cross is for anyone else's sake, the cross is for God's sake.

*"If I would appreciate the blood of Christ I must accept God's valuation of it, for the blood is not primarily for me but for God."*

Watchman Nee

- ♦ The glory of God drove Jesus to the cross.

*"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"*

John 12:27-28

- He shows us that sin is infinitely offensive.
  - There is no room for self-exaltation at the cross.
  - Everything at the cross is God-exaltation.
- He shows us that God is infinitely glorious.
  - The cross is not a display of the finite worth of man.
  - The cross is a display of the infinite worth of God.

- ▶ The provision...

- ♦ How does God satisfy Himself and save sinners at the same time?

## Divine SUBSTITUTION

*There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*

1 Timothy 2:5

- God satisfies Himself by substituting Himself in the place of sinners.

*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

2 Corinthians 5:21

- Consider the person of Christ...

*"The possibility of substitution rests on the identity of the substitute."*

John Stott

- ▶ Jesus is fully man.

*For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*

Hebrews 2:17

- ♦ He was born of a virgin.

*This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."*

Matthew 1:18-20

*The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."*

Luke 1:35

- ♦ He possessed the full range of human characteristics.
  - A human body.

*And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*

Luke 2:7

*And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.*

Luke 2:40

*Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.*

John 4:6

*After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.*

Matthew 4:2

- A human mind.

*And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*

Luke 2:52

▪ A human soul.

*“Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’?  
No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.”*

John 12:27

*After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified,  
“I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me.”*

John 13:21

*Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.  
Stay here and keep watch with me.”*

Matthew 26:38

▪ Human emotions.

*When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him,  
“I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.”*

Matthew 8:10

*Jesus wept.*

John 11:35

*During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with  
loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death,  
and he was heard because of his reverent submission.*

Hebrews 5:7-8

▪ Human observation.

*When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there. Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. “Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?” they asked. “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren’t all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?”*

*And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, “Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor.” And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.*

Matthew 13:53-58

♦ He is fully able to identify with us.

*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

Hebrews 4:14-16

- He is familiar with our struggles.
- He is familiar with our sorrow.
- He is familiar with our suffering.

► Jesus is fully God.

*“The doctrine of Christ’s divinity seems to me not something stuck on which you can unstick but something that peeps out at every point so that you’d have to unravel the whole web to get rid of it.”*

C.S. Lewis

✦ His identity...

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.*

John 1:1-4

- He is eternal.

*But about the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom.”*

Hebrews 1:8

- He is Creator.

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.*

Colossians 1:15-16

- He is Sustainer.

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

Colossians 1:17

- He is omnipotent.

*He replied, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”*

Matthew 8:26-27

*And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.*

Matthew 14:19

▪ He is omniscient.

*Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things?"*

Mark 2:8

*He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.*

John 2:25

*"Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God."*

John 16:30

▪ He is sovereign.

*When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"*

Mark 2:5-7

*At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."*

Matthew 11:25-27

♦ His testimony...

*"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"*

John 8:58

*"I and the Father are one."*

John 10:30

♦ Man's testimony...

*Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"*

John 20:28

*For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,...*

Colossians 2:9

*The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*

Hebrews 1:3

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was,  
and who is to come, the Almighty."*

Revelation 1:8

- ✦ The quintilemma...
- Is Jesus a legend?
- Is Jesus a lama?
- Is Jesus a liar?
- Is Jesus a lunatic?
- Is Jesus Lord?

*"You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit on Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."*

C.S. Lewis

- ✦ Jesus is fully able to identify with God.

*"He suffered not as God, but he who suffered was God."*

John Owen

- ▶ The person of Christ is a mysterious unity of two natures.

*"Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man...perfect God, and perfect man...who although he be God and man; yet he is not two, but one Christ; one, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by taking of the manhood into God."*

Athanasian Creed

- ✦ His human nature and divine nature are different.
  - He has returned to heaven AND He is present with us.

*After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."*

Acts 1:9-11

*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*

Matthew 28:20

- He was 30 years old AND He eternally existed.

*Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry.*

Luke 3:23

*"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"*  
John 8:58

- He was tired AND omnipotent.

*Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping.*  
Matthew 8:24

*He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"*  
Matthew 8:26-27

- He was born a baby AND He sustains the universe.

*And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*  
Luke 2:7

*For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*  
Colossians 1:16-17

- He lost his human life AND He possesses divine authority.

*Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."*  
*When he had said this, he breathed his last.*  
Luke 23:46

*The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.*  
John 10:17-18

- ♦ His human nature and divine nature are unified.

*"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"*  
John 8:58

*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,...*  
1 Corinthians 15:3

*I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.*

John 16:28

*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*

Matthew 28:20

► The person of Christ on the cross...

♦ Not Jesus alone.

♦ Not God alone.

♦ God in Christ.

*For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

Colossians 1:19-20

■ Consider the purpose of Christ...

*For the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost.*

Luke 19:10

► Jesus came to live a sinless life.

*"What is truth?" Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him."*

John 18:38

*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.*

Hebrews 4:15

*...the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*

1 Peter 1:19

*But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.*

1 John 3:5

♦ He was obedient.

*If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.*

John 15:10

♦ He was righteous.

*...because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.*  
Acts 2:27

*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we  
might become the righteousness of God.*

2 Corinthians 5:21

*My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we  
have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.*

1 John 2:1

▶ Jesus came to die a substitutionary death.

♦ He assumed our identity.

*For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might  
become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he  
might make atonement for the sins of the people.*

Hebrews 2:17

▪ He died in the place of the disobedient.

▪ He died in the place of the unrighteous.

*Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know  
nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people  
than that the whole nation perish." He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that  
year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation  
but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.*

*So from that day on they plotted to take his life.*

John 11:49-53

*You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.  
Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might  
possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still  
sinners, Christ died for us.*

Romans 5:6-8

*For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one  
died for all, and therefore all died.*

2 Corinthians 5:14

*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written:  
"Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."*

Galatians 3:13

*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

1 Peter 2:24

✦ He accomplished our salvation.

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Galatians 2:20

*Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—*

Colossians 1:21-22

### ■ The Divine Dilemma Solved

#### ▶ Divine Satisfaction...

✦ The totality of God's character is expressed.

*Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other.*

Psalms 85:10

*LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD.  
Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.*

Habakkuk 3:2

#### ▶ Divine Substitution

✦ Salvation through God's Son is achieved.

✦ The essence of sin: Man substitutes himself for God.

▪ Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be.

✦ The essence of salvation: God substitutes Himself for man.

▪ God sacrifices Himself for man and puts Himself where only man deserves to be.

*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

2 Corinthians 5:21

#### ▶ Satisfaction through substitution...

✦ At the cross, God expresses His judgment on sin.

✦ At the cross, God endures His judgment against sin.

✦ At the cross, God enables salvation for sinners.

### ■ Consider the prophecy of Christ...

*Isaiah 53 is "the Bible in miniature and the Gospel in essence."*

Charles Spurgeon

► An Important Passage...

- 8 of the 12 verses are attributed to Jesus in the NT.
- Quoted 7 times in the New Testament.

*When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases."*

Matthew 8:16-17

*It is written: And he was numbered with the transgressors; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment.*

Luke 22:37

*This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: "Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"*

John 12:38

*But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?"*

Rom. 10:16

*The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."*

Acts 8:32-33

*It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."*

Rom. 15:20-21

*"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

1 Peter 2:22-25

► An Insightful Passage...

- See the person of Christ.
  - His humanity: He is familiar with suffering (3).
  - His deity: He is free from sin (9).
- See the sinfulness of man (4-6, 8, 12).
- See the substitution of God (4-6, 10-12).
- See the satisfaction of God (6, 10-11).
- See the salvation of men (11).

## Chapter 26

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# The Person of Christ

*How is Jesus fully God and fully man, yet one person?*

### EXPLANATION AND SCRIPTURAL BASIS

We may summarize the biblical teaching about the person of Christ as follows: *Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man in one person, and will be so forever.*

The scriptural material supporting this definition is extensive. We will discuss first the humanity of Christ, then his deity, and then attempt to show how Jesus' deity and humanity are united in the one person of Christ.

#### A. The Humanity of Christ

**1. Virgin Birth.** When we speak of the humanity of Christ it is appropriate to begin with a consideration of the virgin birth of Christ. Scripture clearly asserts that Jesus was conceived in the womb of his mother Mary by a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit and without a human father.

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, *before they came together* she was found to be with child *of the Holy Spirit*" (Matt. 1:18). Shortly after that an angel of the Lord said to Joseph, who was engaged to Mary, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for *that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit*" (Matt. 1:20). Then we read that Joseph "did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus" (Matt. 1:24–25).

The same fact is affirmed in Luke's gospel, where we read about the appearance of the angel Gabriel to Mary. After the angel had told her that she would bear a son, Mary said, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" The angel answered,

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you,  
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;  
*therefore the child to be born will be called holy*  
the Son of God." (Luke 1:35; cf. 3:23)

The doctrinal importance of the virgin birth is seen in at least three areas.

1. It shows that salvation ultimately must come from the Lord. Just as God had promised that the "seed" of the woman (Gen. 3:15) would ultimately destroy the serpent, so God brought it about by his own power, not through mere human effort. The virgin birth of Christ is an unmistakable reminder that salvation can never come through human effort, but must be the work of God himself. Our salvation only comes about through the supernatural work of God, and that was evident at the very beginning of Jesus' life when "God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4–5).

2. The virgin birth made possible the uniting of full deity and full humanity in one person. This was the means God used to send his Son (John 3:16; Gal. 4:4) into the world as a man. If we think for a moment of other possible ways in which Christ might have come to the earth, none of them would so clearly unite humanity and deity in one person. It probably would have been possible for God to create Jesus as a complete human being in heaven and send him to descend from heaven to earth without the benefit of any human parent. But then it would have been very hard for us to see how Jesus could be fully human as we are, nor would he be a part of the human race that physically descended from Adam. On the other hand, it probably would have been possible for God to have Jesus come into the world with two human parents, both a father and a mother, and with his full divine nature miraculously united to his human nature at some point early in his life. But then it would have been hard for us to understand how Jesus was fully God, since his origin was like ours in every way. When we think of these two other possibilities, it helps us to understand how God, in his wisdom, ordained a combination of human and divine influence in the birth of Christ, so that his full humanity would be evident to us from the fact of his ordinary human birth from a human mother, and his full deity would be evident from the fact of his conception in Mary's womb by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit.

3. The virgin birth also makes possible Christ's true humanity without inherited sin. As we noted in chapter 24, all human beings have inherited legal guilt and a corrupt moral nature from their first father, Adam (this is sometimes called "inherited sin" or "original sin"). But the fact that Jesus did not have a human father means that the line of descent from Adam is partially interrupted. Jesus did not descend from Adam in exactly the same way in which every other human being has descended from Adam. And this helps us to understand why the legal guilt and moral corruption that belongs to all other human beings did not belong to Christ.

This idea seems to be indicated in the statement of the angel Gabriel to Mary, where he says to her,

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you,  
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;  
*therefore the child to be born will be called holy*  
the Son of God." (Luke 1:35)

*Because* the Spirit brought about the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary, the child was to be called "*holy*." Such a conclusion should not be taken to mean that the transmission of sin comes only through the father, for Scripture nowhere makes such an assertion. It is enough for us merely to say that *in this case* the unbroken line of descent from Adam was interrupted, and Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. Luke 1:35 connects this conception by the Holy Spirit with the holiness or moral purity of Christ, and reflection on that fact allows us to understand that through the absence of a human father, Jesus was not fully descended from Adam, and that this break in the line of descent was the method God used to bring it about that Jesus was fully human yet did not share inherited sin from Adam.

But why did Jesus not inherit a sinful nature from Mary? The Roman Catholic Church answers this question by saying that Mary herself was free from sin, but Scripture nowhere teaches this, and it would not really solve the problem anyway (for why then did Mary not inherit sin from her mother?). A better solution is to say that the work of the Holy Spirit in Mary must have prevented not only the transmission of sin from Joseph (for Jesus had no human father) but also, in a miraculous way, the transmission of sin from Mary: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you ... *therefore* the child to be born will be called *holy*" (Luke 1:35).

It has been common, at least in previous generations, for those who do not accept the complete truthfulness of Scripture to deny the doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ. But if our beliefs are to be governed by the statements of Scripture, then we will certainly not deny this teaching. Whether or not we could discern any aspects of doctrinal importance for this teaching, we should believe it first of all simply because Scripture affirms it. Certainly such a miracle is not too hard for the God who created the universe and everything in it—anyone who affirms that a virgin birth is “impossible” is just confessing his or her own unbelief in the God of the Bible. Yet in addition to the fact that Scripture teaches the virgin birth, we can see that it is doctrinally important, and if we are to understand the biblical teaching on the person of Christ correctly, it is important that we begin with an affirmation of this doctrine.

## **2. Human Weaknesses and Limitations.**

**a. Jesus Had a Human Body:** The fact that Jesus had a human body just like our human bodies is seen in many passages of Scripture. He was born just as all human babies are born (Luke 2:7). He grew through childhood to adulthood just as other children grow: “And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him” (Luke 2:40). Moreover, Luke tells us that “Jesus increased in wisdom *and in stature* and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52).

Jesus became tired just as we do, for we read that “Jesus, *wearied* as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well” in Samaria (John 4:6). He became thirsty, for when he was on the cross he said, “*I thirst*” (John 19:28). After he had fasted for forty days in the wilderness, we read that “he was *hungry*” (Matt. 4:2). He was at times physically weak, for during his temptation in the wilderness he fasted for forty days (the point at which a human being’s physical strength is almost entirely gone and beyond which irreparable physical harm will occur if the fast continues). At that time “angels came and ministered to him” (Matt. 4:11), apparently to care for him and provide nourishment until he regained enough strength to come out of the wilderness. When Jesus was on his way to be crucified, the soldiers forced Simon of Cyrene to carry his cross (Luke 23:26), most likely because Jesus was so weak following the beating he had received that he did not have strength enough to carry it himself. The culmination of Jesus’ limitations in terms of his human body is seen when he died on the cross (Luke 23:46). His human body ceased to have life in it and ceased to function, just as ours does when we die.

Jesus also rose from the dead in a physical, human body, though one that was made perfect and was no longer subject to weakness, disease, or death. He demonstrates repeatedly to his disciples that he does have a real physical body: he says, “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for *a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have*” (Luke 24:39). He is showing them and teaching them that he has “flesh and bones” and is not merely a “spirit” without a body. Another evidence of this fact is that “they gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them” (Luke 24:42; cf. v. 30; John 20:17, 20, 27; 21:9, 13).

In this same human body (though a resurrection body that was made perfect), Jesus also ascended into heaven. He said before he left, “I am leaving the world and going to the Father” (John 16:28; cf. 17:11). The way in which Jesus ascended up to heaven was calculated to demonstrate the continuity between his existence in a physical body here on earth and his continuing existence in that body in heaven. Just a few verses after Jesus had told them, “A spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39), we read in Luke’s gospel that Jesus “led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them,

he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven” (Luke 24:50–51). Similarly, we read in Acts, “As they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9).

All of these verses taken together show that, as far as Jesus’ human body is concerned, it was like ours in every respect before his resurrection, and after his resurrection it was still a human body with “flesh and bones,” but made perfect, the kind of body that we will have when Christ returns and we are raised from the dead as well. Jesus continues to exist in that human body in heaven, as the ascension is designed to teach.

**b. Jesus Had A Human Mind:** The fact that Jesus “*increased in wisdom*” (Luke 2:52) says that he went through a learning process just as all other children do—he learned how to eat, how to talk, how to read and write, and how to be obedient to his parents (see Heb. 5:8). This ordinary learning process was part of the genuine humanity of Christ.

We also see that Jesus had a human mind like ours when he speaks of the day on which he will return to earth: “But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13:32).

**c. Jesus Had a Human Soul and Human Emotions:** We see several indications that Jesus had a human soul (or spirit). Just before his crucifixion, Jesus said, “Now is my soul *troubled*” (John 12:27). John writes just a little later, “When Jesus had thus spoken, he was *troubled* in spirit” (John 13:21). In both verses the word *troubled* represents the Greek term *tarasso* a word that is often used of people when they are anxious or suddenly very surprised by danger.

Moreover, before Jesus’ crucifixion, as he realized the suffering he would face, he said, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death” (Matt. 26:38). So great was the sorrow he felt that it seemed as though, if it were to become any stronger, it would take his very life.

Jesus had a full range of human emotions. He “marveled” at the faith of the centurion (Matt. 8:10). He wept with sorrow at the death of Lazarus (John 11:35). And he prayed with a heart full of emotion, for “in the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, *with loud cries and tears* to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear” (Heb. 5:7).

Moreover, the author tells us, “Although he was a Son, *he learned obedience* through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (Heb. 5:8–9). Yet if Jesus never sinned, how could he “learn obedience”? Apparently as Jesus grew toward maturity he, like all other human children, was able to take on more and more responsibility. The older he became the more demands his father and mother could place on him in terms of obedience, and the more difficult the tasks that his heavenly Father could assign to him to carry out in the strength of his human nature. With each increasingly difficult task, even when it involved some suffering (as Heb. 5:8 specifies), Jesus’ human moral ability, his ability to obey under more and more difficult circumstances, increased. We might say that his “moral backbone” was strengthened by more and more difficult exercise. Yet in all this he never once sinned.

The complete absence of sin in the life of Jesus is all the more remarkable because of the severe temptations he faced, not only in the wilderness, but throughout his life. The author of Hebrews affirms that Jesus “*in every respect* has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). The fact that he faced temptation means that he had a genuine human nature that could be tempted, for Scripture clearly tells us that “God cannot be tempted with evil” (James 1:13).

**d. People Near Jesus Saw Him As Only a Man:** Matthew reports an amazing incident in the middle of Jesus' ministry. Even though Jesus had taught throughout all Galilee, "healing every disease and every infirmity among the people," so that "great crowds followed him" (Matt. 4:23–25), when he came to his own village of Nazareth, the people who had known him for many years did not receive him:

And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, and coming to his own country he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "*Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all this?*" And *they took offense at him ...* . And he did not do many mighty works there, *because of their unbelief.* (Matt. 13:53–58)

This passage indicates that those people who knew Jesus best, the neighbors with whom he had lived and worked for thirty years, saw him as no more than an ordinary man—a good man, no doubt, fair and kind and truthful, but certainly not a prophet of God who could work miracles and certainly not God himself in the flesh. Although in the following sections we will see how Jesus was fully divine in every way—was truly God and man in one person—we must still recognize the full force of a passage like this. For the first thirty years of his life Jesus lived a human life that was so ordinary that the people of Nazareth who knew him best were amazed that he could teach with authority and work miracles. They knew him. He was one of them. He was "the carpenter's son" (Matt. 13:55), and he was himself "the carpenter" (Mark 6:3), so ordinary that they could ask, "Where then did this man get all this?" (Matt. 13:56). And John tells us, "*Even his brothers* did not believe in him" (John 7:5).

Was Jesus fully human? He was so fully human that even those who lived and worked with him for thirty years, even those brothers who grew up in his own household, did not realize that he was anything more than another very good human being. They apparently had no idea that he was God come in the flesh.

**3. Sinlessness.** Though the New Testament clearly affirms that Jesus was fully human just as we are, it also affirms that Jesus was different in one important respect: he was without sin, and he never committed sin during his lifetime. Some have objected that if Jesus did not sin, then he was not *truly* human, for all humans sin. But those making that objection simply fail to realize that human beings are now in an *abnormal* situation. God did not create us sinful, but holy and righteous. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before they sinned were *truly* human, and we now, though human, do not match the pattern that God intends for us when our full, sinless humanity is restored.

The sinlessness of Jesus is taught frequently in the New Testament. We see suggestions of this early in his life when he was "filled with wisdom" and "the favor of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40). Then we see that Satan was unable to tempt Jesus successfully, but failed, after forty days, to persuade him to sin: "And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13). We also see in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) no evidence of wrongdoing on Jesus' part. To the Jews who opposed him, Jesus asked, "Which of you convicts me of sin?" (John 8:46), and received no answer.

The statements about Jesus' sinlessness are more explicit in John's gospel. Jesus made the amazing proclamation, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). If we understand light to

represent both truthfulness and moral purity, then Jesus is here claiming to be the source of truth and the source of moral purity and holiness in the world—an astounding claim, and one that could only be made by someone who was free from sin. Moreover, with regard to obedience to his Father in heaven, he said, “I always do what is pleasing to him” (John 8:29; the present tense gives the sense of continual activity, “*I am always doing* what is pleasing to him”). At the end of his life, Jesus could say, “I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” (John 15:10). It is significant that when Jesus was put on trial before Pilate, in spite of the accusations of the Jews, Pilate could only conclude, “I find no crime in him” (John 18:38).

In the book of Acts Jesus is several times called the “Holy One” or the “Righteous One,” or is referred to with some similar expression (see Acts 2:27; 3:14; 4:30; 7:52; 13:35). When Paul speaks of Jesus coming to live as a man he is careful not to say that he took on “sinful flesh,” but rather says that God sent his own Son “*in the likeness of* sinful flesh and for sin” (Rom. 8:3). And he refers to Jesus as “him ... who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21).

The author of Hebrews affirms that Jesus was tempted but simultaneously insists that he did not sin: Jesus is “one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, *yet without sin*” (Heb. 4:15). He is a high priest who is “holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens” (Heb. 7:26). Peter speaks of Jesus as “a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Peter 1:19), using Old Testament imagery to affirm his freedom from any moral defilement. Peter directly states, “*He committed no sin*; no guile was found on his lips” (1 Peter 2:22). When Jesus died, it was “the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). And John, in his first epistle, calls him “Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1) and says, “In him there is no sin” (1 John 3:5). It is hard to deny, then, that the sinlessness of Christ is taught clearly in all the major sections of the New Testament. He was truly man yet without sin.

In connection with Jesus’ sinlessness, we should notice in more detail the nature of his temptations in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1–11; Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–13). The essence of these temptations was an attempt to persuade Jesus to escape from the hard path of obedience and suffering that was appointed for him as the Messiah. Jesus was “led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil” (Luke 4:1–2). In many respects this temptation was parallel to the testing that Adam and Eve faced in the Garden of Eden, but it was much more difficult. Adam and Eve had fellowship with God and with each other and had an abundance of all kinds of food, for they were only told not to eat from one tree. By contrast, Jesus had no human fellowship and no food to eat, and after he had fasted for forty days he was near the point of physical death. In both cases the kind of obedience required was not obedience to an eternal moral principle rooted in the character of God, but was a test of pure obedience to God’s specific directive. With Adam and Eve, God told them not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the question was whether they would obey simply because God told them. In the case of Jesus, “led by the Spirit” for forty days in the wilderness, he apparently realized that it was the Father’s will that he eat nothing during those days but simply remain there until the Father, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, told him that the temptations were over and he could leave.

We can understand, then, the force of the temptation, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread” (Luke 4:3). Of course Jesus was the Son of God, and of course he had the power to make any stone into bread instantly. He was the one who would soon change water into wine and multiply the loaves and the fishes. The temptation was intensified by the fact that it seemed as though, if he did not eat soon, his very life would be taken from him. Yet he had come to obey God perfectly in our place, and to do so *as a man*. This meant that he had to

obey in his human strength alone. If he had called upon his divine powers to make the temptation easier for himself, then he would not have obeyed God fully *as a man*. The temptation was to use his divine power to “cheat” a bit on the requirements and make obedience somewhat easier. But Jesus, unlike Adam and Eve, refused to eat what appeared to be good and necessary for him, choosing rather to obey the command of his heavenly Father.

