

Theology for Life

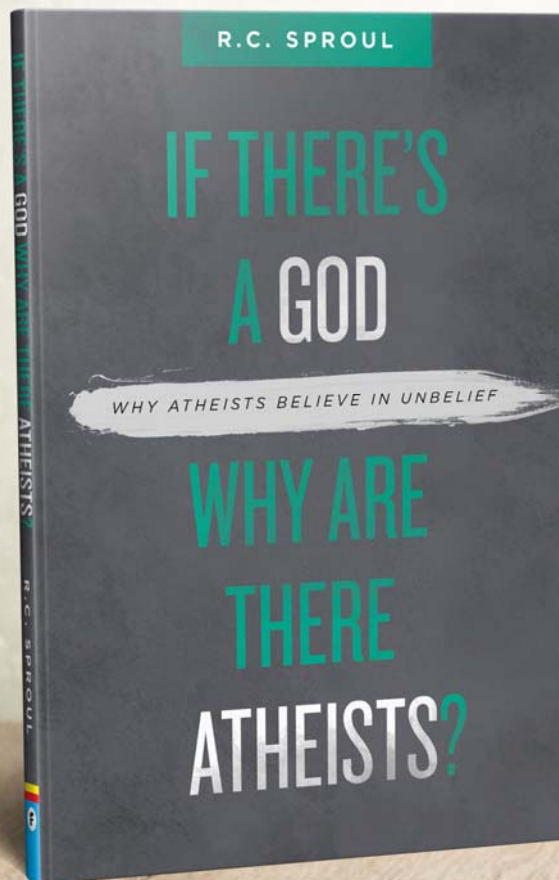
Volume 5 | Issue 1 | Spring 2018



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- The Three Offices of Christ
- The Whole Bible in One Meal
- What is Jesus' Evangelism Program?
- Jesus the Divine Word

Has psychology explained away religion?



For the believer who is troubled by doubts or who wants to respond intelligently to unbelievers, this book offers clear, thought-provoking discussion.

For the unbeliever who has an open mind, it offers stimulating debate, worthy of time and thought.

OSBORNE NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES



"This is a tremendous resource that will serve a new generation of Bible readers well for years to come. Highly recommended!"

ANDREAS KÖSTENBERGER

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Editor's Corner

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The resurrection of Jesus is critical to a solid understanding of the gospel. When talking about the doctrine of salvation, what is often emphasized in the contemporary evangelical literature is the death of Jesus and the benefits therein. What's often missing is the *resurrection* of Jesus. When we look at the Gospels, though, we see Jesus talking about the resurrection. When we look at the rest of the New Testament, we discover the Apostles talking about the resurrection. Now, the death of Jesus is central to the gospel, make no mistake about it. But the death of Jesus is only one-third of the gospel. The other two-thirds of the gospel are the burial, and resurrection of Jesus. To be clear, I'm not only saying that the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is all the gospel is—there is more to the work of Jesus than just the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus is *just* as critical to an accurate gospel message as is the death and burial of our Lord Jesus. Not only is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus essential, so is the ascension of Jesus, His ongoing ministry as our High Priest/ Intercessor/ Mediator, and His soon return at His Second Coming.

In John 11:25-26, Jesus says to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" These words of Jesus in John 11:25 are among the most precious and important words to ever fall from His lips. J.C. Ryle comments that Jesus "tells Martha that He is not merely a human teacher of the resurrection, but the Divine Author of all resurrection, whether spiritual or physical and the Root and Foundation of all life."

Jesus reveals Himself as the source of "the resurrection and the life". We can hope in the resurrection because Jesus Himself has entered into death and risen from the grave. "The whole human race is plunged in death," writes John Calvin. "Therefore, no man will possess life unless he is first risen from the dead. Hence Christ teaches that He is the beginning of life."

"In him was life," John said in chapter 1 of his Gospel testimony, "and the life was the light of men" (verse 4). Therefore, "All who face the recurrent death situations of life and wrestle with questions of death and life can find an answer only through faith in him." To believe in Jesus is to receive the benefit not only of His life and death, but also of His resurrection; from Him through faith, Christians are entered into glory through the light of His open tomb. "Because I live," Jesus said, "you also will live" (John 14:19).

If the resurrection's beginning and source rests with Jesus Himself—with His divine person and saving work—then the middle of Christ's resurrection promise deals with His answer to death: "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" (John 11:25). Here is the answer—the only real answer—to the problem of death. By trusting in

Jesus, we gain the promise of resurrection life.

To believe in Jesus is to start living the resurrection life *even now*. We do not have to wait until we die to receive new life from Christ; His resurrection begins in us the moment we believe. This was Paul's point in Ephesians 1:2 and 4-5—namely that the gift of God offers to anyone who will come in faith to Jesus. Those who believe in Jesus are freed from the power of death, even before they die, and they receive His never-ending life even now, to live in this world as those who have everything to gain and nothing to lose.

Whether you have questions about the death of Jesus or the resurrection of Jesus, in this issue of *Theology for Life Magazine* we are exploring these issues to help skeptics understand the heartbeat of the Christian faith. Also, we're aiming to help Christians grow in knowledge and confidence in the gospel message so they will share it with others all around them.

Wherever you are on the spectrum regarding the death and resurrection of Jesus, all of history revolves around Jesus. Jesus is the *only* Lord and Savior who can save. All other greats of world history have gone and are buried in the grave. Only Jesus rose again from the grave. Only Jesus can grant eternal life to those who believe in Him. All the philosophies and philosophers, along with the religions of the world, fail to offer what the biblical gospel delivers on—namely eternal life.

We encourage you to dive into this issue of *Theology for Life* and read it carefully, thoughtfully. No doubt, you'll have further questions about these issues, which is why—at the end of this issue—we've provided recommended reading for your thoughtful and prayerful consideration. Take up and read, and learn about our great God in Jesus Christ, who came as a baby—although under the sentence of death for man's sin—and lived a sinless life, died in the place and for sinners, was buried, and rose again. This Lord is coming back for His own to judge, rule, and to fully establish His Kingdom for the praise of His name and the joy of His Beloved.

In Christ Alone,
Dave Jenkins
Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

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To Focus on Jesus and His Resurrection, Spotlight the Bible

By David Prince



Do not believe anyone who tells you that the way to focus on Jesus and His resurrection is to take the spotlight off the Bible. The entire Bible is a blessing to the believer, not a burden. It is not an obstacle to effective evangelism; it is our divinely authoritative source of gospel truth. The Spirit that raised Jesus from the grave is the same Spirit that inspired the Holy Scriptures (Luke 16:19-31, Romans 8:11, 2nd Peter 1:16-21).

Scripture is not only the product of human authors but is also, and ultimately, the product of the Divine Author, representing God's self-revelation to humanity. Scripture is the very word of God

addressed to human beings. What the Bible says, God says. The Bible possesses a divine unity as it progressively unfolds redemptive history, which points toward Jesus Christ, the one in whom all of the promises of God are “Yes” and “Amen” (2nd Corinthians 1:20).

Moreover, “the analogy of Scripture” (Scripture interprets Scripture) is a principle that Scripture itself commends to interpreters, not some foreign notion imposed on the text. The analogy of Scripture simply reminds the interpreter that the Word of God is infallibly auto-interpreting. “All Scripture is breathed out by God”, and the God who gives His Word is also the interpreter of His Word (1st Timothy 3:16). Understanding, and rightly trusting in the historical acts of God, is dependent on the Scriptural witness that provides us with the meaning of those acts. The outward events of Jesus’ life and ministry took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled. The Bible answers the question, “Which Jesus? What resurrection?”

The risen Jesus’ method to convince His disciples that He was resurrected and that the Messianic promise of redemption and kingdom remained was to exegete the Old Testament Scripture (Luke 24:27). He did this rather than providing some new sign or vision. The fact of Jesus of Nazareth’s resurrection does not answer the question of meaning apart from the biblical witness that it was the resurrection of the promised Messiah (Luke 24:44). In light of Jesus’ approach and teaching, it is clear that Scripture must have a vital place in the life of the believing community in order for it to faithfully focus on Jesus. It must be a priority to properly interpret and proclaim the Scripture to the Church and to the world so that we can communicate the meaning of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.

“In Paul’s lengthy chapter on the resurrection of Christ, he begins by tying the fact of the resurrection to the Scriptures...”

Paul follows Jesus’ example and focuses on the resurrection of Jesus by putting the spotlight on the Bible. Paul, preaching in Thessalonica, followed the pattern of Jesus before him: “As was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ’” (Acts 17:2-3). Before Agrippa, Paul was “saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:22b-23).

In Paul’s lengthy chapter on the resurrection of Christ, he begins by tying the fact of the resurrection to the Scriptures: “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1st Corinthians 15:3-4). Jesus’ acts were rooted in a deliberate word-fulfillment of the biblical testimony about the Messiah. He came to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17). The Scriptures testify of Him (John 5:39). The Scriptures cannot be broken (John 10:35). Fulfilling the Scriptures was Jesus’ vocation as Messiah. To take the focus off of the Bible is to take the focus off of the meaning of Jesus the Messiah and His resurrection.

The biblical text must not be ignored or abused in preaching. We are to preach Christ from the entire Bible, because proper exegesis demands it. Jesus holds Himself up as the key to understanding the Scripture (John 5:46). The written word, the inscripturated *Logos*, is not just the message about

Christ; it is also the ministry of Christ. He is present and active in the truth of His Word. He is the incarnate Word who comes to us in the inspired Word. To faithfully explain the living Word is to rightly proclaim the written Word. They can be conceptually separated, but they function as one unified fount of authority. Christ comes to us and is present to us in preaching that is true to His Word (Romans 10:14-16).

The Bible is the written Word of God. Jesus is the definitive Word of God. Faithful preaching in every era centers on the definitive Word of God, Jesus, as revealed in the authoritative written Word of God, the Scripture. The diverse genres and epochs of the biblical witness cohere around the story of the kingdom of Christ. Faithful preaching proceeds theologically with awareness that the entire biblical storyline finds its meaning and culmination in God's final word, Jesus. The gospel is the hermeneutical key and the theological center of the entire Bible.

Any attempt to sever Jesus from the Scripture, or vice versa, is a fool's errand. To minimize either is to distort the other inevitably. There is a world of difference in suggesting that Jesus is the only thing in the Bible that fundamentally matters and believing that because of Jesus everything in the Bible matters. The first is a path to apostasy, and the latter is the ground of our hope now and forever. Like John, we are those who bear "witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:2).

Biblical and Historical Evidence for the Triumphant Resurrection of Christ

By Dave Jenkins



Jesus in John 11:25 said, “I am, the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.” The lengthiest explanation of Jesus’ resurrection is found in 1st Corinthians 15. This whole chapter is about how if Jesus did not bodily rise in victory over death, then Christianity is false and dreamed up by liars to give false hope to people. In this article, we will examine the biblical evidence, historical evidence, and arguments against the resurrection.

The resurrection of Christ is the most known and celebrated miracle in the history of the world. There has always been consensus that it is in many ways the core of our faith: Thomas Arnold (Professor of Modern History at Oxford) said, “No one fact in the history of mankind is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort [than the fact that] Christ died and rose from the

dead.”

Bishop B.F. Westcott stated: “Indeed, taking all the evidences together it is not too much to say that there is no historical incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ.”

John Locke said, “Our Savior’s resurrection is truly of great importance in Christianity; so great that His being or not being the Messiah still stands or falls with it.”

Billy Graham explains: “The entire plan for the future has its key in the resurrection.”

Martin Luther assures: “Our Lord has written the promise of the resurrection not in words alone, but in every leaf in springtime.”

John R. Stott notes: “Christianity is in its very essence a resurrection religion. The concept of resurrection lies at its heart. If you remove it, Christianity is destroyed.”

William Lyon Phelps (Yale Professor) instructs: “In the whole story of Jesus Christ, the most important event is the resurrection.”

Benjamin Warfield (Princeton Professor) exclaims: “The resurrection of Christ is a fact.” Having taken a look at what some people have said regarding the resurrection let us now turn to the Biblical evidence for the Resurrection of Christ.

Rooted in History

700 years before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah promised that Jesus would be born into humble circumstances, to live a simple life, die a brutal death, and then rise to take away our sin

(Isaiah 53:8-12). On numerous occasions, Jesus himself plainly promised He would die and rise three days later (Matthew 12:38-40; Mark 8:31; John 2:18-22).

“Jesus was a very poor man who could not afford an expensive burial plot.”

The death of Christ was a brutal event where He underwent sleepless nights of trial and beating that left Him exhausted. He was scourged with a whip, crucified on a cross, and had a spear thrust in His side. Later He was wrapped in roughly one hundred pounds of linens and spices, which would have killed Him by asphyxiation, were He

still alive. Through this all Jesus could have survived, but He could not have endured three days without food and water in a cold tomb carved out of rock with all of His previous treatments piled on. (John 19:34-35). Jesus was dead before they’d wrapped him in the linens for burial.

Jesus Was Buried in a Tomb That Was Easy to Find

Jesus was a very poor man who could not afford an expensive burial plot. After He died on the cross, a wealthy and well-known man named Joseph of Arimathea gifted his expensive tomb for the burial of Jesus. This made the tomb easy to find, as soldiers were assigned to guard it. The disciples and women who visited the tomb and found it empty all knew exactly where Jesus’ dead body had been laid to rest. Had Jesus not risen from death, it would have been easy to prove it by opening the tomb and presenting Jesus’ body as evidence. (Isaiah 53:9, Matthew 27:57-30)

Jesus Appeared Physically Alive Three Days After His Death

The Jehovah’s Witnesses reject the *physical resurrection* of Jesus while maintaining that He rose spiritually. This alternative explanation for Jesus’ resurrection does not agree with the historical facts. Following Jesus’ resurrection, *many people touched His body*; His disciples clung to His feet, Mary clung to Him, and Thomas (the doubter) put his hand into the open spear hole in Jesus side. Jesus appeared to His disciples after the resurrection, who had been uncertain if He had truly physically risen from death. The Scriptures are clear however that Jesus went out of His way to prove His bodily resur-

rection (Matthew 28:9; John 20:17, John 20:17; John 20:20-28). There is no credible historical evidence from the time period of Jesus to validate any alternative explanation for Jesus' resurrection, other than His literal physical resurrection (Luke 24:36-43).

Jesus' Resurrection Was Recorded as Scripture Shortly After it Occurred

Mark's Gospel account of the days leading up to Jesus' crucifixion mentions the high priest without naming him. Mark did not mention the high priest by name because he expected his readers to know whom he was speaking about. Caiaphas was high priest from 18-37 A.D.; the latest possible date for this tradition is 37 A.D. This date is so close to the death of Jesus there would not have been sufficient time for a legend of His resurrection to occur. This proves that the biblical record of Jesus' resurrection was penned while eyewitnesses were still alive to verify the facts. His resurrection was not a legend that was developed after the time of Jesus (Mark 14:53-54).

Jesus' Resurrection was Celebrated in the Earliest Church Creeds

1st Corinthians 15:3-4 states, "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures." This statement is accepted as the earliest church creed which began circulating as early as 30-36 A.D., shortly after Jesus' resurrection. The early age of this creed demonstrates there was not sufficient time between the crucifixion and the creed for any legend about Jesus' resurrection to accrue. Also, the witnesses mentioned were still alive and available to be questioned about the facts surrounding the resurrection. The early date of this creed also proves that the church did not corrupt the truth about Jesus with fables and folklore like the resurrection. Rather, the early church simply clung to the plain and incontrovertible facts of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

Jesus' Resurrection Convinced His Family to Worship Him as God

James, Jesus' half-brother, was originally opposed to the claims of his brother. A transformation occurred in James after he saw his brother resurrected from death. James went on to pastor the church in Jerusalem and authored the New Testament epistle bearing his name. He was also actively involved in shaping the early church, which suffered and died to proclaim to everyone that Jesus is the one true God. Jesus' mother, Mary, was part of the early church that prayed to and worshiped her Son as God, as was Jesus' other brother, Jude, who wrote a book of the New Testament bearing his name. While it is not impossible to imagine Jesus convincing his own mother and brothers to suffer persecution in this life and risk the torments of Hell in eternal life for worshiping Him as the one true God unless He truly is (John 7:5; 1st Corinthians 15:7; James 1:1; Acts 12:17; Galatians 2:9; Acts 1:14; Jude 1).

Jesus' Resurrection was Confirmed by His Most Bitter Enemies Like Paul

Paul was a devout Jewish Pharisee who routinely persecuted and killed Christians. After an encounter with the risen Christ, Paul was converted and became the most dynamic defender and expander of the Church. Had Jesus not truly risen from death, it is absurd to assume that Paul would ever have worshiped Him as God, particularly when Paul rightly believed that worshiping a false God would send one into Hell. Paul hated Jesus and would never have changed his religious practice unless Jesus had risen from the dead to prove him wrong. Finally, Paul insisted that Jesus had risen in almost all of his letters that are in the New Testament. (Philippians 3:4-6; Acts 7:54-60; Acts 9).

Historical Evidence for Jesus' Death and Resurrection

After studying the biblical evidence for Jesus' resurrection, it is now important to examine the historical evidence for His life, death, and resurrection. The historical evidence for Christ's resurrection is overwhelming. The testimony of these non-Christians is important because it confirms the truthfulness of the biblical accounts of Jesus. The argument from many non-Christians is there is no historical evidence to substantiate the Resurrection. Not only is this charge false, it dismisses the evidence without even considering it, which is to violate the principles of sound research in order to justify one's opinion. Let the historical evidence presented here speak for itself and realize this is only a sampling of the massive historical evidence for the resurrection of Christ.

Josephus (37-100 A.D.)

In the *Testimonium Flavianum*, Josephus says: "Now there was about this Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these men and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day."

Suetonius (70-160 A.D.)

Suetonius was a Roman historian and annalist of the Imperial House. In his biography of Nero, Suetonius mentions the persecution of Christians by indirectly referring to the resurrection: "Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition [the resurrection]."

Pliny the Younger (62-113 A.D.)

Pliny the Younger wrote a letter to Emperor Trajan describing early Christian worship gatherings that met early on Sunday mornings in memory of Jesus' resurrection day: "I have never been present at an examination of Christians. Consequently, I do not know the nature of the extent of the punishments usually meted out to them, nor the grounds for starting an investigation and how are it should be pressed. They also declared that the sum total of their guilt or error accounted to no more than this: they had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day [Sunday in remembrance of Jesus' resurrection] to change verses alternately amongst themselves in honor of Christ as if to a god."

Christ Compared to Other "gods"

Wilbur M. Smith, in *Therefore Stand*, states, "The original accounts of Buddha never ascribe to him any such thing as a resurrection; in fact, in the earliest accounts of his death, namely, the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, we read that when Buddha died it was 'with that utter passing away in which nothing whatever remains behind.'"

Professor Childers says, "There is no trace in the Pali scriptures or commentaries (or so far as I know in any Pali book) Sakya Muni having existed after his death or appearing to his disciples. Mohammed died June 8th, 632 A.D., at the age of sixty-one, at Medina, where his tomb is annually visited by thousands of devout Mohammedans [Muslims]. All the millions and millions of Jews, Buddhists, and Mohammedans agree that their founders have never come up out of the dust of the earth in resurrection."

Theodosius Harnock exclaims: "Where you stand with regard to the fact of the Resurrection is in my eyes no longer Christian theology. To me, Christianity stands or falls with the Resurrection."

Professor William Milligan advises: "While speaking of the positive evidence for the Resurrection of our Lord, it may be further urged that the fact, if true, harmonizes all the other facts of His history."

Bernard Ramm says, "[That even] the most cursory reading of the Gospels reveals the fact that the Gospels deal with the death and resurrection of Christ in far greater detail than any other part of the ministry of Christ. The details of the resurrection must not be artificially severed from the passion account."

Many impartial students who have approached the resurrection of Christ with a judicial spirit have been compelled by the weight of the evidence to belief in the resurrection as a fact of history. An example may be seen from a letter written by Sir Edward Clarke, K.C., to Reverend E. L. Macassey:

As a lawyer, I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter Day. To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court, I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. Inference follows on evidence, and a truthful witness is always artless and disdains effect. The Gospel evidence for the resurrection is of this class, and as a lawyer, I accept it unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts they were able to substantiate.

Professor Bernard Ramm also comments, "In both ecclesiastical history and creedal history the resurrection is affirmed from the earliest times. It is mentioned in Clement of Rome, Epistle to the Corinthians (95 A.D.), the earliest document of church history and so continuously throughout all the patristic period. It appears in all forms of the Apostles' Creed and is never debated."

The Jewish Explanation

The earliest attempt to provide an alternative explanation for the resurrection of Christ did not deny that tomb was empty (Matthew 28:13-15). The Jews claimed that the body was stolen, thus admitting the fact of the empty tomb. The tomb was closed with an enormous rock and sealed by the government, and there is no explanation for how the rock was moved while being guarded by Roman soldiers. Second, if the body had been stolen, a large ransom could have been offered to the thieves, and they could have been coerced to produce the body. If the disciples had taken the body, then the only thing the Jews would have had to do is to persecute the disciples enough to give up the body of Jesus. Thirdly, if the body was stolen, how are we to account for the fact that Jesus appeared to multiple crowds of people, proving that He was alive. Finally, the theft of the body is unlikely and still fails to account for it returning to life.

In Summary...

The historical testimony of those who were not Christians stands in agreement with the Scripture that Jesus died and rose again, because those are facts established from the Bible and history. Having examined the biblical, historical, and some of the arguments against the resurrection, it is clear that the resurrection of Christ is a historical and biblical *fact*.

Every year Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus at Easter. Many people believe in the historical fact of Jesus' resurrection but have not become Christians by placing their personal faith in Him. Jesus promised that He would not only rise from death to prove beyond any shadow of a doubt that He is God, but also that He would judge everyone who has ever lived and determine their faith (John 5:16-30). His first promise came true when He rose from death, and His second promise will come true either upon our death or upon His return. The opportunity in this life is to repent and turn from sin only extends in this life. There are no second chances after death to repent. Jesus is more than just a good man, teacher, prophet, and priest; He is the Son of God, who died for sinners, was buried, and rose again. Forgiveness and eternal life are made possible only through Jesus' own death

and resurrection for humanity.

The burial and resurrection of Christ form two-thirds of the Gospel. The Gospel is not secondary, it is primary. Paul reminds Christians in 1st Corinthians 15:1-3, “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you— unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.” Paul makes it clear that the content of the gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. These are the “words of Christ” which Paul speaks of in Romans 10:17.

Having now examined the biblical, historical, and some of the arguments against the resurrection it is now time to make a decision. Will you come to hear and heed the gospel of Jesus Christ? Jesus often divided His audience into categories: those who pretend to follow Him, and those who authentically take up their crosses and follow Him. The same is true today; those who accept the gospel will be saved by believing and confessing that Jesus Christ died, was buried, and rose again. The gospel of Jesus Christ has been the clarion message of the Church for two thousand years. There is no other message that God has authorized other than His Gospel. Any message that takes away from the gospel dismisses Christianity entirely. The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of man’s souls. Man’s deepest need is Christ’s righteousness.

