

Systematic Theology: The Doctrine of Christ

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The Doctrine of Christ—Table of Contents

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Christology—the Person and Work of Christ

I. Introduction

To place the doctrine of Christ after the doctrine of man (anthropology) would seem to be out of logical order, but this is precisely the order in which we find these subjects in Scripture. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” In Genesis 2, man is presented as the crown of creation followed by man’s fall in Genesis 3. In Genesis 3: 15, the seed of the woman is promised who would come and crush the head of the serpent. From that point on we have an Old Testament which focuses primarily on man and the dreadful condition of sin into which man had fallen. Throughout the OT, we find glimpses of the promise of a redeemer who will come and save man from the horrors of sin and condemnation, but this redeemer does not show up in person until the NT and the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Thus, we treat anthropology before Christology because Christ is the solution to man’s needs.

The NT shows us that Christ came to do for us what our first federal head, Adam, failed to do. God had told Adam to keep His word, and as long as he did so, he and all mankind with him would be confirmed in perpetual blessing in the Garden of Eden. It would be literally heaven on earth. Adam failed in this probation, and by failing he brought all his posterity into sin and ruin with him. Christ was incarnated in human flesh as the second Adam, and in contrast to the first Adam, He lived as the perfect Son of God in whom God the Father was well pleased. By His active righteousness in keeping the will (law) of God perfectly, he took over Adam’s place as the new federal head for all those who have faith in Him. And as death came into the world by Adam’s failure, life from the dead is accomplished through Christ’s success. By His passive righteousness in dying on the cross, He also paid the penalty of sin for every individual who trusts in His atoning blood.

II. Names of Christ

A. Son of Man

When Jesus was betrayed and placed into the hands of the Jewish authorities, the high priest challenged Him with this statement, “I adjure You by the living God, that you tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God” (Matt. 26: 63). Christ did not hesitate to answer, “You have said it yourself...” (v.64). Actually, the word “yourself” does not occur in the original Greek. The verse literally reads “You have said it...” In other words, “You are right!” Jesus was exactly the one the high priest was talking about. But not to leave the answer in any doubt whatsoever, He continues, “...nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” At that point, the high priest didn’t need to hear anything else to make his accusation of blasphemy. By identifying Himself with the Son of Man in Daniel 7, He identified His kingdom with the kingdom of God. James Denney’s words are to the point.

This description of His majesty is borrowed from Dan. 7: 13ff and it...is the basis on which the conception of the ‘Son of Man’ rests. Daniel’s vision contains, in the briefest outline, a religious philosophy of history—a sketch of the rise and fall of powers in the world till the final sovereignty comes. The prophet sees four great beasts come up from the sea and reign in succession. What they have in common is that they are beasts—brutal, rapacious, destructive. But they have their day; the dominion they exercised is taken away from them; it is transferred—and here the vision culminates [comes to conclusion]—to one like a son of man. The brute kingdoms are succeeded by a

human kingdom, the dominion of selfishness and violence by the dominion of reason and goodness; and this last is universal and everlasting. This is the historical antecedent of that name, once so intimate and so mysterious, which Jesus appropriated [took] to Himself—the Son of Man....He intimated [implied] to those who were able to understand it His consciousness of being head of a new, universal, and everlasting kingdom, in which all that was truly and characteristically human [as opposed to beastly] should have authority. The wild beasts had had their time; now the hour had come for the dominion of the human; man claimed his sovereignty in Jesus” (James Denney, *Studies in Theology*, pp.36-37, emphasis his, quoted in class syllabus for Systematic Theology, vol. 2, pp. 2-3, Douglas F. Kelly).

In the above quotation, Denny makes reference to the human kingdom over creation which Adam had enjoyed as God’s vice-regent or earthly king. After he rebelled against God’s authority, Adam then lost much of his authority over the creation. This becomes evident in the fact that the earth no longer readily yields its fruit to his efforts of cultivation, and in the fact that the beasts of the earth are no longer on good terms with man. In the final and universal reign of Christ, the true humanity of man is restored to God’s original intention (Col. 3: 10; Eph. 4: 24) and man rules over the earth fully as he did in Adam while remaining in submission to Christ, the God-man. In other words, Christ came to restore the kingdom which man lost at the fall.

B. Son of God

Jesus is also the Son of God. He does not use this title for Himself in the Synoptic Gospels, but other voices use this designation for Him (God the Father in Mark 1:11 and Mark 9: 7; Satan in Matt. 4: 6; and demons in Lk. 4: 41). Jesus calls God “Father” four times in Mark and 28 times in Matthew, but in John He speaks of God as His father 106 times (Kelly, p.4). The sonship of Christ is the “ ‘central Christological idea in John, and he writes his Gospel to make explicit what was implicit in the synoptics’ ” (G. E. Ladd, *New Testament Theology*, p. 247, quoted in Kelly, p.4).

Kelly (p.4) also makes note of the fact that Jesus never speaks of God as “our Father” which would place him in the same relationship with God as His disciples. Rather, He refers to God as “My Father”. For example, in Jn. 20: 17, He says to Mary, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to My God and your God.” His knowledge of the Father is an exclusive knowledge that only He possesses (See Jn. 6: 47; 10: 15).

C. Lord (Kurios)

In the Greek translation of the OT (the Septuagint), the word “kurios” is used as the translation for various names of God (Yahweh, Adonai). It is used some 6156 times for the name, Yahweh. In the NT, the word “kurios” is used for God in OT quotations (Mk. 1:3; 12: 11; Acts 2: 34) (Kelly, p.6). Jesus’ lordship is attested throughout the NT with the words “Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 8:6 being only one reference among many) (cf. John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, pp. 141-142).

III. Prologue of the Gospel of John

The prologue of John’s gospel is obviously a reference to Genesis 1 and the creation account. Notice the words, “In the beginning”. The “Word” is clearly a reference to Christ. The Word was in the beginning before creation. The Word was with God (“pros ton theon” or face to face with God). The Word was God. The word “was” is imperfect tense which indicates continuous action in past time rather than an action which took place at a definite point in time. In other words, Jesus was always

the eternal and unchanging being of God. This is to be contrasted with the aorist tense found in v.6 when John says, “There came a man, sent from God whose name was John.” This verse could read, “There came into being....” In other words through the use of the Greek tenses, John is careful to indicate that Jesus never came into being, but eternally “was.” While we are taken to the beginning of creation in the book of Genesis, in the Gospel of John we go beyond the beginning of creation to the eternal Word of God (B. F. Westcott, cited in Kelly, class notes).

In v. 14, the word used for “dwelled” is the word “tabernacled” and is the same word used in the LXX (Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT) for the tabernacle built in the OT which housed the shekhinah glory.

Mormons have made much of the fact that the word “God” does not have the definite article “the.” Thus they translate the verse, “the Word was a god” rather than “the word was God”, the only God. If this translation is correct, then there is nothing unique about Jesus; He is just one god among many gods. The Mormons themselves teach that Jesus was a normal man who through His obedience became a god by taking upon Himself the *quality* of God. Every human being has the same potential, and it should be our goal in life to become a god like Jesus. This is the very sin for which Adam and Eve were condemned—wanting to be like God (Gen. 3: 5). But Mormons are known more for Biblical distortion than scholarship. It is true that sometimes a noun without the definite article implies *quality*, but the hermeneutical principle of context is all-important in understanding this passage. The references to the Word being in the beginning with God; that all things came into being by Him (See also v.10); that in Him was life; that the life was the light of men, but the darkness did not understand the light all point to the identification of the Word with the God of creation. The words “beginning,” “life,” “light,” “darkness,” are words which John uses very deliberately to present the Word as God. As we have seen in our study of John’s gospel, the whole book is written to prove the deity of Jesus.

Besides, even the Greek supports the conclusion that Jesus is God. We have already noted that the verb John uses does not in any sense indicate that Jesus “became” a god (aorist tense) but that He “was” God (imperfect tense signifying continual action in the past). He always was God. Furthermore, in the Greek, the last part of verse 1 reads, “...and God was the Word.” Two rules should be noted in the interpretation of this phrase (Kelly, class notes).

- (1) Colwell’s Rule: A definite predicate nominative has the article when it follows the verb.
- (2) Carson’s Rule: To determine the predicate nominative, if two nouns are connected by a form of the word “to be” (in this case “was”) then the one with the definite article is the subject.

Let’s apply these two rules to the last phrase in verse 1. First, to determine the subject of the phrase “...and God was the Word,” we must notice which word in the phrase has the definite article. The two words “God” and “Word” are connected by “was” which is a form of the verb “to be”. It is “the Word” which has the definite article, “the”, which means that “Word” is the subject. This leaves only “God” to be the predicate nominative. Now, according to Colwell’s rule, a predicate nominative has the definite article (“the”)

when it *follows* the verb. In this case, the word “God” does not follow the verb in the Greek and it therefore does not have the definite article. Therefore, to argue that John is only talking about the Word having the quality of God rather than being God is unfounded even from a grammatical standpoint. The argument will not “hold up in court.”

B. F. Westcott, in his commentary on John, says that if John had used the definite article before “God,” then the verse would have read, “*the* Word was *the* God” which would have equated the Word with God. This would mean that there was no difference at all between the Word and God and would have been antitrinitarian or Unitarian (Kelly, class notes). You will recall in our study of the Trinity that though the Father and the Son are of the same “substance” ontologically (sharing the same divine attributes), they have distinct personalities from one another which express themselves in the economic or functional trinity. To say that Jesus identifies Himself with the Father (“I and the Father are one.”) is not the same as saying that the Father *is* the Son and the Son *is* the Father. John did not say, “. . .the Word was the *Father*,” but “. . .the word was *God*.” There is a huge theological difference in these two statements.

Jesus as the Word incarnate in human flesh is the focus of verses 9-14. Jesus “became flesh and dwelt among us.” The word “became” is the same Greek verb and tense (aorist) that we find in vs. 6. John the Baptist “became” a man at particular point in time in the past. Christ likewise “became” human flesh at a particular point in time. This means that He was not *eternally* flesh as He was *eternally* the Son of God. He *became* flesh when He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. Further, verse 14 tells us that He “tabernacled among us,” a term obviously reminiscent (suggestive) of the tabernacling of Yahweh in the wilderness with the Israelites. During that experience, the shekhinah glory of God would appear before all the people (Lev. 9: 23). When John says, “and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father”, he is identifying the glory of the incarnate Son with the glory of Yahweh in the wilderness experience; the glory is the same. This is why Jesus tells Philip in John 14: 9, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” He was not saying that the Father and Son are the same person, otherwise why would Jesus commune with the Father in prayer, and why would He say, “Not my will, but your will be done”? He was simply saying that He and the Father are one in essence or glory, as we find here in Jn. 1: 14.

There is a very interesting phrase found in v.11, “He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.” The phrase, “came to His own” is also found in Jn. 19: 27. The exact Greek is “eis ta idia”. In Jn. 19: 27, the beloved disciple John took Jesus’ mother Mary “into his own home” to take care of her. When John says that Jesus came to his own, he could have said, “He came into His own home.” In other words, Jesus did not come to earth as an alien would come from the planet Mars. When He came, He was coming home where He belonged. And how can we say that Jesus belonged on the earth? He belonged because He made the earth (Jn. 1: 3; 1 Cor. 8: 6) and because He became incarnate in human flesh like one of us (Kelly, class notes). He also came home to his elect people, the Jewish nation. When Jesus comes again the second time, He will come to restore the whole universe which He created, and the restored universe will include a paradise on earth in which God will once more walk with His people in the garden-city in the cool of the day (Compare Gen. 3: 8 with Rev. 22: 1-5).

Tragically, when Jesus came to His own home, those who should have joyfully received Him, rejected Him. The word for “did not receive” is aorist tense indicating a decisive rejection of Jesus by the Jewish nation in particular and the world in general. The Jews in particular should have been prepared to recognize and receive their long-awaited Messiah, but they rejected Him decisively.

But not everyone rejected Jesus. To them that received Him, He gave the right to become the children of God and to enjoy the full benefits of adoption (v. 12). These were born not by the will of men or the will of the flesh, but of God. That is, they were born not in any sense as the result of human initiative or human desire (sexual desire), but by the will and desire of God.

IV. The Kenosis Passage: Philippians 2: 5-11

This passage teaches the hypostatic (personal) union of humanity and deity together in the one person of Christ. Hypostasis is the fundamental thing (or the underlying reality) which makes a person a person. In v. 6, it is significant that Paul used the word, “form” (morphe—Greek) instead of the word, “appearance” (skema—Greek) which he uses in v. 8. Morphe (form) is the objective inner being of something as it really is. It is the essential attributes of something. Used here in Philippians, it means that the essential nature of Christ was deity and that He possessed in His person all the attributes of God. Paul is saying essentially the same thing here as he says in Col. 1: 19, “For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him....” All the fullness of God dwelled in the incarnate person of Christ. “Skema”, on the other hand, refers to the outward appearance of something but not the essential being of something. Thus, Paul says in v. 8 that Jesus was found to be in the appearance as a man. In other words, although He was God, He did not appear to be any different from the multitudes of men who surrounded Him. Had we been in the land of Palestine during Jesus’ earthly ministry, we would not have been able to pick Him out of a crowd of people. He looked like any other ordinary man. However, Jesus’ life and ministry demonstrated the fact that He was and continued to be in the very form (morphe) of God by the perfect expression of His inward qualities as God. Although He looked like everyone else (skema), His teaching, healing, and moral life was certainly something which distinguished Him from everyone else.

