

Christology: What the Bible Says about Christ

Eight hundred years ago Bernard of Clairvaux penned the beautiful hymn:

Jesus, the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest.

Ever since the holy Child was laid in the manger in Bethlehem, men have found Jesus Christ to be the worthy Object of their worship. As the Word of God expressed in human form, He has drawn all believing souls to Himself. Although no other person is the object of more scriptural revelation, human pens falter when attempting to describe Him.

The poet, biographer, theologian and orator alike confess their inability to speak adequately on the glories and perfections of our blessed Savior. Charles Wesley said it best for all of us:

O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of His grace.¹

Christianity by its very name has always honored Jesus Christ as its historical and theological center. No other person has been more essential to its origination and subsequent history. One's faith in and understanding of Jesus Christ are the most important spiritual issues anyone can face.²

Satan knows this. That's why he has waged a fierce battle down through the centuries, to get men to think less of Jesus Christ than they ought. As early as the third century after Christ, a large segment of the Church had begun to deny that Jesus had been any more than just a man. This philosophy persisted in the background of human thought, until it burst forth into bold proclamations by the liberal theologians of the 19th century. Liberalism begins by categorically denying that there are such things as miracles; therefore there is no such thing as prophecy, no such thing as an infallible Word of God, no such thing as a Virgin Birth and (finally) no such thing as an eternal Son of God. Mind you, all of this has been preached in nominally Christians churches.

¹ Walvoord, John F., *Jesus Christ Our Lord* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 7.

² Walvoord, p. 11.

Early in the 20th century, people were getting tired of the way liberalism left Christians with such a hopeless feeling and an anemic faith. So under the leadership of Karl Barth, neo-orthodoxy was born. Neo-orthodoxy teaches that, while there may never have been an actual historical event called the Virgin Birth, it really doesn't matter. What matters is the wonderful feeling you get when you read about Jesus and allow his powerful message to transform you. It's enough to believe in a God who could perform miracles if he wanted to. Whether or not he actually has is beside the point.

Well, we want to know, understand, and trust in Jesus Christ, and we're not satisfied with the opinions of modern men. If we're going to learn the truth about the Person and work of our Savior, we're going to get our information from the Book, the only source that does not fail.

The Pre-Existence of Christ

1. Why is his pre-existence important?
 - His credibility depends upon it
 - Some of his statements are blasphemous if he didn't exist before Bethlehem (John 8:58)
 - Some of his statements are nonsense if he didn't exist before Bethlehem (John 17:5)
 - His claim to deity depends upon it
 - Certain things are true of God
 - He is eternal (Psalm 90:2)
 - He is the Creator (Genesis 1:1)
 - Certain things are said of Jesus Christ
 - He is eternal (John 8:58)
 - He is the Creator (Colossians 1:17)
 - Therefore, if you prove that Jesus existed before Bethlehem, you have gone almost the whole way in proving that he is God.
 - His Word depends upon it

- Jesus claims that Jesus was “sent from heaven” (over 40 times in John’s gospel alone). Note: For a person to be sent from point ‘A’ to point ‘B’ naturally assumes that he began at point ‘A.’
- Jesus claims that he is the only Way to life (John 14:6)
- If the first statement is false, it casts serious doubt on the second statement.

2. Where is his pre-existence taught in Scripture?

- In the New Testament

- In the words of John the Baptist (John 1:15)
- In the words of Christ himself
 - To the crowds (John 6:62)
 - To the people of Israel (Matthew 23:37)
 - To his enemies (John 8:58)
 - To his disciples (John 16:28)
 - To his Father (John 17:5)
- In the words of the apostles
 - John (1:1)
 - Paul (Philippians 2:5 ff.)
 - Peter (1st Petr 1:20)

- In the Old Testament

- He appears as “the angel of the Lord”
 - This “angel” appears in many passages
 - Genesis 16:7 – he found Hagar
 - Genesis 22:7 – he called to Abraham from heaven
 - Exodus 3:1-2 – he appeared to Moses in the burning bush
 - Numbers 22:22, 26 – he stood in Balaam’s way
 - Judges 13:2-3 – he appeared to Manoah

- This “angel” can be identified as God
 - He names himself with a name that is reserved for Deity (Judges 13:15-18 with Isaiah 9:6; 28:19)
 - He is described interchangeably as “angel” and “God” (Genesis 48:15-16)
 - He demands worship (Exodus 3:1-5 contrast with Revelation 19:10 & 22:8-9)
- This “angel” can be identified as the 2nd Person of the Trinity
 - The 2nd Person is the visible God of the New Testament (John 1:18)
 - The Angel of the Lord never appears again after the incarnation (Matthew 1:20; 2:19; Acts 5:19; 12:7, 23)
 - The Angel of the Lord and the Son of God function in the same way: as sent by the Father
 - He appears as YHWH (Isaiah 6:1-5 with John 12:39-41)

3. How is his pre-existence practical?

- It helps me to appreciate his Word
 - Assurance of help (Psalm 34:7)
 - Assurance of salvation (John 5:39)
- It helps me to appreciate his Person (2nd Peter 3:18)
- It helps me to appreciate his love (Philippians 2:6-8)

The Deity of Christ

When Jesus said, “I and the Father are one,” the Jews took up stones to stone him. Today one of Satan’s most successful and hideous campaigns against the church has been to undermine and nearly eliminate the church’s belief and teaching that Jesus is indeed God.