The temptation to bow down and worship Satan for a moment and then receive authority over “all the kingdoms of the world” (Luke 4:5) was a temptation to receive power not through the path of lifelong obedience to his heavenly Father, but through wrongful submission to the Prince of Darkness. Again, Jesus rejected the apparently easy path and chose the path of obedience that led to the cross.

Similarly, the temptation to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple (Luke 4:9–11) was a temptation to “force” God to perform a miracle and rescue him in a spectacular way, thus attracting a large following from the people without pursuing the hard path ahead, the path that included three years of ministering to people’s needs, teaching with authority, and exemplifying absolute holiness of life in the midst of harsh opposition. But Jesus again resisted this “easy route” to the fulfillment of his goals as the Messiah (again, a route that would not actually have fulfilled those goals in any case).

These temptations were really the culmination of a lifelong process of moral strengthening and maturing that occurred throughout Jesus’ childhood and early adulthood, as he “increased in wisdom ... and in favor with God” (Luke 2:52) and as he “*learned obedience* through what he suffered” (Heb. 5:8). In these temptations in the wilderness and in the various temptations that faced him through the thirty-three years of his life, Christ obeyed God in our place and as our representative, thus succeeding where Adam had failed, where the people of Israel in the wilderness had failed, and where we had failed (see Rom. 5:18–19).

As difficult as it may be for us to comprehend, Scripture affirms that in these temptations Jesus gained an ability to understand and help us in our temptations. “*Because he himself has suffered and been tempted* he is able to help those who are tempted” (Heb. 2:18). The author goes on to connect Jesus’ ability to sympathize with our weaknesses to the fact that he was tempted as we are:

For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then [lit., “therefore”] with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:15–16)

This has practical application for us: in every situation in which we are struggling with temptation, we should reflect on the life of Christ and ask if there were not similar situations that he faced. Usually, after reflecting for a moment or two, we will be able to think of some instances in the life of Christ where he faced temptations that, though they were not the same in every detail, were very similar to the situations that we face every day.

**4. Could Jesus Have Sinned?** The question is sometimes raised, “Was it possible for Christ to have sinned?” Some people argue for the *impeccability* of Christ, in which the word *impeccable* means “not able to sin.” Others object that if Jesus were not able to sin, his temptations could not have been real, for how can a temptation be real if the person being tempted is not able to sin anyway?

In order to answer this question we must distinguish what Scripture clearly affirms, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, what is more in the nature of possible inference on our part. (1) Scripture clearly affirms that Christ never actually sinned (see above). There should be no question in our minds at all on this fact. (2) It also clearly affirms that Jesus was tempted, and that these were real temptations (Luke 4:2). If we believe Scripture, then we must insist that Christ “*in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin*” (Heb. 4:15). If our speculation on the question of whether Christ could have sinned ever leads us to say that he was not truly tempted, then we have reached a wrong conclusion, one that contradicts the clear statements of Scripture.

(3) We also must affirm with Scripture that “God cannot be tempted with evil” (James 1:13). But here the question becomes difficult: if Jesus was fully God as well as fully man (and we shall argue below that Scripture clearly and repeatedly teaches this), then must we not also affirm that (in some sense) Jesus also “could not be tempted with evil”?

This is as far as we can go in terms of clear and explicit affirmations of Scripture. At this point we are faced with a dilemma similar to a number of other doctrinal dilemmas where Scripture seems to be teaching things that are, if not directly contradictory, at least very difficult to combine together in our understanding. For example, with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity, we affirmed that God exists in three persons, and each is fully God, and there is one God. Although those statements are not contradictory, they are, nonetheless, difficult to understand in connection with each other, and although we can make some progress in understanding how they fit together, in this life, at least, we have to admit that there can be no final understanding on our part. Here the situation is somewhat similar. We do not have an actual contradiction. Scripture does not tell us that “Jesus was tempted” and that “Jesus was not tempted” (a contradiction if “Jesus” and “tempted” are used exactly in the same sense in both sentences). The Bible tells us that “Jesus was tempted” and “Jesus was fully man” and “Jesus was fully God” and “God cannot be tempted.” This combination of teachings from Scripture leaves open the possibility that as we understand the way in which Jesus’ human nature and divine nature work together, we might understand more of the way in which he could be tempted in one sense and yet, in another sense, not be tempted. (This possibility will be discussed further below.)

At this point, then, we pass beyond the clear affirmations of Scripture and attempt to suggest a solution to the problem of whether Christ could have sinned. But it is important to recognize that the following solution is more in the nature of a suggested means of combining various biblical teachings and is not directly supported by explicit statements of Scripture. With this in mind, it is appropriate for us to say: (1) If Jesus’ human nature had existed by itself, independent of his divine nature, then it would have been a human nature just like that which God gave Adam and Eve. It would have been free from sin but nonetheless *able to sin*. Therefore, if Jesus’ human nature had existed by itself, there was the abstract or theoretical possibility that Jesus could have sinned, just as Adam and Eve’s human natures were able to sin. (2) But Jesus’ human nature never existed apart from union with his divine nature. From the moment of his conception, he existed as truly God and truly man as well. Both his human nature and his divine nature existed united in one person. (3) Although there were some things (such as being hungry or thirsty or weak) that Jesus experienced in his human nature alone and were not experienced in his divine nature (see below), nonetheless, an act of sin would have been a moral act that would apparently have involved the whole person of Christ. Therefore, if he had sinned, it would have involved both his human and divine natures. (4) But if Jesus as a person had sinned, involving both his

human and divine natures in sin, then God himself would have sinned, and he would have ceased to be God. Yet that is clearly impossible because of the infinite holiness of God's nature. (5) Therefore, if we are asking if it was *actually* possible for Jesus to have sinned, it seems that we must conclude that it was not possible. The union of his human and divine natures in one person prevented it.

But the question remains, "How then could Jesus' temptations be real?" The example of the temptation to change the stones into bread is helpful in this regard. Jesus had the ability, by virtue of his divine nature, to perform this miracle, but if he had done it, he would no longer have been obeying in the strength of his human nature alone, he would have failed the test that Adam also failed, and he would not have earned our salvation for us. Therefore, Jesus refused to rely on his divine nature to make obedience easier for him. In like manner, it seems appropriate to conclude that Jesus met every temptation to sin, not by his divine power, but on the strength of his human nature alone (though, of course, it was not "alone" because Jesus, in exercising the kind of faith that humans should exercise, was perfectly depending on God the Father and the Holy Spirit at every moment). The moral strength of his divine nature was there as a sort of "backstop" that would have prevented him from sinning in any case (and therefore we can say that it was not possible for him to sin), but he did not rely on the strength of his divine nature to make it easier for him to face temptations, and his refusal to turn the stones into bread at the beginning of his ministry is a clear indication of this.

Were the temptations real then? Many theologians have pointed out that only he who successfully resists a temptation to the end most fully feels the force of that temptation. Just as a champion weightlifter who successfully lifts and holds over head the heaviest weight in the contest feels the force of it more fully than one who attempts to lift it and drops it, so any Christian who has successfully faced a temptation to the end knows that that is far more difficult than giving in to it at once. So it was with Jesus: every temptation he faced, he faced to the end, and triumphed over it. The temptations were real, even though he did not give in to them. In fact, they were most real *because* he did not give in to them.

What then do we say about the fact that "God cannot be tempted with evil" (James 1:13)? It seems that this is one of a number of things that we must affirm to be true of Jesus' divine nature but not of his human nature. His divine nature could not be tempted with evil, but his human nature could be tempted and was clearly tempted. How these two natures united in one person in facing temptations, Scripture does not clearly explain to us. But this distinction between what is true of one nature and what is true of another nature is an example of a number of similar statements that Scripture requires us to make (see more on this distinction, below, when we discuss how Jesus could be God and man in one person).

**5. Why Was Jesus' Full Humanity Necessary?** When John wrote his first epistle, a heretical teaching was circulating in the church to the effect that Jesus was not a man. This heresy became known as *docetism*. So serious was this denial of truth about Christ, that John could say it was a doctrine of the antichrist: "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses *that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh* is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist" (1 John 4:2–3). The apostle John understood that to deny Jesus' true humanity was to deny something at the very heart of Christianity, so that no one who denied that Jesus had come in the flesh was sent from God.

As we look through the New Testament, we see several reasons why Jesus had to be fully man if he was going to be the Messiah and earn our salvation. We can list seven of those reasons here.

**a. For Representative Obedience:** As we noted in the chapter on the covenants between God and man above, Jesus was our representative and obeyed for us where Adam had failed and disobeyed. We see this in the parallels between Jesus' temptation (Luke 4:1–13) and the time of testing for Adam and Eve in the garden (Gen. 2:15–3:7). It is also clearly reflected in Paul's discussion of the parallels between Adam and Christ, in Adam's disobedience and Christ's obedience:

Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so *one man's act of righteousness* leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so *by one man's obedience* many will be made righteous. (Rom. 5:18–19)

This is why Paul can call Christ "the last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45) and can call Adam the "first man" and Christ the "second man" (1 Cor. 15:47). Jesus had to be a man in order to be our representative and obey in our place.

**b. To Be a Substitute Sacrifice:** If Jesus had not been a man, he could not have died in our place and paid the penalty that was due to us. The author of Hebrews tells us that "For surely it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he *had to* be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation [more accurately, "propitiation"] for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:16–17; cf. v. 14). Jesus had to become a man, not an angel, because God was concerned with saving men, not with saving angels. But to do this he "*had to*" be made like us in every way, so that he might become "the propitiation" for us, the sacrifice that is an acceptable substitute for us. Though this idea will be discussed more fully in chapter 27, on the atonement, it is important here to realize that unless Christ was fully man, he could not have died to pay the penalty for man's sins. He could not have been a substitute sacrifice for us.

**c. To Be the One Mediator Between God and Men:** Because we were alienated from God by sin, we needed someone to come between God and ourselves and bring us back to him. We needed a mediator who could represent us to God and who could represent God to us. There is only one person who has ever fulfilled that requirement: "There is one God, and *there is one mediator* between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). In order to fulfill this role of mediator, Jesus had to be fully man as well as fully God.

**d. To Fulfill God's Original Purpose for Man to Rule Over Creation:** As we saw in the discussion of the purpose for which God created man, God put mankind on the earth to subdue it and rule over it as God's representatives. But man did not fulfill that purpose, for he instead fell into sin. The author of Hebrews realizes that God intended everything to be in subjection to man, but he admits, "As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him" (Heb. 2:8). Then when Jesus came as a man, he was able to obey God and thereby have the right to rule over creation *as a man* thus fulfilling God's original purpose in putting man on the earth. Hebrews recognizes this when it says that now "we see Jesus" in the place of authority over the universe,

“crowned with glory and honor” (Heb. 2:9; cf. the same phrase in v. 7). Jesus in fact has been given “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18), and God has “put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church” (Eph. 1:22). Indeed, we shall someday reign with him on his throne (Rev. 3:21) and experience, in subjection to Christ our Lord, the fulfillment of God’s purpose that we reign over the earth (cf. Luke 19:17, 19; 1 Cor. 6:3). Jesus had to be a man in order to fulfill God’s original purpose that man rule over his creation.

**e. To Be Our Example and Pattern in Life:** John tells us, “He who says he abides in him ought to walk *in the same way in which he walked*” (1 John 2:6), and reminds us that “when he appears we shall be like him,” and that this hope of future conformity to Christ’s character even now gives increasing moral purity to our lives (1 John 3:2–3). Paul tells us that we are continually being “changed into his likeness” (2 Cor. 3:18), thus moving toward the goal for which God saved us, that we might “be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29). Peter tells us that especially in suffering we have to consider Christ’s example: “Christ also suffered for you, *leaving you an example* that you should follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). Throughout our Christian life, we are to run the race set before us “looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). If we become discouraged by the hostility and opposition of sinners, we are to “consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself” (Heb. 12:3). Jesus is also our example in death. Paul’s goal is to become “*like him* in his death” (Phil. 3:10; cf. Acts 7:60; 1 Peter 3:17–18 with 4:1). Our goal should be to be like Christ all our days, up to the point of death, and to die with unfailing obedience to God, with strong trust in him, and with love and forgiveness to others. Jesus had to become a man like us in order to live as our example and pattern in life.

**f. To Be the Pattern for Our Redeemed Bodies:** Paul tells us that when Jesus rose from the dead he rose in a new body that was “imperishable ... raised in glory ... raised in power ... raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15:42–44). This new resurrection body that Jesus had when he rose from the dead is the pattern for what our bodies will be like when we are raised from the dead, because Christ is “the first fruits” (1 Cor. 15:23)—an agricultural metaphor that likens Christ to the first sample of the harvest, showing what the other fruit from that harvest would be like. We now have a physical body like Adam’s, but we will have one like Christ’s: “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven” (1 Cor. 15:49). Jesus had to be raised as a man in order to be the “first-born from the dead” (Col. 1:18), the pattern for the bodies that we would later have.

**g. To Sympathize As High Priest:** The author of Hebrews reminds us that “because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted” (Heb. 2:18; cf. 4:15–16). If Jesus had not been a man, he would not have been able to know *by experience* what we go through in our temptations and struggles in this life. But because he has lived as a man, he is able to sympathize more fully with us in our experiences.

**6. Jesus Will Be a Man Forever.** Jesus did not give up his human nature after his death and resurrection, for he appeared to his disciples as a man after the resurrection, even with the scars of the nail prints in his hands (John 20:25–27). He had “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39) and ate food (Luke 24:41–42). Later, when he was talking with his disciples, he was taken up into

heaven, still in his resurrected human body, and two angels promised that he would return in the same way: “This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, *will come in the same way* as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). Still later, Stephen gazed into heaven and saw Jesus as “the Son of man standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56). Jesus also appeared to Saul on the Damascus Road and said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5)—an appearance that Saul (Paul) later coupled with the resurrection appearances of Jesus to others (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8). In John’s vision in Revelation, Jesus still appears as “one like a son of man” (Rev. 1:13), though he is filled with great glory and power, and his appearance causes John to fall at his feet in awe (Rev. 1:13–17). He promises one day to drink wine again with his disciples in his Father’s kingdom (Matt. 26:29) and invites us to a great marriage supper in heaven (Rev. 19:9). Moreover, Jesus will continue forever in his offices as prophet, priest, and king, all of them carried out by virtue of the fact that he is both God and man forever.

All of these texts indicate that Jesus did not *temporarily* become man, but that his divine nature was *permanently* united to his human nature, and he lives forever not just as the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, but also as Jesus, the man who was born of Mary, and as Christ, the Messiah and Savior of his people. Jesus will remain fully God and fully man, yet one person, forever.

## B. The Deity of Christ

To complete the biblical teaching about Jesus Christ, we must affirm not only that he was fully human, but also that he was fully divine. Although the word does not explicitly occur in Scripture, the church has used the term *incarnation* to refer to the fact that Jesus was God in human flesh. The *incarnation* was the act of God the Son whereby he took to himself a human nature. The scriptural proof for the deity of Christ is very extensive in the New Testament. We shall examine it under several categories.<sup>16</sup>

**1. Direct Scriptural Claims.** In this section we examine direct statements of Scripture that Jesus is God or that he is divine.

**a. The Word *God* (*Theos*) Used of Christ:** Although the word θεός (G2536) “God,” is usually reserved in the New Testament for God the Father, nonetheless, there are several passages where it is also used to refer to Jesus Christ. In all of these passages the word “God” is used in the strong sense to refer to the one who is the Creator of heaven and earth, the ruler over all. These passages include John 1:1; 1:18 (in older and better manuscripts); 20:28; Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8 (quoting Ps. 45:6); and 2 Peter 1:1. As these passages have been discussed in some detail in the chapter on the Trinity, the discussion will not be repeated here. It is enough to note that there are at least these seven clear passages in the New Testament that explicitly refer to Jesus as God.

One Old Testament example of the name *God* applied to Christ is seen in a familiar messianic passage: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called “Wonderful Counselor, *Mighty God* ...” ’ (Isa. 9:6).

**b. The Word *Lord* (*Kyrios*) Used of Christ:** Sometimes the word *Lord* (Gk. Κύριος, G3261) is used simply as a polite address to a superior, roughly equivalent to our word *sir* (see Matt. 13:27; 21:30; 27:63; John 4:11). Sometimes it can simply mean “master” of a servant or slave (Matt.

6:24; 21:40). Yet the same word is also used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was commonly used at the time of Christ) as a translation for the Hebrew יהוה, H3378, “Yahweh,” or (as it is frequently translated) “the LORD,” or “Jehovah.” The word Κύριος is used to translate the name of the Lord 6,814 times in the Greek Old Testament. Therefore, any Greek-speaking reader at the time of the New Testament who had any knowledge at all of the Greek Old Testament would have recognized that, in contexts where it was appropriate, the word “Lord” was the name of the one who was the Creator and Sustainer of heaven and earth, the omnipotent God.

Now there are many instances in the New Testament where “Lord” is used of Christ in what can only be understood as this strong Old Testament sense, “the Lord” who is Yahweh or God himself. This use of the word “Lord” is quite striking in the word of the angel to the shepherds of Bethlehem: “For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ *the Lord*” (Luke 2:11). Though these words are familiar to us from frequent reading of the Christmas story, we should realize how surprising it would be to any first-century Jew to hear that someone born as a baby was the “Christ” (or “Messiah”), and, moreover, that this one who was the Messiah was also “the Lord—that is, the Lord God himself! The amazing force of the angel’s statement, which the shepherds could hardly believe, was to say, essentially, “Today in Bethlehem a baby has been born who is your Savior and your Messiah, and who is also God himself.” It is not surprising that “all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them” (Luke 2:18).

When Mary comes to visit Elizabeth several months before Jesus is to be born, Elizabeth says, “Why is this granted me, that the mother of *my Lord* should come to me?” (Luke 1:43). Because Jesus was not even born, Elizabeth could not be using the word “Lord” to mean something like human “master.” She must rather be using it in the strong Old Testament sense, giving an amazing sense to the sentence: “Why is this granted me, that the mother of the Lord God himself should come to me?” Though this is a very strong statement, it is difficult to understand the word “Lord” in this context in any weaker sense.

We see another example when Matthew says that John the Baptist is the one who cries out in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of *the Lord* make his paths straight” (Matt. 3:3). In doing this John is quoting Isaiah 40:3, which speaks about the Lord God himself coming among his people. But the context applies this passage to John’s role of preparing the way for Jesus to come. The implication is that when Jesus comes, *the Lord himself* will come.

Jesus also identifies himself as the sovereign Lord of the Old Testament when he asks the Pharisees about Psalm 110:1, “The Lord said to *my Lord* Sit at my right hand, till I put your enemies under your feet” (Matt. 22:44). The force of this statement is that “God the Father said to God the Son [David’s Lord], “Sit at my right hand ...” ’ The Pharisees know he is talking about himself and identifying himself as one worthy of the Old Testament title Κύριος (G3261) “Lord.”

Such usage is seen frequently in the Epistles, where “the Lord” is a common name to refer to Christ. Paul says “there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and *one Lord* Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor. 8:6; cf. 12:3, and many other passages in the Pauline epistles).

A particularly clear passage is found in Hebrews 1, where the author quotes Psalm 102, which speaks about the work of the Lord in creation and applies it to Christ:

You, Lord, founded the earth in the beginning,  
and the heavens are the work of your hands;

they will perish, but you remain;  
they will all grow old like a garment,  
like a mantle you will roll them up,  
and they will be changed.  
But you are the same,  
and your years will never end. (Heb. 1:10–12)

Here Christ is explicitly spoken of as the eternal Lord of heaven and earth who created all things and will remain the same forever. Such strong usage of the term “Lord” to refer to Christ culminates in Revelation 19:16, where we see Christ returning as conquering King, and “On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and *Lord of lords*.”

**c. Other Strong Claims to Deity:** In addition to the uses of the word *God* and *Lord* to refer to Christ, we have other passages that strongly claim deity for Christ. When Jesus told his Jewish opponents that Abraham had seen his (Christ’s) day, they challenged him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” (John 8:57). Here a sufficient response to prove Jesus’ eternity would have been, “Before Abraham was, I was.” But Jesus did not say this. Instead, he made a much more startling assertion: “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, *I am*” (John 8:58). Jesus combined two assertions whose sequence seemed to make no sense: “Before something in the past happened [Abraham was], something in the present happened [I am].” The Jewish leaders recognized at once that he was not speaking in riddles or uttering nonsense: when he said, “I am,” he was repeating the very words God used when he identified himself to Moses as “*I AM WHO I AM*” (Ex. 3:14). Jesus was claiming for himself the title “*I AM*,” by which God designates himself as the eternal existing One, the God who is the source of his own existence and who always has been and always will be. When the Jews heard this unusual, emphatic, solemn statement, they knew that he was claiming to be God. “So they took up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple” (John 8:59).

Another strong claim to deity is Jesus’ statement at the end of Revelation, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev. 22:13). When this is combined with the statement of God the Father in Revelation 1:8, “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” it also constitutes a strong claim to equal deity with God the Father. Sovereign over all of history and all of creation, Jesus is the beginning and the end.

In John 1:1, John not only calls Jesus “God” but also refers to him as “the Word” (Gk. λόγος, G3364). John’s readers would have recognized in this term λόγος a dual reference, both to the powerful, creative Word of God in the Old Testament by which the heavens and earth were created (Ps. 33:6) and to the organizing or unifying principle of the universe, the thing that held it together and allowed it to make sense, in Greek thinking. John is identifying Jesus with both of these ideas and saying that he is not only the powerful, creative Word of God and the organizing or unifying force in the universe, but also that he became man: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (John 1:14). Here is another strong claim to deity coupled with an explicit statement that Jesus also became man and moved among us as a man.

Further evidence of claims to deity can be found in the fact that Jesus calls himself “*the* Son of man.” This title is used eighty-four times in the four gospels but only by Jesus and only to speak of himself (note, e.g., Matt. 16:13 with Luke 9:18). In the rest of the New Testament, the phrase “*the* Son of man” (with the definite article “the”) is used only once, in Acts 7:56, where Stephen refers to Christ as the Son of Man. This unique term has as its background the vision in

Daniel 7 where Daniel saw one like a “Son of Man” who “came to the Ancient of Days” and was given “dominion and glory and kingdom, *that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away*” (Dan. 7:13–14). It is striking that this “son of man” came “with the clouds of heaven” (Dan. 7:13). This passage clearly speaks of someone who had heavenly origin and who was given *eternal rule* over the *whole world*. The high priests did not miss the point of this passage when Jesus said, “Hereafter you will see the Son of man *seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven*” (Matt. 26:64). The reference to Daniel 7:13–14 was unmistakable, and the high priest and his council knew that Jesus was claiming to be the eternal world ruler of heavenly origin spoken of in Daniel’s vision. Immediately they said, “He has uttered blasphemy ... He deserves death” (Matt. 26:65–66). Here Jesus finally made explicit the strong claims to eternal world rule that were earlier hinted at in his frequent use of the title “the Son of man” to apply to himself.