The verb, “existed” (huparchon—Greek) indicates prior existence before the birth of Christ and continuing after the birth of Christ. The tense of the verb is imperfect which implies continued action. Jesus existed in the form of God before His incarnation and continued existing in the form of God after His birth. He did not begin to exist in the form of God at birth, but always existed in the form of God eternally.

This passage has been used by liberal theologians (especially in the middle of the 19th century), to prove that Christ stripped Himself of His divine attributes as God in order to join Himself to human nature. Later, He developed again into a divine-human person. Supposed justification for this theory comes from the verb, “ekenosen” or “emptied Himself” (v. 7). This may not be the best translation of this verb which is found in only four other passages in the NT (Rom. 4:4; 1 Cor. 1:17; 9: 15; 2 Cor. 9: 3). In all of these passages, the verb is better translated “to make void” or “to make of no effect”. The King James Version of the Bible translates the phrase, “made himself of no reputation” and the New International Version translates it, “made himself nothing”. The KJV probably gets closest to the intended meaning. Even as the exalted second person of the Trinity, Jesus did not cling to His privileges as God, but humbled Himself to the point of assuming fallen human nature. He did not give up His divine qualities. The gospels clearly indicate that He was the God-man walking on earth, performing miracles that no mere man could perform. Rather, He willingly laid aside the divine glory and adoration that He was entitled to as God and rightfully deserved from His creatures in order to humble Himself as a man and eventually to die as a man. What Christ laid aside was not the *form* of God, but His *functional equality* as God and His right to full sovereignty over His creation. He

voluntarily placed Himself in a subordinate position to His Father and made Himself accountable to the Law pronounced at Mount Sinai. Therefore, it was not the being of Christ that was laid aside at the incarnation, but the status and privileges He enjoyed as God. His incarnation was the beginning of what theologians call Christ's state of humiliation (See also Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 328.)

V. The Incarnation of Christ in Human Flesh

Why was it necessary for Christ to assume human nature? It may be best to answer this question by quoting Scripture: "For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendent of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted" (Heb. 2: 16-18). Notice in this statement that Christ was made like his brethren in all things. There is, therefore, nothing about our human nature which is different from the human nature of Christ except the in-born disposition toward sin which is called total depravity. In some way which we cannot understand, Jesus was not born with a depraved nature inherited from Adam through his conception in the womb of Mary. Yet, His nature was entirely capable of being tempted in "all things as we are" (Heb.4: 14), and unlike us, Jesus felt the full force of being tempted since He never yielded to the temptation. It is difficult for us to understand the implications of this fact, but in every respect, Jesus was tempted as we are, even in His thoughts. He was tempted to covet the material wealth of others as he struggled with poverty. Jesus also had normal sexual needs like any other man and was tempted to lust after women. Only as we consider our own temptations and our frequent failures to withstand these temptations can we appreciate Jesus' moral perfection in both thought and life. In this way, He gives help to the "seed" (descendants) of Abraham and not to angels. Jesus did not take upon Himself the nature of angels nor does He offer salvation to fallen angels, but only to those who are of like nature with Him.

The church father, Gregory of Nazianzen, summed the matter up this way, "For that which He [Christ] has not assumed he has not healed." In other words, if Christ has not taken to Himself the entirety of fallen human nature including mind, soul, and body; then the human mind, soul, and body remain untouched by the remedy of Christ's atoning work. In order for God to save us, He must come all the way to where we are in our fallen estate, yet without participating with us in our sinfulness. This is what God did for us in Christ. He became like us and identified Himself with us in every sense of the word except that He did not sin. This is precisely why Jesus submitted Himself to the baptism of John, which was a baptism of repentance. Having never sinned He did not need to repent, but He wished to identify in His baptism with the sinners He came to save (Matt. 3: 13-15).

Without the incarnation of Christ there would be no bridge between God and man, but only an infinite gulf which no one could cross (See Lk. 16: 26). God is infinitely holy and man is finite and unworthy to come into the presence of God. How then can man ever enjoy fellowship with this God when there is so much distance between them? Christ's incarnation is the answer to this question. Christ is both God and man, and being such, He can descend to man and then elevate man into communion with God. The Apostle Paul says that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself..." (2 Cor. 5: 19). The work of Christ, then, was both the work of a true man and the work of God. Only a man could experience the temptations to which men are subject (Heb. 4: 15). Only a

man could experience the sufferings and trials of humanity, and only a man could die on a cross. But this man also had to be sinless or else his death would be the just penalty paid for his own personal sin rather than for the sins of the world. Christ also had to be God because only a divine sacrifice would have the infinite worth necessary to atone for the sins of the whole world; a merely human sacrifice would be insufficient for such an atonement.

Without being defiled or soiled by our sinfulness, God stooped down in the person of Christ to pull man out of the pit of sin and bring him into communion with God. The English word “atonement” can be broken down into three words, “at one ment”. That is, the atonement of the God-man, Christ, brings man into union with God and brings God into union with man. The God-man, Christ Jesus, had two wills, the will of God and the will of man. In His atoning work, the will of God is brought into union with the will of perfect man and affects the reconciliation both from the side of man and from the side of God (Kelly, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, class syllabus, p. 30). Without this atoning work, God remains alienated from man and man remains alienated from God. Thus, the atonement is the act of God in Christ of becoming “at one” with man. However, we should avoid any liberal tendencies of believing that man has somehow become God through the atonement of Christ. There will always remain a huge gulf between the being of God and the being of man, yet, through Christ, we can have fellowship with this God even as Adam and Eve had fellowship with Him before the fall (Gen. 3: 8).

VI. Human and Divine Natures in the One Person of Christ

Great efforts have been made to explain the existence of two natures in the one person of Christ. The subject dominated the great ecumenical councils of the church for many centuries. In the end, any human explanation fails to explain this mystery, and the Scriptures themselves make no attempt to explain it, being content to simply describe the person of Christ as both fully human and fully God. Yet, much benefit can be gained from our feeble attempts to understand it since many Scripture passages can be better understood by struggling with this miracle. The following is a brief outline of the work of the church fathers in struggling with this mystery and the comments of modern reformed theologians (Kelly, *Systematic Theology* Syllabus, Vol. 2, p. 21).

A. Historical Development of this Doctrine

1. The Council of Nicaea—AD 325

This council affirmed that Jesus is truly God and condemned the heresy of Arianism that Jesus did not pre-exist with the Father.

2. The Council of Constantinople—AD 381

This council affirmed that Jesus Christ was a perfect man with a human mind against the Apollinarians who said that while the body of Jesus was human, he retained the divine mind of the “logos”, the Word.

3. The Council of Ephesus—AD 431

This council maintained that Jesus Christ was one person against the Nestorians who said Christ was two persons, the human and the divine. This is different from Biblical orthodoxy which affirms the two natures of Christ in the one person.

4. The Council of Chalcedon—AD 451

This council affirmed the two distinct natures of Christ in one person. Furthermore, the two distinct natures are hypostatically united (personally united) in one person in such a way that the two natures are not confused, converted, divided, or separated.

“Without confusion or conversion” means that the two natures do not merge and are not converted into a third nature which is neither human nor divine. The two natures operate in the one Christ. Eutychianism taught wrongly that Jesus’ humanity was absorbed into His deity. If this was true, then Jesus was not a true man like us. It would also mean that our fallen humanity is not healed (“Whatever is not assumed is not healed.”)

“Without division or separation” means that there is no division or separation of the two natures of Christ as if there were two Christs and not one. Even in the death of Christ, there is no division of His personhood as if one part of Christ dies and the other lives. The Person of Christ died on the cross and the Person of Christ rose again from the dead and ascended to the Father. He is now sitting on the right hand of God the Father both in His humanity and His deity. He continues to be the God-man.

5. The Council of Constantinople—AD 680

This council affirmed that Jesus Christ had not only a divine will but a human will. Otherwise, we would not be able to say that Jesus was truly tempted by sin since God cannot be tempted (James 1: 13).

6. The Reformation (16th Century)

While the Chalcedonian formula for the doctrine of Christ is stated more in static terms of being or essence, the Reformation attempted to state the doctrine of Christ in dynamic terms of His atoning work on the cross and his perfect life. (See the discussion below.)

B. The Effects of the Two Natures in One Person

By possessing a human nature, Jesus Christ could be ignorant (Matt. 24: 36), hungry (Matt. 4: 2); troubled (Lk. 22: 44); and subject to flogging and death. At the same time He was omniscient (Jn. 4: 16-18) and all-powerful (Matt. 26: 53). An amazing statement concerning the true humanity of Christ is found in Lk. 2: 40 and 52. As the boy Jesus grew up physically, He was also growing up spiritually and intellectually. He “increased” in wisdom as He grew up which means that Jesus Christ was not born fully developed mentally and spiritually. He gained understanding by reading the Scriptures and communing with His heavenly Father and by listening to the instruction of His mother and earthly father. It is most likely that as a child Christ gained much understanding of His identity as the Christ from His mother and father, and mostly from His mother since Joseph was probably dead shortly after Jesus turned twelve. At least, we hear nothing of Joseph after this age (Lk. 2: 41-43). At the same time, neither Joseph nor Mary understood the full substance and significance of Jesus’ mission (Lk. 2: 50). As a child He remained in subjection to His mother and father even though He created them (Lk. 2: 51; Jn. 1:3).

Care must be taken in determining the relationship of the human nature to the divine nature. The divine nature in Christ was not humanized; neither was the human nature deified. The divine nature remained 100% God, and the human nature remained 100% man. According to the Chalcedonian formula, there is no conversion of one nature into the other nature and there is no combination of the two natures together to form a third nature which is neither human nor divine. The deity cannot share in human weaknesses (weariness, hunger, death), and true humanity cannot share in the incommunicable attributes of God (omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, etc.). What properly belongs to one nature is not attributed to the other nature so as to blur the distinction between the two. Yet, in the one person of Christ, there is a cooperation of the two natures in His mediatorial work on the cross and throughout His entire ministry. For example, when feeding five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish, the omnipotent power of deity cooperated with the human body of Jesus in distributing the food, and the disciples could see that it was Jesus, a flesh and blood man who was performing the miracle. It was Christ who healed the sick and the lame and Christ who wept over the unbelief of Israel and held babies in His human arms. Similarly, it was Christ who was crucified on the cross and Christ who rose again from the dead. The operations of grace throughout His ministry required a truly human Christ and a truly divine Christ.

C. A Human Analogy of the Two Natures of Christ in One Person

The union of the two natures of Christ in one person will always remain a mystery, and technically speaking, there really is no human analogy which will explain it. However, the relationship bears some similarity to the relationship in man between the body and the soul. Berkhof describes this similarity in the following quotations, followed by my explanations (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 325).

In man there are two substances, matter and spirit, most closely united and yet not mixed; so also in the Mediator.

In other words, there is no mixture of the body and the soul so that we have a soulish body or a material soul which can be dissected out of the body. No one can find the location of the soul within the human body simply because it is not material.

In man the principle of unity, the person, does not have its seat in the body but in the soul; in the Mediator, not in the human, but in the divine nature.

For example, when a person dies, even though his body is lying in a coffin, we know that the real person is not in the coffin. His soul or spirit has departed from the body and we speak of him as being in another world, either heaven or hell. So also, the central being of Jesus Christ is found in His divine nature, which He was before the incarnation in human flesh. Remember our discussion of John's prologue. The Word "was" (that is, eternally was), but He "became flesh" at a point in time.

As the influence of the soul on the body and of the body on the soul is a mystery, so also the connection of the two natures in Christ and their mutual influence on each other.

In other words, we can no more explain the principle of body and soul than we can the deity and humanity of Christ.

Everything that happens in the body and in the soul is ascribed to the person; so all that takes place in the two natures of Christ is predicated [affirmed as a quality] of the person.

When a person gets saved, we know that nothing has changed in terms of his body, but his soul is now regenerated and brought into union with Christ. Nevertheless, we do not say that only his soul is saved, but that he as a person is saved. In the same regard, if a person is injured, we don't say that only his body is injured but that he as a person is injured. In the same way, when Christ healed the ten lepers, we do not say that His divine nature healed the lepers, but that Christ healed the lepers. When Christ died on the cross, we don't say that His human nature died on the cross but that Christ died on the cross. Whatever Christ did or whatever happened to Christ is ascribed to His person and not to the particular nature, whether human or divine.

Berkhof is quick to point out the deficiency in this comparison.

Of course, the comparison is defective. It does not illustrate the union of the divine and the human, of the infinite and the finite. It does not even illustrate the unity of two spiritual natures in a single person. In the case of man the body is material and the soul is spiritual. It is a wonderful union, but not as wonderful as the union of the two natures in Christ.

