

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

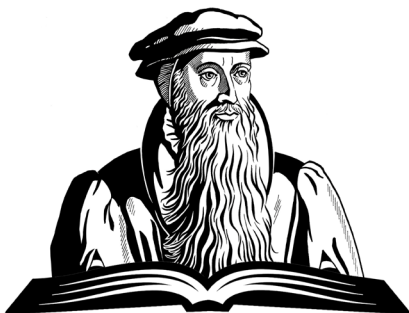
Video Lecture Series

Lectures 1 through 3, by Dr. Stephen Myers
and

Lectures 4 through 10, by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

Module 4

CHRISTOLOGY— THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST 10 Lectures



The John Knox Institute
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SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

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

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SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Dr. Stephen Myers

Module 4 ~ Lecture 1

Introduction to Christology

We want to begin now our study of Christology, where we learn both who Jesus Christ is, and what he's done for his people. In the Gospel of Matthew, in Matthew 16, Jesus has an important conversation with his disciples. They're in the town of Caesarea Philippi, a town outside of Israel, and Jesus begins in Matthew, chapter 16, verse 13, with a very simple question for his disciples: "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" Jesus wants his disciples to tell him what other people are saying about his identity, about who he is. The disciples tell Jesus, in verse 14, that some people say that he is John the Baptist. Some people say that he is Elijah. Other people say that he is Jeremiah. Still other people say that he is simply one of the prophets.

Now all of these identities are very important identities. All of these are people whom the Old Testament had said would come before the coming of the Messiah. These are important identities. To have been any of these figures, would have been to be a very important person. None of these are lowly assessments of who Jesus is. But they're all wrong. All the people on whom the disciples are reporting have said exalted things about Jesus. None of them has sought to insult Jesus, or underestimate his importance or his glory, but they've all been wrong. So Jesus turns his attention to the disciples themselves. In verse 15, Jesus looks upon his disciples, and he says, "But whom say ye that I am?" But in hearing this question, the disciples—they are men who have left behind everything to follow Jesus: they've left their homes, their jobs, their families, they've laid down everything to follow Jesus, to be with him. So who is he? Who is this man who is positioned at the very center of their lives?

Peter speaks up and speaks into the charged silence, and he says, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And with those words, Peter speaks the truth that stands at the very center of history. Peter tells us who Jesus is. He is the Christ, the promised One of God. And in that identity, Jesus tells us what Jesus has come to do—he's come to bring the deliverance that had been foretold from the very beginning of the book of Genesis. In one sentence, one answer, to one question, Peter has given us a Christology that it will take us the rest of this lecture series to unpack. You see, it matters who Jesus is. It matters deeply who Jesus is. Doubtless there are many things on your heart and on your mind right now. There are distractions, and cares, and concerns. There are things going on in your life, in your family, and they're all terribly important—they are. But none of them is as important as your answer to this simple question: Whom do you say that Jesus is? You can say a lot about him. You can say high and lofty things about him, and still miss him in his glory. All of the people whose responses the disciples reported had—those people had encountered Jesus, but they didn't know who he was. Whom do you say that Jesus is? That's more important than anything else.

Let's start with an easy answer, with an obvious answer. Who is Jesus? Well, he's Jesus. In Matthew, chapter 1, verse 21, Joseph just has learned that Mary, whom he is supposed to marry, is pregnant, and so he has decided to end their relationship quietly. However, an angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream, and tells him that the child in Mary's womb is conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost. And then the angel goes on to say, "And she shalt bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name, JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." This holy One is named Jesus, because he will save his people from their sin. His name "Jesus" means, literally, "Jah saves," or "Jehovah saves." Now if you likely already know, Jehovah is the most precious name of God given in the Old Testament. It's his covenant name, his most precious name—the name that most clearly points him out as the God who faithfully, and all-powerfully saves his people. And "Jesus" means "Jehovah saves"—or even "Jehovah is salvation". His name, Jesus, is conjuring up all of God's saving acts in past generations, all of his deliverances of his people, and placing the baby in Bethlehem as the ultimate fulfillment of that salvation. Jehovah is the God who delivered his people out of Egyptian shackles. Jehovah is the God who brought the children of Israel into a land flowing with milk and honey. Jehovah saves. All of history, all the Old Testament, all of it is testimony of the same truth that Jesus' name holds forth—God saves, Jehovah saves.

But notice the subtle shift in what the angel says. Jesus is given this name "Jesus", which means "Jehovah saves"—why? Because Jehovah saves? Well yes, but that's not what the passage says. Verse 21 says that this child is to be named "Jehovah saves," because he will save his people. When we see Jesus saving his people, we see Jehovah saving his people—we see God himself saving his people. Jesus just is the saving God of the covenant. Jesus isn't named "Jesus" because Jehovah is going to save his people through him. No, the passage tells us that Mary's son will be named Jesus, because, as Jehovah, he will save his people. Jehovah saves—Jesus saves—it's saying the same thing.

And notice what Jesus is saving. Verse 21 says that Jesus will save his people. When Mary's son undertakes and accomplishes his work of redemption, he won't be saving God's people, he won't be saving Jehovah's people. No, Scripture tells us that he will be saving "his" people. To speak of God's people, and to speak of Jesus' people, is to speak of the same group. In Mary's son, the God of Israel has come for his people.

And from what will this saving Jesus save his covenant people? He'll save them from their sin. He hasn't come to save them from political oppression. He hasn't come to save them from hardship or affliction. No, according to verse 21, he's come to save them from their sin. Many centuries earlier, the psalmist had written, in Psalm 130, verses 7 and 8: "Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities." The son of Mary is that One—the Jehovah of Israel, who has perforated time to redeem his people from their iniquities, just as he had promised.

Do you see the glory of this Jesus? The Lord of glory, whose throne is in heaven, and whose footstool is the earth, he names himself by his Majesty. He is the Jehovah who saves—the Almighty God who saves. And he also names himself by our need. He's the One who saves. He names himself by the mission of salvation that he has undertaken to bring us to himself. The incandescent glory of the thrice holy God, and the crushing need of his people—they meet in Jesus. They kiss in his name—his majestic glory and our debilitating need.

Who do we say that Jesus is? We say that he is Jesus, the Holy One of Israel, who has come for his people to save them from their sin. And this Jesus, he is the Christ. That is specifically the name that Peter uses for Jesus in Matthew 16, verse 16: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And this word, this title “Christ” means “the Anointed One”. Now here is one of the many places where it’s important to remember that the Old Testament originally was written in the Hebrew language, while the New Testament originally was written in the Greek language. The two parts of the Bible originally were written in different languages. And so sometimes, the same word will look different, will be different in the New Testament than it was in the Old Testament. And that’s precisely what happens here. In the New Testament, the title “Christ” is used to mean the exact same thing that was meant by the title “Messiah” in the Old Testament. When Peter says that Jesus is the Christ, he is confessing that Jesus is the Messiah. And the Messiah, in the Old Testament, was the longed-for deliverer whom God had promised that he would send for the salvation of his people. By the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry—and that phrase “Jesus’ earthly ministry” refers to the whole span of time between Jesus’ birth, and his crucifixion.” But we’ll talk more about that later. By the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry, the Jewish expectations for the Messiah had become attached specifically to the promises surrounding a Davidic king. In 2 Samuel, chapter 7, God had made a covenant with David, and among other things, God had promised that one of David’s descendants would rule over Israel forever. That promise had become Israel’s great hope. There was a king, a son of David, whom God would send to rule over them. In Psalm 2, the psalmist had said that the nations, the wicked leaders of the world, were arrayed against God, and against his Messiah—in verse 2. And then in verses 8 and 9, God had declared that all of those nations would be given to his Messiah. His Messiah would shatter his enemies before him. The Messiah, who would reign over God’s people in accordance with God’s promise, he would destroy all of the enemies of his name and of his people. This promise, and many others like it—the promise of a coming Messiah—was very dear to the Israelite people, as they suffered in the hands of others, in the hands of pagan nations; as they were carried into captivity in Babylon; as they were ruled by the Roman Empire. It was these promises of a Messiah to which they clung, and in which they hoped.

One place where the Old Testament speaks of this Messiah, and of his deliverance, is in Habakkuk, chapter 3. There, the prophet Habakkuk is praying, and he describes this scene of coming deliverance; this raw, harrowing description of the Lord coming in judgment against the nations and in deliverance for his people. And in Habakkuk, chapter 3, verse 3 through 5, we read this: “God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power. Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting.” This is a deliverer. This is One who lays the mountains down, in order to gather in his people, and in order to deliver them. And then we read, skipping down to verse 13: “Thou wentest forth for the salvation thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah.” This mighty, trembling deliverance that God is going to bring to his people, Habakkuk says, he will bring through his Messiah, with his Messiah. This is the Anointed One. This is the Messiah. And he brings the deliverance of the God whose feet spew burning coals. There is hope. There is deliverance. There is power here for the people of God.

This judging, all-powerful Messiah appears elsewhere in the Old Testament, of course. In Isaiah, chapter 11, verse 1 and following, we read this: “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of

knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.” Now here, the promised One of God, the Messiah, the Anointed One, he isn’t anointed in any ordinary way. He’s anointed with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of the Lord rests upon him. And as you see towards the end of the passage that we read, this Messiah will be precisely what we read described in Habakkuk 3. He’ll smite the enemies of his people, he’ll slay the wicked. But before we get there, before we get to the judgment, we see something more. Not only will the Anointed One deliver his people by destroying their enemies, but also by ruling among them in peace, and in wisdom, and in equity. This Messiah, he is marked by wisdom, and by love for the Lord. The poor, the meek, the vulnerable, they’re not intimidated by him—he is for them. This Anointed One, he delivers the children of Israel, he destroys their enemies, and with him, his people are safe. They are people set free, and ruled in righteousness, delivered from oppression, and ruled in peace.

Now if you noticed, at the very start of our passage, we were told that this Messiah is of the stem of Jesse. Now Jesse, of course, was the father of David. This is a Davidic Messiah, a Messiah in the line of David who is described here. And we find this Davidic Messiah once again in Micah, chapter 5, at verse 2. And there, through his servant, Micah, the Lord declares: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting.” In Bethlehem, there would be born the One who would rule in Israel—the great son of David. Descending from David, this One would come and rule over God’s people.

Now here, it’s important to note what we find in Matthew, chapter 2, at verse 2. There, three wise men from the east, far away from Israel, men who aren’t Jews. They’ve seen a star in the sky. They’ve known that this star means that the king of the Jews has been born, and they have travelled for a long, long time to find, by that star, the newborn king. Now here, they have arrived in Jerusalem, they ask King Herod where the king of the Jews has been born, where the Davidic king, the promised Messiah, in other words, has been born. And Herod goes to his chief priests and his scribes, he goes to his religious leaders, and according to Matthew, chapter 2, verse 4, he demanded of them where the Christ should be born. Continuing into verse 5: “And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.” In this one panicked scene, you see the coalescing—the coming together—of all of these components of Messianic expectation. You have the promised descendant of David, the king of the Jews to whom the wise men refer in verse 2, when Herod hears mention of this Davidic descendant, and he speaks of that Davidic figure to his scribes and priests, what does he call it?—the Christ, Messiah. And instantly, the scribes and the priests know where this One has been born. They’ve read their Bibles, you could say—they know that he is to be born in Bethlehem. They quote Micah, chapter 5, verse 2 to that effect. So, the descendant of David, the Messiah, the One through whom God would rule over and care for his people, it all is the same person. They all speak of the same One—the Messiah, the Christ, is the promised One through whom God would deliver his people from every oppression, and through whom, he would rule in righteousness in their midst.

And then, in Caesarea Philippi, outside of Israel’s bounds, Peter says to Jesus, “Thou art the

Christ.” Now, we don’t know this for certain—none of us were there. But you can imagine, Peter’s words must have hung in the air—silenced everything else: “Thou art the Christ.” Generation upon generation of God’s people, all had been waiting for this promised deliverer, and then he came, and he was standing before Peter—Jesus, the Christ. First Peter, chapter 1, verse 12 tells us that these things are so wonderful that the very angels of heaven long to look upon. Jesus is the Christ.

Always, there is the question: Whom do you say that Jesus is? We’ve started to see something of the answer. We will spend the rest of our time together seeking to see that answered more fully—the answer to that question that ought to punctuate all of our days, and that will be before us even on the last great day. And in what we’ve seen so far, we’ve seen at least three things.

First, when we seek to understand who Jesus is, we are not dealing only with New Testament realities. All of the Old Testament speaks of Jesus. Through it, God was preparing his people, so that, at the perfect moment, when Jesus, the Messiah, came, they would be prepared for it. In Genesis, chapter 3, verse 15, God promised that at the perfect time, he would send One who would crush the head of Satan, One who would destroy the enemy of the souls of his people. In that promise, God promised Jesus. And all of the rest of the Old Testament unfolds the riches of that promised Messiah. In Luke, chapter 24, and verse 27, the Scriptures tell us that all of the Old Testament is about Jesus. It prepares the way for him, it points to him, it traces out who he will be in the hearts of his people. And as we work our way through the study of Christ, we will deal often with the Old Testament, because Jesus is there, and it speaks of him.

You are here, and you’re listening to these lectures, because you want to know truth, and that’s wonderful—it’s commendable. In wanting to know truth, you are desiring a good thing. But at the very center of Biblical religion, there is not an abstract truth, there’s a person—there’s Jesus. If we could but see him and know him, we will have all other things besides. Jesus is at the center of God’s revelation to man. Jesus is at the center of the Bible. And so, we will draw on all of God’s Word as we consider Christ.

Now the second thing that we’ve seen is that when we deal with Christ, we are dealing with an infinitely glorious person. We’re told, in Isaiah, chapter 53, at verse 2, that there was nothing visibly different about Jesus. When he was born, he looked like any other child. You could walk past him on the dusty streets of Galilee, and he would appear like any other person. In fact, in places like John 6, verse 42; Matthew, chapter 13, verse 55 and 56, people who knew Jesus personally, had difficulty believing that he was any different from any other person from their home towns. But Jesus was the glorious, living God, come in the flesh. In Isaiah, chapter 6, verses 1 through 4, the prophet Isaiah has a vision. And he sees the Lord sitting upon his throne. We’re told that the Lord is high and lifted up. His glory fills the heavenly temple. His glory is so overwhelming that the very pillars of the heavenly temple quake—they nearly collapse under the weight of his glory. And he’s encircled by angels—angels with six wings. With two wings, the angels cover their feet; with two wings, they fly; and with two wings, they cover their eyes—they cover their eyes. They cover their eyes, because the holiness of this God is so pure, is so clean, that they cannot even look upon it—he’s too holy. And one of the angels, he cries out: “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.” And Isaiah, the prophet who’s seeing this, he falls back. He sees his unworthiness. He fears that he will be consumed. This is the God of glory—the God of a glory so immense that even the heaven of heavens cannot contain it, and the angels cannot behold it. And in John 12, verses 40 and 41, John tells us that this Holy One, this One of such overwhelming glory, was Jesus before he came in the flesh.

Brothers and sisters, as we learn about Jesus, as we draw near to Jesus, we’re not dealing with

just another religious leader. We're not dealing with one who fits neatly into our categories and understandings. We're dealing with the living God of heaven and earth. We're dealing with One too holy for the angels to behold. We're dealing with One before whom one day, all of the rulers of the world will bow. When we draw into his presence, we draw into the fire of the holiness of God. This is the One, this is the One in whom we have all things. This is the One without whom we have nothing. Brothers and sisters, I want you to know truth. I want you to know doctrine. But I want most for you to know Jesus, because he's everything. He's everything. He is the radiant glory of the living God.