During His sinless life, Jesus demonstrated that He cared for the poor, weak, sick, and so many more by ministering His healing power, which stemmed from the fact He was the Son of God. People knew that Jesus was the real deal and were attracted to Him because of His divine authority and power. Christians today have been empowered by the Resurrected Christ to spread His Gospel to the ends of the earth; calling people to repent from their idols and turn to the living God through His Son, Jesus Christ, whose death forever satisfied the wrath of the Father. It is this gospel that is the foundation stone for the Church and by it believers may “stand” (1 Corinthians 15:1).

Do you have assurance that your sins are forgiven? Do you know where you are going when you die? The only One who can offer you forgiveness from your sin and empower you to live a new life is the Resurrected Christ. Let us be reminded of Romans 11:36, which exalts, “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

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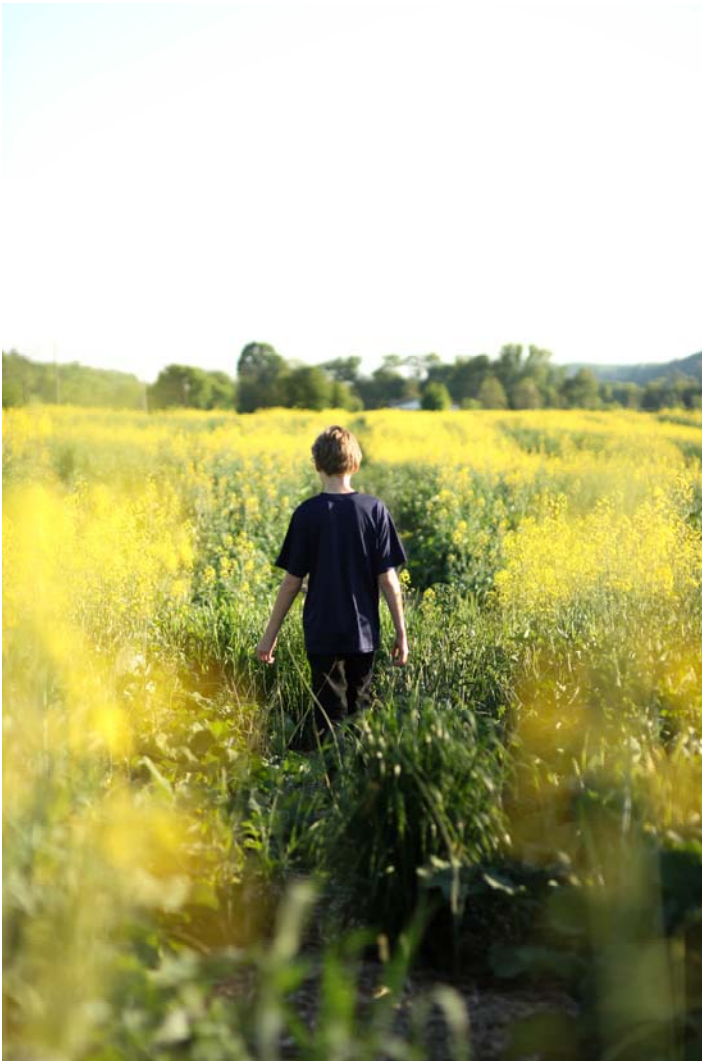
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For more on the evidence for Jesus read *Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Historical evidences for the Christian Faith* by Josh McDowell.

“During His sinless life, Jesus demonstrated that He cared for the poor, weak, sick, and so many more by ministering His healing power...”

“But Now”— Learning to Live in the Newness of Christ

By David Schrock



It has often been observed that the “last days” are not just some future event of tribulation and doom, but are instead the days of Christ’s church, inaugurated by His resurrection. Thus, as Acts 2:17 and Hebrews 1:2 teach us, the *last days* have begun with the finished work of Christ and will culminate when he comes again to consummate what His resurrection began.

Such an observation stands behind the notion of an inaugurated eschatology, the belief that the Kingdom of God is already and not yet. Indeed, coming out of the debates with George Eldon Ladd in the mid-twentieth century, evangelical theology has found a large consensus on this fact—the Kingdom is not only present and it is not only future; rather, the Kingdom of God has been inaugurated but awaits its culmination.

Certainly, this view of the Kingdom is different than the way the Old Testament Prophets foresaw the coming Kingdom. To them the coming of the Messiah meant the restoration of Israel’s kingdom, the outpouring of the Spirit, and a new age marked by resurrection and life. What we find in the New Testament, however, is that this new age would come in the midst of the old, and that the last days of the old age would coincide with the era of the church, whereby the people of God would bear witness to Christ’s future return.

Biblical evidence for this two-phased kingdom

is found in the Gospels where Jesus speaks of the kingdom as already (Matthew 12:28) and not yet (Matthew 24:35). It is also found in the arrival of the Holy Spirit which has made born again believers new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), but without restoring the whole cosmos yet—what Isaiah 65 describes as a new heavens and new earth. Likewise, the resurrection of Christ—the first-fruits of the new creation—indicates a redemptive-historical shift from the old age to the new. And it is this resurrection shift that is picked up by certain language in the New Testament.

Beginning with Paul's speech to in Athens (Acts 17), there are two words that mark the change brought about by Christ's resurrection. These words are *nuni de*, "but now." As Fleming

"These are not the only places *nuni de*, meaning "but now" from the Greek, are used..."

Rutledge observes in her provocative book on Christ's crucifixion (and resurrection), "this radical newness, this transformation, is epitomized by the very frequent appearance in Paul's letters and the epistles of Peter of the phrase "but now" (*nuni de*)" *The Crucifixion* (60). Her observation reflects the apocalyptic nature of the New Testament, that the future has invaded the present (to borrow Ladd's language), the kingdom of heaven has come to earth, and the resurrection of Jesus has marked a new stage in redemptive history. Indeed, the kingdom is not consummated yet,

but neither is it absent. And importantly, the presence of the kingdom and the resurrection power of Christ is witnessed through the apocalyptic phrasing "but now".

"But Now" in Acts, Paul, Peter, and Hebrews

To get a sense of how prevalent this phrasing is, consider these 13 passages. These are not the only places *nuni de*, meaning "but now" from the Greek, are used (John 8:40; Romans 11:23; 1st Corinthians 5:11; 1st Timothy 3:6), but the only ones which have redemptive-historical importance.

1. Acts 17:30–31 — But now repentance goes to all people...

The times of ignorance God overlooked, **but now** he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (Cf. John 15:22, 24).

2. Romans 3:20–23 — But now righteousness has been granted in Christ...

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. **But now** the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...

3. Romans 6:20–23 — But now slaves of sin have been set free from their dead-ly master...

For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. **But now** that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

4. Romans 7:5–6 — But now we have died to the law and been made alive by the Spirit...

For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our

members to bear fruit for death. **But now** we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

5. Romans 11:30–31 — But now we have received mercy from the God we disobeyed...

For just as you were at one time disobedient to God **but now** have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy.

6. Galatians 3:24–26 — But now faith has come and we are sons of God by faith...

So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. **But now** that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

7. Galatians 4:8–9 — But now we are known by God...

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. **But now** that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

8. Ephesians 2:11–13 — But now Gentiles have been brought near...

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

9. Ephesians 5:6–8 — But now you are in the light; so walk in the light...

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.

10. Colossians 1:24–26 — But now the mysteries of the gospel are revealed in Christ...

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations **but now** revealed to his saints (Cf. John 16:4–8; Ephesians 3:1–13).

11. Colossians 3:7–8 — But now you must walk in your new life...

In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. **But now** you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

12. Hebrews 12:26 — But now God is establishing a kingdom that cannot be shaken...

At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.”

13.1 Peter 2:10 — But now you are God’s people who have received God’s mercy...

Once you were not a people, **but now** you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, **but now**

you have received mercy.

Together, these verses many of the glorious realities of those who have been raised to life with Christ (Romans 6). Moreover, they show just how apocalyptic the New Testament is. That is, in addition to giving pastoral instruction to the church, Paul and Peter also teach the Church how to live in the age of Christ's resurrection. In this sense, the Church is God's apocalyptic community, the people on whom the end of the ages has come (1st Corinthians 10:11).

Accordingly, this "but now" reality should shape everything about us. Because of the redemptive-historical realities laid out in these Scriptures—things like forgiveness, freedom from the law's penalty, and the power of the Holy Spirit—we find what we need to walk in newness of life. Indeed, just as Ephesians and Colossians teach, because we have been raised with Christ in His new age, we now have power to live in a new way. In fact, Philemon 11 shows exactly how the redemptive-historical shift brings about individual change: "Formerly he was useless to you [when he was dead in sin], *but now* he is indeed useful to you and to me [because Onesimus is alive in Christ]." Do you see how practical this is? Seeing the big picture of the Bible is not just an esoteric exercise; it is imminently useful.

Living in the "But Now"

In the end, a faithful reading of the Bible often depends on seeing small but important words. Observing how Paul and Peter employ "but now" is one example. In the flow of their letters, these words do not give us major propositional truth, as they are not main verbs or key subjects. Instead, they are a simple temporal contrast. But covenantally and canonically, catching Paul's phrasing is massive for understanding what is happening in the New Testament and in the new covenant Church made of Jews and Gentiles.

Therefore, when we read the Bible, we should endeavor to see the eschatological and apocalyptic nature of the New Testament. We should marvel at the new work that God has done in Christ. Indeed, as Rutledge puts it, we should see how "the cross, incomparably vindicated by the resurrection, is the *novum*, the new factor in human experience, the definitive and world-changing act of God that makes the New Testament proclamation unique in the world" (61).

Truly, the newness of the New Testament is found in the fact that God has begun to bring about His new creation in the last days of the old age. In this, we do not have to wait until some future time period to experience the power of God. Rather, in the gospel (Romans 1:16) and in the Spirit of Christ (Ephesians 1:18–23, 3:14–21) we find the power of God through faith in Christ. May we rejoice in that reality and walk in that strength, remembering that the old world is fading away, "but now" in Christ we are new creatures being renewed day by day (2nd Corinthians 4:17).

Reigning with Christ on Daily Mission

By Jason M. Garwood



To say that the heart of the gospel is Christ crucified would not be wrong (1st Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 6:14). To say that the heart of the gospel is the resurrection of Christ would not be wrong either, for by it our justification comes (Romans 4:25; cf. 1st Timothy 3:16). To say that the heart of the gospel is the ascension of Christ would not be wrong, but you may receive a funny stare from a confused onlooker. The reason, of course, is that the ascension of Christ is an often overlooked element of the universally huge, wonderfully true, gospel of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Perhaps you've glossed over this verse before: "And when he [Jesus] had said these things, as they [the disciples] were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their

sight” (Acts 1:9). To give another perspective on this event, Mark shares that, “The Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them [the disciples], was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19).

The anticipation of the Old Testament, as well as the resounding message of the New Testament, is that Christ is King. This is not an empty saying. It means something. The writer of Hebrews says that, “When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet” (Hebrews 10:12-13). The verse alluded to here in Hebrews is found in Psalm 110 (which just so happens to be the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament). Jesus uses the same verse to vindicate His ministry, claiming that David was writing about Him (Matthew 22:41-46).

The Exalted King in the Old Testament

The theme of an exalted King to come is all over the Old Testament. Isaiah says that this King’s “temple” will be established “as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted above the hills; and all nations will flow to it” (Isaiah 2:2). Later Isaiah says that this Son would be given and “the government shall be on his shoulder...Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end” (Isaiah 9:6, 7). Fast forward to the time of the Babylonian exile, and we find Daniel interpreting King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. The dream showed a stone that struck the feet of the statue which symbolized the coming nations of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. The kingdom “stone”

“The resurrection of Christ is intimately connected to the ascension of Christ, and both serve as events confirming that the kingdom of God has indeed come.”

broke the entire statue so “not a trace of [the kingdoms] could be found” (Daniel 2:35). The stone grew into a great mountain that would fill the earth. Jump over to Daniel 7 and we see the vision of the Son of Man who comes up to the Ancient of Days and “to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:14).

Verses like these are what we find as the backstory to Christ’s ministry on earth, and the overwhelming consensus of the New Testament writers is that all of this is now true. Peter affirms it in Acts 2, and the rest of the Bible sets its context inside the end of the ages (1st Corinthians 10:11) that happened in A.D. 70 with the destruction of the Temple. Because the Old Covenant has passed away, the New Covenant has come, and with it the newly crowned King. The millennial reign of Christ as King is now. Jesus has all authority in Heaven and on Earth (Matthew 28:18).

Now, lest we see this as irrelevant for us who serve as God’s ambassadors and vice-regents, pay close attention to what Paul says in Ephesians as he affirms what has just been laid out above: “He [God] worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:20). Notice the connection: Resurrection, then Kingdom. The resurrection of Christ is intimately connected to the ascension of Christ, and both serve as events confirming that the kingdom of God has indeed come.

But please do not miss what happens next, because this is crucial for the Christian and his implementation of the Kingdom of God in his life. Paul uses nearly the same language to describe our union with Christ: “He [God] raised us up with him [Jesus] and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6). The context of Ephesians 2:1-5 has to do with resurrection language that is employed when describing our salvation. We were dead, but God made us alive. And not only did he make us alive, but we are also now reigning with Christ in his perfect Kingdom.

Seated with the King

Where have we heard that before? You guessed it: Revelation 20. When you participate in the first resurrection (the rebirth; cf. John 5:25), you are blessed because death has no power anymore—Jesus' death has broken it. Not only that, you reign with Christ. You have been (past tense) seated with the King.

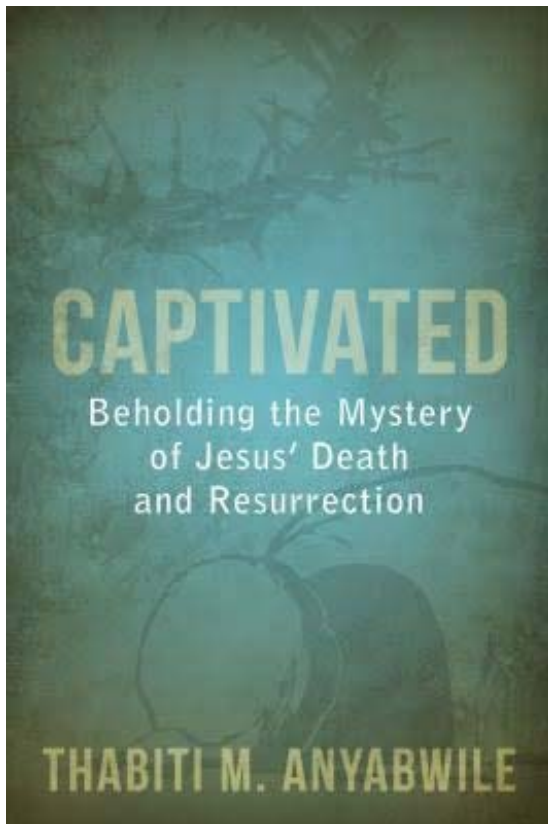
This is where you and I come in. It is time we see our lawn mowing, dish washing, gardening, and work as Kingdom business. I heard a pastor recently describe some of his extracurricular activities as having “nothing to do with the Kingdom”. I beg to differ. Whatever you do, do it for God's glory because God's glory is now on full display (1st Corinthians 10:31). It will fill the earth (Isaiah 11:9). All of this is about dominion. And dominion is about man ruling the earth on behalf of Christ. We seek justice in the Church, the family, and the state. We labor not just for souls to be saved, but for society to be transformed. Certainly this cannot happen apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in the souls of men, but the Kingdom truly affects everything. When Christ issued His decree as the King of the Universe, it was a decree to make disciples. What is a disciple? Someone who is baptized (a part of the visible Church) and obedient to the word of God (that's why Jesus told us to teach the nations to observe everything that he commanded).

To the stay-at-home-so-you-can-build-a-home mom: diapers are about the Kingdom—for how else are we to leave a legacy for generations to follow? Fathers: your work to provide for your family absolutely matters. It matters that you contribute to society with the sweat of your brow. Parents: train up your children in the knowledge of God. Farm the land; build business and do economics; do accounting to the glory of God. Why? Because you reign with Christ. And Christ is in the process of putting all His enemies under His feet (1st Corinthians 15:25). The “subdue the earth” command Adam forfeited, the Second Adam recovered. That's why the ascension of Christ matters. That's why you matter.

A Book Review:

Captivated: Beholding the Mystery of Jesus' Death and Resurrection

By Dave Jenkins



Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection form the crux of the gospel. This is not to say that the death and resurrection of Jesus encapsulates everything about the gospel, but it does nicely summarize what the gospel is about. The Apostle Paul, throughout his book to the Romans and his other epistles, speaks often of the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection. The Apostle Paul also speaks of the gospel in broader terms in his epistles such as justification, adoption, redemption, reconciliation, and several other words that round out a fuller perspective on what the gospel is and what it demands. As we reflect on the Easter season it is especially important for Christians to meditate on the question, "What is the Gospel?" Thankfully, *Captivated: Beholding The Mystery of Jesus' Death and Resurrection* by Thabiti M. Anyabwile invites readers to stare into the mystery of the cross and the empty tomb.

Captivated begins with asking, "What are we meant to know about the defeat of death and the Christian hope? What might we know about knowledge itself, our epistemology?" (2). The author asks these questions so the reader will genuinely contemplate them and "stare at Jesus and be captivated by Him" (2). Each of the five chapters of this book seek to draw out the importance of understanding Jesus death, burial, and resurrection by highlighting how Jesus died in the place of sinners and for their sin. Furthermore, the book helps readers understand the beauty of Jesus' finished work for all of life.

ished work for all of life.

In particular, I enjoyed two aspects of this book. First, the examples used in this book were just as informative as the author's explanation of the Scriptures. Often times, in my opinion, illustrations can be dangerous in that sometimes they take away from what the author is saying and leaves the reader confused about his/her point. In this book, however, Thabiti uses illustrations to open the

reader's understanding of Scripture. This is an approach I appreciate because it helps the reader think in terms that he/she can understand, with a view to help them grasp the teaching of Scripture. As is usual with Thabiti you can expect faithfulness to Scriptures, and writing that connects with his readers.

Finally—while I've read quite a few books over the years on Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection—what *Captivated* does so well is to get you thinking about these things from the perspective of the Word of God. In a day and an age when biblical Christianity is under attack from all sides, Thabiti's emphasis on the death and resurrection of Jesus helps Christians grab hold of the centrality of these events for everyday life and to delight in the finished work of Jesus.

***Captivated: Beholding The Mystery of Jesus' Death and Resurrection* by Thabiti M. Anyabwile** is a beneficial work that will help new or mature Christians to understand what Jesus death and resurrection accomplished, and why it is essential to the entire Christian life. As you read this book, you'll begin to grab hold of Christ's suffering and resurrection for His people. This book is a great resource that will help new and seasoned Christians to gain insight on familiar events; all to help readers understand the Bible and love Jesus more. I highly recommend this book by Thabiti M. Anyabwile and pray the Lord uses it to help God's people to stand firm in the truth of the Word of God.

Three Critical Truths About Redemption

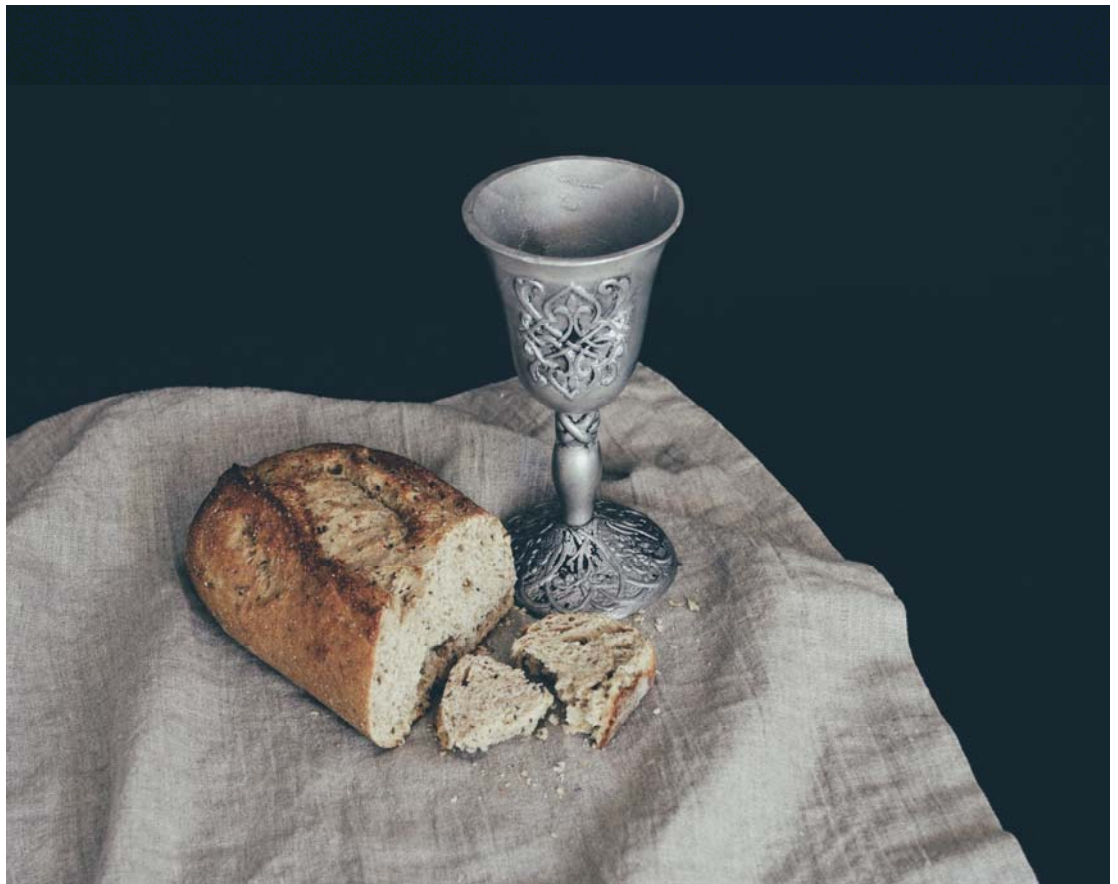
By Brian Hedges

“Redemption” is a rich word and perhaps somewhat unique among the great gospel words in our theological vocabulary, in that it’s a word that easily resonates with unbeliev-

ers. Some of our favorite stories, songs, and films are built around the themes of redemption. George Lucas, for example once said that the original *Star Wars* films were about the redemption of Ana-

kin Skywalker. One of Johnny Cash’s greatest songs is titled “Redemption”.[1] Or, if you want an example a bit more highbrow, look no further than the character of Jean Valjean in Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*.

None of this suggests, of course, that redemption in our cultural artifacts bears a one-to-one relationship to redemption in Christianity. There are very important biblical features of redemption



through the Lord Jesus Christ that set it apart from all other redemption stories. But the widespread use of the word in our culture does indicate an innate recognition of the human need for forgiveness and hope.