VII. The Virgin Birth

In the incarnation, the pre-existent Christ became incarnate in human flesh by means of the virgin birth. It is believed by some that the sin nature inherited from Adam is passed on to the offspring through the human father; thus, Christ avoided this sin nature since He was begotten by the Holy Spirit and not by a human father. The problem with this argument is that it ignores the fact that Mary also had a sin nature inherited from Adam. It is clear that Christ was not imputed with the guilt of Adam as are all other human beings. It is equally clear that the virgin birth must have something to do with His immunity from guilt. The answer lies in the fact that the birth of Christ had nothing to do with human initiative. Genesis 5: 3 tells us that Adam begot a child in his own image, but Christ did not come from Adam and is not in the image of Adam, but of God directly through the initiative of the Holy Spirit. Christ “is parallel to the first man, a new departure, and as such not involved in the guilt which runs in the original stream...a sinless humanity is impossible without a miracle. The first man was holy because God made him so; the new man (the Christian) is holy because God makes him so; the Last Man [Jesus] is holy because God makes him so. Holiness can exist in human life only by virtue of divine action and so far as Jesus Christ is concerned that action occurs in the very commencement of his existence” (Donald MacLeod, *The Person of Christ*, pp.39-41).

The key to understanding the significance of the virgin birth, according to Berkhof, is found in John 1: 13 which says of believers that they “were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Believers are born, John says, not of human will or initiative, but are born of the will and initiative of God. In the same way, Jesus was not born of human will or initiative, but of the will and initiative of God through the operation of the Holy Spirit upon the womb of the virgin Mary. His sinlessness has nothing to do with Mary, but everything to do with the work of the Holy Spirit.

VIII. The States of Christ

The states of Christ refer to his status or position.

A. Christ's Humiliation

Reformed theologians usually name five stages in the humiliation of Christ: incarnation, suffering, death, burial, and descent into hell. We will treat others as well as these.

1. His Incarnation

In the incarnation, it is theologically better to say that the Word became flesh than to say that God became man. Remember that in the incarnation, the second person of the Trinity did not cease to be God and He was not changed into a man. Rather, He who was and continued to be God took upon Himself human flesh and assumed a human nature. It should also be said that Christ did not assume a human personality which existed independently of the incarnation. Jesus Christ only has one personality which He possessed before the incarnation. What He assumed was not human personality but human flesh. The belief that God the Son assumed an independent, individual personality who existed before the incarnation is known as adoptionism. If this were true, it would be impossible to establish the sinlessness of Christ. (See the discussion above on the virgin birth.) This does not mean that Christ's human nature was impersonal since the Logos (the Word) assumed human nature into the substance of His own independent, divine person. One might say that the human nature of Christ was "in-personal" (Berkhof, p. 322); that is, His human nature found its dependent existence in the divine person of Christ. In the gospels we find many references which indicate a distinct personality of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, and we find the Father addressing the Son and the Son addressing the Father in an "I—You" relationship (Ps. 2: 7; Jn. 17: 1,4, 5, 21-24). We find no evidence of this "I—You" relationship in terms of the divine and human natures of Christ. We also never see Jesus referring to Himself in the plural (we) as we see God doing so in Genesis 1: 26; 3: 22; 11:7.

The very act of the incarnation is part of the humiliation of Christ. By taking on human flesh, Christ subjected Himself to all the frailties related to human existence. As a baby, He was dependent upon His father and mother for food, protection from the heat and cold, etc. This is directly in contrast to the attribute of God known as aseity, the total independence of God and His lack of need of anything from man. So then, the very incarnation is a great demotion for Christ from His exalted position with the Father to a lowly human baby. We learn from the narrative in Matthew that because of Herod's murderous envy, Joseph and Mary had to flee from Bethlehem to Egypt until Herod was dead (Matt. 2: 13-15). It is difficult to imagine the necessity of this moment: the Creator of the universe being protected by a lowly carpenter and his wife.

2. His Poverty

The NT presents Christ not as someone who through His obedience became God, but as God who lowered His status by taking upon Himself finite human existence. A classic statement of His voluntary condescension (lowering of His status) is found in 2 Cor. 8: 9. He was rich, but for our sake He became poor. With God in heaven there is no lack; the whole world and all of its riches are His. The Bible says that He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. But Jesus was born to a poor woman and his human father was a poor carpenter. All of His life as a child was spent in poverty. Even if Christ had been born as a prince, His condition compared to the riches of heaven would have been poor, but by being born into human poverty, God in Christ highlighted the extent to which He would go to make all who believe in Him rich.

We also remember Jesus' statement to one would-be follower, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Lk. 9: 58). In other words, Jesus did not have a permanent home but depended on the generosity of others to provide Him a place to sleep.

3. His Suffering

By becoming a man, Christ subjected Himself to all the suffering related to humanity. He experienced pain, hunger, sickness, discomfort from cold and heat, and worst of all, mistreatment from others and finally death. His mistreatment did not just come from His enemies, but inevitably even from the members of His own family, all of whom were sinners.

He was slandered and maligned by the religious leaders of the day, people educated in the Law and who should have recognized Him as the long-awaited Messiah. Instead, they accused Him of blasphemy and hounded Him until He was arrested and crucified. Isaiah describes Him as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3). This does not mean that Jesus never experienced joy in His life. Lack of joy would itself have been a sin. Yet, we should be able to get a sense of Jesus' sorrow at the pitiful condition of the human race in its condition of sin and misery. He had come from the presence of His Father in which there was inexpressible glory and honor given to the Father and the Son by all the angels in heaven and the four living creatures continually crying out, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty" (Rev. 4: 8). This experience of Christ is without human analogy, but we might begin to understand it, if all of the sudden, we were cast out of our peaceful and loving families to live with a band of thieves and murderers.

The greatest part of His suffering was in His temptation. We have only the record of Matthew 4 and Luke 4 of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, but this was not the only time He was tempted. His whole life was one of continuous temptation. Hebrews 4: 15 tells us that He was tempted in "all things as we are yet without sin." His temptation in the wilderness event gives us a record of only a few temptations. In order for Him to be tempted in all things, Satan's temptation of Christ must have been relentless (without letting up). As weak human beings who constantly give in to temptation, we cannot possibly understand the suffering that temptation inflicted upon Jesus. He was perfectly holy and hated sin. His greatest desire in life was to do the will of His Father in heaven. He alone among the human race could see fully the miserable consequences sin had had upon man's condition. Yet, He was tempted to hate other people, to lust after women, to envy others of better conditions in life. Most importantly, He was tempted to avoid going to the cross and experiencing the excruciating physical pain of crucifixion and the rejection of His Father. We ourselves as Christians know something of the suffering of temptation. We would rather not be tempted, and we long for the day when we shall be perfect and not subject to the constant bombardment of Satan's attempts to drag us under the ruin of sin.

4. His Subjection to the Law—Its Conditions and Curse

Christ was born under the Law and under its curse of death to all who do not keep it. Whatever one member of the Trinity does, the other two Persons participate with Him (perichoresis), which means that Christ also participated with God the Father in the giving of the Law at Sinai. Thus, the One

who gave the Law now willingly subjects Himself to its conditions and curse. Had Jesus not kept the Law perfectly, He would have forfeited His own life and would not have served a suitable substitute for us. By keeping its demands, He earned for all of His people the promise of life offered in the Law and removed the curse of the Law from us, “the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us which was hostile to us (Col. 2:14). This is known as the *active obedience of Christ*. His *passive obedience* consisted in His willing submission to the Father to die on the cross as an atonement for the sins of His people. In doing so, He was also taking upon Himself the curse of the Law. (Refer back to your notes on covenant theology). Phil. 2: 6-8 refers both to the active and the passive obedience of Christ. He humbled Himself by becoming obedient (in His active obedience to the law) even to the point of death (His passive obedience).

5. *His Death*

In His death, Christ succumbed to (was subject to) the judgment of God upon the human race for their disobedience. He who was life itself and had life in Himself succumbed to death because the wages of sin is death, not His own sin, but the sin of the elect who were chosen before the world was made. “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on *our behalf*, that *we* might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

6. *His “Descent into Hell”*

The Apostles’ Creed says that “He descended into hell.” This statement is made in the creed after the phrase, “was crucified, dead, and buried. . . .” In my opinion, the phrase rightly belongs after the word “crucified” and should be joined by the conjunction “and.” Christ “was crucified and descended into hell.” In other words, Christ’s “hell” was the dereliction (forsaking or abandoning) by the Father as He hung on the cross. He said, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” God forsook Christ because Christ had become sin on our behalf. But just before Jesus died He said, “It is finished.” That is, the atoning sacrifice had been paid and there were no other grounds for His rejection by the Father. He told the thief next to Him, “Today, you shall be with me in paradise.” “Today”, not tomorrow or three days later. Though His body remained in the grave for three days until the resurrection, we are not to assume that Jesus remained under the curse and wrath of God for three days, even though the very presence of Christ in the grave is part of His humiliation. Furthermore, His final words were, “Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit” (Lk. 23: 46), indicating that the breach of fellowship between Him and the Father was now healed by His atoning work.

Nowhere in Scripture do we have a clear reference to Christ’s descent into hell. Calvin speaks of this descent metaphorically rather than literally (as I have interpreted it above). It should be noted that this part of the Apostles’ Creed was not part of the earliest formulations of the creed and was not used until 390 AD (Berkhof, pp. 340-342). The statement itself can be misleading and has led to wild speculations, including the one which says that Christ descended into hell and preached the gospel in hell.

Nevertheless, we should appreciate the full significance of Christ’s cry of anguish, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me.” Christ suffered the second death (the wrath of God) before He experienced the first death or physical death (Kelly, p. 33).

B. Christ's Exaltation

Bible is clear in declaring that Christ did not remain in the tomb nor did His body even begin to deteriorate and decay (Acts 2: 27). Theologians speak of four steps in Christ's exaltation: resurrection, ascension, session, and return (Kelly, pp. 33-34).

1. The Resurrection of Christ

By raising Christ from the grave, God confirms that He is satisfied with the payment of the debt of sin on our behalf and that our sins are forgiven. In 1 Cor. 15: 12-22, Paul energetically argues that the resurrection of Christ is not a peripheral (unimportant) matter. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then no one else can be raised from the dead for the simple reason that if Christ is not risen, we are still in our sins (v. 17). There are many theologians who teach that the resurrection of Christ is not essential to our faith. This was obviously not the opinion of the Apostle Paul, who said in no uncertain terms that if Christ is not risen, "your faith is worthless" (v. 17), and that of all men living on the earth Christians are to be pitied more than any others because we have foolishly believed a lie (v.19). Paul says later on in this chapter that it is pointless to lay down our lives in service to God if there is no resurrection. "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'" (v. 32). In other words, if there is no resurrection, we might as well make the most of this life, because after we die, there is nothing else. But we can be assured that Christ *has been raised* (v.20), and that His resurrection is the assurance of our resurrection, and that His resurrection is the grounds for the new federal headship of Christ (v. 22). In Adam death came through sin, and in Christ, all who believe will be made alive. His resurrection is also the grounds for our sanctification, as we learn in Romans 6: 5, "For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection."

Paul also tells us that the last enemy to be abolished (destroyed) is death (v.26) and that death is swallowed up in the victory of Christ's resurrection. Death now has no victory for those who are in Christ and it has no "sting" (v.54-55). The teaching of v.55 is that sin is the only reason that death has a sting. Without sin there would be no such thing as death since death entered the world through sin (Rom. 5: 12). Furthermore, when sin is pardoned, death is merely a passage from this life to the next life in the presence of God and should have no dread for the true believer; it is harmless. When sin is not pardoned, death is the ultimate enemy since it then becomes the passage of the condemned sinner into total separation from the goodness and mercy of God and into a perpetual (ongoing) state of punishment from which there is no chance of return. Also, the strength of sin is the law, the law of God, without which there could be no sin (Rom. 5: 13).

a. Evidence of the Resurrection

Time and space do not permit a discussion of the evidence of Christ's resurrection. The Bible does not go into a lot of detail on the subject, but simply declares it to be a fact. Nevertheless, consider the following arguments.

1. Even though modernists do not believe such a thing can happen, for two thousand years no evidence has ever been presented to disprove the fact of the resurrection. If there had ever been any

compelling evidence that Jesus did not rise from the dead, the Christian faith would never have succeeded in the hostile environment of religious and political oppression.

2. When it was reported that Jesus rose from the dead, no one was ever able to present His dead body to prove otherwise. From Matt. 27: 64-66, we learn that Pilate sent a guard of Roman soldiers to secure the tomb. When Jesus rose from the grave, these same soldiers came to the chief priests and reported that the tomb was empty. They were then bribed by the chief priests to lie about the incident, claiming that the disciples had stolen the body. There are several problems with the believability of their story. First, the disciples, who were not soldiers, could not possibly overcome a group of hardened, trained Roman soldiers who had to guard the tomb at the risk of their lives. The reason they agreed to lie is that they faced the death penalty for failing at their task of guarding the tomb. They were at the mercy of the chief priests who agreed to protect them from execution. Second, were Jesus' disciples, at this point in their lives, the type of men who would risk their lives to retrieve the body of Jesus? Peter had lied to a mere servant girl about being Jesus' disciple, and the others had run away the night Jesus was betrayed. They were hardly courageous men. Their courage to face death came only after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

3. It is not likely that the disciples would have been transformed from cowards into fearless preachers of the gospel for a Savior who was still in the grave. Furthermore, the Apostle Paul, a distinguished intellectual, would not have been converted from a Christian persecutor to a tireless evangelist unless he had been convinced of the resurrection. Since he was chosen by God to be the apostle to the Gentiles, God made sure that Paul himself was a witness of the resurrected Lord (Acts 9).