Though the title “Son of God” can sometimes be used simply to refer to Israel (Matt. 2:15), or to man as created by God (Luke 2:38), or to redeemed man generally (Rom. 8:14, 19, 23), there are nevertheless instances in which the phrase “Son of God” refers to Jesus as the heavenly, eternal Son who is equal to God himself (see Matt. 11:25–30; 17:5; 1 Cor. 15:28; Heb. 1:1–3, 5, 8). This is especially true in John’s gospel where Jesus is seen as a unique Son from the Father (John 1:14, 18, 34, 49) who fully reveals the Father (John 8:19; 14:9). As Son he is so great that we can trust in him for eternal life (something that could be said of no created being: John 3:16, 36; 20:31). He is also the one who has all authority from the Father to give life, pronounce eternal judgment, and rule over all (John 3:36; 5:20–22, 25; 10:17; 16:15). As Son he has been sent by the Father, and therefore he existed before he came into the world (John 3:17; 5:23; 10:36).

The first three verses of Hebrews are emphatic in saying that the Son is the one whom God “appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” (Heb. 1:2). This Son, says the writer, “reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp [lit., is the “exact duplicate,” Gk. *χαρακτήρ*, G5917] of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power” (Heb. 1:3). Jesus is the exact duplicate of the “nature” (or being, Gk. *ὕπόστασις*, G5712) of God, making him exactly equal to God in every attribute. Moreover, he continually upholds the universe “by his word of power,” something that only God could do.

These passages combine to indicate that the title “Son of God” *when applied to Christ* strongly affirms his deity as the eternal Son in the Trinity, one equal to God the Father in all his attributes.

**2. Evidence That Jesus Possessed Attributes of Deity.** In addition to the specific affirmations of Jesus’ deity seen in the many passages quoted above, we see many examples of actions in Jesus’ lifetime that point to his divine character.

Jesus demonstrated his *omnipotence* when he stilled the storm at sea with a word (Matt. 8:26–27), multiplied the loaves and fish (Matt. 14:19), and changed water into wine (John 2:1–11). Some might object that these miracles just showed the power of the Holy Spirit working through him, just as the Holy Spirit could work through any other human being, and therefore these do not demonstrate Jesus’ own deity. But the contextual explanations of these events often point not to what they demonstrate about the power of the Holy Spirit but to what they demonstrate about Jesus himself. For instance, after Jesus turned water into wine, John tells us, “This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and *manifested his glory*; and his disciples believed in him” (John 2:11). It was not the glory of the Holy Spirit that was

manifested but the glory of Jesus himself, as his divine power worked to change water into wine. Similarly, after Jesus stilled the storm on the Sea of Galilee, the disciples did not say, “How great is the power of the Holy Spirit working through this prophet,” but rather, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea *obey him*?” (Matt. 8:27). It was the authority of Jesus himself to which the winds and the waves were subject, and this could only be the authority of God who rules over the seas and has power to still the waves (cf. Ps. 65:7; 89:9; 107:29).

Jesus asserts his *eternity* when he says, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58, see discussion above), or, “I am the Alpha and the Omega” (Rev. 22:13).

The *omniscience* of Jesus is demonstrated in his knowing people’s thoughts (Mark 2:8) and seeing Nathaniel under the fig tree from far away (John 1:48), and knowing “from the first who those were that did not believe, and who it was that would betray him” (John 6:64). Of course, the revelation of individual, specific events or facts is something that God could give to anyone who had a gift of prophecy in the Old or New Testaments. But Jesus’ knowledge was much more extensive than that. He knew “who those were that did not believe,” thus implying that he knew the belief or unbelief that was in the hearts of all men. In fact, John says explicitly that Jesus “*knew all men* and needed no one to bear witness of man” (John 2:25). The disciples could later say to him, “Now we know that *you know all things*” (John 16:30). These statements say much more than what could be said of any great prophet or apostle of the Old Testament or New Testament, for they imply omniscience on the part of Jesus.

Finally, after his resurrection, when Jesus asked Peter if he loved him, Peter answered, “Lord, *you know everything*; you know that I love you” (John 21:17). Here Peter is saying much more than that Jesus knows his heart and knows that he loves him. He is rather making a general statement (“You know everything”) and from it he is drawing a specific conclusion (“You know that I love you”). Peter is confident that Jesus knows what is in the heart of every person, and therefore he is sure that Jesus knows his own heart.

The divine attribute of *omnipresence* is not directly affirmed to be true of Jesus during his earthly ministry. However, while looking forward to the time that the church would be established, Jesus could say, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, *there am I* in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). Moreover, before he left the earth, he told his disciples, “I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matt. 28:20).

That Jesus possessed divine *sovereignty* a kind of authority possessed by God alone, is seen in the fact that he could forgive sins (Mark 2:5–7). Unlike the Old Testament prophets who declared, “Thus says the LORD,” he could preface his statements with the phrase, “But *I say to you*” (Matt. 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44)—an amazing claim to his own authority. He could speak with the authority of God himself because he was himself fully God. He had “all things” delivered into his hands by the Father and the authority to reveal the Father to whomever he chose (Matt. 11:25–27). Such is his authority that the future eternal state of everyone in the universe depends on whether they believe in him or reject him (John 3:36).

Jesus also possessed the divine attribute of *immortality* the inability to die. We see this indicated near the beginning of John’s gospel, when Jesus says to the Jews, “Destroy this temple, and in three days *I will raise it up*” (John 2:19). John explains that he was not speaking about the temple made with stones in Jerusalem, “but he spoke of the temple of *his body*. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken” (John 2:21–22). We must insist of course that Jesus really did die: this very passage speaks of the time when “he was raised from the dead.” But it is also significant that Jesus predicts that he will have an active role in his own

resurrection: “*I will raise it up.*” Although other Scripture passages tell us that God the Father was active in raising Christ from the dead, here he says that he himself will be active in his resurrection.

Jesus claims the power to lay down his life and take it up again in another passage in John’s gospel: “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father” (John 10:17–18). Here Jesus speaks of a power no other human being has had—the power to lay down his own life *and* the power to take it up again. Once again, this is an indication that Jesus possessed the divine attribute of immortality. Similarly, the author of Hebrews says that Jesus “has become a priest, not according to a legal requirement concerning bodily descent but by the power of *an indestructible life*” (Heb. 7:16). (The fact that immortality is a unique characteristic of God alone is seen in 1 Tim. 6:16, which speaks of God as the one “who alone has immortality.”)

Another clear attestation to the deity of Christ is the fact that he is counted *worthy to be worshiped* something that is true of no other creature, including angels (see Rev. 19:10), but only God alone. Yet Scripture says of Christ that “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9–11). Similarly, God commands the angels to worship Christ, for we read, “When he brings the first-born into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him” ’ (Heb. 1:6).

John is allowed a glimpse of the worship that occurs in heaven, for he sees thousands and thousands of angels and heavenly creatures around God’s throne saying, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” (Rev. 5:12). Then he hears “*every creature* in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, “To him who sits upon the throne *and to the Lamb* be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!” ’ (Rev. 5:13). Christ is here called “the Lamb who was slain,” and he is accorded the universal worship offered to God the Father, thus clearly demonstrating his equality in deity.

### **3. Did Jesus Give Up Some of His Divine Attributes While on Earth? (The Kenosis Theory).** Paul writes to the Philippians,

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but *emptied himself* taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (Phil. 2:5–7)

Beginning with this text, several theologians in Germany (from about 1860–1880) and in England (from about 1890–1910) advocated a view of the incarnation that had not been advocated before in the history of the church. This new view was called the “kenosis theory,” and the overall position it represented was called “kenotic theology.” The *kenosis theory* holds that Christ gave up some of his divine attributes while he was on earth as a man. (The word κενόσις is taken from the Greek verb κενόω, G3033, which generally means “to empty,” and is translated “emptied himself” in Phil. 2:7.) According to the theory Christ “emptied himself” of some of his divine attributes, such as omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence, while he was on earth as a man. This was viewed as a voluntary self-limitation on Christ’s part, which he carried out in order to fulfill his work of redemption.

But does Philippians 2:7 teach that Christ emptied himself of some of his divine attributes, and does the rest of the New Testament confirm this? The evidence of Scripture points to a negative answer to both questions. We must first realize that no recognized teacher in the first 1,800 years of church history, including those who were native speakers of Greek, thought that “emptied himself” in Philippians 2:7 meant that the Son of God gave up some of his divine attributes. Second, we must recognize that the text does not say that Christ “emptied himself of some powers” or “emptied himself of divine attributes” or anything like that. Third, the text *does* describe what Jesus did in this “emptying”: he did not do it by giving up any of his attributes but rather by “taking the form of a servant,” that is, by coming to live as a man, and “being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8). Thus, the context itself interprets this “emptying” as equivalent to “humbling himself” and taking on a lowly status and position. Thus, the NIV, instead of translating the phrase, “He *emptied* himself,” translates it, “but *made himself nothing*” (Phil. 2:7 NIV). The emptying includes change of role and status, not essential attributes or nature.

A fourth reason for this interpretation is seen in Paul’s purpose in this context. His purpose has been to persuade the Philippians that they should “do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves” (Phil. 2:3), and he continues by telling them, “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4). To persuade them to be humble and to put the interests of others first, he then holds up the example of Christ: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant ...” (Phil. 2:5–7).

Now in holding up Christ as an example, he wants the Philippians to imitate Christ. But certainly he is not asking the Philippian Christians to “give up” or “lay aside” any of their essential attributes or abilities! He is not asking them to “give up” their intelligence or strength or skill and become a diminished version of what they were. Rather, he is asking them to put the interests of others first: “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4). And because that is his goal, it fits the context to understand that he is using Christ as the supreme example of one who did just that: he put the interests of others first and was willing to give up some of the privilege and status that was his as God.

Therefore, the best understanding of this passage is that it talks about Jesus giving up the *status* and *privilege* that was his in heaven: he “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” (or “clung to for his own advantage”), but “emptied himself” or “humbled himself” for our sake, and came to live as a man. Jesus speaks elsewhere of the “glory” he had with the Father “before the world was made” (John 17:5), a glory that he had given up and was going to receive again when he returned to heaven. And Paul could speak of Christ who, “though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor” (2 Cor. 8:9), once again speaking of the privilege and honor that he deserved but temporarily gave up for us.

The fifth and final reason why the “kenosis” view of Philippians 2:7 must be rejected is the larger context of the teaching of the New Testament and the doctrinal teaching of the entire Bible. If it were true that such a momentous event as this happened, that the eternal Son of God ceased for a time to have all the attributes of God—ceased, for a time, to be omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent, for example—then we would expect that such an incredible event would be taught clearly and repeatedly in the New Testament, not found in the very doubtful interpretation of one word in one epistle. But we find the opposite of that: we do not find it stated anywhere else that the Son of God ceased to have some of the attributes of God that he had

possessed from eternity. In fact, if the kenosis theory were true (and this is a foundational objection against it), then we could no longer affirm Jesus was fully God while he was here on earth. The kenosis theory ultimately denies the full deity of Jesus Christ and makes him something less than fully God. S.M. Smith admits, “All forms of classical orthodoxy either explicitly reject or reject in principle kenotic theology.”<sup>29</sup>

It is important to realize that the major force persuading people to accept kenotic theory was not that they had discovered a better understanding of Philippians 2:7 or any other passage of the New Testament, but rather the increasing discomfort people were feeling with the formulations of the doctrine of Christ in historic, classical orthodoxy. It just seemed too incredible for modern rational and “scientific” people to believe that Jesus Christ could be truly human and fully, absolutely God at the same time. The kenosis theory began to sound more and more like an acceptable way to say that (in some sense) Jesus was God, but a kind of God who had for a time given up some of his Godlike qualities, those that were most difficult for people to accept in the modern world.

**4. Conclusion: Christ Is Fully Divine.** The New Testament, in hundreds of explicit verses that call Jesus “God” and “Lord” and use a number of other titles of deity to refer to him, and in many passages that attribute actions or words to him that could only be true of God himself, affirms again and again the full, absolute deity of Jesus Christ. “In him *all the fulness of God* was pleased to dwell” (Col. 1:19), and “in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily” (Col. 2:9). In an earlier section we argued that Jesus is truly and fully man. Now we conclude that he is truly and fully God as well. His name is rightly called “Emmanuel,” that is, “God with us” (Matt. 1:23).

**5. Is The Doctrine of the Incarnation “Unintelligible” Today?** Throughout history there have been objections to the New Testament teaching on the full deity of Christ. One recent attack on this doctrine deserves mention here because it created a large controversy, since the contributors to the volume were all recognized church leaders in England. The book was called *The Myth of God Incarnate* edited by John Hick (London: SCM, 1977). The title gives away the thesis of the book: the idea that Jesus was “God incarnate” or “God come in the flesh” is a “myth—a helpful story, perhaps, for the faith of earlier generations, but not one that can really be believed by us today.

The argument of the book begins with some foundational assumptions: (1) the Bible does not have absolute divine authority for us today (p. i), and (2) Christianity, like all human life and thought, is evolving and changing over time (p. ii). The basic claims of the book are laid out in the first two chapters. In chapter 1, Maurice Wiles argues that it is possible to have Christianity without the doctrine of the incarnation. The church has given up earlier doctrines, such as the “real presence” of Christ in the Lord’s Supper, the inerrancy of Scripture, and the virgin birth; therefore, it is possible to give up the traditional doctrine of the incarnation and still keep the Christian faith as well (pp. 2–3). Moreover, the doctrine of the incarnation is not directly presented in Scripture but originated in a setting where belief in the supernatural was credible; nevertheless, it has never been a coherent or intelligible doctrine through the history of the church (pp. 3–5).

Regarding the New Testament teaching, Francis Young, in chapter 2, argues that the New Testament contains the writings of many diverse witnesses who tell of their own understanding of Christ, but that no single or unified view of Christ can be gained from the entire New

Testament; the early church's understanding of the person of Christ was developing in various directions over time. Young concludes that the situation is similar today: within the Christian church many diverse *personal responses* to the story of Jesus Christ are acceptable for us as well, and that would certainly include the response that sees Christ as a man in whom God was uniquely at work but not by any means a man who was also fully God.

From the standpoint of evangelical theology, it is significant to note that this forthright rejection of Jesus' deity could only be advocated upon a prior assumption that the New Testament is not to be accepted as an absolute divine authority for us, truthful at every point. This question of authority is, in many cases, the great dividing line in conclusions about the person of Christ. Second, much of the criticism of the doctrine of the incarnation focused on the claim that it was not "coherent" or "intelligible." Yet at root this is simply an indication that the authors are unwilling to accept anything that does not appear to fit in with their "scientific" worldview in which the natural universe is a closed system not open to such divine intrusions as miracles and the incarnation. The assertion that "Jesus was fully God and fully man in one person," though not a contradiction, is a paradox that we cannot fully understand in this age and perhaps not for all eternity, but this does not give us the right to label it "incoherent" or "unintelligible." The doctrine of the incarnation as understood by the church throughout history has indeed been coherent and intelligible, though no one maintains that it provides us with an exhaustive explanation of how Jesus is both fully God and fully man. Our proper response is not to reject the clear and central teaching of Scripture about the incarnation, but simply to recognize that it will remain a paradox, that this is all that God has chosen to reveal to us about it, and that it is true. If we are to submit ourselves to God and to his words in Scripture, then we must believe it.

**6. Why Was Jesus' Deity Necessary?** In the previous section we listed several reasons why it was necessary for Jesus to be fully man in order to earn our redemption. Here it is appropriate to recognize that it is crucially important to insist on the full deity of Christ as well, not only because it is clearly taught in Scripture, but also because (1) only someone who is infinite God could bear the full penalty for all the sins of all those who would believe in him—any finite creature would have been incapable of bearing that penalty; (2) salvation is from the Lord (Jonah 2:9 NASB), and the whole message of Scripture is designed to show that no human being, no creature, could ever save man—only God himself could; and (3) only someone who was truly and fully God could be the one mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5), both to bring us back to God and also to reveal God most fully to us (John 14:9).

Thus, if Jesus is not fully God, we have no salvation and ultimately no Christianity. It is no accident that throughout history those groups that have given up belief in the full deity of Christ have not remained long within the Christian faith but have soon drifted toward the kind of religion represented by Unitarianism in the United States and elsewhere. "No one who denies the Son has the Father" (1 John 2:23). "Any one who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9).

### **C. The Incarnation: Deity and Humanity in the One Person of Christ**

The biblical teaching about the full deity and full humanity of Christ is so extensive that both have been believed from the earliest times in the history of the church. But a precise understanding of how full deity and full humanity could be combined together in one person was

formulated only gradually in the church and did not reach the final form until the Chalcedonian Definition in A.D. 451. Before that point, several inadequate views of the person of Christ were proposed and then rejected. One view, Arianism, which held that Jesus was not fully divine, was discussed above in the chapter on the doctrine of the Trinity. But three other views that were eventually rejected as heretical should be mentioned at this point.

### **1. Three Inadequate Views of the Person of Christ.**

**a. Apollinarianism:** Apollinaris, who became bishop in Laodicea about A.D. 361, taught that the one person of Christ had a human body but not a human mind or spirit, and that the mind and spirit of Christ were from the divine nature of the Son of God. This view may be represented as in figure 26.1.

#### **Figure 26.1: Apollinarianism**

But the views of Apollinaris were rejected by the leaders of the church at that time, who realized that it was not just our human body that needed salvation and needed to be represented by Christ in his redemptive work, but our human minds and spirits (or souls) as well: Christ had to be fully and truly man if he was to save us (Heb. 2:17). Apollinarianism was rejected by several church councils, from the Council of Alexandria in A.D. 362 to the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381.

**b. Nestorianism:** Nestorianism is the doctrine that there were two separate persons in Christ, a human person and a divine person, a teaching that is distinct from the biblical view that sees Jesus as one person. Nestorianism may be diagrammed as in figure 26.2.

#### **Figure 26.2: Nestorianism**

Nestorius was a popular preacher at Antioch, and from A.D. 428 was bishop of Constantinople. Although Nestorius himself probably never taught the heretical view that goes by his name (the idea that Christ was two persons in one body, rather than one person), through a combination of several personal conflicts and a good deal of ecclesiastical politics, he was removed from his office of bishop and his teachings were condemned.

It is important to understand why the church could not accept the view that Christ was two distinct persons. Nowhere in Scripture do we have an indication that the human nature of Christ, for example, is an independent person, deciding to do something contrary to the divine nature of Christ. Nowhere do we have an indication of the human and divine natures talking to each other or struggling within Christ, or any such thing. Rather, we have a consistent picture of a single person acting in wholeness and unity. Jesus always speaks as “I,” not as “we,” though he can refer to himself and the Father together as “we” (John 14:23). The Bible always speaks of Jesus

as “he,” not as “they.” And, though we can sometimes distinguish actions of his divine nature and actions of his human nature in order to help us understand some of the statements and actions recorded in Scripture, the Bible itself does not say “Jesus’ human nature did this” or “Jesus’ divine nature did that,” as though they were separate persons, but always talks about what the *person* of Christ did. Therefore, the church continued to insist that Jesus was one person, although possessing both a human nature and a divine nature.

**c. Monophysitism (Eutychianism):** A third inadequate view is called *monophysitism* the view that Christ had one nature only (Gk. *μόνος*, G3668, “one,” and *φύσις*, G5882, “nature”). The primary advocate of this view in the early church was Eutyches (c. A.D. 378–454), who was the leader of a monastery at Constantinople. Eutyches taught the opposite error from Nestorianism, for he denied that the human nature and divine nature in Christ remained fully human and fully divine. He held rather that the human nature of Christ was taken up and absorbed into the divine nature, so that both natures were changed somewhat and *a third kind of nature* resulted. An analogy to Eutychianism can be seen if we put a drop of ink in a glass of water: the mixture resulting is neither pure ink nor pure water, but some kind of third substance, a mixture of the two in which both the ink and the water are changed. Similarly, Eutyches taught that Jesus was a mixture of divine and human elements in which both were somewhat modified to form one new nature. This may be represented as in figure 26.3.

### Figure 26.3: Eutychianism

Monophysitism also rightly caused great concern in the church, because, by this doctrine, Christ was neither truly God nor truly man. And if that was so, he could not truly represent us as a man nor could he be true God and able to earn our salvation.

**2. The Solution to the Controversy: The Chalcedonian Definition of A.D. 451.** In order to attempt to solve the problems raised by the controversies over the person of Christ, a large church council was convened in the city of Chalcedon near Constantinople (modern Istanbul), from October 8 to November 1, A.D. 451. The resulting statement, called the Chalcedonian Definition, guarded against Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, and Eutychianism. It has been taken as the standard, orthodox definition of the biblical teaching on the person of Christ since that day by Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox branches of Christianity alike. The statement is not long, and we may quote it in its entirety:

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; *consubstantial [coessential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood*; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in *two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably*; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather *the property of each nature being*

*preserved* and concurring in *one Person* and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has been handed down to us.

Against the view of Apollinaris that Christ did not have a human mind or soul, we have the statement that he was “*truly man of a reasonable soul and body ... consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us.*” (The word *consubstantial* means “having the same nature or substance.”)

In opposition to the view of Nestorianism that Christ was two persons united in one body, we have the words “*indivisibly, inseparably ... concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons.*”

Against the view of Monophysitism that Christ had only one nature, and that his human nature was lost in the union with the divine nature, we have the words “to be acknowledged in *two natures unconfusedly, unchangeably ... the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved.*” The human and the divine natures were not confused or changed when Christ became man, but the human nature remained a truly human nature, and the divine nature remained a truly divine nature.

Figure 26.4 may be helpful in showing this, in contrast to the earlier diagrams. It indicates that the eternal Son of God took to himself a truly human nature, and that Christ’s divine and human natures remain distinct and retain their own properties, yet they are eternally and inseparably united together in one person.

#### **Figure 26.4: Chalcedonian Christology**

Some have said that the Chalcedonian Definition really did not define for us in any positive way what the person of Christ actually *is* but simply told us several things that it *is not*. In this way some have said that it is not a very helpful definition. But such an accusation is misleading and inaccurate. The definition actually did a great deal to help us understand the biblical teaching correctly. It taught that Christ definitely has two natures, a human nature and a divine nature. It taught that his divine nature is exactly the same as that of the Father (“consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead”). And it maintained that the human nature is exactly like our human nature, yet without sin (“consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin”). Moreover, it affirmed that in the person of Christ the human nature retains its distinctive characteristics and the divine nature retains its distinctive characteristics (“the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather *the property of each nature being preserved*”). Finally, it affirmed that, whether we can understand it or not, these two natures are united together in the one person of Christ.

When the Chalcedonian Definition says that the two natures of Christ occur together “in one Person and one *Subsistence*,” the Greek word translated as “Subsistence” is the word ὑπόστασις (G5712) “being.” Hence the union of Christ’s human and divine natures in one person is sometimes called the *hypostatic union*. This phrase simply means the union of Christ’s human and divine natures in one being.