Christians often use the word “redemption” in a broad sense, as a synonym for salvation. Think of phrases like “the history of redemption” or the four big events in the Christian metanarrative: creation, fall, redemption, restoration. But in the New Testament, “redemption” (*apolutrwsiz*) and the related words, redeem (*lutrow*), and ransom (*lutron*)—each belonging to the *lutrw* word-group in Greek—carry connotations that are both richer and more precise.[2] For, at its root, *to redeem* means *to set someone free from slavery through the payment of a ransom*. In the words of John Murray:

“The idea of redemption must not be reduced to the general notion of deliverance. The language of redemption is the language of purchase and more specifically of ransom. And ransom is the securing of release by the payment of a price.”[3]

A full unfolding of the doctrine of redemption would show:

- Our *need* for redemption (because of our bondage to the law, sin, and death).
- God’s *provision* of redemption (through his eternal covenant and the gift of his Son).
- Christ’s *accomplishment* of redemption (by his obedient life, his payment of a blood ransom in his sin-atonement death, and his victorious resurrection).
- And all the *fruits* of redemption (including the forgiveness of sins, the gift of adoption, our inheritance as heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, the future resurrection of the body, and more).

But this isn’t a theology textbook, and many good theologians have already done this work. (The above-referenced work by John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, is a good place to start.)

Instead, I want to suggest three ways Scripture links redemption to our lives: with a story, a meal, and a forward-looking hope. I hope that meditating in this way will foster not just deeper understanding of the doctrine of redemption itself, but especially richer worship of the Redeemer.

A Story

Redemption in the Scriptures doesn’t start with Jesus dying on the cross for our sins, as glorious and climatic moment as this is. Even in the New Testament, redemption was closely linked to another story deep in the memory of God’s people. Just think about the features of redemption we’ve already seen: bondage in slavery, liberation and freedom, the payment of a blood ransom, inheritance, etc. [4]

You don’t have to think long before remembering the story of Israel’s exodus from Egypt, that great paradigmatic saving event of the Old Testament. God’s people were enslaved in a land of darkness, but in faithfulness to His covenant with Israel, God stretched out His mighty hand and rescued His people, providing a covering for their sins, so He could pass over them while executing judgment on their oppressors, and finally give them an inheritance in the land of promise.

This story ran so deep in the consciousness of God’s people that the prophets returned to it again and again. This is especially obvious in Isaiah 40-55, as the prophet evokes all kinds of Exodus imagery while calling Israel to fresh faith in the Lord, their Redeemer, who will lead them out of exile. And those very themes (and texts) get picked up again in the gospel narratives, as the evangelists skillfully present the story of Jesus in terms of a New Exodus, in which Jesus will pay Israel’s ransom through his own death. [5]

A Meal

A second way Scripture links the doctrine of redemption to our lives is with a meal, the meal given to us by Jesus Himself on the day before His crucifixion. This connection is slightly more round about than the one above, but there all the same, especially when we remember that the Christian celebration of the Lord's Supper is itself an outgrowth of the Jewish celebration of Passover.

However, you also can see the connection when you compare Jesus' words of institution in that last Passover meal with his disciples with a previous statement He made about the purpose for which He came.

- "...the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).
- "Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'" (Matthew 26:26-28).

The similar structure in the two passages is striking. Jesus came to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. And then when Jesus serves His disciples the Passover meal, He says that the wine is His blood, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

And lest there be any doubt in our mind, Paul makes the connection explicit, reminding us that "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1st Corinthians 5:7). And this means that every time we sit at this sacred feast we do so in celebration of the true Passover, the new exodus, the full and final redemption that Jesus has purchased for us by death.

"But when we come to the table of the Lord, we not only look back, we look forward."

A Forward-Looking Hope

But when we come to the table of the Lord, we not only look back, we look forward. When we remember the redemption story, we are to think not only of Israel's redemption out of Egypt, but also its fulfillment in the atoning work of Jesus. We also set our eyes on the future, as we wait with confident and expectant hope for the consummation of redemption. In Romans 8, Paul reminds us that we join the created order itself, in our waiting:

"For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (Romans 8:22-25).

And what is it we wait for? The redemption of our bodies. And how do we know it will happen? Because we've already received the first down payment, "the firstfruits of the Spirit". (That's surely one reason why Paul reminds us not to grieve the Spirit who has sealed us "for the day of redemption" in Ephesians 4:30.) And the presence of the Spirit in our hearts, prompting us to cry "Abba, Father", assures us that we will one day join the heavenly chorus in the everlasting joy of extolling the Lamb who has ransomed us by His blood. May we, even now, join the worshipers around the throne and sing:

"Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals,

for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:9-10).

References:

[1] Cash, of course, was a believer and the song shows it. But his music is so mainstream that I thought it worth mentioning among these cultural references to redemption.

[2] See especially B. B. Warfield, “The New Testament Terminology of ‘Redemption’ in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932; reprint Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 2000), pp. 327-372.

[3] John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), p. 42.

[4] Of course, the Old Testament concept of the kinsman-redeemer, best known from the book of Ruth, also shapes our understanding of redemption.

[5] See especially Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

Five Truths about the Resurrection of Jesus

By Joseph Scheumann



The resurrection of Jesus is foundational to the Christian faith, and yet, often-times, we only give it real thought around the Easter season. But the resurrection of Jesus is so important that Paul writes, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1st Corinthians 15:17). And later he says, “If in Christ we have hope in this life

only, we are of all people most to be pitied” (verse 19). In the hopes of gaining a deeper understanding of this glorious reality, here are five truths about the resurrection.

Jesus Had a Bodily Resurrection

When Jesus was raised from the dead, he did not leave his body behind. In fact, after His resurrection His scars remained (John 20:27), He ate fish (John 20:12), He bodily ascended to Heaven (Acts 1:9), and will bodily come again (1st Thessalonians 4:16). The Son of God will always have a bodily existence.

The fact that Jesus still has a body testifies to the dignity of the human body—both the ones that we have, and the ones we will have after our resurrection. Matthew Lee Anderson writes, “The resurrection of the body means that to be human with God is to be with him not as disembodied souls, but as people with noses, faces, arms, and legs that are similar to those we currently have” (*Earthen Vessels*, 60–61).

Jesus Had a Justifying Resurrection

Perhaps the clearest instance of Paul connecting Jesus's resurrection with his justification is obscured in most English translations. Paul writes in 1st Timothy 3:16, "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory." The word "*vindicated*" is typically translated "declared righteous" or "justified" elsewhere in the New Testament.

But, if Jesus was perfect, how could He be justified, since justification implies guilt (Romans 4:5)? The answer lies in Jesus's death and resurrection. Richard Gaffin explains, "As long as he [Jesus] remained in a state of death, the righteous character of his work, the efficacy of his obedience unto death remained in question, in fact, was implicitly denied. Consequently, the eradication of death in his resurrection is nothing less than the removal of the verdict of condemnation and the effective affirmation of his righteousness" (*Resurrection and Redemption*, 121–122).

"The resurrection is not only a future event for believers. Those who believe in Christ have already been raised to life with Him."

Jesus Had a Trinitarian Resurrection

The pattern in the New Testament is to speak of God the Father as the one who does the raising, Jesus as the one who is being raised, and the Spirit as the means by which the Father raised Jesus. This pattern is seen in Romans 8:11, "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you." Here we see not only that God the Father raises Jesus through the Holy Spirit, but also that our resurrection will be parallel to the resurrection of Jesus — God the Father will raise us through the Spirit.

Jesus Had a First-fruits Resurrection of Ours to Come

Paul describes Jesus' resurrection as "the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1st Corinthians 15:20). First-fruits is an agricultural metaphor that points to the initial quality of the harvest. Gaffin explains, "Paul is saying here, the resurrection of Christ and of believers cannot be separated. Why? Because, to extend the metaphor as Paul surely intends, Christ's resurrection is the 'firstfruits' of the resurrection 'harvest' that includes the resurrection of believers. This thought is reinforced in verse 23: 'Each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ'" (*By Faith, Not By Sight*, 68).

In Jesus, Believers are Already Spiritually Resurrected

The resurrection is not only a future event for believers. Those who believe in Christ have already been raised to life with Him. Paul writes, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1). Christians are people who have already been raised with Christ. Gaffin explains, "Believers will never be more resurrected than they already are. God has done a work in each believer, a work of nothing less than resurrection proportions, that will not be undone" (*By Faith, Not by Sight*, 76).

The resurrection is an already-but-not-yet reality for the Christian because of our union with Christ. Jesus' resurrection means that those who have faith in Him have been raised from the dead because they are *in Christ*, and yet we still await the full experience of the resurrection to come (Romans 8:22–23).

Three Critical Historical Evidences for the Resurrection of Christ

By Matt Perman



The historical evidence for the resurrection of Christ is very good. Scholars such as William Lane Craig, J.P. Moreland, Gary Habermas, and others have done an especially good job of detailing that evidence.¹ It is the aim of this article to offer a sort of synthesis of some of their key points and show the strength of the historical evidence for the resurrection of Christ.

A method commonly used today to determine the historicity of an event is "inference to the best explanation". William Lane Craig describes this as an approach where we "begin with the evidence available to us and then infer what would, if true, provide the best explanation of that evidence." In other words, we ought to accept an event as historical if it gives the best explanation for the evidence surrounding it.

When we look at the evidence, the truth of the resurrection emerges very clearly as the best explanation. There is no other theory that even come close to accounting for the evidence. Therefore, there is solid historical grounds for the truth that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. It is worth pointing out that in establishing the historicity of the resurrection, we do not need to assume that the New Testament is inspired by God or even trustworthy. While I do believe these things, we are going to focus here on three truths that even critical scholars admit. In other words, these three truths are so strong that they are accepted by serious historians of all stripes. Therefore, any theory must be able to adequately account for the data. The three truths are:

- The tomb in which Jesus was buried was discovered empty by a group of women on the Sunday following the crucifixion.
- Jesus' disciples had real experiences with one whom they believed was the risen Christ.
- As a result of the preaching of these disciples, which had the resurrection at its center, the Christian church was established and grew.

Virtually all scholars who deal with the resurrection, whatever their school of thought, assent to these three truths. We will see that the resurrection of Christ is the best explanation for each of them individually. But then we will see, even more significantly, that when these facts are taken together we have an even more powerful case for the resurrection—because the skeptic will not have to explain away just one historical fact, but three. These three truths create a strongly woven, three chord rope that cannot easily be broken.

The Empty Tomb

To begin, what is the evidence that the tomb in which Jesus was buried was discovered empty by a group of women on the Sunday following the crucifixion? First, the resurrection was preached in the same city where Jesus had been buried shortly before. Jesus' disciples did not go to some obscure place where no one had heard of Jesus to begin preaching about the resurrection, but instead began preaching in Jerusalem, the very city where Jesus had died and been buried. They could not have done this if Jesus was still in His tomb—no one would have believed them. No one would be foolish enough to believe a man had raised from the dead when His body lay dead in the tomb for all to see. As Paul Althaus writes, “[The resurrection proclamation] could not have been maintained in Jerusalem for a single day, for a single hour, if the emptiness of the tomb had not been established as a fact for all concerned.”

“So it is pretty well established that the early Jews admitted the empty tomb.”

Second, the earliest Jewish arguments against Christianity admit the empty tomb. In Matthew 28:11-15, there is a reference made to the Jew's attempt to refute Christianity by saying that the disciples stole the body. This is significant because it shows that the Jews did not deny the empty tomb. Instead, their "stolen body" theory admitted the significant truth that the tomb was in fact empty. The *Toledoth Jesu*, a compilation of early Jewish writings, is another source acknowledging this. It acknowledges that the tomb was empty, and attempts to explain it away. Further, we have a record of a second century debate between a Christian and a Jew, in which a reference is made to the fact that the Jews claim the body was stolen. So it is pretty well established that the early Jews admitted the empty tomb.

Why is this important? Remember that the Jewish leaders were opposed to Christianity. They were hostile witnesses. In acknowledging the empty tomb, they were admitting the reality of a fact that was certainly not in their favor. So why would they admit that the tomb was empty unless the evidence was too strong to be denied? Dr. Paul Maier calls this "positive evidence from a hostile source. In essence, if a source admits a fact that is decidedly not in its favor, the fact is genuine."

Third, the empty tomb account in the gospel of Mark is based upon a source that originated within seven years of the event it narrates. This places the evidence for the empty tomb too early to be legendary, and makes it much more likely that it is accurate. What is the evidence for this? I will list two pieces. A German commentator on Mark, Rudolf Pesch, points out that this pre-Markan source never mentions the high priest by name. "This implies that Caiaphas, who we know was high priest at that time, was still high priest when the story began circulating."

"...the empty tomb is supported by the historical reliability of the burial story."

"[For] if it had been written after Caiaphas' term of office, his name would have had to have been used to distinguish him from the next high priest. But since Caiaphas was high priest from A.D. 18 to 37, this story began circulating no later than A.D. 37, within the first seven years after the events," as Michael Horton has summarized it. Furthermore, Pesch argues that "since Paul's traditions concerning the Last Supper [written in 56] (1st Corinthians 11) presuppose the Markan account, that implies that the Markan source goes right back to the early years" of Christianity (Craig). So the early source Mark used puts the testimony of the empty tomb too early to be legendary."

Fourth, the empty tomb is supported by the historical reliability of the burial story. New Testament scholars agree that the burial story is one of the best established facts about Jesus. One reason for this is because of the inclusion of Joseph of Arimathea as the one who buried Christ. Joseph was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, a sort of Jewish supreme court. People on this ruling class were simply too well known for fictitious stories about them to be pulled off in this way. This would have exposed the Christians as frauds. So they couldn't have circulated a story about him burying Jesus *unless it was true*. Also, if the burial account was legendary, one would expect to find conflicting traditions—which we don't have.

But how does the reliability of Jesus' burial argue that the tomb was empty? Because the burial account and empty tomb account have grammatical and linguistic ties, indicating that they are one continuous account. Therefore, if the burial account is accurate the empty tomb is likely to be accurate as well. Further, if the burial account is accurate then everyone knew where Jesus was buried. This would have been decisive evidence to refute the early Christians who were preaching the resurrection—for if the tomb had not been empty, it would have been evident to all and the disciples would have been exposed as frauds at worst, or insane at best.

Fifth, Jesus' tomb was never venerated as a shrine. This is striking because it was the 1st century custom to set up a shrine at the site of a holy man's bones. There were at least 50 such sites in Jesus' day. Since there was no such shrine for Jesus, it suggests that His bones weren't there.

Sixth, Mark's account of the empty tomb is simple and shows no signs of legendary development. This is very apparent when we compare it with the gospel of Peter, a forgery from about 125 A.D. This legend has all of the Jewish leaders, Roman guards, and many people from the countryside gathered to watch the resurrection. Then three men come out of the tomb, with their heads reaching

up to the clouds. Then a talking cross comes out of the tomb! This is what legend looks like, and we see none of that in Mark's account of the empty tomb—or anywhere else in the gospels for that matter!

Seventh, the tomb was discovered empty by women. Why is this important? Because the testimony of women in 1st century Jewish culture was considered worthless. As Craig says, "If the empty tomb story were a legend, then it is most likely that the male disciples would have been made the first to discover the empty tomb. The fact that despised women, whose testimony was deemed worthless, were the chief witnesses to the fact of the empty tomb can only be plausibly explained if, like it or not, they actually were the discoverers of the empty tomb."

Because of the strong evidence for the empty tomb, most recent scholars do not deny it. D.H. Van Daalen has said, "It is extremely difficult to object to the empty tomb on historical grounds; those who deny it do so on the basis of theological or philosophical assumptions." Jacob Kremer, who has specialized in the study of the resurrection and is a New Testament critic, said "By far most exegetes hold firmly to the reliability of the biblical statements about the empty tomb..." and he lists twenty-eight scholars to back up his fantastic claim.

I'm sure you've heard of the various theories used to explain away the empty tomb, such as the idea that the body was stolen. But those theories are laughed at today by all serious scholars. In fact, they have been considered dead and refuted for almost a hundred years. For example, the Jews or Romans had no motive to steal the body—they wanted to suppress Christianity, not encourage it by providing it with an empty tomb. The disciples would have had no motive, either. Because of their preaching on the resurrection, they were beaten, killed, and persecuted. Why would they go through all of this for a deliberate lie? No serious scholars hold to any of these theories today. What explanation, then, do the critics offer, you may ask? Craig tells us that "they are self-confessedly without any explanation to offer. There is simply no plausible natural explanation today to account for Jesus' tomb being empty. If we deny the resurrection of Jesus, we are left with an inexplicable mystery." The resur-

rection of Jesus is not just the best explanation for the empty tomb, it is the only explanation in town!

The Resurrection Appearances

As the Jewish Scholar, Pinchahs Lapide, stated, "[This creed] may be considered the statement of eyewitnesses."

Next, there is the confirmation that Jesus' disciples had real experiences with one whom they believed was the risen Christ. This is not commonly disputed today because we have the testimony of the original disciples themselves that they saw Jesus alive again. And you don't need to believe in the reliability of the gospels to believe this. In 1st Corinthians 15:3-8, Paul records an ancient creed concerning Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection appearances that is

much earlier than the letter in which Paul is recording it:

"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time..."

It is generally agreed by critical scholars that Paul received this creed from Peter and James between 3-5 years after the crucifixion. Now, Peter and James are listed in this creed as having seen the risen Christ. Since they are the ones who gave this creed to Paul, this is therefore a statement of their own testimony. As the Jewish Scholar, Pinchahs Lapide, stated, "[This creed] may be considered the statement of eyewitnesses."

Now, I recognize that just because the disciples think they saw Jesus doesn't automatically

mean that they really did. There are three possible alternatives:

- They were lying.
- They hallucinated.
- They really saw the risen Christ.

Which of these is most likely? Were they lying? On this view, the disciples knew that Jesus had not really risen, but they made up this story about the resurrection. But then why did 10 of the disciples willingly die as martyrs for their belief in the resurrection? People will often die for a lie that they believe is the truth. But if Jesus did not rise, the disciples knew it. Thus, they wouldn't have just been dying for a lie that they mistakenly believed was true. They would have been dying for a lie that they knew was a lie. Ten people would not all give their lives for something they know to be a lie. Furthermore, after witnessing events such as Watergate, can we reasonably believe that the disciples could have covered up such a lie?

Because of the absurdity of the theory that the disciples were lying, we can see why almost all scholars today admit that, if nothing else, the disciples at least believed that Jesus appeared to them. But we know that just believing something to be true doesn't make it true. Perhaps the disciples were wrong and had been deceived by a hallucination?

The hallucination theory is untenable because it cannot explain the physical nature of the appearances. The disciples record eating and drinking with Jesus, as well as touching him. This cannot be done with hallucinations. Second, it is highly unlikely that they would all have had the same hallucination. Hallucinations are highly individual, and not group projections. Imagine if I came in here and said to you, "Wasn't that a great dream I had last night?" Hallucinations, like dreams, generally don't transfer like that. Further, the hallucination theory cannot explain the conversion of Paul, three years later. Was Paul, the persecutor of Christians, so hoping to see the resurrected Jesus that his mind invented an appearance as well? And perhaps most significantly, the hallucination theory cannot even deal with the evidence for the empty tomb.

Since the disciples could not have been lying or hallucinating, we have only one possible explanation left: the disciples *believed* that they had seen the risen Jesus because they *really had* seen the risen Jesus. So, the resurrection appearances alone demonstrate the resurrection. Thus, if we reject the resurrection, we are left with a second inexplicable mystery—first the empty tomb, and now the appearances.

The Origin of the Christian Faith

Finally, the existence of the Christian church is strong proof for the resurrection. Why is this? Because even the most skeptical New Testament scholars admit that the disciples at least believed that Jesus was raised from the grave. But how can we explain the origin of that belief? William Lane Craig points out that there are three possible causes: Christian influences, pagan influences, or Jewish influences.

Could it have been Christian influences? Craig writes, "Since the belief in the resurrection was itself the foundation for Christianity, it cannot be explained as the later product of Christianity." Further, as we saw, if the disciples made it up, then they were frauds and liars—alternatives we have shown to be false. We have also shown the unlikelihood that they hallucinated this belief.

But what about pagan influences? Isn't it often pointed out that there were many myths of dying and rising savior gods at the time of Christianity? Couldn't the disciples have been deluded by those myths and copied them into their own teaching on the resurrection of Christ? In reality, serious scholars have almost universally rejected this theory since WWII, for several reasons. First, it has

been shown that these mystery religions had no major influence in Palestine in the 1st century. Second, most of the sources which contain parallels originated after Christianity was established. Third, most of the similarities are often apparent and not real—a result of sloppy terminology on the part of those who explain them. For example, one critic tried to argue that a ceremony of killing a bull and letting the blood drip all over the participants was parallel to Holy Communion. Fourth, the early disciples were Jews, and it would have been unthinkable for a Jew to borrow from another religion. For they were zealous in their belief that the pagan religions were *abhorrent* to God.

Jewish influences cannot explain the belief in the resurrection, either. 1st century Judaism had no conception of a single individual rising from the dead in the middle of history. Their concept was always that everybody would be raised together at the end of time. So the idea of one individual rising

“It is generally agreed that the explanation with the best explanatory scope should be accepted.”

in the middle of history was foreign to them. Thus, Judaism of that day could have never produced the resurrection hypothesis. This is also another good argument against the theory that the disciples were hallucinating. Psychologists will tell you that hallucinations cannot contain anything new—that is, they cannot contain any idea that isn't already somehow in your mind. Since the early disciples were Jews, they had no conception of the Messiah rising from the dead in the middle of history. Thus, they would have never hallucinated about a resurrection of Christ. At best, they would have hallucinated that he

had been transported directly to heaven, as Elijah had been in the Old Testament, but they would have never hallucinated a resurrection. So we see that if the resurrection did not happen, there is no plausible way to account for the origin of the Christian faith. We would be left with a third inexplicable mystery.

Three Independent Facts

These are three independently established facts that we have established. If we deny the resurrection, we are left with at least three inexplicable mysteries. But there is a much, much better explanation than a wimpy appeal to mystery or a far-fetched appeal to a stolen body, hallucination, and mystery religions. The best explanation is that Christ in fact rose from the dead! Even if we take each fact by itself, we have good enough evidence. But taken together, we see that the evidence becomes even stronger. For example, even if two of these facts were to be explained away, there would still be the third truth that establishes the fact of the resurrection.

These three independently established facts also make alternative explanations less plausible. It is generally agreed that the explanation with the best explanatory scope should be accepted. That is, the theory that explains the most of the evidence is more likely to be true. The resurrection is the only hypothesis that explains all of the evidence. If we deny the resurrection, we must come up with three independent natural explanations, not just one. For example, you would have to propose that the Jews stole the body, then the disciples hallucinated, and then somehow the pagan mystery religions influenced their beliefs to make them think of a resurrection. But we have already seen the implausibility of such theories. And trying to combine them will only make matters worse. As Gary Habermas explains, “Combining three improbable theories will not produce a probable explanation. It will actually increase the degree of improbability. It’s like putting leaking buckets inside each other, hoping each one will help stop up the leaks in the others. All you will get is a watery mess.”

Legend?

Before examining, briefly, the implications of the resurrection, I wish to take a quick look at perhaps the most popular theory today against the resurrection—that it was a legend that developed over time. The facts we have established so far are enough to put to rest any idea of a legend.