4. In arguing for the certainty of the resurrection, Paul presents tangible, verifiable evidence of this event (1 Cor. 15: 5-8). After His resurrection, Paul says, Christ appeared to Cephas (Peter) and to the twelve disciples gathered together, and later to more than 500 people at one time (an event not recorded in the gospel accounts). Most of these 500 people, Paul says, were still alive as he was writing the first letter to the Corinthians, which means that they were still able to provide eye witness accounts of the risen Lord. Christ also appeared to James, all the apostles, and to him (Paul).

5. On the Day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2, Peter preaches a strong sermon on the reality of the resurrection of Christ. There were thousands of Jews in Jerusalem from many different countries who doubtless had heard of the events which happened only a short time ago. None of these Jews were prepared to refute Peter's claim that Christ had risen from the grave for the simple fact that the tomb was empty and the Jewish leaders had not been able to produce the dead body of Jesus for all to see.

6. Even years after the resurrection, King Agrippa II, upon personally hearing Paul's testimony, could not convincingly ridicule Paul for being insane for believing that Christ rose from the dead (Acts 26: 24-26). Agrippa was simply too familiar with many of the OT prophecies about the resurrection and the intimate details of the events surrounding the resurrection; a familiarity which Paul uses to his advantage in his testimony (Acts 26: 27). Paul was confident that even Agrippa could not deny that something supernatural had happened. Embarrassed at the strength of Paul's appeal, Agrippa attempted to laugh it off by saying in affect, "Paul, you are trying to make me play the Christian and manipulate me into admitting that there really *was* a resurrection." Agrippa was not about to allow

Paul to put him in the predicament of opposing Festus, the proconsulate of Rome (F. F. Bruce, Acts, p. 495-496).

7. The Bible says that Jesus after Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to many for a period of 40 days (Acts 1: 3). This forty day period is further proof for His resurrection. Christ did not just appear to Mary and Martha and His immediate disciples, but to many (more than 500) and not just for a period of a few days, but for 40 days, long enough to dispute any claims of His skeptics (people who did not believe in Him) that this was really Him and not some imposter claiming to be Him. Surely during this same period those who had been with Him for three years would have known the difference between the true Jesus and someone merely claiming to be Him.

b. Continuity and Discontinuity in the Resurrected Body of Christ

In the resurrected body of Jesus, there is both continuity (continuation) and discontinuity with His pre-resurrection body. For one thing, He was still recognizable after His resurrection, and His body still bore the scars of the crucifixion (Lk. 24: 31, 36-39; Jn. 20: 19-20, 25; Matt. 28: 9). Nothing significant had changed about His appearance. This is an indication to us that when we receive our resurrection bodies, our outward appearances will be much the same and will be recognizable by others. (Even though there remains the question about those who died as children. Will their bodies in heaven be adult versions? Although Scripture is silent on this matter, it is very likely that they will be adults based on the inference from the first creation in which God created man as a full-grown adult). We also notice that Jesus' body has material substance in that He is able to eat food as before, and it did not have the appearance of a ghost (Lk. 24: 38-43). This is also proof that we will not occupy heaven only as spirits without bodies. For the time between our physical death and the return of Christ, we will be content in heaven without bodies (1 Thes. 4), but Jesus' resurrection is the assurance that we will one day enjoy a material, as well as a spiritual, existence in heaven.

However, there is some discontinuity in the body of Christ. It is not exactly the same as it was before the resurrection. For example, it seems that Jesus can now appear as if out of nowhere and vanish in thin air (Lk. 24: 31, 36; Jn. 20: 19). John's account seems to make a point of the fact that the doors were shut when Jesus suddenly appeared. Thus, we may conclude that at times His body can be invisible and has more substance even than a wall or a door. This is a glorified body and perhaps these eye witness accounts of Jesus after the resurrection prompted Paul to write about this kind of body in 1 Cor. 15.

c. Agents of the Resurrection

Who raised Jesus from the dead? We have mentioned the term perichoresis before, the term which refers to the fact that when one member of the Trinity is involved in an activity, all three members are somehow involved in the same activity. This is also true of the resurrection. In Acts 2: 24, the Bible says that God (implying God the Father) raised Christ up again. In Romans 8:11, the activity of the Holy Spirit is indicated in the resurrection. Even the activity of Christ Himself is involved in the resurrection. In Jn. 2: 19, Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days *I* will raise it up." According to Jn 2: 21, Jesus was speaking of the temple of His body. Also, in Jn. 10: 17-18, we read that no one can take away the life of Christ without His express permission. "No one has taken it [my

life] away from Me, but I lay it down on my own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.”

2. The Ascension of Christ

After the forty day period following His resurrection, Christ ascended into heaven. The ascension is recorded in Mk.16: 19; Lk. 24: 50-53; and Acts 1: 9-11. The account in Acts is the most detailed and gives us the additional information that Jesus’ return will be very similar to His ascension. Notice that the ascension is accompanied by a cloud. We see the presence of a cloud many times in Scripture and it is usually associated with the Shekinah glory of God (Ex. 13: 21; 33: 9; Matt. 17: 5).

The Scripture presents the ascension as being the occasion for the giving of Christ’s gifts to His church. On the eve of His crucifixion, Christ promises His disciples that in His absence, He would send them “another Helper”, the Holy Spirit who would continue the teaching ministry of Christ. In fact, He assures them that His imminent departure is to their advantage, because if He stays, the Spirit will not come and do His miraculous work (Jn. 16: 7). In Eph. 4: 8, Paul says that when Christ ascended, He “gave gifts to men” and these “gifts” are specified in vv. 11 as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. In Ephesians, only the equipping gifts are mentioned, but we have others lists of gifts in Romans 12 and 1 Cor. 12. All of these are mentioned as gifts of the Holy Spirit and all are given on the occasion of Christ’s ascension into heaven. In Ps. 2: 8, we learn that God the Father gives to Christ, upon His request, the nations as His inheritance. Believers from every tribe, and tongue, and nation (Rev. 5: 9) are the inheritance of Christ purchased with His blood. We are His reward for His active and passive obedience. Christ was not about to leave His little flock alone as orphans (Jn. 14: 18), but would lavish (give abundantly) His people with the Spirit and all the gifts of the Spirit to ensure their success as His church, the body of Christ.

The giving of the Spirit is not the only theological significance of the ascension. Berkhof shares other insights into its significance (*Systematic Theology*, p. 351).

1. The ascension proves that the mediatorial work of Christ is accepted by the Father and is indicated by the Father admitting Christ into the heavenly glory. Jesus told the elders and chief priests that He would be seated at the right hand of the power of God, the place of honor. To Him, and to Him alone, God the Father said, “Sit at my right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for your feet” (Heb. 1: 13 quoted from Ps. 110: 1).

2. The ascension of Christ is prophetic of the ascension of all believers. Spiritually, the believer already lives in two worlds. We live in this world, but we also live with Christ already in the heavenly places (Eph. 2: 6—the word “seated” is in the aorist tense signifying a definitive action at a point in time. In other words, we are not just going to be seated in the heavenly places; we already are seated in the heavenly places.). In His high priestly prayer, Jesus tells His Father that He desires His disciples to be with Him where He is so that they can behold His glory (Jn. 17: 24), and He assures them earlier that in His Father’s house are many dwelling places which He is preparing for them. The ascension, therefore, is the assurance that we also shall ascend into heaven to be with Christ, and that heaven is, indeed, a place and not simply a state of mind or state of being.

3. The ascension reveals the future restoration of the original plan of God to install mankind as the ruler over the created world (Heb. 2: 5-9). Man forfeited this high standing by rebelling against God. Christ has come to restore mankind to his rightful place in the created order. A “little while” (v.7) may appear to be a long time since man has been in rebellion since the sin of Adam, but from the perspective of eternity, it is a short duration, indeed. So then, Christ’s ascension is a guarantee and a model for our ascension and the renewal of God’s exalted purpose for mankind.

If all of this is true, and it is, what then should our attitude be about the ascension of Christ and our future ascension? Paul tells us what that attitude should be in Col. 3: 1-6. If we are raised up with Christ (spiritually speaking) in His ascension, and if we are awaiting the full realization of this ascension in the resurrection of our bodies, then our hearts and minds should be riveted (fastened) to heaven and not to the world as we now know it. The true life of the believer is not yet fully revealed; it “is hidden with Christ in God.” When Christ is revealed to the world in all His glory, then we as believers will also be revealed in all our glory, the glory intended for man from the very beginning of creation. Consequently, we are to live presently in this world as those who are hidden in Christ and intended for the glory God has designed for us from the foundation of the world. We are to live holy lives (vv.5-6).

3. The Session of Christ

This is closely associated with the ascension of Christ and refers to His being seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven (Col. 3: 1; Heb. 1: 13; Acts 2: 33). The session of Christ at the right hand of the Father signifies the formal inauguration of His governmental reign over the universe as the God-man (Berkhof, p. 352). As such, His session is not to be interpreted as inactivity, but one of continual activity. He is at the same time Lord over His church and walks in the midst of His church (Rev. 2: 1; Col 1: 18). He is continually interceding for His church before the Father, holding up before God the eternal merits of His accomplished atonement (Heb. 7: 24-25). Thirdly, Christ continues in His role as prophet through the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14: 26).

4. The Return of Christ

We will discuss this under the separate heading of “Eschatology”, but a few comments will be made here. The return of Christ is definitely a part of His exaltation which would not be complete until Christ judges those who will not submit to His lordship over the earth and over their lives. Many places in the Bible refer to His coming again to judge the earth. The time for salvation and mercy will then be past, and men will cry out for the mountains to fall on them to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb (Rev. 6: 16; see also Acts 10: 42 and Matt. 25).

IX. The Offices of Christ—Prophet and Priest

It may be more appropriate to speak of the singular *office* of Christ rather than *offices* (plural) of Christ since his saving work is not to be separated into isolated categories. All of His work finds its goal or completion in the salvation of His people which is one salvation with many aspects or parts. Nevertheless, for the sake of explanation, theologians have generally divided the one office of Christ into three parts: prophet, priest, and king.

Before explaining these three functions of Christ's saving work, it should be said that the idea of "office" implies something which was received as a commission (authorization to perform certain duties). As Berkouwer notes, "One does not call himself to an office, but he *is* called to a task" (*The Work of Christ*, p.64, emphasis his). Consistently Christ points to the divine calling to His task. "I can do nothing on my own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (Jn. 5:30). "My food," Jesus said, "is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work" (Jn. 4:34). His purpose in coming to earth is explicitly stated in Jn. 6:38, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." And the will of Him who sent Christ is explicitly stated in the next verse as being the salvation of all who believe in the Son. "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day (v.40). Earlier in v. 37, Jesus tells us that some people have been given to Him by the Father and that all such people will assuredly come to Jesus in repentance and faith. Some theologians call this arrangement between the Father and the Son the "covenant of redemption" in which the Son agrees to die for His people and the Father agrees to forgive their sins and give them to the Son for an everlasting inheritance. Everything which Christ does in His office as prophet, priest, and king is designed to carry out the commission which He is given to Him by the Father. In His agony in the garden of Gethsemane just before His betrayal Jesus prays, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done" (Lk. 22: 42), and as He was barely able to gasp His last breath on the cross, He said, "It is finished", namely, the sacrificial work the Father had commissioned Him to do.

As we study the office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king, it behooves us (is necessary for us) to consider this commission from the Father. It is necessary because each of us as believers participate with Christ in all three of these functions. As Berkhof points out, "The fact that Christ was anointed to a threefold office finds its explanation in the fact that man was originally intended for this threefold office and work. As created by God, he was prophet, priest, and king, and as such was endowed with knowledge and understanding [the prophetic office], with righteousness and holiness [the priestly office], and with dominion over the lower creation [the kingly office]. Sin affected the entire life of man and manifested itself not only as ignorance, blindness, error, and untruthfulness; but also as unrighteousness, guilt, and moral pollution; and in addition to that as misery, death, and destruction. Hence it was necessary that Christ, as our Mediator, should be prophet, priest, and king" (*Systematic Theology*, p. 357, my explanation in brackets).

In other words, Christ came to restore fallen man to God's original intention of having man rule as king over the universe under the ultimate kingship of God. He was also to be a prophet who constantly and consistently proclaimed the excellencies of His Maker, and a priest who lived a holy life in full communion with God. All of this will be explained in more detail below, but it is important to understand that the office of Christ in all three functions is not a cosmic coincidence (something which takes place purely by accident with no forethought). God's original plan for man was temporarily put on hold by Satan's temptation and man's fall into sin, but God will not be frustrated. He does whatever He wills and brings to pass all His good pleasure, and it is His good pleasure that man rule over creation as prophet, priest, and king.

A. Christ as Prophet

The idea of Christ as prophet is not simply a theological concept but is fully supported from Scripture. We see it as far back as Dt. 18: 17-19 in which Moses promises the people of Israel a prophet who would come after him: “And the Lord said to me, . . . I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And it shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I myself will require it of him.” The Jews were clearly looking for this prophet as indicated by their question to John the Baptist, “Are you the Prophet?” (Jn. 1: 21). John answered with an unambiguous (without the possibility of misinterpretation), “No.” He knew that the Prophet they were looking for was Jesus Christ who made it clear on a number of occasions that He was the Prophet into whose mouth God had put His words (See Jn. 4: 25-26; 8: 28; 12: 49, 50; Lk. 13: 33). His teaching was with an authority unlike that of the scribes and Pharisees (Mk. 1: 27; Mt. 7: 29). We have the unquestionable testimony of Peter in Acts 3: 19-24 that Jesus is the long-awaited prophet which Moses had predicted.

