

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Video Lecture Series

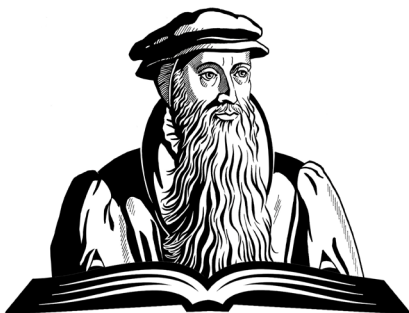
by Dr. Stephen Myers and Robert D. McCurley, ThM

Module 4:

CHRISTOLOGY— THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

Lecture 5

THE STATES OF CHRIST



The John Knox Institute
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by Dr. Stephen Myers and Robert D. McCurley, ThM

Module 4 ~ Christology

Lectures by Dr. Stephen Myers:

1. Introduction to Christology
2. The Divinity of Christ
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6. The Offices of Christ
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10. The Preeminence of Christ

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

Module 4 ~ Lecture 5

The States of Christ

Children learn from human experience about gravity long before their teachers teach them the technical definition of the law of gravity in science class. Children throw a ball or a stick, or a toy up into the air, and every time, it comes back down to the ground. Quickly they conclude that what goes up must come down. Now later on, in school, they learn why this happens, as well as the exceptions to this rule.

Well, this provides an illustration by way of contrast, not in terms of scientific laws, but rather, spiritual and eternal realities. In the incarnation, the one who came down, later went up. He who descended, afterward ascended. As Ephesians 4, verse 10 says, “He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.” Well this describes the two states of the incarnate Word, the Lord Jesus Christ—his state of humiliation, and his state of exaltation.

This series of lectures in this fourth module on Systematic Theology is devoted to the study of the Doctrine of Christ. The purpose is to explore what the Bible teaches about the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the last few lectures, we’ve learned that the Lord Jesus Christ is God and man in two distinct natures, and one person forever. We now turn to consider other important doctrinal truths related to Christ’s incarnation. In this lecture, we will explore Christ’s states of humiliation and exaltation.

So first of all, we’ll begin by looking briefly at a passage of Scripture, to open up our consideration of the doctrine of Christ’s states of humiliation and exaltation. We read the following in Philippians 2, verses 6 to 11—regarding the Lord Jesus Christ, it says, “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Well, first we see who is being described. This is one who himself is the eternal God, one equal with God, the second Person of the blessed Trinity. Well, this corresponds to what we learned in the last lecture. The one Person is the Person of the Son of God, who existed before the incarnation, and was found in the highest heavens.

Second, we read about his descent. This describes the humiliation of the incarnate Word. You will notice that verse 8 says, “he humbled himself.” Well, how so? The text says he was made of no reputation, that he took on the form of a servant, and he was made in the likeness of men, and

he became obedient unto the death of the cross. Well, this teaches us about his state of humiliation.

Well, third, we read about his ascent. Paul turns our attention to the exaltation of Christ. Again, you'll note that in verse 9, it says, "God also hath highly exalted him." Well, what did this exaltation include? Well, Christ is given a name, we're told, above every name, before which the whole universe will bow, and acknowledge, and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Well, this introduces us to the Biblical doctrine of Christ's humiliation and exaltation. We'll now consider in this lecture some of the theological details. And so, secondly, let's consider some of those details regarding Christ's states of humiliation and exaltation.

By the word "states," we are referring to the conditions into which he entered. So to be clear, when speaking of Christ's states of humiliation and exaltation, we're speaking of the constitution of his Person as God-man, the Mediator, as the incarnate Word. And so there's two categories, if you will, there's humiliation and exaltation. We'll begin with humiliation.

Christ's humiliation displays an infinite condescension, his low condition which flows from his incarnation. We can summarize this under his birth, life, death, and after his death, all pertaining to humiliation. This is set out, for example, in *Larger Catechism*, question #46, which says, "The estate of Christ's humiliation was that low condition, wherein he for our sakes, emptying himself of his glory, took upon him the form of a servant, in his conception and birth, life, death, and after his death until his resurrection." And so we think of his state of humiliation as spanning from his conception in the womb of the virgin Mary, until his resurrection.