First, we have seen that the testimony of the resurrection goes back to the original experiences. Remember the eyewitness creed of 1st Corinthians 15:3-5? That is the first-hand testimony of Peter and James. So it is not the case that the resurrection belief evolved over time. Instead, we have testimony from the very people who claimed to have experienced it. Second, how can the myth theory explain the evidence for the empty tomb? Third, the myth theory cannot explain the origin of the Christian faith—for we have already seen that the real resurrection of Christ is the only adequate

“Jesus is the only religious leader who has risen from the dead.”

cause for the resurrection belief. Fourth, the myth theory cannot explain the conversion of Paul. Would he be convinced by a myth? His conversion was, in fact, too early for any myth to have developed by then. How then can we explain his conversion? Do we dare accuse him of lying when he said he saw the risen Christ?

Fifth, we have seen the evidence that the empty tomb story in Mark was very early—within seven years of the events. That is not long enough for legends. Sixth, we have seen that the empty tomb narrative lacks the classic traits of legendary development. Seventh, critical scholars

agree that the resurrection message was the foundation of the preaching of the early Church. Thus, it could not have been the product of the later Church. Eighth, there is very good evidence that the Gospels and the Book of Acts were written very early. For example, the Book of Acts never records the death of Paul, which occurred in about 64 A.D., or the destruction of Jerusalem, which occurred in 70 A.D.

Since both Jerusalem and Paul are key players in the Book of Acts, it seems strange that their demises would be omitted. The best explanation seems to be that Paul's death and Jerusalem's destruction are omitted because the Book of Acts had been completed before they happened. This means that Acts was written before 64 A.D., when Paul died. Since the Book of Acts is volume 2 of Luke's writings (the Gospel of Luke being the first), then the Gospel of Luke was even earlier, perhaps 62 A.D. And since most scholars agree that Mark was the first gospel written, that gospel would have been composed even earlier, perhaps in the late 50s. This brings us within twenty years of the events, which is not enough time for legends to develop. So the legend theory is not very plausible.

On the basis of the evidence we have seen, it appears to me that the resurrection is the best explanation. It explains the empty tomb, the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, and the existence of the Christian Church. No other competing theory can explain all three of these facts. In fact, none of these competing theories can even give a satisfying explanation for even one of these facts. So it seems like the rational person will accept that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

The Importance of the Resurrection

But, in conclusion, don't we have to ask ourselves what implications this has? Why does it matter? Or is this some dry, dusty old piece of history that has no relevance to our lives? I believe that the resurrection is the most important truth in the world. It has far reaching implications on our lives.

First, the resurrection proves that the claims Jesus made about himself are true. What did

Jesus claim? He claimed to *be God*. One might say, "I don't believe that He claimed to be God, because I don't believe the Bible." But the fact is that even if we take only the passages which skeptical scholars admit as authentic, it can still be shown that Jesus claimed to be God. It is impossible to get around the fact that Jesus claimed to be God. Now, if Jesus had stayed dead in the tomb, it would be foolish to believe this claim. But since He rose from the dead, it would be foolish *not* to believe it. The resurrection proves that what Jesus said about Himself is true—He is fully God and fully man.

Second, have you ever wondered what reasons there are to believe in the Bible? Is there good reason to believe that it was inspired by God, or is it simply a bunch of interesting myths and legends? The resurrection of Jesus answers the question. If Jesus rose from the dead, then we have seen this validates His claim to be God. If He is God, He speaks with absolute certainty and final authority. Therefore, what Jesus said about the Scriptures must be true. Surely you are going to accept the testimony of one who rose from the dead over the testimony of a skeptical scholar who will one day die himself—without being able to raise himself on the third day. What did Jesus say about the Scriptures? He said that it was inspired by God and that it *cannot error*. I will accept the testimony of Jesus over what I would like to be true, and over the opinions of other men and women. Therefore I believe that the Bible is inspired by God, without error. Don't get misled by the numerous skeptical and unbelieving theories about the Bible. Trust Jesus—He rose from the dead.

Third, many people are confused by the many different religions in the world. Are they all from God? But on a closer examination, we see that they cannot all be from God, because they all contradict each other. They cannot all be true any more than *2+2 can equal both 4 and 5* at the same time. For example, Christianity is the only religion that believes Jesus Christ is both God and man. All other religions say that he was a good man only, and not God. Clearly, both claims cannot be right! Somebody is wrong. How are we to know which religion is correct; which is the truth? By a simple test: which religion gives the best evidence for its truth? In light of Christ's resurrection, I think that Christianity has the best reasons behind it.

Jesus is the only religious leader who has risen from the dead. All other religious leaders are still in their tombs. Who would you believe? The answer is clear: Jesus' resurrection demonstrates that what He said was true. Therefore, we must accept His statement to be the only way to God: *"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, except through me"* (John 14:6).

Fourth, the resurrection of Christ proves that God will judge the world one day. The Apostle Paul said, "God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30, NASB). The resurrection of Christ proves something very personal and significant to each of us—we will have to give an account of ourselves to a holy God. And if we are honest with ourselves, we will have to admit that we do not measure up to His standard. We are sinful, and therefore deserve to be condemned at His judgment.

Which leads to our fifth point: the resurrection of Christ provides genuine hope for eternal life. Why? Because Jesus says that by trusting in Him, we will be forgiven of our sins and thereby escape being condemned at the judgment. The New Testament doesn't just tell us that Christ rose from the dead and leave us wondering why He did this. It answers that He did this because we are sinners. And because we have sinned, we are deserving of God's judgment. Since God is just, He cannot simply let our sins go. The penalty for our sins must be paid.

The good news is that God, out of His love, became man in Jesus Christ in order to pay the penalty for sinners. On the cross, Jesus died in the place of those who would come to believe in Him. He took upon Himself the very death that we deserve. The Apostle Paul says "He was delivered up be-

cause of our sins." But then he goes on to say, "He was raised to life because of our justification." Paul is saying that Christ's resurrection proves that His mission to conquer sin was successful. His resurrection proves that He is a Savior who is not only willing, but also able, to deliver us from the wrath of God that is coming on the Day of Judgment. The forgiveness that Jesus died and rose to provide is given to those who trust in Him for salvation and a joy-filled future.

Let me close with the sixth reason the resurrection is significant. The Bible says that Christ's resurrection is the pattern that those who believe in Him will follow. In other words, those who believe in Christ will one day be resurrected by God just as He was. The resurrection proves that those who trust in Christ will not be subject in eternity to a half-human existence in just their souls. It proves that our bodies will be resurrected one day. Because of the resurrection of Christ, believers will one day experience, forever, the freedom of having a glorified soul and body.

References:

¹ See William Lane Craig's *Reasonable Faith* and *The Son Rises*, J.P. Moreland's *Scaling the Secular City*, and Gary Habermas' *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* and *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?*, a debate with then-atheist Anthony Flew.

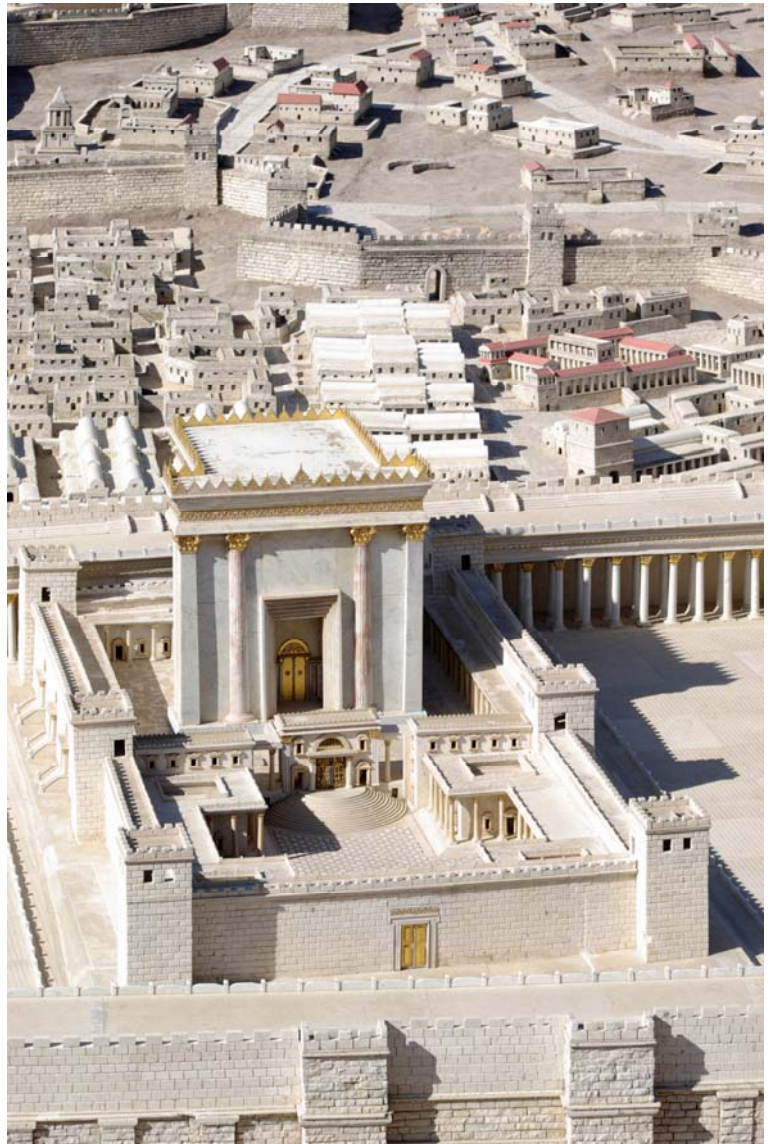
The Three Offices of Christ

By Matt Adams

Theology can be a daunting subject. When it comes to topics like the Doctrine of Christ, people can sink into their seats and ignore the subject, which is a terrible response to such precious biblical truth. Within the Doctrine of Christ, most theologians cover two distinct sections, the person of Christ and the work of Christ. Both of these are of utmost importance for biblical Christianity, but for this particular article, the work of Christ will be highlighted. Specifically, the "three offices" of Christ and His execution of those offices will be our primary targets. As Christ executes these three offices, He is meeting man's need for restoration, since Jesus Christ is God; man's restoration is undeniable and permanent. These three offices help us to understand Jesus' redemptive work. As Prophet, He brings us the true word of God. As Priest, He brings sacrifice and makes intercession. As King, He rules all things in His sovereign power.

The Three Offices of Christ

Christ executes three offices: Prophet, Priest, and King. Because these three offices come together for the salvation of God's people, they need to be discussed thoroughly so that we can see how Christ executes these offices, what that means, and how that applies to the life of the believer. The Westminster Shorter Catechism is a great tool that should be utilized in this discussion; therefore, with each of the offices, the question and answer will be quoted



and examined.

The first office that Christ executes is the office of a prophet. The Shorter Catechism asks the question, “How does Christ execute the office of a prophet?” The answer, “Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in revealing to us, by his word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.” [\[1\]](#)

Prophet

When glancing at this office, specifically the Shorter Catechism question and answer, it seems to be fairly simple. That Christ shows us the way to salvation and God’s will through His Word and His Spirit, but through closer examination, this office of prophet carries far more weight.

A prophet is one who speaks the Word of God. This definition is very fitting with Scriptural backing, but it also shows that Jesus is more than a Prophet because He is the very Word of the Lord Himself. John chapter one tells readers this specifically as it reads, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1). Ultimately, as one continues to read, it is seen that the Word was Jesus in the flesh (John 1:14). Not only were the words of God on the lips of Jesus, but He is the living and breathing Word of God incarnate. Therefore, because Jesus is the Word of God, He is the ultimate Prophet; He fulfills every prophecy.

Priest

The second office Christ executes is the office of is Priest. In the Question 25 and its corresponding answer in the Shorter Catechism, we have a good summary statement of how Christ executes the office of a Priest. The answer reads, “Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God; and in making continual intercession for us.” [\[2\]](#) Through this answer, two duties are brought out and summarized for this office—sacrifice and intercession.

In regards to sacrifice, Jesus Christ brings fulfillment to the Old Testament sacrifice system, which God used to teach the people what Jesus would do when He came to Earth. Hebrews 10:3-7 speaks of this clearly, as the author writes:

“But in these sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”

Jesus’ sacrifice for His people fulfills the Old Testament sacrifice system of bulls, goats, lambs, doves, flour, wine, and oil. Therefore, Jesus is this perfect and spotless sacrifice being given up as an offering for sin. Jesus, through His obedience, is the atoning sacrifice for all of God’s people as He bore their sins, took them upon Himself, and cast them as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). The atonement of Jesus Christ makes us righteous in the sight of God. That means that our punishment for sin is taken care of through Jesus! What a glorious thought! We are reconciled to God and no longer an enemy of Him (2nd Corinthians 5:18-19).

In regards to intercession, a truth that is priceless to Christians, Christ pleads for His people to the Father bringing all of our needs to the great throne of God. There are some tremendous Scriptural references that teach believers about Christ’s interceding for them. One of these is Hebrews 4:15 which says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” The author then writes in Hebrews 7:25, “Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for [His people].” (Hebrews 7:25)

Paul writes in Romans, “Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” (Romans 8:34)

King

Lastly, the third office that Christ executes is the office of King. The Shorter Catechism gives great light to what is meant by this doctrinal phrase. It reads, “Christ executeth the office of a king, in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.” [3] This is very clear, that Christ is not just a Prophet and a Priest, but He is also the sovereign King. Revelation 19:16 gives us this complete title, the “King of kings and Lord of lords.” Jesus Christ is the One sitting upon the throne in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, for Jesus Christ is God. We see Christ's Kingship over the whole earth in His magnificent works and power. Everything God the Father does, the Son does as well.

John Frame, a prominent Reformed theologian, helps connect the dots when he says that in connection to Christ's Kingship, one must focus on the resurrection. He states:

“The resurrection, like the atonement, is part of our salvation from sin. It is Jesus’ great triumph over death and sin: death could not hold him. It is also the Father’s witness that Jesus’ claims are true and that his atonement accomplished its purpose. And consider this as well: Romans 6:4 tells us that when Jesus died, we died with him—to sin. And when he rose from the dead, we rose with him—to new life.” [4]

If there is no resurrection, we are still dead in our sins, which means we do not have a Savior who is victorious over sin and death. As believers present the gospel, we shouldn't stop with Christ's death on the cross but must continue on to explain the resurrection. The death of Christ is victorious, and the resurrection of Christ shows His triumph over sin and death. Jesus now serves as our exalted King, High Priest, Mediator, and Intercessor before the Father.

Final Thoughts...

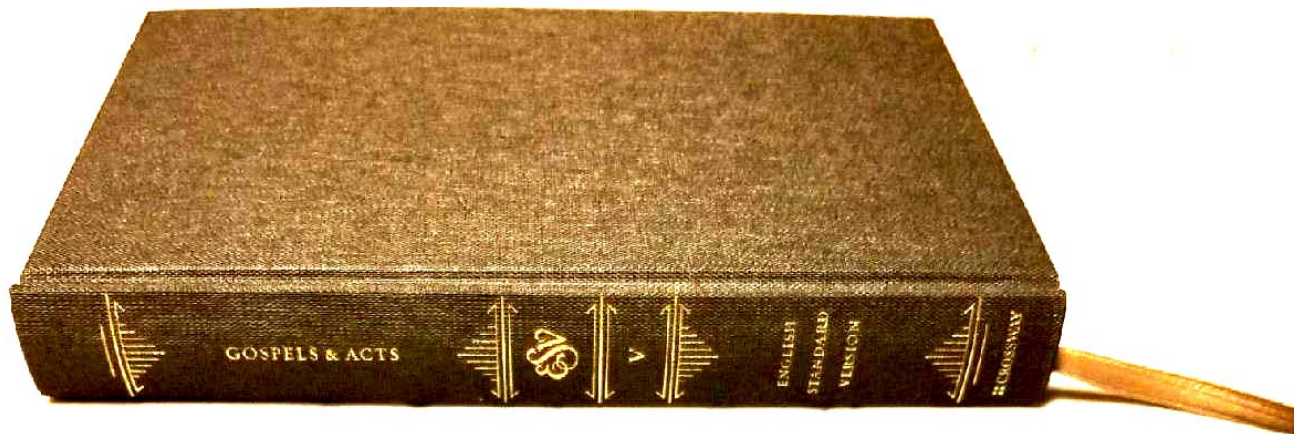
The work of Christ is for His people. He is redeeming them from their sins and restoring them to a right standing with God the Father. He accomplishes this work of redemption by executing the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. As He is the Word of God, He is our sacrifice and mediator, and He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. 1st Timothy 1:15 reminds us, *“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”* And again, Paul expounds, *“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time”* (1st Timothy 2:5-6).

References:

- [1] WSC, Question 24
- [2] WSC, Question 25
- [3] WSC, Question 26
- [4] Frame., 908

Jesus the Divine Word

By Dave Jenkins



The Gospel of John differs from the other gospel accounts in many ways, chiefly among them—the beginning of his account of Jesus. Like the other Gospel writers, John wants us to understand that Jesus is God *made flesh*—the only God who became truly man. Matthew and Luke approached this by explaining the virgin birth. But John’s prologue gives a theological explanation of Jesus’ coming into the world, beginning with His eternal original before the creation of all things.

John starts in chapter 1 with, “In the beginning was the Word.” This mirrors the way in which the Old Testament begins in Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” John places Jesus where we expect God: *in the beginning*. The subject of this Gospel, the man—Jesus—who lived, died, and rose again, is thus identified as *God*.

John 1:1 teaches Jesus’ deity in three respects, beginning with His eternal being: “In the beginning was the Word.” When creation “was made”, Jesus—here designated as “the Word”—already “was” (existed). This was an important statement during the Church’s fight with the earliest heretics in the 3rd century A.D. Consider Arius, for instance, whose heresy articulated ideas that began percolating during John’s life and prompted the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. Arius maintained that Jesus, though certainly godlike in many ways, was nonetheless *not* God. Arius argued that Jesus was a created being, however, glorious and close to God. But John tells us, instead, that when time and creation began, Jesus already “was”. Leon Morris explains, “The Word existed before creation, which makes it clear that the Word was not created.... The Word is not to be included among created

things.”

If the Word already was in the beginning, then either He must have been with God or He must have been God. John teaches both. His second statement is that “the Word was with God.” This tells us that the Word is a person who has a relationship with God. In the creation account of Genesis chapter 1, we read “and God said” nine times. It was by God’s Word that He brought creation into being. John now tells us that this Word is a person who was “with God”. This statement sheds light on Genesis 1:26 which reads, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image.’” God was speaking to the Word. John clarifies in verses 2-3, “He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” So the Word is God’s executor in creation, the agent who accomplishes God’s will. God said in Genesis 1:3, “Let there be light” and the Word made light. All throughout the Bible, it is God’s Word that does God’s will. Psalm 33:6 emphasizes this by stating, “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made.” And Psalm 107:20 states, “He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction.” So the Word who made creation also brings God’s salvation.

With this in mind, we see that John wants us to understand, not only the eternity of the Word, but also the personhood of the Word. The Word is a person, the companion of God Himself. This warns us against another perennial heresy, namely, that which denies the distinct personhood of the various members of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity states, “In the unity of the Godhead there are three persons [...]: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit” (Westminster Confession of Faith 2.3). It is hard for us to understand how there can be only one God, but three distinct persons in that God, but verses such as this cause us to believe it. When John speaks of the Word, he means God the Son, Jesus Christ, who eternally lives in relationship with, and does the will of, God the Father. Some people would deny that these are distinct persons, instead seeing the Father and Son as different modes of the one, undifferentiated God. But while one person can be by himself, he is never with himself; John insists that the Word is a distinct person: “the Word was with God.”

Third, verse 1 makes a straightforward statement that the Word not only is a companion to God, but is Himself divine. Secular voices as diverse as conspiracy-theory novelist Dan Brown, in his best-seller *The Da Vinci Code*, and liberal scholar Bart Ehrman, assert that Christians never considered Jesus to be God until the Council of Nicea in the fourth century. But here, in clear language, the apostle John writes, “*And the Word was God.*” He repeats this claim in John 1:18, saying that the One “who is at the Father’s side” is Himself “the only God”. Likewise, at the Gospel’s end, when the resurrected Jesus appears to doubting Thomas, the disciple falls before Him and cries, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). That is the Christian confession. John wants us to know from the beginning of his Gospel that Jesus Christ, the Word, is God.

“Because it states Christ’s deity so plainly, John 1:1 has long come under attack, beginning with Arius.”

Because it states Christ’s deity so plainly, John 1:1 has long come under attack, beginning with Arius. His argument, used by Jehovah’s Witnesses today, was that John does not teach that Jesus is God, but rather that Jesus is a “godlike creature”. He is divine, but not a deity. This is based on the fact that in this final phrase of verse 1, John places a definite article (“the”) before “Word”, but not before “God”. Jehovah’s Witnesses argue, “John says, ‘The Word was a God’, but not *the* God.”

What is our reply? First, it is clear throughout the Gospel that John intends us to identify Jesus as God. Our teaching of Christ's deity does not depend on this verse, and what John says elsewhere clarifies his meaning here. Consider, for instance, the indisputable assertion of deity in John 1:18, which describes Jesus as "the only God, who is at the Father's side". Second, if John meant that Jesus was divine but not a deity, there was a perfectly good Greek word (*theios*) that he *did not use*. The word he did use (*theos*) means "God", and not "godlike". Third, while the Arian and Jehovah's Witnesses argument might convince novices in New Testament Greek, the Greek grammar does not demand a definite article for both of the nouns when they are joined in this way. It is common for one definite article to serve for both nouns, and so the grammatical argument is simply wrong. Fourth, there is an obvious reason for John's construction. His point is to identify *the Word* both as God (meaning "God the Father") and also as distinct from God. If he had written, "the Word was the God", that would be identifying Jesus with God in a way that would render them indistinguishable. His point is clearly to specify Christ's deity, while also distinguishing him from God the Father.

Martin Luther said, "This text is a strong and valid attestation of the divinity of Christ. Everything depends on this doctrine. It serves to maintain and support all other doctrines of our Christian faith. Therefore the devil assailed it very early in the history of Christendom, and he continues to do so in our day."

John, in his Gospel, wants us to realize Christ's deity and His relationship to God the Father, insisting on Jesus' divine Sonship for our salvation. Jesus is God the Executor, doing the will of His Father (God the Ordainer), within the perfect harmony of the Trinity. A.W. Pink nicely wraps up this discussion when he says, "The One who was heralded by the angels to the Bethlehem shepherds, who walked this earth for thirty-three years, who was crucified at Calvary and who rose in triumph from the grave, and who forty days later departed from these scenes, was none other than the Lord of glory."

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Three Critical Truths about Propitiation

By Chris Poblete



Propitiation (noun) prō-pi-shē-ā-shān: the act of gaining or regaining the favor of; in this case, a sacrifice that bears God's *wrath* and turns it to *favor*.

Why Does It Matter?