**3. Combining Specific Biblical Texts on Christ's Deity and Humanity.** When we examine the New Testament, as we did above in the sections on Jesus' humanity and deity, there are several passages that seem difficult to fit together (How could Jesus be omnipotent and yet weak? How could he leave the world and yet be present everywhere? How could he learn things and yet be omniscient?). As the church struggled to understand these teachings, it finally came up with the Chalcedonian Definition, which spoke of two distinct natures in Christ that retain their own properties yet remain together in one person. This distinction, which helps us in our understanding of the biblical passages mentioned earlier, also seems to be demanded by those passages.

**a. One Nature Does Some Things That the Other Nature Does Not Do:** Evangelical theologians in previous generations have not hesitated to distinguish between things done by Christ's human nature but not by his divine nature, or by his divine nature but not by his human nature. It seems that we have to do this if we are willing to affirm the Chalcedonian statement about "*the property of each nature being preserved.*" But few recent theologians have been willing to make such distinctions, perhaps because of a hesitancy to affirm something we cannot understand.

When we are talking about Jesus' human nature, we can say that he ascended to heaven and is no longer in the world (John 16:28; 17:11; Acts 1:9–11). But with respect to his divine nature, we can say that Jesus is everywhere present: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, *there am I* in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20); "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 28:20); "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and *we* will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23). So we can say that both things are true about the *person* of Christ—he has returned to heaven, *and* he is also present with us.

Similarly, we can say that Jesus was about thirty years old (Luke 3:23), if we are speaking with respect to his human nature, but we can say that he eternally existed (John 1:1–2; 8:58) if we are speaking of his divine nature.

In his human nature, Jesus was weak and tired (Matt. 4:2; 8:24; Mark 15:21; John 4:6), but in his divine nature he was omnipotent (Matt. 8:26–27; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3). Particularly striking is the scene on the Sea of Galilee where Jesus was asleep in the stern of the boat, presumably because he was weary (Matt. 8:24). But he was able to arise from his sleep and calm the wind and sea with a word (Matt. 8:26–27)! Tired yet omnipotent! Here Jesus' weak human nature completely hid his omnipotence until that omnipotence broke forth in a sovereign word from the Lord of heaven and earth.

If someone asks whether Jesus, when he was asleep in the boat, was also "continually carrying along all things by his word of power" (Heb. 1:3, author's translation), and whether all things in the universe were being held together by him at that time (see Col. 1:17), the answer must be yes, for those activities have always been and will always be the particular responsibility of the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God. Those who find the doctrine of the incarnation "inconceivable" have sometimes asked whether Jesus, when he was a baby in the manger at Bethlehem, was also "upholding the universe." To this question the answer must also be yes: Jesus was not just potentially God or someone in whom God uniquely worked, but was *truly and fully God* with all the attributes of God. He was "a Savior, who is Christ *the Lord*" (Luke 2:11). Those who reject this as impossible simply have a different definition of what is

“possible” than God has, as revealed in Scripture. To say that we cannot understand this is appropriate humility. But to say that it is not possible seems more like intellectual arrogance.

In a similar way, we can understand that in his human nature, Jesus died (Luke 23:46; 1 Cor. 15:3). But with respect to his divine nature, he did not die, but was able to raise himself from the dead (John 2:19; 10:17–18; Heb. 7:16). Yet here we must give a note of caution: it is true that when Jesus died his physical body died and his human soul (or spirit) was separated from his body and passed into the presence of God the Father in heaven (Luke 23:43, 46). In this way he experienced a death that is like the one we as believers experience if we die before Christ returns. And it is not correct to say that Jesus’ divine nature died, or could die, if “die” means a cessation of activity, a cessation of consciousness, or a diminution of power. Nevertheless, by virtue of union with Jesus’ human nature, his divine nature somehow tasted something of what it was like to go through death. The *person* of Christ experienced death. Moreover, it seems difficult to understand how Jesus’ human nature alone could have borne the wrath of God against the sins of millions of people. It seems that Jesus’ divine nature had somehow to participate in the bearing of wrath against sin that was due to us (though Scripture nowhere explicitly affirms this). Therefore, even though Jesus’ divine nature did not actually die, Jesus went through the experience of death as a whole person, and both human and divine natures somehow shared in that experience. Beyond that, Scripture does not enable us to say more.

The distinction between Jesus’ human and divine natures also helps us understand Jesus’ temptations. With respect to his human nature, he certainly was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). Yet with respect to his divine nature, he was not tempted, because God cannot be tempted with evil (James 1:13).

At this point it seems necessary to say that Jesus had two distinct wills, a human will and a divine will, and that the wills belong to the two distinct natures of Christ, not to the person. In fact, there was a position, called the *monothelite* view, which held that Jesus had only “one will,” but that was certainly a minority view in the church, and it was rejected as heretical at a church council in Constantinople in A.D. 681. Since then the view that Christ had two wills (a human will and a divine will) has been generally, but not universally, held through the church. In fact, Charles Hodge says:

The decision against Nestorius, in which the unity of Christ’s person was asserted; that against Eutyches, affirming the distinction of natures; and that against the Monothelites, declaring that the possession of a human nature involves of necessity the possession of a human will, have been received as the true faith by the Church universal, the Greek, Latin, and Protestant.

Hodge explains that the church thought that “to deny Christ a human will, was to deny he had a human nature, or was truly a man. Besides, it precluded the possibility of his having been tempted, and therefore contradicted the Scriptures, and separated him so far from his people he could not sympathize with them in their temptations.” Moreover, Hodge notes that along with the idea that Christ had two wills is the related idea that he had two centers of consciousness or intelligence: “As there are two distinct natures, human and divine, there are of necessity two intelligences and two wills, the one fallible and finite, the other immutable and infinite.”<sup>42</sup>

This distinction of two wills and two centers of consciousness helps us understand how Jesus could learn things and yet know all things. On the one hand, with respect to his human nature, he had limited knowledge (Mark 13:32; Luke 2:52). On the other hand, Jesus clearly knew all things (John 2:25; 16:30; 21:17). Now this is only understandable if Jesus learned things and had limited knowledge with respect to his human nature but was always omniscient with respect to

his divine nature, and therefore he was able any time to “call to mind” whatever information would be needed for his ministry. In this way we can understand Jesus’ statement concerning the time of his return: “But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13:32). This ignorance of the time of his return was true of Jesus’ human nature and human consciousness only, for in his divine nature he was certainly omniscient and certainly knew the time when he would return to the earth.

At this point someone may object that if we say that Jesus had two centers of consciousness and two wills, that *requires* that he was two distinct persons, and we have really fallen into the error of “Nestorianism.” But in response, it must simply be affirmed that two wills and two centers of consciousness *do not* require that Jesus be two distinct persons. It is mere assertion without proof to say that they do. If someone responds that he or she *does not understand* how Jesus could have two centers of consciousness and still be one person, then that fact may certainly be admitted by all. But failing to understand something does not mean that it is impossible, only that our understanding is limited. The great majority of the church throughout its history has said that Jesus had two wills and centers of consciousness, yet he remained one person. Such a formulation is not impossible, merely a mystery that we do not now fully understand. To adopt any other solution would create a far greater problem: it would require that we give up either the full deity or the full humanity of Christ, and that we cannot do.

**b. Anything Either Nature Does, the Person of Christ Does:** In the previous section we mentioned a number of things that were done by one nature but not the other in the person of Christ. Now we must affirm that anything that is true of the human or the divine nature is true of the person of Christ. Thus Jesus can say, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). He does not say, “Before Abraham was, my divine nature existed,” because he is free to talk about anything done by his divine nature alone or his human nature alone as something that *he* did.

In the human sphere, this is certainly true of our conversation as well. If I type a letter, even though my feet and toes had nothing to do with typing the letter, I do not tell people, “My fingers typed a letter and my toes had nothing to do with it” (though that is true). Rather, I tell people, “*I* typed a letter.” That is true because anything that is done by one part of me is done by *me*.

Thus, “*Christ* died for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3). Even though actually only his human body ceased living and ceased functioning, it was nonetheless *Christ* as a person who died for our sin. This is simply a means of affirming that whatever can be said of one nature or the other can be said of the *person* of Christ.

Therefore it is correct for Jesus to say, “I am leaving the world” (John 16:28), or “I am no more in the world” (John 17:11), but at the same time to say, “I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20). Anything that is done by one nature or the other is done by the *person* of Christ.

**c. Titles That Remind Us of One Nature Can Be Used of the Person Even When the Action Is Done By the Other Nature:** The New Testament authors sometimes use titles that remind us of either the human nature or the divine nature in order to speak of the person of Christ, even though the action mentioned may be done only by the other nature than the one we might think of from the title. For example, Paul says that if the rulers of this world had understood the wisdom of God, “they would not have crucified *the Lord of glory*” (1 Cor. 2:8). Now when we see the phrase “the Lord of glory” it reminds us specifically of Jesus’ divine nature. But Paul uses this title (probably intentionally to show the horrible evil of the crucifixion) to say that Jesus was “crucified.” Even though Jesus’ divine nature was not crucified, it was true of Jesus as a

person that he was crucified, and Paul affirms that about him even though he uses the title “the Lord of glory.”

Similarly, when Elizabeth calls Mary “the mother of *my Lord*” (Luke 1:43), the name “my Lord” is a title that reminds us of Christ’s divine nature. Yet Mary of course is not the mother of Jesus’ divine nature, which has always existed. Mary is simply the mother of the human nature of Christ. Nevertheless, Elizabeth can call her “the mother of my Lord” because she is using the title “Lord” to refer to the person of Christ. A similar expression occurs in Luke 2:11: “For to you *is born* this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ *the Lord*.”

In this way, we can understand Mark 13:32, where Jesus says no one knows the time of his return, “not even the angels in heaven, *nor the Son* but only the Father.” Though the term “the Son” specifically reminds us of Jesus’ heavenly, eternal sonship with God the Father, it is really used here not to speak specifically of his divine nature, but to speak generally of him as a person, and to affirm something that is in fact true of his human nature only. And it is true that in one important sense (that is, with respect to his human nature) Jesus did not know the time when he would return.

**d. Brief Summary Sentence:** Sometimes in the study of systematic theology, the following sentence has been used to summarize the incarnation: “Remaining what he was, he became what he was not.” In other words, while Jesus continued “remaining” what he was (that is, fully divine) he also became what he previously had not been (that is, fully human as well). Jesus did not give up any of his deity when he became man, but he did take on humanity that was not his before.

**e. “Communication” of Attributes:** Once we have decided that Jesus was fully man and fully God, and that his human nature remained *fully* human and his divine nature remained *fully* divine, we can still ask whether there were some qualities or abilities that were given (or “communicated”) from one nature to the other. It seems there were.

#### **(1) From the Divine Nature to the Human Nature**

Although Jesus’ human nature did not change its essential character, because it was united with the divine nature in the one person of Christ, Jesus’ human nature gained (a) a worthiness to be worshiped and (b) an inability to sin, both of which did not belong to human beings otherwise.

#### **(2) From the Human Nature to the Divine Nature**

Jesus’ human nature gave him (a) an ability to experience suffering and death; (b) an ability to understand by experience what we are experiencing; and (c) an ability to be our substitute sacrifice, which Jesus as God alone could not have done.

**f. Conclusion:** At the end of this long discussion, it may be easy for us to lose sight of what is actually taught in Scripture. It is by far the most amazing miracle of the entire Bible—far more amazing than the resurrection and more amazing even than the creation of the universe. The fact that the infinite, omnipotent, eternal Son of God could become man and join himself to a human nature forever, so that infinite God became one person with finite man, will remain for eternity the most profound miracle and the most profound mystery in all the universe.

## QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. After reading this chapter, are there specific ways in which you now think of Jesus as being more like you than you did before? What are these? How can a clearer understanding of Jesus' humanity help you face temptations? How can it help you to pray? What are the most difficult situations in your life right now? Can you think of any similar situations that Jesus might have faced? Does that encourage you to pray confidently to him? Can you picture what it would have been like if you had been present when Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am"? What would you have felt? Honestly, what would your response have been? Now try visualizing yourself as present when Jesus made some of the other "I am" statements recorded in John's gospel.
2. After reading this chapter, is there anything that you understand more fully about the deity of Jesus? Can you describe (and perhaps identify with) what the disciples must have felt as they came to a growing realization of who Jesus actually was? Do you think Jesus is the one person you would be able to trust with your life for all eternity? Will you be happy to join with thousands of others in worshipping around his throne in heaven? Do you delight in worshipping him now?

## SPECIAL TERMS

Apollinarianism  
Arianism  
Chalcedonian definition  
communication of attributes  
docetism  
Eutychianism  
God  
hypostatic union  
impeccability  
incarnation  
kenosis theory  
logos  
Lord  
monophysitism  
monothelite view  
Nestorianism  
Son of God  
Son of Man  
virgin birth

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  - 1986 Ryrie, 235–53, 260–66
5. Lutheran
  - 1917–24 Pieper, 2:55–279
  - 1934 Mueller, 255–86
6. Reformed (or Presbyterian)
  - 1559 Calvin, 1:423–94 (2.9–14)
  - 1724–58 Edwards, 2:499–510, 949–55
  - 1861 Heppe, 410–47
  - 1871–73 Hodge, 1:483–521; 2:378–454
  - 1878 Dabney, 464–99
  - 1887–1921 Warfield, *BTS* 157–237; *SSW* 1:139–66; *BD* 71–100, 175–212; *PWC* 4–319; *LG* 1–304; *CC* 3–389, 447–58
  - 1889 Shedd, 2a:261–349; 3:378–400
  - 1937–66 Murray, *CW* 1:29–35, 340–43; *CW* 2:132–41; *CW* 4:58–91
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  - 1962 Buswell, 2:17–32, 40–70
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## SCRIPTURE MEMORY PASSAGE

**John 1:14:** *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.*

## HYMN

### “FAIREST LORD JESUS”

Fairest Lord Jesus, ruler of all nature,  
Son of God and Son of Man!  
Thee will I cherish, thee will I honor,  
Thou, my soul's glory, joy, and crown.

Fair are the meadows, fair are the woodlands,  
Robed in the blooming garb of spring:  
Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer,  
Who makes the woeful heart to sing.

Fair is the sunshine, fair is the moonlight,  
And all the twinkling, starry host:  
Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines purer  
Than all the angels heav'n can boast.

Beautiful Savior! Lord of the nations!  
Son of God and Son of Man!  
Glory and honor, praise, adoration,  
Now and forever more be thine.

From *Munster Gesangbuch* 1677, translated 1850, 1873

## Chapter 27

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# The Atonement

*Was it necessary for Christ to die? Did Christ's entire earthly life earn any saving benefits for us? The cause and nature of the atonement. Did Christ descend into hell?*

### EXPLANATION AND SCRIPTURAL BASIS

We may define the atonement as follows: *The atonement is the work Christ did in his life and death to earn our salvation.* This definition indicates that we are using the word *atonement* in a broader sense than it is sometimes used. Sometimes it is used to refer only to Jesus' dying and paying for our sins on the cross. But, as will be seen below, since saving benefits also come to us from Christ's life, we have included that in our definition as well.

#### A. The Cause of the Atonement

What was the ultimate cause that led to Christ's coming to earth and dying for our sins? To find this we must trace the question back to something in the character of God himself. And here Scripture points to two things: the *love* and *justice* of God.

The love of God as a cause of the atonement is seen in the most familiar passage in the Bible: "For God *so loved the world* that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). But the justice of God also required that God find a way that the penalty due to us for our sins would be paid (for he could not accept us into fellowship with himself unless the penalty was paid). Paul explains that this was why God sent Christ to be a "propitiation" (Rom. 3:25 NASB) (that is, a sacrifice that bears God's wrath so that God becomes "propitious" or favorably disposed toward us): it was "*to show God's righteousness* because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins" (Rom. 3:25). Here Paul says that God had been forgiving sins in the Old Testament but no penalty had been paid—a fact that would make people wonder whether God was indeed just and ask how he could forgive sins without a penalty. No God who was truly just could do that, could he? Yet when God sent Christ to die and pay the penalty for our sins, "it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26).

Therefore both the love and the justice of God were the ultimate cause of the atonement. It is not helpful for us to ask which is more important, however, because without the love of God, he would never have taken any steps to redeem us, yet without the justice of God, the specific requirement that Christ should earn our salvation by dying for our sins would not have been met. Both the love and the justice of God were equally important.

#### B. The Necessity of the Atonement

Was there any other way for God to save human beings than by sending his Son to die in our place?

Before answering this question, it is important to realize that it was not necessary for God to save any people at all. When we appreciate that “God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgment” (2 Peter 2:4), then we realize that God could also have chosen with perfect justice to have left us in our sins awaiting judgment: he could have chosen to save no one, just as he did with the sinful angels. So in this sense the atonement was not absolutely necessary.

But once God, in his love, decided to save some human beings, then several passages in Scripture indicate that there was no other way for God to do this than through the death of his Son. Therefore, the atonement was not absolutely necessary, but, as a “consequence” of God’s decision to save some human beings, the atonement was absolutely necessary. This is sometimes called the “consequent absolute necessity” view of the atonement.

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prays, “*If it be possible* let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matt. 26:39). We may be confident that Jesus always prayed according to the will of the Father, and that he always prayed with fullness of faith. Thus it seems that this prayer, which Matthew takes pains to record for us, shows that it was *not possible* for Jesus to avoid the death on the cross which was soon to come to him (the “cup” of suffering that he had said would be his). If he was going to accomplish the work that the Father sent him to do, and if people were going to be redeemed for God, then it was necessary for him to die on the cross.

He said something similar after his resurrection, when he was talking with two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They were sad that Jesus had died, but his response was, “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not *necessary* that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:25–26). Jesus understood that God’s plan of redemption (which he explained for the disciples from many Old Testament Scriptures, Luke 24:27) made it necessary for the Messiah to die for the sins of his people.

As we saw above, Paul in Romans 3 also shows that if God were to be righteous, and still save people, he had to send Christ to pay the penalty for sins: “It was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26). The epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes that Christ had to suffer for our sins: “He *had to* be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation [lit. “propitiation”] for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17). The author of Hebrews also argues that since “it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins” (Heb. 10:4), a better sacrifice is required (Heb. 9:23). Only the blood of Christ, that is, his death, would be able really to take away sins (Heb. 9:25–26). There was no other way for God to save us than for Christ to die in our place.

## **C. The Nature of the Atonement**

In this section we consider two aspects of Christ’s work: (1) Christ’s obedience for us, in which he obeyed the requirements of the law in our place and was perfectly obedient to the will of God the Father as our representative, and (2) Christ’s sufferings for us, in which he took the penalty due for our sins and as a result died for our sins.

It is important to notice that in both of these categories the primary emphasis and the primary influence of Christ’s work of redemption is not on us, but on God the Father. Jesus obeyed the Father in our place and perfectly met the demands of the law. And he suffered in our place, receiving in himself the penalty that God the Father would have visited upon us. In both cases, the atonement is viewed as objective; that is, something that has primary influence directly on

God himself. Only secondarily does it have application to us, and this is only because there was a definite event in the relationship between God the Father and God the Son that secured our salvation.

**1. Christ's Obedience for Us (Sometimes Called His "Active Obedience").** If Christ had only earned forgiveness of sins for us, then we would not merit heaven. Our guilt would have been removed, but we would simply be in the position of Adam and Eve before they had done anything good or bad and before they had passed a time of probation successfully. To be established in righteousness forever and to have their fellowship with God made sure forever, Adam and Eve had to obey God perfectly over a period of time. Then God would have looked on their faithful obedience with pleasure and delight, and they would have lived with him in fellowship forever.

For this reason, Christ had to live a life of perfect obedience to God in order to earn righteousness for us. He had to obey the law for his whole life on our behalf so that the positive merits of his perfect obedience would be counted for us. Sometimes this is called Christ's "active obedience," while his suffering and dying for our sins is called his "passive obedience." Paul says his goal is that he may be found in Christ, "*not having a righteousness of [his] own based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ* the righteousness from God that depends on faith" (Phil. 3:9). It is not just moral neutrality that Paul knows he needs from Christ (that is, a clean slate with sins forgiven), but a positive moral righteousness. And he knows that that cannot come from himself, but must come through faith in Christ. Similarly, Paul says that Christ has been made "*our righteousness*" (1 Cor. 1:30). And he quite explicitly says, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be *made righteous*" (Rom. 5:19).

Some theologians have not taught that Christ needed to achieve a lifelong record of perfect obedience for us. They have simply emphasized that Christ had to die and thereby pay the penalty for our sins. But such a position does not adequately explain why Christ did more than just die for us; he also became our "righteousness" before God. Jesus said to John the Baptist, before he was baptized by him, "It is fitting for us *to fulfill all righteousness*" (Matt. 3:15).

It might be argued that Christ had to live a life of perfect righteousness for his own sake, not for ours, before he could be a sinless sacrifice for us. But Jesus had no need to live a life of perfect obedience for his own sake—he had shared love and fellowship with the Father for all eternity and was in his own character eternally worthy of the Father's good pleasure and delight. He rather had to "fulfill all righteousness" for our sake; that is, for the sake of the people whom he was representing as their head. Unless he had done this for us, we would have no record of obedience by which we would merit God's favor and merit eternal life with him. Moreover, if Jesus had needed only sinlessness and not also a life of perfect obedience, he could have died for us when he was a young child rather than when he was thirty-three years old.

By way of application, we ought to ask ourselves whose lifelong record of obedience we would rather rely on for our standing before God, Christ's or our own? As we think about the life of Christ, we ought to ask ourselves, was it good enough to deserve God's approval? And are we willing to rely on his record of obedience for our eternal destiny?

**2. Christ's Sufferings for Us (Sometimes Called His "Passive Obedience").** In addition to obeying the law perfectly for his whole life on our behalf, Christ also took on himself the sufferings necessary to pay the penalty for our sins.

**a. Suffering for His Whole Life:** In a broad sense the penalty Christ bore in paying for our sins was suffering in both his body and soul throughout his life. Though Christ's sufferings culminated in his death on the cross (see below), his whole life in a fallen world involved suffering. For example, Jesus endured tremendous suffering during the temptation in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1–11), when he was assaulted for forty days by the attacks of Satan. He also suffered in growing to maturity, "Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he *suffered*" (Heb. 5:8). He knew suffering in the intense opposition he faced from Jewish leaders throughout much of his earthly ministry (see Heb. 12:3–4). We may suppose too that he experienced suffering and grief at the death of his earthly father, and certainly he experienced grief at the death of his close friend Lazarus (John 11:35). In predicting the coming of the Messiah, Isaiah said he would be "a *man of sorrows* and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3).

**b. The Pain of the Cross:** The sufferings of Jesus intensified as he drew near to the cross. He told his disciples of something of the agony he was going through when he said, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Matt. 26:38). It was especially on the cross that Jesus' sufferings for us reached their climax, for it was there that he bore the penalty for our sin and died in our place. Scripture teaches us that there were four different aspects of the pain that Jesus experienced:

### **(1) Physical Pain and Death**

We do not need to hold that Jesus suffered more physical pain than any human being has ever suffered, for the Bible nowhere makes such a claim. But we still must not forget that death by crucifixion was one of the most horrible forms of execution ever devised by man.