We'll begin with his birth. The Son of God became the Son of man. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. Now, we know a little bit about Mary, and her own low estate contributes to his low estate. The world would not view him or his condition as beautiful. Isaiah 53, verse 2 says, "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." He was born of a woman, brought into this fallen world, not as a renowned monarch esteemed with grandeur by the world, but in his humanity, as a helpless baby, with the incapacities of infancy and dependence upon his mother. His humanity included the limitations of knowledge and strength. So we read, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man"—Luke 2, verse 52. You think of the lowly circumstances of his birth—poverty and obscurity. Luke 2, verse 7 says, "And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." He was laid in a manger, in an insignificant city, Bethlehem, which is called, in Micah 5, verse 2, "Little among the thousands of Judah." Later, he was raised in Nazareth, of which it was said, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?"—John 1, verse 46. So we see the humiliation in terms of his birth.

But also, secondly, in terms of his life, he subjected himself to the law of God. He was made under the law, we're told, obliged to obey all the precepts. He came to do the will of his Father, and to fulfill all righteousness. He yielded perfect obedience at every point throughout his life, with sinless perfection, without a single infraction. Nevertheless, he was subject to the curse of the law broken by his people. Galatians 3, verse 13 says, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." He endured all the indignities of the world, and the infirmities of human nature.

Shortly after his birth, he was forced with his parents to flee for his life under the threat of Herod. He spent his life in relative poverty. We read, "And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head"—

Matthew 8, verse 20. The world did not see or acknowledge his divine glory, or give him the worship he was due. John 1, verse 10 says, “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.” The Jews doubted his words and his works, and reproached him for his miracles. They flung false accusations at him. We read, in Matthew 11, verse 19, “And they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.” Prior to his ultimate death, the Jews hunted, hounded him, sought to kill him many times.

Furthermore, he endured manifold temptations. “He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin,” as Hebrews 4:15 tells us. In the midst of isolation in the wilderness, and weakness from forty days of fasting, Satan assaulted him with temptations and questioned his Sonship. He was, throughout his whole life, confronted with temptations to sin. Hebrews says “He suffered temptation.” It was a sore suffering, being grieved by the very thing most repugnant to him.

But then, thirdly, we have his humiliation in his death. He was betrayed by one closest to him, Judas Iscariot. Peter also openly denied him. He was forsaken by his disciples whom he had served and loved, and they forsook him at the moment of his greatest need and vulnerability. Don’t be mistaken—Jesus felt the pain and suffering of such treachery and betrayal. Isaiah 63, verse 3 says, “I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me.” He was scorned and rejected by the world. We sing of Christ in this regard in Psalm 22, verses 6 and 7, where it says, “But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn.” He was condemned and tormented by his persecutors. The Jews cried out, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” And Pilate, who knew his innocence, condemned him to death as a common criminal, so that Christ was “numbered with the transgressors,” as we see in Isaiah 53. He was beaten, stripped, flogged, crowned with thorns, and sorely afflicted.

Furthermore, he suffered the terrors of death, the powers of darkness, and he bore the weight of God’s wrath. Remember Philippians 2, verse 8, earlier, “He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” And so, he was physically nailed to a cross. This is ignomy. This is picture of being rejected outright. This is identified with shame, to be hung upon a tree. But the torments of his soul were even greater than the physical sufferings. Why? Because he wasn’t just being crucified. Caesar crucified countless thousands of people that period. But the Lord Jesus Christ was the sin-bearer. And so he was the one who had laid upon him the sins, with the penalty and punishment of that sin. And so while physically he was being crucified, God the Father is arising with his sword of justice, in order to plunge it into the soul of Christ. And all of the fury, and torment, and wrath of Almighty God against the sins of his people was poured out into the soul of Jesus Christ, so that he was bearing, as it were, the consequences of hell for those sins in the punishment that he received. He laid down his life an offering for sin. He underwent the experience of death, and the most grievous time. He passed through the valley of death.

But we see more, even after his death. He’s still in his state of humiliation. He underwent the indignity of being buried. Isaiah 53:9 says, “And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.” His burial, of course, is further proof of his real death. Death is the sentence of sin. “The wages of sin is death.” So his body was laid in the grave as the substitute for his people. “It is appointed unto man once for man to die,” we’re told. In his descent in humiliation, this brings Christ to the bottom, to be buried. And he continued in the state of death, and under the power of death till the third day. Well, this summarizes Christ’s state of humiliation. What sorrow was like unto his sorrow? He was the “man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.”