Read that definition again, and it should be crystal clear why it matters! The meaning of *propitiation* packs a heavy punch—a punch that is key to our understanding of the gospel—the good news of Jesus Christ. In this simple word, we see both the need for God's wrath to be appeased (since our God is a just God) and the need for an atoning sacrifice to be offered (since our God is a merciful God).

Where Do We Find This Word?

The word propitiation is found in a few different books of the New Testament:

- **[Romans 3:23-26]** *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a **propitiation** by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.* (Greek word *hilastērion*).
- **[Hebrews 2:17]** *Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make **propitiation** for the*

sins of the people. (Greek word *hilaskomai*).

- **[1 John 2:2]** *And He Himself is the **propitiation** for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.* (Greek word *hilasmos*).
- **[1 John 4:10]** *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the **propitiation** for our sins.* (Greek word *hilasmos*).

Propitiation and the Gospel

When we hear or read the word propitiation, we ought to be reminded of the gospel: *Propitiation reminds us that God is just.* Sin is the high offense against a holy God. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And because He is righteous, just, and good, God must not let sin go unpunished.

Propitiation reminds us that God initiates. Every single one of us is born dead in our sins (Ephesians 2) and without life. There is no one perfect. Because of this sinful nature, you and I cannot justify ourselves before God. We can try, but we will fall short, every one of us. God would still be a good God if He left us in this state, ushering each of us to suffer His righteous wrath. But instead, He provided a way out for us. He initiated by sending His only begotten Son, Jesus of Nazareth, as a propitiation for our sins.

Propitiation reminds us that God is loving and merciful. Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords—the only perfect sacrificial Lamb—was a willing sacrifice. In order for us to spend an eternity with our Maker, God’s wrath needed to be satisfied by a propitiation. That propitiation is Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

“The Wrath of God Was Satisfied”

Jesus did not merely *deflect* God’s wrath (like a helmet can deflect a baseball). Jesus absorbed it. *All of it.* For us. This is the reason why, in the hymn *In Christ Alone*, we sing:

***...on that cross as Jesus died
the wrath of God was satisfied,
for every sin on Him was laid,
here in the death of Christ I live.***

You see, to say that Jesus is a propitiation “by His blood” and “for our sins” is to say what kind of Savior He is to me—the kind of Savior that satisfies God’s wrath on a cross in my stead. And because this sweet Savior died and rose, you and I can have new life in Him. This is the gospel of God’s amazing grace to sinners.

Understanding the Gospel Justification

By Matt Perman



“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). At the heart of the biblical gospel is the amazing truth of justification. Without this truth, there would be no gospel at all. It is, in fact, very difficult to overestimate its importance because it is an absolutely essential element of true Christianity (Galatians 1:8; 5:4). The Protestant Reformation was mainly over the nature of justification, and still today it is a dividing line between true and false gospels. As Christians, a better and more complete

understanding of justification will help us to understand the gospel and our relationship with God properly.

Justification may be defined as a legal act of God, at the instant we believe in Christ, in which He (1) forgives our sins, (2) imputes to us the righteousness of Christ (this means that He thinks of it as belonging to us), and (3) declares us to be righteous in his sight, thereby (4) delivering us from all condemnation.

Forgiveness

The first aspect of justification is forgiveness of sins. This means that God stops holding our sins against us, and that they will never again be grounds for condemnation. In order for God to remain just in forgiving us, however, He cannot just overlook our sin, He must judge it. Therefore, this element of justification is only possible because of the atoning death of Christ. On the cross, God punished Jesus for our sins in our place. God is now able to forgive our sins without compromising His justice because Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sins: "...being justified as a gift by His grace *through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus*; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation [the sacrifice for sins that took away God's wrath] in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness...so that He would be *just and the justifier* of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:23-26). Justification is therefore closely tied to the atonement of Christ (His paying the penalty for our sins)—the atonement is not part of our justification, but it makes possible our justification.

Imputed Righteousness

If we are to be accepted by God, however, it is not enough just to have our sins forgiven. This would only make us neutral in the sight of God, whereas God requires that we actually have a positive righteousness in order to be accepted by Him. This is where the second aspect of justification comes in: God imputes to us the righteousness of Christ. In this context, to have something imputed to you means being given credit for something that you did not do. So having Christ's righteousness imputed to you means that God gives you credit for the righteousness of Christ—the perfect obedience that He accomplished in your place while He was on earth. "For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the *gift of righteousness* will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:17; Romans 4:6). Another way to define imputed righteousness is that God thinks of Christ's righteousness as belonging to you. God is then able to declare us righteous (or, *just*) in His sight (the third aspect justification) because He has given to us the perfect righteousness of Christ.

Declared Righteous

If God did not impute the righteousness of Christ to us, He could not declare us righteous. This is because we are sinners, and there is nothing in us that makes us worthy of being declared righteous before God. But God will not declare a person righteous unless there is some righteousness to base this declaration upon. The perfect righteousness of Christ solves this dilemma. God declares us righteous on the basis of what Christ did in our place. As Paul says, Christ became for us righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30; Isaiah 61:10; Jeremiah 23:6). Because God first imputes to us Christ's righteousness (which He accomplished through His perfect obedience to the Father in our place while He was on earth), He can justly declare us righteous.

Imputed Versus Infused Righteousness

The distinction between *imputed* righteousness and *infused* righteousness serves to clarify this point further. Justification does not mean that God infuses righteousness into our hearts and declares us righteous on the basis of that. He does not transform us into righteous creatures and on

that basis declare us righteous. Instead, God imputes to us someone else's righteousness—Christ's—and declares us righteous on *that* basis. Thus, we are declared righteous before God on the basis of who Christ is and what He did, not on the basis of anything inherently good in us or anything that we have done. Justification involves a change in our *standing* before God but not a change in our *character*. Again, God does not declare us righteous on the basis of a change that He brings about in us or on

the basis of good deeds that we do for Him (i.e., infused righteousness), but He declares us righteous on the basis of what Christ did for us, and we are then given credit for (i.e., imputed righteousness).

"I have tried to make it clear that justification does not have anything at all to do with something God does *in* us; it is what He does *about* us."

This is how we can be both justified and sinners at the same time—because justification does not involve anything that we inherently are, but involves having credit for what Christ did. Paul makes this clear: "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who *justifies the ungodly*, his faith is credited as righteousness" (Romans 4:5). "...and may be

found in Him, *not having a righteousness of my own* derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, *the righteousness which comes from God* on the basis of faith" (Philippians 3:9). "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, *being justified as a gift* by His grace *through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 3:23-24).

The concept of imputation is thus central to justification. It is the basis of both our forgiveness and our being declared just. God is able to forgive us our sins because He imputed them to Christ on the cross and then justly punished Him in our place. And He is able to declare us righteous because He took Christ's righteousness and imputed it to us. What a deal! Christ gets the blame (and thus the punishment) for our unrighteousness and we get the credit (and thus salvation) for His righteousness. Paul brings out both of these aspects in 2nd Corinthians 5:21: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." This is a truly wonderful and marvelous thing that should bring about great praise to God from our hearts.

Deliverance from All Condemnation

Since justification involves forgiveness, being given Christ's righteousness, and being declared righteous, we are thereby delivered from all condemnation because *there is no reason left for us to be condemned*. If we are justified, we will never be sent to hell: "Therefore there is now *no condemnation* for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns?" (Romans 8:33-34).

How Justification Relates to Sanctification

I have tried to make it clear that justification does not have anything at all to do with something that God does *in* us; it is what He does *about* us. But do not take this to mean that a justified person will not begin a changed life. Justification is always accompanied by sanctification—the process by which God makes us holy in our character, not just our standing before Him. But it must be kept clear that justification and sanctification are not the same thing. They are simply two different things that occur together. Further, whereas justification occurs *in an instant* the moment one believes, sanctification is a *process* that continues throughout life. God begins this process of sanctification at conversion when we are justified, but it does not end until we die.

John MacArthur makes this distinction between justification and sanctification clear: "This is a crucial point on which Protestants have historically been in full agreement: sinners are not justified because of some good thing in them; God can declare them righteous because he first imputes to them

the perfect righteousness of Christ...Again, this is owing to no good thing in us—not even God’s sanctifying or regenerating work in our hearts” (*The Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 199).

Justification is by Faith Alone

Perhaps the central truth of justification that must be understood is that it is by *faith alone*. We do not earn justification and salvation by good works—God does not give it to us because we are good enough. He gives it to us because we believe in Christ, period. It is not faith plus works, but faith alone through which we are saved. Many Scriptures make this clear: “By the works of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight” (Romans 3:20). “...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, *being justified as a gift*” (Romans 3:23-24). “For we maintain that *a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law*” (Romans 3:28). “He saved us, *not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy...*” (Titus 3:5). “But to the one who *does not work, but believes* in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness” (Romans 4:5). “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace” (Romans 11:6). “...nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus...” (Galatians 2:16).

Good works will always follow in the life of a justified person, but they are the result of our salvation, not the cause of it. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; *not as a result of works*, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus for good works*, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10).

God does not see an individual believe and say, “Now that he has believed, I will repay his good choice by justifying him.”

But how does justification by faith alone square with the words of James: “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24)? Is this in contradiction to the verses we saw above? No, it is not. As Dr. Wayne

Grudem has said, “Here we must realize that James is using the word justified in a different sense from the way Paul uses it” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 731). Paul uses the word justify to mean “declare to be righteous”, but the word can also mean “to demonstrate to be righteous”. For example, the word is used this way in Luke 16:15. That James is using it this way is supported by the fact that the instance that he uses to show that Abraham was “justified by works” (2:21)—which is recorded in Genesis 22—came many years after Genesis 15:6 where Abraham believed God and “[God] reckoned it to him as righteousness.” Further, James is concerned in this section with showing that mere intellectual assent to the gospel is not true faith (2:18, 26). Grudem summarizes: “James is saying here that ‘faith’ that has no results or ‘works’ is not real faith at all; it is ‘dead’ faith. He is not denying Paul’s clear teaching that justification (in the sense of a declaration of right legal standing before God) is by faith alone apart from works of the law; he is simply affirming a different truth, namely, that ‘justification’ in the sense of an outward showing that one is righteous only occurs as we see evidence in a person’s life. To paraphrase, James is saying that a person is ‘*shown to be righteous*’ by his works, and not by his faith alone.” This is something with which Paul also would certainly agree (2nd Corinthians 13:5; Galatians 5:19-24)” (Grudem, pp. 731-732).

Faith Does Not Earn Salvation

It should also be kept clear that faith is not regarded by God as a good act that we do which He “rewards” by giving us justification. God does not see an individual believe and say, “Now that he has

believed, I will repay his good choice by justifying him.” Instead, faith is the *means* through which we are justified. Faith is what *connects* us with the righteousness of Christ, not something that *earns* us the righteousness of Christ. For example, let’s say that a friend works a whole summer so that he can give to me the money he earns. He would have earned the credit in my place, just like Christ earned righteousness to God, through His obedience, in my place. Once my friend has all of the money that he earned, he then writes a check and offers it to me. In order to receive the check, I reach out my hand and grab it. Reaching out my hand was not something I did to earn the check, but it was instead the means through which I received it. So it is with justification. We do not earn it by our faith, but instead, receive it through our faith.

Application

In closing, what are the applications of this doctrine? First, if we believe in Christ, we can be confident that we have peace with God (Romans 5:1). Second, a proper understanding that we are justified by faith alone through Christ alone is necessary to being a Christian (Galatians 5:4). Third, it gives us deep comfort, security, and confidence before God to know that even though I will never be perfect in this life, I am nonetheless considered perfectly righteous in His sight. This has huge ramifications for the way we relate to God. Fourth, knowing this truth gives us a fuller—and more accurate—understanding of our God and the gospel we preach, and keeps us from preaching a false gospel. Fifth, true humility is only possible by recognizing that we cannot earn salvation, but instead must admit our horribly sinful condition and accept salvation as a gift (Romans 4:2; Ephesians 2:8, 9). Sixth, knowing this truth gives us a greater delight in God and deeper worship of Him, for it reveals to us more of His ways that we may know Him more fully (Exodus 33:11). Finally, we need to know about justification in order to fully appreciate our salvation.

How to Deal with Guilt, Condemnation, and Shame with the Gospel

By Dave Jenkins



Joe and Barbara are both solid Christians. They regularly spend quality time in the Scriptures, in prayer, and are routinely involved in the life and ministry of their local church. Both though struggle with feelings of condemnation. Joe has secret sins that are eating away at him. Barbara regularly feels guilty because she periodically overeats. While both have godly friends they can and should be opening up to, what they both need to understand is who they are now in Christ. Many Christians today are like Joe and Barbara. They are involved in solid Bible-believing and practicing local churches. They are regu-

larly feasting at the table of the Lord in His Word and aiming to serve others. And yet, they often know little of the practical peace that has been offered to them now in Christ. They have no idea how to fight against guilt, condemnation, and shame with the gospel. And that is precisely why I wrote this article to help you who are like Joe and Barbara either struggling with secret sins that need to come out in the light and be open and transparent with others around you about what is going on. It's only in the light that we can find freedom from secret sins and know the hope of practical peace that Jesus promises us in Christ. Furthermore, it's only in the gospel that now we are in Christ. While this article was written for Joe and Barbara's; it's also written to help Pastors and ministry leaders help Joe and Barbara. So as we begin, let's consider Romans 8:1 and then move into the heart of what Paul has to say to God's people today.

The word "*therefore*" in Romans 8:1 indicates that Paul is stating an important summary and conclusion related to his preceding argument. This verbiage is based first on the exclamation of victory that comes "through Jesus Christ our Lord" (7:23-25), which in turn is linked back to 7:6, where

the idea of the “new life of the Spirit” is first mentioned. More broadly, however, Paul seems to be recalling his whole argument about salvation in Christ from 3:21-5:21. The “now” in 8:1 matches the “now” in 7:6, showing that the new era of redemptive history has now been inaugurated by Christ Jesus for those who are “now” in right standing before God, because they are united with Christ. The

“Paul here announces the marvelous good news that for Christians there will be no condemnation, neither sentencing nor punishment for the sins that believers have committed...”

summary, therefore, relates further to the whole argument presented in chapters 3-5.

No condemnation echoes the conclusion stated in 5:1 (“Therefore we have peace with God”) and underscores the stunning implications of the gospel first introduced in—and underscores the stunning implications of—the gospel first introduced in 1:16-17. As Paul immediately goes on to explain, there is “no condemnation” for the Christian because God has condemned sin in the flesh by sending His own Son (8:3) to pay the penalty for sin through His death on the cross.

The following verses then show that indwelling sin is overcome through the power of the indwelling Spirit, with ten references to the Spirit in Romans 8:4-11.

Guilt, Shame, Condemnation, and the Gospel

Many believers struggle with guilt, shame, and condemnation. Romans 8 marks a major change in the focus of the flow of the epistle. At this point, the apostle begins to delineate the marvelous results of justification in the life of the believer. He begins by explaining as best as possible to infinite minds, some of the cardinal truths of salvation (no condemnation, as well as justification, substitution, and sanctification).

God’s provision of salvation came not through Christ’s perfect teaching or through His perfect life, but through His perfect sacrifice on the cross. It is through Christ’s death, not His life, that God provides the way of salvation. For those who place their trust in Christ, and in what He has done on their behalf, there is therefore now no condemnation.

The Greek word *katakrima* (condemnation) appears only in the book of Romans, here in 8:1 and in 5:16 and 18. Although it relates to the sentencing for a crime, its primary focus is not so much on the verdict, as on the penalty that the verdict demands. As Paul has already declared, the penalty or condemnation for sin is *death* in Romans 6:23.

Paul here announces the marvelous good news that for Christians there will be no condemnation, neither sentencing nor punishment for the sins that believers have committed or will ever commit.

The word “no” in the Greek is an emphatic negative adverb of time, and carries the idea of complete cessation. In His parable about the king who forgave one of his slaves an overwhelming debt (Matthew 18:23-27), Jesus pictured God’s gracious and total forgiveness of the sins of those who come to Him in humble contrition and faith. That is the heart and soul of the gospel—that Jesus completely and permanently paid the debt of sin and the penalty of the law (which is condemnation to death) for every person who humbly asks for mercy and trusts in Him. Through the apostle John, God assures His children that “if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” (1st John 2:1-2).

Jesus not only pays the believer’s debt of sin, but also cleanses him “from all unrighteousness” (1st John 1:9). Still, more amazingly, He graciously imputes and imparts to each believer His

own perfect righteousness: “For by one offer He Christ has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (Hebrew 10:14; Romans 5:17; 2nd Corinthians 5:21; Phil. 3:9). More even than that, Jesus shares His vast heavenly inheritance with those who come to Him in faith (Ephesians 1:3, 11, 14). It is because of such immeasurable divine grace that Paul admonishes Christians to be continually “giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light” (Colossians 1:12). Having been qualified by God the Father, we will never—under any circumstance—be subject to divine condemnation. How blessed to be placed beyond the reach of condemnation!

The truth that there can never be the eternal death penalty for believers is the foundation of the 8th chapter of Romans. As Paul asks rhetorically near the end of the chapter, “If God is for us, who is against us?” (v.31), and again, “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies” (v.33). If the highest tribunal in the universe justifies us, who can declare us guilty?

It is extremely important to realize that deliverance from condemnation is not based in the least measure on any form of perfection achieved by the believer. He/she does not attain the total eradication of sin during his/her earthly life. It is that truth that Paul establishes so intensely and poignantly in Romans 7. John declares that truth as unambiguously as possible in his first epistle: “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1st John 1:8). The Christian’s conflict with sin does not end until he goes to be with the Lord. Nevertheless, there is still no condemnation, because the penalty for all the failures of this life has been paid in Christ and applied by Christ.

It is also important to realize that deliverance from divine condemnation does not mean deliverance from divine discipline. “For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines and He scourges every son whom He receives” (Hebrews 12:6). Nor does deliverance from God’s condemnation mean escape from our accountability to Him: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

“Moreover, the weakest of believers are promised that, although they still stumble and fall into sin’s power in their flesh, they will experience ultimate victory over sin in the life to come.”

The “*therefore*” that introduces Romans 8:1 refers back to the major theme of the first seven chapters of the epistle—the believer’s complete justification before God, graciously provided in response to trust in the sacrificial death and resurrection of His Son.

The divine condemnation from which believers are exonerated (8:1) is without exception or qualification. It is bestowed on those who are in Christ Jesus, in other words, on every true Christian. Justification completely and forever releases every believer from sin’s bondage and its penalty of death (6:23), and therefore fits him to stand sinless before a holy God forever. It is on this particular aspect of justification on which Paul focuses on the beginning of chapter 8.

Paul’s use of the first person singular pronouns (*I* and *me*) in 7:7-25 emphasizes the sad reality that, in this present life, no Christian, not even an apostle, is exempt from struggles with sin. In the opening verses of chapter 8, on the other hand, Paul emphasizes the marvelous reality that every believer, even the weakest and most unproductive, shares in the complete and eternal freedom from sin’s condemnation. The holiest of believers are warned that, although they are no longer under sin’s slavish dominion, they will experience conflicts with it in this present life. Moreover, the weakest of believers are promised that, although they still stumble and fall into sin’s power in their flesh, they will experience ultimate victory over sin in the life to come.

The key to every aspect of salvation is the simple but infinitely profound phrase “*in Christ Jesus*”. A Christian is a person who is in Christ Jesus. Paul has already declared this truth in Romans 6:3-5. Being a Christian is not simply being outwardly identified with Christ, but being part of Christ; not simply of being united with Him, but united in Him. Our being in Christ is one of the profoundest of mysteries, which we will not fully understand until we meet Him face to face in Heaven. However, Scripture does shed light on that marvelous truth. We know that we are in Christ spiritually in a divine and permanent union. “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive,” Paul explains in 1st Corinthians 15:22. Believers are also in Christ in a living, participatory sense. “Now you are Christ’s body,” Paul declares in that same epistle, “and individually members of it” (12:27). We are actually a part of Him, and in ways that are unfathomable to us now, we work when He works, grieve when He grieves, and rejoice when He rejoices. “For by one spirit we were all baptized into one body,” Paul assures us, “whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1st Corinthians 12:13). Christ’s own divine life pulses through us.

Conclusion

The key to dealing with guilt, shame, and condemnation is to grow in understanding of the work of Christ. As we’ve seen throughout our examination of Romans 8:1, the believer has a new identity and a new nature. The believer is now in Christ because of the work of Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Because of the believer’s new identity and new nature in Christ, the believer can deal with guilt, shame, and condemnation, since the gospel addresses these issues. The gospel addresses our guilt by showing us that Christ bore our sins and now offers us forgiveness of sin through the cross. The gospel addresses our shame because Christ took upon Himself our shame and was thoroughly humiliated and yet died in our place for our sins. The gospel addresses our condemnation because we justly deserve to be condemned to hell, but God, in His grace and mercy, offers us a full pardon through the work of Christ.

If you're struggling with guilt, shame, condemnation or a litany of other issues, I implore you to grow in your knowledge and understanding of the gospel. By growing in the knowledge and understanding of the gospel, you will be able to deal with these issues, but most importantly, you will grow in what it means to be in Christ a marvelous truth that one can drill down deep upon until the day one dies and goes to be with Jesus.

Christ Our Substitute: The Meaning of the Cross

By Thaddeus Williams



Several biblical terms express (but do not exhaust) the ministry of Jesus as Substitute, and the meaning of the cross. Those are including (but not limited to) the following:

Jesus as our PROPITIATION. “He is the propitiation for our sins...” (1 John 2:2). Related to the ancient Jewish world of temple sacrifices, the core meaning of *propitiation* (Greek being

ἱλασμός, or “*hilasmos*”) speaks of Christ as our “wrath taker” (see also 1st John 4:10; Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17).

Jesus as our SACRIFICE. “But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26). Also related to the ancient Jewish system, *sacrifice* (Greek being *θυσίας*, or “*thusias*”) speaks of Christ as the final and all-sufficient substitute, pouring out His blood for our life, rendering the old system of animal sacrifice obsolete.

Jesus as our REDEMPTION. “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7). Related to the first century world of slave trading, *redemption* (Greek being *ἀπολύτρωσις*, or “*apolutrosis*”) speaks of Christ paying the price to purchase freedom for slaves (like us) incapable of self-liberation (see also Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 9:12; 1st Corinthians 6:20; Galatians 3:13).

Jesus as our RECONCILIATION. “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation” (2nd Corinthians 5:18-19). Related to first century family and social relationships, *reconciliation* (Greek being *καταλλάξαντος*, or “*katallaxantos*”) speaks of Christ mending the relational rift between God and men resulting in relational peace where there used to be war and a deep love connection where there used to be a vast disconnect (Romans 5:10).

Jesus as our JUSTIFICATION. “...Who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Romans 4:25). Related to the first century legal world, *justification* (Greek being *δικαίωσιν*, or “*dikaioisin*”) speaks of Christ as the one in whom we are declared legally righteous in the eyes of God, the divine Judge (Romans 4:25, 5:16, 18). God the Father declared His own Son, who was actually righteous, sinful and punished Him as such, so He could declare us, who are actually sinful, righteous and reward us as such (see also John 11:50-52; Romans 5:8-9; 1st Peter 2:21-25, 3:18).

