

# The Person and Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

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# **The Person and Work of Christ**

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# The Person and Work of Christ

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## Chapter 1

### The Incarnation of the Son of God

[Editor's Note: This article is the first in a series on the general subject, "The Person of Christ." A previous series on Christ in the Old Testament, appearing in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March, 1947, through January-March, 1949), forms a background for this study.]

The incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ is the central fact of Christianity. Upon it the whole superstructure of Christian theology depends. Probably no portion of Scripture has received more intense examination, more scholarly research, and more theological debate than the four Gospels as they unfold the birth and life of the Lord Jesus Christ. The interpretation of the Biblical revelation of the four Gospels inevitably lays down the guiding lines for all other interpretation.

The central character of the Scriptural presentation of the incarnation of the Son of God has been recognized by all branches of theology. Those attempting to sustain the thesis that Jesus was only a man have lost no time in questioning the facts as presented in the Bible, in denying the virgin birth of Christ, and a few have gone so far as to deny the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth because of the scarcity of extra-Scriptural literature dealing with the facts of the birth of Christ. Special attention necessarily has been directed to the Scriptural narratives.

Warfield gives a masterful summary of the small amount of reference to Christ outside the Scriptures: "The rise of Christianity was a phenomenon of too little apparent significance to attract the attention of the great world. It was only when it had refused to be quenched in the blood of its founder, and, breaking out of the narrow bounds of the obscure province in which it had its origin, was making itself felt in the centers of population, that it drew to itself a somewhat irritated notice. The interest of such heathen writers as mention it was in the movement, not in its author. But in speaking of the movement they tell something of its author, and what they tell is far from being of little moment. He was, it seems, a certain 'Christ,' who had lived in Judea in the reign of Tiberius (14-37 A.D.), and had been brought to capital punishment by the procurator, Pontius Pilate (q.v.; cf. Tacitus, 'Annals,' xv. 44). The significance of His personality to the movement inaugurated by Him is already suggested by the fact that He, and no other, had impressed His name upon it. But the name itself by which He was known particularly attracts notice. This is uniformly, in these heathen writers, 'Christ,' not 'Jesus.'" <sup>1</sup> Warfield mentions but questions the authenticity of the reference in Josephus to "Jesus" (*Ant.* XVIII, iii. 3, XX, ix. 1), but cites as authentic the references to Christ by Suetonius ("Claudius," xxv.), and that of Tacitus and Pliny. <sup>2</sup> As Warfield concludes, "Beyond these great facts the heathen historians give little information about the founder of Christianity." <sup>3</sup>

The theological significance of the facts of the incarnation have undoubtedly been the main cause both of faith and unbelief. It is important therefore for the student of the incarnation to examine with care what the Bible actually teaches on this subject and then to ascertain whether that teaching is self-consistent and justifies the belief of orthodox scholars that this is indeed inspired and infallible Scripture. Though none of the four Gospels are especially written as an apologetic for the Christian faith, the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke present the historical facts according to the theme of each gospel. The Gospel of Matthew is especially concerned with the explanation that Jesus is indeed the King of Israel and the promised Messiah. Luke is concerned with the historical narrative, and the facts are presented with the purpose of establishing the certainty of the historical background of Christianity.

### The Prophetic Forerunner of Christ

John the Baptist occupies the peculiar role of being a prophetic bridge from the Old Testament prophets to the New. Luke gives in detail the account of his birth as subject to special revelation to Zacharias his father. In the chronologies provided in the first chapter of Luke the Annunciation to Mary occurs three months before the birth of John the Baptist. The subsequent birth of Christ is therefore presented in the context of prophetic divine preparation that a great work of God is about to be consummated. John the Baptist later in his public ministry was also to be a forerunner of Christ in the sense of providing a spiritual preparation and warning to the people of Israel culminating in the baptism of Christ by John and the transfer of John's disciples to the Lord Jesus. Apart from the denial of the supernatural, there is no bona fide reason for questioning the account given by Luke, substantiated as it is, by the historical events which followed.

## **The Annunciation to Mary**

In the Gospel narratives only Luke records the Annunciation to Mary. With fitting restraint and simplicity Luke unfolds this dramatic incident which he may have heard from the lips of Mary herself.

The Annunciation is given the background of a similar announcement to Zacharias by an unknown angel. In the account of the Annunciation to Mary the Angel Gabriel is especially mentioned, an important angel earlier sent with a special revelation to Daniel the Prophet. His tidings to Mary were introduced by the fact that she was highly favored and had been chosen of the Lord for an unusual honor. She was to bring forth a Son whom she should call Jesus. This Son would be called the Son of the Most High and to Him the Lord God would give the throne of His father David and over the house of Jacob He would reign forever as there would be no end to His kingdom.

In answer to the natural question raised by Mary concerning how this should come about, since she was an unmarried woman, the angel replied: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God." In these unmistakable terms Mary is informed that her Son would have no human father, but that He should be indeed the Son of God who would fulfill the promises given to David of a Son to reign over His house forever. In confirmation of this unusual promise and evidence of the supernatural power of God, Mary is informed that her kinswoman, Elizabeth, had also conceived a son in her old age as a demonstration of the power of God.

To these tidings Mary replies in devout submission: "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." The simplicity of this narrative, the avoidance of all extravagant details, and the very natural movement of the conversation between Mary and the angel testify to the genuineness of this portion of Scripture and lead to the theological conclusion that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin. The Magnificat of Mary<sup>4</sup> recorded in Luke 1:46-55 gives eloquent expression to the godly faith of Mary and provides some indication as to why God chose her for this unique honor.

## **The Annunciation to Joseph**

It is in keeping with the purposes of the Gospel of Matthew that it, rather than Luke, should record the Annunciation to Joseph. In Matthew the narrative deals with the legal right of Christ to the throne of David. The Annunciation to Joseph apparently was subsequent to that of Mary, and the time interval between the two annunciations was undoubtedly a test of faith both to Mary and to Joseph. When Joseph became aware of the fact that Mary to whom he was betrothed was with child, though he was a righteous man as the Gospel of Matthew indicates, he was not willing to make his problem public, but intended to break the betrothal privately. As he contemplated this action it is recorded in Matthew 1:20 that an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. To Joseph the tidings were given: "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." The angel goes on to explain: "And she shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins." The angel further points out to Joseph that this is a fulfillment of the prediction recorded in Isaiah 7:14: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." In keeping with this instruction Joseph took to himself his wife, thereby avoiding any scandal that might attach to Mary and at the same time giving to the Son that was born the legal right to the throne of David.

# The Birth of Jesus Christ

Though the Apostle Paul in his epistles gives frequent indication of knowing the details of the birth of Jesus Christ, only Matthew and Luke give us the precise account, Matthew dwelling upon the fact that Christ was born in Bethlehem and Luke tracing many of the lesser details. Here again, as in other aspects of the narrative, the simplicity of the account is one of the important testimonies to its authenticity.

Luke goes to great detail to date the birth of Christ, linking it with a decree that went out from Caesar Augustus when Quirinius was governor of Syria (cf. Luke 2:1-2). Because of this decree Joseph needed to go to Bethlehem to register and Mary accompanied him.

The account of the birth of Christ is given in only two sentences. Luke records: "And it came to pass, while they were there, the days were fulfilled that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son; and she wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." In utter contrast to the dignity of the Son of God and His ultimate glorification as King of kings and Lord of lords, the birth of Christ was in the rudest circumstances. Some have pictured it as being in one of the outer buildings of the inn used for cattle. Others have favored a cave nearby.<sup>5</sup> The Scriptures indicate that He was laid in a manger, a rude improvised crib by the loving hands of Mary herself.<sup>6</sup> His obscurity, however, was soon ended by the visitation of the angels to the shepherds in nearby fields. According to Luke's account: "And an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid." Unto the shepherds the angel said: "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people: for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this is the sign unto you: Ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger." As the angel delivered his message, suddenly, according to Luke's account, a multitude of angels appeared in the heavens chanting: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men in whom he is well pleased." Under the stimulus of this dramatic experience the shepherds lost no time in coming to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph and the Babe lying in the manger.

## The Infancy of Christ

Both the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of Matthew testify to some of the details of the early days of the incarnate Son of God upon the earth. The first event recorded after the visit of the angels was the observance of the rite of circumcision as stated in Luke 2:21 when He was named *Jesus* in keeping with the instruction of the angel to Mary before Christ was born and as Joseph also was commanded in the Annunciation to him in Matthew 1:21. On the occasion of the circumcision of Christ the instruction of the law concerning the offering was duly kept as provided in Leviticus 12:6. On this occasion the testimony of Simeon was given as he blessed God and said: "Now lettest thou thy servant depart, Lord, according to thy word, in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples; a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:28-32). On that occasion also Simeon predicted to Mary: "Behold, this child is set for the falling and the rising of many in Israel; and for a sign which is spoken against; yea and a sword shall pierce through thine own soul; that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35). To Simeon's testimony was added that of Anna the Prophetess who gave her word of thanksgiving to God concerning this provision for the redemption of His people.

It is probable that the visit of the Magi from the East as recorded in Matthew 2:1-12 occurred sometime later and not as commonly believed at the time of the birth of Christ. The chronology demanded by the time interval made necessary by the trip of the Magi after they had seen the star appear would point to the passage of a number of months. Matthew records their dramatic appearance in Jerusalem demanding where the King of the Jews was to be born. When Herod inquired of the chief priests and the scribes, he was told that in Bethlehem the King of the Jews would be born. Herod therefore told the Magi to find the child and to return to bring him word that he might come and worship Him. Herod intended of course to kill the child as soon as he could identify Him. The star, reappearing according to Matthew 2:9, led the Magi to Bethlehem where they found the child with Mary His mother now in a house. This was apparently on a subsequent visit to Bethlehem from Nazareth a number of months after the birth of Christ. To the child they offered their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh

and worshipped Him in recognition of His deity. Meanwhile, warned by a dream, the Magi returned to their land without reporting to Herod, and Joseph, following instructions also from the Lord, fled to Egypt to avoid the destroying hatred of Herod. The prophecy of Hosea 11:1, partially fulfilled by the redemption of Israel out of Egypt, is cited by Matthew as having its complete fulfillment in Christ. Later when it was safe after the death of Herod, Joseph and Mary and young Jesus returned to Nazareth where He spent His childhood.

## Critical Problems

Though there have been many attempts to weaken the credibility of the accounts of the birth of Christ, there has been little documentary evidence to support this attitude of unbelief. The Biblical accounts themselves, presented in a straight forward manner without the embellishment that would have occurred in a fictitious account, give the simple and historical facts pertaining to the birth of Christ. No attempt is made to provide an apologetic for these facts. Those who received the Gospels when they were first written had little ground to question the approach of Luke as a careful investigator, and the meticulous precision of his presentation is its own assurance that the records are true. and the Old Testament. In Genesis 11:12 there is an omission of Cainan, recorded in Luke 3:36. Omissions in genealogy are common, however, as illustrated in the Old Testament omissions found in Ezra 7:1-5 where six generations of the priesthood are left out. It should be clear that genealogies are not necessarily complete, the main point being legitimate descent rather than inclusion of all the links in the genealogy.

The principal problem of Luke's genealogy, however, is that an entirely different lineage is presented from David to Joseph, the descent coming from Nathan the son of David rather than through Solomon as in Matthew's account. The most common explanation of this seems to be the best, i.e., that Joseph as the son-in-law of Eli was considered in the descent from Eli through his marriage with Mary and that the lineage therefore is that of Mary rather than of Joseph.8

This at least fits in beautifully with the Old Testament predictions given through Jeremiah (cf. Jer 22:30; 36:30 ) to the effect that the line of Coniah would never have a man to sit upon the throne. Though the legal right to the throne passed from Christ through Joseph as his legal father, the actual physical lineage could not come through Joseph because of this curse upon his line. The account of Luke therefore is to trace the physical lineage of Christ through Mary back to Adam the first man, connecting Christ to the predicted seed of the woman. Though there has been opposition to this interpretation, the arguments for it far outweigh the arguments against it and give a reasonable explanation why there should be two lineages from David to Christ.

One of the most important controversies relative to the birth of Christ has been because of the presentation of the Scriptures that He is born of a virgin. This has been opposed as both unnatural and as unlikely, and therefore an invention rather than a solid historical fact. It might be granted that if the person and work of Christ had been that of an ordinary prophet there might be good grounds to question His virgin birth. The whole tenor of Scripture as presented in both the Old Testament prophecies that He was to be God and man and the New Testament fulfillment make the virgin birth a divine explanation in so far as it can be explained of an otherwise insuperable problem. How could one who was both God and man have perfectly human parents? The account of the virgin birth therefore, instead of being an unreasonable invention, becomes a fitting explanation of how in the supernatural power of God the incarnation was made a reality.

Much of the discussion on the virgin birth takes for granted that it is possible to ignore the carefully worded record of Scripture. It should be noted that not only does Luke give us a very specific account which states in plain language that Christ was born of a virgin, but the account of Matthew written by a different author and from a different point of view confirms this explanation. Throughout the rest of the New Testament there is constant assumption that Christ is indeed the very Son of God and that He was born of a woman but not a man. This is the teaching of Paul in Galatians 4:4 as well as the prophetic record of the book of Revelation 12:1-2. The sign promised through Isaiah 7:14 of a virgin bearing a son to be called Immanuel and the description of this child as One who bears the title Mighty God in Isaiah 9:6 add additional confirming evidence. If the supernatural power of God to perform such an act as this be admitted, there is no logical reason for not accepting the plain intent of the Scriptural portions bearing on this great theme. The wisest of scholars as well as the most simple of humble believers have bowed alike at the manger in Bethlehem and acknowledged that the infant, born of the

virgin and laid in swaddling clothes, is their Lord and Savior in whom is resident all the attributes of the infinite God.

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<sup>1</sup> B. B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ*, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5-6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. John V. G. Koontz, "Mary's Magnificat," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 116:336-49, October-December, 1959.

<sup>5</sup> Jamieson, Fausset & Brown, *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testament* (1866), V, 225.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Bruce, *The Expositor's Greek New Testament*, W. R. Nicoll, ed., I, 472.

<sup>8</sup> Jamieson, Fausset & Brown, *ibid.*, V, 235-36.

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# The Person and Work of Christ

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## Chapter 2

### The Person of the Incarnate Christ

[Editor's Note: This article is the second in a series on the general subject, "The Person of Christ."]

The study of the person of Christ is one of the most complicated and intricate studies which can be undertaken by a Biblical theologian. The many single volumes which have been produced, such as B. B. Warfield's excellent book, *The Person and Work of Christ*, as well as such massive works as the five-volume set by J. A. Dornier on *The Doctrine of the Person of Christ*, are evidence of the importance of this subject. Contemplation on the person of Christ is an exhaustless mine of theology and vital preaching as well as at the heart of any true devotion of the Savior. Every systematic theology worthy of the name gives considerable attention to the person of the incarnate Christ.

### The Preincarnate Person of Christ

The person of Christ incarnate is best understood in comparison to the person of Christ before He became incarnate. In any orthodox statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, the Second Person is described as possessing all the attributes of the godhead, being distinguished as the Second Person in contrast to the First or Third Person of the Trinity and as the eternal Son in contrast to the Father or the Holy Spirit. In such utterances as Hebrews 13:8 it is made clear that these attributes are the eternal possession of Christ continuing even in His incarnate state. Even before His incarnation, however, Christ had certain properties and ministries which distinguished Him from God the Father and God the Son. In the plan of God He was designated as the coming Redeemer. In the Old Testament He appeared frequently in the character of the Angel of Jehovah and other theophanies. His person, however, prior to the incarnation did not include any human or angelic attributes, and the theophanies did not involve any change or addition in His nature. In general the preincarnate person of Christ was not complicated, and does not present the theological problems which originate in the incarnation.

### The Deity of the Incarnate Christ

When the Second Person of the Godhead became incarnate there was immediately introduced the seemingly insuperable problems of uniting God with man and combining a person who is infinite and eternal with that which is finite and temporal. Orthodox Christianity, however, has been united in the opinion that the incarnation did not diminish the deity of the Second Person of the Trinity even during the period of humiliation and suffering while Christ was on earth. Such limitations as may have been involved in the kenosis did not subtract one attribute or in any sense make Christ less than God. The central importance of the continued deity of Christ has been recognized by theologians from early centuries until the present, and any attack on the deity of Christ is justly recognized as an assault upon a central aspect of Christian faith.

Generally speaking, those who accept the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture do not question the deity of the incarnate Christ. Among the early church fathers a major defection on the deity of Christ was led by Arius which resulted in his rejection by the orthodox fathers and the formulation of the Nicene Creed in the fourth century. Earlier the deity of Christ had been denied by sects such as the Ebionites, the Alogi, and others. The defection from the Biblical doctrine of the deity of Christ was continued by Socinus, the sixteenth-century reformer, and was perpetuated by Schleiermacher and Ritschl in the nineteenth century. Though the denial of the deity of Christ was not embraced by the majority of the Christian church prior

to the twentieth century, the Biblical doctrine has been openly questioned in many contemporary works, and Jesus Christ is considered the natural son of Joseph and Mary.

Representative of modern scholarship is the work of Millar Burrows, *An Outline of Biblical Theology*. Burrows doubts the validity of the birth accounts in Matthew and Luke which testify to the miraculous conception of Christ. He approves the poorly supported Sinaitic Syriac rendering of Matthew 1:16: “Joseph...begat Jesus.”<sup>1</sup> He holds there is no support for the birth narrative elsewhere in the Bible.<sup>2</sup> Though the Gospel of John frequently refers to the pre-existence of Christ, Burrows nevertheless says: “There is no indication that he ever thought of himself in that way.”<sup>3</sup>

The evidence of Scripture is so complete that one who denies the deity of Christ must necessarily reject the accuracy of the Scriptures. Berkhof summarizes the evidence for the deity of Christ in these words: “We find that Scripture (1) *explicitly asserts the deity of the Son* in such passages as John 1:1; 20:28 ; Rom 9:5; Phil 2:6; Titus 2:13; 1 John 5:20, ; (2) *applies divine names to Him*, Isa 9:6; 40:3 ; Jer 23:5, 6; Joel 2:32 (comp. Acts 2:21) ; 1 Tim 3:16; (3) *ascribes to Him divine attributes*, such as eternal existence, Isa 9:6; John 1:1, 2; Rev 1:8, 22:13 , omnipresence, Matt 18:20; 28:20 ; John 3:13, omniscience, John 2:24, 25; 21:17 ; Rev 2:23, omnipotence, Isa 9:6; Phil 3:21; Rev 1:8, immutability, Heb 1:10-12; 13:8 , and in general every attribute belonging to the Father, Col 2:9; (4) *speaks of Him as doing divine works*, as creation, John 1:3, 10; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2, 10, providence, Luke 10:22; John 3:35; 17:2 ; Eph 1:22; Col 1:17; Heb 1:3, the forgiveness of sins, Matt 9:2-7; Mark 2:7-10; Col 3:13, resurrection and judgment, Matt 25:31, 32; John 5:19-29; Acts 10:42; 17:31 ; Phil 3:21; 2 Tim 4:1, the final dissolution and renewal of all things, Heb 1:10-12; Phil 3:21; Rev 21:5, and (5) *accords Him divine honour*, John 5:22, 23; 14:1 ; 1 Cor 15:19; 2 Cor 13:13; Heb 1:6; Matt 28:19.”<sup>4</sup>

Charles Hodges has provided another summary of Scriptural evidence for the deity of Christ: “All divine names and titles are applied to Him. He is called God, the Mighty God, the great God, God over all; Jehovah; Lord; the Lord of lords and King of kings. All divine attributes are ascribed to Him. He is declared to be omnipresent, omniscient, almighty, and immutable, the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is set forth as the creator and upholder and ruler of the universe. All things were created by Him and for Him; and by Him all things consist. He is the object of worship to all intelligent creatures, even the highest; all angels (i.e., all creatures between man and God) are commanded to prostrate themselves before Him. He is the object of all the religious sentiments; of reverence, love, faith, and devotion. To Him men and angels are responsible for their character and conduct. He required that men should honour Him as they honoured the Father; that they should exercise the same faith in Him that they do in God. He declares that He and the Father are one; that those who have seen Him had seen the Father also. He calls all men unto Him; promises to forgive their sins; to send them the Holy Spirit; to give them rest and peace; to raise them up at the last day; and to give them eternal life. God is not more, and cannot promise more, or do more than Christ is said to be, to promise, to do. He has therefore, been the Christian’s God from the beginning in all ages and in all places.”<sup>5</sup>

All modern defections from the doctrine of the deity of Christ assume that the Bible is not authoritative or final in its revelation of this doctrine. If scholars are free to question the explicit statement of Scriptures on the basis of higher criticism, there can be no remaining norm for the theological doctrine of the deity of Christ. Though a denial of Scriptural infallibility does not necessarily result in a denial of the deity of Christ, it is impossible to evade the mass of Scriptures representing Jesus Christ as the eternal God without questioning the Scriptural record. Even modern liberals pay lip service to this in their recognition of the term *the Son of God* and their recognition of the term *Lord and Savior* as applying to Christ. Without question the crucial issue in Biblical theology is the deity of Christ, and disregard or question of this central doctrine of the Bible leads to inevitable chaos in theology as a whole.

## **The Humanity of the Incarnate Christ**

Though the doctrine of the deity of Christ is generally recognized as the indispensable fundamental of Christology, the doctrine of His true humanity is equally important. On the fact of His humanity depends the reality of His death on the cross, His claim to be Israel’s Messiah, His fulfillment of the promise to David of a descendent to sit on his throne, and His offices of prophet and priest. Those who deny the true humanity of Christ such as modern Christian Science are just as effective at

destroying the true Christian faith as those who deny the deity of Christ. As in the case of the doctrine of the deity of Christ, the Scriptures bear a full testimony to His humanity, and a denial of these aspects of His incarnate person would necessitate a denial of the Scriptures themselves. It is for this reason that the doctrine of the true humanity of Christ has always been a part of orthodox Christian faith.

The humanity of Christ is evident first of all in the fact that He possessed a true human body composed of flesh and blood, and, like the bodies of other men in everything that is essential except those qualities which have resulted from human sin and failure. The evidence for His human body in the Scriptures is if anything even more evident than the evidence for His deity.

According to the Scriptures, Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, fulfilling in this notable historical event of His incarnation all that would normally be expected of a human birth and fulfilling the many Old Testament prophecies which anticipated His genuine humanity.

The life of Christ subsequent to His birth in Bethlehem reveals the same normal human development and growth. According to Luke 2:52: "Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men." His bodily growth was normal like that of other children. More difficult to understand, however, is the statement that he advanced in wisdom or knowledge. This is commonly interpreted to refer to His humanity rather than to His divine consciousness. Other aspects of His experience correspond to that of ordinary human beings. He experienced in His life similar feelings and limitations as other human beings, and His physical movements were such as corresponded to a genuine human nature and human body. He, according to the Scriptures, was able to suffer pain, thirst, hunger, fatigue, pleasure, rest, death, and resurrection. Both before and after His resurrection He could be seen and felt, and His human body was tangible to human touch just as other human beings. No one seems to have ever doubted that He possessed a true human body prior to His death, and even after His resurrection He went out of His way to demonstrate the genuineness of His human body. The elements of the supernatural evident in miracles such as walking on the water, though admittedly beyond human powers, did not change the essential character of His body any more than in the case of Peter who also walked on the water.

The true humanity of the incarnate Christ is also recognized in Scripture in the human titles which were given to Him such as *Son of man*, *the man Christ Jesus*, *Jesus*, *the Son of David*, *man of sorrows*, etc. The Scriptures also testify specifically to the fact that His body possessed flesh and blood (Heb 2:14; 1 John 4:2-3). A denial of His humanity, therefore, must also carry with it a denial of these important Scriptures which are essential to the New Testament revelation of the person of the incarnate Christ.

The Scriptures not only bear testimony to the physical characteristics of the human body of the incarnate Christ, but also speak specifically of the fact that He possessed a human rational soul and spirit. According to Matthew 26:38 Christ said to His disciples: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." This could hardly be attributed to His divine nature and therefore is a reference to the fact that He possessed a human soul. A similar statement is given in John 13:21 in regard to His human spirit where it is recorded: "When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in the spirit." According to these and other Scriptures, it is therefore evident that Christ possessed a true humanity not only in its material aspects as indicated in His human body, but in the immaterial aspect specified in Scripture as being His soul and spirit. It is therefore not sufficient to recognize that Jesus Christ as the Son of God possessed a human body, but it is necessary to define the human aspect of His person as that of a complete human nature including body, soul, and spirit. hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (cf. Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69-70). The appearances of Christ after His resurrection also substantiate the continuity of His true humanity. When the worshipping women met Christ in Matthew 28:9 it is recorded: "They came and took hold of his feet, and worshipped him." Mary Magdalene, according to John 20:17, actually clung to Christ in her joy at seeing Him after His resurrection. Further evidence is found in the other appearances in the postresurrection ministry as well as in the fact of His bodily ascension into heaven (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:30-31, 39-43, 50-53; John 20:22, 27-28; Acts 1:1-11; 7:56 ). According to Philippians 2:10, the human name Jesus is continued in connection with the final judgment. His humanity seems also to be essential to His work of mediation. According to 1 Timothy 2:5: "There is one God, one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus." The term "Son of man" which Christ uses Himself in Matthew 26:64 as describing His reign in heaven is mentioned also in Revelation 1:13; 14:14 .

Though certain aspects of His meditorial work will terminate according to 1 Corinthians 15:25-28, there is no indication anywhere in the Bible that His humanity will ever be terminated. By its very nature a human personality once brought into existence never ceases to exist, and what is true of ordinary human experience is also true of Christ who became man. His continuance as a human being in eternity seems to involve also the continuance of a human body. This is demonstrated, first, in the resurrection of Christ where His body was raised and prepared for heaven; second, in the fact of His ascension which was a bodily ascension into heaven; third, in the fact that He will return bodily to the earth, and, fourth, that His body is a pattern of the body of believers who are raised or translated. There is every reason, therefore, to believe that the humanity of Christ will continue throughout all eternity to come.

Among conservative theologians the fact of the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Christ is well established. The problem does not lie in the fact of the union, but rather in the relationship of the two natures of Christ, the nature of the self-consciousness of Christ and how the two natures relate to the will of Christ. These items will form the burden of subsequent discussions.

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<sup>1</sup> Millar Burrows, *An Outline of Biblical Theology*, p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>4</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II, 582.

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# The Person and Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

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## Chapter 3

### The Person of the Incarnate Christ

[Editor's Note: This article is the third in a series on "The Incarnation of Christ."]

#### The Relation of the Two Natures

Few subjects in the realm of theology are more difficult than the definition of the relation of the two natures in the incarnate Christ. Theologians are faced first with the problem of definition. The English word *nature* is derived from the Latin *natura* and is the equivalent of the Greek *physis* (cf. Rom 2:14; Gal 2:15; 4:8; Eph 2:3; 2 Pet 1:4). In the history of Christian doctrine the usage of the term *nature* has varied, but the word is now commonly used to designate the divine or human elements in the person of Christ. In theology the expression *substance* from the Latin *substantia* is also used, corresponding to the Greek *ousia*. All of these terms are used to define the real essence, the inward properties which underlie all outward manifestation. As this refers to the person of Christ, nature is seen to be the sum of all the attributes and their relationship to each other. Necessarily, such attributes must be compatible to the nature to which they correspond and cannot be transferred to another substance or nature. As applied to the problem of defining the humanity and deity of Christ, nature as used of the humanity of Christ includes all that belongs to His humanity. As applied to the deity of Christ, it includes all that belongs to His deity. Hence, theologians speak of two natures, the human and the divine, each with their respective attributes.

Much confusion arose in the early history of the church on the problem of how such incompatible natures as a human nature and a divine nature could be joined in one person without one or the other losing some of its essential characteristics. The resulting discussion, however, led to the orthodox statement that the two natures are united without loss of any essential attributes and that the two natures maintain their separate identity. Through the Incarnation of Christ, the two natures were inseparably united in such a way that there was no mixture or loss of their separate identity and without loss or transfer of any property or attribute of one nature to the other. The union thus consummated is a personal or hypostatic union in that Christ is one person, not two, and is everlasting in keeping with the everlasting character of both the human and divine natures.