In the Bible, a prophet had two main functions. First, he received revelations from God as indicated by the two Hebrew words *chazah* and *roeh* (Isa. 30: 10; 1 Sam. 9: 9; 1 Chron. 29: 29; Amos 7: 12; Isa. 6). Being the recipient of revelations, the prophet was able to see future events as if they had already happened. Jesus was able to see clearly the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Mt. 24) as well as He was able to see into the mind and heart of the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4: 16-19). The passive role of receiving the revelation of God always led to the active role of communicating this revelation to others (See Berkhof, p. 358). Ezekiel 37 is a good illustration of the communication of a vision which the prophet received from the Lord. However, the prophesy to be communicated was not usually a vision or dream but more often the moral commandments of God and the failure of the people to live up to these moral commandments (Isa. 1: 16-17; Mal. 3: 8-9; Micah 6: 8). Thus, for the most part, the prophets spoke the moral will of God to the people. They did not exist primarily to tell the people what would happen in the future even though this was partly their function. (Isaiah, prophesying some one and a half to two centuries before the event, predicts the restoration of Jerusalem and the temple during the reign of Cyrus, the Medo-Persian king. See Isa. 44: 28 and 45: 1).

In the NT, the word *prohetes* indicates the second function of the prophet as one who “speaks forth” the will of God, and Jesus unmistakably identifies Himself as such a prophet in Matt. 13: 57. One can also discern in this verse that Jesus identifies Himself with all the other true prophets of God who came before Him in the OT, prophets who were despised by the very people to whom they came to deliver God’s message (See also Matt. 5: 12). Jesus’ most scathing denunciation of the Jews’ shameful treatment of the prophets comes in Matthew 23: 29-39 in which He likens the scribes’ and Pharisees’ hatred toward Him with the hatred leveled by the apostate Jewish nation against the prophets of God before Him. Note also in v. 34 that Jesus will send other true prophets to the scribes and Pharisees (who represent the unbelief of the Jewish nation as a whole), and that these prophets and wise men will be treated just as harshly as the OT prophets and Jesus. A simple reading of the Book of Acts will verify His claim as Peter, Paul, and other messengers of God were cruelly treated by the people to whom they were sent. They were not surprised that their message was hated since Jesus had warned them beforehand (Jn. 15: 20; 16: 33).

Although the formal office of prophet has ceased after the NT era (my opinion only and not the opinion of many others), the prophetic function continues to exist every time a Christian speaks the

word of God with clarity (clearness). It is God's word, not ours, and it will inevitably accomplish the task God intends for it, whether salvation or condemnation (See Isa. 55: 11; 2 Cor. 2: 14-16). Every preacher of the gospel serves a prophetic role as he expounds (explains) the Scriptures to his congregation Sunday after Sunday. He is not predicting the future (a prophetic role which was rarely used in the OT or the NT era and limited to a few individuals), but the faithful preacher is proclaiming the truth of God. As he does so, the message may be received with joy and thanksgiving or it may be rejected with indifference and hatred. The true prophets, and Jesus Himself, were not popular people even among the chosen nation of Israel blessed with the "oracles of God" and the promises (Rom. 3: 2; 9: 1-6). Likewise, the preacher may not be the most popular person in his village or even in his own church. If he is a true "prophet", he will be loved and respected by those whose hearts are touched by the Holy Spirit, and he will be despised by those who are still in bondage to Satan, the world, and sin. Of course, this is a generalization. As preachers, we are not perfect like our Lord Jesus, and sometimes we deserve the ill-treatment of others, even those who are true believers. Nevertheless, the generalization which Jesus gives us holds true, and preachers must be prepared for some rough treatment even when they are faithfully carrying out their task. If we are not getting any mistreatment, we may well question whether we are shying away from the difficulties of the mission which God has given us to "preach the word...reprove, rebuke, exhort...." (keeping in mind that this mission must be executed with "great patience" 2 Tim. 4: 2).

Thankfully, the prophetic function of proclaiming the will and truth of God is not limited (and never was limited) to moral instruction and rebuke. It also included the magnificent proclamation of the promises of God for those who believed. As Berkhof explains,

It was their duty to protest against mere formalism, to stress moral duty, to urge the necessity of spiritual service, and to promote the interests of truth and righteousness. If the people departed from the path of duty, they had to call them back to the law and to the testimony, and to announce the coming terror of the Lord upon the wicked. *But their work was also intimately related to the promise, the gracious promises of God for the future. It was their privilege to picture the glorious things which God had in store for His people* (Systematic Theology, p. 358, emphasis mine).

1 Peter 1: 10-11 indicates that throughout the OT revelation, the Spirit of Christ was operating in the prophets as they were predicting the coming of the gracious promises of God through the Lord Jesus Christ. The gracious promise of the new covenant with better promises is given explicitly in Jeremiah 31, the offer of forgiveness to the repentant nation in Isaiah 55, and the promise of new life in the Spirit in Ezekiel 37. Throughout the writings of the OT prophets, there is a mixture of exhortation, rebuke and warning, along with the promise of forgiveness, grace, and the glorious future for those who know the Lord. Jesus repeats this pattern as *the* Prophet who not only has stern words of rebuke and warning for unbelief but promises of unspeakable joy and rewards for those who believe (Jn. 14: 1-4; Matt. 19: 27-30; 25: 34).

As we have seen above, Jesus' prophetic ministry began before His incarnation in human flesh. We must also see that it did not cease with His ascension into heaven. Jesus promised that He would not leave us as orphans but would send us the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Christ) to continue His prophetic work of "teaching us all things" (Jn. 14: 16-26). And just as Jesus was commissioned by the Father to speak only that which He was commanded to speak (Jn. 14: 10; 12: 49-50), the Holy Spirit "will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I [Jesus] said to you." As Jesus did not speak on His own initiative (Jn. 14: 10), the Spirit also will not speak on His own initiative, "but whatever He hears, He will speak; and will disclose to you what is to come" (Jn. 16: 13). Thus the

Holy Spirit is commissioned by the Father and the Son to continue the prophetic ministry of Jesus Christ in the hearts of believers. Not only so, but through the gifts of the Spirit granted to the church at the ascension of Christ. When Christ ascended, He gave gifts to His church for the edification of the whole body so that the whole body of Christ would “attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4: 7-14).

One of the gifts mentioned is the gift of prophecy. Before the completion of the NT canon (the NT Scriptures in collective form), it was necessary for the church to receive revelation from the Spirit to provide the additional instruction they needed to obey the will of God in the new covenant. This additional instruction was not provided in the OT Scriptures, but is now provided in the NT canon. The provision of the NT Scriptures is the ground upon which many believe the gift of prophesy no longer is needed by the NT church, but there is much debate about this point. Clearly, whichever position one takes in this debate, the Holy Spirit never contradicts Himself and He never speaks on His own initiative but speaks what He hears from the Father and the Son. As I have said before, the Spirit is not with us to point to Himself or to take the focus of attention away from Jesus Christ.

Another way that the Spirit continued (and continues) to carry on the prophetic ministry of Christ is through the preaching and teaching ministry of the word of God and the prophetic witness of every believer as we speak the word of God to others. This has already been mentioned, but I want to underscore the point that Christ came as a prophet partly in order to restore the prophetic function which man lost at the fall (See the discussion above.) As Paul says in 2 Cor. 10: 12, “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ...” This is the prophetic function of every believer (though more so for some than others), to challenge unbelief in every form it takes and to contradict the so called wisdom of man with the wisdom of God. When confronted with the so-called wisdom of men, the Christian should know the Bible well enough to challenge this thinking with the teaching of Scripture: “*You say this, but the Bible says this. I’ll stick with the Bible, thank you very much.*”

B. Christ as Priest

As the prophet was the spokesman for God and represented God to the people, the priest represented the people to God. It is true that the priests in the OT also had a teaching function, but generally speaking their teaching emphasized the obligations of the people to fulfill ritual and sacrificial obligations (Berkhof, p. 361) (See Ezek. 22: 26). Berkhof notes four priestly duties taken from Hebrews 5: (1) He is chosen from among men to be a representative of men. (2) He does not aspire to this position himself but is chosen by God to perform this task. In the OT, only the family of Aaron could be priests, even though the whole tribe of Levi was chosen to serve in the tabernacle. (3) His duties are strictly those things which “pertain to God”, that is, in those things which are religious. (4) A large portion of his work consisted of offering sacrifices and offerings for the forgiveness of sins. (5) He made intercession for the people (Heb. 7: 25).

The priesthood of Christ is prefigured throughout the sacrificial rituals of the OT. We will not take time to look at them here, but ritual sacrifice included the practice of the sinner laying his hand upon the animal to be sacrificed, a practice which clearly implied the transfer of guilt from the sinner to the

innocent animal (Lev.1:4-5; 3: 2; 16: 21). In Isaiah 53: 5-6, speaking of the Christ, Isaiah says, “He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; *but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.*” In the sacrifice of Christ, our sin fell upon Him and He was the innocent sacrifice to whom our guilt was transferred.

In Ps. 110:4, the Psalmist says of Christ, “The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” This verse brings up many questions pertaining to this mysterious character Melchizedek. Who was he and where did he come from? Was he a real person or was he a theophany, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ in the OT. The first time we are confronted with this person is in the story of Abraham in Genesis 14. After defeating the four kings which raided Sodom and Gomorrah and took Lot captive, Abraham was met by two kings at the valley of Shaveh. One was the king of Sodom who was understandably grateful for the deliverance he had received from Abraham. He was a worldly king, and the testimony of Scripture is filled with references to the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah. The second was Melchizedek, king of Salem, which means “peace”, and “he was a priest of God Most High. Melchizedek blessed Abraham and Abraham gave him a tenth of the spoils of war (vv. 19-20). After this, the king of Sodom offered Abraham the spoils which they had retrieved from the four kings, an offer which Abraham refused on the grounds that he must give the king of Sodom no occasion for claiming to make Abraham rich (23).

We could draw many applications from this event. For one thing, it highlights Abraham’s determination to follow the one true God and to derive his blessings solely from Him. Taking wealth from the worldly king of Sodom would compromise his single hearted devotion and trust in “God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth.” By repeating the name for God used by Melchizedek, Abraham gives evidence of his understanding that the wealth and favor of the world are not needed for the believer to be truly blessed by God Most High who owns everything on earth. It could be argued that this was a test for Abraham. He is confronted by two kings, one clearly representing God, and the other clearly representing the world and Satan. Abraham makes a clear choice and honors Melchizedek with a tithe, while refusing any favors from the king of Sodom. Later on the book of Genesis, we will see that Lot was not as single-minded as Abraham. He attempted to maintain his allegiance to God while grasping at the world by settling down in Sodom and Gomorrah. His heart was divided between the world and God and because of this divided loyalty, he lost the things which were the most precious in his life: his wife and children—his wife through death (Gen. 19:26) and his children through the pagan influence of Sodom and Gomorrah. The pagan nations of Moab and Ammon, which later opposed Israel, were the result of their incestuous relationship with their father (Gen. 19: 30-38). Were it not for Peter’s mention of “righteous Lot” in 2 Pet. 2: 6-8, we would be convinced that Lot was an unbeliever based on his poor choices in life.

The writer of Hebrews goes to some length in making a comparison between Melchizedek and Christ, particularly between his priesthood and the priesthood of Christ. Melchizedek was not only a priest but a king, and the translation of his name means “king of righteousness”. By serving both as priest and king, he is a type of Christ who is not only the Great High Priest but the Righteous King. The way in which Melchizedek is described in v.3 is not to be taken literally as if he had a supernatural birth without any parents or that he never died. He is not a type so much in the physical,

verifiable facts of his existence, but in the way the Scripture *presents* him. The writer is simply using the obscurity (unclearness) of his life in the time of Abraham, a life about which very little is said, to typify the supernaturalness of the birth of Christ and the fact of His eternal nature which enables Him to be “a priest perpetually” (forever). In the OT, a time in which one’s origins were extremely important, it is odd that there is no information about the origin of Melchizedek. He appears in Genesis 14 as if out of nowhere and is never mentioned again except in Ps. 110. Furthermore, even though it was with Abraham that God made His covenant, it is clear that Melchizedek is a worshipper of the true and living God, the same God Abraham serves. How was the true faith communicated to Melchizedek? Certainly not through Abraham since according to this passage in Hebrews Melchizedek is considered superior to Abraham (v.7). We are simply not told the derivation of his faith, a fact which heightens his typological significance as a type of Christ who is the *author* of the covenant rather than the *recipient*.

Some scholars have explained Melchizedek as a theophany or a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ in the OT. This is highly unlikely since he was the king of Salem, a literal geographical city which later served as the capital of the Israelite nation during the reign of David. At some point in history, the name of the city was changed to Jerusalem. Furthermore, the worship of the true God eventually died out. When and how this happened is not given to us in Scripture.