We believe the Bible is plain on this point. But our job as Christians is not just to believe the truth, but to share it. Your pastors’ job is to “equip the saints,” to commit the truth to “faithful men” (and women) who will be able to go out and teach others also. That’s why it’s of supreme importance to lay before you the five major avenues by which the Bible brings us to this cardinal truth: Jesus is God.

1. The names of God are applied to Christ

- God
 - John 1:1 – “In the beginning was....”
 - John 20:28 – “My Lord and my God!”
 - Titus 2:13 – “Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.”
- Son of God
 - John 5:18 – “For this cause the Jews were seeking...to kill him, because he...was calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”
 - John 10:33 – “We stone you for blasphemy; because you, being a man, made yourself out to be God.” (Note: “Son” = sameness of nature, but difference in position.)
- The Lord
 - Luke 2:11 – “Christ the Lord”
 - John 13:13 – “You call me teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am.”
- The Lord of Glory
 - 1st Corinthians 2:8 – “If they had understood (God’s wisdom) they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.”
 - Psalm 24:10 – “Who is this King of Glory? The LORD of Hosts, he is the King of Glory.”
- The Holy One
 - Acts 3:14 – “You disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked that a murderer be granted to you.”

- Hosea 11:9 – “I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.”

- The First and Last
 - Revelation 1:17 – “Do not be afraid; I am the First and Last.”

 - Isaiah 44:6 – “Thus says the LORD, the king of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of Hosts, ‘I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides me.’”

- 2. The attributes of God are applied to Christ.
 - He is self-existent
 - John 1:4 – “In him was life.”

 - 14:6 – “I am the life.”

 - Acts 3:15 – “You have put to death the Author of Life.”

 - He is eternal
 - Isaiah 9:6 – “Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”

 - Micah 5:2 – “His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.”

 - He is unchangeable
 - Hebrews 13:8 – “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

 - He is omnipresent
 - Matthew 18:20 – “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am.”

 - Matthew 28:20 – “Behold, I am with you always.”

 - Colossians 3:11 – “Christ is all, and in all.”

 - He is omniscient

- John 6:64 – “Jesus knew who did not believe, and who would betray him.”
- Colossians 2:3 – “In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”
- He is omnipotent
 - Philippians 3:20-21 – “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of his glory, by the exertion of the power that he has even to subject all things to himself.”
- He is perfect
 - Colossians 2:9-10 – “For in him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in him you have been made complete, and he is the head over all rule and authority.”
- He is infinite
 - Ephesians 3:8 – “To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ....”
- He is incomprehensible
 - Matthew 11:27 – “All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal him.”
- He is holy
 - Luke 1:35 – “The holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.”
- He is true
 - Revelation 3:7 – “He who is holy and true, who has the key of David...says, ‘I know your deeds.’”
- He is love (Romans 8:35-39)
- He is righteous (1st John 2:1)

- He is faithful (Revelation 3:14)
- He is merciful (Jude 21)

3. The works of God are done by Christ.

- He created all things (Colossians 1:16)
- He upholds and preserves all things (Colossians 1:17)
- He guides and directs the stream of history (Hebrew 1:2)
- He forgives the sins of men and gives them eternal life (Mark 2:5-12)
- He builds and maintains the Church (Matthew 16:18)
- He receives and answers prayer (John 14:14)
- He will raise the dead at the Resurrection (John 5:28-29)
- He is the final Judge of the world (John 5:22 with 27)

4. Jesus Christ accepts worship.

- Worship belongs to God alone
 - The apostles refused worship (Acts 14:11-15)
 - Peter refused worship (Acts 10:25-26)
 - Angels refused worship (Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9)
 - Christ commanded men to worship God alone (Matthew 4:8-10)
 - Men are punished for accepting what belongs to God alone (Acts 12:21-23)
- Yet Christ is to be worshiped as God
 - He accepted and encouraged such worship (Matthew 28:9-10)