The proof that the two natures maintain their complete identity, though joined in a personal union, is based on a comparison of the attributes of the human nature and the divine nature. It should be clear that divine attributes must necessarily belong to the corresponding divine nature and that human attributes must belong to the corresponding human nature, though the attributes of either the human or divine nature belong to the person of Christ. Because the attributes of either nature belong to Christ, Christ is theanthropic in person, but it is not accurate to refer to His natures as being theanthropic as there is no mixture of the divine and human to form a new third substance. The human nature always remains human, and the divine nature always remains divine. Christ is therefore both God and man, no less God because of His humanity and no less human because of His deity.

Calvinistic theology generally holds that the two natures of Christ are united without any transfer of attributes. Just as any essence is composed of the sum of its attributes and their relationship, a change of any attribute would necessarily involve a change in essence. For instance, infinity cannot be transferred to finity; mind cannot be transferred to matter; God cannot be transferred to man, or vice versa. To rob the divine nature of Christ of a single attribute would destroy His deity, and to rob man of a single human attribute would result in destruction of a true humanity. It is for this reason that the two natures of Christ cannot lose or transfer a single attribute.

A significant variation, however, from this doctrine is the Lutheran teaching of the ubiquity of the human body of Christ. In connection with the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper, it is held that while the elements are not transubstantiated into the body of Christ they contain the body of Christ. This concept is considered to be supported by the teaching that the body of Christ is everywhere. In sustaining this doctrine, Lutheran theologians have felt that the doctrine of omnipresence as it relates to the divine nature is properly also an attribute of the human body of Christ. The Lutheran doctrine is challenged by Calvinists principally on the basis of the lack of Biblical evidence for it and the contradiction involved in the concept of a body that is everywhere present. While it is normal for theology to consider Christ in His divine nature as omnipresent, the humanity of Christ always seems to have a local concept, and Christ is revealed to be seated now at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

In the incarnation no attribute of the divine nature was changed though there was a change in their manifestation. This is sometimes referred to as the kenosis doctrine or the self-emptying of Christ. It is clear that Christ, while on earth following His incarnation, did not manifest the glory of God except on rare occasions, but there were no attributes surrendered. Christ was still all that God is even though He had chosen sovereignly to limit certain phases of His activity to the human sphere. Even during the period of humiliation, therefore, there is no need for qualifying the basic doctrine that both the human and the divine natures retain all their essential characteristics.

The two natures of Christ are not only united without affecting the respective attributes of the two natures, but they are combined in one person. This union should not be defined as deity possessing humanity as this would deny true humanity its rightful place. It is not, on the other hand, humanity merely indwelt by deity. Christ did not differ from other men simply in degree of divine influence as sometimes advanced by modern liberals. In His unique personality He possessed two natures, one eternal and divine, the other human and generated in time. The union of these two natures was not one of sympathy alone nor merely a harmony of will and operation. Orthodox theology regards this union as personal and constitutional. As Charles Hodge put it: "The Son of God did not unite Himself with a human person, but with a human nature."<sup>1</sup>

One of the difficult aspects of the relationship of the two natures of Christ is that, while the attributes of one nature are never attributed to the other, the attributes of both natures are properly attributed to His person. Thus Christ at the same moment has seemingly contradictory dualities. He can be weak and onipotent, increasing in knowledge and omniscient, finite and infinite. These qualities can, of course, be traced to their corresponding nature, but, as presented in Scripture, a variety of treatment can be observed. At least seven classifications of this aspect of the truth can be observed in what is called the communion of attributes.

1. Some attributes are true of His whole person such as the titles, *Redeemer*, *Prophet*, *Priest*, and *King*. As Redeemer, Christ is both man and God, both natures being essential to this function. It is therefore an attribute or characteristic true of His whole person.
2. Some attributes are true only of deity, but the whole person is the subject. In some cases the person of Christ is related to an attribute peculiar to the divine nature. For instance, Christ said: "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). The whole person is the subject, but the attribute of eternity applies only to the divine nature. It is possible, however, to say of the person of the incarnate Christ that His person is eternal even though humanity was added in time.
3. Some attributes are true only of humanity, but the whole person is the subject. In contrast to John 8:58, in some cases attributes true only of His humanity are mentioned but the whole person is in view. On the cross Christ said: "I thirst" (John 19:28). The statement can be attributed only to the human nature, but the whole person is involved. This type of reference disappears after His resurrection and ascension and the resulting freedom from the limitations of His earthly life.
4. The person may be described according to divine nature but the predicate of the human nature. A seeming contradiction is sometimes found when the person of Christ is described according to His divine nature, but that which is predicated is an attribute of the human nature. An illustration is afforded in the revelation of Christ in glory in Revelation 1:12-18 where the deity of Christ is in evidence. Yet Christ is revealed as the One who "was dead" (v. 18), an attribute possible only for the

humanity of Christ. self-consciousness was as fully operative when He was a Babe in Bethlehem as it was in His most mature experience. There is evidence, however, that the human nature developed and with it a human self-consciousness came into play. In view of the varied forms of manifestation of the divine and human natures, it seems possible to conclude that He had both a divine and a human self-consciousness, that these were never in conflict, and that Christ sometimes thought, spoke, and acted from the divine self-consciousness and at other times from the human.

## **The Relation of the Two Natures to the Will of Christ**

In view of the complete divine and human natures in Christ, the question has been raised whether each nature had its corresponding will. If by *will* is meant *desire*, it is clear that there could be conflicting desires in the divine and human natures of Christ. If by will, however, is meant that resulting moral decision, one person can have only one will. In the case of Christ, this will was always the will of God. Hence, when Christ prayed in the garden of Gethsemane: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt 26:39), here, as in all other cases, the ultimate sovereign will of Christ was to do the Father’s will. It was natural to the human nature to desire to avoid the cross even as it was in keeping with the divine nature to avoid the contact with sin involved in substitution. The will of God, however, was that Christ should die, and this Christ willingly did. It is therefore no more proper to speak of two wills in Christ than it is of two wills in an ordinary believer who has both a sin nature and a new nature. A conflict of desires should not be equated with a conflict of moral choice.

## **Important Results of the Union of the Two Natures in Christ**

The incarnation of Christ plays such a large part in the doctrine of the person of Christ that it is obviously tremendous in its significance. At least seven important results of the union of the two natures in Christ by the incarnation are revealed.

1. The union of the two natures in Christ is related vitally to His acts as an incarnate person. Though the divine nature is immutable, the human nature could suffer and learn through experience with the result that the corporate person can be said to come into new experiences. Thus Christ learned by suffering (Heb 5:8). In a similar way, the act of redemption in which Christ offered Himself a sacrifice for sin was an act of His whole person. It was traceable to both natures, not to the human nature alone nor the divine. As man Christ could die, but only as God could His death have infinite value sufficient to provide redemption for the sins of the whole world. Thus the human blood of Christ has eternal and infinite value because it was shed as part of the act of the divine-human person.

2. The eternal priesthood of Christ is also based on the hypostatic union. It was essential to His priesthood that He be both God and man. By incarnation He became man and hence could act as a human priest. As God, His priesthood could be everlasting after the order of Melchizedek, and He properly could be a mediator between God and man. Because of the human nature His priesthood could evince a human sympathy (Heb 4:15) and as the divine Son of God He was assured that God the Father would hear Him.

3. Though in ordinary cases a prophet does not need to have a divine nature, it is clear in examining the prophetic office of Christ that it is related to the act of incarnation. While God could speak from heaven as has been done on many occasions in Scripture, it was the purpose of God to reveal Himself through a man, and this required an incarnation. Hence, the eternal Logos, the Word of God, declared the nature of God by becoming man (John 1:18).

4. The kingly office of Christ was dependent on both the divine and human natures, and would have been impossible apart from the incarnation. Though it is possible for God to rule as God, it was a function of Christ to rule not only in the divine sense but as the Son of David fulfilling the Davidic covenant and its promise that the seed of David would sit upon the throne. According to the Davidic covenant, a son of David would sit on the throne of Israel forever (2 Sam 7:16), and David’s house, kingdom, and throne are declared to be established forever (cf. Luke 1:31-33). To fulfill His kingly office, therefore, it was necessary to have a human birth which would link Him with David and He had to have a divine nature that would assure Him the everlasting quality of His government and throne.

5. The incarnate person of Christ is worshipped as the sovereign God. In the period of His life on earth, He was worshipped even when His eternal glory was hidden, and it is now all the more fitting that He should be worshipped as the glorified God-man. The recognition of His deity and sovereignty is related to His dominion as the second Adam. In the original creation dominion was given the first Adam, and it was God's declared purpose that man should rule creation. Though this prerogative was lost by Adam because of sin, it properly belongs to the incarnate Christ who will rule the earth, especially in the millennial kingdom.

6. In the ascension of the incarnate Christ to heaven, not only was the divine nature restored to its previous place of infinite glory, but the human nature was also exalted. It is now as the God-man that He is at the right hand of God the Father. This demonstrates that infinite glory and humanity are not incompatible as illustrated in the person of Christ and assures the saint that though he is a sinner saved by grace he may anticipate the glory of God in eternity.

7. The union of the two natures in Christ, while not affecting any essential attribute of either nature, did necessarily require certain unique features to be manifested such as the absence of the sin nature, freedom from any act of sin, and lack of a human father. This also of course was true of Adam before the fall and therefore is not a contradiction of the essential humanity of Christ. Though these elements find no parallel in the race after the fall of Adam, they do not constitute ground for denying the true humanity of our Lord.

Much necessarily remains inscrutable in the person of Christ. The problem of the theologian is not to understand completely, but to state the facts revealed in Scripture in such a way as to do full honor to the person of Christ. The portraits of Christ provided in the four Gospels as well as additional revelation provided in the rest of the New Testament fully support the orthodox theological statement of the person of Christ and the relation of the two natures. They justify the believer in Christ in worshipping the Son of God as possessing all the divine attributes and encourage the child of God to come to Him in full assurance of sympathy and understanding arising in His human nature and human experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II, 391.

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# The Person and Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

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## Chapter 4

### The Earthly Life of the Incarnate Christ

[Editor's Note: This article is the fourth in a series on "The Person of Christ."]

The historical study of the life of Christ provides much of the material contained in the New Testament on the person and work of Christ. Though a study of the Gospels is not the primary concern of systematic theology, the general facts as presented of the life of Christ on earth necessarily form a background for the important doctrines which relate to His person and work. No other period of history is given more minute revelation than the few years of Christ's public ministry.

Though each of the Gospels presents a full picture of all aspects of the person of Christ, a particular emphasis can be observed. The Gospel of Matthew is primarily directed to presenting Christ as the King, the Son of David who will reign over the house of Israel. Hence there is emphasis upon the genealogies, upon the credentials of the King, and extensive teaching on the subject of the kingdom itself in the Sermon on the Mount and the discourse in Matthew 13. The Gospel of Mark is the Gospel of action, presenting Christ and His works as the Servant of Jehovah. Little attention is paid to His background, and the emphasis is on the evidences that He is indeed the promised Deliverer of Israel. The Gospel of Luke emphasizes the human aspect of Christ, dwelling upon the details of His birth, and presents Christ as the perfect Man born of the Virgin Mary. The emphasis of the Gospel of John is on the deity of Christ, and evidence is produced demonstrating that He is indeed the Son of God and that those who believe in Him receive eternal life.

The fact that there is a varied emphasis in the four Gospels does not imply that there is contradiction. It is rather that four different portraits are given of the same person, and, though there is variation, it is not a distorted presentation. The Gospel of Luke, emphasizing the humanity, also presents full evidence that He is the Son of God. Hence, the four different biographies, when combined, give a perfect picture. Real problems are sometimes raised by the comparison of narratives in the four Gospels, but conservative scholarship has been united that there is no contradiction, that each record is authentic and inspired of the Holy Spirit.

Different principles have been used to analyze the life of Christ. The most common and beneficial is the combination of the chronological and geographical divisions which are related to His life. Using this method, an eightfold division is possible.

### The Birth of Christ

The details of the birth of Christ are given in the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke. In Matthew the central fact that Christ is the prophesied King of Israel and the promised Son of David is presented, and His genealogy is traced through Solomon and Jechoniah. As indicated in previous discussions, Matthew gives the legal genealogy while Luke seems to trace the lineage of Christ from David through Nathan and Mary His mother, and continues the line to Adam.

The Gospel of Matthew presents Joseph's aspect of the story, the account of the visit of the Magi, and other details which confirm that Jesus Christ is the Son of David. The Gospel of Luke traces some of the more human elements. The birth of John the Baptist and the related incidents, the experience of Mary and her Magnificat, the details of the birth in Bethlehem, and the visits of the shepherds and the words of Simeon and Anna with profound simplicity give the details of the birth of Christ.

# The Thirty Years of Obscurity

Matthew 2; Luke 2

Relatively few details are given concerning the life of Christ before His public ministry. Matthew's Gospel records the flight into Egypt and the return to Nazareth, and immediately plunges into the ministry of John the Baptist which introduced Christ. The Gospel of Luke alone presents the incident of Christ in the temple at the age of twelve. Here is early evidence of His Messianic consciousness and His divine omniscience. The boy Jesus astonished the wise men of His day with His understanding and answers to their questions. After a brief glimpse of Christ in His youth, Luke also turns to the ministry of John the Baptist as it introduces Christ. It is evident from this brief narrative that the Spirit of God is not interested in satisfying the curiosity of those who would know the details of the early life of Christ. The glimpses given are sufficient to testify to His person and provide a background for His public ministry.

## The Opening of Christ's Public Ministry

Matthew 3:1—4:11 ; Mark 1:1-3; Luke 3:1—4:13 ; John 1:19—2:12

In the introduction to the ministry of Christ, the Synoptic Gospels as well as the Gospel of John recount the ministry of John the Baptist, his message of repentance, and the baptism of Jesus Christ. All three of the Synoptic Gospels mention the temptation of Christ in the wilderness for forty days, though Mark's account is very short. The Gospel of John emphasizes the early followers of Christ and the word of Christ to them. The details of the winning of Andrew, John, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael are recited in rapid succession followed by the account of the opening miracle as recorded in the Gospel of John, chapter two , where Christ turned the water into wine at Cana and had a short ministry in Capernaum.

## The Early Ministry of Christ in Judea

John 2:13—4:42

Only the Gospel of John records the early ministry of Christ in Judea. In John 2:13-25 the first cleansing of the temple is recorded on the occasion of Christ's visit to Jerusalem at the time of the first Passover. Here also is recorded the first prophecy of His coming death. The Gospel of John then records the interview with Nicodemus and the contrasting account of the conversion of the woman of Samaria (John 3:1—4:42 ). Both of these incidents are in keeping with the theme of the Gospel of John showing Christ as the Savior.

## The Ministry of Christ in Galilee

Matthew 4:12—18:35 ; Mark 1:14—9:50 ; Luke 4:14—9:50 ; John 4:43—8:59

After leaving Jerusalem when He observed the first Passover, Christ began His extended ministry in Galilee, using Capernaum as His home after His rejection at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30). The Galilean ministry covered a period of a year and nine months and during this time Christ visited Jerusalem only on the occasion of healing the infirm man at the pool of Bethesda and possibly at the time of the second Passover mentioned in his public ministry. The close of His Galilean ministry was occasioned by His visit to Jerusalem at the time of the Feast of the Tabernacles mentioned in John 7:1-52 which was followed by a period of teaching ministry (John 7:53-8:59 ).

It is customary to recognize a threefold division of the Galilean ministry: (1) the period of ministry prior to the choosing of the twelve disciples (Matt 4:12-23; 8:1-4 ; 9:1-17 ; 12:1-14 ; Mark 1:14—3:6 ; Luke 4:14—6:11 ); (2) the period of ministry from the choosing of the twelve disciples to the departure from Capernaum to northern Galilee (Matt 4:23—8:1 ; 8:5-34 ; 9:18—11:30 ; 12:15—15:20 ; Mark 3:7—7:23 ; Luke 6:12—9:17 ; John 6:1-71); (3) the period from the withdrawal into

northern Galilee to final departure from Galilee for Jerusalem (Matt 15:21—18:35 ; Mark 7:24—9:50 ; Luke 9:18—9:50; John 7:1—8:59 ).

During the first period the disciples are given their first call to service, the great miracles at Capernaum and elsewhere are performed, and the early opposition to Christ appears. In the second period, the twelve disciples are formally chosen; the Sermon on the Mount giving the principles of the kingdom was delivered; the notable miracle of the raising of the son of the widow at Nain is performed; and in the face of the growing opposition Christ denounces the Scribes and Pharisees and delivers the parables of Matthew 13. The opposition to Christ becomes more intense toward the close of this period. The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is rejected, and the Discourse on the Bread of Life occasions much unbelief. The second period concludes with the rebuke of the Scribes and Pharisees who come from Jerusalem to find fault with Christ for transgressing their traditions.

The third period includes the tour of Tyre and Sidon and the first healing of a Gentile. In contrast to growing unbelief, Peter is the spokesman for the faith of the disciples in Christ. Christ foretells His death and resurrection repeatedly, and this dark shadow is in contrast to His transfiguration. During the third period, while withdrawn from Galilee and Capernaum, He returns for a brief visit to Galilee and later to Capernaum. The period closes with a visit to Jerusalem in the fall of the year, on which occasion the events and discourse of John 7:1—8:59 , occur.

## **The Perea Ministry**

Matthew 19:1—20:34 ; 26:6-13 ; Mark 10:1-52; 14:3-9 ; Luke 9:51—19:28 ; John 9:1—12:11

The Perea period of the ministry of our Lord receives its name from the fact that Christ upon His final departure from Galilee passed through Perea, ministering as He went; and after His arrival in Jerusalem He retired again to Perea until a few days before His Passion. As Christ left Galilee He sent out the seventy disciples on their mission (Luke 10:1-24). The parable of the good Samaritan and the events of John chapters 9 and 10 occur during the Perea ministry. After the feast of dedication in Jerusalem, some of the more important utterances of Christ are recorded. After the resurrection of Lazarus and the increased opposition to Christ which it aroused, Christ again withdrew into Ephraim. Until the time of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of the Passion Week, Christ was not inactive. The Scriptures record the cleansing of ten lepers, the interview with the rich young ruler, and Christ dining with Zacchaeus. While at Bethany He was anointed by Mary. The period of His Perea ministry extends from the fall until the following spring of Christ's last year.

## **The Passion Week**

Matthew 21:1—26:5 ; 26:14—27:66 ; Mark 11:1—14:2 ; 14:10—15:47 ; Luke 19:29—23:56 ; John 12:12—19:42

The exact order of the events of the Passion Week is disputed, depending on the date given His crucifixion. Three theories have been advanced: (1) that Christ was crucified on Wednesday<sup>1</sup> (2) that Christ was crucified on Thursday<sup>2</sup> (3) that Christ was crucified on Friday, the traditional view.<sup>3</sup> The reconstruction of the events of the week depends on the theory which is accepted. Generally speaking, however, the order of events is sufficiently plain even if the day on which some of them occurred is not clear.

The Passion Week began with the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem which occurred six days before the Passover—on Saturday if Christ was crucified on Wednesday and the Passover was on Tuesday,<sup>4</sup> on Sunday if Christ was crucified on either Thursday or Friday. In this dramatic entry into Jerusalem, Christ publicly fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9. Campbell Morgan suggests that this may have been one of three entries into Jerusalem on successive days.<sup>5</sup> The day following the entry the second cleansing of the temple occurs. Tuesday probably marked the final messages of Christ to the people if the traditional chronology is assumed. On that day He warned them of the results of rejecting Him, answered the questions of His opponents, and silenced them, pronounced woes on the Pharisees, and delivered the great Olivet Discourse. The traditional view holds that there is no record of events on Wednesday, which according to Callaway was the day on

which Christ died. The usual view is that on Thursday night Christ gathered His disciples for their last supper together. Some believe this to have been the Passover Feast, others a preliminary supper which was held before the Passover, which was to be held two days later, after the death of Christ. Some believe two suppers were held on the same night, one following the other, the latter being the real Passover. While controversy exists as to the details, the beauty of these last moments of Christ with His disciples remains, with the important Upper Room Discourse recorded in John 13-16 forming the main body of divine revelation.

The chronology of events following the arrest of Christ in Gethsemane indicates six separate trials were held, three before Jewish rulers and three before Roman rulers.

1. The trial before Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas (John 18:12-24), was held immediately after the arrest of Christ. In reply to questions, Christ tells them to ask those who had heard Him teach. The trial was entirely illegal, being at night, contrary to Jewish law; no indictment was prepared; no witnesses were heard; and no counsel was provided for the defendant—all required by the Jewish law.

2. The trial before Caiaphas immediately followed (Matt 26:57-66; Mark 14:53-65). At this trial false witnesses were produced, but the uniformity of their testimony could not be attained. In answer to the direct question of whether He was the Christ, Jesus affirmed it, and was convicted on this confession.

3. The third trial was held the following morning (Matt 27:1-2; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71) probably because of the legal necessity of conforming to the Jewish law providing that trials must be held in daylight. Here Christ is asked if He is the Son of God. Upon His admission of His deity, Christ is convicted on the grounds of blasphemy and referred to the Roman rulers for sentence.

4. The fourth trial was held before Pilate (Matt 27:11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-7; John 18:28-38). Christ is here accused of forbidding tribute to Caesar, perverting the nation, and claiming to be King of the Jews.

5. The trial before Herod is recorded only in one Gospel (Luke 23:8-12). At this trial Christ is silent to all questions and after being mocked by the soldiers is returned to Pilate.

6. The final trial before Pilate resulted in a second acquittal and the offer to scourge and release Christ (Matt 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:18-25; John 18:29—19:16). The alternative suggestion of Pilate that they accept the release of the wicked Barabbas and crucify Christ—made in the vain hope they would allow him to free Christ—was accepted by the Jews, and Pilate pronounces sentence on Christ according to the will of the Jews. In this travesty of justice, our Lord is condemned to death and led off to His crucifixion.

On the way to Calvary Christ carried His cross until, unable to bear it further, Simon of Cyrene is pressed into service. Upon reaching the scene of execution Christ is immediately crucified along with two thieves who were crucified on either side. Over His head is the inscription which in full was probably: “This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

The order of events of the crucifixion of Christ is as follows: (1) Upon arrival at Calvary Christ is offered wine mingled with gall which would dull His senses (Matt 27:33-34; Mark 15:22-23; Luke 23:33; John 19:17). (2) After refusal of the drink, Christ is crucified along with the two thieves (Matt 27:35-38; Mark 15:24-28; Luke 23:33-38; John 19:18-24). (3) The first cry on the cross: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). (4) The soldiers divide the garments and cast lots for His coat, thus fulfilling Scripture (Matt 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:23-24). (5) The chief priests and the scribes, as well as the people, mock Jesus (Matt 27:39-44; Mark 15:29-32; Luke 23:35-38). (6) One of the thieves believes on Him (Matt 27:44; Mark 15:32; Luke 23:39-43). (7) The second cry on the cross: “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). (8) The third cry: “Woman, behold thy son” and to John: “Behold thy mother” (John 19:26-27). (9) The three hours of darkness (Matt 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44). (10) The fourth cry: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46-47; Mark 15:34-36). (11) The fifth cry: “I thirst” (John 19:28). (12) The sixth cry: “It is finished” (John 19:30). (13) The seventh cry: “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46). (14) Jesus

yields up His Spirit (Matt 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 19:30).

This moving spectacle of our blessed Lord dying on the cross for the sins of the whole world is of inestimable theological significance. Christ lived as no man has ever lived before, and He died as no man has ever died.

## The Resurrection of Christ

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the crucial events in His life on earth upon which the significance of His entire life and death hangs. It is the first step in a series in the exaltation of Christ, and is a fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 16:10 as well as Christ's own predictions of His resurrection (Matt 16:21; 20:19 ; 26:32 ; Mark 9:9; 14:28 ; John 2:19).

The order of events as relating to the resurrection appearances of Christ is presented in Scripture as follows. (1) The guards witnessed the angel rolling away the stone (Matt 28:2-4). (2) The arrival of the women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, and others (Matt 28:1, 5-7; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-10; John 20:1). (3) Mary Magdalene runs to tell the apostles, the other women following more slowly (Matt 28:8; Mark 16:8; Luke 24:8-10; John 20:2). (4) Mary Magdalene returns with Peter and John and sees the empty tomb (John 20:2-10). (5) The first appearance of Christ; Mary Magdalene remains after Peter and John leave and sees Christ (John 20:11-17; cf. Mark 16:9-11). (6) Mary Magdalene returns to report the appearance of Christ; the other women return and see Christ (Matt 28:9-10). The best texts omit here the words: "as they went to tell his disciples." They actually were on their way back to the garden. (8) The report of the guards watching the tomb (Matt 28:11-15). (9) The third appearance of Christ; to Peter in the afternoon (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5). (10) The fourth appearance of Christ; on the road to Emmaus (Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-35). (11) The fifth appearance of Christ; to the ten disciples (Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-23). Though Mark mentions "eleven," there appeared to be only ten disciples here. The term *eleven* seems to be used loosely of the group. (12) The sixth appearance of Christ; to the eleven disciples (John 20:26-29). (13) The seventh appearance of Christ; to the seven disciples by the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-23). (14) The eighth appearance of Christ; to the five hundred (1 Cor 15:6). (15) The ninth appearance of Christ; to James the Lord's brother (1 Cor 15:7). This explains apparently why James, not a believer before the resurrection (John 7:3), immediately after the resurrection is included as a believer (Acts 1:14; Gal 1:19). (16) The tenth appearance of Christ; to the eleven on a mountain in Galilee (Matt 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-18). (17) The eleventh appearance of Christ; at the time of the ascension (Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:3-9). (18) The twelfth appearance; to Stephen (Acts 7:55-56). (19) The thirteenth appearance of Christ; to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6; 22:6-11 ; 26:13-18 ). (20) The fourteenth appearance of Christ; to Paul in Arabia. This appearance is somewhat conjectural (Acts 20:24; 26:17 ; Gal 1:12-17). (21) The fifteenth appearance of Christ to Paul in the temple (Gal 1:18; Acts 9:26-30; 22:17-21 ). (22) The sixteenth appearance of Christ; to Paul in prison (Acts 23:11). (23) The seventeenth appearance of Christ; to the Apostle John (Rev 1:12-20).

The fact of the resurrection of Christ, therefore, is one of the most well-attested events of ancient history, and is given a prominent place in the Scriptural presentation. The significance of His resurrection will be subject to further discussion later.

## The Ascension of Christ

Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:49-53; Acts 1:8-11

Though allusions in Scripture to the ascension of Christ are much fewer than to His resurrection, the accounts as given demonstrate the bodily departure of Christ from earth and His arrival in heaven. In addition to the accounts given in Mark, Luke, and Acts, the epistles refer to the ascension as a fact (Heb 4:14; 1 Pet 3:22). The arrival of Christ in heaven is also repeatedly stated in Scripture in more than a score of passages (cf. Acts 2:33-36). It was a fitting climax for the life of Christ on earth and in fulfillment of His own declaration that He would return to the Father. The historical facts as they recount the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ and culminate in His ascension to the right hand of the Father give a solid basis for theological consideration of the person and work of Christ. The historical narratives are fully in keeping with the theological implications which are drawn from them in the epistles. Upon these facts rest our Christian faith and our hope of life to come.

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene C. Callaway, *The Harmony of the Last Week*.

<sup>2</sup> James Gall, *Good Friday*.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Four Gospels*; Stevens and Burton, *A Harmony of the Gospels*.

<sup>4</sup> Callaway, *op. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to John*, pp. 209-10.

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# The Person and Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

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## Chapter 5

### The Ministry of Christ in His Life on Earth

[Editor's Note: This article is the fifth in a series on "The Person and Work of Christ."]

The four Gospels provide our principal source of information concerning Christ in His life on earth. Though the narratives are selective, in keeping with the principle governing each Gospel, and though only a fraction of the incidents which might be of interest are related, the picture provided in the inspired Scripture is intriguing to all classes of scholars and is replete with theological significance.

Though the historical character of the Gospels makes them easy to understand, their theological interpretation is by no means uncomplicated. Few sections of Scripture require more careful analysis and precise interpretation. The reason does not lie in the complicated narrative, but rather in the fact that the incidents recorded are more than just history. They constitute a revelation of God and His purposes.

### The Major Spheres of the Earthly Life of Christ

One of the reasons why the Gospels are difficult to interpret is that Christ lived in three major spheres and His teaching as well as His life are related to them. The right understanding of this fact is essential not only to a correct interpretation of the Gospels but gives the key to the entire New Testament.

