

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

## Video Lecture Series

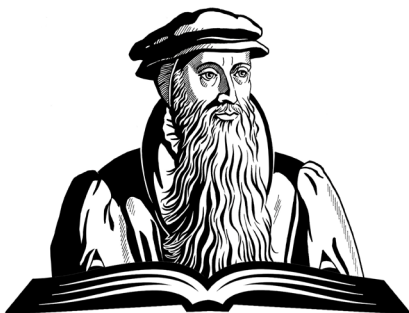
by Dr. Stephen Myers and Robert D. McCurley, ThM

*Module 4:*

### CHRISTOLOGY— THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

*Lecture 10*

### THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST



The John Knox Institute  
of Higher Education

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# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

## Video Lecture Series

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
3. The Humanity of Christ

Lectures by Robert D. McCurley, ThM:

4. The Hypostatic Union
5. The States of Christ
6. The Offices of Christ
7. The Necessity of the Atonement
8. The Nature of the Atonement
9. The Extent of the Atonement
- 10. The Preeminence of Christ**

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

## *Module 4 ~ Lecture 10*

# The Preeminence of Christ

The series of lectures in this fourth module on Systematic Theology has been devoted to the study of the Doctrine of Christ. The purpose was to explore what the Bible teaches about the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the last three lectures, we have focused on the work of Christ, specifically his atonement. We've learned about its Necessity, Nature, and Extent. In this last and final lecture of this module, we will explore the Preeminence of Christ. After all that we've learned about Christ's person and work, where does that leave us? We've reached the culmination of our study in the consideration of the place that the Scriptures give to Christ, in the church, and world, and in our own minds and hearts. Christ has the preeminence, which means he is superior to all others. This entire module should lead you to magnifying the superiority and supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So first of all, we will begin by looking very briefly at a passage of Scripture to open up our consideration of the doctrine of Christ's Preeminence. Colossians, chapter 1 provides us with one of the most Christocentric chapters in the New Testament, setting forth the glory and supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ. Another chapter would be Hebrews 1, which is like it. But Paul writes of Christ in Colossians 1, verse 18, saying, "That in all things he might have the preeminence." This text teaches us that Christ has, and must have, the preeminence in all things; not some things, not most things, but in absolutely all things, in the whole universe and beyond it. Why? Because, as Paul says, in verse 15, Christ "is the image of the invisible God." He himself is God, and God is supreme in himself above all else. We read in verse 19, "For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell." Paul says of Christ, in verse 16, "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist." He is preeminent as Creator.

He is also preeminent in the church, the most glorious institution in the world. Christ's unconquerable kingdom. We read at the beginning of verse 18, "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead." We also read in that chapter that as head, "We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins...And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven"—that's seen in verse 14 and verse 20.

Well, in this lecture, we will explore further what the Bible teaches regarding the Preeminence of Christ. And so, secondly, let's consider some of the doctrinal details regarding the Preeminence of Jesus Christ. Christ's preeminence means that he is superior to all others. That remains an undeniable truth. He alone is God-man, the only Mediator between God and man. There is no other

like him—none that can be compared to him. Furthermore, we have also considered his work, which is unparalleled to any other. He alone can and does atone for the sins of his people, redeeming them with his precious blood. But we can explore this further.

First of all, Christ has all the preeminence in Systematic Theology as a whole. Now, think about this series of seven modules on Systematic Theology, which will probably consist of a total of nearly eighty individual lectures. Interestingly, Christology, the Doctrine of Christ, is at the dead center of this series of modules. It is course number four. Three modules precede it, and three modules—five, six, and seven—will follow it. This illustrates for us the centrality of Christ's preeminence. But we can trace this idea through the courses themselves.

In the first module, on the Doctrine of First Principles, the Scriptures are the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of Christ, provided by him in the canon, and preserved by him in providence. Christ, the Word, is the source of the written Word in the Spirit.

In the second module, on the Doctrine of God, knowing God is the greatest priority in the world, as we see in Jeremiah 9, verses 23 and 24. And Christ is the finest and fullest revelation of God. The Bible describes him, as we saw earlier, as the one “who is the image of the invisible God.” And in Hebrews 1, verse 3, we learn, “Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.” So our knowledge of God is tied to his revelation of himself in the person of Jesus Christ. To be God centered is also to be Christ centered. Paul says that he comes “to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”—2 Corinthians 4:6.

We have the third module on the Doctrine of Man, understanding man's nature, his being made as the image of God, and his will. All of these things flow from Christ. He is the quintessentially perfect man, that enables us to understand human nature. Christ fulfills the covenant of works, and he serves as the Mediator of the covenant of grace between God and men.

Of course, we have the current module on the Doctrine of Christ, which is devoted to the person and work of Christ.