It should also be noticed that just as Melchizedek is a priest not of the order of Levi, Christ is also not of the order of Levi. He was from the tribe of Judah which was not the priestly line, which means that Christ did not inherit the right to his priesthood through human descent, but received it directly from God (v. 13). The superiority of Christ’s priesthood over Aaron’s (the Levitical) priesthood is brought to our attention by the fact that Levi was not yet born when Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek. The argument made is that Levi “was still in the loins of his father [Abraham] when Melchizedek met him [Levi]”; and therefore when Abraham paid the tithe to Melchizedek, Levi also paid tithes to Melchizedek vicariously (representatively) through his father Abraham. This is the same type of argument which Paul makes in Romans 5, namely, that every human being in the loins of Adam sinned in and with Adam in the Garden of Eden. The Priesthood of Melchizedek, which is a type of the priesthood of Christ, comes before the priesthood of Levi, and is therefore superior to the priesthood of Levi.

The superiority of Christ’s priesthood is brought into focus in three ways: (1) It is not like the temporal nature of the Levitical priests whose priesthood was limited by old age and death [v.23] (2) It is superior because of the person Christ is—a perfect priest—in contrast to the imperfection of the Levitical priests who were beset with sins [v. 26-28]. (3) Christ was sworn in as a priest forever by an oath from God the Father, something never done in the case of Levitical priests [v.20-21].

The importance of the above comparison with Melchizedek can be found in the fact that we as believers have an eternal priest in heaven who lives continually to make intercession for the people of God before the throne of God the Father. “Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (v.25). Intercession is a crucial ministry of Christ as He stands at the right hand of God the Father. Satan is the “accuser of the brethren” (Rev. 12: 10), a fact which is amply illustrated in the story of Job in which Satan accuses Job for loving God only for the benefits God had given him. Take away the benefits, Satan argues, and Job would no longer serve the Lord (Job 1: 8-11). Satan also wished to destroy Peter’s

faith and would have succeeded had it not been for Jesus' intercession before the Father: "but I [Jesus] have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail" (Lk. 22: 32). Were it not for the intercession of Christ before the Father's throne for the sake of the elect, all of us would fall from the faith and be lost.

What is the basis of Jesus' intercession? What argument does He present to the Father for the forgiveness of our sins? Not only did Christ serve as the Great High Priest who offers the blood of the sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, but the blood He offers is His own blood. Thus we have an infinitely holy priest offering an infinitely precious sacrifice before the Father. Having offered this sacrifice, how can the Father refuse such a sacrifice—the blood of His own perfect Son offered up through the voluntary death of His son? It is upon this basis and this basis alone that we can be forgiven by God the Father. Any works or merits of our own which we would offer to God in addition to the sacrifice of Christ would make the total sacrifice imperfect since the perfect sacrifice of Christ would be mixed with our imperfect sacrifice.

Throughout human history, the sacrifice of Christ has been the only basis of forgiveness with God. Even in the OT, the animal sacrifices were to no avail unless these sacrifices pointed the sinner's heart toward the promised redemption in the coming Messiah, "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10: 4). It is clear from Heb. 10: 5-7 that God could not be pleased with the sacrifices of animals alone. These sacrifices could have value only as they were organically connected with the once and for all sacrifice of Christ. And the only way a person can appropriate this sacrifice for himself is by faith in the one to whom all the sacrifices pointed, even Jesus Christ. The body that is prepared in v. 5 is the body of Christ and none other, and it is that body which Christ lays down voluntarily in obedience to the will of God (v.7).

We may ask at this point what purposes the OT sacrifices served. If they did not actually atone for sin, why were they offered in the first place? In the words of Berkhof,

As far as the theocratic, the covenant relation was concerned, they were the appointed means whereby the offender could be restored to the outward place and privileges, enjoyed as a member of the theocracy, which he had forfeited by neglect and transgression. As such they accomplished their purpose irrespective of the temper and spirit [that is, the motivation] in which they were brought. However, they were not in themselves efficacious [effective] to expiate moral transgressions. They were not the real sacrifice that could atone for moral guilt and remove moral pollution, but only shadows of the coming reality....From the spiritual point of view they were typical of the vicarious [substitutionary] sufferings and death of Christ, and obtained forgiveness and acceptance with God only as they were offered in true penitence, and with faith in God's method of salvation. They had saving significance only in so far as they fixed the attention of the Israelite on the coming Redeemer and the promised redemption.

To summarize Berkhof's statement, the OT sacrifices were pictures of the future reality of Christ's sacrifice. If the sinner offered them routinely and casually without sincere repentance of sin and trust in the coming redeemer, he could still be admitted into the external benefits of covenant life in Israel (for no one could examine his heart), but he could not be forgiven on that basis simply because the OT sacrifices have a relationship to Christ only through faith. Without faith, they are just dead animals. The same can be said of the Lord's supper. There is real benefit in partaking of the Lord's Supper for those who recognize, by faith, the merit of the death of Christ for their sins. But if the partaker of the supper does not recognize the bread and water as symbolic of the body and blood of Christ which was broken and shed for his own personal transgressions of the law of God, then there is

no benefit in taking the supper, and the person actually “eats and drinks judgment to himself” (1 Cor. 11:29).

The Bible is forthrightly against all kinds of religious formalism—going through the motions of religion while the heart is fixed on something else. The OT prophets speak of the dangers of formalism even more so than the NT apostles. Much of this formalism is related to the giving of sacrifices (Isa. 1: 11-17) and the temple worship (Jer. 7: 1-11). Unless we are connected to Christ through faith, all of our religious activity avails nothing. God is not ultimately pleased with religion, but with Christ alone and those truly joined to Christ by faith.

X. The Satisfaction of Christ

The work of Christ in his passive obedience on the cross and in his active obedience in perfectly obeying the law of God totally satisfies the demands of the law of God. Hodge’s observations are helpful in understanding this point (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, pp. 493-494).

Our relation to the law is two-fold, federal and moral. It is of the nature of the covenant prescribing the conditions of life. It says, “Ye shall keep my statutes and my judgments; which if a man do, he shall live in them.” And, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”

From this federal relation to the law we are, under the gospel, delivered. We are no longer bound [obligated] to be free from all sin and to render perfect obedience to the law, as the condition of salvation. If this were not the case, no flesh living could be saved. We are not under law but under grace.

This deliverance from the law is not affected by its abrogation, or by lowering its demands, but by the work of Christ. He was made under the law that He might redeem those who were under the law. . . . The work of Christ was therefore of the nature of a satisfaction to the demands to the law. By his obedience and sufferings, by his whole righteousness, active and passive, He, as our representative and substitute, did and endured all that the law demands.

Those, who by faith receive this righteousness, and trust upon it for justification, are saved; and receive the renewing of their whole nature into the image of God. Those who refuse to submit to this righteousness of God, and go about to establish their own righteousness, are left under the demands of the law; they are required to be free from all sin, or having sinned, to bear the penalty.

Christ also satisfied the demands of the wrath of God against sin. This is presented in Scripture in Romans 3: 25 and 1 Jn. 2: 2. Christ is presented as the “propitiation” (satisfaction) for our sins. Somehow, because man had offended a holy God and incurred (brought upon himself) His wrath, some sacrifice had to be paid to satisfy this wrath. Notice it says in Romans that it was God the Father who set forth Christ as the propitiation. We are not to think of Christ as the God of love appeasing the wrath of an unloving Father. No, it is God the Father who initiates this sacrifice of Christ as the satisfaction of His wrath (cf. John Murray, *Romans*).

XI. The Atonement of Christ

A. Theories of the Atonement

Why was the sacrifice of Christ necessary? This question does not relate to the fact that man needed to be forgiven by God for his rebellion. The question is rather, was there any other way for this forgiveness to be granted other than the atoning work of Christ?

1. The Atonement Was Not Necessary

In the history of the church, there were, and are, some who regard the sacrifice of Christ as purely the arbitrary will of God. That is to say, God was not bound by His own internal nature and attributes to choose this method of forgiving the human race, but simply chose it as the means among many other possible means. Duns Scotus was one historical figure who held to this position as well as Grotius who both taught that the justice of God was based upon His moral perfection and did not require the punishment of sin. God was free to relax the requirement of the performance of His will whenever He chose. The modern philosophers Scheirmacher and Ritschl followed in this error and insisted that God can forgive sin without demanding the satisfaction of His wrath against sin (Berkhof, pp. 368-369). Liberal theologians ever since have followed them in their resistance to the necessity of the atonement of Christ.

2. The Atonement was Hypothetically Necessary

What this means is that God chose the atonement as the best possible means of salvation on the basis of His divine, sovereign decree. “The atonement was necessary, therefore, because God sovereignly determined to forgive sin on no other condition.” This was the opinion of Athanasius, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin. It is not, however, the opinion of most reformed theologians today.

3. The Atonement was Absolutely Necessary

In the early church, Irenaeus and Anselm both taught the absolute necessity of the atonement, and Turretin and Owen followed. It is the preferred opinion of reformed scholars today and is the position taken by the Westminster Confession of Faith. This position is grounded chiefly in the justice of God and the necessity of His moral perfection which makes it absolutely necessary for Him to preserve His holiness through the punishment of sin. God cannot maintain His holiness apart from the judgment of sinners, and He must either judge each sinner individually or vicariously (by way of substitution) through the atonement of Christ. We will see below that the absolute necessity of the atonement is the theory of the atonement most in keeping with the scriptures.

Luke 24: 26 Jesus says that it was “necessary” for Him to suffer. This passage alone should be sufficient proof. It is truly inconceivable that God the Father would have sent Christ to die on a cross had there been any other way for God to reconcile sinners to Himself while maintaining His justice and holiness.

Rom. 3: 25-26 Notice that Paul says that the sacrifice of Christ as the “propitiation” or satisfaction of the wrath of God was a demonstration of the “righteousness” of God and by that sacrifice God is shown to be both “just” and the “justifier” of one who has faith in Jesus.

Matt. 5: 18 The Law required death to the one who violated it (See also Dt. 30), a requirement which Jesus Himself does not rescind (do away with). The Apostle Paul continues to teach the inviolability (unbreakability) of the law apart from the penalty of death. For God to do away with the penalty of death for breaking His law would mean that He would not be true to His word. And if God is not found to be true at this point, can we trust Him to be true in anything else He says? (Num. 23: 19). It is an established fact from Scripture that Christ suffered the penalty of the law, death, in the place of those who believe in Him (Gal. 3: 13). The inability of the Law of Moses, or any other law, to impart life to the sinner is acknowledged by Paul in Gal. 3: 21. Had there been a law which would have imparted life, surely God would have employed it in the salvation of His people rather than sending His Son to die on a cross. (See comments on Luke 24: 26 above.)

B. Objections to the Necessity of the Atonement

Some theologians object to the atoning work of Christ on the grounds that it makes God less merciful than individuals who often forgive others without any conditions being met. The failure in their thinking is that God cannot be compared to a private individual. God is the Judge of all the earth. Even a human judge cannot ignore violations of the law in his official capacity as a judge, but is bound by law to punish those who are convicted of wrong-doing. In his private life, he is free to be as merciful as he wishes, but not as a judge. This position also ignores the fact that God was not compelled by anything outside of His own compassion to save anyone. He could have decided to save no one and would have been within His rights as God had He so chosen. The atonement is the result of His abundant grace to sinners.

Corresponding to the objection above is the one which assumes that the atonement represents an internal division within the Trinity. God the Father is the stern, unforgiving judge who demands death for sinners, and Christ is the merciful sacrifice who loves us enough to die for us thereby appeasing His wrathful Father. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Bible says that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself...” (2 Cor. 5: 19). Jesus said in His high priestly prayer that he had accomplished the work of atonement which the Father had given Him (Jn. 17: 4). These verses (and many more could be added) prove that the reconciliation achieved between God and the world of sinners was not something Jesus persuaded the Father to do against His will, but something God the Father wished to do because of His love for sinners.

(For a more thorough treatment of the necessity of the atonement, see Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 367-372, from which this summary has been taken.)

C. The Purpose of the Atonement

The OT word for atonement is *kaphar*, to cover. The atoning sacrifice made a covering for the sinner to hide his sin from the eyes of God. Jesus Christ is our covering because He clothes us in His own righteousness. God no longer sees our sinfulness, but sees only the atoning blood of His son.

Reformed theologians believe that the atonement of Christ not only made salvation possible for the sinner, it made it certain. On the other hand are Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Arminians who

believe that His atonement made salvation possible for those to whom it is offered, but certain for none. Under these three systems, it is theoretically possible that Christ could have come into the world and died without securing the salvation of a single, solitary sinner. This is so because of the hardness of men's hearts in resisting the offer of salvation. Conceivably, after the death of Christ, not a single person would have believed the gospel and the immediate disciples could have fallen away in despair.