*The sphere of Jewish law.* The law which was inaugurated for Israel through Moses was still in effect throughout the lifetime of Christ and in one sense is not terminated until His death (Gal 3:23-25; 4:5). In much of His teaching, Christ affirmed the Mosaic law and declared it must be fulfilled (Matt 5:7-19). As related to the life of Christ, it can be said that Christ lived under the law, that His teaching constituted a major interpretation of it, and that He kept it perfectly (2 Cor 5:21). Christ on numerous occasions contradicted the customary teaching of the law. He insisted, moreover, on its practical application to the spiritual issues of His day in contrast with the common evasion of the law by the scribes. As the Son of God, He also was free to interpret authoritatively the law and in some cases contrasted His own teaching with that of Moses.

Christ insisted that keeping the letter of the Mosaic law was not sufficient. The Mosaic law could be properly fulfilled only by those who attained its highest form of interpretation, centering in the love of God and love of one's neighbor. In some cases, Christ pointed out that the Mosaic law represented divine condescension in that God accommodated Himself to the weakness of the people, as in the case of the teaching on divorce. Frequently, Christ appealed to the higher law of God of which the Mosaic law was a particular expression.

*The sphere of the kingdom.* Much of the teaching of Christ is directly related to the doctrine of the kingdom. The Gospels connect this line of truth specifically to the Old Testament revelation of the kingdom to be established on earth by the power of the Messiah. The Gospel of Matthew, in its opening portion, especially related Christ to David as fulfilling the Davidic covenant. The Gospel of Luke records the angelic messenger who promised Mary that her Son would reign on the throne of David and rule over the house of Israel forever.

In the opening section of Matthew the credentials of the King are presented and the predicted signs are recorded as fulfilled. In keeping with His relation to the kingdom, Christ revealed the spiritual principles which govern this kingdom in the

Sermon on the Mount, giving present application of these principles to the particular situation, as well as speaking prophetically of the spiritual qualities which are to enter into His millennial kingdom. In the Olivet Discourse, specific prophecy is given concerning the great tribulation which will introduce His second coming and the establishment of His throne on the earth.

Though the New Testament doctrine of the kingdom necessarily is based on the Old, the tendency of scholars to limit the teaching of Christ to one phase of the kingdom or another is open to question. An examination of what Christ had to say about the kingdom should make plain that in some instances He spoke concerning the general government and authority of God over the universe. In other cases He dealt with the reign of God in the heart, or a spiritual kingdom. In other cases, He spoke specifically of the kingdom promise to David. It is, therefore, an error to limit His teaching to making all His kingdom messages apply to the millennial period alone. On the other hand, it is equally erroneous to limit His teaching to a spiritual kingdom to be fulfilled in part before His second advent.

The kingdom teachings are found principally in the Old Testament, and the kingdom partakes to some extent of the legal character of this period. As presented in the teachings of Christ, however, the millennial kingdom is a distinct sphere of rule both in its content and in its application, and is to be contrasted with the present age of the church or the past dispensation of law.

*The sphere of the church.* In addition to the teachings of Christ relating to the Mosaic law and the kingdom, prophecy is given of the church. The first mention of this is found in Matthew 16:18, following the rejection of Christ as King and the opposition to His message on the spiritual principles of the kingdom. Earlier, in Matthew 13, the entire interadvent age is revealed under the seven mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Chronologically the church coincides with much of the development of this period revealed in Matthew 13.

The chief revelation concerning the church, however, is found in the Gospel of John in the Upper Room Discourse. Here, apparently for the first time, the essential principles are revealed which pertain to the purpose of God in the present interadvent age. The basic spiritual principles are given in John 13. In chapter 14 the fact that Christ will be in the Father's house during the present age and will send the Spirit to dwell in the believer is unfolded. The vine and the branches in chapter 15 speak of the organic union of the believer with Christ, the new intimacy of being friends of Christ, and the fact that believers are chosen and ordained to bring forth fruit. The opposition and persecution which will characterize the present age is revealed also in chapter 15, in contrast with the protection of the saints in the millennial kingdom. A major doctrine given in John 16 is the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the world and the believer. The great purposes of God as they will be fulfilled in the church are also implicit in the intercession of Christ recorded in chapter 17. The fact that the believer will be perfectly united to God and that he will be in Christ and Christ will be in him forms the center of the revelation.

A study of the four Gospels, therefore, will demonstrate three major spheres of revelation. It is a hasty generalization, however, to characterize the Gospels as law or that they pertain to the church or kingdom. It is rather that Christ taught in all these spheres, and each utterance must be understood in its context and content.

## **Christ as Prophet**

Without question, Christ is the greatest of the prophets. His teachings contained in the four Gospels demonstrate a great variety of subjects, a broader scope of prophecy, and a more comprehensive revelation than is found in any of the recorded prophets of Scripture. In almost every aspect of revelation, Christ made a distinct contribution.

Unlike all other prophets, Christ revealed God not only in His spoken ministry but in His life and person. As the Logos of John, Christ was eternally the source of knowledge, truth, wisdom, and light. When He became incarnate, He became a declaration in human flesh of what God is (John 1:4-18). In His life, death, and resurrection, Christ was a revelation of God far beyond that of any preceding prophet. Even after His resurrection Christ continued to exercise His prophetic office, teaching His disciples the things they needed to know to adjust themselves to the new age into which they were going. After

His ascension, the Holy Spirit was sent to continue the prophetic work, however, revealing to the saints the truth that Christ would have them know (John 16:12-15).

## The Office of Priest

Just as Christ, fulfilled to the utmost the office of prophet so also He qualifies as the High Priest and is the embodiment of all that is anticipated in the Old Testament priesthood. As a priest, He fulfilled the primary definition of what constitutes a priest, “a man duly appointed to act for other men in things pertaining to God.”<sup>1</sup> Not only in His person but also in His work, Christ fulfilled the ministry of a priest, offering gifts, sacrifices, and intercession. He acted as a true Mediator between God and man. According to the Epistle to the Hebrews, Christ fulfilled the five necessary requirements of the priesthood: (1) He was qualified for the office (Heb 1:3; 3:1-6 ); (2) He was appointed of God (Heb 5:1-10); (3) His priesthood was of a higher order than that of Aaron’s, as Christ’s priesthood superseded Aaron’s as Aaron’s had superseded the patriarchal system (Heb 5:6, 10; 7:1—8:6 ); (4) all functions of the priesthood were performed by Christ (Heb 7:23-28; 9:11-28 ; 10:5-18 ); (5) His priesthood is eternal, indicating His superiority and finality (Heb 7:25). A detailed discussion of His priesthood is planned for a later section.

## The Office of King

One of the fundamental purposes of the incarnation was the fulfillment of the earthly purpose of God in the Davidic covenant. The Old Testament had predicted the coming of a King who would fulfill the promise of God to David (2 Sam 7:16; Pss 2 ; 45 ; 72 ; 110 ; Isa 9:6-7; Dan 7:13-14; Mic 5:2; Zech 9:8). When Christ came, He fulfilled the requirements of the prophesied King, though the full revelation of His work as King was reserved for His second coming.

The record in the New Testament is both historical and prophetic (Luke 1:31-33; John 1:49; 18:37 ; 19:12 ; 1 Cor 15:25; 1 Tim 6:15; Rev 1:5; 17:14 ; 19:16 ). The rejection of Christ as king by Israel (John 19:15) resulted in the postponement of the millennial kingdom, but it did not alter the certainty of complete fulfillment of His work as King, nor the fact that in His person He is the King of Israel.

Taken together, the three offices of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King are the key to the purpose of the incarnation. His prophetic office was concerned with the revelation of the truth of God; the priestly office was related to His work as Savior and Mediator; His kingly office had in view His right to reign over Israel and over the entire earth. In Christ the supreme dignity of these offices is reached.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II, 464.

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# The Person and Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

## Chapter 6

### The Humiliation of the Son of God

[Editor's Note: This article is the six in a series on the "Person and Work of Christ."]

One of the important considerations in the theological statement of the incarnation is the definition of what was involved in the condescension and humiliation of Christ in becoming man. How could the eternal God take upon Himself human limitations while retaining His eternal deity? Orthodox theologians have answered the question by declaring that God in becoming man did not diminish His deity, but added a human nature to the divine nature. How this actually affected the divine nature is treated in the classic passage of Philippians 2:5-11. Some have interpreted this statement as meaning that Christ in some sense gave up part of His deity in order to become man. As such a conclusion would seriously affect the orthodox doctrine of the deity of Christ, theologians have examined this passage minutely to find an answer to the problem of what Christ actually did in becoming man.

In general, the act of the Son of God in the incarnation is described first by the word *condescension* in that He, the eternal God, condescended to be man. As a man He submitted to the death on the cross which is described by the term *humiliation*. After His passion, Christ rose from the dead and later ascended into heaven where He was exalted to the right hand of God the Father. The theological question is raised, therefore, as to whether the process of condescension, humiliation, and exaltation involved any change in the divine nature of Christ.

### The Exegesis of Philippians 2:5-11

The Philippian passage concerning the self-emptying or kenosis of the Son of God was introduced in support of a practical exhortation to have the mind or attitude of Christ. In support of this, the action of Christ in proceeding from glory to become man and suffer on the cross was cited as an illustration. In the accompanying explanation, the apostle gave one of the most concise theological statements of the incarnation to be found anywhere in the Scriptures. Christ is described first of all as "existing in the form of God." The word for *existing* is not the usual Greek verb  $\omega\upsilon$  (to be), but  $\upsilon\pi\alpha\rho\chi\omega$  which is found in a form used for both the present and the imperfect participle and carries the meaning of continued existence. The thought is that Christ always has been in the form of God with the implication that He still is. If the Greek form is taken as the present tense instead of the imperfect, the word would mean that Christ existed as God in the past, that is, before the incarnation, and is still existing in the form of God. This would be asserting that the deity of Christ continues unchanged by the act of the incarnation. If taken as a simple imperfect, it would refer to His state before the incarnation, without explicitly affirming continuity of the form of God though the implication of continuity would remain.

As stated by the apostle, Christ "existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross" (ASV). The attitude of Christ which believers are exhorted to emulate is that He did not grasp at being on an equality with God as if it had to be retained by effort. Though having existed in the form of God from all eternity, He was willing to empty Himself, taking the form of a servant, and ultimately He became obedient unto death.

The act of the incarnation is described by the strong word  $\epsilon\kappa\epsilon\nu\omega\sigma\epsilon\nu$  (English, *kenosis*) meaning *to empty* (cf. four other instances where used in the New Testament—Rom 4:14; 1 Cor 1:17; 9:15 ; 2 Cor 9:3). Warfield considers the translation

“emptied himself” (ASV) as an error, apparently preferring the Authorized Version rendering, “made himself of no reputation,” i.e., emptied Himself of the manifestations of deity.<sup>1</sup> The crux of the exposition of this important passage hangs on the definition of the act of kenosis. Orthodox theologians have pointed out that the meaning of this word must be interpreted by the context itself. The passage does not state that Christ ceased to exist in the form of God, but rather that He added the form of a servant. The word *ορφη*, translated *form*, speaks of the outer appearance or manifestation. As it relates to the eternal deity of Christ, it refers to the fact that Christ in eternity past in outer appearance manifested His divine attributes. It was not mere form or appearance, but that which corresponded to what He was eternally. In becoming man He took upon Himself the form of a servant, that is, the outward appearance of a servant and the human nature which corresponds to it. This is further defined as manifesting the likeness (*ομοιωσις*) of man in that He looked and acted like a man. The passage further declares that He was “found in fashion as a man,” the word *fashion* (*σχημα*) indicating the more transient manifestations of humanity such as weariness, thirst, and other human limitations. Taking the whole passage together, there is no declaration here that there was any loss of deity, but rather a limitation of its manifestation. It is certainly clear from other declarations of Paul that he recognized that Jesus Christ in the flesh was all that God is even though He appeared to be a man.

The kenosis passage of Philippians, chapter two, though it was probably never intended to be a complete statement of the incarnation, has been claimed as a Scriptural basis for the idea that in the incarnation Christ in some sense emptied Himself of certain divine attributes, especially the attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. It is claimed that this passage justifies the idea that a true incarnation involves surrender of certain qualities of deity and that therefore Christ was something less than God while in the sphere of condescension and humiliation on earth.

A.B. Bruce in his work, *The Humiliation of Christ*, classifies the kenotic series as falling into four types, all of which are denied by orthodox theologians as constituting a rejection of the deity of Christ. Bruce writes: “Fortunately, however, we are not required by the history of opinion to be mathematically complete in our exposition, but may content ourselves with giving some account of *four* distinct kenotic types, which may for the present be intelligibly, if not felicitously, discriminated as, (1) the *absolute dualistic* type, (2) the *absolute metamorphic*, (3) the *absolute semi-metamorphic*, and (4) the *real but relative*. Of the first, *Thomasius* may conveniently be taken as the representative; of the second, *Gess*; of the third, *Ebrard*; and of the fourth, *Martensen*.”<sup>2</sup>

The first of these described as the absolute dualistic type as set forth by *Thomasius* and others attempts to distinguish between the ethical or immanent attributes of God and the relative or physical.<sup>3</sup> According to this view, the relative and physical attributes, including omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence, were surrendered by Christ in becoming man. In opposition to this view, orthodox theologians have pointed out that God cannot change His nature by act of His will any more than any other being. Attributes inherent in a personal essence cannot be dismissed. This is contained in the divine attribute of immutability which is expressly affirmed of Christ (Heb 13:8). Further, though there are problems stemming from certain Scriptural statements concerning the human nature of Christ, there is considerable evidence that Christ retained omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence even while on earth. Further, a loss in attributes would mean in effect that Christ was not God at all which is contradicted by innumerable Scriptures and specifically by the Gospel of John.

Bruce also points out a second view<sup>4</sup> known as the absolute metamorphic type supported by *Gess* which goes even further and asserts that divine attributes were given up in the incarnation and Christ was entirely human though *Gess* asserts according to Bruce that Christ was not “simply an ordinary man,” having a “superadamitic element.”<sup>5</sup> The divine consciousness in Christ ceased entirely though it was later gradually reassumed, beginning with His experience in the temple at the age of twelve. This point of view is so extreme that it hardly requires refutation by those who accept the Biblical testimony.

The third view, described by Bruce as the “absolute semi-metamorphic type” as espoused by *Ebrard* is another attempt at compromising the deity of Christ.<sup>6</sup> It held that the divine properties were disguised and appeared as a mode of human existence. The mode of existence of Christ was changed from that of the form of God to the form of a man, from the eternal manner of being to a temporal manner of being. The difficulty with this view is that while it accommodates itself to the human appearance of Christ it in effect denies that He was actually God simultaneously with His human experience. It is not

the picture of Christ which is afforded in the entire New Testament.

The fourth view known as the “real but relative”<sup>7</sup> is closer to the truth in that it affirms that Christ was God, but limits His experience to that of the human consciousness and remolds the divine attributes into properties of the human nature. Christ is limited in His experience of knowledge even though as God He was omniscient and limited in His experience of power. This, however, is contradicted by the fact that though Christ in His human nature was limited His divine consciousness is still omniscient and His divine will still omnipotent. The difficulties with all these views which fall short of ascribing to Christ a full deity is that they read into the passage in Philippians 2 more than it actually says and contradict many other Scriptures which fully assert the deity of Christ during the period He was on earth.

The explanations of the so-called kenotic theologians are therefore judged inadequate either as an explanation of the incarnation itself or the revelation contained in Philippians 2. Objections which arise to their theories are far more serious than the problem which the false theory of kenosis attempts to solve.

First, it is impossible to surrender an attribute without changing the character of the essence to which it belongs. To rob sunlight of any of its various colors would change the character of the sunlight. To rob God of any attribute would destroy His deity. Hence, if Christ did not possess all the attributes of the Godhead, it could not be said that He possessed a true deity. As the attributes belong to the essence, it is impossible to subtract any attributes without changing the character of the essence of God. This is a far more serious problem than that occasioned by the humiliation of Christ.

Second, the attempt to distinguish between the importance of relative and absolute attributes is entirely unjustified as both are equally essential to deity. The absolute attributes imply the necessity of the relative, and, though there seems to be a justifiable theological distinction, it is not that one class of attributes is more essential to deity than the other.

Third, the false theory of kenosis is in direct conflict with Scriptures which affirm the omniscience of Christ (John 2:24; 16:30 ), assert His omnipresence (John 1:48) and demonstrate His omnipotence as revealed in His many miracles. The purpose of the Gospel of John was specifically to prove the deity of Christ during the period He was on earth and automatically excludes the idea that Christ was less than divine while in the sphere of humiliation.

## **The Proper Doctrine of Kenosis**

If it is true that Christ did not give up any divine attribute or any essential quality of deity in becoming man, how can the act of emptying Himself be defined?

First, it may be stated that the humiliation of Christ consisted in the veiling of His preincarnate glory. It was necessary to give up the outer appearance of God in order to take upon Himself the form of man. In answer to the prayer of Christ to the Father (John 17:5) the manifestation of His glory was restored when His work on earth was finished. The glory was never surrendered in an absolute sense as is shown by the revelation of Himself as the glorified Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration. It may be implied that there was also a flash of glory when in the Garden of Gethsemane Christ said: “I am he” and those who beheld Him “went backward and fell to the ground” (John 18:6). From these instances it would appear that the glory of Christ, though necessarily veiled in order to permit Him to walk among men, was not surrendered. The situation was the same in the Old Testament when He appeared in the form of the Angel of Jehovah and in some instances His glorious appearance was hidden from earthly eyes in order for Him to appear to men and converse with them. After the ascension Christ is never seen except in His glorified state.

Second, the union of Christ to an unglorified humanity unquestionably involved divine condescension and was a necessary factor in His ultimate humiliation on the cross. The humiliation was not the initial step of incarnation, but was involved in the whole program of God leading to His shameful death. The humanity to which Christ was united was not a glorified humanity, but one subject to temptation, distress, weakness, pain, sorrow, and limitation. After His return to glory His humanity was glorified, but the original union with unglorified humanity is included in the kenosis.

Third, while it is not true that Christ in the incarnation surrendered the relative attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience, He did embark upon a program where it was necessary to submit to a voluntary nonuse of these attributes in order to obtain His objectives. Christ does not seem to have ever exercised His divine attributes on His own behalf though they had abundant display in His miracles. This is qualified to some extent by the fact that His omniscience is revealed in His prophetic ministry, but He did not use His divine knowledge to make His own path easier. He suffered all the inconveniences of His day even though in His divine omniscience He had full knowledge of every human device ever conceived for human comfort. In his human nature there was growth in knowledge, but this must not be construed as a contradiction of His divine omniscience. Limitations in knowledge as well as limitations in power are related to the human nature and not to the divine. His omnipotence was manifested in many ways and specifically in the many miracles which He did, in some cases by the power of the Holy Spirit and in others on the basis of His own word of authority. Here again He did not use His omnipotence to make His way easy and He knew the fatigue of labor and transportation by walking. Though in His divine nature He was omnipresent, He did not use this attribute to avoid the long journeys on foot nor is He ever seen in His ministry in more than one place at a time. In a word, He restricted the benefits of His attributes as they pertained to His walk on earth and voluntarily chose not to use His powers to lift Himself above ordinary human limitations.

Fourth, on two specific occasions Christ is revealed to have performed His miracles in the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:28; Luke 4:14-18). In these instances Christ chose voluntarily to be dependent upon the power of the Father and the Holy Spirit to perform His miracles. In view of the fact that this is mentioned only twice and hundreds of miracles were performed, it would seem clear that Christ exercised His own power when He chose to do so as, for instance, when He commanded the waves to be still and caused Lazarus to come forth from the tomb at His command.

The act of kenosis as stated in Philippians 2 may therefore be properly understood to mean that Christ surrendered no attribute of deity, but that He did voluntarily restrict their independent use in keeping with His purpose of living among men and their limitations. The summary which is given by A. H. Strong sets forth the true doctrine in comparison to the false in these words: "Our doctrine of Christ's humiliation will be better understood if we put it midway between two pairs of erroneous views, making it the third of five. The list would be as follows: (1) Gess: The Logos gave up all divine attributes; (2) Thomasius: The Logos gave up relative attributes only; (3) True View: The Logos gave up the independent exercise of divine attributes; (4) Old Orthodoxy: Christ gave up the use of divine attributes; (5) Anselm: Christ acted as if He did not possess divine attributes."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> B. B. Warfield, *Christology and Criticism*, p. 375.

<sup>2</sup> A. B. Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ*, p. 179. For discussion of these four types of kenotic theology, cp. C. L. Feinberg, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 92:368:415-17, October-December, 1935; L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 327-28.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 179-87.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 187-97.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 197-206.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 206-12.

<sup>8</sup> A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 704.

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# The Person and Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

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## Chapter 7

### The Impeccability of Christ

[Editor's Note: This article is the seventh in a series on the "Person and Work of Christ."]

Orthodox theologians generally agree that Jesus Christ never committed any sin. This seems to be a natural corollary to His deity and an absolute prerequisite to His work of substitution on the cross. Any affirmation of moral failure on the part of Christ requires a doctrine of His person which would deny in some sense His absolute deity.

A question has been raised, however, by orthodox theologians whether the sinlessness of Christ was the same as that of Adam before the fall or whether it possessed a peculiar character because of the presence of the divine nature. In a word, could the Son of God be tempted as Adam was tempted and could He have sinned as Adam sinned? While most orthodox theologians agree that Christ could be tempted because of the presence of a human nature, a division occurs on the question as to whether being tempted He could sin.

#### Definition of Impeccability

The point of view that Christ could sin is designated by the term *peccability*, and the doctrine that Christ could not sin is referred to as the *impeccability* of Christ. Adherents of both views agree that Christ did not sin, but those who affirm peccability hold that He could have sinned, whereas those who declare the impeccability of Christ believe that He could not sin due to the presence of the divine nature.

The doctrine of impeccability has been questioned especially on the point of whether an impeccable person can be tempted in any proper sense. If Christ had a human nature which was subject to temptation, was this not in itself evidence that He could have sinned? The point of view of those who believe that Christ could have sinned is expressed by Charles Hodge who has summarized this teaching in these words: "This sinlessness of our Lord, however, does not amount to absolute impeccability. It was not a *non potest peccare*. If He was a true man, He must have been capable of sinning. That He did not sin under the greatest provocations; that when He was reviled He blessed; when He suffered He threatened not; that He was dumb as a sheep before its shearers, is held up to us as an example. Temptation implies the possibility of sin. If from the constitution of his person it was impossible for Christ to sin, then his temptation was unreal and without effect and He cannot sympathize with his people."<sup>1</sup>

The problem that Hodge raises is very real, and, judging by our own experience, temptation is always associated with peccability. Hodge, however, assumes certain points in his argument which are subject to question. In order to solve the problem as to whether Christ is peccable, it is necessary, first of all, to examine the character of temptation itself to ascertain whether peccability is inevitably involved in any real temptation and, second, to determine the unique factor in Christ, i.e., that He had two natures, one a divine nature and the other a sinless human nature.

#### Can an Impeccable Person Be Tempted?

It is generally agreed by those who hold that Christ did not commit sin that He had no sin nature. Whatever temptation could come to Him, then, would be from without and not from within. Whatever may have been the natural impulses of a sinless

nature which might have led to sin if not held in control, there was no sin nature to suggest sin from within and form a favorable basis for temptation. It must be admitted by Hodge, who denies impeccability, that in any case the temptation of Christ is different than that of sinful men.

Not only is there agreement on the fact that Christ had no sin nature, but it is also agreed on the other hand, that as to His person He was tempted. This is plainly stated in Hebrews: “For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (4:15).

It is also clear that this temptation came to Christ in virtue of the fact that He possessed a human nature, as James states: “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempteth no man” (1:13). On the one hand, Christ was tempted in all points except through that of a sin nature, and on the other hand His divine nature could not be tempted because God cannot be tempted. While His human nature is temptable, His divine nature is not temptable. On these points all can agree. The question is, then, can such a person as Christ is, possessing both human and divine natures, be tempted if He is impeccable?

The answer must be in the affirmative. The question is simply, is it possible to attempt the impossible? To this all would agree. It is possible for a rowboat to attack a battleship, even though it is conceivably impossible for the rowboat to conquer the battleship. The idea that temptability implies susceptibility is unsound. While the temptation may be real, there may be infinite power to resist that temptation and if this power is infinite, the person is impeccable. It will be observed that the same temptation which would be easily resisted by one of sound character may be embraced by one of weak character. The temptation of a drunken debauch would have little chance of causing one to fall who had developed an abhorrence of drink, while a habitual drunkard would be easily led astray. The temptation might be the same in both cases, but the ones tempted would have contrasting powers of resistance. It is thus demonstrated that there is no essential relation between temptability and peccability. Hodge’s viewpoint that temptation must be unreal if the person tempted is impeccable is, therefore, not accurate.

As Shedd points out, temptability depends upon a constitutional susceptibility to sin, whereas impeccability depends upon omnipotent will not to sin. Shedd writes: “It is objected to the doctrine of Christ’s impeccability that it is inconsistent with his temptability. A person who cannot sin, it is said, cannot be tempted to sin. This is not correct; any more than it would be correct to say that because an army cannot be conquered, it cannot be attacked. Temptability depends upon the constitutional *susceptibility*, while impeccability depends upon the *will*. So far as his natural susceptibility, both physical and mental, was concerned, Jesus Christ was open to all forms of human temptation excepting those that spring out of lust, or corruption of nature. But his peccability, or the possibility of being overcome by those temptations, would depend upon the amount of voluntary resistance which he was able to bring to bear against them. Those temptations were very strong, but if the self-determination of his holy will was stronger than they, then they could not induce him to sin, and he would be impeccable. And yet plainly he would be temptable.”<sup>2</sup>

The question of whether an impeccable person can be tempted is illustrated by the example of the elect angels. This is brought out by Shedd in his continued discussion on the matter of impeccability: “That an impeccable being can be tempted, is proved by the instance of the elect angels. Having ‘kept their first estate,’ they are now impeccable, not by their own inherent power, but by the power of God bestowed upon them. But they might be tempted still, though we have reason to believe that they are not. Temptability is one of the necessary limitations of the finite spirit. No creature is beyond the possibility of temptation, though he may, by grace, be beyond the possibility of yielding to temptation. The only being who cannot be tempted is God: ο• γα•ρ θεο•ς α•πει•ραστος, James 1:13. And this, from the nature of an Infinite Being. Ambition of some sort is the motive at the bottom of all temptation. When the creature is tempted, it is suggested to him to endeavor to ‘be as gods.’ He is incited to strive for a higher place in the grade of being than he now occupies. But this, of course, cannot apply to the Supreme Being. He is already God over all and blessed forever. He, therefore, is absolutely intemptable.”<sup>3</sup>

## Were the Temptations of Christ Real?

If the temptation of an impeccable person be considered possible, can it be said of Christ that His temptations were real? If there were no corresponding nature within to respond to sin, is it true that the temptation is real?

This question must also be answered in the affirmative. In the case of the human race, the reality of temptation can be easily proved by the frequency of sin. While this is not true in the case of Christ, it is nevertheless evident that Christ's temptations were real. While Christ never experienced the inner struggle of two natures deadlocked as in Paul's case in Romans 7, there is abundant evidence of the reality of temptation. The forty days in the wilderness at the close of which He was tempted marks a trial to which, no other human frame has ever been subjected. The temptation to turn stones into bread was all the more real because Christ had the power to do it. The temptation to make a public display of God's preservation of Christ by casting Himself from the temple was also most real. No other has ever been offered all the glory of the world by Satan, but Christ was so tempted, and did not sin. While, on the one hand, it is true that Christ did not experience the temptations arising in a sin nature, on the other hand, He was tried as no other was ever tried. Added to the nature of the temptation itself was the greater sensitivity of Christ. His body being without sin was far more sensitive to hunger and abuse than that of other men. Yet, in full experience of these longings, Christ was completely in control of Himself.