But then secondly, we have to consider his exaltation. Christ’s exaltation displays the remarkable heights to which he was raised as the God-man, in his incarnation. This is summarized in *Larger*

Catechism, question #51: “The estate of Christ’s exaltation comprehendeth his resurrection, ascension, sitting at the right hand of the Father, and his coming again to judge the world.” So we’ll consider each of these.

First of all, his resurrection. Think of the facts. His buried body did not undergo corruption in death. We sing about that at the end of Psalm 16, and we see it quoted in the New Testament. So, that much is true. But it was impossible for him to remain under the power of death. Instead, he rose again from the dead on the third day, as he had foretold. This refers to the real, physical resurrection of his body, the very same body in which he suffered, really and truly united to his soul. This resurrected body was, of course, no long susceptible to death anymore, or the infirmities that belong to bodies in this life. Christ’s bodily resurrection forms a vital, central point in the whole history of redemption. Go back and read 1 Corinthians 15. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the center of history. We have the change of the Sabbath from the last day of the week to the first day of the week, in order to represent this and memorialize this. But Paul says, if Christ is not raised, then all of our Christian religion is in vain, and our faith is in vain, and we’re dead in our sins, and so on. It’s absolutely essential. The resurrection showed forth open vindication and triumph. By it, Christ declared himself to be the Son of God, demonstrating the truth of all that he had revealed and proclaimed about himself. The resurrection showed that Christ had satisfied divine justice, and that God had accepted his atoning sacrifice for his people. Salvation of the elect was definitively accomplished. Christ won the victory, vanquishing death, and triumphing over Satan, and sin, and hell itself. Christ alone holds the keys of death and hell, exercising power over them. He alone is the Lord of both the quick and the dead. All that Christ did in his resurrection, he did as the representative of his people, the Head of his church. He secured for them their justification, and quickening in grace, and support against enemies, and other saving benefits. Christ’s resurrection power is manifest in the regeneration and the sanctification of his people, and because they are members of the body of which he is Head, his resurrection assures them of their own future resurrection from the dead at the last day. And so, the first point to be noted under his exaltation is his resurrection.

Secondly, his ascension. Again consider the facts. For forty days after his resurrection, Christ frequently appeared to his apostles, teaching them of the kingdom of God, and commissioning them to preach the gospel to all nations. At the completion of this, his disciples physically watched him go up into the highest heavens, in our nature, triumphing over enemies as our Head. Christ, at his ascension, received from God gifts for men, including many spiritual blessings, but chiefly, the fulness of the Spirit, which he poured out upon his people at Pentecost. He also ascended in order to raise our affections to things above, where Christ sits, as we read in Colossians 3, verse 1 and following. He told his disciples that he went to prepare a place for them, that they might be with him where he is for all of eternity. So we have his ascension.

Thirdly, we have what’s called his “session”. Christ’s session refers to his sitting, his sitting at the right hand of God as the God-man. His human nature continues in one place, and that location is in the highest heavens, above all principalities and powers. Christ is advanced to the highest favor with God the Father, with all fulness of joy and glory. He has all power and authority over all things in heaven and earth. He does and will continue to reign from this place in heaven until his second coming. Well, what exactly is Christ doing sitting at the right hand? Well, we’ll consider this further in the next lecture. But Christ is gathering and defending his church. He’s subduing their enemies. He’s furnishing his ministers and people with gifts and graces. He’s also making continual intercession for them before the Father in heaven, and much more.

The last point regarding his state of exaltation is his triumphant return in judgment. He ascended to the highest heavens, and continues to sit at the right hand of God until his second coming at the end of the world. Then he will return to judge the world on the last day in great power. On the last day, the world will see the full manifestation of his glory and that of his Father. He will come with all his holy angels, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God to judge the world in righteousness. He will assemble the whole mass of humanity, every person, from all ages, and from all over the world, to appear before his throne of judgment to give an account to him. Well, this event, the last judgment, is explained in more detail in the seventh and last module on Systematic Theology. But this summarizes Christ's state of exaltation. Our nature is raised above the highest heights in the one who himself is God-man.