Many readers of the Gospels in the ancient world would have witnessed crucifixions and thus would have had a painfully vivid mental picture upon reading the simple words "And they crucified him" (Mark 15:24). A criminal who was crucified was essentially forced to inflict upon himself a very slow death by suffocation. When the criminal's arms were outstretched and fastened by nails to the cross, he had to support most of the weight of his body with his arms. The chest cavity would be pulled upward and outward, making it difficult to exhale in order to be able to draw a fresh breath. But when the victim's longing for oxygen became unbearable, he would have to push himself up with his feet, thus giving more natural support to the weight of his body, releasing some of the weight from his arms, and enabling his chest cavity to contract more normally. By pushing himself upward in this way the criminal could fend off suffocation, but it was extremely painful because it required putting the body's weight on the nails holding the feet, and bending the elbows and pulling upward on the nails driven through the wrists. The criminal's back, which had been torn open repeatedly by a previous flogging, would scrape against the wooden cross with each breath. Thus Seneca (first century A.D.) spoke of a crucified man "drawing the breath of life amid long-drawn-out agony" (Epistle 101, to Lucilius, section 14).

A physician writing in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1986 explained the pain that would have been experienced in death by crucifixion:

Adequate exhalation required lifting the body by pushing up on the feet and by flexing the elbows ... However, this maneuver would place the entire weight of the body on the tarsals and would produce searing pain. Furthermore, flexion of the elbows would cause rotation of the wrists about the iron nails and cause fiery pain along the damaged median

nerves ... Muscle cramps and paresthesias of the outstretched and uplifted arms would add to the discomfort. As a result, each respiratory effort would become agonizing and tiring and lead eventually to asphyxia.

In some cases, crucified men would survive for several days, nearly suffocating but not quite dying. This was why the executioners would sometimes break the legs of a criminal, so that death would come quickly, as we see in John 19:31–33:

Since it was the day of Preparation, in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the sabbath (for that sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him; but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.

## **(2) The Pain of Bearing Sin**

More awful than the pain of physical suffering that Jesus endured was the psychological pain of bearing the guilt for our sin. In our own experience as Christians we know something of the anguish we feel when we know we have sinned. The weight of guilt is heavy on our hearts, and there is a bitter sense of separation from all that is right in the universe, an awareness of something that in a very deep sense ought not to be. In fact, the more we grow in holiness as God's children, the more intensely we feel this instinctive revulsion against evil.

Now Jesus was perfectly holy. He hated sin with his entire being. The thought of evil, of sin, contradicted everything in his character. Far more than we do, Jesus instinctively rebelled against evil. Yet in obedience to the Father, and out of love for us, Jesus took on himself all the sins of those who would someday be saved. Taking on himself all the evil against which his soul rebelled created deep revulsion in the center of his being. All that he hated most deeply was poured out fully upon him.

Scripture frequently says that our sins were put on Christ: "The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6), and "He *bore the sin* of many" (Isa. 53:12). John the Baptist calls Jesus "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Paul declares that God made Christ "*to be sin*" (2 Cor. 5:21) and that Christ became "a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). The author of Hebrews says that Christ was "offered once to bear the sins of many" (Heb. 9:28). And Peter says, "He himself *bore our sins* in his body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24).

The passage from 2 Corinthians quoted above, together with the verses from Isaiah, indicate that it was God the Father who put our sins on Christ. How could that be? In the same way in which Adam's sins were imputed to us, so God *imputed* our sins to Christ; that is, he *thought of them as belonging to Christ* and, since God is the ultimate judge and definer of what really is in the universe, when God thought of our sins as belonging to Christ then in fact they actually did belong to Christ. This does not mean that God thought that Christ had himself committed the sins, or that Christ himself actually had a sinful nature, but rather that the guilt for our sins (that is, the liability to punishment) was thought of by God as belonging to Christ rather than to us.

Some have objected that it was not fair for God to do this, to transfer the guilt of sin from us to an innocent person, Christ. Yet we must remember that Christ voluntarily took on himself the guilt for our sins, so this objection loses much of its force. Moreover, God himself (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is the ultimate standard of what is just and fair in the universe, and he decreed that the atonement would take place in this way, and that it did in fact satisfy the demands of his own righteousness and justice.

### **(3) Abandonment**

The physical pain of crucifixion and the pain of taking on himself the absolute evil of our sins were aggravated by the fact that Jesus faced this pain alone. In the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, he confided something of his agony to them: “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch” (Mark 14:34). This is the kind of confidence one would disclose to a close friend, and it implies a request for support in his hour of greatest trial. Yet as soon as Jesus was arrested, “all the disciples forsook him and fled” (Matt. 26:56).

Here also there is a very faint analogy in our experience, for we cannot live long without tasting the inward ache of rejection, whether it be rejection by a close friend, by a parent or child, or by a wife or husband. Yet in all those cases there is at least a sense that we could have done something differently, that at least in small part we may be at fault. It was not so with Jesus and the disciples, for, “having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (John 13:1). He had done nothing but love them; in return, they all abandoned him.

But far worse than desertion by even the closest of human friends was the fact that Jesus was deprived of the closeness to the Father that had been the deepest joy of his heart for all his earthly life. When Jesus cried out “Eli, Eli, lama sabach-thani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46), he showed that he was finally cut off from the sweet fellowship with his heavenly Father that had been the unfailing source of his inward strength and the element of greatest joy in a life filled with sorrow. As Jesus bore our sins on the cross, he was abandoned by his heavenly Father, who is “of purer eyes than to behold evil” (Hab. 1:13). He faced the weight of the guilt of millions of sins alone.

### **(4) Bearing the Wrath of God**

Yet more difficult than these three previous aspects of Jesus’ pain was the pain of bearing the wrath of God upon himself. As Jesus bore the guilt of our sins alone, God the Father, the mighty Creator, the Lord of the universe, poured out on Jesus the fury of his wrath: Jesus became the object of the intense hatred of sin and vengeance against sin which God had patiently stored up since the beginning of the world.

Romans 3:25 tells us that God put forward Christ as a “*propitiation*” (NASB) a word that means “a sacrifice that bears God’s wrath to the end and in so doing changes God’s wrath toward us into favor.” Paul tells us that “This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:25–26). God had not simply forgiven sin and forgotten about the punishment in generations past. He had forgiven sins and stored up his righteous anger against those sins. But at the cross the fury of all that stored-up wrath against sin was unleashed against God’s own Son.

Many theologians outside the evangelical world have strongly objected to the idea that Jesus bore the wrath of God against sin. Their basic assumption is that since God is a God of love, it would be inconsistent with his character to show wrath against the human beings he has created and for whom he is a loving Father. But evangelical scholars have convincingly argued that the idea of the wrath of God is solidly rooted in both the Old and New Testaments: “The whole of the argument of the opening part of Romans is that all men, Gentiles and Jews alike, are sinners, and that they come under the wrath and the condemnation of God.”<sup>12</sup>

Three other crucial passages in the New Testament refer to Jesus' death as a "propitiation": Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2; and 4:10. The Greek terms (the verb ἱλάσκομαι, G2661, "to make propitiation" and the noun ἱλασμός (G2662) "a sacrifice of propitiation") used in these passages have the sense of "a sacrifice that turns away the wrath of God—and thereby makes God propitious (or favorable) toward us." This is the consistent meaning of these words outside the Bible where they were well understood in reference to pagan Greek religions. These verses simply mean that Jesus bore the wrath of God against sin.

It is important to insist on this fact, because it is the heart of the doctrine of the atonement. It means that there is an eternal, unchangeable requirement in the holiness and justice of God that sin be paid for. Furthermore, before the atonement ever could have an effect on our subjective consciousness, it first had an effect on God and his relation to the sinners he planned to redeem. Apart from this central truth, the death of Christ really cannot be adequately understood (see discussion of other views of the atonement below).

Although we must be cautious in suggesting any analogies to the experience Christ went through (for his experience was and always will be without precedent or comparison), nonetheless, all our understanding of Jesus' suffering comes in some sense by way of analogous experiences in our life—for that is how God teaches us in Scripture. Once again our human experience provides a very faint analogy that helps us understand what it means to bear the wrath of God. Perhaps as children we have faced the wrath of a human father when we have done wrong, or perhaps as adults we have known the anger of an employer because of a mistake we have made. We are inwardly shaken, disturbed by the crashing of another personality, filled with displeasure, into our very selves, and we tremble. We can hardly imagine the personal disintegration that would threaten if the outpouring of wrath came not from some finite human being but from Almighty God. If even the presence of God when he does not manifest wrath arouses fear and trembling in people (cf. Heb. 12:21, 28–29), how terrible it must be to face the presence of a wrathful God (Heb. 10:31).

With this in mind, we are now better able to understand Jesus' cry of desolation, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46b). The question does not mean, "Why have you left me forever?" for Jesus knew that he was leaving the world, that he was going to the Father (John 14:28; 16:10, 17). Jesus knew that he would rise again (John 2:19; Luke 18:33; Mark 9:31; et al.). It was "for the joy that was set before him" that Jesus "endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). Jesus knew that he could still call God "my God." This cry of desolation is not a cry of total despair. Furthermore, "Why have you forsaken me?" does not imply that Jesus wondered why he was dying. He had said, "The Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Jesus knew that he was dying for our sins.

Jesus' cry is a quotation from Psalm 22:1, a psalm in which the psalmist asks why God is so far from helping him, why God delays in rescuing him:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?  
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;  
and by night, but find no rest. (Ps. 22:1–2)

Yet the psalmist was eventually rescued by God, and his cry of desolation turned into a hymn of praise (vv. 22–31). Jesus, who knew the words of Scripture as his own, knew well the context of Psalm 22. In quoting this psalm, he is quoting a cry of desolation that also has implicit in its

context an unrelenting faith in the God who will ultimately deliver him. Nevertheless, it remains a very real cry of anguish because the suffering has gone on so long and no release is in sight.

With this context for the quotation it is better to understand the question “Why have you forsaken me?” as meaning, “Why have you left me *for so long*?” This is the sense it has in Psalm 22. Jesus, in his human nature, knew he would have to bear our sins, to suffer and to die. But, in his human consciousness, he probably did not know how long this suffering would take. Yet to bear the guilt of millions of sins even for a moment would cause the greatest anguish of soul. To face the deep and furious wrath of an infinite God even for an instant would cause the most profound fear. But Jesus’ suffering was not over in a minute—or two—or ten. When would it end? Could there be yet more weight of sin? Yet more wrath of God? Hour after hour it went on—the dark weight of sin and the deep wrath of God poured over Jesus in wave after wave. Jesus at last cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Why must this suffering go on so long? Oh God, my God, will you ever bring it to an end?

Then at last Jesus knew his suffering was nearing completion. He knew he had consciously borne all the wrath of the Father against our sins, for God’s anger had abated and the awful heaviness of sin was being removed. He knew that all that remained was to yield up his spirit to his heavenly Father and die. With a shout of victory Jesus cried out, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). Then with a loud voice he once more cried out, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46). And then he voluntarily gave up the life that no one could take from him (John 10:17–18), and he died. As Isaiah had predicted, “he poured out his soul to death” and “bore the sin of many” (Isa. 53:12). God the Father saw “the fruit of the travail of his soul” and was “satisfied” (Isa. 53:11).

### **c. Further Understanding of the Death of Christ:**

#### **(1) The Penalty Was Inflicted By God the Father**

If we ask, “Who required Christ to pay the penalty for our sins?” the answer given by Scripture is that the penalty was inflicted by God the Father as he represented the interests of the Trinity in redemption. It was God’s justice that required that sin be paid for, and, among the members of the Trinity, it was God the Father whose role was to require that payment. God the Son voluntarily took upon himself the role of bearing the penalty for sin. Referring to God the Father, Paul says, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin [that is, Christ], so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Isaiah said, “The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). He goes on to describe the sufferings of Christ: “Yet it was the will of the LORD to bruise him; he has put him to grief” (Isa. 53:10).

Herein we see something of the amazing love of both God the Father and God the Son in redemption. Not only did Jesus know that he would bear the incredible pain of the cross, but God the Father also knew that he would have to inflict this pain on his own deeply loved Son. “God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

#### **(2) Not Eternal Suffering but Complete Payment**

If we had to pay the penalty for our own sins, we would have to suffer eternally in separation from God. However, Jesus did not suffer eternally. There are two reasons for this difference: (a) If we suffered for our own sins, we would never be able to make ourselves right with God again. There would be no hope because there would be no way to live again and earn perfect

righteousness before God, and there would be no way to undo our sinful nature and make it right before God. Moreover, we would continue to exist as sinners who would not suffer with pure hearts of righteousness before God, but would suffer with resentment and bitterness against God, thus continually compounding our sin. (b) Jesus was able to bear all the wrath of God against our sin and to bear it to the end. No mere man could ever have done this, but by virtue of the union of divine and human natures in himself, Jesus was able to bear all the wrath of God against sin and bear it to the end. Isaiah predicted that God “shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul *and be satisfied*” (Isa. 53:11). When Jesus knew that he had paid the full penalty for our sin, he said, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30). If Christ had not paid the full penalty, there would still be condemnation left for us. But since he has paid the full penalty that is due to us, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

It should help us at this point to realize that nothing in the eternal character of God and nothing in the laws God had given for mankind required that there be eternal suffering to pay for man’s sins. In fact, if there is eternal suffering, it simply shows that the penalty has never been fully paid, and that the evildoer continues to be a sinner by nature. But when Christ’s sufferings at last came to an end on the cross, it showed that he had borne the full measure of God’s wrath against sin and there was no penalty left to pay. It also showed that he was himself righteous before God. In this way the fact that Christ suffered for a limited time rather than eternally shows that his suffering was a sufficient payment for sins. The author of Hebrews repeats this theme again and again, emphasizing the completion and the finality of Christ’s redemptive work:

Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with blood not his own; for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself ... Christ, having been offered once *to bear the sins of many* will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. (Heb. 9:25–28)

This New Testament emphasis on the completion and finality of Christ’s sacrificial death stands in contrast to the Roman Catholic teaching that in the mass there is a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ. Because of this official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, many Protestants since the Reformation, and still today, are convinced that they cannot in good conscience actually participate in the Roman Catholic mass, because it would seem to be an endorsement of the Catholic view that the sacrifice of Christ is repeated every time the mass is offered.

The New Testament emphasis on the completion and finality of Christ’s sacrifice of himself for us has much practical application, because it assures us that there is no more penalty for sin left for us to pay. The penalty has entirely been paid by Christ, and we should have no remaining fear of condemnation or punishment.

### **(3) The Meaning of the Blood of Christ**

The New Testament frequently connects the blood of Christ with our redemption. For example, Peter says, “You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Peter 1:18–19).

The blood of Christ is the clear outward evidence that his life blood was poured out when he died a sacrificial death to pay for our redemption—“the blood of Christ” means his death in its

saving aspects. Although we may think that Christ's blood (as evidence that his life had been given) would have exclusive reference to the removal of our judicial guilt before God—for this is its primary reference—the New Testament authors also attribute to it several other effects. By the blood of Christ our consciences are cleansed (Heb. 9:14), we gain bold access to God in worship and prayer (Heb. 10:19), we are progressively cleansed from remaining sin (1 John 1:7; cf. Rev. 1:5b), we are able to conquer the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10–11), and we are rescued out of a sinful way of life (1 Peter 1:18–19).

Scripture speaks so much about the blood of Christ because its shedding was very clear evidence that his life was being given in judicial execution (that is, he was condemned to death and died paying a penalty imposed both by an earthly human judge and by God himself in heaven). Scripture's emphasis on the blood of Christ also shows the clear connection between Christ's death and the many sacrifices in the Old Testament that involved the pouring out of the life blood of the sacrificial animal. These sacrifices all pointed forward to and prefigured the death of Christ.

#### **(4) Christ's Death as "Penal Substitution"**

The view of Christ's death presented here has frequently been called the theory of "*penal substitution*." Christ's death was "penal" in that he bore a penalty when he died. His death was also a "substitution" in that he was a substitute for us when he died. This has been the orthodox understanding of the atonement held by evangelical theologians, in contrast to other views that attempt to explain the atonement apart from the idea of the wrath of God or payment of the penalty for sin (see below).

This view of the atonement is sometimes called the theory of *vicarious atonement*. A "vicar" is someone who stands in the place of another or who represents another. Christ's death was therefore "vicarious" because he stood in our place and represented us. As our representative, he took the penalty that we deserve.

**d. New Testament Terms Describing Different Aspects of the Atonement:** The atoning work of Christ is a complex event that has several effects on us. It can therefore be viewed from several different aspects. The New Testament uses different words to describe these; we shall examine four of the more important terms.

The four terms show how Christ's death met the four needs that we have as sinners:

1. We deserve to *die* as the penalty for sin.
2. We deserve to *bear God's wrath* against sin.
3. We are *separated* from God by our sins.
4. We are in *bondage to sin* and to the kingdom of Satan.

These four needs are met by Christ's death in the following ways:

#### **(1) Sacrifice**

To pay the penalty of death that we deserved because of our sins, Christ died as a sacrifice for us. "He has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26).

## **(2) Propitiation**

To remove us from the wrath of God that we deserved, Christ died as a propitiation for our sins. “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10 NASB).

## **(3) Reconciliation**

To overcome our separation from God, we needed someone to provide reconciliation and thereby bring us back into fellowship with God. Paul says that God “through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor. 5:18–19).

## **(4) Redemption**

Because we as sinners are in bondage to sin and to Satan, we need someone to provide redemption and thereby “redeem” us out of that bondage. When we speak of redemption, the idea of a “ransom” comes into view. A ransom is the price paid to redeem someone from bondage or captivity. Jesus said of himself, “For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life *as a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45). If we ask to whom the ransom was paid, we realize that the human analogy of a ransom payment does not fit the atonement of Christ in every detail. Though we were in bondage to sin and to Satan, there was no “ransom” paid either to “sin” or to Satan himself, for they did not have power to demand such payment, nor was Satan the one whose holiness was offended by sin and who required a penalty to be paid for sin. As we saw earlier, the penalty for sin was paid by Christ and received and accepted by God the Father. But we hesitate to speak of paying a “ransom” to God the Father, because it was not he who held us in bondage but Satan and our own sins. Therefore at this point the idea of a ransom payment cannot be pressed in every detail. It is sufficient to note that a price was paid (the death of Christ) and the result was that we were “redeemed” from bondage.

We were redeemed from bondage to Satan because “the whole world is in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19), and when Christ came he died to “deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage” (Heb. 2:15). In fact, God the Father “has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Col. 1:13).

As for deliverance from bondage to sin, Paul says, “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus ... For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace” (Rom. 6:11, 14). We have been delivered from bondage to the guilt of sin and from bondage to its ruling power in our lives.

**e. Other Views of the Atonement:** In contrast to the penal substitution view of the atonement presented in this chapter, several other views have been advocated in the history of the church.

### **(1) The Ransom to Satan Theory**

This view was held by Origen (c. A.D. 185—254), a theologian from Alexandria and later Caesarea, and after him by some others in the early history of the church. According to this view, the ransom Christ paid to redeem us was paid to Satan, in whose kingdom all people were by virtue of sin.

This theory finds no direct confirmation in Scripture and has few supporters in the history of the church. It falsely thinks of Satan rather than God as the one who required that a payment be made for sin and thus completely neglects the demands of God's justice with respect to sin. It views Satan as having much more power than he actually does, namely, power to demand whatever he wants from God, rather than as one who has been cast down from heaven and has no right to demand anything of God. Nowhere does Scripture say that we as sinners owe anything to Satan, but it repeatedly says that God requires of us a payment for our sins. This view also fails to deal with the texts that speak of Christ's death as a propitiation offered to God the Father for our sins, or with the fact that God the Father represented the Trinity in accepting the payment for sins from Christ (see discussion above).

## **(2) The Moral Influence Theory**

First advocated by Peter Abelard (1079–1142), a French theologian, the moral influence theory of the atonement holds that God did not require the payment of a penalty for sin, but that Christ's death was simply a way in which God showed how much he loved human beings by identifying with their sufferings, even to the point of death. Christ's death therefore becomes a great teaching example that shows God's love to us and draws from us a grateful response, so that in loving him we are forgiven.

The great difficulty with this viewpoint is that it is contrary to so many passages of Scripture that speak of Christ dying for sin, bearing our sin, or dying as a propitiation. Moreover, it robs the atonement of its objective character, because it holds that the atonement had no effect on God himself. Finally, it has no way of dealing with our guilt—if Christ did not die to pay for our sins, we have no right to trust in him for forgiveness of sins.

## **(3) The Example Theory**

The example theory of the atonement was taught by the Socinians, the followers of Faustus Socinus (1539–1604), an Italian theologian who settled in Poland in 1578 and attracted a wide following. The example theory, like the moral influence theory, also denies that God's justice requires payment for sin; it says that Christ's death simply provides us with an example of how we should trust and obey God perfectly, even if that trust and obedience leads to a horrible death. Whereas the moral influence theory says that Christ's death teaches us how much God loves us, the example theory says that Christ's death teaches us how we should live. Support for this view could be found in 1 Peter 2:21, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."

While it is true that Christ is an example for us even in his death, the question is whether this fact is the complete explanation of the atonement. The example theory fails to account for the many Scriptures that focus on Christ's death as a payment for sin, the fact that Christ bore our sins, and the fact that he was the propitiation for our sins. These considerations alone mean that the theory must be rejected. Moreover, this view really ends up arguing that man can save himself by following Christ's example and by trusting and obeying God just as Christ did. Thus it fails to show how the guilt of our sin can be removed, because it does not hold that Christ actually paid the penalty for our sins or made provision for our guilt when he died.

## **(4) The Governmental Theory**

The governmental theory of the atonement was first taught by a Dutch theologian and jurist, Hugo Grotius (1583–1645). This theory holds that God did not actually have to require payment for sin, but, since he was omnipotent God, he could have set aside that requirement and simply forgiven sins without the payment of a penalty. Then what was the purpose of Christ's death? It was God's demonstration of the fact that his laws had been broken, that he is the moral lawgiver and governor of the universe, and that some kind of penalty would be required whenever his laws were broken. Thus Christ did not exactly pay the penalty for the actual sins of any people, but simply suffered to show that when God's laws are broken there must be some penalty paid.

### **The Gradual Formation of the Apostles' Creed**

The problem with this view again is that it fails to account adequately for all the Scriptures that speak of Christ bearing our sins on the cross, of God laying on Christ the iniquity of us all, of Christ dying specifically for our sins, and of Christ being the propitiation for our sins. Moreover, it takes away the objective character of the atonement by making its purpose not the satisfaction of God's justice but simply that of influencing us to realize that God has laws that must be kept. This view also implies that we cannot rightly trust in Christ's completed work for forgiveness of sin, because he has not actually made payment for those sins. Moreover, it makes the actual earning of forgiveness for us something that happened in God's own mind apart from the death of Christ on the cross—he had already decided to forgive us without requiring any penalty from us and then punished Christ only to demonstrate that he was still the moral governor of the universe. But this means that Christ (in this view) did not actually earn forgiveness or salvation for us, and thus the value of his redemptive work is greatly minimized. Finally, this theory fails to take adequate account of the unchangeableness of God and the infinite purity of his justice. To say that God can forgive sins without requiring any penalty (in spite of the fact that throughout Scripture sin always requires the payment of a penalty) is seriously to underestimate the absolute character of the justice of God.