The final test of the reality of His temptations is found in the revelation of His struggle in Gethsemane and His death on the cross. No other could know the temptation of a holy person to avoid becoming the judgment for the sin of the world. This was Christ's greatest temptation, as evidenced in the character of His struggle and submission. On the cross the same temptation is evident in the taunt of His enemies to come down from the cross. Christ willingly continued in suffering and of His own will dismissed His spirit when the proper time came. No greater realm of temptation could be imagined. While Christ's temptations, therefore, are not always exactly parallel to our own, He was tried in every part of His being even as we are tried, and we can come to Him as our High Priest with the assurance that He fully understands the power of temptation and sin, having met it in His life and death (Heb 4:15). The temptations of Christ, therefore, possess a stark reality without for a moment detracting from His impeccability. A proper doctrine of the impeccability of Christ therefore affirms the reality of the temptations of Christ due to the fact that He had a human nature which was temptable. If the human nature had been unsustained as in the case of Adam by a divine nature, it is clear that the human nature of Christ might have sinned. This possibility, however, is completely removed by the presence of the divine nature.

## **The Proof of the Impeccability of Christ**

The ultimate solution of the problem of the impeccability of Christ rests in the relationship of the divine and human natures. It is generally agreed that each of the natures, the divine and the human, had its own will in the sense of desire. The ultimate decision of the person, however, in the sense of sovereign will was always in harmony with the decision of the divine nature. The relation of this to the problem of impeccability is obvious. The human nature, because it is temptable, might desire to do that which is contrary to the will of God. In the person of Christ, however, the human will was always subservient to the divine will and could never act independently. Inasmuch as all agree that the divine will of God could not sin, this quality then becomes the quality of the person and Christ becomes impeccable.

Shedd has defined this point of view in these words: "Again, the impeccability of Christ is proved by the relation of the two wills in his person to each other. Each nature, in order to be complete, entire, and wanting nothing, has its own will; but the finite will never antagonizes the infinite will, but obeys it invariably and perfectly. If this should for an instant cease to be the case, there would be a conflict in the self-consciousness of Jesus Christ similar to that in the self-consciousness of his apostle Paul. He too would say, 'The good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?' Rom 7:19, 20, 24. But there is no such utterance as this from the lips of the God-man: On the contrary, there is the calm inquiry of Christ: 'Which of you convinceth me of sin?' John 8:46; and the confident affirmation of St. John: 'In him was no sin.' 1 John 3:5. There is an utter absence of personal confession of sin, in any form whatever, either in the conversation or the prayers of Jesus Christ. There is no sense of indwelling sin. He could not describe his religious experience as his apostle does, and his people do: 'The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh,' Gal 5:17."<sup>4</sup>

The question of the impeccability of Christ therefore resolves itself into a question as to whether the attributes of God can be

harmonized with a doctrine of peccability. The concept of peccability in the person of Christ is contradicted principally by the attributes of immutability, omnipotence, and omniscience.

The fact of the immutability of Christ is the first determining factor of His impeccability. According to Hebrews 13:8, Christ is “the same yesterday, today, yea and for ever,” and earlier in the same epistle Psalm 102:27 is quoted “Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail” (Heb 1:12). As Christ was holy in eternity past, it is essential that this attribute as well as all others be preserved unchanged eternally. Christ must be impeccable, therefore, because He is immutable. If it is unthinkable that God could sin in eternity past, it must also be true that it is impossible for God to sin in the person of Christ incarnate. The nature of His person forbids susceptibility to sin.

The omnipotence of Christ makes it impossible for Him to sin. Peccability always implies weakness on the part of the one tempted. He is weak to the extent that He can sin. On the part of Christ, this is clearly out of the question. While the human nature of Christ if left to itself would have been both peccable and temptable, because it was joined to the omnipotent divine nature the person of Christ was thereby made impeccable. A careful distinction should be made between omnipotence, which has a quality of infinity and therefore would sustain impeccability, and the concept of sufficient power or grace. Impeccability is defined as being not able to sin, whereas a concept of sufficient power would be merely able not to sin. A moral creature of God sustained by the grace of God can achieve the moral experience of being able not to sin as is illustrated in every victory over temptation in the Christian life. All agree that Christ was able not to sin, even those who affirm His peccability. The contrast, however, is between the idea of sufficient power and omnipotence. The infinite quality of omnipotence justifies the affirmation that Christ is impeccable.

It is foolish speculation to attempt to decide what the human nature of Christ would have done if not joined to the divine nature. The fact remains that the human nature was joined to the divine nature, and while its own realm was entirely human, it could not involve the person of Christ in sin. On the ground of omnipotence, then, it may be concluded that Christ could not sin because He had infinite power to resist temptation.

The omniscience of Christ contributed a vital part of His impeccability. Sin frequently appeals to the ignorance of the one tempted. Thus Eve was deceived and sinned, though Adam was not deceived as to the nature of the transgression. In the case of Christ, the effects of sin were perfectly known, with all the contributing factors. It was impossible for Christ having omniscience to commit that which He knew could only bring eternal woe to Himself and to the race. Having at once infinite wisdom to see sin in its true light and at the same time infinite power to resist temptation, it is evident that Christ was impeccable.

It is rationally inconceivable that Christ could sin. It is clear that Christ is not peccable in heaven now even though He possesses a true humanity. If Christ is impeccable in heaven because of who He is, then it is also true that Christ was impeccable on earth because of who He was. While it was possible for Christ in the flesh to suffer limitations of an unmoral sort—such as weakness, suffering, fatigue, sorrow, hunger, anger, and even death—none of these created any complication which affected His immutable holiness. God could have experienced through the human nature of Christ these things common to the race, but God could not sin even when joined to a human nature. If sin were possible in the life of Christ, the whole plan of the universe hinged on the outcome of His temptations. The doctrine of the sovereignty of God would forbid any such haphazard condition. It is therefore not sufficient to hold that Christ did not sin, but rather to attribute to His person all due adoration in that He could not sin. While the person of Christ could therefore be tempted, there was no possibility of sin entering the life of Him appointed from eternity to be the spotless Lamb of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II, 457.

<sup>2</sup> William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, II, 396.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 336-37.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 335-36.

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# The Person and Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

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## Chapter 8

### Christ in His Suffering and Death

[Editor's Note : This article is the eighth in a series on "The Person and Work of Christ."]

#### Introduction

No event of time or eternity quite equals the transcending significance of the death of Christ on the cross. Though other important undertakings of God could be mentioned, such as the creation of the physical world, the incarnation of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, His second coming, and the creation of the new heavens and the new earth, no one event is more far-reaching in its implications than the death of Christ. Accordingly, throughout the history of the church devout minds have found this subject worthy of deepest meditation.

A faithful student of Christology cannot escape the responsibility of a careful study of this doctrine. Its proper understanding is the heart of gospel preaching as well as systematic theology, and without it other doctrines of Christology have no relevance either to human needs or to a vital hope. Everything that is essential to salvation depends upon the suffering and death of Christ.

Like other important doctrines of Christian faith, the suffering and death of Christ can only be understood partially and surpasses ordinary human understanding. It requires a Spirit-taught mind to enter into the wonders of its meaning as it partakes of the infinity of the nature of Christ Himself. In the cross of Christ God is supremely revealed in His holiness and righteousness in their greatest historic revelation, set over against the love of God which prompted the sacrifice of Christ. The infinite wisdom of God revealed in the divine plan for the death of Christ is another evidence of the omniscience of God. No human mind would ever have devised such a way of salvation and only an infinite God would have been willing to give His Son to accomplish it.

The death of Christ has been disputed in two major areas by those who reject the Scriptural revelation: (1) Some liberals affirm that Christ died but did not literally rise from the dead, thereby casting doubt upon the significance of His death. (2) Some few have held that Christ did not actually die and was merely revived. In this case both the death and resurrection of Christ are in question. Either of these two positions are destructive to Christian faith.

The Biblical record of the death, of Christ is a complete presentation both from the prophetic and the historic standpoints. Many passages in the Old Testament as well as in the Gospels predicted the death of Christ, such as Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, Mark 8:31, Luke 9:22, and similar references. If one accepts the Biblical testimony, it is unavoidable that one also accepts the fact of the death of Christ. All the Gospels and all of the epistles either state or assume the fact of His death (cp. Matt 27:32-66; Mark 15:21-47; Luke 23:26-56; John 19:16-42; Rom 5:6; 1 Cor 15:3; 2 Cor 5:15; Rev 5:9).

The Biblical testimony, of course, is confirmed by the history of the church and the fact of the existence of the church itself. Historically, the Biblical doctrine of the person and work of Christ are essential to explain the existence of the church. Without the death of Christ there would be no sacrifice for sin, no salvation, no resurrection, and all the other elements that form the content of Christian faith from the beginning. The fact that the Christian church was able to endure centuries of persecution and survived centuries of neglect and opposition is difficult to explain apart from the system of theology stemming from belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who actually died, rose, and ascended into heaven.

# Theological Terminology Relating to Christ in His Death

In order to have an accurate understanding of the theology relating to the death of Christ, it is necessary first of all to define the terms used in the Bible and in theology relating to the atonement. The following important words are worthy of careful definition.

*Atonement.* This word is used in three different senses. Biblically the word is found only in the Old Testament where it means *to cover*, that is, put sin out of sight. In the Authorized Version, the word *atonement* is found in Romans 5:11, but it should have been translated *reconciliation*. The Old Testament concept of atonement is not found in New Testament revelation. *Etymologically* the word is a combination of the syllables *at-one-ment*, meaning to be made at one, i.e., to reconcile. This meaning is somewhat archaic, however, and seldom is meant when the word is used in modern English. *Theologically*, the word *atonement* is used to include all which Christ accomplished by His death. It has by usage come to be a technical word meaning something more than the Old Testament concept and more than its etymological background. The theological usage therefore should be considered normal on the basis of the hermeneutical principle that usage determines the meaning of words. It is not proper, therefore, to refer to atonement theologically in the same sense as the word was used in the Old Testament, i.e., a temporary covering of sin. Some writers prefer not to use the word in the theological sense because of possible confusion with the Old Testament doctrine.

*Expiation.* Though not a Biblical word, *expiation* is properly used to represent the Biblical idea of bearing a penalty for sin and therefore pays the penalty demanded by the moral law which was transgressed. Inherent in this definition is the concept of sacrifice and judicial suffering, though it is not necessarily substitutional in character.

*Forgiveness.* Though sometimes considered only an emotional change whereby the party injured ceases to feel resentment against the guilty party, in its theological use it represents the removal of charges against the sinner on the ground of proper satisfaction. Forgiveness on the part of God always has a judicial basis, not an emotional basis, and represents an attitude of God based upon the satisfaction of His righteousness in some way.

*Guilt.* As used objectively in theology, the word guilt represents a just charge against a sinner for any kind of sin or transgression, whether a breach of conduct, violation of law, a sinful state, a sinful nature, or the fact that sin has been imputed. It regards the one who has thus fallen short of the highest divine standard as justly liable to a penalty. In popular usage it is sometimes limited in its application to nets which constitute a violation of moral law rather than to a sinful state, sinful nature, or the imputation of sin. A true concept of guilt must of course be based upon, Biblical revelation as to its nature.

*Justice.* Derived from the Latin *justus*, this word represents the strict rendering of what is due in the form of merited reward or proper punishment. As administered by God, it is in keeping with His faithfulness, righteousness, and the standards of His holiness. When God forgives it is on the basis of satisfied justice. The grace of God is another aspect of God's justice in that it is made possible by the work of Christ on behalf of the sinner.

*Justification.* In popular usage this word means *showing proper grounds for*. In theological context, however, justification is the judicial act of God declaring one to be righteous by imputation of righteousness to him. It is a matter of declaration rather than experiential transformation, and is therefore not primarily concerned with sin as such, nor with forgiveness of sin, but with the sinner's lack of righteousness without which he cannot be accepted by God. It is totally judicial and not experiential. A believer in Christ is justified at the moment of his faith in Christ as his Savior. All believers are equally justified because it is based not on their works, but on the work of Christ on their behalf for which they have qualified by faith.

*Penalty.* The natural and judicial results of sin can be represented by the word penalty. The suffering caused by the penalty must be of a kind and nature sufficient to be retribution for sin. In the case of Christ, His suffering was forensic, that is, representative and infinite in value and therefore sufficient to pay the penalty for the sins of the whole world. Sometimes

penalty may be considered in less than a judicial sense as is illustrated in the chastening of a believer who, though justified by faith, is permitted to suffer by God with a view to his sanctification.

*Propitiation.* Though understood by some to be synonymous to reconciliation, and by others such as C. H. Dodd limited to the idea of expiation, in its theological usage propitiation has in view the satisfaction of all of God's righteous demands for judgment on the sinner by the redemptive act of the death of Christ. It is not experiential, but is a judicial aspect of the death of Christ by which the demands of a holy God are fully met. This important aspect of the death of Christ will be considered in full later.

*Ransom.* When used in relation to the death of Christ, the word has reference to the price paid by Christ on the cross by which redemption was wrought. The ransom was paid to God, not man or Satan, and is an expression relating to the act of redemption.

*Reconciliation.* In human relations, this word means to restore harmony between the parties estranged. In its theological meaning, reconciliation refers to the work of God in transforming man's position and state so completely that no barrier to fellowship with God remains. It reconciles man to God by elevating man to God's level morally. It has in view man's judicial standing rather than the state of his conduct. The act of reconciliation is the application of the death of Christ to the individual believer by the power of the Spirit, changing his status from that of condemnation to complete acceptability to God. Further discussion of this important subject will be considered later.

*Redemption.* As will be pointed out in later discussion, the work of redemption was accomplished by Christ in His death on the cross and has in view the payment of the price demanded by a holy God for the deliverance of the believer from the bondage and burden of sin. In redemption the sinner is set free from his condemnation and slavery to sin.

*Remission.* Coming from a Latin word meaning *to send back*, this word is used, in reference to *a sending away* of sin in the sense of forgiveness, pardon, and relinquishment of punishment due. For all practical purposes, it may be considered synonymous theologically to the idea of forgiveness. Some Greek words in the New Testament are translated "forgiveness" or "remission" interchangeably.

*Righteousness.* Though used in various senses in the Bible and in theology, the basic concept of this word is that of conforming to a moral standard. The quality of being right or righteous is first of all a relative attribute of God. Through the death of Christ, righteousness may be imputed to the believer giving a believer a righteous standing before God which is described in Scripture as justification. The word is also used of the limited righteousness of the natural man which is unacceptable to God and also in reference to moral acts prompted by the Spirit of God which are recognized by God as conforming to His standards. As used in the Bible, it is primarily in reference to justification by faith, that is, the imputation of righteousness to the believer in Christ.

*Sanctification.* In its broad sense, sanctification is the act of God setting apart someone or something to holy use. Sanctification may be positional, i.e., a sanctification resulting from relation to that which is holy, as may be illustrated in the fact that a Christian is positionally sanctified in Christ. Sanctification may also be experiential in the sense that the grace of God by the power of the Spirit influences the life of a Christian causing his character and manner of life to be transformed to conform to the divine pattern. This is a progressive experience which continues throughout life. Sanctification may also be considered as that which is absolute, the ultimate perfection of the believer in heaven. Positional sanctification, i.e., the setting apart of a believer to God's holy use, and the ultimate sanctification of the believer in heaven are absolute and not subject to degree in contrast to experiential sanctification which is relative and only partially realized in this life. In heaven absolute and relative aspects of sanctification are brought to the same infinite plane of perfect conformity to the will of God.

*Satisfaction.* Used as a synonym for propitiation, the concept of satisfaction is that the moral requirement of God has been completely met by the death of His Son on behalf of the believer and is therefore a satisfied or propitiated God (cf. definition of propitiation).

*Substitution.* The doctrine that Christ suffered in the sinner's place as his substitute is represented in the theological term *substitution*. An equivalent term is *vicarious* which has reference to one who serves as an alternate for another, that is, as his substitute. Orthodox Christianity has recognized the doctrine of substitution though the word itself does not appear in the English text. The concept of substitution is plainly involved in the Scriptural revelation of the death of Christ on behalf of the sinner. Christ was "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). As a substitute for sinners, Christ died on the cross accomplishing the believer's propitiation to God for the guilt of his sin and supplying the believer's lack of righteousness by His own act of doing the Father's will. The act of substitution makes it possible for God to justify the believer on the ground that he has been represented in Christ.

## Theories of the Atonement

R. W. Dale in his famous work *The Atonement* cites Turretin as declaring that the atonement is "the richest treasure of the Christian Church" and a pivotal doctrine of the Christian faith. Dale writes: "Francis Turretin,—the greatest of Calvinistic theologians—in the first of his celebrated dissertations on the Satisfaction offered by our Lord Jesus Christ for the sins of men, speaks of the doctrine of the Atonement as 'the chief part of our salvation, the anchor of Faith, the refuge of Hope, the rule of Charity, the true foundation of the Christian religion, and the richest treasure of the Christian Church.' 'So long,' he says, 'as this doctrine is maintained in its integrity, Christianity itself and the peace and blessedness of all who believe in Christ are beyond the reach of danger; but if it is rejected, or in any way impaired, the whole structure, of the Christian faith must sink into decay and ruin.'"<sup>1</sup>

In general, one's understanding of the doctrine of the atonement depends on whether he regards the death of Christ as primarily being concerned with the sinner and his need of righteousness or whether the necessity of the atonement is to be found in the demands of God's justice which requires punishment of sin in keeping with God's moral government of the universe. If both of these attitudes toward the atonement be considered, a number of different views can be seen in the history of the church though some of them, as Berkhof points out, are theories of reconciliation rather than theories of atonement.<sup>2</sup> In order to examine the wide divergence of the theology of the atonement, a summary of the various views will be considered.

*Substitutional atonement.* This point of view, variously described as vicarious or penal, holds that the atonement is objectively directed toward God and the satisfaction of His holy character and demands upon the sinner. It is vicarious in the sense that Christ is the substitute who bears the punishment rightly due sinners, their guilt being imputed to Him in such a way that He representatively bore their punishment. This is in keeping with the general idea of sacrifices in the Old Testament and is explicitly taught in the New Testament in such passages as John 1:29, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:13, Hebrews 9:28, and 1 Peter 2:24. It is further sustained by the use of such prepositions as *peri*, *huper*, and *anti*, which in numerous contexts support the idea of a divine substitute for the sinner in the person of Christ on the cross. A. A. Strong's reference to "ethical atonement"<sup>3</sup> which satisfied God's holiness is similar to this point of view which is expounded at some length by Louis Berkhof.<sup>4</sup>

*Payment-to-Satan theory.* One of the theories which was advanced in the early church by Origen and taught by Augustine and other early fathers was that the death of Christ was paid to Satan in the form of a ransom to deliver man from any claims which Satan might have upon him.<sup>5</sup> Though others besides Origen followed this teaching in the early church, in the course of the history of the church it faded from view and ceased to have any substantial adherents. In modern times it has been held only by certain sects.

*Recapitulation theory.* This point of view championed by Irenaeus is based on the idea that Christ in His life and death recapitulates all phases of human life including being made sin in His death on the cross. In so doing, He does properly what Adam failed to do. Irenaeus also regarded the suffering of Christ on the cross as satisfying the divine justice of God, but considered this only one phase of the total picture.

*The commercial or satisfaction theory.* One of the first well-organized theories of the atonement was offered by Anselm in

the eleventh century in his classic work, *Cur Deus Homo?* His teaching springs from the concept that the necessity of the atonement arises in the fact that God's honor has been injured by sin.<sup>6</sup> God could satisfy His honor by punishing the sinner or by accepting a suitable substitute. Being a God of love and mercy, God provided through His Son the satisfaction that was required. Christ in His life on earth perfectly kept the law of God but, as this was required of Him in any case, it did not constitute a satisfaction of the honor of God on behalf of sinners. Christ went further and died on the cross for sin which He did not need to do for Himself. As this was in the nature of a work of supererogation, the benefits of it were applied to sinners who had fallen short of attaining the righteousness of God. God's honor was thus vindicated and the sinner saved from the penalty of sin.

Objections to this view are principally that more than God's honor has been violated. While Anselm supported the substitutionary character of the death of Christ, he falls short of recognizing properly that a penalty was involved and his view is somewhat similar to the Roman Catholic doctrine of penance rather than a true Biblical doctrine of propitiating a righteous God.

*The moral influence theory.* This point of view which has had much support in modern liberal theology was first introduced by Abelard<sup>7</sup> in opposition to the commercial theory of Anselm. It proceeds on the premise that God does not necessarily require the death of Christ as an expiation for sin, but has rather chosen this means to manifest His love and to show His fellowship with them in their sufferings. The death of Christ therefore primarily demonstrates the love of God in such a way as to win sinners to Himself. The death of Christ does not constitute a satisfaction of divine law, but rather demonstrates the loving heart of God which will freely pardon sinners.

Liberal and neo-orthodox theologians today adopted in one form or another the moral influence theory of Abelard. Actually no new view of the atonement has arisen in the twentieth century, and existing opinions can be found in one or more of the classic theories which have emerged from the past. The general disposition outside of orthodoxy itself has been to consider the death of Christ as something less than penal and not vicarious in the strict sense of the term. It is rather that Christ in His death is, on the one hand, a demonstration of the love of God and, on the other, reveals God's hatred of sin. Right-wing liberals and neo-orthodox scholars tend to support the moral influence theory while left-wing and extreme liberals regard the death of Christ as little more than an example or mystical influence.

Orthodox Christianity has always opposed this point of view as being quite insufficient to explain the many Scriptures which present the point of view that the death of Christ is a propitiation of a righteous God and that His death is absolutely necessary to make it possible for God to justify a sinner. Though Christ's death is a demonstration of the love of God and should soften human hearts, it seldom does this apart from a saving work of God.

*Theory of Thomas Aquinas.* Among the various combinations of the views of Anselm and Abelard was that of Thomas Aquinas, often considered the norm for Roman Catholic theology. He countered the assertion of the necessity of the atonement by contending that God was under no necessity to offer atonement and could have allowed men to go unredeemed. He recognized, however, the historic fact that God had in Christ offered a satisfaction for sin and to some extent went along with Anselm in holding this sacrifice sufficient and applicable to those who were joined to Christ in the mystical union of Christ and His church.

*Theory of Duns Scotus.* The contribution of Duns Scotus to theories of the atonement lies principally in the contention that there is no absolute necessity for the atonement as far as the nature of God is concerned, and that the demands for an atonement for sin proceeds entirely from the will of God. He held that it was God's prerogative to decide whether an atonement was necessary in the first place and, having determined that it was, He could have chosen an angel or any sinless man to have effected a sacrifice for sin. For him the main point was that God had accepted the sacrifice of Christ as sufficient whether it was or not. The theory of Duns Scotus has generally been considered quite inadequate by orthodox theologians who prefer to find a necessity for the atonement in the nature of God rather than the will of God. In modern theology there have been few if any adherents to this position.

*The example theory.* As the title of this teaching indicates, this theory holds that Christ in His death was merely our example.

Like the moral influence theory, it denies that there is any principle of justice which needs to be satisfied in God and that therefore the death of Christ was not necessary as an atonement for sin, but is rather a means of divine revelation which characterized the obedience of Christ in dying on the cross. The origin of this point of view is usually traced to the Socinians who are the forerunners of the modern Unitarians. Like the moral influence theory, it is actually a denial of many Scriptures which teach to the contrary, and is a restatement in various form of a number of heresies which plagued the early church. It was based upon Unitarian teachings which affirm human ability and oppose the doctrine of human depravity. In its Unitarian form it also denied the deity of Christ. Though it is true that Christ in His death was our example in many ways, this did not constitute the efficacy of His death. It provides no solid basis for the salvation of saints who died before Christ, nor does it have in itself the power to redeem in the Scriptural sense of the term. It assumes also that Christ is an example to those who are still unsaved, whereas Scripture makes very plain that the example of Christ is for those who have already been redeemed by His death.

*Mystical experience theory.* As an outgrowth of the mysticism of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and others, the teaching was advanced that the death of Christ is to be understood best as exercising a mystical influence upon the sinner.<sup>8</sup> Though similar to some extent to the moral influence theory, it is considered more than an ethical influence, and represents the influence of Christ upon mankind in general. Some of the advocates of this position did not question that Christ Himself had a sin nature, but they held that through the power of the Holy Spirit He gained victory over it and in His own experience of sanctification culminating in His death became a transforming power in mankind.

Like other false views of the atonement, the mystical experience theory bypasses many Scriptures which plainly state man's hopelessly sinful estate and his utter need of a supernatural work of God to relieve him of his just punishment for his sins. It does not provide the divine grace and enablement to lift him out of his present sinful state and bring him into right relationship to God. It involves a false view of the person of Christ and usually denies His sinless perfection. Like the moral influence theory, it does not provide for those who lived in Old Testament times.

*The governmental theory of Grotius.* This point of view represented a compromise between the example theory and the orthodox view normally held by Protestant reformers. Adherents trace the necessity of the death of Christ to the government of God rather than to an inexorable law of divine justice. They argue that inasmuch as God's divine government is the product of His will, He can alter it as He wishes, but must in the end uphold the principle of the divine government. Hence, the death of Christ was considered in the form of a nominal payment, a recognition of the principle of government which normally punishes sin, but it did not, according to this view, actually constitute a penal expiation. Christ deferred to the law by dying, but the actual penalty of this law is then set aside inasmuch as the principle of government has been recognized. This interpretation, which was considered to avoid some of the harsher doctrines contained in the concept of the penal and substitutionary atonement, had a natural attraction for those who did not want to go to the extreme of the Socinian position. It was adopted by the Calvinist Wardlaw<sup>9</sup> as well as the Arminian Miley,<sup>10</sup> and had quite a following in New England theology in our own country. The principal objection to this teaching is that it does not satisfy the Scriptural representation of the death of Christ. It seems to make an unnecessary division between the government of God and the nature of God from which the government comes.

*The theory of vicarious confession.* This teaching is based upon the idea that God would forgive man if he could perfectly repent of his sins and confess them to God. Because man is unable to provide an adequate repentance, he is not able naturally to offer a true confession and Christ on behalf of man by His death demonstrated the awfulness of sin which is accepted by God as a completely adequate confession. This theory, like many others, falls short of a true and adequate explanation of Scriptural revelation on the death of Christ. Confession of sin in itself is not vicarious. Like other views, it does not provide for a true penal satisfaction of the righteous demands of God. In any case, one man cannot confess or repent for another, though substitution in other cases may be valid. This view often attributed to McLeod Campbell has not attracted many modern adherents and is actually without a true Scriptural foundation.<sup>11</sup>

The only point of view which completely satisfies Scriptures bearing on the death of Christ is the substitutional or penal concept of the atonement as embodied in numerous passages unfolding the doctrines of redemption, propitiation, and reconciliation. Christ in His death fully satisfied the demands of a righteous God for judgment upon sinners and as their

infinite sacrifice provided a ground not only for the believer's forgiveness, but for his justification and sanctification. While certain aspects of other theories can be recognized as having merit, they fall short of establishing the true justice of God in exacting the penalty of the death of His Son. The substitutionary character of the death of Christ is further borne out in great doctrines which describe the substance of His work upon the cross such as justification, redemption, propitiation, and reconciliation. An examination of the Scriptural revelation concerning these doctrines will further substantiate the concept of substitutional atonement.

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<sup>1</sup> R. W. Dale, *The Atonement*, p. 2; cf. Francisci Turretini: *De Satisfactione Christi Disputationes*, Geneva, 1667. Opera, IV, 1.

<sup>2</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 384. Cf. also Berkhof's excellent discussion of the theories of the atonement, pp. 367-91.

<sup>3</sup> A. A. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 750-71.

<sup>4</sup> Berkhof, *op. cit.*, p. 361-83.

<sup>5</sup> L. W. Grensted, *A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement*, pp. 32-55.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. George C. Foley, *Anselm's Theory of the Atonement*, 327 pp.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Mackintosh, *Historic Theories of Atonement*, pp. 139-48.

<sup>8</sup> Grensted, *op. cit.*, pp. 329-38.

<sup>9</sup> Ralph Wardlaw, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 358-72.

<sup>10</sup> John Miley, *The Atonement in Christ*, 351 pp.

<sup>11</sup> John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement*, pp. 124-25.

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# The Person and Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

## Chapter 9

### Redemption

The doctrine of redemption both in Scripture and in theology is an important aspect of the work of God in salvation. Though it is difficult to find any one term which is comprehensive of the entire work of God on behalf of sinful men, if the term salvation be understood as the comprehensive term of the complete work of God in time and eternity for man, then redemption is particularly concerned with that aspect of salvation which was accomplished in the death of Christ.