- He demanded such worship (John 5:23)
 - The Father commands such worship of Christ (Hebrews 1:6)
 - Christ will be worshiped by all of heaven (Revelation 5:8)
 - This worship of Christ will at last be universal (Philippians 2:10-11)
5. Christ made claims for himself which could only be true if he were Deity.
- He claimed absolute authority over the laws and institutions of God
 - The Law of Moses (Matthew 5:31-34, 38-39 with 7:28-29)
 - The temple (Matthew 12:6)
 - The Sabbath (Matthew 12:8)
 - The Kingdom (Matthew 16:19)
 - He claimed to be the supreme object of saving faith equally with the Father (John 14:1; 21:15-22)
 - At times Christ pointed to himself alone as the true object of men's faith and devotion, with no mention of the Father (John 3:36)
 - Our Lord insisted that the highest and most precious of human ties and devotion must yield to him (Luke 14:26)
 - He claimed that in himself all the deepest spiritual and eternal needs of humanity are completely satisfied
 - The knowledge of God (Matthew 11:27)
 - The door to salvation (John 10:7-9)
 - Rest for the soul (Matthew 11:28-29)
 - Security from danger (John 10:28-30)
 - Fruit-bearing energy (John 15:5)

The Incarnation of Christ

“Incarnation” is that divine act in which the second Person of the Triune God was embodied in human nature, flesh, and form.

1. The fact of the Incarnation

It's easy to describe the beginning of normal human existence: “conceived,” “born.” But it's not so easy to describe the entrance of the Son of God into human life. The New Testament writers exhaust human language in their attempt:

Matthew 20:28; John 6:51; John 3:13; 1st Timothy 1:15; John 3:17; 1st John 3:5; Philippians 2:7; 2nd Corinthians 8:9; Hebrews 2:9; Hebrews 10:5; Galatians 4:4; John 1:14; Hebrews 2:14; Romans 1:3; Romans 8:3; Philippians 2:7-8; Hebrews 2:17; 1st Corinthians 15:47; 1st Timothy 3:16.

2. The importance of the Incarnation

- Man's complaint (Job 9:32-33)

Job voices the universal feeling of our sinful race in the presence of an infinite God. The chasm between such a God and man has seemed at times so vast as to be unbridgeable.

- God's answer (John 1:14)

God not only answers in word, but in deed, with the Incarnation of God in Christ, the eternal Son made flesh, clothed in the likeness of men. Now it's no longer valid for me to say of God, “He is not a man.” For the God who today sits upon the throne of the universe is also Man!

- The significance of God's answer (1st John 4:2-3)

These words cannot be misunderstood. If you don't confess that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh, you're not of God. There's no middle ground here. You're either right or wrong, in or out, saved or lost. Christianity and the Incarnation of God in Christ stand or fall together.

3. The meaning of the Incarnation

- What it meant to Christ

- A change in his dwelling place (John 6:51)
- A change in his possessions (Luke 9:58; 2nd Corinthians 8:9)
- A change in his glory (John 1:10; 17:5)
- A change in his position (Matthew 20:26-28)
- A change in his form (Philippians 2:6-7)

Notes: All of the above were temporary except the last. And there was no change in his divine personhood.

- What it meant to mankind

- God became incarnate in Christ in order to die for sinners and thus to save them from their sins.

The wages of sin is death. Death is the separation of the body from the spirit. God is Spirit and cannot die. Therefore, God must take on a body. The story of his birth cannot be separated from the purpose of his coming: the cross.

- God became incarnate to share with men his own eternal life.
 - No Incarnation, no abundant life (John 10:10-11)
 - No Incarnation, no Bread of Life (John 6:51)
- Our Lord became incarnate so that he could know human life by personal experience.
 - So he could be a sympathetic High Priest (Hebrews 2:17-18)
Suffering ... temptation ... poverty ... slander ... betrayal.
 - So he could be a Righteous Judge (John 5:22, 27)
- God became incarnate so he could reveal in himself the ideal humanity
 - He reveals what we ought to be right now (1st John 2:6; 1st Peter 2:21)

- He reveals what we shall be hereafter (1st John 3:2; Hebrews 2:6-10)
 - God became incarnate to provide for us an everlasting revelation of himself in visible human form
 - On one hand, there's no question that he is God (John 1:18; 14:9; 20:28)
 - On the other hand, it's clear that he has retained his human form even though he has gone back to heaven (Colossians 1:15)
 - Furthermore, Christ assures us that he now thinks of himself not only as the eternal Son of God, but as a human being like us (Revelation 22:16)
4. The value of the Incarnation
- It shows us that human life is possible without sin
 - It satisfies our desire for a Savior who really understands us
 - It demonstrates the glory of sacrifice on behalf of others

The Virgin Birth

1. How did God do it? (Luke 1:35)

Obviously this was a biological miracle. Just how did God manage to adjust for the need of both male and female cell with their corresponding genes and chromosomes? Did he simply create the necessary male cell out of thin air; or did he alter a cell from Mary's body and implant the altered cell in her womb?

Probably we won't know the answer to these questions until "we know even as we are known." That shouldn't make us too impatient; we're surrounded daily by mysterious facts which we can't understand, but which are accepted as facts nevertheless. Before we waste precious time and energy trying to determine *how* God engineered the Virgin Birth, there is a much more basic question that we must prove.

2. Did God do it?

One of the most vehement denials of the Virgin Birth comes from those who complain that it requires a biological miracle in order to believe this teaching. But there is yet an even more basic question.