But third, because of who he is, Jesus has undertaken a very specific work. There are things that he came to do. There are things that he even still now is doing. He redeems his people. He saves them from their sin. He rules over this people in peace. He judges the wicked. Because he is Jesus the Christ, he has a majestic work that he has undertaken. Because he is Jesus the Christ, that work will come to certain complete perfection in his time.

Now all of this will be our concern in the coming lectures, as we undertake the study of Christology. Who is Jesus? And what has he done? And what is he doing? Brothers and sisters, these are not trivial questions. These questions have, as their answer, the gospel. So let us set out to answer them. Together, we will do that—we will seek to answer these questions. But I invite you, I challenge you, the whole time to be asking a question that no one else can answer, that I certainly can't answer: Who do you say that Jesus is? If you will but see him in what lies ahead, not seeing just facts, not seeing just Scripture references, but seeing him, you will cry out with Thomas, in John 20, verse 28: "My Lord, and my God!" And you will know life, and you will be able to minister that life to others. May it be so.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Dr. Stephen Myers

Module 4 ~ Lecture 2

The Divinity of Christ

In Matthew, chapter 16, verse 13, Jesus asks his disciples a question: “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” As we discussed in our last time together, this is the most important question in all the world. This question, and our answer to the question, stands at the very center of Christianity. Whom do we say that Jesus is? And the Scriptures give us profound, life-changing answers to that question. Among other things, in the Scriptures, we find out that Jesus both fully and completely God, and he is fully and completely man. Over the next three lectures, we’re going to spend time examining this scriptural witness.

First, how do the Scriptures show us that Jesus is fully God? This is referred to as the divinity of Christ. Next, how do the Scriptures show us that Jesus is fully man? This is referred to as the humanity of Christ. And then, how can we understand how Jesus is both fully God and fully man at the same time? These are important issues. These are issues that give us a glimpse of the glory and the beauty of Jesus Christ. In our time together in this session, we’ll look first, at five ways in which the Scriptures present Jesus as being fully God, and then we’ll spend a little bit of time in four different passages of Scripture, where we see with particular clarity that Jesus is fully and truly God.

But first, what are five ways in which the Scripture presents Jesus as being fully God. Well first, the Scripture repeatedly uses divine names for Jesus. Last time, we saw how the Scripture gives the name Jehovah to Jesus. In fact, that’s at the very center of his name—Jesus. If you’ll remember, in Matthew 1, verse 21, the angel tells Joseph that Jesus’s name is to be JESUS, which means Jehovah saves, because he, Jesus, will save his people from their sin. Jesus is the Jehovah who saves. Well, in Isaiah, chapter 42, verse 8, God says he will give this name, Jehovah, to none other than himself. In being Jehovah, Jesus is God. In fact, the Scriptures call Jesus exactly that. In John, chapter 20, verse 28, which we also mentioned last time, Thomas had cried out to Jesus, “My Lord, and my God.” Similarly, in Romans, chapter 9, verse 5, Paul refers to Christ as “God blessed for ever.” In Titus, chapter 2, verse 13, Paul speaks of “the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” In a variety of ways, and in a variety of settings, the Scriptures freely use divine names—names intended only for God—to refer to Jesus.

In addition to having divine names used of him, Jesus also, secondly, displays divine attributes. In John, chapter 8, verse 58, Jesus says, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.” Now here, Jesus tells us that he existed before Abraham. Jesus’s point is that he was before he became flesh. Jesus is eternal. In Hebrews, chapter 13, and verse 8, we read of “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” We read a very similar description of Jesus, alongside a self-description by Jesus himself, in Revelation, chapter 1, verse 8. There, Jesus says, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which

is to come, the Almighty.” Jesus Christ hasn’t only always been, he’s not only eternal, he also is unchanging, or immutable—qualities, or characteristics, or attributes that are true only of God, are said by the Scripture to be true of Jesus. What does that mean? It means that Jesus is fully God.

But not only is Jesus given divine names, and not only does he display divine attributes, but Jesus also manifests divine power. In John, chapter 6, after Jesus had fed five thousand men with just five loaves of bread and two fish, his disciples boarded a boat to cross the sea of Galilee to Capernaum. Jesus himself stayed ashore. But then in the night, the disciples saw something unexpected. Beginning in John, chapter 6, and verse 19, we read this: “They see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid. But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid. Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.” Now there are a lot of very important details in those three verses.

First, as Jesus drew near to the ship, as he drew near to the terrified disciples, what did he say? In verse 20, Jesus said, “It is I.” It’s not always easy to recognize this, as the Scriptures get translated out of their original languages and into different languages, but Jesus there identifies himself by using the most precious name for God in the Old Testament. We’ve seen this name before, we mentioned it just a moment ago. In Exodus, chapter 3, and verse 14, Moses is standing at the burning bush, and God is speak to him out of the burning bush, and God declares for Moses what was his most precious, most personal name—Jehovah. Or sometimes, some people pronounce it as Yahweh. But what it means is, “I am,” or even, “I am that I am.” Who is God? He is the one who simply is. God is the one who cannot not exist. He just is. God’s name is “I am.” And what does Jesus say to his trembling disciples, in John, chapter 6, verse 20? “It is I,” or to translate the passage very directly, what Jesus actually says is, “I am.” He identifies himself as the holy, living God of Israel.

But that identification doesn’t just stop with Jesus’s words. Notice what Jesus is doing in the passage. He’s walking on the waves of the sea. The stormy waves are his path. And when he reaches the boat in calmness, the disciples find themselves at the place they wanted to be. In the Old Testament book of Job, we find many glorious descriptions of God’s power and his majesty, and among those descriptions, we find in Job, chapter 9, verse 8, these words. Job is speaking of who God is at this point, and he says, in Job, chapter 9, verse 8, that God “alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea.” Who treads on the waves of the sea? God does. And here comes Jesus, strolling on the sea. Or consider Psalm 107. Beginning in verse 21, Psalm 107 speaks of God’s power as displayed in his control over the seas, how he shows his power through his works there, how he commands the wind, and the rising and the falling of the waves, how he is in sovereign control over those who do their business on the sea. Let’s read there beginning in verse 23: “They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits’ end. Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven.” According to those verses in Psalm 107, what does God do? He controls the seas. And so when his people in distress cry out to him, he delivers them, he calms the waves, and he brings them into their desired haven. And amidst the panicked cries of his disciples, Jesus has come to them, and he’s delivered them, and they find themselves in their desired haven.

As we've seen already, there are many places in Scripture where Jesus is called God, or he is given divine names, he is called what God is called. But Jesus's divinity as seen in Scripture, is so much richer than just that. All of the things that God alone does, all of the things for which his people had praised him in the Old Testament, all of the mighty things that God and God alone can do, Jesus does them. And he does them in precisely the same way as the Old Testament had described God doing it. This one, this one who makes the stormy waves his path, and who delivers his people to peace, he is God. That's what the Old Testament says, and that's what Jesus demonstrates.

But Jesus doesn't demonstrate this only through his display of raw power. Jesus also, in a closely related way, manifests his divinity through his exercise of divine prerogatives. Not only does Jesus do the things that only God can do, but underlying that, Jesus has the authority that only God has. We read a striking example of this in Matthew, chapter 9, verses 1 through 8. Here, Matthew is referring to Jesus, and he writes, "And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city. And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus, knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house, and he arose, and departed to his house. But when the multitudes saw it, they marveled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men."

Now here, Jesus has crossed over the sea of Galilee, he's come to his home town, and he has this dramatic interaction. There's a man with palsy, a man with a debilitating physical affliction, and some of his friends, or some of his family—the passage doesn't say exactly—but some people who care about this man, they bring him to Jesus. This man is unable even to walk. Those who bring him, have to carry him on a bed to Jesus for healing. Jesus sees this man, and verse 2 tells us that Jesus is moved. He sees the faith of the man and his friends. And so what does Jesus do? He doesn't immediately heal the man. No, Jesus sees through the palsy to the man's real need, and he tells the man that his sins are forgiven. Jesus forgives the man's sin. And the scribes, the Jewish religious leaders, they're scandalized. Only God can forgive sin. All of our sin is sin against God. Psalm 51, verse 4 makes that plain. And so only God can forgive sin. As God himself says, in Isaiah 43, verse 25, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." God alone can forgive sins. So when Jesus says that he has forgiven this man his sins, he's claiming to be God. He's claiming to have the authority to do that which only God has the authority to do. And in Matthew, chapter 9, Jesus knows that this has offended the scribes. In verse 4, he asks them why they're offended. Then in verse 5, Jesus makes a very clear observation. It's easy to say that a person's sin has been forgiven. It's easy to say that because there's no real way that man can test it. When Jesus says that his man's sin has been forgiven, there's nothing to which the scribes can point to prove Jesus wrong. It's another thing altogether to tell this lame man to stand up and walk—to tell this man, who has had to be carried into Jesus's presence, to stand up and walk. That's hard. Because if Jesus tells this man to walk, and the man cannot walk, it would be obvious to anyone and to everyone that Jesus does not have the power or the authority to heal him. There would be something very concrete to which the scribes can point to show that Jesus has been wrong. In that way, telling the lame man to walk is harder than telling him that his sins are forgiven, because human beings can test the command to walk. And so Jesus turns to the man with the palsy, in verse 6, and he tells him to stand up, to take the bed on which he had been carried, and

to go to his house. And the man does it. He stands up. The bed that just moments before had been required to carry him, he takes it up, and he goes to his home. The lame man walks to his home. No one there could deny that Jesus had the power to heal that walking man. And, as Jesus puts it in verse 6, neither could they then deny that Jesus has the power to forgive sin. That thing which only God can do—forgive sin—Jesus can do it. The formerly lame walking man proves it. Jesus can forgive sin. Jesus exercises divine prerogatives, because Jesus is God. He's divine.

In fact, because he is divine, we find Jesus, in the Scripture, receiving divine worship. And this receipt of divine worship is itself a further evidence of Jesus's divinity. In the Scripture, of course, it's clear that worship is due to God alone. As we read in Deuteronomy, chapter 10, and verse 20: "Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by this name. He is thy praise, and he is thy God." Or, as Jesus puts it, in Luke, chapter 4, and verse 8: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." Only God is to be worshipped. In Acts chapter 14, Paul and Barnabas were ministering in Lystra, and when Paul healed a man there, the people of Lystra tried to worship Paul and Barnabas. But Paul and Barnabas stopped them, they said that they were men just like them, they weren't God, and therefore they were not to be worshipped.

In the same way, in Revelation, chapter 22, at verse 8, the Apostle John, having seen the wonders and the beauties of the new Jerusalem, fell down at the feet of the angel who had shown him all of these things, to worship that angel. And what does the angel say? In Revelation, chapter 22, verse 9, the angel says, "See thou do it not:...worship God." God alone is to be worshipped. And what do we find a little earlier in Revelation? Among other places, in Revelation, chapter 5, at verse 13, we read of all creation crying out, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever." All of creation is worshipping the Lamb—they're worshipping Jesus. Jesus receives worship which is due to God alone, and he accepts that worship, because he is God. He's divine. Being fully God, Jesus receives, and he accepts divine worship. All of these things are spread throughout the Scriptures. All of these clear evidences of Jesus's divinity. He has divine names. He has divine attributes. He has divine power. He exercises divine prerogatives. He receives divine worship. Jesus is God. It's laced throughout all of the Scriptures.

But we want to take the time that we have remaining to look at four specific places in the Scripture, where we see the full divinity of Jesus with particular clarity and power. The first place, and really one of the places where we see the divinity of Jesus most clearly, and most movingly in the Scriptures, comes in the opening verses of the Gospel of John. In John, chapter 1, verses 1 through 4, we read this: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men."

In those verses, John speaks of this figure—the Word. Who or what is this "Word"? Well, that becomes clearer just a little bit later, in verse 14. In John 1, verse 14, we read: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." The Word is the one who became flesh. The Word is Jesus, as John names him in verse 17. So when John refers to the Word in these opening verses, he is referring to Jesus.

Now, John tells us a lot about Jesus in these verses, but I want us to notice just two of them. First, John explicitly says that Jesus is God, verse 1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Word was God. Now, of course, John also says that the Word was with God. And there, John is giving us a glimpse into the doctrine of the Trinity, but

that's a topic for a different set of lectures. Looking just at Jesus, just at the Word, John directly, explicitly says that he is God—he is divine.

But John also tells us something further. Notice how verse 1 starts: “In the beginning.” Those words may sound familiar to you perhaps. That's exactly the way that Genesis 1, verse 1, the very first verse of the entire Bible begins. Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.” When John starts his gospel with exactly the same words, “In the beginning,” he's wanting to bring Genesis 1, verse 1 into our minds. In the beginning, before creation, when the only thing that existed was God himself, the Word was there, and he was God. In fact, as John tells us in verse 3, it was this Word, it was the Son who created, who made all things. So in these verses, John makes it unmistakably clear that Jesus is fully God. He directly calls him God, and he tells us that when only God existed, and then began to create all things, the Word was the one who did the creating. The Word is God—Jesus is God.

This same glorious truth is communicated to us in Colossians 1, so we want to look there as well. In Colossians 1, verses 15 through 20, Paul is speaking of Jesus, and he writes, “Who is the image of invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: 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. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; 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.”

Those verses are filled with the glory of Jesus, the divinity of God the Son. In verse 15, Paul begins by telling us that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. In Jesus, we see the God who is invisible. The God, who no one in the Old Testament could see, is seen in Jesus. When you look upon Jesus, you see the invisible God.

Paul then refers to the Son as “the firstborn of every creature.” Now, this statement gets misunderstood sometimes. Paul is not saying here that Jesus was the first creature born, or the first thing that God created. No, the idea of “the firstborn” has to do with power and authority. Jesus being “the firstborn of every creature” means that Jesus has unrivaled authority and power over all of creation. In fact, in verse 16, Paul tells us why this is—why does Jesus have authority over all of creation? Because, according to verse 16: “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.” Jesus has unrivaled authority over all of creation, because he created all of creation. Paul is at pains there, in verse 16, to make plain that the Son created everything. Outside of God himself, there is nothing that exists that was not created by the Son. And therefore, he has authority over it. If you think back to verse 15, as I mentioned, Paul's statement that Jesus is the “firstborn of every creature,” sometimes gets confused to mean that Jesus was the first creature. Well, given what Paul has said here in verse 16, that simply can't be. If Jesus were a creature, then Paul could not say in verse 16 that Jesus created everything outside of God that exists, because he himself would be a creature that he had not created. Outside of God himself, anything and everything that exists, the Son created. Once again, we see that the Son is God, and he is doing the things that God does.

Paul doesn't stop there, of course, he goes on in verse 17 to say that “by him all things consist.” The Son didn't just create all things, he holds all things together, moment by moment. If the Son

somehow were to withdraw his hand, all of reality would evaporate. It would pass into in nonbeing. All of created reality was not only created by the Son, but it all is held together by the Son. This one is God.

Paul tells us the same thing in a more compressed way, in Philippians, chapter 2, verses 5 and 6. Philippians 2:5 and 6 is part of a larger, more familiar passage of Scripture, and we'll return to that passage in a later lecture. But we want for now to focus just on these two verses. In Philippians 2, verses 5 and 6, we read: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." What does the Apostle Paul, who wrote the book of Philippians, tell us there about Jesus? He tells us that Jesus was "in the form of God." That can sound like a peculiar way to state it, but what Paul is saying is that Jesus is God. Everything that makes God, God, Jesus is. He is in the form of God. He is God. What that means, among other things, is that, as Paul says in the second half of verse 6, for Jesus, equality with God is not robbery. When we speak of Jesus being God, we are not diminishing the glory or the grandeur of God at all. He is fully equal with God. He is, in fact, God. As I said, we'll come back to Philippians 2.