Inasmuch as the historic concept of redemption has been subject to considerable criticism in modern theology, it is most important in the study of the death of Christ to determine the precise Scriptural teaching on the act of redemption. A rich linguistic background is afforded in the Old Testament and upon this the New Testament builds its more complete doctrine. In general the study concerns itself with two major groups of words, namely  $\alpha\gammaο\rho\alpha\zeta\omega$  and its derivatives and  $\lambdaυτ\rho\omega$  and its cognate forms. A third term  $\pi\epsilon\rho\iota\piοι\epsilon\omega$  adds a confirming statement in Acts 20:28. From the study of these words and how they are used in the Scriptures a solid doctrine of redemption in Christ can be erected. The etymological study in this instance is prerequisite to the theological conclusions which follow.

### The Idea of Purchase

*The use of  $\alpha\gammaο\rho\alpha\zeta\omega$ .* This basic expression for redemption in Scripture is a verb derived from  $\alpha\gammaο\rho\alpha$ , i.e., a forum or a market place, and therefore means simply *to buy* or *purchase*.<sup>1</sup> Ordinarily it has reference to simple purchases of items in the market place, but in six instances in the Bible Christians are said to be redeemed or bought in reference to the death of Christ (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23 ; 2 Pet 2:1; Rev 5:9; 14:3-4 ).

In the Septuagint and in general Greek usage the idea of purchase is the common concept of  $\alpha\gammaο\rho\alpha\zeta\omega$ . It does not seem to be used in a theological sense in the Old Testament. Though not found in connection with the purchase and freedom of slaves, Morris after Deissmann believes that this idea may be involved, because of the use of  $\tau\iota\eta$ , meaning "price," with this verb in 1 Corinthians 6:20 and 7:23 which is a common word used in the purchase of slaves.<sup>2</sup>

Based on Greek usage, therefore, it leads to the concept that Christians are bought by Christ and are therefore His slaves. Hence, the conclusion of Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: "Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have from God? and ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body." The same thought is borne out in 1 Corinthians 7:23: "Ye were bought with a price; become not bond-servants of men." The teaching therefore is that Christ in the act of redemption purchased Christians and made them His slaves. They were therefore not to obey other masters in that they were bought at such a high cost with a view to accomplishing the will of God.

In 2 Peter 2:1 the same expression is used in describing false prophets as those "who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction." The denial of the fact of the purchase of Christ is therefore described as a heresy of such proportions as to bring its teachers under the swift judgment of God. The blasphemy of their false doctrine is seen in the context of rejection of the loving redemption provided in Christ.

The fact that believers are in a special relationship to God as those purchased by the death of Christ is made the theme of the

new song that is sung in heaven recorded in Revelation 5:9: “Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.” Here specifically the death of Christ is the price that was paid. Offensive as is this truth to the false prophets mentioned in 2 Peter 2:1, it is the clear teaching of the Word of God and puts redeemed man in a special relationship as being purchased by that which is of infinite value.

In Revelation 14:3-4, the one hundred and forty-four thousand are twice declared to be “purchased” with special regard to their holy calling as those who will follow the Lamb and be “the firstfruits unto God and unto the Lamb” (Rev 14:4). The emphasis in all of these passages therefore is on purchase through the death and shed blood of Christ with the resulting relationship that the believer is a bondsman to Jesus Christ and obligated to do His will.

Εξαγορα•ζω. This verb, found four times in the New Testament (Gal 3:13; 4:5 ; Eph 5:16; Col 4:5) is obviously α•γορα•ζω with the added prefix ε•ξ, meaning *to buy back* or *to buy from*, in which sense it is used in Galatians 3:13 and Galatians 4:5.<sup>3</sup> In Colossians 4:5 and Ephesians 5:16 it is used with the meaning of *buying up the time*, i.e., making the most of it in view of the Lord’s return.<sup>4</sup>

In Galatians three the statement is made that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us. In the context, in Galatians 3:10 the thought is brought out, based on a quotation from Deuteronomy 27:26, that everyone is cursed who does not perfectly keep the law. The argument is that the law’s effect on man is that of cursing him because of incomplete obedience. No man is able to live up to the law perfectly. In addition to this argument, Paul points out that justification is by faith and not by the law in any event. As a curse rests upon everyone who does not comply fully with the law, it was necessary for Christ to die and take the curse upon Himself. This was fulfilled in keeping with Deuteronomy 21:23 that the curse is upon one who hangs upon a tree. This familiar concept of substitution is imbedded in the Hebraic understanding of a sacrifice as is illustrated in the lambs which died on the altar and the scapegoat which was freed. Note should be taken of the fact that υ•πε•ρ is used in the expression “a curse for us” in Galatians 3:13. This seems in this context clearly to be used in a substitutionary sense. Morris cites Delitzsch, and even Bushnell and Manson, as agreeing that substitution is the inescapable meaning of this text.<sup>5</sup>

The curse, however, is not a curse of God, but the curse of the broken law. Moreover, in the ultimate administration it is God who judges Christ as bearing the penalty of sin, and it is not sufficient to refer this simply to the government of God as did Grotius. It is difficult even for a liberal theologian to escape the idea that here the death of Christ is presented both as penal and substitutionary. Galatians 4:4-5 gives added support in stating that Christ was “born of a woman, born under the law” (Gal 4:5).

It is evident that if α•γορα•ζω emphasizes the thought of purchase and resulting ownership as relating the believer to God, εξαγορα•ζω is a more intensive form which has the idea of not only being bought, but being bought *out of* the market or bought *back* from a previous condition of obligation to the law. It is upon this platform that the resulting idea of being free from obligation is built. The purpose of God was that through the ε•ξαγορα•ζω Gentile believers might receive the blessing in Christ promised all nations through Abraham and might in addition be given the promise of the Spirit through faith (Gal 3:14).

*The use of περιποιη•ω.* This word is found three times in the New Testament (Luke 17:33; Acts 20:28; 1 Tim 3:13). Only one reference, namely, Acts 20:28, is used in reference to Christ. Generally speaking, the word means *to save* or *to preserve one’s self*, i.e., *preserve his own life* (Luke 17:33) or *to acquire, obtain, or gain for one’s self* as in Acts 20:28 and 1 Timothy 3:13.<sup>6</sup> In Acts 20:28 the exhortation is given: “Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood.” In contrast to the use of α•γορα•ζω which would emphasize the idea of purchase, the verb used here has more the thought of the result of the action, that the church has been “acquired.” The idea is therefore one of possession rather than emphasis on the act of purchase. This is also true in 1 Timothy 3:13.

The additional expression “with his own blood” identifies the act of purchase as related to the death of Christ and therefore supports the idea of substitutionary atonement but also adds what is the main point of the apostle here, that the church of the Lord is especially precious because of the high price which was paid. The bishops are entrusted with that which cost God the death of His own Son. The combined force of ἀγοραζω, εξαγοραζω, and περιποιεω is that of (1) purchase, (2) of being bought off the market, not subject to resale, and (3) of a possession regarded as precious in the sight of the Lord.

## The Idea of Freedom from Bondage

*The use of λυτροω.* One of the most important aspects of redemption is revealed in the Bible through the use of λυτροω and its cognate forms which have the meaning of *freed by paying a ransom, redeemed, set free, rescued.*<sup>7</sup> The verb form is found three times in the New Testament (Luke 24:21; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 1:18). The first of these references was a statement of the disciples on the road to Emmaus that they had hoped that Christ would “redeem Israel.” The word here is used clearly in the thought of releasing them from their bondage to Rome and introducing the period of blessing of which the Old Testament prophets spoke. To the disciples it therefore seemed impossible that these promises of deliverance should be fulfilled now that Christ died on the cross. Leon Morris somewhat misses the point on this when he says: “The passage is not of first importance, for our purposes; for clearly a redemption rendered impossible by the cross can tell us little about the redemption effected by the cross.”<sup>8</sup> The Scriptures here only record the thought of the disciples which as a matter of fact was wrong. The cross was going to be the steppingstone to the ultimate deliverance of Israel, not only from their enemies but from the bondage of sin.

More specifically, however, in Titus 2:14 the basic idea of being set free by a ransom is revealed. Christ “gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works.” Here the ransom is that of Christ giving Himself for us (υπερ υμων). The believer is set free by the ransom paid by Christ on the cross. The expression “gave himself for us,” though not speaking specifically of His death, is nevertheless a clear reference to it.

The final instance in the New Testament, 1 Peter 1:18, is explicit on this matter. Here it is stated: “Ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ.” Here clearly set forth is the concept of ransom by the death of Christ, something that was impossible by payment of silver and gold. By it the believer is set free from his former obligation and former vain life. Only an obvious prejudice against the idea of substitution can erase it from this passage, as it would be difficult to state it more explicitly than it is found here.

*The use of λυτρον.* Twice in the New Testament the noun form λυτρον is used (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45). In both instances the word is properly translated *ransom* and refers to the death of Christ. According to Matthew 20:28: “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” Mark 10:45 is a parallel reference: “For the Son of man also came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” In both instances there is clear mention that the death of Christ constituted the ransom by which the sinner is set free. The New Testament usage is in entire harmony with the frequent use in Greek literature as a whole and in the Septuagint where it was a common term for the ransom money paid for the manumission of slaves.<sup>9</sup>

*The use of αντιλυτρον.* Mention should be made of αντιλυτρον occurring only in 1 Timothy 2:6 where Christ is said to be the one who “gave himself a ransom for all.” The αντι emphasizes the substitutionary character of the ransom.

*The use of απολυτρωσις.* One of the most common and definitive terms for redemption is the use of the word απολυτρωσις ten times in the New Testament (Luke 21:28; Rom 3:24; 8:23 ; 1 Cor 1:30; Eph 1:7, 14; 4:30 ; Col 1:14; Heb 9:15; 11:35 ). The frequent use of this term in the New Testament is somewhat accentuated by the fact that outside of the Bible it is rarely used. The verb form απολυτροω is not found in the Bible at all, and only eight times in other literature.<sup>10</sup> It is obvious that απολυτρωσις is a compound form somewhat more intensive than λυτροω or λυω. It may be defined as *set free, released, pardoned, dismissed, sent away.*<sup>11</sup> It is not difficult to establish that in all of its instances it

has the concept of a ransom being paid with resultant deliverance of the one in difficulty.

Of the ten instances in which ἀπολυτρωσις is found in the New Testament, all but one are clear references to redemption in Christ and fully substantiate the idea of deliverance by payment of a price. Romans 3:24 states: “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ.” Here the great fact of justification without cost to the believer through the grace of God is made possible by the ransom price, i.e., “the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” This is specified in verse twenty-five as being accomplished by the propitiation of Christ through faith in or by His blood. The payment of the ransom price is a declaration of the righteousness of God in forgiving sins in the Old Testament as well as in justifying the believer in the New Testament.

Almost identically the same thought is expressed in Ephesians 1:7: “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.” Here again the ransom price of His blood accomplishes the freedom and deliverance of the sinner in difficulty, though Abbott attempts to evade this.<sup>12</sup> In Hebrews 9:15 Christ is declared to be “the mediator of a new covenant. that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.” As in the two former references, the ransom price has been paid in the death of Christ and Christ Himself is constituted the mediator of a new covenant thereby.

Though less explicit, other references confirm the same concept. 1 Corinthians 1:30 cites redemption as that which comes to us because we are in Christ which is a corollary of righteousness and sanctification. Colossians 1:14 links redemption with our forgiveness of sins because we are in Christ. Several references may be construed eschatologically as a future deliverance stemming from the past redemption accomplished by Christ. Luke 21:28 refers to the fact that at the second coming “your redemption draweth nigh.” Romans 8:23 states that we are “waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our bodies.” This seems to refer to resurrection of the body.

A similar reference to resurrection is found in Ephesians 4:30 where it mentions that we are sealed by the Holy Spirit “unto the day of redemption,” i.e., our deliverance from this world into the world to come through resurrection or translation. Ephesians 1:14 may be construed in the same sense where the Holy Spirit is referred to as “an earnest of our inheritance, unto the redemption of God’s own possession, unto the praise of his glory.” Leon Morris<sup>13</sup> thinks this should be interpreted in the same light as Ephesians 1:7 which speaks of redemption through the blood of Christ. The context, however, would seem to point to the future aspect when God’s own possession now sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise is fully delivered in the presence of the Lord. Only Hebrews 11:35, speaking of those who would not accept deliverance by denial of their faith, seems to have no direct connection with the death of Christ. All the other references with varied force refer either to the death of Christ or its result, i.e., the ransom paid with the resulting deliverance. The clear force of substitution involved in all of these instances gives added emphasis to previous revelation of this truth and should assure the believer of the great accomplishment wrought by Christ in His death.

*Use of λυτρωσις.* Three remaining passages should be mentioned where the noun λυτρωσις is used (Luke 1:68; 2:38 ; Heb 9:12). Of these only Hebrews 9:12 is of significance in the doctrine of redemption. In a much discussed passage Christ is declared to have obtained redemption through His blood: “Nor yet through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption.” The emphasis here is on the cost of redemption which is declared to be eternal. Like the high priest of old who entered into the holy place after offering sacrifice on the altar, so Christ, having offered His own blood and in virtue of His finished work, entered into the holy place. His entrance signifies that an eternal redemption has been wrought. The use of λυτρωσις here instead of ἀπολυτρωσις is not especially significant, though it seems to imply more emphasis on the deliverance itself than the resulting state.

## Conclusion

The study of redemption in Christ in the New Testament reveals a clear teaching that Christ by act of substitution in His death on the cross paid the ransom price and redeemed the enslaved sinner from his sinful position before God. Christ’s

death constituted an act of purchase in which the sinner is removed from his former bondage in sin by payment of the ransom price. The act of redemption takes the purchased possession out of the market and effects his release. Scholars may reject the New Testament teaching if they will, but the revelation of redemption is written clearly in the Scriptures.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Arndt and Gingrich, *op. cit.*, s.v.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 54. Cf. Delitzsch, *Commentary on Hebrews*, II. 426; Bushnell, *The Vicarious Sacrifice*, p. 121; Manson, *Jesus the Messiah*, p. 165.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Arndt and Gingrich, *op. cit.*, s.v.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v.

<sup>8</sup> Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Arndt and Gingrich, *op. cit.*, s.v.; Deissmann, *Light From the Ancient East*, p. 327; Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-24.

<sup>10</sup> Morris cites Warfield's eight references, cf. *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> Arndt and Gingrich, *ibid.*, s.v.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-40.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

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# The Person and Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

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## Chapter 10

### Propitiation

Propitiation is the biblical doctrine embodying the concept that the death of Christ fully satisfied the demands of a righteous God in respect to judgment upon the sinner. The doctrine is not found with great frequency in the New Testament, the word *propitiation* appearing only three times in the Authorized Version (Rom 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10 ) and four times in the American Standard Version (Heb 2:17 added). One might be misled into the unwarranted assumption that this is a minor doctrine of the New Testament. A closer study, however, reveals four different Greek words related to this subject and a number of other passages where the idea is contained in the thought.

The four New Testament words related to this doctrine are all of the same root. The verb ἰλασکوμαι is used in Luke 18:13 in the prayer of the publican, which translated literally reads: “God, be propitiated for me, the sinner.” Hebrews 2:17 refers to Christ becoming our High Priest “to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” The noun form ἰλαστήριον, one of the most important references, is translated “a propitiation” in Romans 3:25 and “the mercy seat” in Hebrews 9:5. Another noun form ἰλαστός occurs twice (1 John 2:2; 4:10 ) in both of which passages it is stated that Christ is “the propitiation for our sins.” A fourth word ἰλεως is found in Matthew 16:22 in relation to the idiom of Peter: “Be it far from thee, Lord,” and in Hebrews 8:12 where it is translated “merciful.” Neither of these two instances apply directly to the doctrine of propitiation in Christ.

The doctrine of propitiation in theology has been complicated, first, by disagreement as to its actual meaning, i.e., does it mean (1) to expiate, (2) to reconcile, or (3) to satisfy? Modern writers have tended to dispute the traditional orthodox interpretation of the doctrine of propitiation by affirming that a loving God does not need the death of His Son to satisfy a principle of righteousness. They either argue that a God of love does not require satisfaction for sin or that the word *propitiation* itself as used in the Old and New Testaments should not be thus construed. The interpretation of propitiation pivots somewhat on the theological concept of the wrath of God in both pagan and Old Testament usage, and this must be defined before the New Testament doctrine of the wrath of God can be properly discussed.

### Propitiation in the Old Testament

As Leon Morris demonstrates, most scholars recognize that in pagan usage the concept of propitiation is clearly that of appeasing a deity. Morris cites Smeaton concerning ἰλαστός, “the uniform acceptance of the word in classical Greek, when applied to the Deity, is the means of appeasing God, or averting His anger; and not a single instance to the contrary occurs in the whole Greek literature.”<sup>1</sup> Modern writers such as C. H. Dodd, however, feel that this concept is a crude pre-Biblical point of view in which pagan worshippers attempted to placate a vindictive, arbitrary, and capricious God. Such a concept they feel is unworthy of the God of the Scriptures. Even orthodox writers such as Westcott feel that the Old Testament usage of propitiation is different from that found in non-Biblical writings.

In the effort to escape the idea of expiation of a vengeful deity, C. H. Dodd, however, seems to go too far in his attempt to eliminate the concept of the wrath of God entirely from both the Old and New Testaments. Leon Morris in his evaluation of Dodd’s discussion concludes: “However, when we have rendered our full tribute to the work of this great scholar we must be asked to be forgiven for wondering whether the last word has yet been said. We readily agree that pagan ideas of wrath and propitiation are absent from the biblical view of God, but Dodd seems to say that all ideas of wrath and propitiation are

absent from it.”<sup>2</sup> Morris goes on to demonstrate that the wrath of God is an important doctrine of the Old Testament, finding over five hundred eighty occurrences of this concept. He summarizes the Old Testament concept of the wrath of God in these words: “There is a consistency about the wrath of God in the Old Testament. It is no capricious passion, but the stern reaction of the divine nature to evil in man. It is aroused only and inevitably by sin, which may be thought of in general terms (Job 21:20; Jer 21:12; Ezek 24:13), or may be categorized more exactly as the shedding of blood (Ezek 16:38; 24:8), adultery (Ezek 23:25), violence (Ezek 8:18), covetousness (Jer 6:11), revenge (Ezek 25:17), afflicting widows and orphans (Exod 22:23 f.), taking brethren captive (2 Chron 28:11-13), etc. Wrath comes upon Israel because of the evil of Jeroboam as repeated by Jehoahaz (2 Kings 13:3), and because of the evil of Manasseh (2 Kings 23:26), while Moses feared that the desire of the two and a half tribes not to pass over Jordan would have a similar effect (Num 32:14). Profaning the sabbath arouses wrath (Neh 13:18), which comes also upon men who ‘have not told the truth about’ God (Job 42:7, Moffatt), and Gideon feared that his repeated testing of the Lord would also cause God’s anger (Judges 6:39).”<sup>3</sup>

In view of the abundant evidence in the Old Testament describing God as a deity who must bring judgment upon the sinner, a serious question may be raised as to whether the attempts of modern writers to eliminate the idea of the wrath of God entirely from the Old Testament is a justified procedure. It is more accurate to conclude that the doctrine of the righteousness of God is coupled with the love and mercy of God in the Old Testament. The harmony established between these attributes by the doctrine of satisfaction for sin is embodied in propitiation.

Leon Morris summarizes his extensive research in the doctrine of propitiation in the Septuagint by agreeing on the one hand with “the verdict of such scholars as Westcott and Dodd in their demonstration that in the Old Testament there is not the usual pagan sense of a crude propitiation of an angry god.”<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, he feels they have gone too far when they say in effect “when the LXX translators used ‘propitiation’ they do not mean ‘propitiation,’ it is surely time to call a halt. No sensible man uses one word when he means another, and in view of the otherwise invariable Greek use it would seem impossible for anyone in the first century to have used one of the ἰλασκόα group without conveying to his readers some idea of propitiation.”<sup>5</sup>

Morris further concludes, based on Old Testament usage: “Where there is sin, the Old Testament teaches, that there is wrath; but this does not mean that all men are to be consumed, for that wrath is the wrath of a loving father Who yearns for His children to come to Him.”<sup>6</sup> The Old Testament concept of propitiation, therefore, elevates it above the crude pagan idea of placating an unreasonable deity and introduces a high concept of divine righteousness which is satisfied by a propitiation from a loving God who desires to provide a proper basis by which the sinner can come to Himself. If this is the proper understanding of the Old Testament doctrine, it provides a broad platform upon which the New Testament concept can be understood.

## Propitiation in the New Testament

The New Testament doctrine of propitiation is an extension of the Old Testament doctrine, but with the tremendous added revelation embodied in Jesus Christ, His Person, and His work. In the New Testament the same God as found in the Old Testament is revealed, a God of infinite righteousness who is also a God of infinite love. Though the term “wrath” (Greek, οργη) does not occur frequently in the New Testament, it is found in such significant contexts as Romans 1:18 which is a logical introduction to the doctrine of propitiation found in Romans 3:25. C. H. Dodd is certainly ignoring much evidence to the contrary when he attempts to eliminate the idea of wrath in the New Testament. It is expressly mentioned in Mark 3:5; Luke 21:23; Matthew 3:7; Luke 3:7; John 3:36; Romans 9:22; Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 3:6; Revelation 6:16; 11:18; 14:10; 16:19, and 19:15.

The word θυος (meaning anger or wrath) is linked with the idea of wrath in Revelation 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19, and 19:15. Other references dealing with the anger and wrath of God are Romans 2:5; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; Ephesians 2:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2:16; 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, and Hebrews 12:29. In addition to this, the New Testament abounds with warnings of divine judgment upon sinners who do not avail themselves of the mercy of God.

The use of ἱλαστήριον. One of the most important references to propitiation in the New Testament is found in Romans 3:25 where it is stated of Christ Jesus: “Whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood, to show his righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God.” The only other instance of this particular word in the New Testament is found in Hebrews 9:5 where it is translated “mercy seat.” Because of the Hebrews usage, it has been argued that propitiation in Romans 3:25 should be considered the place of sacrifice rather than the sacrifice itself. From this have emerged two concepts in the interpretation of Romans 3:25: (1) the literal view, that the meaning is the place of sacrifice where blood is sprinkled to make what was a place of judgment a mercy seat; (2) the concept that propitiation in Romans 3:25 has the sacrifice itself in view rather than the idea of a place where sacrifice is made.

Though it is difficult to determine with finality which of these two concepts is intended in Romans 3, the weight of conservative scholarship seems to be in favor of the second based on the context. All agree that the word is not a technical one which always means the mercy seat. The usage in Hebrews, therefore, is not the only possible usage, but one of many. It is probable that Hebrews was written after the Epistle to the Romans. Furthermore, the typology of Hebrews is not at all mentioned prior to Romans 3:25 in the epistle. The meaning of Romans 3:25, therefore, must stand upon its immediate context. The argument begins in Romans 1:18, and upon the revelation of sin, the doctrine of redemption and propitiation in Romans 3 is erected.

The argument of Paul in this section is an expansion of the doctrine of justification by faith. He points out the necessity of it being based upon the wrath of God against sin in all forms which is developed in Romans 1:18-3:20. The conclusion is that there can be no justification apart from faith. The doctrine of justification itself then is unfolded beginning in Romans 3:22 where it is revealed to be “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe.” Justification is through redemption (v. 24) accomplished by Christ. In this connection, Christ is presented as “a propitiation” made effective through faith by or “in his blood.”

It would seem from the argument of Romans, then, that what Paul had in mind was a general reference to propitiation or satisfaction by the death of Christ rather than to a place in which propitiation was accomplished. The alternative view of a place however has continued to intrigue modern scholars and is supported by frequent usages in the Septuagint of the word for the golden top of the mercy seat. Numbered among the adherents of this view are such writers as C. I. Scofield, T. W. Manson, and Karl Barth. The expression “in his blood” which immediately follows the reference to propitiation would seem, however, to favor the concept that Christ is here referred to as the means of propitiation rather than the place of propitiation. The resulting idea in either case, however, is that of substitution and sacrifice, the shedding of blood accomplishing the satisfaction of the divine righteousness of God.

The word ἱλασμός, found twice in the New Testament, contributes to the doctrine by referring to Christ as “the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:2; 4:10). Modern authors such as C. H. Dodd have objected to the translation “propitiation” here as found in the Authorized Version and the American Standard Version on the ground of their theory that the Bible does not use propitiation in the same sense as in extra-Biblical literature. Morris cites Dodd in his discussion on this point as saying: “The common rendering ‘propitiation’ is illegitimate here as elsewhere.”<sup>7</sup> It has been previously pointed out that Dodd, speaking representatively for contemporary scholars who object to the traditional concept of propitiation, is partly right in that the Bible does use propitiation in a different sense than that of the pagans as it does not speak of appeasing a vengeful God. Biblical terminology in both the Old and New Testaments, however, does not sustain a complete departure from the basic concept of propitiation. It is rather that propitiation is the satisfaction of a God who is making just and righteous demands on the sinner based on His own holy character. These demands are met by the offering of His own Son on the cross.

An interesting commentary on Dodd’s point of view is offered by a comparison of modern translations in these two passages. The Revised Standard Version substitutes the word *expiation* for propitiation, taking over the definition from pagan writers without variation and using a word that is somewhat stronger than the word *propitiation* itself. The New English Bible goes to the other extreme and substitutes the word *remedy* which is a much weaker word than propitiation and begs the question completely as far as theological definition is concerned.

Taking everything into consideration, there is no good reason for denying the use of propitiation understood in its Biblical sense of satisfying the proper demands of a righteous God for judgment on sin. It is significant that in the context of 1 John 2:2 God is referred to as righteous and in 1 John 1:9 is declared to be “faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins.” In the verse itself (1 John 2:2) the problem of sin and its judgment is immediately before us as in the preceding verse it is recorded: “And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” Here again Christ is referred to as the righteous One dealing with the righteous Father as our propitiation. It can hardly be disputed that the righteousness of God is the question and propitiation is the answer, and this on the highest possible Biblical plane.

Further light is cast upon this idea in 1 John 4:10 where propitiation is linked with the love of God: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” The two facts that lift propitiation in the Bible above the pagan concepts in extra-Biblical literature are first of all that it is not the question of satisfying a vengeful God, but satisfying a God who is just and righteous and holy in all His dealings. Second, such a God, while on the one hand demanding complete satisfaction of His righteousness, is the same God who because of His love for lost mankind sent His Son to be that propitiation. The majesty and wonder of the plan of God in salvation as embodied in the attributes of righteousness and love as they meet in the propitiation of Christ is at the heart of Christian orthodoxy and Biblical revelation, and before such a revelation of grace objections to the idea of propitiation pale. It is not unfair to say that the concept today, even though supported by reputable scholars, is refuted by the doctrine of sin and condemnation as well as by the necessity for the righteousness of God being satisfied before love is free to operate. The supreme demonstration of the love of God as well as the righteousness of God is found in Jesus Christ who in love offered Himself and shed His blood, thereby making himself a proper propitiation and entitling Him to be the advocate of the sinner.

Another important word, ἱλασκειν, is used only once in the Bible to refer to the work of Christ (Heb 2:17). Here it is stated in connection with the priesthood of Christ that He was the priest who made propitiation for the people. In the context it is speaking of the fact that as a man He died and as a man He suffered in becoming the author of our salvation (Heb 2:10). This is said to be fitting in Hebrews 2:17: “Wherefore it behooved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”

Considerable discussion has been aroused by the fact that the word for “the sins” (τας ααρτιας) is found in the accusative after the verb *to propitiate*. To avoid the awkward expression to propitiate the sins, it is changed to what seems to be a normal translation “to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” With this the Revised Standard Version agrees in its translation “to make expiation for the sins of the people” and the New English Bible disagrees by making sins the direct object of the verb “to expiate the sins of the people.” As Leon Morris has shown in his thorough discussion of this, based on Old Testament and extra-Biblical usage, there is no good reason for avoiding the conclusions embodied in the translation of the American Standard Version that it is an accusative of general respect, i.e., that the propitiation is in respect to sin but actually objectively directed toward God and His righteousness. It may be concluded therefore that this passage confirms what has been previously revealed in other references to propitiation, namely, that Christ is the answer to the problem of the sinner who is justly under the condemnation of God. Christ is His propitiation, i.e., He satisfied the righteous demands of God completely.

A second reference is found to the same word in the New Testament in Luke 18:13 in the famous prayer of the publican: “God be thou merciful to me a sinner.” This does not refer, of course, to the propitiation in Christ, but is used in the same sense, namely, that the publican desires that somehow God will forgive his sins through a proper propitiation. The verse should be translated: “God be thou propitiated to me, a sinner.”