Well, thirdly, we turn to the polemical consideration of this doctrine, assessing very briefly some errors related to the doctrine of Christ's humiliation and exaltation. First of all, beware of liberal, unbelieving theologians, who deny the supernatural aspects and miracles of redemption regarding both Christ's humiliation and exaltation. They reject, for example, the virgin birth, and the physical resurrection of Christ's body. Well, they can only do so by denying the inspired record of Scripture, which clearly teaches these doctrines. And so, we need to confront them on those points regarding the inspiration, and infallibility, and inerrancy, and authority of Scripture, as we learned in an earlier module on Systematic Theology. These liberals instead appeal to human reason and science as the arbiters of truth.

They also insist that Christ is not the God-man, but only God-like, and that his life and teaching conveyed moral examples of how to live. Well, this strips sinners of the gospel, and of any hope of salvation, because without the incarnation, without Christ being true God and true man, with two distinct natures in one person, there is no reconciliation of God and man that is possible. We'll consider that more in the lecture to come in this module.

Well, secondly, you must resist every attack on the doctrine of Christ's bodily resurrection. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, if Christ is not raised, then we are still dead in our sins, and to be pitied above all men as most miserable. We would have no hope of any saving redemption right now, and no hope of our own resurrection and glorification on the last day. The doctrine of the physical resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is true, and it must be defended with great energy.

Fourthly, we can now draw a few practical applications for ourselves from these doctrines. First of all, Christ's humiliation provides the ground for our own deliverance. We read in 2 Corinthians 8, verse 9, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." And so, we recognize really an element of glory in his humiliation. We see all that he's accomplishing, that in his poverty, and in his low condition, he's actually coming down into the depths, in order to deliver us from those depths, and to raise us to the heights of exaltation with him. And so we should marvel. It should lead us to worship and adore the Lord Jesus Christ for the work that he's accomplished.

Secondly, the pattern of Christ's humiliation governs the Christian's gospel humility in the world. You know, we started with Philippians 2, verse 6 to 11, but just prior to that passage, we read in verse 5, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." In other words, he saying that for the believer, we too must go down in order to come up, and that we are to be clothed with gospel humility. We're to walk with a lowly spirit before the Lord, and we're to esteem others higher than ourselves, and we're to follow this pattern. Later on in that same chapter, he supplies the godly examples of this, in Timothy, who's described as being interested in others more than in himself, and Epaphroditus, who was nigh unto death because of his service to the church.

Also, Christ's exaltation raises our thoughts from earth to heaven. And so this doctrine is what helps to cultivate heavenly-mindedness. Our thoughts and minds are to be focused chiefly on Christ. Well, where is Christ? Christ is in the heavens. And so our thoughts and our affections are taken into the heavens where the Lord Jesus Christ is. And this is the point of Colossians 3, verse 1 and following. We're to be a heavenly-minded, spiritually-minded people, because we're to be a Christ-centered people. And so we hang all of our hopes and all of our greatest desires upon him. We're citizens of heaven, we're headed for heaven, and our hearts are to therefore be in heaven.

Fourthly, we have an unconquerable hope and comfort rooted in Christ's resurrection and ascension. When a believing loved one dies, that is not the end of the story. At death, we discover that death is a defeated foe for us, and this has implications. This loosens our grip on this world, and it frees us from fears of death. It actually emboldens us in risking everything for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Why? The Lord calls us to serve him in ways that are vulnerable and risky, even risking our lives in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian runs headlong into that, because the worst that can happen is that we would die. And that fear of death no longer restrains us. To die is to be with the Lord, our souls perfected in holiness. But we also have this confidence that he who is raised will also raise our bodies and will glorify them. And so, even in martyrdom, the enemies of God who kill and murder his people cannot have the victory. They don't win. Christ wins, because he raises those bodies and makes them incorruptible in glory.

Well, in conclusion, we've been building on the doctrines of Christ, specifically Christ in two distinct natures and one Person. And in this lecture, we've learned further about his states of humiliation and exaltation. Well, in the next lecture, we'll turn our consideration to the offices of Christ—his offices as Prophet, Priest, and King.