Jesus as our ADVOCATE. “...We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1st John 2:1). Another term from the first century courtrooms, *advocate* (Greek being *παράκλητον*, or “*parakleton*”) speaks of Christ as our defense attorney arguing our “not guilty” verdict before the Father by appealing to His own completed death sentence as sufficient payment for our law-breaking.

In Christ Alone

In this manifold work of God, through Jesus, we find the incredible gospel truth of substitutionary atonement. This grace-saturated doctrine reminds us that, in submission to the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ stood as our substitute, in our place, to serve as our propitiation, our sacrifice, our redemption, our reconciliation, our justification, and our advocate. “In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:11-14).

The Incarnation: Jesus Fully God and Fully Man

By Dave Jenkins



The doctrine of the Incarnation is very important to Christianity. It reminds us that Jesus is both God *and* man, which makes it possible to speak meaningfully about who Jesus is and what He did. In the 19th century, James Denney, a professor at the United Free Church College

in Glasgow, Scotland, wrote the following on this matter:

*Christ is the only person who can do this work [salvation] for us. This is the deepest and most decisive thing we can know about him, and in answering the questions which it prompts we are starting from a basis in experience. There is a sense in which Christ confronts us as the reconciler. He is doing the will of God on our behalf, and we can only look on. We see him in judgment and the mercy of God in relation to our sins. His presence and work on earth are a divine gift, a divine visitation. He is the gift of God to men, not the offering of men to God, and God gives himself to us in and with him. We owe to him all that we call divine life. On the other hand, this divine visitation is made, and this divine life is imparted, through a life and work which are truly human. The presence and work of Jesus in the world, even the work of bearing sin, does not prompt us to define human and divine by contrast with each other: there is no suggestion of incongruity between them. Nevertheless, they are both there, add the fact that they are both there justifies us in raising the question as to Jesus' relation to God on the one hand, and to men on the other.*¹

The Reason for the Incarnation

What is the function of the Incarnation in Christianity? A classic statement on why Jesus became man and its answer is found in Anslem of Canterbury's theological masterpiece, *Cur Deus Homo?* (*Why Did God Become Man?*). This book deals with the question of the Incarnation. Anslem stated that God became man in Christ because only one who was both *God* and *man* could achieve our salvation. The Incarnation—Jesus taking on a fully human state—shows us that God has not abandoned us, but rather loves and values us, even in our fallen state.

Why Did God Put on Flesh?

The *atonement* is the reason God came as man. Consider these verses:

- **Hebrews 10:4-7:** "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'"
- **Hebrews 10:10:** "And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."
- **Matthew 1:21:** "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

Jesus spoke of his coming suffering, thus demonstrating his foreknowledge of the events.

- **Mark 8:31:** "And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again."
- **Mark 9:31:** "For he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.'"

He linked the success of his mission to the crucifixion:

- **John 12:32:** "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

Also, in several places in John's Gospel the crucifixion is spoken of as that "vital hour" for

which Christ came (John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20). The death of Jesus is also a major theme throughout the Old Testament: first, in regard to the meaning of the sacrifices (the meaning at the heart of the law); then in regard to the prophecies, which focused increasingly on the promise of a Coming Redeemer. Isaiah 53 and other Old Testament texts speak of the suffering of the deliverer to come.

In Galatians, the Apostle Paul teaches that even Abraham, who lived before both the law and prophets, was saved by faith in the Lord [Jesus] (Galatians 3:8, 16). Furthermore, Jesus told the downcast disciples on the Emmaus Road that the Old Testament foretold His death and resurrection:

“And he said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” (Luke 24:25-27)

“Thus God proclaimed His infinite abhorrence of sin by being willing *Himself* to suffer the cross in place of the guilty, in order that He might justly forgive us all.”

In light of these texts and many others we can acknowledge that the atonement of Christ is the primary reason for the Incarnation. It is the explanation of the twofold nature of Jesus and the focal point of the world and biblical history.

Is the doctrine of the atonement central to the Scriptures? Why must Jesus, the God-Man, be the one to provide salvation? In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin argues that this is how God has chosen to do it and, therefore, it is impertinent of us to ask if there could not be some other way. Salvation had to be achieved by God, for no one else could achieve it. Certainly men and women could not achieve it without Him, for we are the ones who have gotten ourselves into trouble in the first place! We have done so by our rebellion against God’s righteous law and just decrees. We have suffered the effects of sin to such a degree that our will is bound, and therefore we cannot even choose to please God, let alone actually please Him. If we are to be saved, only God has power to save, and must save us.

Remember These Gospel Truths

First, it is God who initiates salvation for man. If this is forgotten, it is easy to think of God as somehow remote from the atonement and therefore merely requiring it as some abstract price paid to satisfy His justice. In that view God appears disinterested, legalistic, and cruel. In actuality, God’s nature is characterized by love, and it is out of love that He planned and carried out the atonement. Through Jesus Christ, God Himself was satisfying His own justice. It’s easy to see why the Incarnation and the atonement must be considered together if each part is not to be distorted.

Secondly, there is no suggestion that human beings somehow placate the wrath of an angry God. Propitiation does refer to the placating of wrath, but it is not man who placates God. Rather it is God placating His own wrath so that His love might go out to embrace and fully save the repentant sinner. A proper recognition of the connection between the Incarnation and the atonement makes the Incarnation understandable. At the same time it eliminates the most common misunderstandings of (and objections to) Christ’s sacrifice of Himself as the means of salvation.

The divine Son, one of the three persons within the Trinity of the One God, is He through whom—from the beginning of the creation—the Father has revealed Himself to man (John 1:18). He took man’s nature upon Himself, and so became our representative. He offered Himself as a sacrifice in our stead, bearing our sin in His own body on the tree. He suffered, not only awful physical an-

guish, but also the unthinkable spiritual horror of becoming identified with the sin to which He was infinitely opposed. He thereby came under the curse of sin, so that for a time even His perfect fellowship with His Father was broken.

Thus God proclaimed His infinite abhorrence of sin by being willing *Himself* to suffer the cross in place of the guilty, in order that He might justly forgive us all. Thus the love of God found its perfect fulfillment because He did not hold back from even that utmost sacrifice, in order that we might be saved from eternal death, through what He endured. Finally it was possible for Him to be just and to justify the believer, because—as Lawgiver and as Substitute for the rebel race of man—He Himself had suffered the penalty of the broken law.

The Centrality of the Cross

There are several explanations that follow from the foundation we have built on the doctrine of the Incarnation. First, according to the Scriptures, Calvary is the center of Christianity. Many consider the Incarnation to be the most important thing. In other words, they consider God identifying Himself with man the most important, and consider the atonement as something like an afterthought. According to the Bible, the reason for the God-Man is that it required just such a person to die for our salvation. J.I. Packer said, “The crucial significance of the cradle at Bethlehem lies in its place in the sequence of steps down that led the Son of God to the cross of Calvary...and we do not understand it till we see it in this context.” To focus on the Incarnation apart from the cross leads to false sentimentality, and neglect of the horror and magnitude of human sin.

Second, if the death of Christ on the cross is the true meaning of the Incarnation, then there is no gospel without the cross. Christmas (or the birth of Jesus) by itself is no gospel. The life of Christ alone is also no gospel. Even the resurrection, important as it is in the total scheme of things, is no gospel by itself. The good news is not just that God became a man, nor that God has spoken to reveal a proper way of life to us; the good news is not even our great triumph over that great enemy we call death. Rather, the good news is that sin has been dealt with (the resurrection is proof of this); that Jesus has suffered its penalty for us as our representative, so that we might never have to suffer it, and therefore all who believe in Him can look forward to Heaven. The other biblical themes must be seen in this context, as we have already seen of the Incarnation. Emulation of Christ’s life and teaching is only possible to those who enter into a new relationship with God through faith in Jesus as their substitute. The resurrection is not merely a victory over death, but a proof that the atonement was a satisfactory reparation in the sight of the Father (Romans 4:25); and that death, the result of sin, is abolished on that basis.

Any gospel that talks merely of the Christ-event, meaning the Incarnation without the atonement, is a *false* gospel. Any gospel that speaks about the love of God without pointing out that His love led Him to pay the ultimate price for sin on the cross is a false gospel. The only true gospel is of the “One Mediator” (1st Timothy 2:5-6), who gave Himself for us.

Finally, just as there can be no gospel without the atonement as the reason for the Incarnation, so also there can be no Christian life without it. Without the atonement, the Incarnation becomes a kind of deification of the human and leads to arrogance and self-advancement. With the atonement, the true message of the life of Christ, and therefore of the life of the Christian man or woman, is humility and self-sacrifice for the obvious needs of others. The Christian life is not indifference to those who are hungry, sick, or suffering from some other lack. It is not contentment with our own abundance, neither the abundance of middle-class living with homes, cars, clothes, and vacations. Nor is it satisfaction with the abundance of education, or even the abundance of good churches,

Bibles, biblical teaching, or Christian friends/acquaintances. Rather, it is the awareness that others lack these things and that we must therefore sacrifice many of our own interests in order to identify with them, and thus bring them increasingly into the abundance we enjoy.

Paul writing on the Incarnation in 2nd Corinthians 8:9 said, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” Also in Philippians 2:5-11, he states, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” This is a strong reminder that we must emulate Christ in every way.

“It is remarkable enough that God the Son would take on human form...”

What Does the Bible Teach About the Incarnation?

Philippians 2:5-11 describes the ultimate example of humble service—Jesus left His throne and became like us in order to serve us. This passage is often referred to as the “hymn of Christ”. In these verses, Christ’s example of service is depicted through a stirring poem that traces His pre-existence, incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of God. Paul wrote this magnificent theology to encourage the Philippians to consider other people’s interests first (v.4). Jesus is the paradigm of genuine spiritual progress; not a self-aggrandizing struggle for supremacy, but a deep love for God and neighbor shown in deeds of service. Verses 6-11 have some clear indications of poetic structure, leading some to believe that this is a pre-Pauline hymn adapted by Paul. It is just as likely, however, that Paul composed the hymn for this setting. In view of the myriad theological questions that arise in these verses, it is critical to keep two things in mind: 1) these verses were written not to spur Christians to theological debate, but to encourage greater humility and love; and 2) the summary of Christ’s life and ministry found here is not unique to the book of Philippians. The same themes are evident throughout the entire New Testament.

Prior to the Incarnation, Christ was in the form of God (Greek: *morphe theou*). Despite the assertions of some scholars to the contrary, this most naturally refers to the “pre-existence” of Christ—He, the eternal Son, was there with the Father (John 1:1; 17:5, 24) before He was born in Bethlehem. “Form” here means the true and exact nature of something, or possessing the characteristics and qualities of something. Therefore having the “form of God” is roughly equivalent to having equality with God (*isa theou*), and it is directly in contrast with having the “form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7).

The Son of God is and Always Has Been God

Form could also be a reference to Christ being the ultimate image of God, “the exact imprint of his nature” (Hebrews 1:3). It might also refer to the fact that He is the visible expression of God’s invisible glory (Colossians 1:15). Remarkably, Christ did not imagine that having “equality with God” (which He already possessed) should lead Him to hold onto His privileges. It was not something

to be grasped, to be kept and exploited for His own benefit or advantage. Instead, He had a mind-set of *service*. “Christ did not please himself” (Romans 15:3). In humility, He counted the interests of others as more significant than His own (Philippians 2:3-4).

“Made Himself Nothing”

“*Made himself nothing*” has occasioned much controversy. The Greek word *keno* can mean “empty”, “pour out”, or also (metaphorically) “give up status and privilege”. Does this mean that Christ temporarily relinquished His divine attributes during His earthly ministry? *No*. The theory of Christ’s *kenosis* or “self-emptying” is not in accord with the context of Philippians or with early Christian theology. Paul is not saying that Christ became less than God or “gave up” some divine attributes; he is not even commenting directly on the question of whether Jesus was fully omnipotent or omniscient during His time on earth. Nor is he saying that Christ ever gave up on being “in the form of God”. Rather, Paul is stressing that Christ, who had all the privileges that were rightly His as King of the universe, gave them up to become an ordinary Jewish baby, bound for the cross. Christ “made himself nothing” by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. While He had every right to stay comfortably where He was (in a position of supreme *power* and *authority*) His *love* drove Him to a chosen position of weakness for the sake of sinful man (2nd Corinthians 8:9: “though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich”). In other words, the “emptying” consisted of His becoming human, not of His giving up any part of His true deity.

Above Arrogance

It is remarkable enough that God the Son would take on human form (Greek: *schema*, “outward appearance, form shape”, a different term from *morphe*, used in vv.6-7 for “form of God” and “form of a servant”), and thus enter into all the mess of a fallen world. But Jesus went much farther than just condescension, He also became obedient even to the point of death, even death on a cross (Romans 5:19). Crucifixion was not simply a convenient way of executing prisoners, it was the ultimate indignity, a public statement by Rome which said that the crucified one was beyond contempt. The excruciating physical pain was magnified by the degradation and humiliation. No other form of death, no matter how prolonged or physically agonizing, could match crucifixion as an absolute destruction of the person (Matthew 27:35). The cross was the ultimate counterpoint to the divine majesty of the pre-existent Christ, and thus was the ultimate expression of Christ’s obedience to the Father.

Jesus’ humiliation and humble service became the foundation for His exaltation. By humbling Himself on the cross out of love, He demonstrates that He truly shared the divine nature of God, who *is* love (1st John 4:8). For this reason God raised Him to life and highly exalted Him, entrusting Him with the rule of the cosmos and giving Him the name that is above every name. In the *Septuagint*, God’s personal name is translated as “*Kyrios*”, which means “Lord”, which is the name specified in Philippians 2:11. Paul indicates that the eternal Son of God received a status and authority (Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:33) that had not been His before He became incarnate as both God and man. The fact that Jesus received this name is a sign that He exercises His messianic authority in the name of *Yahweh*.

While Christ now bears the divine name *Yahweh* (Hebrew for “Lord”), He is still worshiped with

“By becoming a man, God demonstrated that He was interested in mankind through His own willingness to step into our time and space and die for our sins.”

His human name: Jesus. The astounding union of Jesus' divine and human natures is reinforced by the allusion to Isaiah 45:23 in the words, "every knee should bow and every tongue confess", which refers exclusively to *Yahweh* (Isaiah 45:24). The fact that these words can now be applied to God's messianic agent—*Jesus Christ the Lord*—shows that Jesus is fully divine. But the worship of Jesus as Lord is not the final word of the hymn. Jesus' exaltation also results in the glory of God the Father. This identical pattern is found in 1st Corinthians 15:23-28, when God gives Jesus messianic dominion over all creation and declares that everyone will one day rightly give praise to Him as their Lord. In this passage, we learn that when Jesus' Kingdom reaches its fullness, He does not keep the glory for Himself. Instead it says, "The Son himself will also be subjected to him who puts all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all..." (1st Corinthians 15:28). Even in His exaltation, Jesus remains the model of loving service to God.

One Last Glance

Throughout this article, we have examined what the Bible says about the Incarnation and what influential theologians have said about it. The Incarnation is vital to a robust understanding of the gospel as we have seen. In the Incarnation, God became a man and was born from a virgin in Bethlehem. Above, all the Incarnation proves to man that God is not disinterested in the affairs of sinners, but rather He came to deal with the problem of man's sin. The doctrine of the Incarnation demonstrates that God doesn't simply "talk a big game", but actually offers a solution to man's problem of sin. God, in His love, sent Jesus into the world. Jesus lived a sinless life as a man, all the while experiencing all the temptations that mankind faces. And yet, He lived a sinless life in the midst of people who constantly criticized Him, while begging Him for miracles. The people during Christ's ministry spit in His face and ridiculed Him, but all the while Jesus demonstrated that He cared for people by teaching, healing, setting the captives free, raising the dead, and so much more. All of this disproves the modern notion that God is *not interested* in man. By becoming a man, God demonstrated that He was interested in mankind through His own willingness to step into our time and space and die for our sins. So when we consider the doctrine of Incarnation, let us worship the God of the Bible—the Creator of all and the Redeemer of sinners who alone is worthy of all praise, honor, and glory.

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What is the Doctrine of Justification?

By Matt Perman



John Calvin, the great Reformer, spoke for many when he declared that justification is “the main hinge on which religion turns”. Why is it so important? Because “unless you first of all grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of his judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God.”[1]

Such a critical doctrine demands to be understood. This is an attempt to explain the essence of what Protestantism has traditionally taken to be the essence of the biblical doctrine of justification. The goal here is not defending that this understanding is correct, but rather to *clarify the traditional Protestant view* so that it can be more readily compared to the many divergent views in circulation today.

Charles Hodge captured the essence of the Protestant view of the biblical teaching on justification when he wrote that justification is “a sentence of life pronounced upon righteousness”. [2] There are two aspects of this definition that need unfolding if it is to be understood.

A Title to Eternal Life

First, in justification, we are accepted by God into the blessing of eternal life. He pronounces us to be in possession of His blessing of eternal life and, by this pronouncement, causes us to be in actual possession of this blessing. We are, in other words, given a *title* to eternal life. Just as I received a title to my car when I purchased it which made me a possessor of the car with a right to access it, so also having a *title* to eternal life means possessing the right to live forever in God’s blessing with access to His presence. Justification is not the *experience* of the blessing of life but is rather our *right to have the experience of life*. In the same way, the title to my car does not consist in my driving of my car, but is that which gives me the right to drive my car.

To use another analogy, just as a key gives *access* to a locked door, so also justification is the granting of *access* to eternal life. The difference is that a key just gives you the ability to open a door, whereas justification actually brings the possession of eternal life.

The Basis of Our Title to Life

Second, there is a *basis* upon which this title to eternal life is given. We are given a *right* to

eternal life in justification, but *why* does God give us that *right*? That is the question answered here. The *basis* of our eternal life is the *reason* that we have a *title* to that life; it is the reason that we possess it.

This might appear ambiguous at first. Take the example of a courtroom. If an innocent man is on trial for murder and the court acquits him upon discovering that his fingerprints do not match those on the murder weapon, we might say that the reason he was acquitted is the coming to light of this knowledge.

That is not what we mean by *basis*. For in the *deepest sense*, that man was *not* set free because his prints were not on the gun. *He was set free because He did not commit the crime*. The prints are simply the *evidence* that he was innocent, not the *reason* he was innocent. The fact that he was innocent, then, is the *basis* of his being set free (i.e., being given the right to freedom). The existence of somebody else's prints on the murder weapon is the *evidence* which *revealed* the fact that he was innocent. It is *in this sense* that we are using the terms "basis" and "evidence" concerning justification.

"Let us never forget that it is only through Christ Jesus that we have been justified, and not through our own works."

In the same way, then, the perfect *alien* (i.e., outside of us as opposed to inherent in us) righteousness of Christ is the sole *basis* of our right to eternal life. Faith is the sole means of receiving this righteousness. A "means" is different from a "basis". The paycheck a worker receives is given on the basis of the work he did, not on the basis of his accepting that paycheck. The acceptance of the check is the means to receiving it; the 40 hours of work he is getting paid for is the basis of the paycheck.

The faith that justifies necessarily results in an obedient life, but that obedience is in no way the *means* or *basis* of our justification. Our good works, rather, are the *evidence that we have true faith*, and thus *the evidence that we possess the righteousness of Christ*—but not the basis of our title to eternal life. Just as the lack of fingerprints on the gun did not *make* the man innocent, but *revealed* his innocence, so neither do our good works *make* us right with God but, rather, reveal that we are right with God.

Finally, a difference between the courtroom analogy and our justification should be mentioned. In the courtroom analogy, the basis of the man's acquittal was his innocence. Our right to eternal life, however, is not based simply upon the removal of our sins in Christ but also on the positive obedience (righteousness) of Christ reckoned to our account. In justification, to use an analogy from the life of Joseph, we are not simply set free from prison but are made rulers of Egypt. Innocence by itself would set us free from hell, but would not secure for us a title to heavenly and eternal glory. That is based upon the positive righteousness of Christ.

Concerning Terms

To summarize in the words of John Calvin, "[A man] is said to be justified in God's sight who is both reckoned righteous in God's judgment and has been accepted on account of his righteousness." [3] Justification is the reckoning of righteousness to our account and the consequent right to all the blessings that belong to perfect righteousness.

For those who hold to views of justification different from that described above the question which needs to be raised is this: are you denying that God gives us a title to eternal life on the basis

(in the sense described above) of the righteousness of Christ alone, *or* are you simply saying that the term *justification* is not the best way to describe this reality? Are you using simply “justification” to refer to both the reality described above as well as our inner transformation *or* are you saying that our title to eternal life is, in part, based upon (in the sense described above) the transformation that God works in us? In a nutshell, do you affirm that our right to eternal life is based (in the sense described above) upon the alien righteousness of Christ *alone* received through faith alone in Christ alone and *not at all* on the moral transformation that God works in us? Let us never forget that it is only through Christ Jesus that we have been justified, and not through our own works.

References:

1. John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, XI, 2.
2. Charles Hodge, *Justification by Faith Alone*, (Hobbs, NM: The Trinity Foundation, 1995), p. 27.
3. John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, XI, 2.

Why Justification by Faith Alone is Necessary for Good Works

By Matt Perman

“Justification by faith alone frees me to love my neighbor disinterestedly, for his or her own sake, as my sister or brother, not as the calculated means to my own desired ends,” writes Timothy George describing the reason why the traditional Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone *encourages* rather than *discourages* good works.^[1] The freedom to love “disinterestedly” does not, of course, mean that we should not seek joy in loving others, but (as the rest of the sentence shows) that we do not have to love our neighbors in order to meet our own needs. Rather, we are free to love them without ulterior motives and simply for the sake of the joy we find in *their* welfare, to the glory of God.



In other words, if we had to love our neighbor *in order* to be justified, then we could not *genuinely* love our neighbor because we would not be free to love him/her for his/her own sake. Rather, we would have to “use” our neighbors as a means toward securing our own ultimate fulfillment (i.e., eternal salvation)—which would hardly be the love God calls forth from us in passages like Matthew 22:37–40.^[2] But if we are justified apart from good works (such as loving our neighbor), then “we are free ‘to be Christ’s unto one another,’ to expend ourselves on behalf of one another, even as Christ also loved us and gave Himself for us.”^[3] Consequently, the only way to *truly* obey God’s command to love our neighbor, ironically, is to realize that our obedience is not necessary in order to be justified.^[4]

The traditional Protestant doctrine of justification safeguards genuine love among the people of

God. And this is because, at its deepest level, the doctrine of justification is the foundation of our relationship to God. John Calvin expressed this well when he wrote that “unless you, first of all, grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of his judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God.”

It is a very serious matter, therefore, that many modern scholars argue that the Reformers have misunderstood the doctrine of justification at a fundamental level. If these modern scholars are right, then traditional Protestants have built their love for neighbor and relationship with God on a false foundation. But if these scholars are wrong, then their own work is serving to *undermine* and even *destroy* the foundation of genuine love for people and a secure relationship with God.