The word ἱλεως, found twice in the New Testament (Matt 16:22; Heb 8:12), does not refer specifically to propitiation in Christ. In Matthew the expression is idiomatic where Peter says: “Be it far from thee, Lord,” in relation to Christ’s prophecy that He will be killed and raised the third day. Literally it could be translated: “May there be propitiation for thee, Lord.”

In Hebrews 8:12 the word is found in a quotation of Jeremiah 31:34 and is translated: “For I will be merciful to their iniquities,” i.e., “I will be propitiated in respect to their iniquities.” This usage does not throw any additional light on the general doctrine of propitiation though it seems to be in keeping with the doctrine previously established.

Taken as a whole, the doctrine of propitiation as revealed in these New Testament references seems fully to sustain the orthodox concept that Christ in His death on the cross through the shedding of His blood and the sacrifice of His life constituted a satisfaction of divine justice which God accepts on behalf of the sinner making possible the manifestation of His love toward men and bestowal of righteousness through justification by faith. The necessity of such a propitiation is demonstrated by the sin of the race (Rom 3:9, 23; 5:12 ), the righteousness of God (Ps 119:137; 145:17 ; Rom 3:25-26), and the historic fact that Christ actually died for sinful man (Isa 53:5-6; 1 Cor 15:3; Gal 1:4; 3:13 ; Eph 5:2; Heb 9:22, 28; 1 Pet 1:18-19; 2:24 ; Rev 1:5).

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<sup>1</sup> Smeaton, *The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement*, p. 455, cited by Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> Morris, *ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>7</sup> Morris, *ibid.*, p. 178, citing Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks*, p. 95.

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# The Person and Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

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## Chapter 11

### Character and Results of Propitiation

It has been long considered an essential doctrine of orthodox Christian theology that Christ in some sense died as a substitutional sacrifice for sin. The concept of substitution is inherent in the Scriptures in relation to the sacrificial system of the Old Testament and of course is revealed pre-eminently in the death of Christ on the cross in the New Testament.

*Substitution in the Old Testament.* The idea of substitution is prominent in the Old Testament offerings though it remained for the New Testament to give the full revelation of the doctrine of propitiation. The viewpoint of Scripture seems to be that the Old Testament offerings were only a temporary provision, a typical symbol of the propitiation that was to be fulfilled by the sacrifice of Christ. Old Testament sacrifices therefore were imperfect in their revelation of the satisfaction of divine justice embodied in the principle of propitiation. All of the Old Testament offerings which prefigured Christ have the element of substitution. The nonsweet savor offerings, consisting principally of the sin offering and the trespass offering, were representations of Christ satisfying the demands of God by bearing the guilt and judgment of our sin (John 1:29). The sweet savor offering represented Christ satisfying the demands of God by presenting His merit for us (Eph 5:2). In each case the offering was identified with the offerer by some religious act and the sacrifice was offered on behalf of another, usually the one who brought the sacrifice to the priest.

*Substitution in the New Testament.* The sacrifice of Christ, while fulfilling the Old Testament principle of substitution and the anticipation of propitiation, stands in contrast to the Old Testament doctrine in several particulars. (1) In contrast to the many offerings in the Old Testament, Christ was offered once and for all (Heb 9:28). (2) Christ's sacrifice was a complete and an eternal satisfaction for sin, in contrast to the Old Testament offerings which did not offer any permanent satisfaction (Rom 3:25; Heb 10:4). (3) In the Old Testament the victims were animals, unintelligent and involuntary substitutes, while in the sacrifice of Christ one was offered who was willing to die and who intelligently accepted being a sacrificial substitute for sinners. The fact that Christ was a willing sacrifice prompted by the love of God, both in His offering by the Father and in His own willingness to die, lifts the Biblical doctrine of propitiation far above the heathen concept.

*Objections to the doctrine of substitution in propitiation.* Many objections have been raised by scholars of this day against the idea of substitution in relation to the death of Christ which in turn have been answered by conservative scholarship at length—arguments which can only be briefly reviewed here. It has been argued (1) that there is no need for propitiation because God is a God of love whose nature is to be forgiving; (2) that forgiveness purchased is not true forgiveness. Along this line Henry Sloane Coffin argues: "Certain widely used hymns still perpetuate the theory that God pardons sinners because Christ purchased that pardon by His obedience and suffering. But a forgiveness which is paid for is not forgiveness. The God of the prophets and psalmists, the God and Father of Jesus' own teaching, forgives graciously all who turn to Him in penitence.... The cross of Christ is not a means of procuring forgiveness: the Father waits to be gracious."<sup>1</sup>

Such objections of course are founded upon a concept of God which is not afforded in the Scriptures. It is true that God is a God of love and to this the Scriptures give abundant testimony. Contemporary thinkers are unwilling to face the fact that God is also revealed to be a God of righteousness manifested in His many judgments in the Old Testament and in countless pronouncements that He must judge sin. The argument that God is a God of love and therefore not a God of righteousness is playing one attribute against another in a way that is contrary to Biblical revelation. nature of atonement is brought into the very phraseology of Scripture as the analysis of the Biblical term just made clearly shows. To 'cover sin' is to cover it from the sight of God, not the sinner. To 'propitiate' is to propitiate God, not man."<sup>2</sup> Further discussion on this point will be

proper in consideration of the doctrine of reconciliation where most of the confusion arises.

## Results of Propitiation

*God is justified in forgiving sin.* The history of Christian theology has demonstrated that it is difficult for sinful man to realize the absolute necessity of a holy God judging sin. Propitiation is God's answer to this problem arising from His own heart of love. Through the death of Christ God has received satisfaction in full for every sin. On the basis of this sacrifice He can freely and justly forgive sin because the penalty has been paid. Forgiveness as found in God is not an emotion, nor is it directly a matter of expression of love and affection, but is rather one of divine justice. God is acting justly in recognizing that the judgment upon sin has been accomplished by the death of His Son. At the same time God acts in complete harmony and satisfaction in respect to His love which prompted the gift of His Son and the whole plan of redemption. The basis of the gospel invitation and of all divine mercy is found in the fact that the death of Christ is a propitiation for our sins.

*God is justified in bestowing righteousness.* The act of propitiation not only permits God to impute all sin to Christ, but also makes possible the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the sinner. This is sometimes related to the sweet-savor aspect of Christ's offering as foreshadowed in the sweet-savor sacrifice in the Old Testament. The merit of Christ now has become the possession of the believer. In keeping with this freedom not only to forgive, but bestow righteousness, God can justify the sinner, and can proceed unhindered in all the program of salvation and sanctification. God on the basis of the death of Christ can take the foulest sinner and make him as pure in holiness as His own Son. This is the foundation of all effective gospel preaching which on the one hand fully sustains the concept that God is holy, and on the other that such a God is able to welcome sinners to Himself.

*God is justified in bestowing all grace on sinners.* Not only is forgiveness and imputation of righteousness possible for a propitiated God, but there can come into the realm of the believer's possession an experience of the full blessings of God, though totally undeserved. All the blessings of God as manifested in spiritual enablement and ministry, prayer, fruit, spiritual food, illumination, service, sanctification, and glorification are possible. While the full measure of divine blessing is reserved for the eternal state, it is a fundamental factor of the spiritual life that God stands ready right now to bless abundantly those who come to Him. There is no withholding by God of any blessing that can be given. The doctrine of propitiation properly understood may be regarded as the open door to greater understanding of the person of God and His attitude of love and grace toward the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Sloane Coffin, *The Meaning of the Cross*, pp. 118, 121.

<sup>2</sup> W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, II, 394.

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# The Person and Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

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## Chapter 12

### Reconciliation

Few doctrines are more important in a total theology than the doctrine of reconciliation. Though based on comparatively few specific references, reconciliation has been hailed as a doctrine of “vital concern both for doctrinal clarity and pulpit vitality.”<sup>1</sup> Vincent Taylor speaks of reconciliation as “the best New Testament word to describe the purpose of the Atonement....”<sup>2</sup> Referring to Paul’s discussion in 2 Corinthians 5, Taylor comments: “All through this section one cannot fail to be impressed with the immense importance St. Paul attaches to this message and to his sense of being divinely commissioned to declare it.”<sup>3</sup> Leon Morris introduces the subject of reconciliation by quoting T. H. Hughes to the effect that “in the New Testament the basic idea of the atonement is that of reconciliation.”<sup>4</sup> The importance attached to the doctrine of reconciliation not only justifies its discussion, but is also the occasion for major differences of opinion as to its meaning. Few doctrines have been more divergently described within orthodoxy than the doctrine of reconciliation, and, as subsequent discussion will show, the difficulty lies in definition. If limited to what the New Testament actually states about reconciliation, the doctrine is a facet but not the whole. If the doctrine is encumbered with other aspects of soteriology which are logically necessary to accomplish reconciliation, it becomes a more general word with a broader definition.

It is the thesis of this presentation that the doctrine of reconciliation is properly the work of God for man in which God undertakes to transform man and make possible and actual his eternal fellowship with a holy God. Two major aspects will be observed. First, provisionally reconciliation was accomplished once and for all by Christ on the cross with the result that the whole world was potentially reconciled to God. Second, reconciliation becomes actual and experiential in the person of believers in Christ who are reconciled to God at the time of their salvation. It may be seen, therefore, that while reconciliation does not embrace all of the work of Christ, it depends upon it. Its prerequisites are the work of God in Christ in providing redemption and propitiation, on the basis of which man is justified, regenerated, and made a new creature in Christ.

### Reconciliation in the Old Testament

As most treatises of reconciliation recognize, the Old Testament doctrine of reconciliation adds little to the New Testament. Several words in the Old Testament are commonly translated reconcile such as kaphar (cf. Lev 6:30; 8:15 ; 16:20 ; Ezek 45:15, 17, 20; Dan 9:24). It is a common word used of spreading pitch on the ark (Gen 6:14), but translated, when in the piel, to mean *to obtain forgiveness*, and hence *to reconcile*. Mention should also be made of chata translated *reconciliation* in 2 Chronicles 29:24 and ratsah found in 1 Samuel 29:4, translated *reconcile*. These two words mean, respectively *to bear the blame*, in reference to the sin offering, and *to make one’s self pleasing, to obtain favor*. The Old Testament allusions actually add little, either by way of background or definition, to the New Testament doctrine. What is true of the Old Testament carries over into the Septuagint where only rarely the Greek words found in the New Testament for reconciliation are found and such instances as occur are not especially significant as Morris points out.<sup>5</sup> In the literature of Judaism, also discussed by Leon Morris, little can be learned except that there was widespread understanding that man could not be reconciled to God unless something was done to appease the wrath of God. Such reconciliation seldom rose above an anthropomorphic concept of two people in disagreement resolving their difficulties. Though, as Morris states: “The best Rabbinic thought had risen to the concept of God Himself bringing about the reconciliation....”<sup>6</sup> Taken as a whole, the doctrine of the reconciliation before the New Testament is not specific nor precise in its theology and to some extent confuses rather than clarifies the issues involved.

## Survey of New Testament Usage

All the words directly related to the doctrine of reconciliation come from the same root. Probably the most important is *καταλλα•σσω* found twice in active form (2 Cor 5:18, 19) and four times in passive form (Rom 5:10, twice; 1 Cor 7:11; 2 Cor 5:20). It is defined simply as “to reconcile” or in the passive “to become reconciled.”<sup>7</sup> It is used ordinarily of the relationship effected by God in which man is reconciled to Himself. In the New Testament an illustration of human reconciliation is afforded in 1 Corinthians 7:11 where an estranged wife is reconciled to her husband. In every reference where God is spoken of as reconciling man, that is, in five out of six instances, man is spoken of as reconciled to God rather than God as being reconciled to man. In keeping with the preliminary definition, usage would indicate the general meaning of reconciliation as bringing about a renewal of fellowship and relationship effected by God in His transformation of man.

The second Greek word is *καταλλαγη•*, a noun form of the preceding word. Its definition is the same as the verb, and in all four instances (Rom 11:15; 2 Cor 5:18, 19; as well as in Romans 5:11 where the Authorized Version translates it *atonement*) the work of reconciliation is spoken of as originating in God and effective toward man.

A third Greek word is *α•ποκαταλλα•σσω*, and is found three times in the New Testament (Eph 2:16; Col 1:20, 21). This word does not occur in any previous Greek literature, and some feel Paul coined it to express the completeness of reconciliation. It means *to reconcile completely*.<sup>8</sup>

Two other words commonly cited, namely *διαλλα•σσω* (Matt 5:24; cf. LXX, 1 Sam 29:4; 1 Esdras 4:31) and *ι•λα•σκο•αι*, translated *merciful* in Luke 18:13 and incorrectly translated *reconciliation* in Hebrews 2:17, are not properly related to the doctrine of reconciliation, as most evangelical scholars agree. Of the first three words which form the basis of New Testament study, eleven are specifically descriptive of the relation of God to man and in every instance man is said to be reconciled to God, and God is referred to as the One who effects the reconciliation.

From a preliminary survey of the New Testament usage, there is no reason for rejecting a simple definition of reconciliation to the effect that it is the work of God through the death of Christ by which sinful man is brought to spiritual fellowship and moral harmony with God. In this definition, reconciliation is viewed as dealing with man’s position with enmity in his sinful state and the resultant work wipes out that enmity and transforms man into a new creature, making possible his eternal fellowship with God.

### Who Is Reconciled?

Four divergent interpretations of reconciliation appear in answer to the question “Who is reconciled?” William G. T. Shedd is an advocate of the view that reconciliation has God as its object. Shedd holds it is accurate to say that God is reconciled to man.<sup>9</sup>

A second view is offered by Charles Hodge which has attracted many contemporary adherents including Leon Miller. Hodge states in effect that reconciliation affects both parties in that peace is restored between them. In his understanding, God and man are both reconciled.<sup>10</sup>

A third point of view is represented by that of A. H. Strong who holds that the object of reconciliation is man rather than God in that man is changed, not God.<sup>11</sup> Strong views reconciliation as including election, calling, union with Christ, regeneration, conversion, justification, sanctification, and perseverance. A fourth modern view, typical of neo-orthodoxy and Barthian theology, is that reconciliation was accomplished by the incarnation of Christ rather than by the death of Christ, and though not within the ordinary limits of orthodoxy, must be taken into consideration in any modern treatment of the doctrine.

The view of Shedd is set forth in some clarity in his discussion as follows: “The objective nature of atonement appears,

again, in the New Testament term καταλλαγή• and the verb καταλλα•σσειν. These two words occur nine times in the New Testament, with reference to Christ's atoning work. Rom 5:10, 11, 15; 2 Cor 5:18-20. In the authorized version καταλλαγή• is translated 'atonement' in Rom 5:11; but in the other instances, 'reconciliation' and 'reconcile' are the terms employed. The verb καταλλα•σσειν primarily signifies, 'to pay the exchange, or difference,' and secondly 'to conciliate, or appease.' The following from Athenaus (X. 33) brings to view both meanings of the word. 'Why do we say that a tetradrachma καταλλεται, when we never speak of its getting into a passion?' A coin is 'exchanged,' in the primary signification; and a man is 'reconciled,' in the secondary. Two parties in a bargain settle their difference, or are 'reconciled,' by one paying the exchange or balance to the other. In like manner two parties at enmity settle their difference, or are 'reconciled,' by one making a satisfaction to the other. In each instance the transaction is called in Greek καταλλαγή•. The same usage is found in the Anglo-Saxon language. The Saxon bot, from which comes the modern boot, denotes, first, a compensation paid to the offended party by the offender; then, secondly, the reconciling effect produced by such compensation; and, lastly, it signifies the state of mind which prompted the boot or compensation, namely repentance itself. Bosworth: AngloSaxon Dictionary, sub voce.

“The term ‘reconciliation’ is objective in its signification. Reconciliation terminates upon the object, not upon the subject. The offender reconciles not himself but the person whom he has offended, by undergoing some loss and thereby making amends. This is clearly taught in Matt 5:24. ‘First, be reconciled to thy brother’ (διαλλαγήθι τω• αδελφω•). Here, the brother who has done the injury is the one who is to make up the difference. He is to propitiate or reconcile his brother to himself, by a compensation of some kind. Reconciliation, here, does not denote a process in the mind of the offender, but of the offended. The meaning is not: ‘First conciliate thine own displeasure towards thy brother,’ but, ‘First conciliate thy brother’s displeasure toward thee.’ In the Episcopalian Order for the Holy Communion, it is said: ‘If ye shall perceive your offences to be such as are not only against God, but also against your neighbors; then ye shall *reconcile yourselves* unto them; being ready to *make restitution and satisfaction*, according to the uttermost of your powers, for all injuries and wrongs done by you to any other.’ The Biblical phraseology, ‘Be reconciled to thy brother,’ agrees with that of common life, in *describing* reconciliation from the side of the offending party, rather than of the offended. We say of the settlement of a rebellion, that ‘the subjects are reconciled to their sovereign,’ rather than that ‘the sovereign is reconciled to the subjects’; though the latter is the more strictly accurate, because it is the sovereign who is reconciled by a satisfaction made to him by the subjects who have rebelled. In Rom 5:10, believers are said to be ‘reconciled to God by the death of his Son.’ Here the reconciliation is described from the side of the offending party; *man* is said to be reconciled. Yet this does not mean the subjective reconciliation of God towards the sinner. For the preceding verse speaks of God as a being from whose ‘wrath’ the believer is saved by the death of Christ. This shows that the reconciliation effected by Christ’s atoning death is that of the divine anger against sin.”<sup>12</sup>

Though the presentation of Shedd may seem to be a reasonable understanding of the doctrine, a close study will reveal a number of fallacies. (1) Shedd has ignored the specific language of the New Testament which always speaks of God as reconciling man to Himself. Grammatically, God is the subject and man is the object. Never does the Bible say that God is reconciled. It is significant that Shedd avoids comment on 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 which is a major passage on reconciliation and in which the world is declared to be reconciled to God. (2) Shedd confuses reconciliation with propitiation. It may be conceded that propitiation is an essential prerequisite to reconciliation in that God’s righteousness must be satisfied before any mercy can be shown to man. The New Testament, however, does not use reconciliation in the sense of propitiation, and the two words must not be exchanged. (3) Shedd presents reconciliation as a change of attitude on the part of God toward man. This is accomplished, however, not by reconciliation, but by propitiation and the fault lies with what man is rather than what God is. (4) It is significant that Shedd appeals to Matthew 5:24, a word never used for reconciliation between God and man. The command “First, be reconciled to thy brother” does not reveal how the reconciliation is to be accomplished. On a human plane often apology and restitution will affect a reconciliation, but in the relationship between man and God this is an impossibility for man. His illustration of rebelling subjects effecting reconciliation toward their sovereign ruler is a human illustration of human relationships quite different from the relationship of man to God. Though Shedd can say that it is “more strictly accurate” to say that the sovereign is reconciled to his subjects, he would not say that the Bible is not accurate in its terminology. Basically Shedd’s problem is that he is reading into the doctrine of reconciliation a meaning which is not given to it in the New Testament and is ignoring what the Bible actually says on the subject. While evangelical scholarship is in agreement that propitiation is essential to reconciliation, it does not follow that propitiation is included in the New

Testament concept of reconciliation.

Charles Hodge represents a mediate position which has attracted many scholars. His point of view is represented in the following quotation: “Still another form in which the doctrine of expiation is taught is found in those passages which refer our reconciliation to God to the death of Christ. The Greek word used to express this idea in Romans v.10 ; 2 Corinthians v. 18, 19, 20 is καταλλα•σειν, to exchange, or to change the relation of one person to another, from enmity to friendship. In Ephesians ii.16 ; Colossians i.20, 21 , the word used is αποκατταλα•ττειν, only an intensive form, to reconcile fully. When two parties are at enmity a reconciliation may be effected by a change in either or in both. When, therefore, it is said that we are reconciled to God, it only means that peace is restored between Him and us. Whether this is effected by our enmity towards Him being removed, or by his justice in regard to us being satisfied, or whether both ideas are in any case included, depends on the context where the word occurs, and on the analogy of Scripture. In the chief passage, Romans v.10 , the obvious meaning is that the reconciliation is effected by God’s justice being satisfied, so that He can be favourable to us in consistency with his own nature.

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The reconciliation of God with man is effected by the cross or death of Christ, which, removing the necessity for the punishment of sinners, renders it possible for God to manifest towards them his love. The change is not in man, but, humanly speaking, in God; a change from the purpose to punish to a purpose to pardon and save. There is, so to speak, a reconciliation of God’s justice and of his love effected by Christ’s bearing the penalty in our stead.”<sup>13</sup>

From these quotations, it is evident that Hodge views reconciliation as a renewal of peace between God and man resulting from God’s justice being satisfied. His extended discussion is based upon two main arguments: (1) that reconciliation by the death of Christ constitutes an expiation to God which has to, do with the enmity of God toward man rather than man’s enmity toward God; (2) that justification is accomplished by the death of Christ, but not sanctification as it does not result in the immediate subjective change of the sinner. He therefore concludes that reconciliation cannot be said to be the change of the sinner himself and deals primarily with God rather than man.

A number of objections, however, can be cited in opposition to Hodges’s conclusions. It may be agreed (1) that Christ’s death constituted an expiation for sin represented in the non-sweet-savor offerings of the Old Testament. But this was not all that was accomplished by Christ as there was also the sweet-savor aspect in which His righteous obedience was accepted in lieu of our obedience and Satan’s power over the sinner was broken. All agree that the death of Christ does not in itself effect a subjective change in the sinner, but the provisional reconciliation effected by Christ is made actual at the time the individual believes, and the change at that time is not a change in God but a change in man.

(2) There is confusion of that which is positional, true of all Christians, and that which is subjective or conditional. Reconciliation basically does not have to do with man’s feelings toward God, but of his position before God. The unsaved are at enmity toward God not because they feel at enmity, but because they are in Adam who sinned. The child of God who is saved in Christ is reconciled, not because he feels differently, but because he is now in Christ.

(3) Hodge’s distinguishing between justification and sanctification is another failure to differentiate that which is positional and that which is experiential. Neither justification nor sanctification are accomplished for the believer until the moment of saving faith, and both are perfect as far as the believer’s position is concerned. The progressing sanctifying experiences of the Christian’s life do not improve his reconciliation to God, but are an expression of it just as much as reconciliation.

(4) His argument based on the word “enemies” in Romans 5:10 does not sustain his point. The reason they are the objects of God’s wrath is because they are in Adam. Even the death of Christ does not change their ultimate judgment as long as they remain in Adam. It is when one believes in Christ that one becomes actually reconciled to God. Both propitiation and reconciliation are in some sense inoperative until accepted by faith.

Augustus H. Strong in his discussion of reconciliation does not consider in a formal way the arguments for the objective

nature of reconciliation. He rather presents an exposition of his own point of view that the work of God in reconciliation includes His total work for man. Reconciliation therefore is viewed as the application of the work of Christ to man. The exegesis of important Scripture passages will bear out Strong's point of view. The supporting arguments therefore for Strong's thesis will be considered in the exposition of major passages in the New Testament on reconciliation to follow in a later discussion.

Before turning, however, to this material, note should be taken of the modern interpretation characteristic of neo-orthodoxy that it is the incarnation of Christ rather than the work of Christ on the cross which constitutes the basic work of reconciliation. Karl Barth, for instance, resists the old orthodox concept of the hypostatic union of God and man in Christ and prefers to regard God's deity as including His humanity. Barth writes: "In Jesus Christ there is no isolation of man from God or of God from man. Rather, in Him we encounter the history, the dialogue, in which God and man meet together and are together, the reality of the covenant *mutually* contracted, preserved, and fulfilled by them. Jesus Christ in His one Person, as true God, *man's* loyal partner, and as true *man*, *God's*. He is the Lord humbled for communion with man and likewise the Servant exalted to communion with God. He is the Word spoken from the loftiest, most luminous transcendence and likewise the Word heard in the deepest, darkest immanence. He is both, without their being confused but also without their being divided; He is wholly the one and wholly the other. Thus in this oneness Jesus Christ is the Mediator, the Reconciler, between God and man. Thus He comes forward to *man* on behalf of *God* calling for and awakening faith, love, and hope, and to God on behalf of *man*, representing man, making satisfaction and interceding. Thus He attests and guarantees to man God's free *grace* and at the same time attests and guarantees to God man's free *gratitude*. Thus he establishes in His Person the justice of God vis-a-vis man and also the justice of man before God. Thus He is in His Person the covenant in its fullness, the kingdom of heaven which is at hand, in which God speaks and man hears, God gives and man receives, God commands and man obeys, God's glory shines in the heights and thence into the depths, and peace on earth comes to pass among men in whom He is well pleased. Moreover, exactly in this way Jesus Christ, as this Mediator and Reconciler between God and man, is also the *Revealer* of them both."<sup>14</sup>

It is probably fair to Barth to indicate that he does not by this statement push aside the work of Christ on the cross. It is rather a matter of emphasis. The infinite God has bridged the gap to finite man by including man in His deity. It is this act which is the basic reconciliation rather than any subsequent action of the Redeemer. As in the doctrine of revelation in neo-orthodoxy, the emphasis is transferred from the work to the Person.

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From the standpoint of traditional orthodoxy, it may be agreed that the act of incarnation was an essential prerequisite to the act of reconciliation. The idea, however, that the incarnation in itself effected the reconciliation must be resisted. Conceivably Christ could have become incarnate without having reconciled the world to Himself if He had failed to become the sacrifice for sin which was basically required and if no human beings actually ever entered into the reconciliation thus provided. The confusion of ideas and interpretations relative to the doctrine of reconciliation can be resolved only by strict adherence to Scriptural usage and terminology and this will form the substance of our subsequent discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "From Enmity to Amity," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 474:139, April, 1962.

<sup>2</sup> Vincent Taylor, *The Atonement in New Testament Teaching*, p. 191.

<sup>3</sup> Vincent Taylor, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, p. 73.

<sup>4</sup> Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, citing T. H. Hughes, *The Atonement*, p. 312.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>7</sup> Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 415.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Arndt and Gingrich, *ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>9</sup> W. G. T. Shedd., *Dogmatic Theology*, II, 395-97.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II, 514.

<sup>11</sup> A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 886.

<sup>12</sup> Shedd, *ibid.*, II, 395-96.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II, 514-15.

<sup>14</sup> Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, pp. 46-47.

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# The Person and Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

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## Chapter 13

### Reconciliation

Most of the difficulties in definition and exposition of the doctrine of reconciliation resolve when the Biblical passages pertinent to this truth are studied. Likewise, the debated point of the extent of reconciliation yields to patient exegesis.

#### Important Passages on Reconciliation

*2 Corinthians 5:17-21*. This central passage dealing with reconciliation introduces the concept that the believer reconciled to God is a new creation. The key phrase is found in verse 17, “If any man is in Christ.” The new creation is in contrast to the former position in Adam, in which man was doomed to die and under hopeless condemnation (Rom 5:11-21). “The old things” are therefore said to be “passed away” in the sense that the believer in Christ has an entirely new position. He belongs to the new creation instead of the old, the Second Adam instead of the First Adam.

This total change is indicated by the word *reconciliation* in that God has reconciled the believer “to himself through Christ.” As Morris states: “First of all let us notice that the process the apostle has in mind is one which is wrought by God. ‘All things,’ he tells us, ‘are of God, who reconciled us’; ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself,’ ‘him...he made to be sin on our behalf.’ Though it is true that there is an aspect in which men may be exhorted to be reconciled to God, yet there is no question that Paul is thinking of something God has done for men, and not of some merely human activity.”<sup>1</sup> God is the subject, man is the object, Christ is the means.

Because man is given the new standing of being reconciled to God, he also has “the ministry of reconciliation,” as defined in verse 19, “to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses.” Here is the grand reason for man being reconciled to God, namely, that he is in Christ and in this position God has reconciled man unto himself. By the act of imputation He does not impute their sins to them, but instead imputed sin to Christ.

Of interest is the fact that “the world” (Gr. *kosmos*) is used, meaning something more than believers only. It is rather that Christ in His death made a forensic provision for the entire world and has provided reconciliation for all, not just the elect. It is this important point that makes emphatic the ministry of reconciliation as defined in the latter part of verses 19 and 20: “...Having committed unto us the word of reconciliation. We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God.” God, having a provision in the death of Christ for all sinners, now can present a “whosoever” gospel. The appeal is that God has already provided reconciliation for all, but it is effective only when received by the personal faith of the individual. The contrast is between provision and application. The provision is for all, the application is to those who believe. Those who are already reconciled to God are the ambassadors through whom the message is delivered to those who have not yet availed themselves of the mercy of God.