So in the interest of time, we need to move quickly to look at one final passage of Scripture, and that passage is Hebrews, chapter 1, verses 1 through 3. In those verses, we read this: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

Now there are a lot of complexities here that we could explore, if we had more time. But at the very least, we find here that Jesus, God the Son, he is the brightness of the glory of God. He is the image of who God is. When we consider Jesus, when we read the words of Jesus, we are not considering one or reading the words of one who is very exalted, or one who is next to God. When we consider Jesus, we are considering God himself—the one who always has been and always will be the living God. When we read Jesus's word, we're reading the word of one who always has been, and always will be the living God.

In our time together this session, we've looked at a number of things. We've looked at ways in which Jesus is treated in Scripture, being given divine names, divine, worship, and all the rest. We've looked at specific passages that show us the outer margins of the glory of Jesus. And take them all together, and then remember Isaiah, chapter 42, verse 8, where God says, "I am the LORD, that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." The living God of heaven and earth will not give his glory to another. Those who seek to claim it, he strikes down. And then we see Jesus receiving the glory of the living God. What are we to do, but fall down and cry out before him, as Thomas did, in John 20, verse 28: "My Lord, and my God." In Jesus, we have to do with the living God, the one who was, and who is, and who is to come. He is God, and he deserves our worship, and our very lives.

In our next session, we will look at how this one, Jesus, who is fully God, also is fully man.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Dr. Stephen Myers

Module 4 ~ Lecture 3

The Humanity of Christ

In our time together, we've been considering this great question, this most important question in all of life: Whom do you say that Jesus is? If we take the Scriptures as our foundation, whom do we say that Jesus is? And in our last time together, we saw something critically important: Jesus is God. Jesus is fully God, fully divine. So if we ask the question, Whom do you say that Jesus is? A critically important part of the answer has to be that Jesus is God. But there's more to the answer. Yes, Jesus is fully God, but he's also something else. In 1 Timothy, chapter 2, verse 5, the Apostle Paul tells us that we are saved by "the man Christ Jesus." Again, in Romans, chapter 5, and verse 15, we are told that the grace of God comes "by one man, Jesus Christ." Central to Christianity, is the fact that Jesus Christ is fully God; but equally central to Christianity is the fact that Jesus Christ is fully man, that the Word became flesh, as John, chapter 1, verse 14 tells us. This is what we refer to as the humanity of Christ. Christ is fully human. He's fully a man. He is as much human as you or I are, in fact, he's even more human, and more perfectly human than you or I are. But we'll come to that.

When we looked at Jesus's divinity, we saw a host of places in Scripture, where Jesus is treated as or spoken of as fully God. When we come to consider the humanity of Christ, we find the same situation, yet in regard to Jesus's humanity. There are scores of places in Scripture where we are unmistakably confronted with the humanity of Jesus, unavoidably confronted with the shocking fact that Jesus is fully and perfectly human. Often, you might hear people refer to "the incarnation". And that word refers to this fact, that Jesus came in the flesh, perfect in his humanity. *Carne* comes from the Latin for "in the flesh. Jesus came in the flesh. He took to himself the fulness of human nature. He was incarnate. In other words, Jesus is fully a man.

Perhaps the most elementary evidence that he was fully man is that he was born. And we read in Galatians, chapter 4, verse 4, Jesus was "made of a woman," or "born of a woman." Both the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke begin by telling us about this very birth. In Luke, chapter 1, verses 26 through 35, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, who was a virgin, and told her, in Luke chapter 1, verse 31: "Thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS." Mary, of course, is shocked by this. As a virgin, she should not be pregnant, so Mary asks how this is to be, and Gabriel says to her, in verse 35: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Now here, we confront a mystery. We confront, really, a miracle. In the Old Testament, in Isaiah, chapter 7, verse 14, God had decreed through Isaiah that a virgin would give birth to a child, as testimony that God would keep all of his promises. And here is that prophesied birth. A virgin, who should be physically incapable of being pregnant, is pregnant, and she'll give birth to a son.

On the one hand, this very much points to Jesus's divinity, which we discussed last time. He is conceived by the Holy Ghost. He will be the Holy One. In many ways, this points to Jesus's divinity. But it also, just as clearly, points to his humanity. In verse 31, Gabriel says that Mary will "conceive in thy womb." In verse 35, he says that Jesus will be "born of thee." Mary is Jesus's mother, in the same way, and to the same extent that your mother or my mother are our mothers. Think about that. When Jesus came into this world, he came with the genetic information of Mary. Jesus would have looked like Mary. We can't know the details, of course, but perhaps his hair was exactly the same color as hers, or perhaps when he smiled, his smile looked just like his mother's. He was from her womb. Again, as we read in Galatians 4, verse 4, he was "made of a woman." He was born as no other man ever has been born—he was born of a virgin. But he was born, of a virgin. He is fully man.

As fully man, Jesus thus partakes of all that constitutes humanity. He has a real human body. In 1 John, chapter 1, verse 1, John is very clear that the disciples were able to touch Jesus. He wasn't some apparition. He wasn't just appearing like a man. No, Jesus is a man. He had a real human body. In John 20, verse 27, even after Jesus's resurrection, the disciple Thomas is able to feel his body—able to feel even the wounds that Jesus had suffered on the cross. In 2 John, chapter 1, verse 7, John makes a startling statement. He writes: "Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist." Jesus came in the flesh. He was fully human in every way. And to believe or teach otherwise is contrary to the gospel. Jesus is fully man.

As such, Jesus doesn't only have a human body, he also has a human mind. We see that in Matthew, chapter 24, verse 36. He has a human soul, as we see in Luke 23, verse 46. He has a human will, which we see in Luke 22, and verse 42. We will come back to some of those passages in our next lecture, when we think about how Jesus is both fully God and fully man. But for now, we can at least point to them as places in the Scripture where we see that Jesus possesses, Jesus is, all that is involved in being human. There is no part of humanity that Jesus lacks. There's no component of human nature that Jesus lacks. When the Word became flesh, he took to himself a full human nature—a human body, a human soul.

Now at this point, we have to be very clear. Jesus Christ was totally and perfectly free from sin. In Hebrews, chapter 4, verse 15, we read that Jesus Christ is like us in every way, "yet without sin." Or, as Hebrews states it in chapter 7, verse 26: "[Jesus] is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." In 2 Corinthians 5, verse 21, Paul writes plainly that Jesus "knew no sin." It's striking what we read in Matthew, chapter 27, verse 23. There, Jesus is before his accusers, his trial is being considered by Pilate, and Jesus's accusers scour Jerusalem to find one man—one man—who would bring one charge against Jesus. And they couldn't find one, not one. Even those enemies who always were lurking, always were seeking out a false word, always were watching for one slip, they couldn't produce one single thing that Jesus had done wrong. Jesus is perfectly free from the taint of sin. He was holy in Mary's womb—we saw that just a moment ago in Luke, chapter 1—and he remained free from sin his entire life.

Now here, a question can present itself. If all men are sinners, and Jesus was not a sinner, how can we say that he was fully man? We can say both things. We can say that Jesus is perfectly free from sin, and that he is fully man, because sin—fallenness—is not true human nature. It is the distortion of human nature. When Adam and Eve were created in the Garden of Eden, they were fully human, perfectly human, but they were without sin prior to the fall. A body of flesh is necessary to being a man. If you don't have a body of flesh, you're not a man. Sin is not necessary to being a

man. Jesus is fully, perfectly a man, and part of the perfection of his humanity, is that he is without sin. In his full humanity, Jesus actually is what mankind was created to be—holy, undefiled. So we have to be very clear, on the one hand, that Jesus is completely like us—he is fully man. And at the same time, we have to be very clear that he is without sin. To quote Hebrews, chapter 4, verse 15, again, he is like us in every way, “yet without sin.”

But his likeness to us in every other way that we find in Jesus is profound, and it’s complete. He really is fully man. In the Scripture, we see, for example, that Jesus experienced normal growth and development. In Luke, chapter 2, and verse 52, Luke is writing about Jesus, and he writes that “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.” Jesus grew up. He was a toddler, and then he was an adolescent, and then he was a teenager. And all the while, he was growing taller, he was growing stronger. He was gaining a reputation, doubtless a reputation as the kind son of the carpenter. And in Luke, chapter 2, verses 42 to 52, the passage leading up to the verse that I just read, we read about Jesus at age twelve. And at the relatively young age of twelve, Jesus already had such a profound understanding of the Scriptures, that he was able to astonish the religious leaders in Jerusalem with his knowledge. After that passage in Luke, chapter 2, we’re not really told much about Jesus until he was much older, and entering into his public ministry, that period of about three years prior to his crucifixion and resurrection. And when we meet this adult Jesus, we see that he still is in every way, fully man.

While Jesus wasn’t sinful, not fallen, he did have human limitations. After a long day of preaching and travelling, he would get tired. We read of one such instance in Mark, chapter 4, verse 38. Jesus got thirsty, as we read in John, chapter 19, verse 28. Jesus was localized. He was in a place, and you had to come to the spot where he was to see him and to hear him—you had to have a line of vision. This basic facts are laced through the account of Zacchaeus, in Luke, chapter 19, verses 1 through 4, for example. Jesus had human emotions—the full range, in fact, of sinless human emotions. Jesus was joyful; he laughed, and enjoyed time and fellowship with his disciples. We see that in John, chapter 15, verse 11. Jesus loved others, as we see in John, chapter 11, verse 5. He had a particular love, a special love, for his mother, which we see evidenced in John, chapter 19, verses 26 and 27. When Jesus saw the vulnerable, he had compassion on them, as he does in John, chapter 8, verse 7. He pitied those who were in aching need, as we see in Mark, chapter 10, verses 50 to 52. The ravages of sin in a fallen world frustrated him. We see it doing so, in John, chapter 11, verse 33. When Jesus’s friends died, he wept. He does so in John, chapter 11, verse 35. Jesus knew anguish so deep, that only his own holy integrity, and the ministry of the Spirit, and the ministry of angels kept him from collapse, as we find in Gethsemane, in Luke, chapter 22, verse 44. Jesus knew what it was to tremble at the prospect of doing God’s will in hard providences. He faces that trembling in Matthew, chapter 26, verses 36 through 46. He knew the horror, the desolation, of coming under the just wrath of God. We see it in Matthew, chapter 27, verse 46. If there is a sinless human emotion, Jesus felt it.

In all of these things, Jesus was, once again, fully human. He was just like every other man, and any other man in that way. In Isaiah, chapter 53, verse 2, we’re told that the “suffering servant,”—and that suffering servant is Jesus—we are told that [Jesus] hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.” Now that verse doesn’t mean that Jesus was ugly, it means that there was nothing visibly different about him. He didn’t stand out. You could walk past him on the streets of Nazareth, and he would just blend right in with everyone else. He was ordinary. We read in the Gospels, in places like Mark, chapter 6, verse 2, that people were astonished at Jesus’s teachings and his miracles because, to all appearances, he was ordinary.

He didn't look like he should be able to do the things that he did. The people of Jesus's home town, the people who would have known him his entire life, to them, he was just the ordinary son of an ordinary carpenter. We see that reaction in Mark, chapter 6, verse 3.

Jesus was ordinary. He was born. He grew up, all the while experiencing human limitations, human emotions, just like any other man, yet without sin, and then he died. Now, Jesus's death was utterly unique, and we will come to that, but it also had a commonality with all human death. Jesus died. One unmistakable indication that Jesus is fully human is that he died. And he left on the cross a corpse that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had to take down, and bear the heavy weight of it to Joseph's newly hewn tomb. We read of this in John, chapter 19, verses 38 through 42. And that body, that corpse of Jesus, remained there in the tomb until Jesus rose in resurrection power and might. And in his resurrection, Jesus remains—he still is this very moment—fully man.

You see, humanity isn't something that the Son took to himself for his earthly ministry, only to lay it aside at the resurrection. No, the incarnation is ongoing. It never ends. We mentioned just a little while ago, out of John, chapter 20, that Thomas is able to feel Jesus's resurrected human body. The resurrected Jesus is able to eat with his disciples, in John, chapter 21, verses 12 to 14. Now, Jesus's resurrection body seems to be quite different than his body was prior to the resurrection. From what we find in John, chapter 20, verse 19, it appears that Jesus's resurrection body is able to disappear and reappear, for example. So Jesus's human body has new capacities in the resurrection, but it still is his human body. In Philippians, chapter 3, verses 20 and 21, the Apostle Paul writes this: "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Did you hear that? As Christians, our hope, our concerns, our conversation, Paul says, is in heaven, because Jesus is there. And when he comes back, when Jesus returns at the end of the age, Jesus shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body. Jesus's body, even more, Jesus's humanity is what ours will be when we are glorified. Our humanity then will be like his is now.

Jesus was, and he continues to be, and he ever shall be fully a man, perfect in his humanity, from his birth from a woman, through an ordinary life of growth and development, through all of the sinless limitations of humanity, through all of the panoply of sinless emotions to which we are subject, all the way to the last desolation at death, and the tomb, and even the resplendent glory of resurrection—through all of it, Jesus was fully and perfectly human, perfect in his humanity. Jesus didn't come to hover just above the hardships and the realities of life in a fallen world, himself unfallen. Jesus came into this world and was more perfectly human than you or I. And this fact, the fact of the perfect humanity of Jesus, it is absolutely essential to the salvation of God's people. The incarnation is essential, it is necessary for the salvation of God's people. In Hebrews, chapter 2, verses 14 and 15, we read this: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Do you follow the reasoning there? In order to save flesh and blood, the Son had to become flesh and blood. To save men and women, Jesus had to become a man. If Jesus's flesh and blood is not just like ours, he cannot save us. The incarnation was absolutely utterly necessary, because an unincarnate Son could not save his people from their sin. He couldn't die in their place. He couldn't bear their judgment. He had to become man. The same necessity appears in Galatians, chapter 4, verses 4 and 5. There, Paul writes: "But when the fulness of the time was

come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” By being born of a woman—and we’ve discussed all that’s involved in that already—by being born of a woman, the Son came under the law, the passage says. And that coming under the law was necessary if Jesus was to save those who are under the law. Again, in order to save humans, the Son had to be human. The incarnation was utterly necessary for the salvation of sinners.

In fact, the incarnation continues to be necessary for the work that Jesus does not. Later in the course, we’ll discuss the ongoing work of Christ in more detail. But one of the things that Jesus does for his people, that he does for you this very day, is that he intercedes for us. He pleads our cause before the throne of heaven. And in Hebrews, chapter 4, verses 14 through 16, we read this: “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” We are able to hold fast our profession,” verse 14 says, meaning that we are able to stand in the faith, we’re able to come boldly before the throne of grace, finding there mercy and sustaining grace, verse 16 says. Why? Why do we know such comfort? Because our great high priest, Jesus Christ, is fully man. He knows the weaknesses and the limitations of humanity from the inside. Because Jesus is fully man, because of his perfect humanity, Jesus is able to save you and grant you peace to approach the throne of grace even today, because he’s one of us.

Before we close for this session, let me offer you one perhaps uncomfortable challenge that’s set before us, when we consider the perfect humanity of Jesus. As humans, we are expert at blaming our sin on our humanity. We’re jealous of our neighbor because that’s just how humans are. Or we look lustfully, because that’s just what humans do. We’re rebellious against parents, or we are impatient with children, because that’s just how humans are. Or maybe it’s because we’re tired, or lonesome. Brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ, perfect in humanity and without sin, burns all of those lies to the ground. He who is perfect man walked through this life, with all of its fatigue, and isolation, and pain, and he never even skirted the edge of sin. He was holy, harmless, and undefiled. And that means, among other things, that we need to call our sin what it is. It’s sin. It’s not the incapacity of our humanity. It’s sin. And so we need to repent of it, and confess to the one who knew no sin, and who now makes intercession for us at the throne of grace.