But then we have the fifth module, which will follow, on the Doctrine of Salvation. Salvation begins and ends with Christ. And since all spiritual blessings come from him, all glory must go to him. Ephesians 1 covers the whole gambit of salvation. And notice that, woven through the chapter, are these words, “To the praise of the glory of his grace”—verse 6, verse 12, verse 14. After Paul spends the first eleven chapters of Romans expounding the gospel, he concludes with praise to Christ. In chapter 11, verses 33 to 36, which ends in the last verse with these words, “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”

After that, we'll learn about the Doctrine of the Church in the sixth module. The church is the church of Jesus Christ. He alone is Head of the church, and King of his own kingdom. The government, offices, discipline, worship, and ordinances of the church are all prescribed by Christ's authority, and provided by his grace. He is preeminent.

And then lastly, in the seventh module, we'll hear about the Doctrine of Last Things. This too centers on the person of Jesus Christ, on the second coming and bodily return of Christ. The future millennium, the resurrection of the body, the last judgment, heaven, and hell all center on Christ. They all set forth his preeminence.

You can see how Christ is at the center. He has the preeminence in Systematic Theology. The Protestant Reformation recovered many Biblical doctrines, including what we sometimes call the Five Solas of the Reformation: Scripture alone, Faith alone, Christ alone, Grace alone, to the Glory of God alone. Even here, Christ has all five of these truths together. Scripture is the Word of Christ. We are called to faith in Christ. We receive the grace of Christ. And all to the glory of God

in Christ. Everywhere we turn, the preeminence of Christ shines forth.

Secondly, Christ has all the preeminence in the Bible as a whole. The whole Bible reveals the Lord Jesus Christ, and the message of salvation in the gospel of his grace. We trace the unfolding of this revelation of God in Christ through the stages of the history of redemption found in the Old and New Testaments. Paul asserted, “But we preach Christ crucified, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” Well he preached both the person and work of Christ from the whole Bible. The New Testament itself teaches us that the Old Testament Scriptures are the Word of God about Christ. Listen to Christ’s testimony regarding the Old Testament Scriptures. He says, in John 5, verse 39, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.” In the same passage, Jesus challenges the Pharisees and says, in verses 46 and 47, “For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” After Christ’s resurrection, we read the same thing, in Luke 24, verse 27, and verse 44. If you love Christ, then you should love both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is not just a compilation of interesting stories, nor can it be confined simply to a list of moral lessons. Its grand message proclaims Christ, which demonstrates the relevance of the Old Testament to Christians today. For example, see how Paul draws the connection between the Old Testament and Christ, and the New Testament Gentile believer. He says, in Galatians 3:29, “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Martin Luther concluded rightly when he said this: “Therefore he that would correctly and profitably read Scripture should see to it that he find Christ in it, then he find life eternal without fail. On the other hand, if I do not so study and understand Moses and the prophets, so as to find that Christ came from heaven for the sake of my salvation, became man, suffered, died, was buried, rose, and ascended to heaven, so that through him, I enjoy reconciliation with God, forgiveness of all my sins, grace, righteousness, and life eternal, then my reading in Scripture is of no help whatsoever to my salvation.”

Thirdly, we’ve heard much throughout this course about Christ’s preeminence among his redeemed people, but Christ also has all the preeminence among the nations. Christ is described as “the prince of the kings of the earth”—Revelation 1:5; “the governor among the nations”—Psalm 22, verse 28; and “Messiah the Prince,” in Daniel 9, verse 25. We read of Christ’s ascension in Daniel 7, verse 14, where it says, “And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”

We sing, in Psalm 2, verses 8 to 12, of the Father saying to the Son, “Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” And there are consequences for kings and nations, as a result of this. Psalm 2 continues, “Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD”—that’s the Lord’s anointed, Christ—“serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.” We see that kings are to subject themselves to Christ, and to pledge their unqualified allegiance to him. He must have all the preeminence in the nations. Psalm 33, verse 12 tells us, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD.” Now Christ said, in the great commission at the end of Matthew 28 that we are to disciple the nations. And the Bible promises that there is a day coming when this will be accomplished. We sing about it all through the Psalms. For example, Psalm 72, verse 8: “He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends

of the earth.” Verse 11: “Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him.” We sing about it in Psalm 102, verse 15: “So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth thy glory.” This is found throughout the Psalms.

The Old Testament prophets also foretell of this. For example, Isaiah 49, verses 22 and 23 speaks of Gentile nations serving Christ in his church. It says, “Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, . . . And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD.” Revelation 11, verse 15 confirms the same: “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.” Well, we could cite many, many more passages, but the point is clear. Christ is also to have all of the preeminence in nations, as nations, throughout the world.

Well, thirdly, we turn to the polemical consideration of the doctrine of Christ’s Preeminence, and I will highlight briefly examples from four arenas in which Christ’s preeminence is attacked or undermined. First, we will pick on what we just considered at the end of the last point—attacks on Christ’s preeminence in the state or in civil governments. Nations and magistrates do not have religious liberty to believe and do as they please. The Bible does not teach that God only rules over the church and individual believers, and that governments and societies operate with religious neutrality as secular or irreligious entities. No, the Bible teaches that nations, as nations, are obligated to profess, protect, and promote the true and Biblical religion within their civil spheres, to serve Christ as King, and to uphold and rule according to his Word. God’s moral law is the standard to which magistrates, like all men, are held accountable. Most governments refuse to do so and rebel against the Lord, as noted in Psalm 2. But every nation that refuses the yoke of Christ will perish. And those nations whose God is Jehovah will prosper under his blessing, because they seek Christ’s glory, his preeminence, as nations. And as we saw earlier, there is a day coming when the nations will be disciplined through the gospel and come to serve the Lord. In the end, Revelation 21 and 22 speaks of kings and nations bringing their glory into the heavenly Jerusalem above.