3. Could God do it?

What is the Almighty God capable of doing? Is he able to make a man from the body of a woman without a human father? Let's review the Scriptures to see the methods God has used in the past to make human beings:

- He can make a man through the laws of natural generation, by using a man and a woman.
- He can make a man without the agency of either a man or a woman – that's how Adam came to be.
- He can make a human being from the body of a man, without the help of a woman – that's how Eve was created.
- He can make a man by divinely empowering the bodies of parents who are long past the age of child-bearing, as in the case of Abraham and Sarah and their son Isaac.
- Therefore, it's a very small step to assert that God can make a human being by still another method – a human being conceived in the womb of a woman through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

2. The Bible statements on the Virgin Birth

- The Old Testament foreshadows it (Isaiah 7:14)
 - See Isaiah 7:11. This birth was to be a sign to the house of David; it would have to be of cosmic proportions.
 - The word for "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14 always means an unmarried woman. Contrary to some Old Testament scholars, it could not refer to Isaiah's young bride.
 - Matthew casts the deciding vote (1:22-23). As always, any New Testament author may interpret the words of any Old Testament author. (See "The Law of Unity," page 6 of these notes.)

- Matthew and Luke proclaim it
 - Both accounts guard carefully against any suggestion of a human father.
 - Matthew 1:16 – “of whom” (using the feminine pronoun), referring to Mary.
 - Luke 3:23 – “being (as was supposed the son of Joseph) the son of Eli...”
 - The two separate genealogies are required to solve the problem of Jeremiah’s curse upon Jehoiachin (Coniah, Jeconiah), Jeremiah 22:30.
 - Messiah must inherit the throne of David through Solomon (2nd Samuel 7:12-16; Acts 2:30).
 - But Messiah would never be a physical descendent of Solomon through the last legitimate king (Jeconiah) because of the curse.
 - The only solution is for Messiah to be born of a virgin who is a physical descendent of David (through Nathan, brother of Solomon), who marries a man of the royal line of Solomon. By adopting a boy who had no father, but was of David’s family through his mother, Joseph could pass on to Jesus the legal right to the throne without passing on the curse.
 - So Matthew establishes Jesus’ legal right to the throne of David, while Luke establishes Jesus’ physical connection as a son of David.
- Statements of Christ allude to it
 - Luke 2:48-49
 - John 6:33, 38, 41-42
- The rest of the New Testament assumes it
 - Mark 1:11
 - John 1:14
 - Galatians 4:4

3. Objections to the Virgin Birth

- The Bible calls Joseph the father of Jesus (Matthew 13:55)

Yes, but even today an adopted father is often referred to simply as “father.”

- Many other religion have such “virgin birth” myths
 - These aren’t virgin births at all, but rather stories of gods who come to earth in the form of mortal men and unite with women.
 - These myths are wild and fanciful in contrast to the sober and reasonable account of Jesus’ birth.
 - The heathen myths are impure and obscene, while the Bible story of Jesus’ birth is so chaste and pure that we can read it to children.
- The Virgin Birth requires a biological miracle
 - That’s the kind of God we worship.
 - A greater miracle would have been a human being, born under normal circumstances, who never sinned.
 - The denial of this miracle usually leads to the denial of the bodily resurrection of Christ, and ultimately to throwing away the whole Bible.

4. The importance of the Virgin Birth

- It is essential to the trustworthiness of the Gospels.
 - If there was no Virgin Birth, then Matthew and Luke are either liars or the victims of a lie.
 - Then everything in the writings of Matthew and Luke become open to suspicion.
- It is vitally related to our Lord’s sinless nature (Luke 1:35).
 - Some say a Virgin Birth wasn’t necessary to preserve Jesus from sinful human nature.

- But God seems to think it was important enough to handle in this way. He doesn't violate his established laws of nature without a pretty good reason.
- It protects Jesus Christ from the blasphemous alternatives (the product of a premarital sexual encounter between Joseph and Mary; or the product of an illicit affair between Mary and an unknown stranger).
- It is necessary to solve the enormous problem of a curse on Solomon's line.
- It is the only reasonable explanation for the Incarnation.

Without understanding the Virgin Birth, it is impossible to have a complete picture of the supernatural career of the Son of God on earth. Everything about his career was shot through with the supernatural. He was a supernatural person, with supernatural knowledge, power, words, message, life, death, resurrection, and ascension! Considering that he was such a person, would anyone be satisfied if he/she were expected to believe that his birth had been no different from that of the average child? It just wouldn't fit; it would be out of place.

The Person of Christ

On October 8, 451, over five hundred pastors assembled in a church in the city of Chalcedon, just across the Bosphorus from Constantinople. They had met to settle a theological dispute between two parties. It wasn't easy. One historian describes the scene: "The proceedings were, from the outset, very tumultuous and the theological fanaticism of the two parties broke out at times in full blaze, until the laymen present were compelled to remind the bishops of their clerical dignity."