Last session, we learned about the perfect divinity of Jesus. Jesus is fully and perfectly God. There never was a moment in which the Son did not exist, or in which he was not the radiant glory of the living God. In this session, we’ve learned about the perfect humanity of Jesus. Jesus is fully and perfectly man. There is no part of our humanity, sin excepted, that the Son did not take to himself, and that is not still his own in the radiance of heaven. Who do we say that Jesus is? We say that he is fully God, and we say that he is fully man. Jesus is fully God and fully man. In our next session, we’ll try to think just a little bit about what exactly that means, and, as far as we’re able to understand, how it works.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

Module 4 ~ Lecture 4

The Hypostatic Union

Imagine entering the spacious ballroom of a wealthy palace. Lining the walls, you see intricately-carved panels of the finest mahogany, and a beautiful marble floor under your feet. But your eye catches something even more exquisite. In the middle of the room, a large chandelier hangs from the vaulted ceiling. It is covered with an enormous white sheet, through which, bright lights shine into the room, illuminating the space. Underneath the sheet, the chandelier is crafted from pure gold, and decked with precious stones that reflect the numerous lights that cover the chandelier. But from the outside, all of that is covered from sight by the sheet. What shines through is the light and the colors through the sheet.

Well, this serves as a simple and even inadequate illustration of the doctrine of Christ's incarnation. In Christ's earthly ministry, much of his divine glory was hid from those who saw him. Not all could see the exquisite beauty of the one who himself is God. But that is not to say that they saw no glory at all. John speaks for the disciples and others when he writes in John, chapter 1, verse 14, "We beheld his glory; the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." The light of the divine glory of his Person shined through, and his followers beheld him, and they worshipped him, as we see in John 9, verse 38.

The series of lectures in this fourth module or course 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 couple of lectures, we have learned that Christ has both a human nature—a true body and a reasonable soul—which he assumed to himself in his incarnation. And we learned that Christ has a divine nature, as one who is the eternal God, the second Person of the blessed Trinity. Well, having considered his two natures, in this lecture, we will explore another Biblical doctrine, that Christ is One Person. He is the God-man, in two distinct natures and one Person forever.

And so in this lecture, we'll be considering this under the fourfold pattern that we've used in many of the other lectures throughout Systematic Theology. We'll consider it scripturally, we'll consider it doctrinally, we'll consider it polemically, and then fourthly, practically.

And so we will begin by looking briefly at a passage of Scripture to open up our consideration of the doctrine of Christ's one Person. In 1 Timothy 3, verse 16, we read these words, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh." God was manifest in the flesh. This is described as a great mystery. A mystery in the Bible refers to something previously hidden and unknown to the sight and knowledge of men, which God graciously reveals to his people. So it is to be believed, though beyond the reach of unaided and fallen reason. Paul says it is "a great mystery," similar perhaps to the doctrine of the Trinity of three Persons in the

divine essence. Indeed, if you have not listened to the eighth lecture in the second module of Systematic Theology, which covers the doctrine of the Trinity, it would prove helpful background to this present lecture. But going back our text in 1 Timothy, it also described this as “the mystery of godliness.” Why?—well, all doctrine, but especially this doctrine, promotes powerful and practical godliness, in all of its aspects. All of this is said to be beyond all dispute and doubt. It’s without controversy, the passage says.

But what is the mystery itself? We are told that God was manifest in the flesh. Well, it’s not speaking of God’s essence in the abstract. And it’s not speaking of the first Person of the Trinity, or the third Person of the Trinity, because what follows in this passage cannot be said of them. It refers to the second Person, the Son, the eternal Word—the one that John describes in the first verse of his Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John goes on to say, in verse 14, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” So that’s parallel to the passage we’re looking at in 1 Timothy, but here, in John 1, it’s “the Word was made flesh.” And so, he is the eternally begotten Son of the eternal Father, from whom proceeds the eternal Spirit. This is why we read in John 8, verse 58, “Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.” And Jesus says, in John 10, verses 30 to 31, in that section, he says, “I and my Father are one.” Well, the Jews understood his meaning, and they sought to stone him, because he claims to be God, because he is God. And so, in 1 Timothy, it speaks of a divine Person, the second Person of the Trinity, before his incarnation, which is another proof of his true and proper deity, as you heard in a previous lecture. The Son of God in his divine nature is, of course, equally as invisible as God the Father. But he was “made manifest,” the text says, he was made manifest by assuming a human nature into union with his Person, so as to be seen, and heard, and felt. The passage says, “manifest in the flesh.” That refers to him taking this whole human nature to himself, consisting of a true body and a reasonable soul. Indeed, the word “incarnation” means literally, “in flesh.” It refers to the humiliation, and condescension of the eternal Son of God, in taking to himself a human nature, and continuing as both true God and true man in two distinct natures, and one Person forever.

Well, this is the central theme to which the entire Bible points. From the beginning, in Genesis 3:15 forward, everything pointed to Christ’s coming. Yes, there were other manifestations of him in the Old Testament, but this text describes the singular event of his incarnation. God purposed in the incarnation to reveal his divine glory. So we read in John 1, verse 18, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” Likewise, in John 14, verse 9, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” The whole New Testament expounds this theme. Christ is the fullest and final revelation of God. The Bible describes Christ as the one “who is the image of the invisible God”—Colossians 1:15; and elsewhere, “Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person”—Hebrews 1, verse 3.

So our knowledge of God is tied to the revelation in the Person of his Son. To be God-centered is also to be Christ-centered. And so it is Christ’s one Person that we will consider in this lecture.

Secondly, let’s consider some of the doctrinal details regarding Christ’s Person, and the *Larger Catechism* will help summarize the doctrine for us. In *Westminster Larger Catechism*, question #36, we learn, “The only Mediator of the covenant of grace is the Lord Jesus Christ, who being the eternal Son of God, of one substance and equal with the Father, in the fulness of time became man, and so was and continues to be God and man, in two entire distinct natures, and one person for ever.” And to summarize, so if we want to boil this down to a single phrase, it’s this language, “two distinct natures in one person.” That’s what we have to have engraved on our minds. Two distinct

natures in one person. Let's consider what this means, what this entails doctrinally.

We'll begin with the two distinct natures. You've had two lectures describing each of them. But we're going to think of them in light of the doctrine before us. Two distinct natures. A nature has distinct attributes, properties, and powers. So the attributes of the two natures in the Lord Jesus Christ are without mixture. We call them "distinct"—two distinct natures. The two natures are without mixture. The two distinct natures are unified in the one Person. So the unity is in the one Person. The two natures remain distinct. And by that, we mean it did not produce a new hybrid nature by this union. So it's not as if the divine nature and the human nature are blended together, and now there's one new nature as a result that's kind of a mix of the divine and human natures—no! that's not what it's teaching, the Bible. It's teaching there's two distinct natures.

Christ is revealed as having all the attributes of deity, and all the attributes of humanity, including a body and soul. Let me describe it in one of the early church creedal statements produced by the Council of Chalcedon. We read in part of that statement, it describes Christ as "One and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial"—or coessential—"with the Father, according to the Godhead, and consubstantial"—or coessential—"with us, according to the manhood." So there's no confusion of the two natures. Chalcedon goes on to say, "one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of the natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ."

Well, this leads to the next clarification, definition, distinction. We're speaking of Christ as one person. So the question I have is this, Who is that person? The answer is this: it is the Person of the eternal Son of God. The divine second Person of the Trinity assumed an impersonal human nature to himself. And so, the person isn't something new. It is the eternal Son. That's important, because when we speak about the two natures being distinct, we need to be clear—there are not two persons, a human person and a divine person. A twofold personality does not exist in Christ. We have no account of the human speaking to the divine, as it were, within Christ. While there is interaction between the three Persons of the Trinity, there is no analogy like that within the Person, the one Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You'll note, for example, that the Scriptures always use singular person pronouns concerning Jesus Christ. This one Person in the union is, in theology, it's called "the Hypostatic Union." It's speaking of a union of subsistence. We've seen that the Son assumed into permanent union with his Person a human nature. But let's be clear now. God the Son did not change in his divine being. God cannot change. He's infinite, he's eternal, he is immutable, he's unchanging. God the Son cannot change in any way with regards to divine being. And so that helps us. We remember the theology that we learned in the second module of Systematic Theology. That means that Christ did not relinquish some of the attributes of God in becoming man and suffering death, and so on. Nor did he divest himself of divine powers. In the incarnation, there was no subtraction, there was no loss to his being as a divine Person. He remained, and always remains the immutable Son of God. But in taking the human nature, it was his in that unique sense.

So to further clarify, he did not assume a human person. The divine Son did not come and then embody a preexisting person called Jesus, whom he indwelt—no, not at all. At his conception, conceived by the Holy Ghost, he took to himself a sinless human nature. And this is a miracle in

several respects; not just the virgin birth, which is a miracle; not just that he was conceived by the Holy Ghost; but all of the other attending parts of what's entailed in this incarnation reveal what is miraculous to us.

We should also see reinforced here that it is a permanent union. Two distinct natures in one person forever, we said at the beginning. So it's not as if while Jesus was on the earth he had this human nature, and then he shed the human nature on his return to heaven—no! He remains forever the God-man. That means that Christ's glorified human nature is locally present in the highest heavens. As some of our theological fathers said, human dust is on the throne of heaven. Romans 8, verse 34, "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." The one who died, and the one who is risen, is also the one at the right hand of God. And so there is one Person, not two. Just as we said there are two natures, not one.

But we can also think a little more carefully about the communication of the properties of these two natures. And here we can turn again to the *Larger Catechism*, question #40, where we learn, "It was requisite that the Mediator, who was to reconcile God and man, should himself be both God and man, and this in one person, that the proper works of each nature might be accepted of God for us, and relied on by us, as the works of the whole person." So it says, "and this is one person...as the works of the whole person." The properties of both the divine nature and the human nature are the properties of the one Person. Therefore, what is ascribed to either nature—the human nature and the divine nature—is ascribed to the one Person. Well, this makes so much sense, when we're reading our Bibles. This enables us to understand the numerous passages of Scripture, where Christ, perhaps with a divine title, can have human properties ascribed to him, or on other occasions, where Christ, in his human nature, has divine properties ascribed to him. Because the properties of both natures are ascribed to the one Person. In all of Christ's actions, it was the God-man, the one Person who was acting. The works of Christ were the works of the one Person. Nevertheless, there is never a confusion or a blending of those two natures. And so we read about Jesus growing in wisdom and stature. We read about the developments that take place in his life, and so on. That's all appropriate with regards to the human nature. And we read about other things that are appropriate to his divine nature.

It is because Jesus is both God and man, that he can be the Mediator between God and man. We'll be learning more about that in the lectures that follow, how, as Mediator, he brings God and man together. We've noted that the human nature of Christ was exalted to heaven at his ascension, where he remains forevermore both God and man. So, to summarize, rather in a condensed way, we can say this: Not two, not one, but two in one. Two distinct natures in one person forever.

Well, next we turn to the polemical consideration of this doctrine, assessing some of the errors related to the doctrine of Christ's one person. You may recall that in the fourth century, the fourth-century debate between Athanasius and Arias, and the difference between orthodoxy and heresy centered on a single letter. The smallest letter in the Greek alphabet, which is the letter *iota*. There was a difference between Athanasius and Arias over this single letter. Why? Because in one Greek word, *homoousios*, the letter *iota* is not found in the middle. Whereas, in the other word, *homoiousios*, contains the letter *iota*. Okay, what does that mean, especially if we don't now Greek? Athanasius affirmed Christ's divine Person. He asserted *homoousios*, which means that Christ was the same substance with God, *homo* means "same," *ousios* means "substance" or "essence." So he was of the same essence or substance with God. Arias denied Christ's divine Person. He asserted *homoiousios*, which means "similar substance" to God, not the same—*homoi*

means “similar.” You also had another character, Eunomius, who asserted *heteroousios*, which means Christ was “of a different substance” altogether than the Father—*hetero* means “different.” So this is an example from the fourth century. You can see how the debates are taking place within the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me give you a sample of some of the early heresies. And why is this important? Not just to know history, but because these provide recurring themes, errors that continue to recirculate from generation to generation. So knowing some of this history enables you to watch for them, to spot them, to recognize and reject them as unbiblical errors. I’ll give you some examples. There were some in the early church who denied the preexistence of Jesus, thus denying his essential deity. So they believe that when Jesus was conceived and born, he came into existence. They don’t believe, as we learned from 1 Timothy, that it was God who was manifest in the flesh. A second error, there were those who believed that God adopted the human, Jesus, a human person, as his divine Son. That’s clearly not what the Bible teaches. Some deny the two distinct natures of Christ. They said, well, Christ is neither divine nor human, but a new singular nature, a combination of the two. And so in that case, you have one person, one nature, if you will. Others when in the other direction, and they denied the unity of the Person, by so stressing the two natures, that it resulted in Christ being two persons rather than one.

Later on, in the Patristic era, there were those who contended that there were two persons, and two natures. You can see that error. Later on, the monophyletists taught that Christ, while the God-man, possessed a singular will. That is in error, because in his divine nature, there is the divine will, and in the human nature, one of the attributes of the human nature included him having a human will as well. And so they failed to recognize the distinction at that point between the two natures. And this gives you some examples of the sorts of errors that continue to circulate.

I want to give you one other example drawn from later in history, the Reformation and post-Reformation period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They had some of the old errors there. You had the Socinians, which were like the Arians, who denied the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. We see the same thing today. There are the Jehovah Witnesses, as they call themselves. They insist that Jesus is man, that he is not God. They deny the Trinity, they deny the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. That was there, and it continues to surface in each generation.

But I want to narrow the scope just to show you how we move from the doctrine of Christ to other doctrines. There was a debate that arose between the Lutherans and the Reformed, and it took place within the context, not in the first instance over the Person of Christ, but rather the debate over the Lord’s Supper. And more specifically, the nature of Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper. So the position of some of the Lutherans taught the ubiquity of Christ’s human nature, that Christ’s human nature was not limited, as it were, as a human nature is, and local in heaven, but that his human nature could be found in every place. So some of the Lutherans have tended to follow some of the errors from the early church on this point perhaps, by claiming the participation of Christ’s human nature in the divine perfections, which were communicated to his human nature at the incarnation. As I said, this controversy arose in the context of debates over Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper. Some of the Lutherans were maintaining that the human nature of Christ, his body and blood, have omnipresent abilities, and thus, are locally present in the Lord’s Supper itself. That Christ’s body and blood is by, with, and under the bread and wine. This doctrine is called *consubstantiation*. Well, Calvin’s position was very different. Calvin, following the orthodox expressions of Biblical Christology, as summarized in the Chalcedonian tradition, with people like Athanasius and Augustine. He maintained the transcendence of the divine nature of Christ,

and the heavenly location of the body of Christ in his human nature. He stressed that even in the incarnation, the finite humanity of Christ was incapable of receiving the full infinite attributes of the divine nature, such as omnipresence, and so on. And he insisted on his in a phrase. He said, “The finite cannot contain the infinite.” With regards to the Lord’s Supper, Calvin insisted Christ is truly present in the Lord’s Supper by his Spirit, but not physically in his human nature present in the Lord’s Supper. So I mention this just as an illustration, as an example of how our understanding of the doctrine of Christ can influence other doctrines as well. The Reformed confessions—Belgic Confession, Helvetic Confession, Thirty-nine Articles, Westminster Standards—all followed Calvin on this point.