The recipient of the message of reconciliation must receive the reconciliation. As Taylor expresses it: “This passage is also of importance because it is complementary to the truth that it is God, and God alone, who can reconcile men to Himself. As we have already seen, although the verb, ‘to be reconciled,’ is passive, it denotes an active process of co-operation on man’s part. Man cannot accomplish his reconciliation with God, but he can refuse it....”<sup>2</sup>

Commentators have noted that up to verse 20 there is no direct connection of the doctrine of reconciliation with the death of

Christ. Verse 21, however, makes plain that the act of reconciliation did not arise in a divine fiat, but in the work of Christ upon the cross. Here it is stated: "Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him." It was the act of Christ in becoming sin by the imputation of the sins of the whole world to Him (cf. 1 John 2:2) that made possible reconciliation of a sinner to God.

Morris brings this out: "For although in these verses the apostle does not specifically mention the death of the Lord, there is not the slightest doubt that he has it in mind. For it is only through this death that man's trespasses are put away on Paul's view, and thus the cross is vividly present to his mind in verses 19 and 21."<sup>3</sup> Forsyth concurs with this interpretation: "The New Testament at least cannot sever Atonement from Reconciliation. The greatest passage which says that God was in Christ reconciling says in the same breath that it was by Christ being made sin for us. The reconciliation is attached to Christ's death, and to that as an expiation."<sup>4</sup>

The relationship of redemption, propitiation, and reconciliation, therefore, becomes clear. Christ by His death redeemed or paid the price for sin. This payment constituted a propitiation or satisfaction of God's righteousness. This freed the love of God to act in grace toward the sinner in reconciling the sinner to Himself on the basis that Christ has died in his place. The believer who comes into the position of being in Christ through faith and through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13) thus is reconciled to God because God sees him in Christ. The whole act of reconciliation, therefore, is an act of God, a free gift to man, provided for all men, effective to those who believe. Those once estranged in Adam are now reconciled in Christ.

*Romans 5:6-11*. Considered by some to be just as important as the passage in 2 Corinthians, the presentation of the doctrine of reconciliation in Romans 5 is remarkable in many respects. It expounds, first of all, the fourfold need of man for reconciliation, presenting this in climactic order: (1) man's inability, or lack of strength, i.e., "While we were yet weak" (v. 6); (2) man's lack of merit: "ungodly" (v. 6); (3) man's lack of righteousness, or his guilt before God: "sinners" (v. 8); (4) man's lack of peace with God, being at enmity with God: "enemies" (v. 10). From this fourfold indictment, it is clear that man is without strength to accomplish his own reconciliation. He is without merit or a righteousness. He has in fact sinned against God and stands condemned for his disobedience. Finally, his moral depravity has placed an insurmountable wall between him and God, leaving him completely estranged from God's love and mercy.

Certain theological conclusions also are presented forcibly in this passage. First, it may be observed that the death of Christ is mentioned in some way in each verse of the passage from verse 6 to verse 10, in contrast to 2 Corinthians 5, where the death of Christ is only mentioned in the last verse. Here the emphasis is clearly on the means of reconciliation. Second, reconciliation is presented as something that man desperately needs which he has no right to expect, but apart from which he is utterly estranged from God.

Third, reconciliation is shown to be a work of God rather than a work of man for God, as also in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. It is a work which is objectively toward man, in contrast to propitiation which is objectively toward God. This is stated in verse 10: "For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." The verb forms are passive, indicating that God is the actor and man is the recipient. This conclusion is emphasized in verse 11, where it is added, "And not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation."

Fourth, reconciliation is presented in this passage as a ground for assurance. The logic is unanswerable. If Christ died for sinners who at that time were estranged from God, unable to reconcile themselves, and without any merit, if God by His mercy has reconciled sinners to Himself, how much more will He be merciful to those who are reconciled? In other words, if God can save a sinner, then the one who is already reconciled by the death of Christ shall certainly escape the wrath of God. The child of God is saved "in [or, by] His life." The life of Christ mentioned here is the life which was given on Calvary which in resurrection continued to provide the basis for the believer's intercession and advocacy.

Some confusion has arisen because in verse 9 mention is made of the wrath of God and of justification by the blood of Christ resulting in salvation from divine judgment. Some, therefore, have attempted to include this in the work of

reconciliation. Morris, for instance, writes: “There is an objective aspect to reconciliation, and this may well be held to imply that there is a sense in which God can be said to be reconciled to man.”<sup>5</sup> Morris ignores, however, that the Bible carefully avoids ever saying this. It is more accurate to express it as God being propitiated, and man being reconciled. All agree that there is a Godward aspect of the atonement; the question is whether the word *reconciliation* is properly used of this concept.

Reconciliation necessarily depends upon other aspects of the work of God in salvation, namely, the redemption provided in respect to sin and the propitiation provided in respect to the righteous demands of God toward the sinner. These having been accomplished, however, God is now free to reconcile a sinner to Himself by declaring him to be in Christ and justified by faith. Technically, we are not saved because God has been propitiated, which is true of all men, nor because mankind as a whole has been provisionally reconciled. The act of salvation is a personal one by which the individual on the basis of all these works of God is placed in Christ, declared righteous, and therefore reconciled to a holy God. Taken as a whole, the Romans passage brings out in bold relief how tremendous is the scope of divine reconciliation, and how intrinsic is the work of Christ on our behalf as providing a basis by which reconciliation can be effected.

*Ephesians 2:16*. According to this passage, it was God’s purpose to reconcile Jew and Gentile in the present age and form from them “one new man” (Eph 2:15), “so making peace.” As Taylor expresses it: “...St. Paul is not thinking only of the reconciliation of individuals to God, but also of the creation of a new divine community, the Church of God, in which His work of conciliation in Christ is to find its perfect embodiment.”<sup>6</sup> The reconciliation which is afforded the believer in Christ not only reconciled Jew and Gentile in the body of Christ, but reconciled both unto God in the one body referring to the church as a living organism. Reconciliation, therefore, is effective between men as well as between man and God. Hence it may be regarded as horizontal as well as perpendicular.

*Colossians 1:20-22*. This passage confirms and expands the universal extent of reconciliation, declaring that reconciliation extends to all things, but especially toward sinful man: “And through him to reconcile all things unto himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross; through him, I say, whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens. And you, being in time past alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish and unreprouable, before him.”

The truth, as it is unfolded in this important passage, treats both the provision and application of reconciliation. All things are provisionally reconciled to God; this new relationship of peace has been made possible through the blood of the cross; it extends to all things, both in heaven and in earth provisionally; its application is specifically to sinners saved by grace who once were alienated and enemies through evil works, but now reconciled and presented holy, without blemish, and unreprouable before God. It should be clear from this passage, as well as from the others, that the act of reconciliation in the death of Christ does not in itself affect reconciliation for the individual, but rather that it is provisional and makes possible the reconciliation of the individual. The natural state of the unsaved continues unchanged even after the death of Christ until such time that the reconciling work is made effective in him when he believes. Having believed, however, and coming into a new relationship in Christ, he is considered by God as holy and without blemish and unreprouable, even though his actual state may be far from perfection. This passage again clearly indicates that it is the position of believer before God rather than his spiritual state which is in view. Even now the believer in this act of divine reckoning can be presented before a holy God.

## The Extent of Reconciliation

*Reconciliation provided for all*. Reconciliation in its provision is intended for all men, and theologians who differ on this subject usually do so by definition of terms. As Shedd writes in connection with his discussion of the vicarious atonement of Christ: “In answering the question as to the ‘extent’ of Christ’s atonement, it must first be settled whether ‘extent’ means its intended application, or its intrinsic value; whether the active or the passive signification of the word is in the mind of the inquirer. If the word means value, then the atonement is unlimited; if it means extending, that is, applying, then the atonement is limited.”<sup>7</sup> Properly understood then, the question of the extent of the atonement does not give basis for the universalist who would teach that all men are saved, for the Bible truly contradicts his concept. And, on the other hand, it does not support the adherent of limited atonement who would try to make the provision of reconciliation limited to the

elect. A proper orthodox point of view is that reconciliation is provided for all, but applied only to the elect.

The main issue in the question of the extent of reconciliation is that of the design of the atonement. If the strict Calvinist is correct, God's essential purpose was to save the elect, and necessarily the death of Christ was directed primarily to this end. A more tenable position, however, is reflected in moderate Calvinistic, Lutheran, and Arminian theologians. They, in some cases, retained the essential features of Calvinism but held that God's purpose in the death of Christ, while including the salvation of the elect, was a broader purpose to render the whole world savable or reconciled in the provisional sense.

The concept of reconciling the whole world has been given the term *unlimited atonement*, whereas the more strict Calvinistic position is that of *limited atonement*. Many moderate Calvinists, while going along with the main tenets of Calvinism, nevertheless hold to unlimited atonement. The question is somewhat theoretical, as most theologians, even the strict Calvinists, agree that the death of Christ forensically was sufficient for all. The question is a technical one of God's purpose in the death of Christ. The best solution, however, is to be found in what Christ actually did. Here the broad statement of 2 Corinthians 5, where God is said to reconcile the "world," should be determinative. Just as redemption and propitiation were for all men (1 John 2:2), but are applicable only to those who believe, so also is the work of reconciliation.

This concept of the universality of the provision of reconciliation is borne out in the context in which reconciliation is discussed. In 2 Corinthians 5:14, emphasis is given to the fact that all were dead spiritually. The three instances of "all" in 2 Corinthians 2:14-15 seem to be universal. This is followed by the limited application indicated in the phrase "they which live." Hence, the passage reads: "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all [universal], therefore all [universal] died; and he died for all [universal], that they that live [restricted to elect] shall no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who for their sakes died and rose again" (2 Cor 5:14-15). The word "all" is used, then, in a universal sense in this passage, followed by the restricted application indicated in the phrase, "they which live." This is reinforced by the use of the word "world," referring to all men, in verse 19.

*Reconciliation applied to the elect when they believe.* The reconciling work of Christ for all men does not become effective even for the elect until that moment of faith in Christ in which they pass from death unto life. Ephesians 2:1, referring to the Ephesian Christians, plainly indicates that even though they were elect prior to their salvation, they were "dead through... trespasses and sins." Because of this, they lived according to the pattern of the world and "were by nature children of wrath even as the rest" (Eph 2:1-3). What is true of the Ephesian Christians is true today. Though the death of Christ occurred centuries ago, even the elect are not saved in any sense until reconciliation is applied. It is for this reason that the responsibility of carrying the message of reconciliation is pressed upon those who have already believed, and they are exhorted to carry the message to others.

*Reconciliation in relation to the nonelect.* The question may fairly be asked what benefit is the death of Christ to those who have not received Him as Savior. An unbeliever goes on to his eternal doom in much the same manner as if Christ had not died. If God has provisionally reconciled the whole world to Himself, how does this affect the unsaved, if at all?

The answer seems to be that the basis for his condemnation and judgment has been essentially changed. Apart from the death of Christ, a sinner would have been committed to his eternal punishment regardless of what he had done. Even if he had placed faith in God, he would still be in Adam, and there would be no provision of reconciliation or salvation for him. The provision having been made, however, the whole world is placed in an entirely different light. A person now proceeds to eternal punishment not because God has failed to provide, or because the love of God has been ineffective, but rather because he has rejected that which God has provided. This is set forth plainly in John 3:18: "He that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God." The condemnation of the sinner now is not simply because he is a sinner, but because he has rejected God's provision to care for his sin. Though he is still judged according to his works, his eternal punishment has a new character of being that which he chose in rejecting the love and grace of God in Christ.

*Reconciliation in relation to the universe.* One of the reasons why the death of Christ needed to extend to the entire world, not just to the elect, is the fact that the curse of sin inflicted on the universe by Adam had an effect far beyond the bounds of

the human race. According to Romans 8:22, “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” The whole universe is laboring under the curse of God, which is manifested in many ways in nature as well as in man. It is for this reason that Colossians 1:20 speaks of reconciling “all things unto himself,” and specifically extends this reference to “things upon the earth, or things in the heavens.” The question may be raised, however, as to what extent reconciliation actually extends to the earth. Grace, seemingly, is unknown to the angels, except as they observe it in the relationship of God to man. The fallen angels have no offer of salvation and, having once sinned, are doomed. The physical universe, however, having been cursed by the sin of Adam is destined to have this curse relieved in the future millennial reign of Christ, when the desert will once again blossom as a rose, and satanic power will be inactive. Ultimately, God will destroy the present physical universe and replace it with a holy universe which stems from the reconciling work of Christ.

*The results of reconciliation.* In its broadest sense, the work of reconciliation extends to the total work of God on the behalf of the believer, while redemption is active toward the payment of the price for sin, and propitiation is directed to satisfaction of the righteousness of God. Reconciliation, then, deals with man’s total need and total restoration. Certain aspects, however, can be mentioned specifically. (1) The baptism of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13) is the work of God by which the believer is united to the body of Christ and comes into his new position “in Christ.” This, of course, is the key to the whole reconciling work of God. (2) In regeneration, the believer becomes a new creation, having received the very eternal life of God. Just as Adam became a natural man by having breathed into his body the breath of life, so the unregenerated man at the moment of salvation in Christ has breathed into his spiritually dead body the eternal life of God. As such, he is a new creature with a new nature and a new destiny. (3) By justification, the believer is declared righteous before God, because he is now in Christ. In this position there is imputed to him the righteousness of Christ and he is accepted as perfect in the presence of God. (4) The new position in Christ and His justification assures the believer’s positional sanctification in which he is set apart as holy to God. (5) In his new position, as reconciled to God, the believer has the possibility of intimate fellowship assisted by the indwelling presence of the Triune God and the transformation of his character through the new birth. Reconciliation, while essentially positional, has an experiential aspect as the believer walks in fellowship with God. (6) Ultimate sanctification is also assured the one who is thus reconciled to God, in which the believer’s spiritual state is elevated to his high position. (7) The final state of reconciliation is that of glorification in the presence of God in which the last evidences of sin are destroyed and the believer stands perfect and complete, sharing the very glory of Christ in heaven.

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, p. 202.

<sup>2</sup> Vincent Taylor, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, p. 73.

<sup>3</sup> Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 138.

<sup>5</sup> Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

<sup>6</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>7</sup> W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, II, 466.

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# The Person and Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

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## Chapter 14

### Christ in His Resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the fundamental truths of Christian faith. As Robinson writes: “A renewed emphasis upon the resurrection is, however, relevant at this time. In Latin Christianity, the profusion of crucifixes focuses the eye upon the crucified, dead Jesus, leaving to the Evangelical Church a special responsibility for proclaiming the risen, living Lord. In American Protestantism, the weight of old liberalism still swings many from the bodily ‘physical’ resurrection of Christ witnessed in the New Testament to a kind of ‘spiritual resurrection’ at death, one befitting Plato’s society of souls in an idealistic universe. European scholarship is disentangling the biblical from the Hellenistic man, recognizing the body as also the handiwork of God, and the unity of the whole inner and outer man both in this life and in the age to come. Yet the influence of existentialism leads some of these scholars to present the death of Christ as the sole factual event of the kerygma, with the resurrection as an expression of the eschatological significance of the cross, a myth whose meaning is ‘real’ only in faith. The pessimism, resulting from inadequate presentations, can be lifted only by the proclamation of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as factual occurrence, an act of God’s self-disclosure in truly divine dimensions.”<sup>1</sup>

The early disciples were impelled to bear their testimony for Christ because of their belief that Jesus Christ had actually died and rose bodily from the grave. James Orr has made the following comment: “A first fact attested by all witnesses is that *Jesus died and was buried*. St. Paul sums up the unanimous belief of the early Church on this point in the Word: ‘That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried.’ The reality of Christ’s death, as against the swoon theories, was touched on before, and need not be re-argued. No one now holds that Jesus did *not* die!”<sup>2</sup>

From the standpoint of an apologetic for Christian theology, belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God stands or falls with the question of His bodily resurrection. As Paul expressed it in 1 Corinthians 15:17, “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.” The resurrection, therefore, is properly considered a proof of the person of Christ, His deity, Messiahship, and His power to save from sin. Upon the resurrection hangs the value and effectiveness of all His work in the past, present, and future. The resurrection of Christ is also related to the proper fulfillment of prophecy concerning His resurrection in both the Old and New Testament, and is demanded by the concept of the infallibility of the Scriptures.

The doctrine of the resurrection of Christ is also strategic in that it is the first step in a series in the exaltation of Christ: (1) His resurrection; (2) His ascension to heaven and return to His preincarnate glory; (3) His exaltation in being seated at the right hand of the Father and the Father’s throne; (4) His second coming to the earth in power and glory; (5) His occupying the throne of David as ruler of the millennial earth; (6) His exaltation as judge of all men at the great white throne; (7) His exaltation in the new heaven and the new earth.

From the standpoint of the ministry of Christ, the resurrection is the introduction to a new phase of His work on behalf of the saints. Resurrection was preparatory to His return to glory and to His present ministry as our intercessor at the right hand of the Father. All His future work stems from His second coming and events related to the millennial kingdom. Few doctrines of the Christian faith are more necessary to the whole structure than the doctrine of resurrection. It is for this reason that evangelical Christians through the centuries, including the apostles, have placed such emphasis upon this doctrine. her (John 20:11-17; cf. Mark 16:9-11).

6. After she had seen the risen Lord, Mary Magdalene returns to report the appearance of Christ to her (Mark 16:10-11; John

20:18).

7. The second appearance of Christ was to the other women who are also returning to the tomb and see Christ on the way (Matt 28:9-10). The best texts seem to indicate that the phrase “as they went to tell his disciples” is an interpolation, and they were actually returning after telling the disciples.

8. The report of the guards watching the tomb concerning the angel rolling away the stone is another testimony to the resurrection of Christ from unwilling witnesses (Matt 28:11-15).

9. The third appearance was to Peter in the afternoon of the resurrection day. Concerning this there are no details, but it is most significant that Christ sought out Peter, the denier, first, of all the twelve (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5).

10. The fourth appearance of Christ was to the disciples as they walked on the road to Emmaus. Due to supernatural withholding of recognition, Christ was able to expound to them the Old Testament Scripture concerning His death and resurrection, and was not known to them until He broke bread (Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-35).

11. The fifth appearance of the resurrected Christ was to the ten disciples (Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-23). The Mark account refers to them as the eleven, but it is obvious from the context that only ten were there, as Thomas was absent. After the departure of Judas, the remaining disciples were often referred to as the “eleven” even if all were not actually present. In a similar way, Paul refers to the “twelve” as witnesses of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:5), but as a matter of fact Judas Iscariot was already dead.

12. The sixth appearance was to the eleven disciples a week after His resurrection. At this time Thomas was present (John 20:26-29).

13. The seventh appearance was to seven disciples by the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-23). It was on this occasion that he talked so significantly to Simon Peter following the miraculous catch of fish.

14. The eighth appearance was to five hundred and is recited by Paul as an outstanding proof of His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:6).

15. The ninth appearance was to James, the Lord’s brother (1 Cor 15:7). There is some evidence that James was not a believer prior to the resurrection (John 7:3), but immediately after the resurrection he is numbered among the believers (Acts 1:14; Gal 1:19). He later became one of the outstanding leaders in the apostolic church.

16. The tenth appearance was to eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee. On that occasion he gave them the great commission to preach the gospel (Matt 28:16-20). A similar commission is given in Mark 16:15-18 which may have been the same instance or an earlier appearance.

17. The eleventh appearance occurred at the time of His ascension from the Mount of Olives (Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:3-9). This is the last appearance of Christ to His disciples prior to His glorification in heaven.

18. The twelfth appearance of the resurrected Christ was to Stephen just prior to his martyrdom (Acts 7:55-56).

19. The thirteenth appearance of Christ was to Paul on the road to Damascus as he was about to continue his work of persecuting Christians (Acts 9:3-6; cf. Acts 22:6-11; 26:13-18 ). It was on this occasion that Paul was converted.

20. The fourteenth appearance seems to have been to Paul in Arabia (Acts 20:24; 26:17 ; Gal 1:12, 17). This appearance is not clearly stated but may be implied from Galatians 1:12. Some believe that the instruction to Paul, which he mentions in Acts 26:17, were given to him in Arabia, not at the original appearance on the road to Damascus. There is no record of the

precise revelation given to Paul in Acts 9 or Acts 22. In Acts 22:10, he is promised a later revelation which would give him the necessary instruction.

21. The fifteenth appearance of Christ was to Paul in the temple when Paul is warned concerning the persecution which was to come (Acts 22:17-21; cf. Acts 9:26-30; Gal 1:18).

22. The sixteenth appearance of Christ was to Paul while in prison in Caesarea, when it is recorded that “the Lord stood by him,” and told him that he would bear witness in Rome (Acts 23:11).

23. The final and seventeenth appearance of Christ was to the Apostle John at the beginning of the revelation given to him (Rev 1:12-20).

Taken as a whole, the appearances are of such varied character and to so many people under so many different circumstances that the proof of the resurrection of Christ is as solid as any historical fact could be in the first century.

*The empty tomb as a witness to the resurrection of Christ.* All the evidence that exists concerning the tomb after the resurrection of Christ indicates that it was empty. This was the testimony of the disciples who carefully examined the tomb when they found the stone rolled away. The guard that was stationed at the tomb, according to Matthew’s account, also reported that the tomb was empty. Only three explanations are even possibilities: (1) It has been suggested that the disciples may have chanced upon the wrong tomb. This, however, is refuted not only by the presence of the angels, but by the Roman guard who certainly would not have been guarding the wrong tomb. (2) The soldiers themselves made the suggestion that someone had stolen the body while they slept. If this had been the case, the guard would have been summarily executed. Instead, according to Matthew’s account, they were given money to spread the false story that someone had stolen the body. This was obviously an attempt at bribery to prevent the truth being told and was gladly accepted by the soldiers as it also assured them of intervention with the Roman authorities so that they would not be executed. (3) The complete lack of evidence for any alternative leaves the account of the resurrection of Christ the only plausible explanation. If it were not that this were supernatural and so intrinsic to the whole Christian faith, it would not even have been questioned. When the evidence for the empty tomb is added to the many other arguments for a bodily resurrection of Christ, it forms additional proof of the genuineness of the entire narrative. There would have been no motive on the part of the disciples to steal the body in the first place, and if the enemies of Christ had taken the body it would have been to their interest to have produced it when the accounts of the resurrection began to be circulated. There is no evidence, however, that the enemies of Christ made any effort to try to find the supposedly stolen body of Christ. The empty tomb remains a silent but eloquent witness to the fact of the resurrection.

*The character of the human witnesses to the resurrection.* It is clear from the accounts given in the Gospels that the witnesses to the resurrection of Christ were quite reluctant to believe their senses concerning this important event. Only when overwhelming proof was presented did they at long last accept the fact of His resurrection. The disciples certainly could not have been fooled in identifying Christ, as they knew Him well. They themselves, however, demanded tangible evidence such as Thomas required when he was not present at the first appearance of Christ to the eleven. There does not seem to have been any expectation on the part of the disciples that Christ would rise from the dead, even though He had told them plainly that this would be the case. Once the evidence was produced that Christ had actually been raised from the dead, no amount of persecution could make them waiver in their testimony. They repeatedly showed willingness to die rather than give up their faith in Christ as their resurrected Lord. The reluctant testimony of the soldiers as well as the grudging admission of the leaders of the Jews add a touch of reality to the fact of Christ’s resurrection.

*The dramatic change in the disciples after the resurrection.* One of the impressive arguments for the genuineness of the resurrection of Christ was the contrast in the disciples before and after the resurrection. Scripture indicates that the disciples before the resurrection were utterly disheartened, were meeting in fear in obscure places, and were dismayed at the death of Christ. There is no indication in any of the narratives describing the disciples prior to the resurrection that they entertained any real hope that Christ would be restored to them in resurrection. On the day of resurrection itself, there is no evidence that they were credulous or accepted the testimony of the resurrection of Christ without requiring definite proof. It was

evidently hard for them to believe their senses when they actually saw Christ risen. Once they were convinced, however, the disciples were joyous and fearless and, as illustrated in the case of Peter, bore a public testimony to the fact of the resurrection, challenging their hearers to consider the evidence. In their attitude before the resurrection Christ as well as in their subsequent renewed hope and faith, their experiences followed a normal pattern and there is no indication of accepting the fact of the resurrection apart from the solid proofs which were theirs in the postresurrectional appearances.

*The disciples experience of divine power in the postresurrection period.* The book of Acts cites the evidence of the supernatural power of God in the ministry of the apostles. It is, in a sense, the acts of the Holy Spirit, rather than of the apostles themselves. The predicted power of the Spirit that would come upon them on the Day of Pentecost was fulfilled in chapter 2 and in the subsequent experience of the church. Jews and Gentiles are transformed under the power of the gospel as they believed in a Christ who had died for them and arose again. The gospel was attested by supernatural acts of healing, by the divine judgment of Ananias and Sapphira, by the supernatural appearance of Christ to Saul, and numerous other events in which the supernatural power of God was evident. The book of Acts would have been meaningless and impossible if it had not been for an actual resurrection of Christ from the dead. The transforming power of Christ witnessed to by Christians through the ages is likewise without explanation if Christ did not actually rise. The book of Acts, therefore, can be considered a massive confirmation of the doctrine of resurrection.

*The evidence of the Day of Pentecost.* Outstanding in the book of Acts is the support of the resurrection afforded in the events of the Day of Pentecost. This event in itself is a demonstration of the power of God, but is attended by human phenomenon which would be without proper explanation if Christ had not actually arisen from the dead. The Day of Pentecost, occurring only fifty days after the death and resurrection of Christ, was the occasion for the sermon by Peter on the doctrine of resurrection as thousands gathered to hear. Those who listened to Peter had access to the garden where the tomb was located, and had undoubtedly investigated the reports of the resurrection of Christ which was commonly discussed in Jerusalem. As Peter declared the resurrection of Christ there was no contradiction from the multitudes, and the record indicates that instead of offering rebuttal to his assertion three thousand people, who were in a position to know the facts, believed that Jesus Christ had actually been raised from the dead. It is evident that Peter's confident assertion that Christ actually arose in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of David, as recorded in Psalm 16:10-11, must have stemmed not only from his own personal conviction that these were the facts, but also from confidence that there was no one competent to contradict them. The events of Pentecost would be left without a reasonable explanation if Jesus Christ had not been raised from the dead.

*The evidence in the custom of observing the first day of the week.* Early in the apostolic church, it was the custom of believers to gather on the first day of the week and observe it as a special day of worship and praise. On this day they observed the Lord's Supper and would bring their offerings (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2). Orr states: "It is the uncontradicted testimony of all the witnesses that it was the *Easter morning*, or, as the Evangelists call it, 'the first day of the week,' or *third day* after the Crucifixion, on which the event known as the Resurrection happened; in other words, that Jesus rose from the dead *on the third day*. The four Evangelists, whatever their other divergency, are agreed about this. The Apostle Paul, who had conversed with the original witnesses only eight or nine years after the event, confirms the statement, and declares it to be the general belief of the church."<sup>3</sup>

From the first century, the great majority of Christians have continued to observe the first day of the week as a special day of religious significance. The only explanation that has a historic foundation of this change from the seventh day of rest to the first day of the week as a day of worship was that Christ rose from the dead on that day. The historic custom fully attested by the history of the church is therefore another compelling argument that Christ actually arose from the dead.