References:

- [1] Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1988), 73. George is speaking primarily of Luther's doctrine in the immediate context; however, because of the fundamental continuity on the doctrine of justification among Luther, the other Reformers, and traditional Protestantism up to the present day, his statement applies to and concerns the traditional Protestant doctrine as well.
- [2] To use Dr. Daniel Fuller's helpful terminology, love for our neighbor would come perilously close to taking the form of *need love* rather than *benevolent love* if loving our neighbor was, in fact, necessary to be justified (i.e., to have a right to eternal satisfaction in God).
- [3] George, 73.
- [4] This might partially explain why Paul thinks that understanding justification by faith alone spurs us on to good deeds. For example, after expounding justification by faith alone (along with some other doctrines) in Titus 3:1-7, he then writes, “concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so *that* those who have believed God may be careful to engage in good deeds.”

Six Things Christ Accomplished by His Death

By Matt Perman

Was Jesus' death necessary? Why did He have to die, and what did he accomplish? Here's a very brief summary of the six core things Christ accomplished in His death.

Expiation

Expiation means the *removal* of our sin and guilt. Christ's death removes — expiates — our sin and guilt. The guilt of our sin was taken away from us and placed on Christ, who discharged it by His death. Thus, in John 1:29, John the Baptist calls Jesus “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Jesus takes away—that is, expiates—our sins. Likewise, Isaiah 53:6 says, “The Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him,” and Hebrews 9:26 says, “He has been manifested to *put away sin* by the sacrifice of Himself.”



Propitiation

Whereas expiation refers to the removal of our *sins*, propitiation refers to the removal of *God's wrath*. By dying in our place for our sins, Christ removed the wrath of God that we justly deserved. In fact, it goes even further: propitiation is not merely a sacrifice that removes wrath, but a sacrifice that removes wrath and *turns it into favor*. Propitiation does not turn wrath into *love* — God already loved us fully, which is the reason He sent Christ to die; it turns His wrath into *favor* so that His love may realize its purpose of doing good to us every day, in all things, forever, without sacrificing His justice and holiness.

Several passages speak of Christ's death as a propitiation for our sins. Romans 3:25-26 says that God "displayed [Christ] publicly as a propitiation in his blood through faith. This was to demonstrate his righteousness because in the forbearance of God he passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration of his righteousness at the present time, that he might be just and the justifier of him who has faith in Jesus."

"You see, the reality of substitution underlying all of the benefits discussed above, is the means by which Christ accomplishes them.."

Likewise, Hebrews 2:17 says that Christ made "propitiation for the sins of the people" and 1st John 4:10 says, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the *propitiation* for our sins."

Reconciliation

Whereas expiation refers to the removal of our sins, and propitiation refers to the removal of God's wrath, reconciliation refers to the removal of our *alienation* from God. Because of our sins, we were *alienated*—separated—from God. Christ's death removed this alienation and thus *reconciled* us to God. We see this, for example, in Romans 5:10-11: "For if while we were enemies, we were *reconciled to God through the death of his Son*, much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."

Redemption

Our sins had put us in captivity, from which we need to be delivered. The price that is paid to deliver someone from captivity is called a "ransom". To say that Christ's death accomplished redemption for us means that it accomplished deliverance from our captivity through the payment of a price.

There are three things we had to be released from the curse of the law, the guilt of sin, and the power of sin. Christ redeemed us from each of these.

1. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law: "Christ *redeemed us from the curse of the law*, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13-14).
2. Christ redeemed us from the guilt of our sin. We are "justified as a gift by his grace, *through the redemption* which is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24).
3. Christ redeemed us from the power of sin: "knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your fathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (1st Peter 1:18-19).

We are not redeemed merely from the guilt of sin; to be redeemed from the power of sin means that our slavery to sin is broken. We are now free to live to righteousness. Our redemption from the power of sin is thus the basis of our ability to live holy lives: "You have been bought with a price; *therefore glorify God in your bodies*" (1st Corinthians 6:20).

Defeat of the Powers of Darkness

Christ's death was a defeat of the power of Satan. "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him" (Colossians 3:15). Satan's only weapon that can ultimately hurt people is unforgiven sin. Christ took this weapon away from him for all who would believe, defeating him and all the powers of darkness in His death by, as the verse right before this says, "having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross" (Colossians 2:13-14).

And He Did All of This by Dying as Our Substitute

The reality of substitution is at the heart of the atonement. Christ accomplished all of the above benefits for us by dying *in our place*—that is, by dying *instead of* us. We deserved to die, but instead He took our sin upon Him and paid the penalty *Himself*. This is what it means that Christ died *for* us (Romans 5:8) and gave Himself *for* us (Galatians 2:20). As Isaiah says, “he was pierced through *for our transgressions*, he was crushed *for our iniquities*...the Lord has caused the iniquity of *us all* to fall on him” (Isaiah 53:5-6).

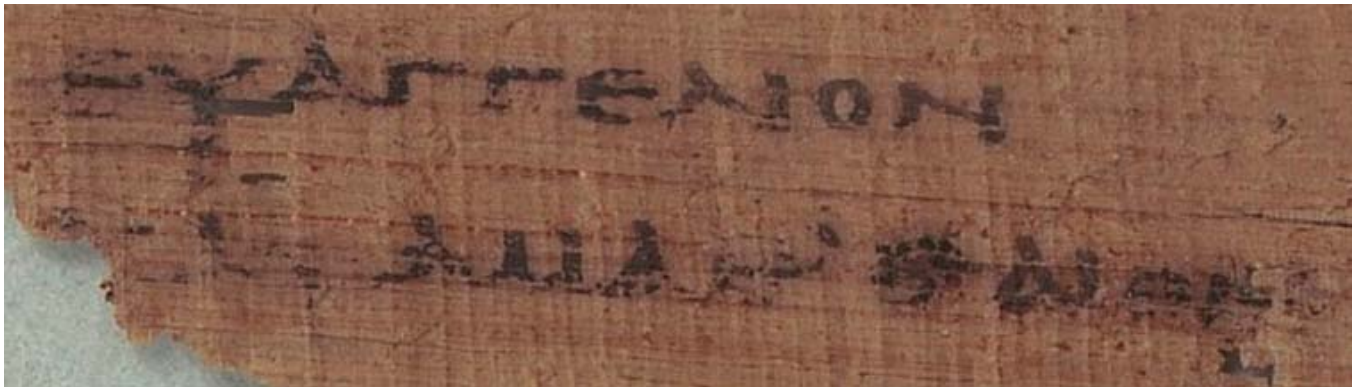
You see, the reality of substitution underlying all of the benefits discussed above, is the means by which Christ accomplished them. For example, substitution is the means by which we were ransomed: “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom *for* many” (Matthew 20:28). Christ’s death was a ransom *for* us — that is, instead of us. Likewise, Paul writes that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law *by becoming a curse for us*” (Galatians 3:13).

Substitution is the means by which we were reconciled: “For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the just for the unjust*, in order that he might bring us to God” (1st Peter 3:18). It is the means of expiation: “He made him who knew no sin *to be sin on our behalf*, that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2nd Corinthians 5:21) and “He himself *bore our sins in his body on the cross*, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (1st Peter 2:24). And by dying in our place, taking the penalty for our sins upon Himself, Christ’s death is also the means of propitiation.

First, all of this is very humbling and should lead us to living humbly before the face of God. Lastly, “Greater love has no one than this, than he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). In His death, Jesus has shown us the greatest love ever known to mankind. May we forever give thanks for His great sacrifice and priceless gift!

A Brief Word on the Gospel and the Old Testament

By Charlie Handren



The English word “gospel” is an approximation of the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*), which means “good news” (Friberg). While it is presently in vogue to refer to the whole Bible, or at least salvation history, as “the gospel”, this term is probably best reserved for the specific work of God in Christ—His incarnation, His words, His works, His suffering and death, His resurrection, His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and His eternal reign as King and High Priest—all of which He did in glad submission to His Father, for the glory of His Father, and for the salvation of all who believe in Him (John 3:16; 5:19; Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 1:1-4).

Accordingly, the term “gospel” first emerges in the Gospels and not before (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:1; Luke 9:6). Surely, when the Apostles and early disciples preached the gospel, they were in part drawing on the Old Testament to do so (Acts 8:25, 40; 20:23-24). That is, their preaching of the Old Testament was not a mere exposition of the text, but exposition with special reference to Christ (e.g., Acts 28:23). This Apostolic practice implies that the gospel is clearly and broadly prophesied, promised, and foreshadowed in the Old Testament, but it does not imply that the Old Testament itself is the gospel. Rather, it is better to envision the story-arc of the Old Testament as preparation for the gospel, and to reserve the term itself for the time of fulfillment, for what Paul calls “the gospel of *his Son*” (Romans 1:9, 16), “the gospel of *Christ*” (1st Corinthians 9:12), and “the gospel of *your salvation*” (Ephesians 1:13; emphasis mine).

Paul does write in Galatians 3:8-9, “And the Scripture [i.e., the Old Testament], foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, *preached the gospel* beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the

man of faith” (emphasis mine). However, this statement refers to the gospel foreseen and not to the gospel revealed, and it does not imply that the term “gospel” properly describes every word or periscope of the Old Testament. Indeed, even for those portions of the Old Testament that explicitly reference Christ, the gospel is not that Jesus *will* come but that He *has* come. It is not that the Christ *will be* Jesus, but that the Christ *is* Jesus, and that by believing in Him we may have eternal life (John 20:31).

I joyfully affirm that the entire Old Testament is a prelude to the gospel proper and that the gospel is being foreshadowed and even preached from the very first words thereof, namely, “in the beginning” and “let there be light” (John 1:1-5; 2nd Corinthians 4:5-6; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-4; 1st John 1:1-5). I delight in the truth that Christ is both the inspiration and the fulfillment of every word spoken in the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (1st Peter 1:10-12). But I agree with John Calvin when he argues that we should reserve the term “gospel” for the specific work of God in Christ.

“Some consider the word Gospel as extending to all the gracious promises of God which are found scattered even in the Law and the Prophets. Nor can it be denied that, whenever God declares that he will be reconciled to men, and forgives their sins, He at the same time exhibits Christ, whose peculiar office it is, wherever he shines, to spread abroad the rays of joy. I acknowledge, therefore, that the Fathers were partakers of the same Gospel with ourselves, so far as relates to the faith of a gratuitous salvation. But as it is the ordinary declaration made by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures, that the Gospel was first proclaimed when Christ came, let us also adhere to this mode of expression; and let us keep by that definition of the Gospel which I have given, that it is a solemn publication of the grace revealed in Christ” (Calvin, 11).

To embrace this point of view neither diminishes the importance of the Old Testament nor denies the ubiquitous presence of the gospel-seeds that are there. To the contrary, this point of view helps us to see how the Bible comes to a crescendo and how the gospel brings all of its parts into sharp focus. As Carson notes, “Rightly done, [teaching and] preaching from the Gospels enables a congregation to put its Bible together, and then to find the Bible’s deepest and most transforming application emerging from this vision...Preaching from the Gospels is above all an exercise in the exposition and application of Christology” (Carson, 102). Such an exercise demands that the object of our exposition be the entire text of Scripture.

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Meeting Jesus at an Old Testament Feast

By John Sittema

The default sin of the human heart is to put ourselves first. “It really is all about me!” was once a funny t-shirt slogan, but it has now become a way of life. Unless preachers and Bible teachers are careful, the way we handle Scripture can actually feed this beast. We rush to application, consumed by the question, “How is this relevant to me?”

But the Bible is theocentric, not anthropocentric. It is more concerned to trace God’s ways—His character, purposes, and His cosmic redemptive plan (“For God so loved the world”)—than it is to give modern believers character-building resource material (“be courageous like Daniel; lead like Nehemiah; with the faith of Abraham”).

We must start by remembering the overarching plot of Scripture. The Bible is remarkable: 66 books, dozens of human authors, 1,500 years in the making, various types of literature. But its grand diversity is held together by a golden thread, a single plot in three movements—creation, fall, redemption—that is unveiled in its first few pages. This plot establishes the crucial backstory to the coming of Jesus Christ. A backstory introduces characters, establishes relationships, and defines key terms. In this case, the Old Testament introduces Jesus, defines His work as Messiah, and establishes the theological framework for understanding God’s redemption.

A brief glance at two Old Testament festivals is illustrative. The first is Passover, the familiar feast that anchored the Exodus from Egypt. Some of its features (the angel of death, blood on doorposts, a meal eaten in haste) are well known parts of the story. Others are not. What matters is that all are shadows of the coming Christ.

Jesus ministered in a Jewish context, keeping the Passover with His disciples. But He took pains to show that the customs were more than context; they defined Him.

The Torah required selected lambs to be put on public display for four days (Exodus 12:3-6) to



verify that they were without blemish. Jesus, following the triumphal entry, presented Himself in the temple for that exact period, for that very purpose. He submitted to testing by the Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, and scribes (Mark 12:13), tried before the Sanhedrin and Pilate, He proved spotless.

“This is my body” and “this cup is a new covenant in my blood” are Lord’s Supper keystones, but they were spoken during the Passover Seder. The true fulfillment and meaning of the Passover meal is found in Jesus.

Passover was both a family and a communal feast. The lamb chosen “for the nation” was staked out in the temple courtyard on Passover at 9 A.M., and slaughtered publicly at 3 P.M. So was Jesus—nailed to the cross at 9 A.M., He died at 3 P.M.—just as the four-footed beast died in a liturgy that concluded, “It is finished!”

Why are such details important? Because the point of Jesus’ death—contra pop theology’s selfish twist—is not merely how much physical pain He endured for me. It is, rather, what God accomplished by His death. The answer is found in Passover imagery. The Passover story (Exodus 12:2) began with strange words: “This month shall be for you...the first month of the year.” With Passover, God reset Israel’s calendar. Her old life as slaves was ending; a new life as sons and daughters was beginning. Jesus’ death was announced the same, but on a grander scale. Paul declares, “We have been united with him in a death like his” (Romans 6:5). But he also exults, “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1st Corinthians 15:54). Death with a capital “D”—not only personal physical death, but sin’s devastating reign over the first Adam’s world (Romans 5:12-21)—was defeated in the cross of Christ.

If death’s reign was defeated in the cross, where dawns the new life? It bursts forth in Jesus’ resurrection on the Feast of Firstfruits. This feast’s Old Testament roots were agricultural: early sheaves were brought to the tabernacle to share God’s bounty with the poor and sojourners in the land. But the feast always tilted Israel forward, rehearsing the day when all of life would be “very good” again as it once had been.

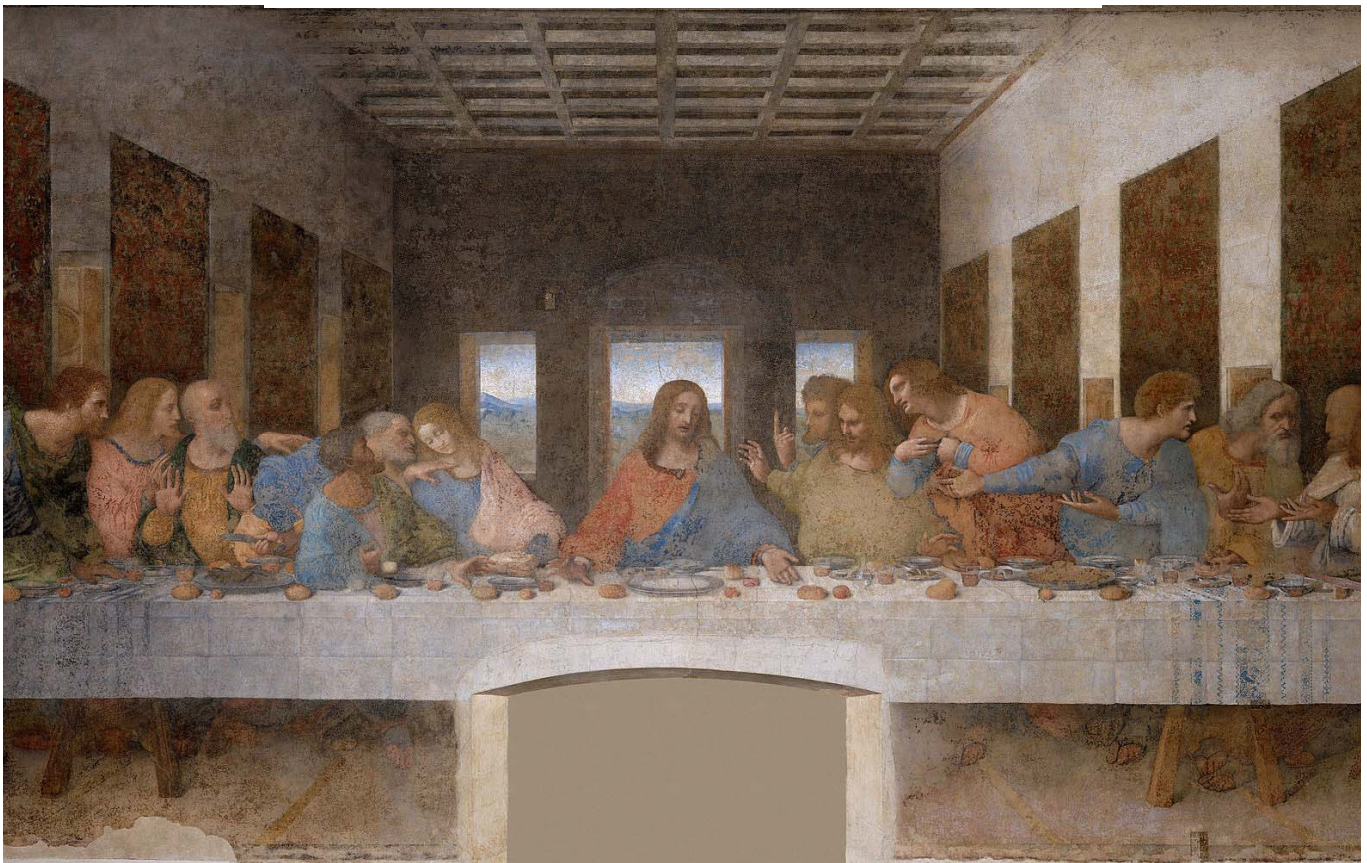
Paul uses festal language to explain this (1st Corinthians 15:20). As Jesus’ death conquered Death, so, too—as the second Adam—His resurrection dawned a new creation, a kingdom of grace (Romans 5:21). Christ is the “firstfruits” of this new world. Raised with Him, we, too, who “have the firstfruits of the Spirit” (8:23), are the firstfruits of the new creation (James 1:18).

Thus the Old Testament Feast of Firstfruits is the ground of a vigorous and practical New Testament eschatology (view of the age to come).

These are only two brief examples; there are many more feasts, countless temple practices, and narrative stories that serve to rehearse the redemption that would come in Jesus. A gospel shaped by the rich Old Testament backstory is evangelistically more compelling, for it honors the cohesive unity of Scripture. And such a gospel produces disciples with a healthier self-image: they resist the default sin of putting themselves first and learn to deny themselves and follow Him.

The Whole Bible in One Meal

By John Flame



I saw the new Star Wars film recently. The last scene (slight spoiler warning) is a wordless image that summarizes the goal of all the action of the film and points ahead to the plots of the sequels. Many films are like that: After all the fights, misunderstandings, reconciliations, evil deeds, narrow escapes, heroism, foolishness, and wisdom, there is a quiet ending that sums it all up, often without words. I have always felt that the Lord's Supper is like that.

In our worship service, the Supper comes at the end, before the benediction. We use some words to explain the sacrament, but for the most part, the sacrament is an image. The bread is broken and distributed to those who have received Jesus by faith. We eat together. Then we drink the cup as

well.

Christ Proclaimed

When I introduce the sacrament, I usually connect it with the sermon. Our sermons, of course, range over the whole of Scripture. But it is never difficult to connect them to the Lord's Supper, because the Lord's Supper is the whole Bible in summary form.

In the Lord's Supper, God gives us gifts of His good creation, which nourish our bodies, but broken they represent the death of the Son of God—the result of man's fall into sin. But the image is not only death, but death as redemption — Jesus enduring death for sinners, for us who killed Him. And in the Supper, we also look to the future: As Paul says, we “proclaim the Lord's death until he comes” (1st Corinthians 11:26).

This redemption is the whole meaning of the Bible. Whatever the preacher preaches on, if he's preaching rightly, he's preaching Christ (Luke 24:27). If he preaches God's moral law, he's preaching how the fall has injured us, why we need to turn to Christ in faith, and how the Lord wants His redeemed people to live. If the preacher speaks about Israel's history, he's telling us how God prepared the earth for the coming of Jesus and for His sacrifice for sin. When he preaches from the Book of Acts, he is telling us how God made His word to grow throughout the world, as believers set out to proclaim the Lord's death “until he comes”.

What is true of the sermon is also true of the hymns and prayers in our worship service: they, too, drive into our hearts the gospel of God's wonderful grace. God, who is perfectly holy, showed His amazing grace by sending His dear Son to give His life for us. We confess our sins, acknowledging that we have no hope of having eternal fellowship with God and one another, apart from what Jesus did for us. In our church we “greet one another” (Romans 16:16) after the confession of sin, confessing that the gospel is the very basis of our friendship and brotherhood. If someone is baptized, he is baptized into Christ, symbolizing our cleansing from sin through Jesus's work.

All about Jesus

The Bible does not specify a single liturgy or order of events in worship that all churches must follow. My point, though, is that however we arrange the specifics, the service is all about Jesus and all about His sacrifice for us. So at the end we sum it all up with one humble, but glorious image: the bread and the cup—proclaiming the Lord's death until He comes again.

The Old Testament: Written To and About Jesus

By Nick Batzig



There has been something of a biblical-theological revolution over the past several decades. It is not a revolution in which new doctrines are being uncovered, so much as it is one by which our understanding of a Christ-centered and redemptive-historical interpretation

of Scripture is being refined. Many in Reformed and Calvinistic churches have welcomed this development with open arms, precisely because the fundamental principles of redemptive-history are already scattered throughout the large corpus of writings of the English Puritans, Dutch theologians of the 17th Century, and other post-Reformation Reformed theologians. In essence, Biblical Theology is nothing more, and nothing less, than historic Covenant theology.

While much of what is being written today has already been articulated in former days, there is still more refinement and progress to be made within this particular realm of biblical interpretation. One such refinement comes as we attempt to answer the question, “How did Jesus read the Old Testament?” Surprisingly, this is one question that has seldom been asked and answered. It is my desire to help us briefly think through this question and the implications it has on our Christian lives.

One of the chief reasons why this question has not been asked more frequently is that Reformed, Calvinistic, and Evangelical Christians sometimes err on the side of thinking of Jesus as merely being God, but downplay His human nature and Covenant membership as an Israelite, born under the Law to redeem His people (Galatians 4:3-5). Certainly, believing that Jesus is the second Person of the Godhead is the most important tenet of the Christian faith—and something that can only be known and believed by the supernatural and gracious work of God—however, believing that He is also fully man, and the Covenant keeping representative Israelite, is equally fundamental to the Christian faith. He is both David's son and David's Lord (Matthew 22:41-46). In addition to the truth of the Tri-unity of God, all the truths of Christ's person, work, and saving benefits form the epicenter of Christianity.