The cause for this ruckus was a fundamental disagreement on the true make-up of our Lord Jesus Christ. The dispute raged for two weeks. Finally the following formal declaration was adopted by the majority of those present, and this statement remains as the orthodox expression of the truth about Jesus Christ:

"We unanimously teach one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, complete as to His Godhood, and complete as to His manhood; truly God and truly man, subsisting in a soul and human flesh...like us in all things yet without sin...in two natures...distinct yet united..."

There were only two problems with the Creed of Chalcedon: It didn't explain how one person could have two natures; and it didn't eliminate the disagreements. Over 1500 years

have come and gone, and still there are disagreements, still there is confusion. How Christ could be both God and man at the same time remains a mystery.

1. The reality of Christ's two natures

- He has the nature of God

He is self-existent, eternal, unchangeable, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, perfect, infinite, holy, and righteous.

- He has the nature of man

He has a true human body composed of flesh and blood. He experienced a true human birth. He enjoyed a normal childhood growth and development (Luke 2:52). He possessed a human soul/spirit (Matthew 26:38; John 13:21).

- The problem(s)

- To possess a certain nature is to possess all of the qualities essential to that nature.
- How can a person be finite and infinite at the same time?
- How can a person be omnipresent and have a body at the same time?

2. The relation of Christ's two natures

- They coexist in one person and are inseparable.

- Sometimes the Bible describes an attribute of Jesus Christ that is true of him both as God and man. For instance, he is our Redeemer. That title belongs to him because he is God; but he also won the right to that title because of his death as a man.
- Sometimes the Bible says things about the person, Jesus Christ, which could be true only of God. In John 8:58 Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am." As God, he is eternal. But it was also the human being, Jesus Christ, who said these words.

- Sometimes things are said about our Lord which could be true only of a human being. On the cross Jesus said, "I thirst." Only a real human could say such a thing; but it was the God-man who said it.
- What about when the Bible pictures Jesus Christ as the glorious, divine Son of God, as in Revelation 1:12-18, only to have him say of himself, "I was dead"?
- Sometimes Jesus describes himself as the Son of Man, only to make a claim that could be true only of God. In John 6:62 he says, "What if you should see the Son of Man ascending where he was before?" He wasn't the Son of Man until after he came down from heaven. But he's one person. If Jesus Christ the Son of God once lived in heaven, then Jesus Christ the Son of Man can say *he* did. There's no difference.
- There are a couple of occasions when Christ was doing something that only God could do, yet he spoke of himself from a human standpoint. On the cross he cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He was in anguish because he, the Son, was for the moment separated from the Father. But he called his Father "God," as though he looked up from the same viewpoint that we do.
- At the same time, however, Christ's two natures remain distinct from each other. They cannot be confused or mingled. His human nature always remains human, and his 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. For example, you can't mingle his infinity with his finiteness. If you add the number two to infinity, the result is infinity; the two is swallowed up and disappears. God cannot be transferred to man, and vice versa. To rob the divine nature of God of a single attribute would destroy his deity, and to mix man's human nature with anything else would make him something other than man.

3. The results of Christ's two natures

- To his person
 - It affects his self-consciousness
 - The logic of his self-consciousness

If he was truly God, and if God is self-conscious from eternity, then (as one author states) he must have been fully aware of the fact that he was God

even as he lay in the manger in Bethlehem. However, since he was human, and since humans become aware of their own existence gradually as they grow, his human self-awareness must have developed normally as a child. If we're going to be logical, we've got to insist that there was no point in his earthly life when Jesus Christ was not – on some level -- aware that he was God.

- The elements of his self-consciousness
 - He must have been conscious that he was the King of Israel.
 - He was conscious of the fact that he was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophetic hopes.
 - He was aware of his supernatural power.
 - He was conscious of the fact that he was the Savior of the world.
 - He knew he was God.

- Having two natures affected Christ's will (Matthew 26:39)

It was natural for the human nature to desire to avoid the cross; but it was the divine nature that "always did the will of the Father." Just because Christ had two natures, it doesn't mean he had two wills. An ordinary believer has both a sin nature and a new nature. That causes a conflict of desires sometimes, but when it comes right down to making a final choice between two paths, a person can only go one way. He gets only one choice. In the same way, you can't say that Christ had two wills that were in conflict with each other. A conflict of desires cannot be equated with a conflict of moral choice.

- It affected his work
 - His act of redemption
 - His present priesthood
 - His kingly office
 - His earthly dominion
 - His future judgment

The Death of Christ

One of the chief forms of heresy over the years has been faulty or inadequate views of the importance and nature of the death of Christ.