Well, we can now draw some practical application for ourselves, briefly. First of all, the doctrine of Christ’s One Person leads us to worship Jesus Christ in his divine glory, as our Lord and King. We should respond as the disciples did. We should worship him as the Person of the Son of God and ascribe to him the glory that is due to his name.

We should also approach the Most High with confidence through our sympathetic Mediator, the God-man. We’ll explore more in future lectures the relationship of salvation to this doctrine, very important, that Christ is both God and man in one Person. That’s necessary for the salvation of sinners. But it’s also a great comfort to believers. Here is one who is God, and therefore knows all things before and after they happen. And he also one who also has a human nature. He knows the frailties and temptations of our humanity. You think of the end of Hebrews 2, and end of Hebrews 4, and all of the consolation that’s derived from the sympathy and compassion of the God-man.

But also, we should listen with fear to what the Lord Jesus Christ says, and to do what our Lord proclaims, because he speaks to us through his Word with divine authority. It is none less than God himself, the eternal Word who speaks to us in the Scripture.

Furthermore, we should seek to be conformed to his image. He is the supreme perfection of all that our humanness entails, that human nature that’s been united to his divine Person. And what is it to mature as a Christian? It is to become more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ, to die unto sin, to grow in righteousness, and in conformity to who he is.

Fifthly, and lastly, we should have jealousy over the orthodox doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ. This requires careful precision, but it is motivated by preserving and proclaiming the true glory of Jesus Christ. Few things should arouse us more than those who contradict the Biblical doctrine regarding the Person of Jesus Christ.

Well, in conclusion, building on the previous lectures regarding Christ’s human and divine natures, in this lecture, we’ve learned that Christ is one Person. He has two distinct natures, and one Person forever. In the next lecture, we’ll build upon this doctrine by considering the states of Christ—his state of humiliation, and his state of exaltation.

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.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

Module 4 ~ Lecture 6

The Offices of Christ

When you meet someone for the first time, one of the questions they will ask you is, What is your name? Your name identifies who you are, and it distinguishes from other people, even people who may be of similar age and background, and family, and appearance to you. Your name sets you apart. In the Bible, names have even greater significance. They were more than a label by which a person was called. Sometimes they described a person's character, their role. And a change in name usually marks something important. Abram and Sarai became Abraham and Sarah. Jacob, which means "deceiver," is called by God, Israel prince of God. In the New Testament, Simon becomes Peter, which means "rock." And there are many other examples we could give.

Well, when we turn to God's names, we learn that they are a revelation of who he is. His name refers to everything by which he makes himself known, in his names, titles, attributes, Word, works, worship, and so on. This explains the importance of the 3rd Commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain. And it explains the importance of the 1st Petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Hallowed be thy name." To know the name of God is to know who God is, and what God does. As we will come to see, this helps us to understand the significance of the name of the Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, and how he executes the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King.

This series of lectures in this fourth module on Systematic Theology is devoted to the study of the Doctrine of Christ. As you've seen, the purpose is to explore what the Bible teaches about the person and the work of Christ. In these last few lectures, we've learned that Christ is God and man in two distinct natures and one Person forever, in both his states of humiliation and exaltation. Well, we now turn to the work he performs in those two estates of humiliation and exaltation. So in this lecture, we'll explore the doctrine of Christ's three offices of Prophet, Priest, and King.

Following our normal pattern, we will first of all begin by looking briefly at a passage of Scripture, to open up our consideration of the doctrine of Christ's three offices. In 1 Timothy 2, verse 5, we read these words, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." A mediator is one who stands between two opposing parties, in order to reconcile them, to bring them together. Well, the greatest enmity in the world lies between the holy God and sinful men. So in order to remove this hostility, God took the initiative by supplying a Mediator in the person of his Son, in order to redeem and reconcile his sinful people to himself. In order to accomplish this, the Mediator himself had to be both God and man. So when we refer to the Mediator in this context, we refer to the God-man. The Mediator is the God-man, the eternal Son of God, who took to himself a human nature.

Well, we have explored what that entails in the last few lectures. So the question is, why, in 1 Timothy 2:5, is the Mediator called "Christ Jesus." Well, the name "Lord Jesus Christ" does not refer to his first and last name, like Mr. John Smith. "Jesus" means "Jehovah saves." So he's given the name "Jesus," because he came to save his people from their sins, as we see in Matthew 1, verse 21. The Mediator is Savior, the one who accomplishes salvation. The word "Christ" is equivalent to the Old Testament word, "Messiah." So John 1, verse 41, says, "We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ." So the words

“Christ” and “Messiah” both mean, “the anointed one.” Christ and Messiah means “anointed one.” Now you think about this. We sing of Christ, therefore, in Psalm 45, verse 7, “God, thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” And we read in the New Testament that Isaiah 61, verse 1, was fulfilled in Christ. What does that passage say? “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek.” Christ was anointed with the Holy Spirit above measure. The concept of anointing is drawing on a familiar Old Testament practice. Men were anointed at their public inauguration to office. More specifically, we learn that three Old Testament offices—prophets, priests, and kings—were anointed to their offices. So it does not surprise us when we turn to the New Testament, to discover that Christ—God’s anointed one—serves as the great and final Prophet, Priest, and King, thereby fulfilling what these Old Testament offices depicted. He was set apart by God and furnished with all authority and ability to carry out these offices.

So to summarize, every time you use the word “Christ,” it is an abbreviated way of speaking of him as Prophet, Priest, and King. In 1 Timothy 2, verse 5, we learn that there is one mediator between God and man, and that that Mediator is the God-man, who is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is Lord—that is, his divine nature. He is Jesus, because he is the Savior. And he is Christ, because he is the anointed Prophet, Priest and King. He brings about the salvation of his people, and their reconciliation to God, through the execution of three offices, in his estates of both humiliation and exaltation. And so it is Christ’s three offices that we’ll consider in this lecture.

Secondly, let’s consider some of the doctrinal details regarding Christ’s three offices. Shorter Catechism, question #23 says this regarding this doctrine: “Christ, as our Redeemer, executeth the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation.” So we’ll consider each office in order.

First of all, the office of Prophet. The prophet was the official messenger of God—an ambassador sent with a word from heaven. They served as the inspired mouthpiece and spokesman of God to his people. They came from God, declaring, “Thus saith the Lord.” Now, when some people hear the word “prophet,” they think primarily of prophetic predictions about the future. Well, it’s true that prophets told about future events, but that was only a part of their ministry. They were sent to reveal the whole will of God to his people. Indeed, the primary emphasis in their message fell upon what God’s people needed to hear in their present circumstances—comforting them in their sorrows; exposing their sins; calling them to repentance and back to God’s law; requiring of them the keeping of the covenant; pointing them to the gospel of salvation; and much more. The purpose of the office of prophet was revelation—God revealed his words through them. The word of the prophets came by his Spirit, and it came regarding everything that concerned his people’s edification and salvation. So this revelation included written, inspired writings, which, of course, the Lord placed in our Bibles. We have the prophecies of Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and Daniel, and so on.

Well, Moses was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. He alone spoke with God face to face. You read about this in Numbers 12, verse 6 to 8. But God told Moses of another prophet greater than himself who was to come. In Deuteronomy 18, verse 18, God says, “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee”—speaking to Moses—“and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.” Well, Peter, when he’s preaching, in Acts 3, verses 22 to 24, proclaims that this text was fulfilled in Christ. He said, “For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.” All the prophets pointed forward to Christ.

But not only did they point forward to him, Christ became God’s last and greatest Prophet. Christ is the fulfillment of all that the prophetic office represented. The Lord Jesus Christ reveals God’s mind and will to us. He reveals our sinful misery, his provision of salvation, and the fruit of thankfulness born in the life of the believer. He serves as God’s final word to the world. We read, in Hebrews 1, in the opening words,

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.” This is why Jesus is called “the truth”—John 14, verse 6. He is called “the Word,” or the *logos*, as you see in the opening of John 1. He is the messenger of the gospel, as we see in Luke 4, verses 18 and 19. He is the one who is “the giver” of the Old Testament, and we could go on and on.

And as with the other two offices, Christ continues as our Prophet in heaven. We read about this in several places. He continues to reveal to us the whole will of God by his Word and Spirit. And this is carried out through the means he’s appointed for the church. We see the exercise of Christ’s prophetic ministry whenever the Bible is read, and preached, and sung. Christ is present by his Spirit, in the church, as our last Prophet. Whenever we hear the inspired Scriptures, we hear the voice of Christ our Prophet. Hebrews 2, verse 12 quotes Psalm 22, verse 22, which says, “I will declare thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.” And Hebrews 2 tells us that these words are fulfilled in Christ, that he’s in the midst of his church. He’s singing even his praise in the midst of his people. So the words spoken from heaven to the three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration remain just as relevant to us today. Remember the words from heaven, “This is my beloved Son in who I am well pleased; hear ye him”—Matthew 17, verse 5. We’re to hear the voice of Christ in the ministry of his Word, executing the office of Prophet.

Secondly, we have the office of Priest. The priest was also a mediator. The Old Testament priest’s role was to represent the people before God. So if you compare the office of prophet with the office of priest, I’ll give you one way of remembering the difference—the prophet primarily comes from God to the people, declaring God’s word to them; the priest primarily goes from the people to God, presenting sacrifice and intercession on their behalf before the Lord. In both cases, we observe the work of a mediator. So man’s sin bars man’s way into God’s favorable presence. So what’s necessary then to gain access? The answer is twofold: a sacrifice, and one to offer the sacrifice. The priest was appointed to present gifts and offerings, sacrifices, and intercessions, and the people themselves before God in pursuit of reconciliation and the expiation of sins. So how can a sinful people approach a holy God? The answer is, through a God-appointed priest offering an acceptable sacrifice, and this is beautifully fulfilled in Christ. He is both the sacrifice offered, and the Priest himself who presents the sacrifice. Both are brought together in him. Hebrews 7, verse 27 says, “Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.” Hebrews 10, verse 12 says, “But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.”

So how does Christ exercise the office of a Priest? First, by his once offering up himself as a sacrifice without spot to God, in order to secure reconciliation for the sins of his people. He did this in his substitutionary atonement on the cross. Christ’s work as a Priest is devoted to our complete redemption. Well, you might think to yourself, “Well, that’s all in the past. Christ offered himself as the one and final sacrifice for sin, which is complete—never to be repeated. So does he continue as Priest in heaven?” The answer is, “Yes, he does.” The New Testament sanctuary and Holy of Holies is not found in a room anywhere on earth, like it was in the tabernacle and temple. We now have the true sanctuary, which is located where our High Priest is found in heaven itself—Hebrews 4, verse 14: “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.” So he appears, as the Lamb of God that was slain, before the Father in heaven, presenting the merit of his obedience and sacrifice on earth, which is applied to all believers. Christ, in heaven, answers all accusations against them, and obtains for them access with boldness to the throne of grace, and the acceptance of their persons and services.

But secondly, he exercises the office of Priest in making continual intercession for his people. Christ continues to serve as the High Priest of his people forever. He intercedes continually, and he does so with compassion and sympathy. Hebrews 2, verse 18, “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.” Hebrews 4, verse 15, “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” God’s people are preserved and perfected through the heavenly prayers of Christ as their High Priest. Well,

we'll actually explore Christ's priestly ministry in his atonement for sin in the future lectures.

Thirdly, we have the office of a King. The king was the sovereign, the ruler, and the protector of the people. In the Old Testament, priests and kings were distinct offices. But we read in Psalm 110 of one to come, who would both reign as king and serve as priest. The New Testament repeatedly cites Psalm 110 as fulfilled in Jesus. God revealed that kings were to represent the Lord himself to his people, and therefore, to have God's heart. So David—David provided the model of a king who reigned under the Lord, pursuing God's interests, God's glory, ruling by God's law. God says David was one who, "kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes"—1 Kings 14:8. But David also had his sins and his imperfections.

In the Old Testament, we read of one king after another, after another, and we're forced to conclude, he is not the one. He is not the great king that is promised. We're left waiting and looking, until at last, Christ appears in the pages of the New Testament, as the true and ultimate heir to David's throne. Christ is the only King who is truly after God's own heart, because he is the divine Messiah. He succeeded in bringing about God's dominion. We see this in the ascension of Christ, foretold in Daniel 7, verses 13 and 14: "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. 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." Well, this text stands behind Christ's great commission, wherein he calls us to take the gospel to the ends of the earth and to disciple the nations, as we read in Matthew 28, verses 18 to 20. Christ is the King of kings, Messiah the Prince. He is the Prince of the kings of the earth. His kingdom will extend throughout the earth. We read in Revelation 11, verse 15, "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, how does Christ execute the office of a King? I'll give you a handful of examples. First of all, by calling people, his people, out of the world. So with the authority, the divine authority of a King, he commands and calls a people out of the kingdom of darkness and bondage under the rule of Satan, and brings them, liberates them, and draws them into the kingdom of light and of himself. Christ, as a King, subdues his people to himself. You know, we begin in a state of sin, and we say with those in the New Testament, "We will not have this king to reign over us." That's where we would be left if Jesus wasn't King. He comes and conquers our hearts, and he subdues us to himself.

We see him exercising his office as King in his kingdom. A king has a kingdom, and he supplies for his kingdom officers, now ministers in the gospel, elders in the church, and so on. He supplies laws for his church. He supplies censures in church discipline in order to govern them. In all of these capacities, as these things are being carried out according to the Word of God, Christ is actually exercising his kingship within the church.

We see him exercising his kingship by bestowing saving grace, and rewards to his people. He's a King who's generous, unlike the kings of this world who fleece the people in order to get for themselves, Christ comes and gives all. And so he bestows grace, and he furnishes them with rewards in this world, and in especially the glory to come. He corrects them, he hems them in, he upholds and sustains them in all of their trials, and in all of their temptations.

As King, he is restraining and overcoming the enemies of God's people, the enemies of Christ himself. He prohibits them, he puts boundaries around what they can do and can't do. And he triumphs over his enemies, whether it's Satan and sin, or hell and death, or whether it's the enemies of this world. He's a victor. He's a triumphant King.

But also, as King, he takes vengeance on those who know not God. And so, in the end, those who resist him and rebel against him, those who oppose him, those who wage war against him, he will defeat utterly and entirely, for his own glory. And so, as Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ executes the offices of a Prophet, Priest, and King.

Thirdly, we need to turn to the polemical consideration of this doctrine, assessing very briefly some

errors related to Christ's three offices. First of all, as Prophet. Christ is God's final Word, and he's given to us, through the apostles and New Testament prophets, the Bible, the New Testament Scriptures. The office of prophet has ceased on the completion of the New Testament. And so those who claim to be prophets in our own day are deceivers, perhaps deceived themselves. We have one Prophet, and he is the Mediator who reigns in heaven. And so we should beware of those who come claiming to be prophets, with new revelations of the Spirit. They're giving us revelations of God that are extra-biblical, outside of the Bible. We dealt with this in greater detail in an earlier module within Systematic Theology, dealing with the holy Scriptures. But we need to beware now, in connection with all that we learned in that module about no new revelations of the Spirit. We need to see how it's tied to the supremacy, superiority, and glory of Christ as Prophet. We don't want to detract from that.

Secondly, with regards to Christ being Priest, we need to reject Roman Catholicism. They claim to have priests, and they have all sorts of priestly ordinances and worship. This is what we call judaizing. They're going back into the Old Testament ceremonial ordinances, and importing them into the New Testament, which is a grievous sin, because those things pointed to Jesus. And with Christ coming as our final High Priest, all of those things are fulfilled in him. And so to bring those things back, the ordinances of sacrifice—Rome refers to the mass as “the fresh sacrifice of Christ”—that's abhorrent to the gospel. And they have all of their priestly robes, and incense, and other priestly actions and worship. These things are not appropriate. They detract from the glory of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. We need to resist them.