There is almost nothing so difficult as understanding the person of Jesus—two distinct but inseparable natures in one eternal person. Yet, the Scriptures teach this truth, historic Christianity affirms it and we will spend eternity worshiping the Christ, who is fully God and fully man. Theologians have spent much time seeking to explain what has been called “the hypostatic union”. The eternally pre-existent Son of God created a human nature for Himself in the womb of the virgin Mary, “and so became, and continues to be, both God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever.” In His human nature, Jesus had to “grow in wisdom and stature” (Luke 2:40; 52). He had to learn, just like any other man. Though in the Divine nature He was omniscient, in His human nature He was finite and subject to growth and development. At each stage of human experience, He had to grow in His capacity to experience sinless human experience to the extent of His ability. He never ceased to be God, yet willingly laid aside access to what was His by Divine right in order to be our representative Second Adam. We needed a Redeemer who was fully man. We need a Redeemer who entered into the same experiences, put Himself under the same Law and who was “tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin.” One of the things that He had to experience as man—and that He had to do as human mediator and covenant keeper—was to study and understand the Scriptures.

There is deep mystery here. Jesus never studied in the Rabbinical schools like all the other religious leaders in Israel (John 7:15). We can safely assume that Mary and Joseph faithfully taught Him the Scriptures from His earliest days. We know that He would have been in the synagogues often as a boy; and Luke tells us that He went with Mary and Joseph to the Temple every year. We find Him there as a 12 year old boy astonishing the teachers with His questions and answers about the Scriptures (Luke 2:41-52). So, how did Jesus read the Old Testament? Did He read it as a book of morals or character development? Did He read it like the Pharisees and Scribes read it? Far from it! Jesus read the Old Testament as the Covenant revelation of God written *to* Him and *about* Him. We

have frequently rushed to this latter part and rightly rejoiced in the fact that Old Testament was written *about* Jesus, but have failed to see that, at the same time, it was written, first and foremost, *to* Jesus.

Another reason why this question has not been asked more frequently is that the Reformed are rightly zealous for application and experientialism. The Bible should make a difference on *my* life. The precious truths contained in it should lead me on to godly living. This is taught everywhere in the pages of Scriptures (e.g. Titus 1:1 and 1st Timothy 4:16). Some have mistakenly thought that if we say that the Scriptures are first and foremost written *to* and *about* Jesus that this will somehow lead on to a denial of my need for transformation. In fact, it is only as we see that the Bible is written *to* and *about* Jesus that we will experience Gospel transformation in our lives.

With these things in mind, here are 10 ways to help us understand how Jesus would have understood the Old Testament to have been written *to* and *about* Himself:

1. Jesus understood that the entire Old Testament revealed that He would be the law-keeping Redeemer of His people. We know this from Psalm 40:7 and Hebrews 10:7. He would be the willing servant of the LORD who submitted Himself to all of His Father's commands and who always did His Father's will for His people.
2. Jesus understood that all the promises of God were made to Him—first and foremost—as the Son of Abraham and Son of David. The Apostle Paul explicitly tells us that the promises made to Abraham and his Seed, were made to Christ—prior to being made to anyone else (Galatians 3:16). He had to first be "the heir of all things" (Hebrews 1:1-4) before any of those who have faith in Him become "heirs of all things." Jesus said, "Yes" to the promised curses of the Covenant (curses that we deserve for our sin) in order to merit the Covenant blessings for us. Paul tells us that "all the promises of God are 'yes' and 'amen' in Him." This means that Jesus read the legal demands of the Law—with their promised blessings and curses—as dependent upon His becoming a curse for us so that we might inherit the blessings (Galatians 3:10-14).
3. Jesus understood that the Old Testament spoke preeminently of His own sufferings and glories (1st Peter 1:10-12), as revealed by His Spirit through the prophets. He knew that this was written in part to carry Him through His ministry. For instance, Psalm 22 could only be read experientially by Jesus. David was not crucified. David was not forsaken of God. The Spirit of Christ revealed the sufferings and glories of Christ to prepare Him to experience them in His Messianic experience. We see this same principle at work in what is said by and of Christ in Psalm 16 and Psalm 110 (Psalm 16; Acts 2:23-36). In this sense, we can say that Jesus knew that the whole of the Old Testament was related to His death and resurrection. He told the two on the road to Emmaus that "everything written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled"...and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead" (Luke 24:44-46).
4. Jesus understood that the Old Testament saints were not—first and foremost—examples of

"Debts would be cancelled and the inheritance would be restored."

moral uprightness for fallen sinners to emulate, but were themselves sinners who were looking forward to Him by faith (Hebrews 11). He explained this to the Pharisees when He told them, “Abraham saw My day, and rejoiced to see it and was glad” (John 8:56-58). Additionally, He explained that David, Solomon, and Jonah existed to point to Him (Matthew 12).

5. Jesus understood that all the Old Testament types, shadows, and symbols pointed to some aspect of His saving work or benefits. We know this because he pointed to Jacob's ladder, the serpent on the pole, and water from the rock (John 1; 3 and 7) as examples of this principle.
6. Jesus understood that every prophecy was about Him. We see this from His persistent appeal to Old Testament Messianic prophecies as verifying who He is (*e.g.* Zechariah 13:7 in Matthew 26:31; and, Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:5).
7. Jesus understood that He was the True Israel, who came to recapitulate Israel's history for the redemption of His people. We know this from Matthew's citation to Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15 (see Matthew 2:13-15); but we also see this from Jesus' quoting from the book of Deuteronomy when he was tempted in the wilderness by the devil (Luke 4). Jesus took up Scripture that was given to Israel in the wilderness where they were tempted. He prevailed where they failed. Jesus is the true Israel. He went down into Egypt, out of Egypt, through the waters, into the wilderness, up on the mountain, down from the mountain, etc.
8. Jesus understood that His ministry was to be one of proclaiming the Kingdom of God and the Good News of redemption to hopeless and helpless sinners. We see this from His first sermon in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30) where He appealed to Isaiah 61:1-2: "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor..."
9. Jesus understood that all the festivals and feasts in the Old Testament were pointing forward to what He would accomplish in the work of redemption. We know this because in that first sermon in Nazareth, He alluded to the Year of Jubilee and explained that He had come to give the reality of what that feast typified. The Year of Jubilee happened once every fifty years—once in a lifetime in an average lifetime (Psalm 90:10). Debts would be cancelled and the inheritance would be restored. Jesus does that very thing spiritually for His people through His death and resurrection.
10. Jesus understood that marriage was ordained at creation in order for Him to have a spiritual bride in the church that He would redeem. He repeatedly referred to Himself as “the Bridegroom” (Matthew 9:15 and 25:1-10).

While much more could and should be considered regarding this subject, understanding that Jesus read the Old Testament as being written to and about Himself should give us a greater appreciation for the extent to which our Savior went to redeem us. It should help us fix our eyes more steadfastly on the One who is the author and finisher of our faith. It should motivate us to seek Him more fervently. It should encourage us to trust Him as our Redeemer more fully. It should help us understand that all life and godliness are found in Him and in Him alone. It should produce in us shouts of thanksgiving and songs of praise for the loving wisdom of our God in revealing His Covenant revelation to the Covenant keeper.

The Lamb of God: Worship and the High Priestly Ministry of Jesus

By Dave Jenkins



The question and theme, “Where is the Lamb?” spans the entire Old Testament.

Abraham, who was thankfully spared by God from fulfilling the task, offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice atop Mount Moriah. 2nd Chronicles 3:1 teaches that it was there that Solomon later built the temple. Upon the very rock where Abraham made his altar and raised his knife above the breast of his son, is where the offerings of Israel were made, century after century, pointing forward to the

true sacrifice that would be made on nearby Mount Calvary. It was God’s Son then; but unlike when Abraham sought to offer his beloved son Isaac, there was no angel to stay the hand of God when the hammers drove the nails into Jesus’ hand and feet.

The question, “Where is the Lamb?” is answered by the whole anxious anticipation of the Old Testament in Jesus Christ. He is, as John the Baptist announced, “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, but it was also the day the Passover lambs were driven in for slaughter, a vivid scene associating Jesus with these sacrificial lambs. Then, in the midst of the Passover Feast, as the thousands of lambs were being actually slaughtered, the soldiers’ hammers nailed our Lord Jesus to the Cross—there to die for His people. The symbolism is obvious as Paul writes in 1st Corinthians 5:7, “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.” Jesus is the true Lamb.

Not only must Christians ask, “Where is the Lamb?”, but “Where is the priest?” Just as God’s people (before the time of Christ) must have realized the inability of sheep and goats to atone for human sin, so they must also have realized that the mortal priests—sinners like themselves—were not qualified for the work of offering the true sacrifice before God.

Exodus 28 teaches about the special garments made for the high priest. There was a breastplate and an ephod, a robe with a tunic, a turban, and a sash. These were made of gold, and the finest linen, corresponding to the decorations of the tabernacle and thus showing that the high priest belonged in the presence of God. In other words, the high priest was fitted to worship God in a way that would glorify God. All of this is important because it points to how Jesus is perfectly fitted to deliver His people from their sin and weakness. He is fitting in His person and His work. Jesus Christ is also

fit for the worship of His people.

The things taught in Hebrews 7:26-28 are essential to true worship. True worship begins with an awareness of our need. This passage teaches that Jesus meets the need of sinners by confronting them with the necessity to admit that need—for forgiveness, for reconciliation with God, and for eternal life.

The other thing sinners need for true worship is the awareness that, in Jesus Christ, God has met their need. The word worship comes from the older word “worth-ship” (or “worthiness”). To worship someone or something is to acclaim worth. When one realizes that Jesus Christ is not just some fine moral teacher or some guru among a crowd of religious figures, but the very Savior they need, the only solution to their predicament, they will worship Him. Indeed to not worship Jesus Christ is to demonstrate that one does not understand one’s need or the sufficiency of His saving work. Only Jesus Christ is able to meet the need for sinners because only He is fitted to deal with the predicament of sin.

That is what the redeemed do in heaven: they worship the true Lamb, who was slain. The apostle John opens a window to this in the Book of Revelation, where he saw a Lamb that was slain upon the throne of Heaven. And then he heard this song of heavenly joy: “And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.’” (Revelation 5:9-10).

The Incarnation and the High Priestly Ministry of Jesus

By Dave Jenkins

Several of the earliest controversies and key battles in Church History were over Christ's divine and human natures. One of the classic texts to explain why Jesus Christ had to become fully man, so that He might perform priestly service before God on man's behalf



is Hebrews 2:17-18. Christ's priestly ministry propitiated (or turned aside) God's wrath against man's sin. The classic explanation of this doctrine was given by Anselm of Canterbury 900 years ago in his towering work, *Cur Deus Homo*, which means "*Why God Became Man*". Speaking of the payment that must be made for man's sins, Anselm wrote:

"It could not have been done unless man paid what was owing to God for sin. But the debt was so great that, while man alone owed it, only God could pay it, so that the same person must be both man and God. Thus it was necessary for God to take manhood into the unity of his person, so that he who in his own nature ought to pay and could not should be in a person who could."^[1]

Anselm of Canterbury gets to the heart of what the writer of Hebrews teaches in Hebrews 2:17: "He had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest." The Old Testament priest represented God before man, which was why the high priest was garbed with glory and honor (Exodus 28:2). The high priest's apparel gleamed, to portray the righteousness of God before the people of God. The high priest represented God before man, which is why the high priest wore an ephod of gold, upon which were fastened twelve stones, bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:9-12).

The purpose of the incarnation is that Christ, as the God-Man, might bear His people's names

upon His shoulders. As the true high priest, Jesus Christ is garbed in His own perfect righteousness, which He now presents on behalf of His redeemed people. Jesus went forth as the minister and representative of His people, offering His own precious blood—His divine and infinitely valuable life—which alone atones for the debt of not only one man's sin, but the sins of the world.

The work of Christ was one of turning aside God's wrath against man's sin. Christ's work of propitiation gets to the reason why He was born into the world—so that, by His death as the God-Man, He might break the hold of death on sinners, and set His people free through the cross and resurrection. While this explains the first and second reasons why Christ had to become a man and die, Hebrews 2:18 gives the third reason, "Because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

Jesus is able to help His people in whatever circumstances they find themselves because He suffered in His people's place on the way to His death and on the cross dying for their sins. The fact that Christ has done all of this is proof of His full humanity, in that "he himself has suffered when tempted." Christians often associate Jesus' temptation in the wilderness at the desert, but there Jesus was afflicted with great hunger and the temptation to accept the crown without the cross. While these were great temptations, Jesus overcame them all. As a result of Jesus temptation and suffering, He knows what His people are going through whether they are struggling with a variety of temptations or going through hard times. Jesus knows what it is like to go through hardship because He endured the sins of humanity on the cross. Jesus the High Priest over His people has real sympathy and compassion for what His people are going through.

"One of the major aspects of Jesus' High Priestly ministry is His ability now to save His people."

Some people think Jesus didn't know the full range of human experience because He wasn't a sinner. This questions whether or not He can have full sympathy for sinners. Far from Jesus knowing less than His people do about temptation, Jesus knows far more about temptation than His people do because He endured it to the point of sweating blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He felt the weight of man's sin in preparing to die on the cross.

B.F. Westcott is correct when he observes: "Sympathy with the sinner in his trial does not depend on the experience of sin but on the experience of the strength of temptation to sin, which only the sinless can know in its full intensity. He who falls yields before the last strain."^[ii]

Jesus has real and knowledgeable sympathy with those who are tempted, which is why the Scriptures say, He is able to help His people. Jesus is not "just like us". Jesus is the Redeemer, and His people are the sinners in need of such a champion. Jesus' work is hardly impersonal or mechanical; it is heartfelt and sensitive. Jesus felt nails as they were driven into His hands and feet so that He might rescue His people from the power of death. The quality of mercy of Christ's work is intimate, personal, and knowing. This intimate, personal, and knowing work calls His people to love Him as a Savior, who has gone to such lengths to know His people in the midst of their trials, to have the fellowship of suffering.

Jesus' suffering means that He is able to help His people and understands all of what they are going through. Whenever God's people encounter difficult circumstances or trials they have a sympathetic and merciful High Priest who hears when His people cry out to Him. Understanding Jesus as

High Priest ought to be a great encouragement to God's people—that they can turn to the Lord in prayer in whatever circumstances they find themselves in.

One of the major aspects of Jesus' High Priestly ministry is His ability now to save His people. His ability to save them means His people can trust Him, knowing that death will bring them no harm, but bring them to Jesus. His people can trust Him for today, knowing He knows and understands any and all present temptations and struggles. Jesus is able to help His people, by praying for them at the throne of His Father in heaven and by sending the Holy Spirit into their hearts, giving them strength that is of Him. This is why Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20). Despite all of Paul's many trials, it was with knowledge of Christ's personal power that he could declare: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Jesus Christ, God's own Son, became a man to be a total Savior, sufficient for the whole range of their need. People are lamenting daily in this World of Woe, asking, "Where is God? Why doesn't he do something?" Meanwhile, He has done everything indeed—more than they could ever ask or imagine. God has entered into man's world. He has walked through the dust of this earth. He who is Life has wept before the grave, and He who is the Bread of Life has felt the aching of hunger in His belly. He has taken the thorns that afflict this sin-scarred world and woven them into a crown to be pressed upon His head. He has stretched open His arms in love, that the hands that wove creation might be nailed to a wooden cross. Then He rose from the dead, conquering all that would conquer His people, setting His people free to live in peace and joy before the face of God.

References:

- [i] Anselm of Canterbury, *Why God Became Man*, in Eugene PR. Fairweather, *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 176.
- [ii] B.F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Macmillan, 1903), 59.

What is Jesus' Evangelism Program?

By David Schrock



Over the last few decades, the church has had no shortage of evangelism programs. Each of these mentioned above have been used by the Lord to add to the eternal harvest. But as I recently learned, each of these programs has, at best, a seven-year shelf life. Since each was created for a particular cultural moment, new methods are constantly needed, because culture keeps changing.

With great appreciation for these programs and for the godly men who created them, I want to ask a very simple question: does the Bible itself give us a program of evangelism? Or more personally, what is Jesus' program of evangelism? Has He left us to devise our own, only to trade them in every seven years? Or has He given us something more long lasting?

Jesus' Evangelistic Program: The Church

While Jesus doesn't give us a four-step approach to sharing the gospel, He did have a program for evangelism, one that far surpasses the methods listed above. What is His evangelistic program? In a word, it is the *Church!*

"The result? Evangelism became a task, instead of a way of life."

While churches have looked externally for better methods, they have forgotten that they are Christ's method for evangelism. Under the influence of entertainers and business leaders, churches have too frequently forgotten their evangelistic identity. Instead of studying the drama of Scripture and all that the Bible says about the Church, churches have gone elsewhere to get their lines.

The result is a case of ecclesial amnesia that distorts the shape of the Church, which in turn distorts the message of the gospel. Like a racehorse who has for-

gotten how to run, the Church clops along with new ways to move forward, forgetting that in its genes lay the most powerful means of evangelism known to man.

Admittedly, Jesus' program isn't a *program* at all. It's better. It is a *people* who have been brought to life by the gospel and who are empowered by the Spirit to preach the gospel. As 1st Peter 2:9 puts it, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, *that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*" Indeed, it is the church *as the church* that is Christ's evangelistic program. But what, I ask you, is the Church?

What is the Church?

While many images could be recruited to describe the Church (e.g., bride, body, temple, people of God, etc.), let's focus on how the gospel relates to the Church. In gospel terms, the Church is a people brought to life by the gospel of Jesus Christ, for the purpose of making the gospel audible and visible to the watching world.

While the Scriptures speak of a cosmic new creation (Revelation 21–22), the Bible also speaks of person new creations: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2nd Corinthians 5:17). In other words, what will take place in the future—the regeneration of the cosmos (Matthew 19:28)—has already taken place in those who have been made alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:5). In this way, salvation is far less a reclamation process; it is a new *creation*. God, through the gospel, calls sinners to life and unites them into missionary outposts of the kingdom.

Not surprisingly, it is this community of *living stones* that is the 'best advertisement campaign' for the gospel. Whereas signs and wonders confirmed the authenticity of the apostles teaching in the first century (Hebrews 2:4), today it is the greater miracle of salvation that makes the world take notice. That is, when a church is filled with transformed people, the gospel of God is made visible. The

world wonders at such new creations, what Ephesians 3:7–11 calls the wisdom of God.

As Jesus' evangelistic program, the Church functions as a gigantic neon light illuminating the wisdom of God and the power of the gospel. As Mark Dever has said, "Christian proclamation might make the gospel audible, but Christians living together in local congregations makes the gospel visible."

Truly, the Church as an army of witnessing evangelists can and should trumpet the gospel. But much of our weakness in proclaiming the gospel lies in this: If we do not do well at displaying the gospel, who will listen to us when we declare the gospel?

The Fruit of Weak Ecclesiology

Indeed, for more than a century American evangelicals have reacted to the mainline denominations abandoning the gospel. In the twentieth century, fundamentalists separated themselves from the world and culture-confronting evangelicals turned aside from the institutional Church to book publishers, radio ministries, and para-church organizations. Church was not canceled per se, but for many Bible-believing Christians, matters of church polity didn't matter. The only thing that really mattered was saving the lost and preaching the gospel.

But God's wisdom is always proven by time, and when the American Church stopped tending to its membership, discipline, and structure, weeds began to choke out wheat. In the absence of solid ecclesiology (what a church should be and do), pragmatism filled the void. Instead of planting churches with principles derived from the New Testament, any model of church structure could be employed, so long as the message on Sunday morning gave an altar call.

Unwittingly, the institutional Church undermined the very message it was called to protect and preserve (1st Timothy 3:15). Instead of making the gospel visible, the Church neglected church discipline, embellished membership numbers, and employed Fortune 500 leadership models instead of those offered by Peter, Paul, and James.

The result? Evangelism became a task, instead of a way of life. The gospel became a sales pitch, instead of an invitation to taste and see the goodness of God. And over time, our neighbors became unimpressed with the Church, because its message bore minimal impact its weekly attenders. Indeed, because the Church paid little attention to its ecclesiology, the message they were assigned to carry lost its punch—not because the gospel wasn't presented, but because the church, in its attempt to reach the culture, became too much like the culture. In short, weak ecclesiology bore bad fruit.

Getting Back to Basics

What to do now? We can keep coming up with new methods of evangelism every few years. Or we go back to Scripture and see what the Bible says about Jesus' plan for the Church. To do the former is easier, but also less fruitful; to do the latter is harder and even painful, but it promises greater effectiveness *in the long run*.

For too long, American churches have relied on preachers and programs to make converts. Going forward, we must give attention to what the gospel is and how we *as a church* are to display it—in our worship, our membership, our doctrine, our community, our mercy, and one hundred other ways.

In the face of rising secularism, the light of the Church needs to be brighter than ever. The declared gospel needs the displayed gospel to enable the lost and dying world to see what it is we are talking about. May God give us grace to not only call ourselves the Church, but to be the Church of Jesus Christ—the best evangelism 'program' ever invented.

Recommended Reading on the Person and Work of Jesus

This season at Servants of Grace, we've been taking a look at the person and work of Jesus. From attacks against the idea of Jesus dying in our place for our sin, to the exclusivity of Christ, many people have a great deal of questions about the person and work of Jesus. With this issue of *Theology for Life Magazine*, we hope that readers would grow in their understanding of the person and work of Jesus. If you've found this subject interesting and want to study the issue further, please check out the recommended reading list below. These are at the top of this genre in both excellence and readability.

- *The Truth of the Cross* by R.C. Sproul—this book is a great introduction to what Christ accomplished on the Cross.
- *The Christian Life* by Sinclair Ferguson—this is a fantastic book that will help Christians understand regeneration, faith, justification, sanctification, and much more.
- *Putting Amazing Back into Grace* by Michael Horton—this is a great book that will help readers to understand the theology of Reformed Christians.
- *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* by John Murray—this is a great book that will help readers understand the doctrine of atonement, along with the order of salvation.
- *The Work of Christ* by Robert Letham—this book will help Christians learn Christ's work as Prophet, Priest, and King.
- *Pierced for Our Transgressions* by Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach—this book will help readers understand what the penal substitutionary atonement of Christ is, how it's under attack, and how to stand fast for the biblical gospel.
- *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* by John Owen—this is a classic treatment on the doctrine of particular atonement. Owen demonstrates from the Scriptures that Christ died to die, not merely to make salvation possible.
- *The Unexpected Jesus* by R.C. Sproul—this is a very helpful introduction to the person and work of Jesus.
- *The Glory of Christ* by John Owen—this is a treasure trove on the person and work of Jesus.
- *The Person and Work of Christ* by B.B. Warfield—this volume on the person and work of Jesus is a must read.

In Christ Alone,
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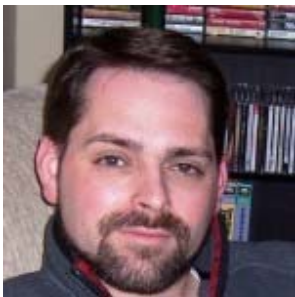
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