1. The importance of the death of Christ

- It is one of the central themes of Scripture
 - In Old Testament prophecy (Genesis 3:15; Zechariah 12:10)
 - In the ministry of John the Baptist (John 1:29)
 - In the teaching of Christ himself (John 6:51)
 - In the epistles (1st Peter 2:24)
- It was the first truth in apostolic teaching (1st Corinthians 15:1-3)
- It is the heart of the church's ordinances (Romans 6:3-4; 1st Corinthians 11:26)
- It is the foundation and source of all true Christian living (Romans 6:10-11)
- It will be remembered as an everlasting monument of God's love and grace (Revelation 21 and 22)

2. Various interpretations of the death of Christ

- The Satanic Ransom Theory: Mankind was under the power of Satan, and the death of Christ was a ransom paid to Satan. (This was the view of some of the Church Fathers.)
- The Eradication Theory: Christ took sinful human nature and gradually overcame it during his lifetime, and finally destroyed it by dying. (This is the view of 7th-Day Adventism and Neo-Orthodoxy.)
- The Martyr Theory: Christ died for the truth he held.
- The Example Theory: Christ died to give us an example.
- The Governmental Theory: Christ died to display the government of God, and to show that wrong must be punished.
- The Influence Theory: Christ died to show the love of God and to make us ashamed of our rebellion.

- The Substitutionary Atonement Theory: Christ as our substitute bore the penalty for our sins, and thus satisfied the demand of God's righteous law.
3. The necessity of the death of Christ
- To accomplish his own eternal purpose (John 12:27)
 - To obey the will of his Father (Matthew 26:38-39)
 - To fulfill prophecy (Luke 24:44-46)
4. The nature of the death of Christ
- Separation from God (Genesis 2:17; 3:22-24; Matthew 27:46)
 - Separation of the spirit from the body (Genesis 35:18-19; Matthew 27:50)
5. The results of the death of Christ
- The results in relation to believers
 - Redeemed us from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13; see 1st Peter 1:18-19)
 - Released us from our sins (Revelation 1:5)
 - Purchased us for God (Revelation 5:9)
 - Brought us near to God (Ephesians 2:13)
 - Secured eternal life for us (John 3:14-15; 1st Thessalonians 5:10)
 - Justified us (Romans 5:9)
 - Sanctified us (Hebrews 10:10)
 - Made us perfect in God's sight (Hebrews 10:14)
 - Opened a way for us into the presence of God (Hebrews 10:19-20)
 - Made it impossible to condemn us (Romans 8:33-34)

- Cleanses us constantly from all sin (1st John 1:7)
- Made us fit to dwell with God in heaven (Revelation 7:14)
- The results in relation to the whole human race
 - He reconciled the world to God (John 1:29; 2nd Corinthians 5:14, 19; 1st Timothy 2:6; Hebrews 2:9; 1st John 2:2)

The death of Christ swept away the great barrier of sin which separated a lost world from a Holy God. God in Christ reconciled the world to himself. Because of the cross, the door is open to all. Our business is to tell the world that the door is open, even though the sinner, left to his own will, refuses to enter that door (John 6:37, 44, 65).

- Exerts a drawing power on all men (John 12:32)
- The results in relation to Satan and his hosts
 - By the cross, Satan was “cast out” (future passive) – a process which began at the cross (the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15), cast out of the place of influence over men (John 12:31 with 32-33)
 - Satan was rendered powerless over believers in the experience of death (Hebrews 2:14-15)
 - Satan and his forces were stripped of their power to use the law against us (Colossians 2:14-15)
- The results in relation to the universe
 - All things were reconciled to God (Colossians 1:19-20)
 - The heavenly things were cleansed (Hebrews 9:22-23)
- The results in relation to Christ (as Mediator)
 - He fulfilled his part in the eternal covenant with God the Father (Hebrews 13:20)
 - He produced a new spiritual race (Isaiah 53:10; Hebrews 2:10)

- He laid the foundation for his priestly work on our behalf (Hebrews 9:11-12)
- He secured his exaltation above all things (Philippians 2:8-9)
- He won the crown of glory and honor (Hebrews 2:9)
- The results in relation to God the Father
 - His love for sinners was revealed (Romans 5:8)
 - His righteousness was revealed (Romans 3:25)
 - His wrath against sin was highlighted (Matthew 27:46)
 - His wisdom was revealed (Romans 3:26)

6. The finality of the death of Christ

- The cross was final for Christ himself (Hebrews 7:27; 9:25-27; Hebrews 10:11-12; 1st Peter 3:18)
- The cross is final for those who are saved (Hebrews 9:11-12; 10:10, 14)
- The cross is final for a lost world (Hebrews 10:12-13, 26-27)

Note: These truths strike at three deadly errors:

- Roman Catholicism: The Mass pretends to repeat his suffering
- Legalism: Attempts to add human effort to the work of the cross
- Universalism: Hopes that God will do something for sinners beyond the cross

7. The death of Christ and the Christian life

- The great practical purpose of the cross was to motivate us to live the right sort of life
 - Righteousness (Romans 8:3-4; 1st Peter 2:24)
 - Holiness (Colossians 1:22)