Thirdly, there is his kingship. Remember, Christ is King, the King of kings. Some will speak of Jesus as, “Well, someday he will become king; that when he returns he will be king.” No! A thousand times, No! Christ is King right now. Christ is reigning with all power and authority right now. Christ is at work in his kingdom right now. He's extending his kingdom right now. And so, that must be affirmed as well.

Fourthly, and briefly, we can draw a few practical applications for ourselves. When we think of Christ as our Prophet, it should reinforce in our minds the centrality of the ministry of the Word, both in private and public. God's Word is to be read, memorized, meditated upon, studied. God's songs, his Book of Psalms, those inspired songs are to be sung. We do this in our private worship, we do this in our family worship. The centrality of the ministry of the Word. Christ is executing the office of Prophet through these means. And in public, the preaching of the Word. This is central. We never, ever, ever allow the centrality of preaching to be removed from public worship and replaced with all sorts of other nonsense. Christ is coming as Prophet in the preaching of his Word, to declare by his Word and Spirit his will for his people.

Secondly, as Priest, we can derive a great deal of comfort from this doctrine. Not only has Christ secured our salvation in the offering of himself as a sacrifice for sin, but it's especially helpful for the Lord's people to also think of Christ's sympathetic intercessions. What is he doing? He's at the right hand of the Father, praying for his people, efficaciously, right now, right here. What comfort there is in all of our losses, and sorrows, and struggles, and trials, and difficulties, to be able to come by faith, and set our minds in heaven, and by faith to behold Christ, who, with sympathy, and tenderness, and pity, and compassion, and love, is praying for his people to uphold and sustain them. There's great comfort in that.

Thirdly, with regards to Christ as King, the Lord Jesus Christ must be Lord of your life. He is the Savior, but he must be Lord. He is to reign as King over your life. You are to bring yourself in subjection to him. And so that means submitting to his reign, acquiescing in his providential dealings with us. But also, receiving with meekness all that he says. When God comes to us in his Word and says, “Thus saith the Lord,” we're not to resist it, we're not to sidestep it, we're not to excuse ourselves of it. We're to come under it. We're to submit to the reign of the great King.

Well, building on the previous lectures regarding Christ's person, in this lecture, we've learned that Christ, as Mediator, executes the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. In the next lecture, and the ones that follow, we will learn how Christ's person relates to Christ's work, especially focusing our attention on the doctrine of the atonement.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

Module 4 ~ Lecture 7

The Necessity of the Atonement

History has what we might call low points and high points. In some periods, significant developments occur, and in other periods, less notable events seem to happen. But what is the greatest event in history? Well, surely it must also include the most important person or people in history. As Christians, we know that answering this question requires knowing that at the center of history is God's unfolding plan of redemption. Everything else in history serves as window dressing. Everything revolves around and contributes to the purposes of the kingdom of God's Son. Consequently, the greatest period in history pertains to the coming of Jesus Christ. Most of the world even marks the years of time by the designations "BC"—before Christ, and "AD"—the year of our Lord, the years that follow Christ. He is the most important person the world has ever known. And the greatest event in history was Christ's work of atoning for the sins of his people. It is to Christ's work, his work of atonement that we now turn.

This series of lectures in this fourth module on Systematic Theology is devoted to the Doctrine of Christ. We have explored what the Bible teaches us about the person and work of Christ. In the previous lectures, we focused our attention on the person of Jesus Christ. We now turn to consider how the person of Christ relates to the work of Christ, especially the atonement for sin. So in this lecture, we will explore the Necessity of the Atonement, and in the next lecture, we'll consider the doctrinal details pertaining to the Nature of the Atonement.

So first of all, we'll begin by looking briefly at a passage of Scripture to open up our consideration of the doctrine of the Necessity of the Atonement. In Hebrews 9, the second half of verse 26 through the beginning of verse 28 says, "But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many."

The book of Hebrews sets forth the superiority and supremacy of the person of Jesus Christ, and it calls men to saving, persevering faith in his person and work. In the middle section of the book, it focuses on how Christ fulfills the Old Testament types that pointed forward to the glory of Christ, as both the sacrifice for sin and the Priest who offers the sacrifice, when he offered himself as the atonement for sin. Well, this brings us to the culmination of history—the end of the world, as Hebrews 9, verse 26 says. Well, the greatest need of mankind pertains to his sin. Sin separates man from God, placing man in a position of alienation and enmity. Sin brings defilement, and guilt, and a curse, and the penalty of everlasting punishment. As long as man is left in his fallen state, his fallen state of sin, he is without God, and without hope in this world. Man is destitute, and the judgment of God follows man's inevitable death. Only God can provide the solution, which he

does in the sending of his Son. Christ came to deal with sin, to put away sin, to remove sin as the barrier between God and sinners. But how does he do this? He does it by way of a sacrifice for sin. He offers himself as the sacrifice to bear the sins of his people. As Hebrews 10, verse 14 goes on to say, “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”

The gospel is the heart of the Bible, and Christ’s atonement is the heart of the gospel. The New Testament opens with John the Baptist’s declaration, “Behold, *the* Lamb of God,” and it ends with the same image—Revelation 5, verse 12, says, “Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is *the* Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory and blessing.” Well, the rest of the New Testament is devoted to expounding the implications of Christ’s work. This is why Paul says, “For I determined not to know any thing among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified”—1 Corinthians 2, verse 2. Well, over the next few lectures, we will be exploring the Doctrine of the Atonement. It is the necessity of the atonement that we will consider in this lecture.

And so, secondly, let’s then consider some of the doctrinal details regarding the Necessity of the Atonement. We’re introduced to the Doctrine of the Atonement in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 8, paragraph 5. It says, “The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.”

Well, we first need to define our words. We know that the word “atonement” deals with the sacrifice of Christ’s death on the cross, but what does this entail? The atonement secures the remission of sin, the removal of the guilt of sin, the cleansing from the defilement of sin, satisfying God’s wrath against sin, the redemption of sinners. All of this through Christ’s obedience and the shedding of his blood, as the ransom and substitutionary sacrifice for his people. The atonement is Christ’s work that results in the reconciliation of sinners to God. The word, English word, “atonement” puts three English words together. If you take atonement and break it into three parts, at-one-ment. And so, atonement deals with those who were opposed being made one. Those who were enemies are made one. They’re reconciled. And Christ’s atonement was perfectly efficacious. It secured and insured the salvation of the elect. We’ll explore in detail some of these concepts I’ve just mentioned, in the next lecture under the Nature of Atonement. But for now, you can clearly see that Christ’s sacrificial atonement is at the heart of the Christian faith.

Well, we can further distinguish between the objective accomplishment of salvation, and the subjective application of redemption. The former, the accomplishment, speaks of Christ’s work for us. Whereas, the latter, the application, pertains to Christ’s work in us. Christ’s work for us—Christ’s work in us. Redemption accomplished—redemption applied. Well, in these lectures, we’re primarily focused on the objective accomplishment of salvation—Christ’s work for us. In the 5th module on Systematic Theology, we will concentrate on the application of salvation to the believer—Christ’s work in us. But these two things must always be held together in Biblical balance. To focus on one to the exclusion of the other would distort the Bible’s gospel message.

Well, in considering the Necessity of the Atonement, we’ll begin with the sinner’s need—the need of sinners. The word “gospel” means “good news”—the good news of salvation found in Christ alone. But you cannot understand and appreciate the good news without first grasping the bad news about sin and sinners. God is the one who made all things good, and created them for his own glory. God owns what he creates, including mankind. Man is therefore accountable to God and under his authority. Man’s sin erupts in this world from rebellion against God himself, and man

is entirely at fault. Sin, at its core, is not being or doing what God requires. And what he requires is found in the revelation of his Word. So sin is transgressing God's law, or not conforming ourselves to it. First John 3, verse 4 confirms this. It says, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." And there are two sides to this coin. On one side, you have the sins of commission—doing what the law forbids. On the other side, you have the sins of omission—not doing what the law demands. Ultimately, because the law reflects the character of God, to violate the law is to attack God himself. It is open war and rebellion—every sin against God. And this results in catastrophic misery. All the miseries of this life are traced back to the presence of sin. As the Bible says, "The way of the transgressor is hard." But man's sin also results in God's curse for his disobedience—"The wages of sin is death." Well, you may be wondering, Why then do sinners not die as soon as they sin? Well, we need to understand the kind and the extent of death that this includes. We'll note three things.

There's, first of all, spiritual death. Sinners are spiritually dead outside of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is speaking of the corruption of the soul. In Paul's words, man is "dead in trespasses and sins"—Ephesians 2, verse 1. So he lost communion with God and can no longer do anything that pleases God. He is dead to doing good. He can only sin. So people can be physically alive, their heart's beating, their brain's working, they're blinking, and breathing, and all of that sort of thing. You can have a live body and a dead soul at the same time, to be spiritually dead in transgression. So that's the first kind of death.

Secondly, there's physical death, so man's body will also die. In the genealogy from Adam to Noah given to us in Genesis 5, we have repeated over and over the words, "and he died," like the repeated gong of a bell ringing out the death toll. And so sin results in man's physical death. Everyone dies.

But then thirdly, there is eternal death. This is the sentence of eternal death. His soul and body are under the wrath and curse of God, and outside of the Lord Jesus Christ, man's soul and body will suffer the pains of hell for all of eternity. This is eternal damnation—the eternal death that comes as a consequence of sin.

And so that paints the backdrop in terms of man's sin. God reveals himself as the infinitely just Judge. Romans 1, verse 18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." So sin must be weighed against the one who is sinned against. The least sin is a sin against an infinite God, therefore it warrants an everlasting punishment. Tragically, by the fall, man lost communion with God. The heart of the curse is separation from God, both in time, and ultimately eternity. Man's sin brought guilt, a guilty sentence against the objective standard of God's Word. It brought defilement or pollution. The guilt and pollution brought shame. Adam hid himself from God's presence. He covered his nakedness with fig leaves. He was now distant, alienated, and at enmity with God. Shame and disgrace are the opposite of glory and honor. Romans 3, verse 23, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Furthermore, man is thrust out of God's presence. Man is cut off from the presence of God. Isaiah 59, verse 2 says, "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." You can read that whole chapter. All of these truths reinforce the great need from man's side for the atonement for sin.

But there's more, because there are two parties that must be reconciled: God and man. So we must also face the realities that emerge from the nature and character of God. The attributes of God reveal who God is, in his very being, not just what God does. He is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in all of his being. Therefore, his attributes cannot be altered, or diminished, or laid

aside. Because God must be all that he is. He cannot not be God, or cease to be all that he is. So he, for example, is perfectly and unchangeably holy, just, and righteous. He abhors all sin, the least sin, every sin, in every person, everywhere. This creates an insuperable hurdle for man, if left to himself. Man must be saved—saved from sin, saved from himself, saved from hell, but also saved from the wrath of God, which is rightly due for sin. Romans 2, verse 5, “But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”

Sinners—this need that sinners have prepares us for the Necessity of the Atonement. And so secondly, let's think then about the Necessity of the Atonement itself. So we've seen the problem. Man is sinful. He cannot remove his own sin, or the penalty for sin. God is holy, and God cannot cease to be holy and righteous. His justice, therefore, requires the execution of his wrath against all sin. There's no wiggle room in either direction. So what is the solution? Man's own perfection is not an option because it's not within his power, and therefore not possible. It is not an option for God to lay aside his justice, because he cannot change or cease to be all that he is. The solution must account for man's sin, and comply with God's nature. What is needed is atonement, precisely the kind of atonement God provides in the sacrifice of his Son.

So first of all, nothing outside of God himself required him to save. Nothing can be required of God outside of himself. And so, furthermore, God was not obligated by his nature or his honor to save anyone. What's that mean? His decree to save the elect was entirely according to the counsel of his free and sovereign will, his own good pleasure. But, in sovereignly determining to save sinners, that salvation obviously had to correspond to all that God is in his unchangeable being. The way of salvation had to be in keeping with his character as a holy, righteous and just God, not in contradiction to it. So in decreeing to save sinners, it was necessary for atonement to come, by satisfaction of divine justice, through the shedding of innocent blood, by one who was both God and man, standing as a substitute, in the place of God's people. And in doing so, God provides a revelation of himself, through Christ's atoning work. Do you see this? He is showing us who he is through what he does.

Again, God cannot change. His provision of salvation must correspond to his own character. The true gospel is the only means of accomplishing this. Which is why, when Paul teaches the gospel, he says, in Romans 3:26, “To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” Well, how can he remain just, and be the justifier of those who are ungodly? The atonement provides the only answer. His justice is upheld in the full punishment of sin, and the satisfaction of his wrath, by placing it on Christ, as the substitute standing in the place of his sinful people. And in doing so, he also manifests his magnificent love for his people, in giving himself freely, willingly, voluntarily, as the sacrifice for sin. The atonement was necessary. God could not have redeemed his people by merely declaring the forgiveness of sins. No, his justice had to be upheld. Christ's work on the cross provides essential content to the message of the gospel, revealing what he has accomplished for the salvation of his people. The cross is an exhibition of both God's justice, and his wrath. We see in the cross what we sing of in Psalm 85, verse 10, “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”

Well, this reinforces the enormity of the penalty paid on the cross. The atonement was necessary, but it was necessary that it be secured by a mediator who was both God and man. It was necessary that he be God, so that he might sustain and keep the human nature from sinking under the infinite wrath of God and the power of death. He had to be God in order to give worth and efficacy to his

sufferings and obedience, not in the place of one sinner—one for one—but in the place of all of his elect—one for all of his redeemed people. As one who was God, he satisfied the infinite justice of God, purchased a redeemed people, and brought them to everlasting salvation. But it was also necessary that the mediator should be man, so that he could perform obedience to the law in our nature. He had to be man in order to suffer and die as the substitution for sin. The divine nature can't die. And he had to be man as well in order to carry out the other aspects of his mediation on our behalf.

What a remarkable and glorious accomplishment! Truly, this is the greatest event in history. The sight of Christ's sacrifice continues in heaven. Revelation 5, verse 6 and verse 9: "And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne...stood a Lamb as it had been slain...And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and has redeemed us to God by thy blood." This helps us understand the Necessity of the Atonement, looking at it from various angles.

But next, we turn to the polemical consideration of this doctrine of the Necessity of the Atonement. First of all, anyone who downplays the message about man's sin, downplays the glory of Christ's salvation. For those who say, "We don't want to preach about sin; we don't want to emphasize sin; we don't want to talk about the lostness of man, and the damnation that's deserved," and so on, that actually undermines, it strips some of the glory of Christ's glorious salvation. So beware of that.

Secondly, recognize that the denial of the atonement is a denial of the gospel, and therefore the rejection of all hope of salvation. If people decide they want to tinker with the doctrine of the atonement—we'll be learning much more about it in the next couple of lectures—they are on very dangerous ground. They are to say, "Well, Christ doesn't need to be considered a substitute in the place of his people," or, "The shedding of blood is not necessary," or, "We ought not to think about God's wrath being poured out upon his Son," and so on—all of this results in a denial of the gospel, which results in no hope of salvation. And so, let us defend vehemently, strongly this Biblical doctrine of atonement.

Thirdly, we've seen once again that we cannot separate who God is from what God does. These two things are held together. That when we're watching what it is that God is doing, he's actually revealing who he is to us. And we begin with who God is to understand what God does, and what God doesn't do. We've noted that, how the unchanging character of God lies behind the very way in which he atones for sin. It has to be in keeping with his being.