**f. Did Christ Descend Into Hell?** It is sometimes argued that Christ descended into hell after he died. The phrase “he descended into hell” does not occur in the Bible. But the widely used Apostles' Creed reads, “was crucified, dead, and buried, he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead.” Does this mean that Christ endured further suffering after his death on the cross? As we shall see below, an examination of the biblical evidence indicates that he did not. But before looking at the relevant biblical texts, it is appropriate to examine the phrase “he descended into hell” in the Apostles' Creed.

#### **(1) The Origin of the Phrase, “He Descended Into Hell”**

A murky background lies behind much of the history of the phrase itself. Its origins, where they can be found, are far from praiseworthy. The great church historian Philip Schaff has summarized the development of the Apostles' Creed in an extensive chart, which is reproduced on pages 583–85.

This chart shows that, unlike the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian Definition, the Apostles' Creed was not written or approved by a single church council at one specific time. Rather, it gradually took shape from about A.D. 200 to 750.

It is surprising to find that the phrase "he descended into hell" was not found in any of the early versions of the Creed (in the versions used in Rome, in the rest of Italy, and in Africa) until it appeared in one of two versions from Rufinus in A.D. 390. Then it was not included again in any version of the Creed until A.D. 650. Moreover, Rufinus, the only person who included it before A.D. 650, did not think that it meant that Christ descended into hell, but understood the phrase simply to mean that Christ was "buried." In other words, he took it to mean that Christ "descended into the grave." (The Greek form has ᾠδης (G87) which can mean just "grave," not γέννα (G1147) "hell, place of punishment."). We should also note that the phrase only appears in one of the two versions of the Creed that we have from Rufinus: it was not in the Roman form of the Creed that he preserved.

This means, therefore, that until A.D. 650 no version of the Creed included this phrase with the intention of saying that Christ "descended into hell—the only version to include the phrase before A.D. 650 gives it a different meaning. At this point one wonders if the term *apostolic* can in any sense be applied to this phrase, or if it really has a rightful place in a creed whose title claims for itself descent from the earliest apostles of Christ.

This survey of the historical development of the phrase also raises the possibility that when the phrase first began to be more commonly used, it may have been in other versions (now lost to us) that did not have the expression "and buried." If so, it probably would have meant to others just what it meant to Rufinus: "descended into the grave." But later when the phrase was incorporated into different versions of the Creed that already had the phrase "and buried," some other explanation had to be given to it. This mistaken insertion of the phrase after the words "and buried—apparently done by someone around A.D. 650—led to all sorts of attempts to explain "he descended into hell" in some way that did not contradict the rest of Scripture.

Some have taken it to mean that Christ suffered the pains of hell while on the cross. Calvin, for example, says that "Christ's descent into hell" refers to the fact that he not only died a bodily death but that "it was expedient at the same time for him to undergo the severity of God's vengeance, to appease his wrath and satisfy his just judgment."

Similarly, the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 44, asks,

Why is it added: He descended into Hades?

Answer: That in my greatest temptations I may be assured that Christ, my Lord, by his inexpressible anguish, pains, and terrors which he suffered in his soul on the cross and before, has redeemed me from the anguish and torment of hell.

But is this a satisfactory explanation of the phrase, "he descended into hell"? While it is true that Christ suffered the outpouring of God's wrath on the cross, this explanation does not really fit the phrase in the Apostles' Creed—"descended" hardly represents this idea, and the placement of the phrase after "was crucified, dead, and buried" makes this an artificial and unconvincing interpretation.

Others have understood it to mean that Christ continued in the "state of death" until his resurrection. The Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 50, says,

Christ's humiliation after his death consisted in his being buried, and continuing in the state of the dead, and under the power of death till the third day; which hath been otherwise expressed in these words, He descended into hell.

Though it is true that Christ continued in the state of death until the third day, once again it is a strained and unpersuasive explanation of "he descended into hell," for the placement of the phrase would then give the awkward sense, "he was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended to being dead." This interpretation does not explain what the words first meant in this sequence but is rather an unconvincing attempt to salvage some theologically acceptable sense out of them.

Moreover, the English word "hell" has no such sense as simply "being dead" (though the Greek word ᾗδης, G87, can mean this), so this becomes a doubly artificial explanation for English-speaking people.

Finally, some have argued that the phrase means just what it appears to mean on first reading: that Christ actually did descend into hell after his death on the cross. It is easy to understand the Apostles' Creed to mean just this (indeed, that is certainly the natural sense), but then another question arises: Can this idea be supported from Scripture?

## **(2) Possible Biblical Support for a Descent Into Hell**

Support for the idea that Christ descended into hell has been found primarily in five passages: Acts 2:27; Romans 10:6–7; Ephesians 4:8–9; 1 Peter 3:18–20; and 1 Peter 4:6. (A few other passages have been appealed to, but less convincingly.) On closer inspection, do any of those passages clearly establish this teaching?

(a) *Acts 2:27*. This is part of Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost, where he is quoting Psalm 16:10. In the King James Version the verse reads: "because thou wilt not *leave my soul in hell* neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."

Does this mean that Christ entered hell after he died? Not necessarily, because another sense is certainly possible for these verses. The word "hell" here represents a New Testament Greek term (ᾗδης, G87) and an Old Testament Hebrew term (שְׁאוֹל, H8619, popularly translated as sheol) that can mean simply "the grave" or "death" (the state of being dead). Thus, the NIV translates: "Because you will not *abandon me to the grave* nor will you let your Holy One see decay" (Acts 2:27). This sense is preferable because the context emphasizes that Christ's body rose from the grave, unlike David's, which remained in the grave. The reasoning is: "My body also will live in hope" (v. 26), "because you will not abandon me to the grave" (v. 27). Peter is using David's psalm to show that Christ's body did not decay—he is therefore unlike David, who "died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day" (v. 29 NIV). Therefore this passage about Christ's resurrection from the grave does not convincingly support the idea that Christ descended into hell.

(b) *Romans 10:6–7*. These verses contain two rhetorical questions, again Old Testament quotations (from Deut. 30:13): "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down) or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." But this passage hardly teaches that Christ descended into hell. The point of the passage is that Paul is telling people not to ask these questions, because Christ is not far away—he is near—and faith in him is as near as confessing with our mouth and believing in our heart (v. 9). These prohibited questions are questions of unbelief, not assertions of what Scripture teaches. However, some may object that Paul would not have anticipated that his readers would ask such questions unless it was widely known that Christ did in fact descend "into the abyss."

However, even if this were true, Scripture would not be saying or implying that Christ went into “hell” (in the sense of a place of punishment for the dead, ordinarily expressed by Gk. γέεννα, G1147), but rather that he went into “the abyss” (Gk. ἄβυσσος (G12) a term which often in the LXX is used of the depths of the ocean [Gen. 1:2; 7:11; 8:2; Deut. 8:7; Ps. 106:26 (107:26)], but it can also apparently refer just to the realm of the dead [Ps. 70:20 (71:20)]).

Paul here uses the word “deep” (ἄβυσσος (G12)) as a contrast to “heaven” in order to give the sense of a place that is unreachable, inaccessible to human beings. The contrast is not, “Who shall go to find Christ in a place of great blessing (heaven) or a place of great punishment (hell)?” but rather, “Who shall go to find Christ in a place that is inaccessibly high (heaven) or in a place that is inaccessibly low (the deep, or the realm of death)?” No clear affirmation or denial of a “descent into hell” can be found in this passage.

(c) *Ephesians 4:8–9*. Here Paul writes, “In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth?”

Does this mean that Christ “descended” to hell? It is at first unclear what is meant by “the lower parts of the earth,” but another translation seems to give the best sense: “What does ‘he ascended’ mean except that he also descended to the *lower, earthly regions*?” (NIV). Here the NIV takes “descended” to refer to Christ’s coming to earth as a baby (the Incarnation). The last four words are an acceptable understanding of the Greek text, taking the phrase “the lower regions of the earth” to mean “lower regions *which are* the earth” (the grammatical form in Greek would then be called a genitive of apposition). We do the same thing in English—for example, in the phrase “the city of Chicago,” we mean “the city which is Chicago.”

The NIV rendering is preferable in this context because Paul is saying that the Christ who went up to heaven (in his ascension) is the same one who earlier came down from heaven (v. 10). That “descent” from heaven occurred, of course, when Christ came to be born as a man. So the verse speaks of the incarnation, not of a descent into hell.

(d) *1 Peter 3:18–20*. For many people this is the most puzzling passage on this entire subject. Peter tells us that Christ was “put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; *in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison* who formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark” (RSV).

#### **Does this refer to Christ preaching in hell?**

Some have taken “he went and preached to the spirits in prison” to mean that Christ went into hell and preached to the spirits who were there—either proclaiming the gospel and offering a second chance to repent, or just proclaiming that he had triumphed over them and that they were eternally condemned.

But these interpretations fail to explain adequately either the passage itself or its setting in this context. Peter does not say that Christ preached to spirits generally, but only to those “who formerly did not obey ... *during the building of the ark*.” Such a limited audience—those who disobeyed during the building of the ark—would be a strange group for Christ to travel to hell and preach to. If Christ proclaimed his triumph, why only to these sinners and not to all? And if he offered a second chance for salvation, why only to these sinners and not to all? Even more difficult for this view is the fact that Scripture elsewhere indicates that there is no opportunity for repentance after death (Luke 16:26; Heb. 10:26–27).

Moreover, the context of 1 Peter 3 makes “preaching in hell” unlikely. Peter is encouraging his readers to witness boldly to hostile unbelievers around them. He just told them to “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you” (1 Peter 3:15 NIV). This evangelistic

motif would lose its urgency if Peter were teaching a second chance for salvation after death. And it would not fit at all with a “preaching” of condemnation.

**Does it refer to Christ preaching to fallen angels?**

To give a better explanation for these difficulties, several commentators have proposed taking “spirits in prison” to mean demonic spirits, the spirits of fallen angels, and have said that Christ proclaimed condemnation to these demons. This (it is claimed) would comfort Peter’s readers by showing them that the demonic forces oppressing them would also be defeated by Christ.

However, Peter’s readers would have to go through an incredibly complicated reasoning process to draw this conclusion when Peter does not explicitly teach it. They would have to reason from (1) some demons who sinned long ago were condemned, to (2) other demons are now inciting your human persecutors, to (3) those demons will likewise be condemned someday, to (4) therefore your persecutors will finally be judged as well. Finally Peter’s readers would get to Peter’s point: (5) Therefore don’t fear your persecutors.

Those who hold this “preaching to fallen angels” view must assume that Peter’s readers would “read between the lines” and conclude all this (points 2–5) from the simple statement that Christ “preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey” (1 Peter 3:19–20). But does it not seem too farfetched to say that Peter knew his readers would read all this into the text?

Moreover, Peter emphasizes hostile *persons* not demons, in the context (1 Peter 3:14, 16). And where would Peter’s readers get the idea that angels sinned “during the building of the ark”? There is nothing of that in the Genesis story about the building of the ark. And (in spite of what some have claimed), if we look at all the traditions of Jewish interpretation of the flood story, we find no mention of angels sinning specifically “during the building of the ark.” Therefore the view that Peter is speaking of Christ’s proclamation of judgment to fallen angels is really not persuasive either.

**Does it refer to Christ’s Proclaiming release to Old Testament saints?**

Another explanation is that Christ, after his death, went and proclaimed release to Old Testament believers who had been unable to enter heaven until the completion of Christ’s redemptive work.

But again we may question whether this view adequately accounts for what the text actually says. It does not say that Christ preached to those who were believers or faithful to God, but to those “who formerly *did not obey*—the emphasis is on their disobedience. Moreover, Peter does not specify Old Testament believers generally, but only those who were disobedient “in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark” (1 Peter 3:20).

Finally, Scripture gives us no clear evidence to make us think that full access to the blessings of being in God’s presence in heaven were withheld from Old Testament believers when they died—indeed, several passages suggest that believers who died before Christ’s death did enter into the presence of God at once because their sins were forgiven by trusting in the Messiah who was to come (Gen. 5:24; 2 Sam. 12:23; Pss. 16:11; 17:15; 23:6; Eccl. 12:7; Matt. 22:31–32; Luke 16:22; Rom. 4:1–8; Heb. 11:5).

**A more satisfying explanation.**

The most satisfactory explanation of 1 Peter 3:19–20 seems rather to be one proposed (but not really defended) long ago by Augustine: the passage refers not to something Christ did between his death and resurrection, but to what he did “in the spiritual realm of existence” (or “through the Spirit”) *at the time of Noah*. When Noah was building the ark, Christ “in spirit” was preaching through Noah to the hostile unbelievers around him.

This view gains support from two other statements of Peter. In 1 Peter 1:11, he says that the “Spirit of Christ” was speaking in the Old Testament prophets. This suggests that Peter could readily have thought that the “Spirit of Christ” was speaking through Noah as well. Then in 2 Peter 2:5, he calls Noah a “*preacher of righteousness*” (NIV), using the noun (κηρυξ, G3061) that comes from the same root as the verb “preached” (ἐκήρυξεν, from κηρύσσω, G3062) in 1 Peter 3:19. So it seems likely that when Christ “preached to the spirits in prison” he did so through Noah in the days before the flood.

The people to whom Christ preached through Noah were unbelievers on the earth at the time of Noah, but Peter calls them “spirits in prison” because they are now in the prison of hell—even though they were not just “spirits” but persons on earth when the preaching was done. (The NASB says Christ preached “to the spirits now in prison.”) We can speak the same way in English: “I knew President Clinton when he was a college student” is an appropriate statement, even though he was not president when he was in college. The sentence means, “I knew the man who is now President Clinton when he was still a student in college.” So “Christ preached to the spirits in prison” means “Christ preached to people who are now spirits in prison when they were still persons on earth.”<sup>30</sup>

This interpretation is very appropriate to the larger context of 1 Peter 3:13–22. The parallel between the situation of Noah and the situation of Peter’s readers is clear at several points:

<b>Noah</b>	<b>Peter’s readers</b>
Righteous minority	Righteous minority
Surrounded by hostile unbelievers	Surrounded by hostile unbelievers
God’s judgment was near	God’s judgment may come soon (1 Peter 4:5, 7; 2 Peter 3:10)
Noah witnessed boldly (by Christ’s power)	They should witness boldly by Christ’s power (1 Peter 3:14, 16–17; 3:15; 4:11)
Noah was finally saved	They will finally be saved (1 Peter 3:13–14; 4:13; 5:10)

Such an understanding of the text seems to be by far the most likely solution to a puzzling passage. Yet this means that our fourth possible support for a descent of Christ into hell also turns up negative—the text speaks rather of something Christ did on earth at the time of Noah.

(e) *1 Peter 4:6*. This fifth and final passage says, “For this is why the gospel was preached even to the dead, that though judged in the flesh like men, they might live in the spirit like God.”

Does this verse mean that Christ went to hell and preached the gospel to those who had died? If so, it would be the only passage in the Bible that taught a “second chance” for salvation after death and would contradict passages such as Luke 16:19–31 and Hebrews 9:27, which clearly seem to deny this possibility. Moreover, the passage does not explicitly say that Christ preached to people after they had died, and could rather mean that the gospel in general was preached (this verse does not even say that Christ preached) to people who are now dead, but that it was preached to them while they were still alive on earth.

This is a common explanation, and it seems to fit this verse much better. It finds support in the second word of the verse, “this,” which refers back to the final judgment mentioned at the

end of verse 5. Peter is saying that it was because of the final judgment that the gospel was preached to the dead.

This would comfort the readers concerning their Christian friends who had already died. They may have wondered, “Did the gospel benefit them, since it didn’t save them from death?” Peter answers that the reason the gospel was preached to those who had died was not to save them from physical death (they were “judged in the flesh like men”) but to save them from final judgment (they will “live in the spirit like God”). Therefore, the fact that they had died did not indicate that the gospel had failed in its purpose—for they would surely live forever in the spiritual realm.

Thus, “the dead” are people who have died and are now dead, even though they were alive and on earth when the gospel was preached to them. (The NIV translates, “For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to *those who are now dead*,” and NASB has “those who are dead.”) This avoids the doctrinal problem of a “second chance” of salvation after death and fits both the wording and the context of the verse.

We conclude, therefore, that this last passage, when viewed in its context, turns out to provide no convincing support for the doctrine of a descent of Christ into hell.

At this point, people on all sides of the question of whether Christ actually descended into hell should be able to agree at least that the idea of Christ’s “descent into hell” is not taught clearly or explicitly in any passage of Scripture. And many people (including the present author) will conclude that this idea is not taught in Scripture at all. But beyond the question of whether any passage positively teaches this idea, we must ask whether it is contrary to any passages of Scripture.

### **(3) Biblical Opposition to a “Descent Into Hell”**

In addition to the fact that there is little if any biblical support for a descent of Christ into hell, there are some New Testament texts that argue against the possibility of Christ’s going to hell after his death.

Jesus’ words to the thief on the cross, “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43), imply that after Jesus died his soul (or spirit) went immediately to the presence of the Father in heaven, even though his body remained on earth and was buried. Some people deny this by arguing that “Paradise” is a place distinct from heaven, but in both of the other New Testament uses the word clearly means “heaven”: in 2 Corinthians 12:4 it is the place to which Paul was caught up in his revelation of heaven, and in Revelation 2:7 it is the place where we find the tree of life—which is clearly heaven in Revelation 22:2 and 14.

In addition, the cry of Jesus, “It is finished” (John 19:30) strongly suggests that Christ’s suffering was finished at that moment and so was his alienation from the Father because of bearing our sin. This implies that he would not descend into hell, but would go at once into the Father’s presence.

Finally, the cry, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46), also suggests that Christ expected (correctly) the immediate end of his suffering and estrangement and the welcoming of his spirit into heaven by God the Father (note Stephen’s similar cry in Acts 7:59).

These texts indicate, then, that Christ in his death experienced the same things believers in this present age experience when they die: his dead body remained on earth and was buried (as ours will be), but his spirit (or soul) passed immediately into the presence of God in heaven (just as ours will). Then on the first Easter morning, Christ’s spirit was reunited with his body and he

was raised from the dead—just as Christians who have died will (when Christ returns) be reunited to their bodies and raised in their perfect resurrection bodies to new life.

This fact has pastoral encouragement for us: we need not fear death, not only because eternal life lies on the other side, but also because we know that our Savior himself has gone through exactly the same experience we will go through—he has prepared, even sanctified the way, and we follow him with confidence each step of that way. This is much greater comfort regarding death than could ever be given by any view of a descent into hell.

#### **(4) Conclusion Regarding the Apostles' Creed and the Question of Christ's Possible Descent Into Hell**

Does the phrase “he descended into hell” deserve to be retained in the Apostles' Creed alongside the great doctrines of the faith on which all can agree? The single argument in its favor seems to be the fact that it has been around so long. But an old mistake is still a mistake—and as long as it has been around there has been confusion and disagreement over its meaning.

On the other side, there are several compelling reasons against keeping the phrase. It has no clear warrant from Scripture and indeed seems to be contradicted by some passages in Scripture. It has no claim to being “apostolic” and no support (in the sense of a “descent into hell”) from the first six centuries of the church. It was not in the earliest versions of the Creed and was only included in it later because of an apparent misunderstanding about its meaning. Unlike every other phrase in the Creed, it represents not some major doctrine on which all Christians agree, but rather a statement about which most Christians seem to disagree. It is at best confusing and in most cases misleading for modern Christians. My own judgment is that there would be all gain and no loss if it were dropped from the Creed once for all.

Concerning the doctrinal question of whether Christ did descend into hell after he died, the answer from several passages of Scripture seems clearly to be no.

### **D. The Extent of the Atonement**

One of the differences between Reformed theologians and other Catholic and Protestant theologians has been the question of the extent of the atonement. The question may be put this way: when Christ died on the cross, did he pay for the sins of the entire human race or only for the sins of those who he knew would ultimately be saved?

Non-Reformed people argue that the gospel offer in Scripture is repeatedly made to all people, and for this offer to be genuine, the payment for sins must have already been made and must be actually available for all people. They also say that if the people whose sins Christ paid for are limited, then the free offer of the gospel also is limited, and the offer of the gospel cannot be made to all mankind without exception.

On the other hand, Reformed people argue that if Christ's death actually paid for the sins of every person who ever lived, then there is no penalty left for *anyone* to pay, and it necessarily follows that all people will be saved, without exception. For God could not condemn to eternal punishment anyone whose sins are already paid for: that would be demanding double payment, and it would therefore be unjust. In answer to the objection that this compromises the free offer of the gospel to every person, Reformed people answer that we do not know who they are who will come to trust in Christ, for only God knows that. As far as we are concerned, the free offer of the gospel is to be made to everybody without exception. We also know that everyone who repents and believes in Christ will be saved, so all are called to repentance (cf. Acts 17:30). The

fact that God foreknew who would be saved, and that he accepted Christ's death as payment for their sins only, does not inhibit the free offer of the gospel, for who will respond to it is hidden in the secret counsels of God. That we do not know who will respond no more constitutes a reason for not offering the gospel to all than not knowing the extent of the harvest prevents the farmer from sowing seed in his fields.

Finally, Reformed people argue that God's purposes in redemption are agreed upon within the Trinity and they are certainly accomplished. Those whom God planned to save are the same people for whom Christ also came to die, and to those same people the Holy Spirit will certainly apply the benefits of Christ's redemptive work, even awakening their faith (John 1:12; Phil. 1:29; cf. Eph. 2:2) and calling them to trust in him. What God the Father purposed, God the Son and the Holy Spirit agreed to and surely carried out.

**1. Scripture Passages Used to Support the Reformed View.** Several Scripture passages speak of the fact that Christ died for his people. "The good shepherd lays down his life *for the sheep*" (John 10:11). "I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:15). Paul speaks of "the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son" (Acts 20:28). He also says, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?" (Rom. 8:32). This passage indicates a connection between God's purpose in giving up his Son "for us all" and giving us "all things" that pertain to salvation as well. In the next sentence Paul clearly limits the application of this to those who will be saved because he says, "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?" (Rom. 8:33) and in the next verse mentions Christ's death as a reason why no one shall bring a charge against the elect (8:34). In another passage, Paul says, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up *for her*" (Eph. 5:25).

Moreover, Christ during his earthly ministry is aware of a group of people whom the Father has given to him. "All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out ... this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day" (John 6:37–39). He also says, "I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours" (John 17:9). He then goes on from this specific reference to the disciples to say, "I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word" (John 17:20).

Finally, some passages speak of a definite transaction between the Father and the Son when Christ died, a transaction that had specific reference to those who would believe. For example, Paul says, "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died *for us*" (Rom. 5:8). He adds, "For if while we were enemies *we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son* much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life" (Rom. 5:10). This reconciliation to God occurred with respect to the specific people who would be saved, and it occurred "while we were enemies." Similarly, Paul says, "*For our sake* he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21; cf. Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:7). And "Christ redeemed *us* from the curse of the law, having become a curse *for us*" (Gal. 3:13).

Further support for the Reformed view is found in the consideration that all the blessings of salvation, including faith, repentance, and all of the works of the Holy Spirit in applying redemption, were also secured by Christ's redemptive work specifically for his people. Those for whom he earned forgiveness also have had those other benefits earned for them (cf. Eph. 1:3–4; 2:8; Phil. 1:29).