The question of God's purpose or design in the atoning work of Christ is a crucial issue because it brings into question the sovereignty of God. If God designed the atonement to secure the salvation of all sinners and failed in this endeavor, then His sovereignty is brought into question. On the other hand, if He designed the atonement to secure the salvation of only a certain class of sinners known as the elect, then it is clear from Scripture that He succeeded in His purpose. This brings us to the question of the extent of the atonement: *for whom did Christ die?*

Before we answer this question, we should clarify some questions we are not asking (See Berkhof, pp. 393-394). The question is not whether the satisfaction of Christ on the cross is sufficient for the salvation of all men who have ever lived and all who will ever live. Everyone agrees that the atonement of Christ is sufficient for the salvation of all who have existed in this world and would be sufficient for millions of worlds besides. The question is also not whether the benefits of the atonement are savingly applied to every man. Every evangelical believes that they are not applied equally simply because there are some who never believe and are eternally lost. It is also not in question whether the gospel is legitimately offered to all men indiscriminately whether they are the elect or not since it is impossible for anyone to determine who the elect is. It is also not in question whether unbelievers to some extent enjoy some of the saving benefits of the atonement. Unbelievers enjoy many benefits through their association with Christians and by living in environments and countries which have been beneficially affected by the gospel. None of the above poses the central question.

The real question concerns the design of the atonement. In sending Christ into the world to save the world, did God intend to save every single individual or did He intend to provide atonement only for those whom He elected before the foundation of the world? In the words of Berkhof, "That is the question, and that is the only question." To put it another way, what did the atonement of Christ actually accomplish? Did it simply make salvation possible or did it actually and certainly secure the salvation of the elect? The reformed position is the latter which substantiates (gives substance or weight to) the sovereign purpose and power of God in salvation. God never, ever, intends to do something which He fails to do. If, indeed He had planned on saving everyone, this is precisely what He would have done and would not have allowed man or the devil to frustrate His plans. As it is, He never intended to save everyone, but only the elect, and sent His son to die for them, and them only, to make their salvation certain.

D. Proof for the Doctrine of Limited (Particular) Atonement

The following proofs are taken from Berkhof (pp. 394-395) and Hodge (pp. 546-552).

1. This first proof has already been mentioned; namely, the argument from the surety of God's sovereign purposes which can never be frustrated. (See Isa.46: 10).

2. The Scripture itself qualifies those for whom Christ died as the “sheep”, the “Church”, the “elect”, “His people” and “His friends” (See Jn. 10: 11,15; Acts 20: 28; Eph. 5: 25-27; Matt. 1: 21; and Rom. 8: 32-35; Jn. 15: 13). We will cover the objections to this doctrine later, but if it be objected that *all* people are His sheep for whom He died, it must be answered that this is not the teaching of Scripture. In Jn. 10: 26, Jesus tells some of the obstinate Jews that they did not believe because they were *not* His sheep. His sheep are those whom the Father *has given Him* and *they* (and they alone) would never perish (vv. 27-29). There is nothing in Scripture about Christ dying for the goats (See Matt. 25). In the words of Hodge, “When mankind are divided into two classes, the Church and the world, the friends and the enemies of God, the sheep and the goats, whatever is affirmed distinctively of the one class is impliedly denied of the other.”

3. The sacrifice of Christ and His intercession are two different parts of the atoning work of Christ and are inseparable from one another. In Jn. 17: 9, Jesus limited His intercession to those whom the Father had given Him (See 2. above) and says expressly that He does not pray for the world. Thus, the scope of Christ’s atonement is no broader than the scope of His intercession.

4. If Christ died for everyone, the only logical conclusion is that everyone is saved. This is argued on the basis of the satisfaction of Christ—that His death on behalf of the sinner actually, and not potentially, satisfied the wrath of God toward the sinner. If Christ died for a person, thus removing the wrath of God against him, then it does not follow that the sinner for whom Christ died would personally incur (be subject to) the same wrath at a later time. God must then be said to have punished the sin twice, once in Christ and once again in the sinner, making the satisfaction of Christ no satisfaction at all. To deny that the sacrifice or atonement of Christ actually atones for sin is to deny the efficacy (effectiveness) of the atonement itself, and to say that however much God the Father designed the atonement to take away the sins of the elect, it failed to achieve this object.

5. The teaching of Scripture does not agree with the argument that salvation is only made possible by the atonement of Christ. Consider the following verses: Matt. 18: 11; Rom. 5: 10; 2 Cor. 5: 21; Gal. 3: 13; In Matt. 18, Christ came “to save”, not to “attempt to save”. We “were reconciled” (aorist participle indicating a single action in the past), not “shall be reconciled possibly” in the future (Rom.5). In 2 Cor. 5: 21, God the Father “made” (aorist—definitive action) Christ to be sin on our behalf. That is, at a point in time, our sin was imputed to Christ and was nailed to the cross with Him. If our sin was placed upon Him, it is no longer upon us, and we are no longer under God’s judgment, for there is nothing to judge. Christ “redeemed us”, not will redeem us from the curse of the law. We also “have redemption”, not will have. In other words, Christians presently have possession of the benefits of salvation. If it be objected that based upon this argument, those for whom Christ died are saved even at conception, it should be said that while the objective grounds for our salvation are already secured in the past with the atonement, the application of this atonement by the Spirit subjectively in the heart of every believer is still essential. This assertion naturally leads us to the next.

6. Not only did Christ purchase our salvation, but He purchased all the necessary conditions of our salvation including faith, repentance, and the work of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 2: 4; Gal. 3: 13-14; Eph. 1: 3-4; 2: 8; Phil. 1: 29; Titus 3: 5-6).

7. A seventh argument, by Hodge, proceeds from the argument of the covenant of redemption between Christ and the Father in which the Father agrees to give Christ a people on condition that He give His life a ransom for them on the cross. It cannot be denied that some people have been given by the Father to the Son and that all people have not been so given (Jn. 10: 29; 6: 37; 17: 6). The salvation of His people is the reward Christ is given for His active and passive obedience, and having accomplished His task, He is entitled to this reward (See Jn. 17: 4-5; Heb. 12: 2).

8. Hodge also argues from the doctrine of election. As we have already seen in our study of systematic theology, God chose some of the human race from among the masses of mankind to be saved (Eph. 1: 3-4). Having so chosen some to salvation and passed over others, God would not send His son to die for those whom He had not chosen. What would be the purpose?

9. The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ gave His life as a ransom (Matt. 20: 28; Mk. 10: 45; 1 Tim. 2: 6). Matthew and Mark limit this ransom for “many”, while Paul says that His ransom is for “all”. The seeming discrepancy can be partially solved when considering the context of 1 Timothy 2. In v.1, Paul calls for prayers to be made in behalf of “all men”. He then qualifies this “all” as all kinds of men, for “kings and all who are in authority”. He then says in v.4 that God “desires all men to be saved...” The context seems to favor the interpretation that prayers and petitions are to be made on behalf of all kinds of men because God desires all men (without distinction of race, class, etc.) to be saved. If indeed God desires that all men without exception to be saved, then we have a contradiction with Job 23: 13, “But He is unique and who can turn Him? And what His soul desires, that He does.”

The idea of ransom implies the performance of certain terms. If someone is held hostage and ransom money is required, upon the payment of the ransom, it is expected that the hostage be released. This may not happen when wicked men are demanding the ransom, but when Christ gives His life a ransom for many, we can be assured that God the Father will honor the ransom being paid and release the hostages (sinners) from any further obligation.

10. On the Day of Atonement recorded in Lev. 16, Aaron the high priest would place his hands on the scape goat and “confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel”. It is only Israel’s sins which are confessed and atoned for, not the sins of Amorites, Moabites, Egyptians, or any other nation, but only those of the sons of Israel. This limited atonement on the Day of Atonement is clearly in agreement with the argument given above (Number 8). Just as God did not chose the Amorites, Moabites, or any other nation besides the Israelites, so the atonement provided on the Great Day of Atonement did not apply to any other nation. Only those who are elected are the recipients of the atonement. It must be kept in mind that the Day of Atonement was only a type of the completed atonement in Christ and did not provide the complete salvation for the people of Israel apart from the sacrifice of Christ. Consequently, only those Jews who were truly repentant and looking ahead to the coming Redeemer (Jn. 8: 56) would truly benefit from this typical and preliminary atonement (Rom. 9).

11. The union of the believer with Christ argues for limited or particular atonement. The federal headship of Christ replaces the federal headship of Adam for all believers. In 1 Cor. 15: 22 Paul says, “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.” Paul’s reference is to the headship of Adam for the whole human race which sinned in and with Adam in the Garden of Eden. *The fall of Adam did not make the condemnation of men possible but absolutely certain.* It was the

ground of their actual condemnation. Analogously (in the same manner) *the obedience of Christ did not make new life possible, but certain*. And lest anyone misuse this verse to teach universalism (that all without exception are “made alive”), we need only to point to the particulars of the verse itself. Only those who are “in Christ” shall be made alive, terminology which is reserved for true believers.

[This of course begs the question of *when* believers were joined to Christ or *when* Christ became their new federal head. Without question, Adam became the federal head of the human race when he was created, not when the men and women he represents are born. Objectively, Christ became the new federal head of the elect in the counsels of eternity and in space and time at His incarnation, not when men and women are born again. And subjectively, this headship (which is already an objective reality) is applied to the benefit of the believer at conversion. (This will become more clear in our study of Soteriology—the doctrine of salvation.) Two passages from Ephesians will help to illustrate the objectivity and the subjectivity of our union with Christ. In Eph. 1: 4, Paul says that believers are chosen in Christ before the world began. Our election, then, is an election “in Christ” as our federal head. There is no election apart from our status “in Christ” rather than “in Adam”. Thus, Christ operated as our federal head before the world began. Objectively, in the mind of God we were “in Christ” before our physical birth because we were chosen “in Christ.” On the other hand, Paul tells us that there was a time in which “we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest” (Eph. 2: 8). At one and the same time we were “chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world” and “were by nature children of wrath”. How can both of these be true at the same time? It is because the objective reality of our election in Christ had not yet been subjectively applied by the Holy Spirit. There is no getting around this objective-subjective dynamic.

We meet with it often in our study of theology. The elect will most certainly be saved because God chose them, but none of the elect will be saved apart from the subjective regenerating work of the Spirit in the heart. All of those who have Christ as their federal head will be forgiven, but none of these will be forgiven apart from the repentance and faith produced by the Spirit. For further discussion on union with Christ, see John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp.161-173.)]

E. Objections to the Doctrine of Particular Atonement

Since this is a doctrine which is much disputed among Bible-believing Christians, we might expect there would be other Scriptural evidence which would seem to teach that Christ died for all people without exclusion or exception. In fact, there are many such passages to which we will now turn (See Berkhof, pp.396-399).

1. Consider the following verses indicating that Christ died for the whole world: John 3: 16; 6: 33, 51; 2 Cor. 5: 19; 1 Jn. 2: 2. The use of these verses to dispute limited atonement must assume the interpretation of “world” as being all members of the human race without exception. But the following passages will prove that the word “world” can have other meanings: Jn. 1: 10; Acts 11: 28; 19: 27; 24: 5; Rom. 1: 8; and Col. 1: 6. We may not conclude from Jn. 1: 10 that all men without exception did not know (or recognize) Christ as the coming Messiah, because some did recognize Him as such. The famine Agabus predicted (Acts 11: 28), though severe, certainly did not encompass the whole of the then-known world. Certainly we are not to believe that the goddess Artemis was actually worshipped by every Asian and every single person in the world at that time

(Acts 19: 27). Paul, certainly a pest to the Jewish leaders, was not capable as a single individual to stir up trouble among all the Jews in the world at that time (Acts 24: 5), and the faith of the Roman Christians was certainly not known to every person alive at the time the letter was written. (See also John 12: 19; 14: 22; 18: 20.)

The conclusion which should be reached in the study of the above Scriptures is not that Christ died for every person who will ever live on earth, but that the New Testament revelation demonstrates a broadening of the blessings of the covenant from the restrictive access of Israel to the “whole world” (See Matt. 24: 14; Rom. 1: 5).

2. Second are those passages which speak of Christ dying for all men (Rom. 5: 18; 1 Cor. 15: 22; 2 Cor. 5: 14; 1 Tim. 2: 4, 6; Titus 2: 11; Heb. 2: 9; 2 Pet. 3: 9). With many of these passages, any attempt to use them to prove that Christ died for everyone actually proves too much. For example, Rom. 5: 18 would be forced to prove that because Christ died for all men without exclusion, then all men without exclusion are justified, that is, made legally just before God. This is impossible if God does, indeed, send some to hell as punishment for their sins—an admitted fact by both sides of the atonement controversy. Using the same reasoning, universal salvation for all men without exclusion would also be taught in 1 Cor. 15: 22, but the context clearly indicates that only those “in Christ” shall be made alive.

In 2 Cor. 5: 14, the class of people for whom Christ died is the same class who actually died with Christ, meaning that when He died on the cross, these people died with Him (See also Rom. 6: 3, 7-8).

We have already discussed 1 Tim. 2: 4 and 6, and Heb. 2: 9 and Titus 2: 11 would fall into the same category. Christ tasted death for everyone—that is, for all kinds of people without distinction, and He brought salvation to all kinds of men. 2 Pet. 3: 9 is best understood from the broader context of the passage. Peter is writing to the Jewish Diaspora (Jewish Christians displaced from their homeland) who had been converted and were undergoing severe persecution in foreign lands. He is not addressing the entire human population, a fact which is evident from the context. Their persecutors were like the “mockers” during the time of Noah who kept scoffing at Noah while he faithfully built the ark. They just could not believe that a day of judgment would come, even as the non-elect of Peter’s day and ours who ridicule the idea of a final judgment. While God was patient with these scoffers for 120 years (Gen. 6: 3), His patience surely was not inexhaustible. He finally had enough of their scoffing and sent the flood to destroy them. But God is ultimately patient toward a certain class of sinners to whom belongs the promise (v.9); namely, the elect of whom He is not willing that any should perish as the scoffers did during Noah’s day.