Fourthly, let me just give you a highlight here on some views on the Necessity of the Atonement. There are those who wrongly say that it was not necessary. So the unbelieving, liberal theologians maintain that God is a gracious God, and he can just show mercy without any price, and without any sacrifice, and so on. That's not what the Bible teaches. But then there's this view that God was actually obligated to save men in order to preserve his own honor, that mankind could not perish completely. Now, that too undermines the glory of God. It's not true. God was not obligated to save men. He chose to save men, out of the counsel of his own sovereign and free will, and for his own good pleasure. And there are others who say, "No, no." They reject those two positions I've just highlighted, and they maintain that God didn't have to save sinners, but when he chose to save sinners, he could have save them in a variety of ways. God could have made atonement in some other way—like granting forgiveness by sovereign declaration. The problem with this view is what we saw in this lecture, and that is, how can you have an atonement by simply declaring forgiveness? Because you have to deal with God's holiness, and righteousness, and justice. His

wrath has to be satisfied. So that doesn't present itself as a credible position either. And so you can see how these different angles compare to what we saw in our exposition.

Lastly, we can now draw a few practical applications for ourselves. The first thing is bringing home to our hearts the fact that all sin must be punished—period. All sin must be punished, everywhere, no exceptions. Indeed, all sin will be punished. The question is this—it is either punished in you or in him. It's all punished. But is it punished in you, in everlasting fire in hell? Or are your sins punished in him, in Christ, in his atoning sacrifice upon the cross. Now, that's helpful for ourselves. It's helpful in speaking to others about the gospel as well.

We also find a great deal of comfort in realizing that the source of Christ's once-for-all and final sacrifice is found in the love of God for his people. In the well-known words of John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Or as Romans 5, verse 8 says, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." If we're really soaking ourselves in this doctrine, it should cause the love of God to be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. And our souls, if we're in Christ and saved by his blood, we ought to be experiencing the joy of the love of God toward such unworthy sinners.

Thirdly, and lastly, Paul says, "For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." This is the chief thing in all preaching, in all pastoring, in our personal experience, in our families, and in our lives, Christ crucified at the center. We ought to be adoring Christ's person, and the display of his glory through the work of his atoning sacrifice.

Well, we've been considering, in previous lectures, Christ's person, and in this lecture, we have introduced Christ's work, his work of atonement. We've seen why it is necessary. We've seen how God supplies for that necessity in providing salvation. But in the next lecture, we will dive into the doctrinal details regarding the Nature of the Atonement.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

Module 4 ~ Lecture 8

The Nature of the Atonement

The world thinks of heroes as winners who succeed in triumph. Heroes defeat their foes, break through barriers, and overcome opposition. They always win in the end. So when the world looks upon the story of Jesus Christ, and upon his gruesome death upon the cross of Calvary, they respond with bewilderment, if not disgust. They see his suffering and degradation as weakness and utter defeat. For them, Christ's enemies appear to win. Well, this message is not attractive. It's repulsive to the unbelieving mind. It is the opposite of kingly glory and power. They cannot grasp the idea of God allowing Christ, himself the God-man, the one who is perfect and innocent, to be subjected to all the horrors that his crucifixion involved. Paul acknowledges this in 1 Corinthians 1, verse 23, "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness." The world then and now reacts to the apparent scandal of the cross. But for believing eyes, the opposite is the case. Paul goes on, in verse 24, "But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

The cross of Christ, which sits at the center of Christianity, carries a message with a polarizing effect. We can affirm with Paul, in 1 Corinthians 1, verse 18, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." God gives to the believer the ability to see clearly. Behind the ignoble suffering and death of Christ lies true and ultimate triumph. In his death, Christ is winning the victory over the greatest enemies of the world—over sin and Satan, death and hell—not despite the cross, but through the cross. Here we behold the wisdom and power of God. The cross is Christ's greatest triumph, not his colossal defeat. Well, to better appreciate this reality, we need to understand what Christ's death entailed. That brings us to considering the very Nature of the Atonement, the nature of Christ's atoning sacrifice upon the cross.

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 the Lord Jesus Christ. In the last lecture, we began to consider the work of Christ, specifically the Necessity of the Atonement. In this lecture, we will explore further details on the Nature of the Atonement. And in the next lecture, we will consider the doctrinal details pertaining to the Extent of that Atonement.

So following our normal pattern, we will begin, first of all, by looking briefly at a passage of Scripture to open up our consideration of the doctrine of the Nature of the Atonement. In Isaiah 53, verse 4 to 7, we read, speaking of Christ, "Surely he hath borne *our* griefs, and carried *our* sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for *our* transgressions, he was bruised for *our* iniquities: the chastisement of *our* peace was upon him;

and with his stripes *we* are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of *us* all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”

Isaiah 53 provides us with a vivid prophecy regarding Christ’s sacrificial death. It depicts him as one who “is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” as we see in verse 3. Well, why is he subjected to so much sorrow? We are told in verse 10, “It pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin.” So then the question comes, “But why? Why does God put him to grief as an offering for sin?” At the heart of this passage, we discover the answer. Notice especially the pronouns used in verses 4 to 7: “He hath borne *our* griefs, and carried *our* sorrows: . . . he was wounded for *our* transgressions, he was bruised for *our* iniquities: the chastisement of *our* peace was upon him; and with his stripes *we* are healed. . . . the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of *us* all.” You see the pronouns—*our*, *we*, *us*. Clearly, he was not dying for himself. Christ was suffering, was bruised, and sacrificed, with sorrow and grief, on behalf of his people. The emphasis falls on substitution. He was dying as a substitute in the place of his people. He was bearing the penalty and punishment for the sins of his people—those he came to save. This is exactly the conclusion Isaiah 53 teaches us. In the very next verse, verse 8, we read, “For the transgression of my people was he stricken.” Christ’s death was a substitutionary atoning sacrifice, in the place of God’s people.

Well, in this lecture we delve into the nature of Christ’s atonement, and so secondly, let’s consider some of the doctrinal details regarding the Nature of the Atonement. *Westminster Confession*, chapter 8, paragraph 5, speaks of the atonement in these words: “The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.”

Well, we defined the word “atonement” in the last lecture, where we consider it’s a necessity. Now we will focus more fully on the some of the components that Christ’s substitutionary atonement includes. This also builds upon what we learned about how the Mediator executes the office of a Priest, in a previous lecture. So we’re going to break this down into several points.

First of all, Christ as a Surety. The first concept is that of Christ as our Surety. A surety is one who acts in the place of another. It is one who has become legally liable for the debt or the failure of another, not of himself. So we read in Hebrews 7, verse 22, “By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.” And then verse 25, “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” As our Surety, Christ in every way discharged our debt for sin, being bound to all the judgments and punishments for us. Although Christ was perfectly blameless, he stooped to the office of a Surety to do that which should have fallen upon us. Christ is the Head of his body, the church, and as the federal representative of his people, suffered for them. He was supremely able to discharge our debt to the uttermost, as Mediator, having two natures in one person, the manhood knit to the Godhead. And so we see this concept of surety.

The second concept is Christ as the sacrifice. So a dominant theme throughout the Scriptures is the role of the mediator in offering up himself as a sacrifice. Ephesians 5, verse 2 says, “Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.” As you know, the entire Old Testament sacrificial system pointed forward to this sacrifice

of Christ. Again, the central idea in this doctrine is that of substitution. This is what is meant by a vicarious sacrificial atonement. “Vicarious” means the idea of substitution. Christ is our penal substitute. He’s liable to the punishment for our sins. He is the one who stands in the place of his people and atones for their sin. This atoning sacrifice includes both expiation and propitiation. So we need to define these two words, because they’re theologically significant.

First of all, “expiation” refers to blotting out or removing sin, and more specifically, taking away the guilt of sin. Revelation 1, verse 5 says, “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.” His blood blots out, it cleanses, it removes sin. But then secondly, we have “propitiation,” and this refers to satisfying divine justice and appeasing the wrath of God. We read in Romans 5, verses 8 and 9, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.” Though some object to this aspect of the atonement, it is an indispensable part of the gospel. God, by his nature as a righteous and just God, must reflect wrath toward all sin. That wrath must be removed through Christ’s death, in order to satisfy divine justice. First John 4, verse 10, says, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Propitiation is appeasing divine wrath, satisfying divine justice. And so both of these are necessary.

Well, the third concept is reconciliation, which lies near to the meaning of the word “atonement.” We read in Romans 5, verses 10 and 11, “For if, when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.” Reconciliation refers to the removal of our enmity with God. Christ’s atonement eliminates our alienation from God, and restores friendship and fellowship with God. Well, this is good news indeed! A message proclaimed in the gospel. Listen to Paul’s description, in 2 Corinthians 5, verses 18 to 20: “And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

The fourth concept is redemption. Ephesians 1, verse 7 says, “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” Redemption refers to our deliverance, the payment of a price to buy us back to himself. In the idea of ransom, Christ delivers his people from the bondage of sin, sets them free to serve the living God. This concept was prominent in the Old Testament. You think of the exodus from Egypt, sanctifying the firstborn, or the institution of the kinsman redeemer. But it’s also equally clear in the New Testament. The New Testament also teaches that Christ was the ransom. The price paid for our redemption was the bloodshed of our Savior. Christ refers to himself, in Mark 10, verse 45, saying, “To give his life a ransom for many.” You’ll see the same thing in 1 Peter 1.

Specifically, God’s people are redeemed from spiritual bondage. So unlike the physical bondage of being brought out of Egypt at the exodus, we’re talking about spiritual bondage. And that spiritual bondage is fourfold. One, it is the bondage of sin. So it’s guilt, defilement, and power. For example, we read in Titus 2, verse 14, “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Secondly, redemption from this bondage includes the curse of the law. So Galatians 3, verse 13 says, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is

every one that hangeth on a tree.” Thirdly, there is the works of the devil. Again, 1 John 3, verse 8, we read, “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” And then fourthly, we are redeemed from the bondage and power of death. Hebrews 2, verse 14 says, “That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death.” So this concept of redemption is redemption from a fourfold bondage.

But the fifth concept is obedience. Salvation requires obedience to God. This obedience was necessary, as we see in Hebrews 2, verse 10, and chapter 5, verse 9. Theologians distinguish between two aspects: Christ’s active obedience, and Christ’s passive obedience. Both of these describe the whole of Christ’s work. So 2 Corinthians 5, verse 21, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” So Christ came to do a work of obedience as the last Adam, and as the chief servant, which many Scriptures teach us. Think about this—sinners must be saved from the guilt of sin. When I say “guilt,” I’m referring to objective guilt, not the guilty feeling, that subjective thing, but being declared guilty objectively as having violated God’s law. So sinners have to be saved from this guilt, and this guilt includes at least two things: being worthy and deserving of punishment, and secondly, an obligation and binding over to that punishment. So we owe to God a double debt. A debt of obedience, and if that fails—which it does—then a debt of punishment. Christ freed us from both of these debts, first, by obeying in our place the will of his Father in everything; and secondly, by suffering in our place what was due to us for our transgressions.

Well, this clarifies the significance of Christ’s active and passive obedience. So first of all, we have his active obedience, that is, Christ’s fulfilling what the law requires, and obtaining a record of perfect righteousness. So God requires perfect obedience to his law. Christ, in his life, obeyed, on behalf of his people, all the precepts of the law. The full requirements and demands of the law and his Father’s will, thereby obtaining a record of perfect righteousness, in our humanity, a record of perfect law-keeping. Christ’s perfect righteousness is then credited, or imputed, to the account of his people, and received by faith, as the ground of their acceptance with God in their justification. So that’s active obedience, Christ’s active obedience, part of his atonement.

Secondly, we have Christ’s passive obedience, that is, his suffering the penalty that is required by the law, so the penalty required for violating the law. God’s law also demands a just punishment for sin. Christ paid the penalty of the law and bears its curse in the place of his people. Philippians 2, verse 8, “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Well, this provides for the remission of sins, forgiveness of sins, the expiation of our guilt, and the appeasement of the wrath of the Father. And so obedience is the last concept we’re considering regarding the atonement.

In summary, notice how Christ’s atonement corresponds to all our needs. We spoke about Christ as our sacrifice—that deals with our problem of guilt and God’s wrath for our sin. Secondly, we considered reconciliation, Christ’s atonement securing reconciliation—that deals with our problem of enmity and alienation from God. We spoke about redemption—that addresses our problem of bondage. And then lastly, we discussed obedience as part of the atonement—that addresses our problem of the demands of God’s law, positively and negatively. Well, in each of these points of doctrine, we learn about the nature of Christ’s sacrificial and substitutionary atonement. This opens up the heart of Christ’s work, which is displayed in the proclamation of his glorious gospel of good news to sinners.

Well, thirdly, we turn to the polemical consideration of this doctrine of the Nature of the Atonement. First of all, every attempt to jettison the substitutionary nature of Christ’s atonement

attacks the core of the gospel. Some object to it being unfair, or unjust, to punish the innocent in place of the guilty. But Christ was not compelled to suffer a unwilling victim. He freely, voluntarily took the place of his people, and exhibited his infinite, divine love in doing so. It is love that shines forth in substitution.

Secondly, others wish to avoid the notions of guilt, the demands of divine law, liability to punishment, and the requirements of a blood-shedding sacrifice. Well, this ignores the nature of man's need, in light of the nature of God's character. You cannot hold to the Bible and reject these notions, which the Bible clearly teaches. The good news is seen to be good news because of the backdrop of the bad news about man's fallen predicament. As we saw in the last lecture regarding the Necessity of the Atonement, these things which people find unseemly and objectionable are very much necessary in order to save sinners.

Next, you should be aware of a few of the erroneous theories of the atonement that have arisen in history. I'll mention them very briefly. There was the ransom theory, and this idea was that Christ paid a price to Satan, that he bought off Satan, as it were, in exchange for his people. Well this reeks havoc with everything we've learned about the Biblical doctrine of the atonement.

There was the governmental theory of the atonement, which said that God was simply demonstrating his displeasure with sin in the death of Christ, but there was no satisfaction or representation in that atoning work. Well this too, as you can see, attacks the very core of the gospel.

There was the mystical theory of the atonement. This denies the necessity of a blood sacrifice, because sin is simply moral weakness, not something that incurs guilt. The Bible tells us that it incurs guilt.

Lastly, the moral theory said that Christ died as a great example to men, as a martyr of truth. So there's no atonement, no redemption, no sacrifice, no substitution at all. He's like any other martyr that's died in history. And if that's the case, then there's no gospel at all, and every sinner born as a son or daughter of Adam is lost forever.

Well, fourthly, we can now draw some practical applications for ourselves. First of all, think of Paul. Paul was a remarkable man—very gifted. Many would say he had many things in which he could have gloried. But he says himself that he gloried in one thing, and one thing only—the cross of Christ. This sets an example for us. You should make meditation on the cross the constant exercise of your soul. We have only touched on some of the basic truths in this lecture, but there are inexhaustible depths for you to see, and learn, and know.

Secondly, the Christian continues to battle with the presence of sin in their lives. What that means is that we are brought back to Christ's atonement on a daily basis, rehearsing all that he's done to save his sinful people, leading us to plead afresh his blood, and to find shelter in the forgiveness of sin that he has provided. These doctrines are never far from us in our daily lives.

Thirdly, all of these truths should not merely supply information for our heads. They should transform our lives. These doctrines must lead to doxology. They must lead to worshipping and adoring the Redeemer with wonder and with grace. We are led to say, in the words of Revelation 5, verse 12, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." These doctrines lead us to worship the Lord Jesus Christ, as the God-man, as the Redeemer of his sinful people.