What I have called “the Reformed view” in this section is commonly referred to as “limited atonement.” However, most theologians who hold this position today do not prefer the term “limited atonement” because it is so easily subject to misunderstanding, as if this view somehow held that Christ’s atoning work was deficient in some way. The term that is usually preferred is *particular redemption* since this view holds that Christ died for particular people (specifically, those who would be saved and whom he came to redeem), that he foreknew each one of them individually (cf. Eph. 1:3–5) and had them individually in mind in his atoning work.

The opposite position, that Christ’s death actually paid for the sins of all people who ever lived, is called “general redemption” or “unlimited atonement.”

**2. Scripture Passages Used to Support the Non-Reformed View (General Redemption or Unlimited Atonement).** A number of Scripture passages indicate that in some sense Christ died for the whole world. John the Baptist said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of *the world!*” (John 1:29). And John 3:16 tells us that “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” Jesus said, “The bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:51). Paul says that in Christ “God was reconciling *the world* to himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). We read of Christ that “he is the expiation [lit. “propitiation”] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of *the whole world*” (1 John 2:2). Paul writes that Christ Jesus “gave himself as a ransom *for all*” (1 Tim. 2:6). And the author of Hebrews says that Jesus was for a little while made lower than the angels “so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one” (Heb. 2:9).

Other passages appear to speak of Christ dying for those who will not be saved. Paul says, “Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died” (Rom. 14:15). In a similar context he tells the Corinthians not to eat publicly at an idol’s temple because they might encourage those who are weak in their faith to violate their consciences and eat food offered to idols. He then says, “And so by your knowledge this weak man is destroyed, the brother *for whom Christ died*” (1 Cor. 8:11). Peter writes about false teachers as follows: “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, *even denying the Master who bought them* bringing upon themselves swift destruction” (2 Peter 2:1; cf. Heb. 10:29).

**3. Some Points of Agreement and Some Conclusions About Disputed Texts.** It would be helpful first to list the points on which both sides agree:

1. Not all will be saved.
2. A free offer of the gospel can rightly be made to every person ever born. It is completely true that “whoever will” may come to Christ for salvation, and no one who comes to him will be turned away. This free offer of the gospel is extended in good faith to every person.
3. All agree that Christ’s death in itself, because he is the infinite Son of God, has infinite merit and is in itself sufficient to pay the penalty of the sins of as many or as few as the Father and the Son decreed. The question is not about the intrinsic merits of Christ’s sufferings and death, but about the number of people for whom the Father and the Son thought Christ’s death to be sufficient payment at the time Christ died.

Beyond these points of agreement, however, a difference remains concerning the following question: “When Christ died, did he *actually pay the penalty* only for the sins of those who

would believe in him, or for the sins of every person who ever lived?” On this question it seems that those who hold to particular redemption have stronger arguments on their side. First, an important point that is not generally answered by advocates of the general redemption view is that people who are eternally condemned to hell suffer the penalty for all of their own sins, and therefore their penalty could not have been fully taken by Christ. Those who hold the general redemption view sometimes answer that people suffer in hell because of the sin of rejecting Christ, even though their other sins were paid for. But this is hardly a satisfactory position, for (1) some have never rejected Christ because they have never heard of him, and (2) the emphasis of Scripture when it speaks of eternal punishment is not on the fact that the people suffer because they have rejected Christ, but on the fact that they suffer because of their own sins in this life (see Rom. 5:6–8, 13–16, et al.). This significant point seems to tip the argument decisively in favor of the particular redemption position.

Another significant point in favor of particular redemption is the fact that Christ completely earned our salvation, paying the penalty for all our sins. He did not just redeem us potentially, but actually redeemed us as individuals whom he loved. A third weighty point in favor of particular redemption is that there is eternal unity in the counsels and plans of God and in the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in accomplishing their plans (see Rom. 8:28–30).

With regard to Scripture passages used to support general redemption, the following may be said: Several passages that speak about “the world” simply mean that sinners generally will be saved, without implying that every single individual in the world will be saved. So the fact that Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29) does not mean (on anybody’s interpretation) that Christ actually removes the sins of every single person in the world, for both sides agree that not all are saved. Similarly, the fact that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:19) does not mean that every single person in the world was reconciled to God, but that sinners generally were reconciled to God. Another way of putting these two passages would be to say that Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of sinners, or that God was in Christ reconciling sinners to himself. This does not mean that all sinners will be saved or were reconciled, but simply that these groups in general, but not necessarily every single person in them, were the objects of God’s redeeming work: it essentially means that “God so loved sinners that he gave his only Son ...” without implying that every sinner in the whole world will be saved.

The passages that speak about Christ dying “for” the whole world are best understood to refer to the free offer of the gospel that is made to all people. When Jesus says, “The bread which I shall give *for the life of the world* is my flesh” (John 6:51), it is in the context of speaking of himself as the Bread that came down from heaven, which is offered to people and which they may, if they are willing, receive for themselves. Earlier in the same discussion Jesus said that “the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world” (John 6:33). This may be understood in the sense of bringing redeeming life into the world but not meaning that every single person in the world will have that redeeming life. Jesus then speaks of himself as inviting others to come and take up this living bread: “He who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst ... This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:35, 50–51). Jesus gives his flesh to bring life into the world and to offer life to the world, but to say that Jesus came to offer eternal life to the world (a point

on which both sides agree) is not to say that he actually paid the penalty for the sins of everyone who would ever live, for that is a separate question.

When John says that Christ “is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2, author’s translation), he may simply be understood to mean that Christ is the atoning sacrifice that the gospel now *makes available for* the sins of everyone in the world. The preposition “for” (Gk. περί, G4309, plus genitive) is ambiguous with respect to the specific sense in which Christ is the propitiation “for” the sins of the world. Περί (G4309) simply means “concerning” or “with respect to” but is not specific enough to define the exact way in which Christ is the sacrifice with respect to the sins of the world. It would be entirely consistent with the language of the verse to think that John is simply saying that Christ is the atoning sacrifice who is available to pay for the sins of anyone in the world. Likewise, when Paul says that Christ “gave himself as a ransom *for all*” (1 Tim. 2:6), we are to understand this to mean a ransom available for all people, without exception.

When the author of Hebrews says that Christ was made lower than the angels “so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one” (Heb. 2:9), the passage is best understood to refer to every one of Christ’s people, every one who is redeemed. It does not say everyone “in the whole world” or any such expression, and in the immediate context the author is certainly speaking of those who are redeemed (see “bringing many sons to glory” [v. 10]; “those who are sanctified” [v. 11]; and “the children God has given me” [v. 13]). The Greek word πᾶς (G4246) here translated “every one,” is also used in a similar sense to mean “all of God’s people” in Hebrews 8:11, “for *all* shall know me,” and in Hebrews 12:8, “If you are left without discipline, in which *all* have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.” In both cases the “all” is not explicitly restricted by a specific phrase such as “all of God’s people,” but this is clearly the sense in the overall context. Of course, in other contexts, the same word “all” can mean “all people without exception,” but this must be determined from the individual context in each case.

When Paul speaks in Romans 14:15 and 1 Corinthians 8:11 about the possibility of destroying one for whom Christ died, it seems best here as well to think of the word “for” in the sense that Christ died “*to make salvation available for*” these people or “to bring the free offer of the gospel to” these people who are associated with the fellowship of the church. He does not seem to have in mind the specific question of the inter-trinitarian decision regarding whose sins the Father counted Christ’s death as a payment for. Rather, he is speaking of those to whom the gospel has been offered. In another passage, when Paul calls the weak man a “brother for whom Christ died” in 1 Corinthians 8:11, he is not necessarily pronouncing on the inward spiritual condition of a person’s heart, but is probably just speaking according to what is often called the “judgment of charity” by which people who are participating in the fellowship of the church can rightly be referred to as brothers and sisters.

When Peter speaks of false teachers who bring in destructive heresies, “even denying the Master who bought them” (2 Peter 2:1), it is unclear whether the word “Master” (Gk. δεσπότης, G1305) refers to Christ (as in Jude 4) or to God the Father (as in Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24; Rev. 6:10). In either case, the Old Testament allusion is probably to Deuteronomy 32:6, where Moses says to the rebellious people who have turned away from God, “Is not he your Father *who has bought you?*” (author’s translation). Peter is drawing an analogy between the past false prophets who arose among the Jews and those who will be false teachers within the churches to which he writes: “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought

them” (2 Peter 2:1). In line with this clear reference to false prophets in the Old Testament, Peter also alludes to the fact that the rebellious Jews turned away from God who “bought” them out of Egypt in the exodus. From the time of the exodus onward, any Jewish person would have considered himself or herself one who was “bought” by God in the exodus and therefore a person of God’s own possession. In this sense, the false teachers arising among the people were denying God their Father, to whom they rightfully belonged. So the text means not that Christ had redeemed these false prophets, but simply that they were rebellious Jewish people (or church attenders in the same position as the rebellious Jews) who were rightly owned by God because they had been brought out of the land of Egypt (or their forefathers had), but they were ungrateful to him. Christ’s specific redemptive work on the cross is not in view in this verse.<sup>42</sup>

With regard to the verses that talk of Christ’s dying for his sheep, his church, or his people, non-Reformed people may answer that these passages do not deny that he died to pay the penalty for others as well. In response, while it is true that they do not explicitly deny that Christ died for others as well, their frequent reference to his death for his people would at least strongly suggest that this is a correct inference. Even if they do not absolutely imply such a particularizing of redemption, these verses do at least seem to be most naturally interpreted in this way.

In conclusion, it seems to me that the Reformed position of “particular redemption” is most consistent with the overall teaching of Scripture. But once that has been said, several points of caution need to be raised.

**4. Points of Clarification and Caution Regarding This Doctrine.** It is important to state some points of clarification and also some areas in which we can rightly object to the way in which some advocates of particular redemption have expressed their arguments. It is also important to ask what the pastoral implications are for this teaching.

1. It seems to be a mistake to state the question as Berkhof does and focus on the purpose of the Father and the Son, rather than on what actually happened in the atonement. If we confine the discussion to the purpose of the atonement, then this is just another form of the larger dispute between Calvinists and Arminians over whether God’s purpose is (a) to save all people, a purpose that is frustrated by man’s will to rebel—the Arminian position—or whether God’s purpose is (b) to save those whom he has chosen—the Calvinist position. This question will not be decided at the narrow point of the question of the extent of the atonement, for the specific scriptural texts on that point are too few and can hardly be said to be conclusive on either side. One’s decisions on these passages will tend to be determined by one’s view of the larger question as to what Scripture as a whole teaches about the nature of the atonement and about the broader issues of God’s providence, sovereignty, and the doctrine of election. Whatever decisions are made on those larger topics will apply specifically to this point, and people will come to their conclusions accordingly.

Rather than focusing on the purpose of the atonement, therefore, the question is rightfully asked about the atonement itself: Did Christ pay for the sins of all unbelievers who will be eternally condemned, and did he pay for their sins fully and completely on the cross? It seems that we have to answer no to that question.

2. The statements “Christ died for his people only” and “Christ died for all people” are both true in some senses, and too often the argument over this issue has been confused because of various senses that can be given to the word “for” in these two statements.

The statement “Christ died for his people only” can be understood to mean that “Christ died to actually pay the penalty for all the sins of his people only.” In that sense it is true. But when

non-Reformed people hear the sentence “Christ died for his people only,” they often hear in it, “Christ died so that he could make the gospel available only to a chosen few,” and they are troubled over what they see as a real threat to the free offer of the gospel to every person. Reformed people who hold to particular redemption should recognize the potential for misunderstanding that arises with the sentence “Christ died for his people only,” and, out of concern for the truth and out of pastoral concern to affirm the free offer of the gospel and to avoid misunderstanding in the body of Christ, they should be more precise in saying exactly what they mean. The simple sentence, “Christ died for his people only,” while true in the sense explained above, is seldom understood in that way when people unfamiliar with Reformed doctrine hear it, and it therefore is better not to use such an ambiguous sentence at all.

On the other hand, the sentence, “Christ died for all people,” is true if it means, “Christ died to make salvation available to all people” or if it means, “Christ died to bring the free offer of the gospel to all people.” In fact, this is the kind of language Scripture itself uses in passages like John 6:51; 1 Timothy 2:6; and 1 John 2:2. It really seems to be only nit-picking that creates controversies and useless disputes when Reformed people insist on being such purists in their speech that they object any time someone says that “Christ died for all people.” There are certainly acceptable ways of understanding that sentence that are consistent with the speech of the scriptural authors themselves.

Similarly, I do not think we should rush to criticize an evangelist who tells an audience of unbelievers, “Christ died for your sins,” if it is made clear in the context that it is necessary to trust in Christ before one can receive the benefits of the gospel offer. In that sense the sentence is simply understood to mean “Christ died to offer you forgiveness for your sins” or “Christ died to make available forgiveness for your sins.” The important point here is that sinners realize that salvation is available for everyone and that payment of sins is available for everyone.

At this point some Reformed theologians will object and will warn us that if we say to unbelievers, “Christ died for your sins,” the unbelievers will draw the conclusion, “Therefore I am saved no matter what I do.” But this does not seem to be a problem in actual fact, for whenever evangelicals (Reformed or non-Reformed) speak about the gospel to unbelievers, they are always very clear on the fact that the death of Christ has no benefit for a person unless that person believes in Christ. Therefore, the problem seems to be more something that Reformed people *think* unbelievers should believe (if they were consistent in reasoning back into the secret counsels of God and the relationship between the Father and Son in the counsels of the Trinity at the point of Christ’s propitiatory sacrifice on the cross). But unbelievers simply do not reason that way: they know that they must exercise faith in Christ before they will experience any benefits from his saving work. Moreover, it is far more likely that people will understand the sentence “Christ died for your sins” in the doctrinally correct sense that “Christ died in order to offer you forgiveness for your sins” rather than in the doctrinally incorrect sense, “Christ died and completely paid the penalty already for all your sins.”

3. In terms of the practical, pastoral effects of our words, both those who hold to particular redemption and those who hold to general redemption agree at several key points:

a. Both sincerely want to avoid implying that people will be saved whether they believe in Christ or not. Non-Reformed people sometimes accuse Reformed people of saying that the elect will be saved irrespective of responding to the gospel, but this is clearly a misrepresentation of the Reformed position. On the other hand, Reformed people think that those who hold to general redemption are in danger of implying that everybody will be saved whether they believe in Christ or not. But this is not a position that non-Reformed people actually hold, and it is always

precarious to criticize people for a position that they do not say they hold, just because you think that they should hold that position if they were consistent with their other views.

b. Both sides want to avoid implying that there might be some people who come to Christ for salvation but are turned away because Christ did not die for them. No one wants to say or imply to an unbeliever, “Christ might have died for your sins (and then again he might not have!).” Both sides want to clearly affirm that all who come to Christ for salvation will in fact be saved. “Him who comes to me I will not cast out” (John 6:37).

c. Both sides want to avoid implying that God is hypocritical or insincere when he makes the free offer of the gospel. It is a genuine offer, and it is always true that all who wish to come to Christ for salvation and who do actually come to him will be saved.

d. Finally, we may ask why this matter is so important after all. Although Reformed people have sometimes made belief in particular redemption a test of doctrinal orthodoxy, it would be healthy to realize that Scripture itself never singles this out as a doctrine of major importance, nor does it once make it the subject of any explicit theological discussion. Our knowledge of the issue comes only from incidental references to it in passages whose concern is with other doctrinal or practical matters. In fact, this is really a question that probes into the inner counsels of the Trinity and does so in an area in which there is very little direct scriptural testimony—a fact that should cause us to be cautious. A balanced pastoral perspective would seem to be to say that this teaching of particular redemption *seems* to us to be true, that it gives logical consistency to our theological system, and that it can be helpful in assuring people of Christ’s love for them individually and of the completeness of his redemptive work for them; but that it also is a subject that almost inevitably leads to some confusion, some misunderstanding, and often some wrongful argumentativeness and divisiveness among God’s people—all of which are negative pastoral considerations. Perhaps that is why the apostles such as John and Peter and Paul, in their wisdom, placed almost no emphasis on this question at all. And perhaps we would do well to ponder their example.

## QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. In what ways has this chapter enabled you to appreciate Christ’s death more than you did before? Has it given you more or less confidence in the fact that your sins have actually been paid for by Christ?
2. If the ultimate cause of the atonement is found in the love and justice of God, then was there anything in you that required God to love you or to take steps to save you (when he looked forward and thought of you as a sinner in rebellion against him)? Does your answer to this question help you to appreciate the character of God’s love for you as a person who did not at all deserve that love? How does that realization make you feel in your relationship to God?
3. Do you think that Christ’s sufferings were enough to pay for your sins? Are you willing to rely on his work to pay for all your sins? Do you think he is a sufficient Savior, worthy of your trust? When he invites you, “Come to me ... and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28), do you now trust him? Will you now and always rely on him with your whole heart for complete salvation?
4. If Christ bore all the guilt for our sins, all the wrath of God against sin, and all the penalty of the death that we deserved, then will God ever turn his wrath against you as a believer

(see Rom. 8:31–39)? Can any of the hardships or sufferings that you experience in life be due to the wrath of God against you? If not, then why do we as Christians experience difficulties and sufferings in this life (see Rom. 8:28; Heb. 12:3–11)?

5. Do you think Christ's life was good enough to deserve God's approval? Are you willing to rely on it for your eternal destiny? Is Jesus Christ a reliable enough and good enough Savior for you to trust him? Which would you rather trust in for your eternal standing before God: your own life or Christ's?
6. If Christ has indeed redeemed you from bondage to sin and to the kingdom of Satan, are there areas of your life in which you could more fully realize this to be true? Could this realization give you more encouragement in your Christian life?
7. Do you think it was fair for Christ to be your substitute and to pay your penalty? When you think about him acting as your substitute and dying for you, what attitude and emotion is called forth in your heart?

## **SPECIAL TERMS**

absolute necessity  
active obedience  
atonement  
blood of Christ  
consequent  
example theory  
general redemption  
governmental theory  
impute  
limited atonement  
moral influence theory  
particular redemption  
passive obedience  
penal substitution  
propitiation  
ransom to Satan theory  
reconciliation  
redemption  
sacrifice  
unlimited atonement  
vicarious atonement

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  - 1847 Finney, 258–82
  - 1875–76 Pope, 2:141–88, 263–316
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  - 1983 Carter, 1:483–505
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  - 1987–90 Oden, 2:317–450
- 3. Baptist
  - 1767 Gill, 1:562–83; 2:1–68
  - 1887 Boyce, 295–341
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- 4. Dispensational
  - 1947 Chafer, 3:35–164, 183–205; 5:177–230
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## SCRIPTURE MEMORY PASSAGE

**Romans 3:23–26:** *Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation [lit. “propitiation”] by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus.*

## HYMN

### “WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDROUS CROSS”

When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of Glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ my God:  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to his blood.

See, from his head, his hands, his feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down:  
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

His dying crimson, like a robe,  
Spread o’er his body on the tree;  
Then am I dead to all the globe,  
And all the globe is dead to me.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Author: Isaac Watts, 1707

## Chapter 28

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# Resurrection and Ascension

*What was Christ's resurrection body like? What is its significance for us? What happened to Christ when he ascended into heaven? What is meant by the states of Jesus Christ?*

## EXPLANATION AND SCRIPTURAL BASIS

### A. Resurrection

**1. New Testament Evidence.** The Gospels contain abundant testimony to the resurrection of Christ (see Matt. 28:1–20; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–53; John 20:1–21:25). In addition to these detailed narratives in the four gospels, the book of Acts is a story of the apostles' proclamation of the resurrection of Christ and of continued prayer to Christ and trust in him as the one who is alive and reigning in heaven. The Epistles depend entirely on the assumption that Jesus is a living, reigning Savior who is now the exalted head of the church, who is to be trusted, worshiped, and adored, and who will some day return in power and great glory to reign as King over the earth. The book of Revelation repeatedly shows the risen Christ reigning in heaven and predicts his return to conquer his enemies and reign in glory. Thus the entire New Testament bears witness to the resurrection of Christ.

**2. The Nature of Christ's Resurrection.** Christ's resurrection was not simply a coming back from the dead, as had been experienced by others before, such as Lazarus (John 11:1–44), for then Jesus would have been subject to weakness and aging and eventually would have died again just as all other human beings die. Rather, when he rose from the dead Jesus was the “first fruits” (1 Cor. 15:20, 23) of a new kind of human life, a life in which his body was made perfect, no longer subject to weakness, aging, or death, but able to live eternally.

It is true that two of Jesus' disciples did not recognize him when they walked with him on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–32), but Luke specifically tells us that this was because “their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (Luke 24:16), and later “their eyes were opened and they recognized him” (Luke 24:31). Mary Magdalene failed to recognize Jesus only for a moment (John 20:14–16), but it may have been still quite dark and she was not at first looking at him—she had come the first time “while it was still dark” (John 20:1), and she “turned” to speak to Jesus once she recognized him (John 20:16).

On other occasions the disciples seemed to have recognized Jesus fairly quickly (Matt. 28:9, 17; John 20:19–20, 26–28; 21:7, 12). When Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples in Jerusalem, they were initially startled and frightened (Luke 24:33, 37), yet when they saw Jesus' hands and his feet and watched him eat a piece of fish, they were convinced that he had risen from the dead. These examples indicate that there was a considerable degree of continuity between the physical

appearance of Jesus before his death and after his resurrection. Yet Jesus did not look exactly as he had before he died, for in addition to the initial amazement of the disciples at what they apparently thought could not happen, there was probably sufficient difference in his physical appearance for Jesus not to be immediately recognized. Perhaps that difference in appearance was simply the difference between a man who had lived a life of suffering, hardship, and grief, and one whose body was restored to its full youthful appearance of perfect health: though Jesus' body was still a physical body, it was raised as a transformed body, never able again to suffer, be weak or ill, or die; it had "put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53). Paul says the resurrection body is raised "imperishable ... in glory ... in power ... a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:42–44).

The fact that Jesus had a physical body that could be touched and handled after the resurrection is seen in that the disciples "took hold of his feet" (Matt. 28:9), that he appeared to the disciples on the road to Emmaus to be just another traveler on the road (Luke 24:15–18, 28–29), that he took bread and broke it (Luke 24:30), that he ate a piece of broiled fish to demonstrate clearly that he had a physical body and was not just a spirit, that Mary thought him to be a gardener (John 20:15), that "he showed them his hands and his side" (John 20:20), that he invited Thomas to touch his hands and his side (John 20:27), that he prepared breakfast for his disciples (John 21:12–13), and that he explicitly told them, "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for *a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have*" (Luke 24:39). Peter said that the disciples "ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead" (Acts 10:41).

It is true that Jesus apparently was able to appear and disappear out of sight quite suddenly (Luke 24:31, 36; John 20:19, 26). Yet we should be careful not to draw too many conclusions from this fact, for not all the passages affirm that Jesus could suddenly appear or disappear; some just say that Jesus came and stood among the disciples. When Jesus suddenly vanished from the sight of the disciples in Emmaus, this may have been a special miraculous occurrence, such as happened when "the Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more" (Acts 8:39). Nor should we make too much of the fact that Jesus came and stood among the disciples on two occasions when the doors were "shut" (John 20:19, 26), for no text says that Jesus "passed through walls" or anything like that. Indeed, on another occasion in the New Testament where someone needed to pass through a locked door, the door miraculously opened (see Acts 12:10).