Milligan shows the convincing character of this change in custom: "We have the institution of the Lord's day, of which there are traces within a week of the Resurrection, and of which no one will dream of denying was expressly designed to commemorate that event. Surely there must have been a depth of conviction as well as an amount of power difficult to estimate, in a belief that could lead to such an institution. Nor do we see the full force of this until we remember the totally different conceptions which the Sabbath and the Lord's day express,—the one the last day of the week, when man, weary of the work of the world, he sought the joyful strength of God in which to face it; the one commemorating the close of the old

creation, the other, the beginning of the new.... It was believed that Jesus rose from the grave on that first morning of the week. It was this fact that made the difference, and a more powerful testimony to men's conviction of the truth of the event within a week after it is said to have happened, it would be impossible to produce."<sup>4</sup>

*The origin of the Christian church.* The existence of the Christian church from the first century historically is explained as stemming from the belief in the resurrection of Christ. Only such definite proof of the deity of Christ would have given the church the convincing power that it needed in the gospel witness. The dynamic which characterized the early church can be explained only on the basis that Christ actually arose from the dead. In the years since, millions of believers have been blessed and transformed by faith in Jesus Christ as their risen Savior and Lord. If the resurrection is a myth, there is no adequate explanation for the power of the early church in its witness and the willingness of its adherents even to die rather than renounce their Christian faith. The continuity of the church through the centuries, in spite of ignorance, unbelief, and erosion of doctrine, would be difficult to explain if there were not a solid basis for its origination and continuation in the historic resurrection of Christ. Those who investigate the facts concerning the resurrection of Christ as contained in the Scripture have certainly an abundant evidence on which to rest their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and God.

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<sup>1</sup> William C. Robinson, "The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ," *Bulletin of Columbia Theological Seminary*, Decatur, Georgia, July 1957, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> James Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> Orr, *Ibid.*, pp. 114-15.

<sup>4</sup> William Milligan, *The Resurrection of Our Lord*, pp. 68-69.

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# The Person and Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

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## Chapter 15

### Christ in His Resurrection

#### The Resurrection Body

The facts concerning the resurrection body of Christ have been obscured by the modern rejection of the details of Christ's resurrection as recorded in the Scripture. Liberals and neo-orthodox scholars have summarily rejected the facts of the Scriptural records, often with hardly any supporting argument. Common among such scholars is the view that Christ arose only in a spiritual sense—continued existence after His death, but not a bodily resurrection.

Though no new evidence has been advanced in support of this rejection of Scripture, the technique has been to assume that the gospel narratives are in serious contradiction of each other, and that what actually happened is that Christ appeared to the disciples in visions or dreams. With no documentary proof whatever, they consider the accounts of the appearances of Christ on the resurrection day and immediately subsequent to it as later fabrications. Even Filson, who seems to accept the fact of the resurrection of Christ, in one sentence sweeps all the resurrection-day appearances into discard in his statement: "Most likely the first appearances to the apostles were in Galilee, and this led to a rallying of the believers in Jerusalem where such appearances continued."<sup>1</sup>

Though many liberal arguments have been so soundly refuted as to have fallen into discard even among liberals (such as the swoon theory, the imposture theory, the wrong-tomb theory, and the wishful credulity of the disciples), the modern mind still assumes that the resurrection is an impossibility and that early Christians were deceived either by their own senses or by other men. On the contrary, conservative scholarship has demonstrated for many generations that the Scriptural accounts are self-sustaining, that they do not contain differences which cannot be reconciled, and in fact offer a web of interrelated facts which make the resurrection of Christ one of the best attested facts of the ancient world. If Scripture may be considered as reliable and infallible revelation, it is found to unfold a marvelous doctrine of resurrection as illustrated in the resurrection of Christ Himself.

The resurrection body of Christ is not only an important aspect of Scriptural revelation unfolding the nature of Christ's resurrection, but is significant of the fact and character of the resurrection which believers in Christ may anticipate. The resurrection of Christ is at once an apologetic for His deity and His substitutionary death on the cross, and at the same time is substantiating evidence of the important place of the future resurrection of saints in the eschatological program of God. Although, the doctrine of resurrection is discussed theologically in 1 Corinthians 15:12-50, the principal source of information is found in the accounts of Christ after His resurrection. Here, for the first time in history, occurs bodily resurrection which is more than restoration—the creation of a new body similar in some respects to the body laid in the tomb but in other important aspects dramatically different. Christ is given a new kind of body in contrast to those restored to life miraculously prior to the resurrection of Christ, such as Lazarus whose body was restored to what it was before he died.

*The resurrection body of Christ identified with the body laid in the tomb.* At least eight features identify the body of Christ raised from the dead as the same body which was laid in the tomb.

1. The nailprints in His hands and feet were retained in the resurrection body of Christ (Ps 22:16; Zech 12:10; John 20:25-29). The Scriptures both prophetically and historically record this important fact which would lead to the conclusion that the resurrection body is the old body transformed rather than the creation of a new body entirely different. corresponded to a

natural body.

8. Christ specifically states of His resurrection body that it possessed flesh and bone (Luke 24:39-40), thereby refuting the idea of the disciples that they were seeing merely a spirit when Christ appeared to them. Confirming these identifying features of the body of Christ raised from the dead is the fact of the empty tomb. Christ in His resurrection did not receive another body but the same body.

*The resurrection body of Christ changed.* After His resurrection Christ manifested certain characteristics which were not seen before His death. Though there seems to be little question in the Bible of the identity of the resurrection body, new qualities were added which distinguished it from the body laid in the tomb.

1. Christ in His resurrection body had a newness of life and a deliverance from the sufferings of His death to such an extent that on several occasions His recognition was somewhat delayed as in the case of Mary Magdalene who mistook Him for the gardener and the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:31; John 20:15). The delay in recognition, however, is explained by other factors and is no greater than one would naturally expect considering the tremendous transformation of resurrection.

2. The ordinary limitations of transportation and distance did not seem to restrict Christ after His resurrection. Though before His death He would become weary from long journeys, there is no evidence that His various appearances to His disciples required such ordinary means of transportation. He apparently was delivered from many of the limitations of time and space.

3. The resurrection body of Christ was characterized as having flesh and bones, but He did not seem to be restricted by physical barriers. This is evident in the fact that He could enter closed rooms without apparent difficulty (Luke 24:36; John 20:19).

4. Christ was able to appear and disappear at will after His resurrection (Luke 24:17; John 20:19).

5. No proof is offered in the Scriptures that the resurrection body of Christ required either rest or food to sustain it. Though He could eat, there is no evidence that He needed food to supply nourishment, and there is no mention of Christ sleeping after His resurrection. In so far as Christ's resurrection body accommodated itself to the conditions of time and space, it was in keeping with the evident purpose of Christ to minister to His disciples prior to His ascension. Some of the features of a resurrection body which were ultimately His such as the glory of heaven were delayed in manifestation.

*The glory of the resurrection body.* Although many of the features of the resurrection body of Christ are revealed in the Scriptures immediately after His resurrection, it is evident that some aspects are delayed in manifestation until after His ascension. During the forty days of His ministry between the resurrection and His ascension, there was no unusual outward appearance of glory such as had occurred prior to His death on the Mount of Transfiguration. It is evident that His ultimate glory is veiled in order to make possible a ministry to His disciples in scenes of earth. After His ascension into heaven, Christ never appears again apart from His glory. In Acts 7:56, Phillip saw Christ standing at the right hand of the Father in the midst of the glory of God. In the appearance of Christ to Paul recorded in Acts 9:3-6, the glory of Christ was such that Paul was blinded. A similar experience befell the Apostle John in Revelation 1:12-20, where John fell at the feet of Christ as one dead when He beheld the glory of Christ in His resurrection. From these indications, it is safe to conclude that the resurrection body of Christ possesses an intrinsic glory which mortal man cannot behold under ordinary circumstances. This glory was temporarily veiled until the time of Christ's ascension, but is now a permanent aspect of His resurrection body. The hope of believers for a resurrection body includes not only the features of the resurrection body manifested in Christ prior to the ascension, but also that our resurrection bodies will be glorious and suited for the glorious presence of God. In the case of believers the resurrection body not only includes the physical and visible aspects attributed to Christ but also that our resurrection body will be similar (Eph 5:27; Phil 3:21; 1 John 3:2).

## **Who Raised Christ from the Dead?**

Like other important acts of God foundational to the Christian faith, the resurrection of Christ is related to each member of the divine Trinity. God the Father is said to have raised Christ from the dead in numerous passages. This is implied in the Old Testament prophecy of the resurrection of Christ found in Psalm 16:10-11 where His deliverance from Sheol and corruption is attributed to God. Peter cites Psalm 16 in Acts 2:24-32 in relating the resurrection of Christ to God. A similar statement is made in Acts 13:30 where Paul states, "God raised Him from the dead." The resurrection of Christ is specifically related to the Father in Romans 6:4 and Ephesians 4:19-20.

Without contradicting the participation of the Father in the resurrection of Christ, the Scriptures also reveal that Christ raised Himself from the dead. In John 2:19 Christ declared, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." A similar statement is made in John 10:17-18 where Christ claimed not only to have power to lay down His life but to take it up again. The work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the resurrection of Christ is less clear. The only reference to it in Romans 8:11 draws a parallel between the resurrection of Christ and the giving of life to the believers, which, in both cases is accomplished "through his spirit that dwelleth in you." Some have interpreted this passage, however, to refer to the resurrection on the part of the Father in which the Holy Spirit somehow participated.

The relation of the resurrection of Christ to the Three Persons of the Trinity is not, however, a contradiction. In other important works of God, such as the creation of the world and the incarnation of Christ, a similar participation of each member of the Trinity can be observed. In revelation, however, the unity of the Trinity as well as their distinction in persons is carefully supported, and no contradiction remains for one who accepts the doctrine of the Trinity. It is indeed the work of the Triune God.

## **The Significance of the Resurrection of Christ**

All branches of systematic theology have tended to underestimate the significance of the resurrection of Christ. Orthodox scholars usually emphasize the apologetic significance of the resurrection as an attestation to the deity of Christ and the value of His substitutionary death. The resurrection of Christ is normally held to be a proof of the future resurrection of the saints. Often neglected, however, is the relation of the resurrection of Christ to His present work.

In liberal theology, the resurrection of Christ is rejected as a nonessential, and the conclusion is reached that Christ continues to exist after His death but not in a body. Scriptures relating to the subject are spiritualized or explained away. As James Orr noted a generation ago, the tendency now is to deny the resurrection as impossible, and therefore untrue.<sup>2</sup>

More important, however, than the liberal view in contemporary theology, is the neo-orthodox concept of the resurrection of Christ. Though the more conservative of neo-orthodox scholars tend to recognize the resurrection of Christ as a historic fact, they claim that in itself it does not have historic significance. Emphasis is placed upon the experience of Christ in the believer rather than in the fact of the empty tomb. The answer to all problems is found in the complete revelation of the Scriptures themselves which, if accepted in the normal meaning of words, establishes the orthodox position concerning the resurrection as a proof of His person and His offices and at the same time demonstrates that the resurrection of Christ is the key to all of His present work as well as the consummation of the divine plan in the prophetic future. For the present discussion, only the major facts can be itemized.

*The resurrection a proof of the person of Christ.* It is significant that the meaning of the three official names of Christ, namely, Lord Jesus Christ, is substantiated by His resurrection from the dead. The title of "Lord," usually regarded as a declaration of His deity and authority over all creation is based on the assumption that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Though in His life He offered many substantiating evidences, the supreme proof of His deity is the solid fact of His resurrection. It was this argument which Peter used in His Pentecostal sermon when he declared on the basis of the fact of His resurrection that Jesus is "both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Peter uses the same argument of the resurrection of Christ in his presentation of the gospel to Cornelius (Acts 10:40). In the introduction to the Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle Paul states that Christ "was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." The early disciples considered the resurrection of Christ as the final and convincing evidence that Jesus was all that He claimed to be, the very Son of God who existing from all eternity had become incarnate to fulfill the plan of God in

His life, death, and resurrection. The resurrection of Christ is, therefore, an important proof of His deity and has been so regarded by orthodox scholars from apostolic days to the present.

In the title “Christ” as attributed to the Lord Jesus is embodied the hope of Israel for a Messiah to deliver them from their sins. Though the death and resurrection of Christ was anticipated by Old Testament prophecies, Jewish leaders in the time of Christ did not realize the necessity of it to fulfill His role of Messiah to Israel. It was only by His death that He could provide redemption and claim victory over Satan, and it was in His resurrection that He demonstrated the power of God which was to be ultimately manifested in the deliverance of Israel and the establishment of His righteous kingdom in the earth. The promise to David that He would have a son who would reign forever is now made possible of fulfillment by Christ in His resurrection body and is in keeping with the claim of Christ that He was the Messiah of Israel (John 4:25-26). The specific relationship of resurrection to His Messianic character is also revealed in His conversation with Martha in John 11:25-27. In a word, it was necessary for Christ to die and to be raised from the dead in order to be what the prophet had anticipated, a Messiah who would be Israel’s deliverer and Savior throughout all eternity. If Christ had not been raised from the dead, it is evident that His claim to Messiahship would have been thus destroyed and conversely the fact of His resurrection establishes His right to be Israel’s Messiah in the past as well as in the future.

“Jesus,” the third title attributed to Christ, meaning “Jehovah saves,” was His human name bestowed by the angel. He was given this name because He would “save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). His work as Savior, however, while inevitably related to His death on the cross, demanded also His resurrection. It was for this reason that Christ was commanded not only to die but to rise from the dead in John 10:17-18. According to John 12:27, where Christ prayed in regard to His death, “Father, save me from this hour,” He did not anticipate merely deliverance from death but prayed that if it were necessary to die, He would experience complete deliverance in His resurrection.

Milligan notes that the Greek is literally “save me *out of* this hour” (italics added). Milligan adds: “Our Lord prayed not merely that, if possible, He might escape suffering, but that, if it was impossible for Him to escape it, He might pass through it to a glorious deliverance,—that through death He might be conducted to that life beyond death in which the purpose of His coming was to be reached.”<sup>3</sup> It is the uniform presentation of Scripture that His resurrection is a necessary counterpart to His work in death, and apart from His resurrection His death would have become meaningless (John 11:25; Rom 5:10; 8:34 ; 10:9 ; Phil 2:9, 11; Heb 5:7). The resurrection of Christ is, therefore, the proof of His person and of that which His person affected, namely His work on the cross.

*The resurrection a proof of His offices.* The three offices of Christ, that of prophet, priest, and king are each related to His resurrection. The offices of Christ are one of the major themes of the Old Testament as they relate to Christ. Moses anticipated Christ’s office as a prophet in Deuteronomy 18:18. The priestly office of Christ is prophesied in Psalm 110:4 and His kingly office is in fulfillment of the promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:16 (cf. Luke 1:31-33).

The prophetic ministry of Christ, though largely fulfilled on earth prior to His death, needed the authentication of His resurrection to give authority to what He had already said as well as His continued ministry through the Spirit whom He would send (John 16:12-14). If Christ had not been raised from the dead, He would have been a false prophet and all of His ministry as recorded in the Gospels would have been subject to question. In like manner, His postresurrection ministry, bringing into climax much that He had taught before, would have been impossible apart from His bodily resurrection. The resurrection, therefore, constitutes a proof of the validity and authority of His prophetic office.

*BSac* 120:479 (Jul 63) p. 204

The resurrection of Christ is clearly related to that of His continuance of a priest. This was anticipated in Psalm 110 where Christ is declared to be a priest eternal in character, “Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent; Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 110:4). The concept of Christ as a priest who continues to live forever is further substantiated in Hebrews 7:25 where it is said of Christ, “He ever liveth to make intercession for them.” In contrast to ordinary priests, who have their priestly office terminated either by death or retirement as in the Levitical order, the resurrection of Christ made possible His continuance forever as our high priest. This is the teaching of the New Testament as well as the

anticipation of the Old. Hebrews 7:24 states it explicitly: “But he, because he abideth for ever, hath his priesthood unchangeable.” It is evident from the Scriptures, that apart from the resurrection of Christ, His office of priest would not have been capable of being fulfilled.

The third office, that of king, fulfilled especially the anticipation of the Old Testament of a Son who would have the right to rule. Christ was not only to rule over Israel, fulfilling the promise to David of a son who would reign forever, but over the entire world as the one to whom God has given the right to rule over the nations (Ps 2:8-9). Christ’s continuance on the throne forever after His death, in fulfillment of the plan of God that He should reign over all nations as well as the nation of Israel, would have been impossible if He had not been raised from the dead. His resurrection was essential to His unique fulfillment of each of His divine offices.

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<sup>1</sup> Floyd V. Filson, *Jesus Christ the Risen Lord*, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> James Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, pp. 14 ff.

<sup>3</sup> William Milligan, *The Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 125.

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# The Person and Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

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## Chapter 16

### Christ in His Resurrection

*The resurrection of Christ essential to all His work.* Just as the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ was a proof of His deity and Lordship, so also was His resurrection an indispensable evidence of the efficacious value of His death on the cross. Here again, one is faced with the absolute question of whether Christ is all He claims to be. If He did not rise from the dead, then He is not the Son of God; and it follows that His death on the cross is the death of an ordinary man and of no value to others. If, on the other hand, Christ actually rose from the dead, it not only demonstrates that He is indeed all He claims to be but that His work has the value set forth in the Scriptures, namely, a substitutionary sacrifice on behalf of the sins of the whole world.

It is for this reason that so frequently in Scripture the resurrection of Christ is linked with His work on the cross, as in Romans 4:25 where it states not only that Christ “was delivered up for our trespasses” but that He was “raised for [with a view to] our justification.” In like manner, the resurrection of Christ is linked to real faith in Him as in Romans 10:9: “Because if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thine heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” The resurrection of Christ and His substitutionary death are twin doctrines which stand or fall together.

As James Orr expressed it: “It seems evident that, if Christ died for men—in Atonement for their sins—it could not be that He should remain permanently in the state of death. That, had it been possible, would have been the frustration of the very end of His dying, for if He remained Himself a prey to death, how could He redeem others?”<sup>1</sup> It is significant that those who deny the bodily resurrection of Christ always also deny His substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

The resurrection of Christ has not only a backward look toward the cross demonstrating the power of God in salvation, but it is also the doorway to His present work in heaven. One of the important reasons for the resurrection of Christ was the necessity of a victory such as His resurrection as a prelude to His work in heaven.

Orr states, “The Resurrection of Jesus is everywhere viewed as the commencement of His Exaltation. Resurrection, Ascension, Exaltation to the throne of universal dominion go together as parts of the same transaction.”<sup>2</sup>

At least a dozen important aspects of His present ministry were contingent upon the fact of His resurrection.

1. *Sending the Holy Spirit.* The promise of Christ that He would send the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26 ; 16:7 ) was contingent upon His resurrection and His return to glory. The Holy Spirit was sent to continue the ministry of Christ which was, in a sense, suspended when He returned to heaven. As Christ expressed it in John 16:7: “Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send him unto you.” The major feature of the present age, namely, the ministry of the Spirit, is therefore dependent upon the validity of Christ’s resurrection from the grave and His return to glory as the triumphant, resurrected Savior.

2. *Bestowing eternal life.* Through the Spirit whom Christ sent to the earth, He is able to bestow eternal life on all those who put their trust in Him (John 11:25; 12:24-25 ). If Christ did not literally rise from the dead, God’s program of giving life for spiritual death through faith in Jesus Christ would become invalid. He is able to bestow eternal life in virtue of who He is and of what He has done in His death and resurrection. It is because “we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus

Christ the righteous.” His work as Advocate in turn depends on the fact that “he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world” (1 John 2:2).

5. *The work of Christ in intercession.* The resurrection of Christ is specifically linked with His work in intercession in which Christ presents His petitions on behalf of weak and tempted Christians and intercedes for them before the throne of grace. According to Hebrews 7:25, this ministry is dependent on His resurrection: “Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” His resurrection is necessary to His perpetual intercession.

6. *The bestowal of gifts.* According to Ephesians 4:11-13, Christ gives gifted men to the church such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. His work in thus bestowing gifted men upon the church is, however, dependent on the fact revealed in the preceding verses that “when He ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men (Eph 4:8). Now that He has “ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things” (Eph 4:10), an act, of course, which depended upon His resurrection, He is able to be sovereign in His bestowal of gifts and gifted men.

7. *Impartation of spiritual power.* Just as the deliverance of Israel from Egypt was God’s divine standard of power in the Old Testament, so the resurrection of Christ from the dead is a divine standard of power in the New Testament, especially in relationship to His work for the church. It was because of who He was and what He was able to do that He could say in Matthew 28:18, “All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth.” This standard of power is described especially in Ephesians 1:17-23 where the apostle expresses his prayer that the Ephesian Christians might “know what is... the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:19-21). It was in virtue of His resurrection that He was able to send the Spirit who would be the channel through which the power would come according to Christ’s own prediction in Acts 1:8: “But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” It is as the Christian enters into the reality that he is in the risen Christ and a partaker of Christ’s victory over death that he is able to realize the divine power of God in his spiritual life.

8. *The raising of believers to a new position in Christ.* It is in keeping with Christ’s present work for believers that they are raised to a new position in Christ. According to Ephesians 2:5-6: “Even when we were dead through our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus.” It is in virtue of the resurrection of Christ that the believer can now be triumphant in his new position, no longer being dead in trespasses and sins in Adam, but raised in newness of life in Christ Jesus.

9. *Christ in His resurrection, the first fruits from among the dead.* In His resurrection from the dead, Christ fulfills the Old Testament anticipation in the feast of the first fruits in that He is the first to be raised from the dead in anticipation of the future resurrection of all believers, as stated in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23: “But now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep. For since by man came death, by man came 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 firstfruits; then they that are Christ’s, at his coming.” The resurrection of Christ, therefore, is the historical proof substantiating the hope of the believer that he too will be raised from the dead, in keeping with the prediction of Philippians 3:20-21.

10. *Christ is now preparing a place.* In the upper room, Christ told His disciples, “In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:2-3). An important aspect of the present work of Christ stemming from His resurrection is that Christ is anticipating future rapture and resurrection of the church and is preparing a place for His bride in heaven. Here again, His present work would be meaningless unless it was supported by a literal resurrection from the dead.

11. *His universal Lordship over all creation.* In Ephesians 1:20-21, it is brought out that Christ not only became Head over the church in virtue of His resurrection and ascension, but has resumed His position of Lord over all creation. Such would be

impossible if He had not been literally raised from the dead as the One who had power to lay down His life and take it again.

12. *Shepherd of the flock.* In His death on the cross, Christ fulfilled the anticipation of Psalm 22 that He would die as the Good Shepherd for His sheep. In His present ministry, however, Christ fulfilled what is anticipated in Psalm 23 as the Great Shepherd who cares for His sheep. His present ministry is anticipated in a number of passages in the New Testament (John 10:14; Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 2:25). Yet to be fulfilled after His second coming is the fulfillment of passages relating to His work as the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet 5:4).

*The future work of Christ also dependent upon His resurrection.* In a number of particulars, the work of Christ yet to be fulfilled in keeping with the prophetic Scripture also depends upon His resurrection. Among these a number of facts can be cited.

1. *The resurrection of all men.* It is anticipated in the prophetic Scriptures that Christ by the power of His own resurrection will raise the dead in a series of resurrections, probably in the following order: (a) the church at the time of the rapture (1 Cor 15:51-53; 1 Thess 4:14-17); (b) Israel and the Old Testament saints at the time of His coming to the earth to establish His kingdom (Dan 12:2, 13; Hos 13:14; Matt 22:30-31); (c) the tribulation saints at the time of His second coming (Rev 20:4); (d) the probable resurrection of millennial saints at the end of the millennium, though this is not mentioned in the Scriptures specifically; (e) the resurrection and judgment of the wicked dead at the end of the millennium (Rev 20:12-14). Regardless of time and character of resurrection, all resurrection is attributed to the power of Christ (John 5:28-29; 1 Cor 15:12, 22) and depends upon the historical fact of His own resurrection.

2. *The marriage of the Bridegroom and the bride.* At the time Christ comes for His church at the rapture, He will be joined to the church in heaven in keeping with the figure of the Bridegroom coming for the bride. This figure in the Scriptures speaks of the eternal union and fellowship of Christ and His church and is an important aspect of His future work, logically depending upon the fact of His resurrection from the dead. The church in the present age is a bride waiting for the coming of her husband (2 Cor 11:2; Rev 19:7).

3. *The judgment of all classes of moral creatures.* In addition to His present work of administering chastening and disciplinary judgments in the life of the believer, Christ will also be the final judge of all moral creatures, whether men or angels. These judgments can be itemized as referring (a) to the church (2 Cor 5:10-11); (b) to Israel nationally and individually (Matt 24:27—25:30); (c) to the Gentiles at the time of His second coming to the earth (Matt 25:31-46); (d) to angels, probably at the end of the millennium (1 Cor 6:3; 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6); (e) to the wicked dead (Rev 20:12-15). There also are general references to the fact of judgment as attributed to Christ in His power demonstrated in His resurrection (John 5:22; Acts 10:42; Rom 14:10; 2 Tim 4:1).

4. *Reigning on David's throne.* In the original prediction to David that his throne and seed would continue forever, it is implied that ultimately one would reign who would be a resurrected person. In ordinary succession of kings who ultimately would die, it is unlikely that the throne would be actually established forever as stated in 2 Samuel 7:16. The prophecy given to David has its confirmation in the announcement of the angel to Mary in Luke 1:31-33 where it was stated of Christ, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32-33). The specific promise given to David, therefore, is to be fulfilled in Christ and could not have been fulfilled if Christ had not been raised from the dead. This is confirmed in Peter's Pentecostal sermon in Acts 2:25-31 where the resurrection of Christ is tied in with the promise to David that God would set one of David's descendants upon His throne.

5. *The final deliverance of the world to the Father.* As a climax to the drama of history, Christ delivers a conquered world to the Father according to 1 Corinthians 15:24-28. This ultimate victory and the establishment of the sovereignty of Christ over all of His enemies could not have been accomplished apart from His resurrection. This is predicted in 1 Corinthians 15:26, "The last enemy that shall be abolished is death." The ultimate resurrection of all men as well as the ultimate subjugation of the entire world to the sovereignty of Christ depends upon His resurrection. It is not too much to say that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a link in the total chain of God's sovereign program without which the whole scheme would collapse.

L.S. Chafer has summarized the importance of the resurrection in these words: “His resurrection is vitally related to the ages past, to the fulfillment of all prophecy, to the values of His death, to the Church, to Israel, to creation, to the purposes of God in grace which reach beyond to the ages to come, and to the eternal glory of God. Fulfillment of the eternal purposes related to all of these was dependent upon the coming forth of the Son of God from that tomb. He arose from the dead, and the greatness of that event is indicated by the importance of its place in Christian doctrine. Had not Christ arisen—He by whom all things were created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers, He for whom things were created, who is before all things, and by whom all things consist (hold together)—every divine purpose and blessing would have failed, yea, the very universe and the throne of God would have dissolved and would have been dismissed forever. All life, light, and hope would have ceased. Death, darkness, and despair would have reigned. Though the spiritual powers of darkness might have continued, the last hope for a ruined world would have been banished eternally. It is impossible for the mind to grasp the mighty issues which were at stake at the moment when Christ came forth from the tomb. At no moment of time, however, were these great issues in jeopardy. The consummation of His resurrection was sure, for omnipotent power was engaged to bring it to pass. Every feature of the Christian’s salvation, position, and hope was dependent on the resurrection of his Lord.”<sup>4</sup>

*The resurrection a proof of the inspiration of Scripture.* Like other important prophecies which have been fulfilled, the resurrection of Christ is another confirmation of the accuracy and infallibility of the Scriptures and a testimony to its inspiration by the Holy Spirit. The resurrection of Christ fulfilled many prophecies both in the Old and New Testament. Of importance in the Old Testament is Psalm 16:10 quoted by Peter in his Pentecostal sermon (Acts 2:27). As Peter points out, this promise could not have been fulfilled by David who died and whose tomb was known to them at the time of Peter’s statements. It could only refer to Jesus Christ whose body did not see corruption.

In the New Testament narrative, Christ frequently referred to His coming death and resurrection and these predictions again had their fulfillment when Christ rose from the dead (Matt 16:21; 20:19 ; 26:62 ; Mark 9:9; 14:28 ; John 2:19). The Apostle Paul in giving his testimony before King Agrippa affirmed that the heart of his message was that which Moses and the prophets had predicted, “how that Christ must suffer, and how that he first by the resurrection of the dead should proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:23). It is inevitable that anyone who denies the resurrection also denies the inspiration of Scripture and usually it is also true that those who deny the inspiration of Scripture deny the bodily resurrection of Christ. The two are linked as are many other important doctrines of Biblical faith. The fact of the resurrection of Christ remains a pillar of the Christian faith without which the edifice soon totters and falls. The resurrection of Christ is, therefore, to be numbered among major undertakings of God which include His original decree, the creation of the physical world, the incarnation, the death of Christ, and His second coming to the earth.

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<sup>1</sup> James Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 277.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>4</sup> L. S. Chafer, *Grace*, pp. 272-73.

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