Well, in conclusion, in these last two lectures, we have been considering Christ's work of atonement. In the last lecture, we saw why it is necessary, and how God supplies for that necessity in providing salvation. In this lecture, we explored the doctrinal details of the Nature of the

Atonement. Well, in the next lecture, we'll dive into the Extent of the Atonement, which addresses the question, For whom did Christ die?

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

Module 4 ~ Lecture 9

The Extent of the Atonement

When a young man comes into mature adulthood, he usually begins to consider marriage. In surveying the possibilities, he singles out a certain young lady, which with the Lord's blessing, eventually leads to securing a wife. In marriage, a man sets his whole heart on one woman, and on one woman only, one woman who is distinguished from all others. He commits himself to his wife, whom he loves, and serves, pursues, and for whom he sacrifices all lifelong. He is kind to other women, but he has a special, unique love for one only, the woman with whom he has entered a marriage covenant. She stands apart, and must do so from all others in his heart and devotion.

Well, God created the institution of marriage, at the beginning of time in the garden of Eden. But it was designed to point to something higher and greater, namely, the relationship between Christ and his bride, the church. This becomes clear throughout the Bible in the Psalms, and Proverbs, the Song of Solomon, the Prophets, the Gospels, epistles—note especially Ephesians 5—and all the way to the end, in Revelation 21. Christ seeks and secures a bride through his atoning sacrifice in the proclamation of that gospel. He weds himself to her in the covenant of grace. He chiefly has eyes for one only, a saving and eternal love for his redeemed people.

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 the Lord Jesus Christ. In the last couple of lectures, we've focused on the work of Christ, specifically his atonement. We've learned about both its necessity and nature. In this lecture, we will explore the Extent of the Atonement, which addresses the question, For whom did Christ die? The answer given in the Bible is that the Lord Jesus Christ offered up himself as an atoning sacrifice for a particular people, to secure definitively the salvation of a specific people from their sins.

Well, first of all, we'll begin by looking briefly at a passage of Scripture to open up our consideration of the doctrine of the Extent of the Atonement. John 17 is often called "Christ's High Priestly Prayer," and for good reasons. It records intercessions of Jesus on behalf of his people, which, as we learned in our sixth lecture, is one of the ways Christ executes his office as a Priest. John 17 is actually the longest recorded prayer of Christ in the Gospels. We're enabled to listen in on Christ's communion with his Father, and thereby to peer into the heart of the Lord. Hear what Christ says, in John 17, verse 9: "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine." Christ explicitly distinguishes between those for whom he is praying, and those for whom he is not praying. He states clearly that he is not praying for the world. Well, this is consistent with what we learned from the Old Testament. For whom did Aaron and the other priests that came after him pray? Well, they did not pray for the world at large—the

Egyptians, Amorites, Philistines, and so forth. They interceded for God's own redeemed people. They represented Israel before God and presented petitions on their behalf. You will recall how the names of the twelve tribes were engraved in stone upon the breastplate of the high priest, borne, as it were, over the heart of the high priest, and brought before God's presence in the Holy Place. The smoke that rose from the golden altar of incense pictured the prayers of the saints of God's people. We see that Psalm 141, verse 2, and Revelation 8, verses 3 and 4.

So for whom was Christ praying in John 17? He says, "I pray for them... which thou hast given me; for they are thine." He is speaking of a specific people, the elect, those he came to save, those who belong to the Father and to the Son. At the beginning of the prayer, Christ says in verse 2, "That he"—that is, Christ—"should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." And you will notice how this reference to those the Father gave to the Son, as distinguished from all others in the world, can be traced through the whole prayer. We read in verse 6, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word." And again, in verses 11 and 12: "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me... I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled." Toward the end of the prayer, we read in verse 24, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." So the Father gave to the Son a particular people. Christ came to secure the salvation of those the Father gave him. Those who were given to him will be saved and will never be lost. And so he prays for this chosen, redeemed people.

Well, this builds on what Jesus teaches us earlier in John's Gospel. Christ says, in John 6, verse 44, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." Verse 65, "Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father." Likewise, in John 10, Jesus reveals that he is the great shepherd who comes to save his sheep, a particular people. We read in John 10, verse 11, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." And then in verses 28 and 29, "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

All of this reflects the design of Christ's atonement. He came to secure definitively the salvation of a specific people. He died to save a chosen people, and they will be saved. Those he saves can never perish. They are both purchased and kept by his divine power. And his prayer in John 17 reflects his efficacious intercessions for them. Well what we learn of Christ in the Gospels informs how we should continue to think of him now. Christ remains the same yesterday, today, and forever. The difference between the time Christ prayed the words of John 17, and today, reflects a change in his location—from earth to heaven—but it does not reflect a change in his heart. How does the ascended Christ intercede for his people from the throne of glory? John 17 provides part of the answer. In unbreakable love, he continues to pray for a particular people—his bride, those the Father gave to him, those he came to redeem.

Well, in this lecture, we will explore further what the Bible teaches regarding the Extent of the Atonement. So secondly, let's consider some of the doctrinal details regarding the Extent of the Atonement. In the last lecture, we learned that at the heart of the Nature of the Atonement is the idea of substitution. Christ's sacrifice was a substitutionary, or vicarious, atonement. He took the place of sinners in paying the penalty and punishment for their sin. The question before us in this

lecture is this: For whom was he a substitute? For whom exactly did he die? For whose sins did he atone? Who are the intended recipients of the blessings of the atonement? The Bible teaches us that Jesus did not die for all the sins of all men. He atoned for the sins of his elect. He died for those who were chosen by the Father to be redeemed by the Son. We are introduced again to the doctrine of the atonement in *Westminster Confession*, chapter 8, paragraph 5, which says, “The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.” That last phrase, “for all those whom the Father hath given unto him,” is relevant for this lecture.

We first need to define some of our terms regarding the Extent of the Atonement. This doctrine is sometimes called Limited Atonement. The word “limited” can be easily misunderstood. It’s not limited in its power. It’s limited in its scope, that is, it’s scope was designed to save a specific chosen people, not all men indiscriminately. But it is unlimited in its power, that is, Christ’s atonement absolutely, successfully, and certainly secures the salvation of those for whom Christ died. This doctrine is also called Definite Atonement—Christ atoned definitively for a definite people. The doctrine is also called Particular Redemption—Christ redeemed a particular people in his death on the cross. You can see how all of the names for this doctrine convey the same point.

Well, in considering the doctrinal details, let’s begin, first of all, by recognizing we need to state clearly the question before us, and to distinguish that issue from what we’re not asserting. This will introduce and open up the topic for further consideration. First of all, consider what is not being questioned. The Bible affirms that the gospel is to be proclaimed to every last person in the world. The Bible affirms, secondly, the overtures of salvation are extended indiscriminately to all those who hear the gospel. The gospel offer goes to all men. Thirdly, the sufficiency of Christ’s work is not being questioned. Is his atonement sufficient to save more people? Well, his atonement is of infinite sufficiency, to save not only all mankind throughout the history of the world, but a thousand worlds beyond that and more. So we’re not talking about the sufficiency of Christ’s work.

Secondly then, so what is being stated in this doctrine? Well, a handful of things, by way of introduction. As we’ll see in a moment, the Extent of the Atonement is rooted in the Nature of the Atonement. We’ll come back to that. Also, since all Christians believe that not everyone goes to heaven, the question is, Who limits the atonement?—God? or man? And the answer is, God does. It would be impossible if left in man’s hands. Furthermore, the sin of unbelief is found in every sinner, so Christ must die for the sin of unbelief, and the gift of faith must be purchased and secured in the atonement itself. We’ll have more to say about that as well. Also, Christ’s love for his own bride is different from his disposition toward the rest of the world. And lastly, there cannot be a double payment, meaning, Christ does not pay for the sins of all men, and then some sinners, unbelievers, pay for that same sin again in hell. That’s not possible. So with those brief thoughts, by way of introduction, we can begin to unpack the details of this doctrine.

Secondly, we need to think about the relationship of the Nature of the Atonement to the Extent of the Atonement. We intentionally covered the Necessity and Nature of the Atonement before considering the Extent of the Atonement. The reason is important for you to understand. The Necessity of the Atonement supplies the background regarding the desperation of man, being spiritually dead and lost, and in a helpless condition. Those doctrines contribute to our understanding of the Extent of the Atonement. In other words, man cannot be saved, if left to himself without God’s divine initiative. But perhaps even more importantly, questions about the Extent of the

Atonement are actually rooted in the very Nature of the Atonement. So understanding the Nature of the Atonement, which we covered in the last lecture, informs and directs our view of its extent to whom it applies. In other words, the truth about the Nature of the Atonement determines the Extent of it. You ask, “Well, how so? What exactly do we mean?” In brief, we mean this: Christ was a real substitute for a real people. He did not die merely to create a hypothetical possibility of salvation. No, his atonement actually secure, guaranteed, and accomplished the successful redemption of his chosen, purchased people.

Well thirdly, let’s think about this idea of particularism, that is, the atonement referring to a particular people. Because the whole Bible teaches this particularism, that God provides atonement for his chosen people. We see it in the Old Testament. You need to see that your understanding of these New Testament concepts will be very limited without a thorough grasp of the Old Testament theology. The revelation of God’s plan of redemption began in Genesis 3:15, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” We’re told from the start that Christ would be given a specific seed, and that he would crush the head of the serpent on their behalf, which comes to full fruition in Christ’s incarnate work. In the process, we’re told Christ’s heel would be bruised—it’s a reference to his work on the cross. We read in 1 John 3, verse 8, “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” This is further confirmed, for example, in Colossians 2:15, “And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly triumphing over them in it.” In the whole history of the Old Testament, we’re told of this grand work, and the New Testament spells out the fulfillment in Christ.

In the Old Testament, God, out of the counsel of his own will, chose a particular people for himself, as distinguished from the rest of the world, and he provided salvation for them. For example, Deuteronomy 7, verses 6 to 8, says, “For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all the people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” The whole sacrificial system which pointed to Jesus Christ, taught the same truth. This is an important point. The sacrifices, those pictures of atonement, were applied to a particular people, not to all men indiscriminately throughout the world. We could consider a host of other texts. For example, you’ll remember the pronouns used in Isaiah 53, which we pointed out at the beginning.

Well, we see the same in the New Testament. From the opening page, in Matthew 1, verse 21, “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.” We see the same thing taught in John 10, verse 15, “I lay down my life for the sheep.” We saw it throughout Christ’s High Priestly Prayer in John 17, that he makes repeated reference to those whom the Father had given him, and that he said in verse 9, “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.” Paul charges the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, verse 28, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” Well, we could provide more texts, but this should suffice. The whole Old Testament and New Testament teach that Christ died and atoned for the sins of a particular chosen people.

Fourthly, this doctrine fits within the broader context of what the Bible teaches about man's total depravity, and his spiritual inability, as well as God's election, his sovereign choice of his people. The whole Bible fits together as a perfect and consistent whole. If you have not gone through the earlier modules on Systematic Theology, I would encourage you to go back and listen to the second module, specifically, lecture 10 on the Doctrine of Predestination, and in the third module, specifically on the Doctrine of Total Depravity. We can't review all of that material here, but it's extremely relevant to understanding the Extent of the Atonement. The point is that all of these doctrines are dovetailed together.

Fifthly, let me tie these threads together by laying out the Biblical doctrine as a whole. John Owen, seventeenth-century English Puritan and Reformed theologian, spells this out very clearly and concisely. Listen carefully, and try to follow along with what he says:

The Father imposed his wrath, and the Son underwent punishment, for either 1) all the sins of all men; 2) all the sins of some men; or 3) some of the sins of all men. In which case, it may be said, 1) that if the last be true, that Jesus died for some of the sins of all men, then all men have some sins to answer for, and so none are saved. Well, that cannot be true. Secondly, that if the second be true, Christ died for all the sins of some men, then Christ, in their stead suffered for all the sins of all the elect in the whole world, and this is the Biblical truth. But then thirdly, if the first case be true, that Christ died for all the sins of all men, then the question is, why are not all men free from the punishment due unto their sins. He died for the sins of all, then they all should be saved. Well, some might answer, "Well, because of unbelief." Then we ask, Is this unbelief a sin, or is it not? If yes, it is a sin, then Christ suffered the punishment due for it, or he did not. If he did not suffer the punishment for the sin of unbelief, why must that hinder them more than their other sins for which he died? If he did not suffer the punishment for the sin of unbelief, he did not die for all their sins.

Well, you can see and appreciate the full force of Owen's argument, which proves that Christ died for all the sins of some men, all the sins of God's elect people. This includes their sin of unbelief. He thereby secured a complete and comprehensive salvation for his own people.

Well, thirdly, we turn to the polemical consideration of this doctrine of the Extent of the Atonement. In doing so, we'll deal with the error of Arminianism. First of all, the error of Arminianism teaches that Christ died for the sins of all men. If he truly atoned for the sins of all, then all should be saved. How could they perish if Christ paid the penalty for their sin? This does not comply with the teaching of Scripture.

Secondly, Arminians also do not understand the relationship of the Nature of the Atonement to its Extent. And so they assert that Christ died for the potential possibility of salvation of all men, if sinners respond with faith, and believe the gospel. But if Christ's atonement was only a possibility, then it was possible that none would believe and be saved, and therefore possible that Christ's atoning sacrifice would be a complete failure. This also contradicts the teaching of Scripture. The omnipotent God could not fail in his intentions. This false doctrine grants all the power to man, and strips God of his power.

But thirdly, it is even worse. Think of the implications of this error. Not only would the atonement possibly fail, it would most certainly fail, and none would be saved. Its success would depend on men having faith to believe, but the natural man is dead in trespasses and sins, and he's ignorant and blind. He's completely unable to believe. Faith must be given as a sovereign gift from God, as we see in Ephesians 2. As we heard a moment ago, Christ died for the sin of unbelief in his people, and purchased for them the gift of faith. This could only apply to his elect, whose salvation Christ himself secured.

Fourthly, can draw a few practical applications for ourselves. Let me illustrate the implications of this doctrine for Christian experience. Let's return to the illustration with which I opened at the beginning of the lecture about a young man seeking a wife. What would you think of a husband that told his wife that he loves her, but he also loves all of the other women in the world just as he loves her. You would be terribly offended, and rightly so. Well, this applies to Christ's atonement. When the Christian looks at the cross, he sees Christ's particular love for his bride, not a generic love for a nebulous, undefined mass of humanity. Christ carried his specific people on his heart, and in his mind, when he offered himself as a sacrifice for their particular sins, all of them. In love, he secured and guaranteed their salvation. Well this is a great aid to the assurance of God's love. Christ was securing the atonement for my sins, in love. This is not a cold doctrine. These truths warm the heart of every believer.

Secondly, this doctrine shows us that the good news of salvation is all of grace, from beginning to end, and top to bottom. God takes the initiative. He provides everything. He guarantees the whole of our salvation. Christ's atonement is perfect and complete. The gospel is God giving to us what we do not deserve and could not obtain ourselves. And since all comes from God, all the glory must go to God. We are led to magnify and bless his glorious name for the abundant riches of grace found in the gospel. There is no God like our God and like our Savior.

Well, in conclusion, in the earlier lectures, we focused our attention on the doctrines related to Christ's person, as the incarnate Word, the God-man, in two distinct natures in one person forever. Over these last three lectures, we have considered the doctrine of the Atonement, its Necessity, its Nature, and its Extent, all pertaining to the work of the Mediator. In the next and final lecture, we will conclude our study of Christology with a consideration of the Preeminence of Jesus 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.¹ 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.