Secondly, I will supply one example of an attack on the preeminence of Christ within the church. Jesus Christ alone is the only Head and King of his church. No one shares this place of preeminence, and no one can supplant him. But within the Roman Catholic religion, the Pope of Rome falsely claims to be the head of the church on earth. He ascribes to himself titles that belong to Christ alone, and he claims powers and privileges reserved for Christ alone. The Pope must be rejected as a wicked imposter, an enemy of Jesus Christ, who deceives men with his blasphemous doctrines of devils. We must resist every tendency to compromise with Roman Catholicism. The *Westminster Confession*, chapter 25, paragraph 6, states this doctrine plainly. It says, “There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ; nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God.”

Third, we can think about attacks within the family. Families, as families, have to acknowledge the preeminence of Christ within the homes. It’s not permitted for individuals within the household to be left to their own ways. A believing home must maintain godly standards that exalt Christ for everyone in the home. Joshua 24, verse 14 and 15 says, “Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth.” It goes on to say, “But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” Joshua ensured that not only he, but also his household served the Lord—not the world, not idols, but the Lord. Believing fathers and heads of households cannot jettison their responsibility. Now, parents cannot produce a saving conversion in their children, but they can

teach them God's ways, and require that his Word be followed in the home. Deuteronomy 6, verse 7 says, "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

Fourthly, and lastly, the preeminence of Christ in the individual. Man's natural tendency consists in self-promotion. People love to pursue their own agendas and ambitions, in order to gather to themselves the adulation of other men. Jesus warned, in John 12, verse 43, "For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." Two of the great sins are selfishness and pride, which amount to saying, "Me first," and, "Me best." To the contrary, the Christian affirms that Christ is both first and best. Christ's preeminence strips man of all glory, and gives it all to the Lord alone.

Well, fourthly, we can now draw some practical application for ourselves. First of all, knowing the Lord Jesus Christ must be the greatest longing and desire of every true believer. Moses expresses this in Exodus 33, verse 13: "Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight." He goes on in verse 18, "And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory." David expressed the same thing in Psalm 27, verse 4, "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple." Jesus said, in John 17, verse 3, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." And so Paul says, in Philippians, chapter 3, verse 8, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency"—or preeminence—"the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." It says in verse 10, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."

Secondly, your entire existence and purpose in life consists in the pursuit of glorifying Christ. That is because Christ himself is chiefly concerned with the promotion of his own surpassing preeminence. When we speak of glorifying him, we do not mean that we add to his glory, or make him more glorious. That is, of course, impossible. Rather, we recognize, acknowledge, and revel in his glory, and then we live in a manner that seeks to display, promote, and show forth Christ's glory. So the gospel fruit of godliness centers on glorifying Christ in his preeminence. Glorifying Christ aims at pleasing him. Paul writes, in 1 Thessalonians 2, verse 4, "Even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts." Perhaps he had in mind the Lord's Word in Isaiah 2, verse 22, "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?" Christ diverts the believer from seeking the praise of men for themselves, to desiring that all of creation would give glory to Christ alone. It teaches us that "no flesh should glory in his presence"—1 Corinthians 1:29; and "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord"—verse 31. Christ's preeminence humbles us and exalts Christ.

Thirdly, the chief and most direct act of glorifying Christ is worshipping him according to his design. In the end, the preeminence of Christ leads to Christ-centered worship. Note that in heaven, evangelism will cease, but worship continues. Indeed, the gospel is a means to the end of worship.<sup>1</sup> Men are attracted to worship that pleases their tastes and desires—worship that is sensational and self-indulgent. Paul warns us, in Philippians 3, verses 18 and 19, "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their

1 "end of worship," meaning, the end result is the worship of God.



shame, who mind earthly things.” But if we wish to glorify Christ, then we must not seek worship that tickles our fancy, but rather, worship that follows Christ’s prescriptions in his Word. We can ask ourselves, Has God appointed in the Bible each act of worship used in the assembly of God’s people? An interest in glorifying Christ fuels deep conviction about worshipping God in the way that he desires and that’s glorifying him.

Well, in conclusion, in this lecture, we’ve explored the doctrine of Christ’s Preeminence, which magnifies the glory and supremacy of Christ, and all that he is, and all that he does. This brings this series of lectures on the fourth module in Systematic Theology to a close. We began in the first module with a series of lectures on the Doctrine of First Things; and in the second module, on the Doctrine of God; and the third module, on the Doctrine of Man. And here in this fourth module, we have considered the Doctrine of Christ. Having considered carefully Christ’s person and work, we are now prepared to study some of the implications for sinners. We must turn our attention from the accomplishment of redemption to the application of redemption. So in the next and fifth module on Systematic Theology, we will explore together the Doctrines of Salvation, and what it means for a sinner to be made a partaker of the redemption purchased by Christ.