- Unselfishness (2nd Corinthians 5:14-15)
- Unworldliness (Galatians 6:14)
- Victory (1st John 5:4-6; Hebrews 12:1-3)
- Service (Hebrews 9:14)
- The secret of moral and spiritual power is tied to the death of Christ
 - It separates us from the world (Galatians 6:14)
 - It sets our conscience free from dead works (Hebrews 9:14 with 10:22)
 - It unites us with Christ's omnipotence (Romans 6:1-11)
 - It sets before us the supreme Example of unselfish obedience and godly suffering (Philippians 2:5-7; 1st Peter 2:20-23)
 - It opens the door into the presence of an infinite God (Hebrews 10:19)
 - It places us under an infinite debt of gratitude to Jesus Christ (1st Corinthians 6:20; 2nd Corinthians 5:15)

How can I say, "Christ loved me and gave himself for me," and then go out into the world and deliberately go on sinning?

The Resurrection of Christ

"After more than seven hundred hours of studying this subject and thoroughly investigating its foundation, I have come to the conclusion that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the most wicked, vicious, heartless hoaxes ever foisted upon the minds of men, OR it is the most fantastic fact of history."³

Does it matter very much whether or not Christ rose from the dead? To read Paul's first letter to the Corinthians will leave no doubt as to the centrality and importance of this article of our faith (1st Corinthians 15:17-19).

³ McDowell, Josh, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), p. 203.

The doctrine of the resurrection is central in the Christian faith. Dr. R. A. Torrey called it “the Cornerstone of Christian Doctrine,” “the Gibraltar of Christian Evidence,” and “the Waterloo of Infidelity.” Without the resurrection, the crucifixion of our Lord would have been in vain, for it was the resurrection which validated and gave saving value to the atoning death.

Granted, there are “Christian” churches and “Christian” schools today which teach that the power of Christianity is not in a literal resurrection of Christ but in the Gospel’s philosophical ability to change men’s lives for the better. However, it is the purpose of this study to prove the importance, evidence, and the practical value of believing that Jesus Christ is literally, physically alive today, and that his resurrection was an actual historical event.

1. The importance of the resurrection

- It was essential to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ in order to be regarded as an Apostle (Acts 1:21-22)
- It was essential to believe in the literal resurrection of Christ in order to be saved (Romans 10:9-10)
- The resurrection is fundamental to everything that Christianity teaches and stands for (1st Corinthians 15:1-4, 17-18)

2. The evidence for the resurrection

Note: It is possible to prove that the resurrection of Christ is an historical fact. But it shouldn’t surprise us when otherwise rational people examine the evidence and deny it anyway (Romans 8:7; 1st Corinthians 2:14).

- Evidence from the Bible
 - The Old Testament predicted the resurrection of the Messiah
 - Psalm 16:10 with Acts 2:25-31
 - Psalm 2:7 with Acts 13:32-37
 - The New Testament testifies to the resurrection of Christ
 - The Lord Jesus himself anticipated it (Matthew 12:38-40; John 2:18-22)

- The New Testament writers attested to it (Matthew, Mark, Luke John, Paul, Peter, James, Jude)

Note: Three of these men were apostles, one was a noted Pharisee, one a doctor, one an associate of Peter, and two were half-brothers of Jesus.

- New Testament theology is founded upon it
 - Matters of Christian belief: salvation (Romans 10:9), justification (Romans 4:2)
 - Matters of Christian morality (1st Corinthians 15:32-34)
 - Matters of Christian service (1st Corinthians 15:58)
 - Matters of Christian hope (1st Thessalonians 4:13-14)
 - Matters of Christian experience (Philippians 3:10)
- Evidence from history
 - The manner in which the event is recorded
 - The apostles willingly record their ignorance
 - Exaggeration/sensationalism avoided
 - Minute details recorded
 - The life of Christ demands such a climax
 - Supernaturally conceived
 - Lived a sinless life
 - Performed miracles
 - Died a voluntary, atoning death
 - The empty grave and disappearance of the body require it
 - His friends couldn't have removed the body
 - His enemies couldn't produce the body
 - The dramatic transformation of the disciples attested it
 - After his death, they were demoralized
 - Shortly after, they were united, zealous, bold, willing to die
 - Overnight, incredulous skeptics became ardent witnesses

- The very existence of the Church is tangible evidence
 - At Pentecost, the core of Peter's message was Christ's resurrection
 - His hearers had access to the tomb
 - No one in the crowd contradicted him
 - 3,000 believed; today believers number in the millions
 - The Church didn't manufacture a resurrection story; the resurrection created the Church

- The conversion of Paul is evidence
 - He was an educated, logical man
 - He had been a mad persecutor of the Church
 - He suddenly changed, testified of the resurrection
 - He had seen the risen Christ

- The custom of worshiping on Sunday
 - These were Jewish believers schooled in the tradition of Sabbath worship
 - Within a week after the reported resurrection, they had begun to meet regularly on Sunday
 - This came about, not by decree, but by unspoken common consent
 - Within a few years it had become the custom of the believers
 - This can only be explained by some powerful force of conviction in the reality of the event they celebrated