Murray Harris has recently proposed an alternative interpretation to the verses quoted above, especially the verses showing Jesus appearing and disappearing at different times: he says that these verses show that while Jesus could sometimes materialize into a physical body, his customary existence was in a nonphysical or nonfleshly form of his "spiritual body." Moreover, when he ascended into heaven after forty days, Jesus permanently gave up any more materializing into a physical body. Professor Harris says:

The resurrection of Jesus was not his transformation into an immaterial body but his acquisition of a "spiritual body" which could materialize or dematerialize at will. When, on occasion, Jesus chose to appear to various persons in material form, this was just as really the "spiritual body" of Jesus as when he was not visible or tangible ... After the forty days, when his appearances on earth were ended, Jesus assumed the sole mode of being visible to the inhabitants of heaven but having a nonfleshly body ... In his risen state he transcended the normal laws of physical existence. He was no longer bound by material or spatial limitations.

It is important to realize that Harris definitely affirms the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. He says that the same body that died was also raised, but then it was transformed into a “spiritual body” with new properties.<sup>8</sup>

In response, while I do not consider this a doctrinal question of major significance (since it is simply a question about the nature of the resurrection body, about which we now know very little), I nevertheless think the New Testament provides some persuasive evidence that would lead us to differ with Harris’s view. Harris agrees that at several times Jesus had a physical body that could eat food and be touched and that had flesh and bones. He even agrees that at Jesus’ ascension into heaven, “It was a real Jesus of ‘flesh and bones’ (Luke 24:39) who was taken up before the eyes of his disciples.” The only question is whether this body of Jesus at other times existed in nonphysical, nonfleshly form, as Harris claims. To answer that, we have to ask whether the New Testament texts about Jesus appearing and disappearing require this conclusion. It does not seem that they do.

Luke 24:31, which says that after Jesus broke bread and gave it to the two disciples, “he *disappeared* from their sight” (NIV), does not require this. The Greek expression used here for “disappeared” (ἄφαντος ἐγένετο) does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament, but when found in Diodorus Siculus (a historian who wrote from 60–30 B.C.), it is used once of a man named Amphiaraus who, with his chariot, fell into a chasm and “disappeared from sight,” and the same expression is used in another place to talk about Atlas who was blown off a mountaintop by high winds and “disappeared.” In neither case does the expression mean that the person became immaterial or even invisible, but only that he was moved to a place hidden from people’s sight.<sup>12</sup> So in Luke 24:31, all we can conclude is that the disciples no longer saw Jesus—perhaps the Spirit of the Lord took him away (as with Philip in Acts 8:39), or perhaps he was just hidden again from their sight (as with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, Matt. 17:8, or as with the heavenly army around Elisha, 2 Kings 6:17, or [apparently] as with the disciples walking past the prison guards in Acts 5:19–23; 12:6, 10). In neither case do we need to conclude that Jesus’ physical body became nonphysical, any more than we need to conclude that the disciples’ bodies became nonphysical when they walked past the guards (Acts 5:23; 12:10) and escaped from prison. So Luke 24:31 does not say that any transformation happened to Jesus’ body; it merely says that the disciples could no longer see him.

As for the claim that Jesus passed through material substances, this is not substantiated in the New Testament. As explained above, the fact that Jesus appeared in a room when the doors had been shut or locked (John 20:19, 26) may or may not mean that he passed through a door or wall. Especially relevant here is the first deliverance of the apostles from prison: they did not walk through the doors, but “an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out” (Acts 5:19); yet the next morning the prison officers reported, “We found the prison securely locked and the sentries standing at the doors, but when we opened it we found no one inside” (Acts 5:23). The angel had opened the doors, the apostles had passed through, and the angel had closed and locked the doors again. Similarly, when Peter was rescued from prison, he did not dematerialize in order to pass through the locked chains around him, but “the chains fell off his hands” (Acts 12:7). In the same way, it is certainly possible that the door miraculously opened for Jesus or even that he had entered the room with the disciples but was temporarily hidden from their eyes.

With regard to the nature of Jesus’ resurrection body, much more decisive than the texts about Jesus’ appearing and disappearing are the texts that show that Jesus clearly had a physical

body with “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39), which could eat and drink, break bread, prepare breakfast, and be touched. Unlike the texts on Jesus’ appearing and disappearing, these texts are not capable of an alternative explanation that denies Jesus’ physical body—Harris himself agrees that in these texts Jesus had a body of flesh and bones. But what were these physical appearances intended to teach the disciples if not that Jesus’ resurrection body was definitely a physical body? If Jesus rose from the dead in the same physical body that had died, and if he repeatedly appeared to the disciples in that physical body, eating and drinking with them (Acts 10:41) over forty days, and if he ascended into heaven in that same physical body (Acts 1:9), and if the angel immediately told the disciples that “this Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11), then Jesus was clearly teaching them that his resurrection body was *a physical body*. If the “customary form” of his resurrection body was nonphysical, then in these repeated physical appearances Jesus would be guilty of misleading the disciples (and all subsequent readers of the New Testament) into thinking that his resurrection body remained physical when it did not. If he was customarily nonphysical and was going to become nonphysical forever at the ascension, then it would be very misleading for Jesus to say, “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39). He did not say, “... flesh and bones, as you see that I temporarily have”! It would have been wrong to teach the disciples that he had a physical body when in his customary mode of existence he really did not.

If Jesus had wanted to teach them that he could materialize and dematerialize at will (as Harris argues), then he could easily have dematerialized before their eyes, so that they could clearly record this event. Or he could easily have passed through a wall while they watched, rather than just suddenly standing among them. In short, if Jesus and the New Testament authors had wanted to teach us that the resurrection body was customarily and essentially nonmaterial, they could have done so, but instead they gave many clear indications that it was customarily physical and material, even though it was a body that was perfected, made forever free from weakness, sickness, and death.

Finally, there is a larger doctrinal consideration. The physical resurrection of Jesus, and his eternal possession of a physical resurrection body, give clear affirmation of the goodness of the material creation that God originally made: “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, *it was very good*” (Gen. 1:31). We as resurrected men and women will live forever in “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13). We will live in a renewed earth that “will be set free from its bondage to decay” (Rom. 8:21) and become like a new Garden of Eden. There will be a new Jerusalem, and people “shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations” (Rev. 21:26), and there will be “the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month” (Rev. 22:1–2). In this very material, physical, renewed universe, it seems that we will need to live as human beings with physical bodies, suitable for life in God’s renewed physical creation. Specifically, Jesus’ physical resurrection body affirms the goodness of God’s original creation of man not as a mere spirit like the angels, but as a creature with a physical body that was “very good.” We must not fall into the error of thinking that nonmaterial existence is somehow a better form of existence for creatures: when God made us as the pinnacle of his creation, he gave us physical bodies. In a perfected physical body Jesus rose from the dead, now reigns in heaven, and will return to take us to be with himself forever.

**3. Both the Father and the Son Participated in the Resurrection.** Some texts affirm that God the Father specifically raised Christ from the dead (Acts 2:24; Rom. 6:4; 1 Cor. 6:14; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:20), but other texts speak of Jesus as participating in his own resurrection. Jesus says: “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father” (John 10:17–18 NIV; cf. 2:19–21). It is best to conclude that both the Father and the Son were involved in the resurrection. Indeed, Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25; cf. Heb. 7:16).

#### **4. Doctrinal Significance of the Resurrection.**

**a. Christ’s Resurrection Insures Our Regeneration:** Peter says that “we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). Here he explicitly connects Jesus’ resurrection with our regeneration or new birth. When Jesus rose from the dead he had a new quality of life, a “resurrection life” in a human body and human spirit that were perfectly suited for fellowship and obedience to God forever. In his resurrection, Jesus earned for us a new life just like his. We do not receive all of that new “resurrection life” when we become Christians, for our bodies remain as they were, still subject to weakness, aging, and death. But in our spirits we are made alive with new resurrection power. Thus it is through his resurrection that Christ earned for us the new kind of life we receive when we are “born again.” This is why Paul can say that God “made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and *raised us up with him*” (Eph. 2:5–6; cf. Col. 3:1). When God raised Christ from the dead he thought of us as somehow being raised “with Christ” and therefore deserving of the merits of Christ’s resurrection. Paul says his goal in life is “that I may know him and the power of his resurrection ...” (Phil. 3:10). Paul knew that even in this life the resurrection of Christ gave new power for Christian ministry and obedience to God.

Paul connects the resurrection of Christ with the spiritual power at work within us when he tells the Ephesians that he is praying that they would know “what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:19–20). Here Paul says that the power by which God raised Christ from the dead is the same power at work within us. Paul further sees us as raised in Christ when he says, “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life ... So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:4, 11). This new resurrection power in us includes *power to gain more and more victory over remaining sin* in our lives—“sin will have no dominion over you” (Rom. 6:14; cf. 1 Cor. 15:17)—even though we will never be perfect in this life. This resurrection power also includes *power for ministry in the work of the kingdom*. It was after Jesus’ resurrection that he promised his disciples, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This new, intensified power for proclaiming the gospel and working miracles and triumphing over the opposition of the enemy was given to the disciples after Christ’s resurrection from the dead and was part of the new resurrection power that characterized their Christian lives.

**b. Christ's Resurrection Insures Our Justification:** In only one passage does Paul explicitly connect Christ's resurrection with our justification (or our receiving a declaration that we are not guilty but righteous before God). Paul says that Jesus "was put to death for our trespasses and *raised for our justification*" (Rom. 4:25). When Christ was raised from the dead, it was God's declaration of approval of Christ's work of redemption. Because Christ "humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8), "God has highly exalted him ..." (Phil. 2:9). By raising Christ from the dead, God the Father was in effect saying that he approved of Christ's work of suffering and dying for our sins, that his work was completed, and that Christ no longer had any need to remain dead. There was no penalty left to pay for sin, no more wrath of God to bear, no more guilt or liability to punishment—all had been completely paid for, and no guilt remained. In the resurrection, God was saying to Christ, "I approve of what you have done, and you find favor in my sight."

This explains how Paul can say that Christ was "raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). If God "raised us up with him" (Eph. 2:6), then, by virtue of our union with Christ, God's declaration of approval of Christ is also his declaration of approval of us. When the Father in essence said to Christ, "All the penalty for sins has been paid and I find you not guilty but righteous in my sight," he was thereby making the declaration that would also apply to us once we trusted in Christ for salvation. In this way Christ's resurrection also gave final proof that he had earned our justification.

**c. Christ's Resurrection Insures That We Will Receive Perfect Resurrection Bodies As Well:** The New Testament several times connects Jesus' resurrection with our final bodily resurrection. "And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power" (1 Cor. 6:14). Similarly, "he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence" (2 Cor. 4:14). But the most extensive discussion of the connection between Christ's resurrection and our own is found in 1 Corinthians 15:12–58. There Paul says that Christ is the "first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20). In calling Christ the "first fruits" (Gk. ἀπαρχή, G569), Paul uses a metaphor from agriculture to indicate that we will be like Christ. Just as the "first fruits" or the first taste of the ripening crop show what the rest of the harvest will be like for that crop, so Christ as the "first fruits" shows what our resurrection bodies will be like when, in God's final "harvest," he raises us from the dead and brings us into his presence.

After Jesus' resurrection, he still had the nail prints in his hands and feet and the mark from the spear in his side (John 20:27). People sometimes wonder if that indicates that the scars of serious injuries that we have received in this life will also remain on our resurrection bodies. The answer is that we probably will not have any scars from injuries or wounds received in this life, but our bodies will be made perfect, "incorruptible" and raised "in glory." The scars from Jesus' crucifixion are unique because they are an eternal reminder of his sufferings and death for us. The fact that he retains those scars does not necessarily mean that we shall retain ours. Rather, all will be healed, and all will be made perfect and whole.

**5. Ethical Significance of the Resurrection.** Paul also sees that the resurrection has application to our obedience to God in this life. After a long discussion of the resurrection, Paul concludes by encouraging his readers, "*Therefore* my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58). It is because Christ was raised from the dead, and we too shall be raised from the dead,

that we should continue steadfastly in the Lord's work. This is because everything that we do to bring people into the kingdom and build them up will indeed have eternal significance, because we shall all be raised on the day when Christ returns, and we shall live with him forever.

Second, Paul encourages us, when we think about the resurrection, to focus on our future heavenly reward as our goal. He sees the resurrection as a time when all the struggles of this life will be repaid. But if Christ has not been raised and if there is no resurrection, then "your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied" (1 Cor. 15:17–19; cf. v. 32). But because Christ has been raised, and because we have been raised with him, we are to seek for a heavenly reward and set our mind on things of heaven:

If then you have been raised with Christ, *seek the things that are above* where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col. 3:1–4)

A third ethical application of the resurrection is the obligation to stop yielding to sin in our lives. When Paul says we are to consider ourselves "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" by virtue of the resurrection of Christ and his resurrection power within us (Rom. 6:11), he then goes on immediately to say, "*Let not sin therefore reign* in your mortal bodies ... Do not yield your members to sin" (Rom. 6:12–13). The fact that we have this new resurrection power over the domination of sin in our lives is used by Paul as a reason to exhort us not to sin any more.

## **B. Ascension Into Heaven**

**1. Christ Ascended to a Place.** After Jesus' resurrection, he was on earth for forty days (Acts 1:3), then he led them out to Bethany, just outside Jerusalem, and "lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:50–51).

A similar account is given by Luke in the opening section of Acts:

And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9–11)

These narratives describe an event that is clearly designed to show the disciples that Jesus went to a place. He did not suddenly disappear from them, never to be seen by them again, but gradually ascended as they were watching, and then a cloud (apparently the cloud of God's glory) took him from their sight. But the angels immediately said that he would come back *in the same way* in which he had gone into heaven. The fact that Jesus had a resurrection body that was subject to spatial limitations (it could be at only one place at one time) means that Jesus went *somewhere* when he ascended into heaven.

It is surprising that even some evangelical theologians hesitate to affirm that heaven is a place or that Jesus ascended to a definite location somewhere in the space-time universe. Admittedly we cannot now see where Jesus is, but that is not because he passed into some ethereal "state of being" that has no location at all in the space-time universe, but rather because

our eyes are unable to see the unseen spiritual world that exists all around us. There are angels around us, but we simply cannot see them because our eyes do not have that capacity: Elisha was surrounded by an army of angels and chariots of fire protecting him from the Syrians at Dothan, but Elisha's servant was not able to see those angels until God opened his eyes so that he could see things that existed in that spiritual dimension (2 Kings 6:17). Similarly, when Stephen was dying, God gave him a special ability to see the world that is now hidden from our eyes, for he "gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God" ' (Acts 7:55–56). And Jesus himself said, "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare *a place* for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:2–3).

Of course we cannot now say exactly where heaven is. Scripture often pictures people as ascending up into heaven (as Jesus did, and Elijah) or coming down from heaven (as the angels in Jacob's dream, Gen. 28:12), so we are justified in thinking of heaven as somewhere "above" the earth. Admittedly the earth is round and it rotates, so where heaven is we are simply unable to say more precisely—Scripture does not tell us. But the repeated emphasis on the fact that Jesus went somewhere (as did Elijah, 2 Kings 2:11), and the fact that the New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven from God (Rev. 21:2), all indicate that there is clearly a localization of heaven in the space-time universe. Those who do not believe in Scripture may scoff at such an idea and wonder how it can be so, just as the first Russian cosmonaut who came back from space and declared that he did not see God or heaven anywhere, but that simply points to the blindness of their eyes toward the unseen spiritual world; it does not indicate that heaven does not exist in a certain place. In fact, the ascension of Jesus into heaven is designed to teach us that heaven does exist as a place in the space-time universe. (See chapter 57 for a further discussion of the nature of heaven.)

## **2. Christ Received Glory and Honor That Had Not Been His Before As the God-Man.**

When Jesus ascended into heaven he received glory, honor, and authority that had never been his before as one who was both God and man. Before Jesus died, he prayed, "Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory which I had with you before the world was made" (John 17:5). In his sermon at Pentecost Peter said that Jesus was "exalted at the right hand of God" (Acts 2:33), and Paul declared that "God has highly exalted him" (Phil. 2:9), and that he was "taken up in glory" (1 Tim. 3:16; cf. Heb. 1:4). Christ is now in heaven with the angelic choirs singing praise to him with the words, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev. 5:12).

**3. Christ Was Seated at God's Right Hand (Christ's Session).** One specific aspect of Christ's ascension into heaven and receiving of honor was the fact that he *sat down* at the right hand of God. This is sometimes called his *session* at God's right hand.

The Old Testament predicted that the Messiah would sit at the right hand of God: "The LORD says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool" ' (Ps. 110:1). When Christ ascended back into heaven he received the fulfillment of that promise: "When he had made purification for sins, he *sat down* at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3). This welcoming into the presence of God and sitting at God's right hand is a dramatic indication of the completion of Christ's work of redemption. Just as a human being will sit down at the

completion of a large task to enjoy the satisfaction of having accomplished it, so Jesus sat at the right hand of God, visibly demonstrating that his work of redemption was completed.

In addition to showing the completion of Christ's work of redemption, the act of sitting at God's right hand is an indication that he received authority over the universe. Paul says that God "raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named" (Eph. 1:20–21). Similarly, Peter says that Jesus "has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him" (1 Peter 3:22). Paul also alludes to Psalm 110:1 when he says that Christ "must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:25).

One additional aspect of the authority that Christ received from the Father when he sat at his right hand was the authority to pour out the Holy Spirit on the church. Peter says on the Day of Pentecost, "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having *received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit* he has poured out this which you see and hear" (Acts 2:33).

The fact that Jesus now sits at the right hand of God in heaven does not mean that he is perpetually "fixed" there or that he is inactive. He is also seen as standing at God's right hand (Acts 7:56) and as walking among the seven golden lampstands in heaven (Rev. 2:1). Just as a human king sits on his royal throne at his accession to the kingship, but then engages in many other activities throughout each day, so Christ sat at the right hand of God as a dramatic evidence of the completion of his redemptive work and his reception of authority over the universe, but he is certainly engaged in other activities in heaven as well.

**4. Christ's Ascension Has Doctrinal Significance for Our Lives.** Just as the resurrection has profound implications for our lives, so Christ's ascension has significant implications for us. First, since we are united with Christ in every aspect of his work of redemption, Christ's going up into heaven foreshadows our future ascension into heaven with him. "We who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17). The author of Hebrews wants us to run the race of life with the knowledge that we are following in Jesus' steps and will eventually arrive at the blessings of life in heaven that he is now enjoying: "Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:1–2). And Jesus himself says that he will one day take us to be with himself (John 14:3).

Second, Jesus' ascension gives us assurance that our final home will be in heaven with him. "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:2–3). Jesus was a man like us in every way yet without sin, and he has gone before us so that eventually we might follow him there and live with him forever. The fact that Jesus has already ascended into heaven and achieved the goal set before him gives great assurance to us that we will eventually go there also.

Third, because of our union with Christ in his ascension, we are able to share now (in part) in Christ's authority over the universe, and we will later share in it more fully. This is what Paul points to when he says that God "raised us up with him, and made us *sit with him in the heavenly places* in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6). We are not physically present in heaven, of course, for we remain here on earth at the present time. But if Christ's session at God's right hand refers to his

reception of authority, then the fact that God has made us sit with Christ means that we share in some measure in the authority that Christ has, authority to contend against “the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12; cf. vv. 10–18) and to do battle with weapons that “have divine power to destroy strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:4). This sharing in Christ’s authority over the universe will be made more fully our possession in the age to come: “Do you not know that we are to judge angels?” (1 Cor. 6:3). Moreover, we will share with Christ in his authority over the creation that God has made (Heb. 2:5–8). Jesus promises, “He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received power from my Father” (Rev. 2:26–27). He also promises, “He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Rev. 3:21). These are amazing promises of our future sharing in Christ’s sitting at the right hand of God, promises that we will not fully understand until the age to come.

### **C. States of Jesus Christ**

In talking about the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, theologians have sometimes talked about the “states of Jesus Christ.” By this they mean the different relationships Jesus had to God’s law for mankind, to the possession of authority, and to receiving honor for himself. Generally two states (humiliation and exaltation) are distinguished. Thus, the doctrine of “the twofold state of Christ” is the teaching that Christ experienced first the state of humiliation, then the state of exaltation.

Within the humiliation of Christ are included his incarnation, suffering, death, and burial. Sometimes a fifth aspect (descent into hell) is included, but as explained above, the position taken in this book is that that concept is not supported in Scripture.

In the exaltation of Christ, there are also four aspects: his resurrection, ascension into heaven, session at the right hand of God, and return in glory and power. Many systematic theologies use the state of humiliation and the state of exaltation as broad categories to organize their discussion of Jesus’ work.

### **QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION**

1. As you read this chapter, what aspects of the Bible’s teaching about a resurrection body were new to your understanding? Can you think of some characteristics of the resurrection body that you especially look forward to? How does the thought of having such a body make you feel?
2. What things would you like to do now but find yourself unable to do because of the weakness or limitations of your own physical body? Do you think these activities would be appropriate to your life in heaven? Will you be able to do them then?
3. When you were born again, you received new spiritual life within. If you think of this new spiritual life as part of the resurrection power of Christ working within you, how does that give you encouragement in living the Christian life and in ministering to people’s needs?

4. The Bible says that you are now seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). As you meditate on this fact, how will it affect your prayer life and your engaging in spiritual warfare against demonic forces?
5. When you think of Christ now in heaven, does it cause you to focus more attention on things that will have eternal significance? Does it increase your assurance that you will someday be with him in heaven? How do you feel about the prospect of reigning with Christ over the nations and over angels as well?

## **SPECIAL TERMS**

ascension  
 exaltation of Christ  
 humiliation of Christ  
 incorruptible  
 raised in glory  
 raised in power  
 resurrection  
 session  
 spiritual body  
 states of Jesus Christ

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## SCRIPTURE MEMORY PASSAGE

**1 Corinthians 15:20–23:** *But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.*

## HYMN

### “CHRIST THE LORD IS RISEN TODAY”

“Christ the Lord is risen today,” al-le-lu-ia!  
Sons of men and angels say; al-le-lu-ia!  
Raise your joys and triumphs high; al-le-lu-ia!  
Sing, ye heav’ns, and earth reply; al-le-lu-ia!

Vain the stone, the watch, the seal; al-le-lu-ia!  
Christ has burst the gates of hell: al-le-lu-ia!  
Death in vain forbids him rise; al-le-lu-ia!  
Christ hath opened paradise. Al-le-lu-ia!

Lives again our glorious King; al-le-lu-ia!  
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Al-le-lu-ia!  
Once he died, our souls to save; al-le-lu-ia!  
Where thy victory, O grave? Al-le-lu-ia!

Soar we now where Christ has led, al-le-lu-ia!  
Following our exalted Head; al-le-lu-ia!  
Made like him, like him we rise; al-le-lu-ia!  
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies. Al-le-lu-ia!

Hail, the Lord of earth and heav’n! Al-le-lu-ia!  
Praise to thee by both be giv’n; al-le-lu-ia!  
Thee we greet triumphant now; al-le-lu-ia!  
Hail, the resurrection thou! Al-le-lu-ia!

Author: Charles Wesley, 1739<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, [\*Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine\*](#) (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 529–624.