3. The practical value of the resurrection

- It gives us some idea of what our glorified bodies will be like someday (1st Corinthians 15:35, 41-44)
 - Jesus' body was genuine flesh and bones
 - He could be touched (Luke 24:39)
 - He could eat (Luke 24:41-43)

 - But Jesus' body was no longer limited in its properties and abilities
 - He passed through the grave clothes (John 20:6-8)
 - He passed through the walls of the upper room (John 20:19)

- It serves as the motivating force behind the thoroughly Christian lifestyle
 - Salvation (Romans 10:9)
 - Service (1st Corinthians 15:58)
 - Hope (1st Thessalonians 4:14-15)
 - Power (Philippians 3:10)

The Ascension of Christ

It is a bit surprising that so little has been written and said about the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, especially since this amazing and important event has such far-reaching implications for the Christian. The ascension is not only a great historical fact of the New Testament, but a great factor in the life of Christ and Christians, since it is the culmination of all of the work he came to earth to do.

1. The fact of the ascension

- The Old Testament had prophesied it
 - Psalm 68:18 with Ephesians 4:8
 - Psalm 110:1 with Acts 2:34-37
- Jesus himself had anticipated it
 - John 7:33-36
 - John 8:21
 - John 14:28-29
 - John 16:5-7
- The Gospels describe it
 - Mark 16:19-20
 - Luke 24:50-51
 - Acts 1:9
- The Epistles assume it
 - Hebrews 4:14
 - 1st Peter 3:22

- There is a whole mass of passages in the New Testament in which Christ is said to be in heaven subsequent to his ascension: Acts, Romans, Ephesians, Philippians, 1st Thessalonians, 1st Timothy, Hebrews, 1st John, and Revelation. This mass of Scripture evidence is one of the reasons why there has been so little question among orthodox Christians concerning the reality of Christ's ascension.

2. The nature of the ascension (see Acts 1)

- Four aspects of his ascent are described
 - He was lifted upward (9)
 - He was received by clouds (9)
 - He was going on a journey (10)
 - He arrived in heaven (11)
- Four qualities of his ascent are detailed
 - He ascended gradually
 - He ascended visibly
 - He ascended bodily
 - He ascended amidst clouds

Note: These latter four facts are of extreme importance. Notice what the angels said in verse 11: "He will come in just the same way as you have seen him go into heaven." This is in stark contrast to what is being taught by some who today claim to be the witnesses of Jehovah. They categorically deny that the return of Christ in power and glory will be a visible, bodily return. Why? Because they have already concluded that he has already come back in spirit form. But to say such a thing is to ignore the plain language of the Bible, and to lead men and women into hopeless confusion concerning the events that are yet to take place in God's timetable for the ages.

3. Things guaranteed by the ascension

- To Christ himself
 - It guaranteed his credibility (Matthew 26:59-66)
 - It guaranteed his righteousness (Psalm 24:3; John 6:62; John 16:10)
 - It guaranteed his final triumph over his enemies (Acts 2:33-35)

- To us believers
 - It assures us that we have someone representing us before the throne of the Father (Hebrews 4:14-16; 9:24)
 - It guarantees a great ministry for us in the world (John 14:12)
 - It foreshadows our own entrance into heaven someday (Hebrews 6:19-20)
- 4. The practical value of the ascension
 - It should fill our hearts with joy (John 14:28)
 - It should focus our attention upon heaven (Colossians 3:1-4)
 - It should give us great assurance (Hebrews 6:17-20)

The Present Work of Christ

1. The present position of Christ

Psalm 110:1; Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36; 16:19; Luke 20:42-43; 22:69; Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3-13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1st Peter 3:22⁴

2. The present authority of Christ

Ephesians 1:21; Hebrews 1:-13; 1st Peter 3:22

3. The present work of Christ

- He is Head of the Body the Church (1st Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:22; 5:31-32)
- He is the Great Shepherd in relation to his sheep (Psalm 23; Hebrews 13:20)
- He is the True Vine in relation to the branches (John 15:5-11)

⁴ Walvoord, John, *Jesus Christ Our Lord* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 224.

- He is the Chief Cornerstone in relation to the stones of the building (1st Corinthians 3:9-11; 1st Peter 2:4-8)
- He is our great High Priest (Hebrews chapters 2-6)

Recommended Reading

McDowell, Josh. *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999.

Morgan, G. Campbell. *The Crises of the Christ*. Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1936.

Walvoord, John. *Jesus Christ Our Lord*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1969.

Assignments for Next Segment (“The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit”)

1. Read Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*, chapters 30, 39, 52-53
2. Answer one or more of the “Questions for Personal Application” at the end of each chapter, and be prepared to share and discuss your answers in class. Or compose a question of your own (which relates to the subject matter in those chapters), research the topic, and be prepared to share your answer with the class.