3. Possibly the most difficult passages to reconcile with the doctrine of limited atonement are those which seem to specifically teach that there are some who are ultimately lost for whom Christ died. For example, Rom. 14: 15 says that the weak “brother...for whom Christ died” is destroyed by the strong Christians insensitive use of Christian liberty. It may be seriously doubted that the word “destroy” should be interpreted as the ultimate destruction of the soul in hell (John Murray, *Romans*). However, even if it does (per Berkhof and Hodge), we must remember that warnings are often given to the elect as a means of encouraging constant diligence (Heb. 6; 2 Pet. 1: 10). Christians are never encouraged to hide behind the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints while overlooking their own

sins or the sins of others. As Hodge says, “Christians are not saved in spite of apostasy but from apostasy.” In this particular case, the stronger brother is made to take seriously the possibility that His actions could lead to the downward spiral which leads to ultimate apostasy from the faith.

Since this is such a difficult and sensitive theological problem, a lengthy quote from Hodge on 1 Cor. 1: 11 is appropriate.

The language of Paul in this verse seems to assume that those may perish for whom Christ died. It belongs, therefore, to the same category as those numerous passages which make the same assumption with regard to the elect. If the latter are consistent with the certainty of the salvation of all the elect, then this passage is consistent with the certainty of the salvation of those for whom Christ specifically died. It was absolutely certain that none of Paul’s companions in shipwreck was on that occasion to lose his life, because the salvation of the whole company had been predicted and promised; and yet the apostle said that if the sailors were allowed to take away the boats, those left on board could not be saved [Acts 27: 14-44]. This appeal secured the accomplishment of the promise. So God’s telling the elect that if they apostatize they shall perish, prevents their apostasy. And in like manner, the Bible teaching that those for whom Christ died shall perish if they violate their conscience, prevents their transgression, or brings them to repentance. God’s purposes embrace the means as well as the end. If the means fail, the end will fail. He secures the end by securing the means. It is just as certain that those for whom Christ died shall be saved, as that the elect shall be saved. Yet in both cases the event is spoken of as conditional. There is not only a possibility, but an absolute certainty of their perishing if they fall away. But this is precisely what God has promised to prevent (Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians*).

The passage in 2 Pet. 2: 1 is more troublesome in which the false prophets who introduce soul-damning heresies are said to deny the “Master who *bought* them...” The most plausible (reasonable) explanation, according to Berkhof, is that Peter describes these false teachers according to their own profession of faith. By their own profession they claimed to be followers of Christ and to be among those for whom Christ died. Peter therefore characterizes them on the basis of their covenantal standing in the Church, the Church for whom Christ died (p. 397). White insists that covenantal blessings which are unique to the elect are often ascribed by the Biblical writers to those who are apostate. He includes 2 Pet. 2: 1 and Heb. 10: 29 in that category of texts. (Fowler White, “Covenant and Apostasy”, p. 210, *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons*, E. Calvin Beisner, editor).

White elaborates further by calling our attention to the finiteness (limitations) of the Biblical author’s knowledge of God’s eternal decree. While the Lord knows those who are His (2 Tim. 2: 19), we don’t, and the Biblical writers didn’t either. It is precisely this lack of information which dissuaded (advised against) the Biblical writers from any attempt to differentiate (make a distinction) between the profession of true believers from the professions of hypocrites. By refusing to make a distinction between the true faith of some and the false faith of others, the Biblical writers were not presenting the possibility of the “reversibility of faith” (as if true faith could be reversed and lost) but the impossibility of human infallibility in discerning the difference between the two (White, pp.212-213).

Later in His essay, White offers a further explanation for this class of texts which appear to teach the application of Christ’s atonement to those who will ultimately be lost. In his view, one which I have personally never encountered before in any commentary on Hebrews 10 or 2 Peter, the Biblical writers were employing sarcasm or irony when they describe the apostate members as being “sanctified” or “bought” by the blood of Christ. Sarcasm is a figure of speech in which the speaker, or writer, says something about someone or something while actually meaning just the opposite. Another expression used to describe this literary device is “tongue in cheek”. Sarcasm is used by Jesus when He warns the unbelieving Jews that “the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the

outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8: 12). The statement seems self-contradictory. How can the *sons* of the kingdom be *cast out* of the kingdom? Only because the Jews, though claiming to be sons of the kingdom through their descent from Abraham, were not, in fact, sons of the kingdom. Through reproachful irony or sarcasm, Jesus ascribes to the apostate Jews the title they give themselves while meaning the exact opposite. They are actually sons of the devil. (See also Mk. 2: 17.) Micaiah the prophet used sarcasm against wicked Ahab (2 Chron. 18:14) and Elijah against the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18: 27).

White’s explanation of 2 Pet. 2: 1 and Heb. 10: 29 is too lengthy to recount here in full, but the gist (general summary) of his argument is that in these passages, the Biblical writer on the one hand *implies* the saving effects of the atonement for those who ultimately perish while *explicitly denying them* these saving effects. Sarcastically he ascribes to them the saving benefits of a salvation they could not possibly have because of their unbelief. For example in Heb. 10: 29, sanctification by the blood of Christ is ascribed to those who later repudiate (deny) the covenant of grace. This would *imply* that the atonement of Christ is applied to those who later reject Christ and go to hell. But this is a strange statement in light of the author’s *explicit* statement in 10: 14 that “...He has perfected *for all time* those who are sanctified.” Hebrews 10: 14 indicates the *eternal* sanctification of the apostate, something which is *explicitly denied* in 10: 27, 30 and 31 which emphatically states that the one who later repudiates the covenant falls under the final judgment of God. Hebrews 10: 29 and 10: 14, taken together, also imply the eternal possession of spiritual blessings (Heb. 6: 4-5) by someone who cannot be renewed to repentance (Heb. 6: 6). But this cannot be so. How can one eternally possess (“for all time”) the spiritual blessings of the covenant if he is in a perpetual (continual) state of unrepentance? Thus, White argues that there are internal contradictions in the author’s argument in Hebrews if we fail to take into account his use of sarcasm or reproachful irony.

White uses the same interpretive strategy with 2 Pet. 2: 1. If one is “bought” by the Master, it means that he is bought with the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1: 18-19; 1 Cor. 6: 20). Those who are bought with the blood of Christ are also “purified” (1 Pet. 1: 9); given everything they need for holy living (1: 3); have “escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord” (2: 20). Yet, these same people are ultimately lost. How can this be? White’s answer, once again, is that Peter is sarcastically ascribing to unbelievers the blessings only truly given to believers.

My personal view is that White’s approach can be combined with the simplicity of Berkhof’s explanation. The Biblical writers are *sarcastically* or *ironically* giving apostates the descriptions which they claim for themselves according to their own profession: “sanctified”, “bought”, “purified”, etc.—descriptions which cannot be true of the apostate *by definition*. That is to say, an apostate is one who *by definition* is “destroyed” and “cast into hell” (2 Pet. 2: 1, 4); and “consumed” by the fire of God’s wrath (Heb. 10: 27).

It should be admitted at the outset that there are many passages which are problematic for the doctrine of limited atonement if they are considered apart from the analogy of faith. Taken by themselves, they can be employed to prove that Christ died for every single soul. But individual Scriptures need not be taken by themselves because they are linked thematically to the entire corpus (body) of Scripture. This is the value of systematic theology which attempts, imperfectly, to take all Scriptural teaching into account. Surely if we examine the weight of the evidence for limited atonement given above, we should come to the conclusion that Christ died only for those given Him by the Father, that is, those elect before the foundation of the world. (For further study on the extent

of the atonement and objections to the doctrine, see John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 59-75.)

F. Do Unbelievers Benefit from the Atonement of Christ?

This question has been mentioned only in passing, but it is one which deserves a more thorough explanation. The answer to the question is “yes.” Even those who eventually go to hell receive some benefits from the atonement. As we have said, unbelievers benefit from the company of Christians (See 1 Cor. 7: 14 in which Paul says that an unbelieving spouse is “sanctified” or set apart, presumably, for certain external covenant privileges because of his or her believing spouse.)

We may also say that the wicked world is being preserved from destruction because of the patience of God toward the elect (2 Pet. 2: 9). Otherwise, God would have destroyed the world long ago. All of the common grace bestowed on unbelieving sinners is also the result of Christ’s atoning work. Just think of the medical care which has been bestowed upon the world through the scientific discoveries of scientists assuming the Christian world-view of a predictable universe. Couple this with the tireless and self-less efforts of Christian nurses and doctors who have served as medical missionaries to underdeveloped countries. The medical care available in Africa today is largely the by-product of Christian medical missions. Many of those being served by increased medical care will perish in hell, but their life on earth was made much more tolerable through the atoning work of Christ applied to medicine.

G. Application of the Doctrine of Limited Atonement

The natural, and all too human, response to this doctrine is the statement, “It isn’t fair.” May I suggest that the only proper response is worship and gratitude. Rather than attempting to understand why Christ did not die for everyone, or, for that matter, why God didn’t elect everyone, we should simply ask, “Why did Christ die for me, since I am worthy of eternal damnation?” Since there was no difference in merit between us and the rest of the world which is going to hell (Rom. 3: 23), why were we singled out for blessing? I would suggest that this question, which is the right question, is unanswerable except from the perspective of God’s unmerited grace, and properly considered will cause us to say, “God, I don’t know why you chose me or why Christ died for me other than the fact that you loved me before the world began for no other reason than your amazing grace.”

XII. The Offices of Christ—King

We come now to the third aspect of the office of Christ. This office is not reserved for the future coming of Christ, as some well-meaning theologians would have us believe. After John the Baptist had been taken into custody by King Herod, Jesus came into Galilee preaching, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mk. 1: 15). In His conversation with Pilate, He is specifically asked whether He *is* (not *will be*) king of the Jews, to which He responds, “You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth” (Jn. 18: 33-37).

Theologians distinguish between the kingship enjoyed by Christ as the second person of the Trinity, who is equal to the Father and eternal, and the mediatorial kingship of Christ as the Theanthropos, the

God-man. The first kingdom is His by virtue of His deity, the kingdom which He has always ruled along with the Father. The mediatorial kingdom of God is the kingdom which is conferred or given to Christ by God the Father for the purpose of accomplishing salvation for the elect. A lengthy quote from Charles Hodge, one of the most capable theologians of the 19th century, will help us understand this distinction.

God as the creator and preserver of the universe, and as infinite in his being and perfections, is, in virtue of his nature, the absolute sovereign of all his creatures. This sovereignty He exercises over the material world by his wisdom and power, and over rational beings as a moral ruler. From this rightful authority of God, our race revolted, and thereby became a part of the kingdom of darkness of which Satan is the head. To this kingdom the mass of mankind has ever since belonged. But God, in his grace and mercy, determined to deliver men from the consequences of their apostasy. He not only announced the coming of a Redeemer who should destroy the power of Satan, but He at once inaugurated an antagonistic kingdom [a kingdom opposed to Satan], consisting of men chosen out of the world and through the renewing of the Holy Ghost restored to their allegiance. Until the time of Abraham this kingdom does not appear to have had any visible organization apart from the families of the people of God. Every pious household was a church of which the parent was the priest. To prevent the universal spread of idolatry, to preserve the knowledge of the truth, to gather in his elect, and to prepare the way for the coming of the promised Redeemer, God entered into covenant with the father of the faithful [Abraham] and with his descendants through Isaac, constituting them his visible kingdom, and making them the depositaries and guardians of his supernatural revelations. In this covenant He promised eternal life upon condition of faith in Him that was to come.

When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, they were made a theocracy so constituted in its officers, in its institutions, and in its services, as not only to preserve alive the knowledge of God's purpose and plan of salvation, but also to set forth the character, offices, and work of the promised seed of Abraham in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed.

The kingdom of God, therefore as consisting of those who acknowledge, worship, love, and obey Jehovah as the only living and true God, has existed in our world ever since the fall of Adam. It has ever been the light and life of the world. It is the salt by which it [the world] is preserved. It is the leaven by which it is ultimately to be pervaded [spread]. To gather his people into this kingdom, and to carry it on to its consummation, is the end of all God's dispensations [periods of saving activity with His people], and the purpose for which his eternal Son assumed our nature. He was born to be a king. To this end He lived and died and rose again, that He might be Lord of all those given to Him by the Father....

Although the kingdom of God has existed from the beginning, yet as everything therewith connected before the Advent [the first coming] was merely preparatory, the Scriptures constantly speak of the Messiah as a king who was to set up a kingdom into which in the end all other kingdoms were to be merged [See Dan. 2] (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Volume 2, pp. 596-597).

As noted earlier, kingship (dominion) over the earth is the purpose for which man was originally destined. But this kingship was in the form of a vice-regency to be performed under the ultimate rule of God (See Ps. 8). Man was meant to be a king, but he was never meant to be a god (in contrast to the Mormon heresy). Since man attempted to usurp the rule of God by thinking and acting independently of God (in the Garden and ever since), he has in essence shifted his allegiance away from God to Satan. To reclaim this allegiance and to restore His original intention of having one in His own image rule as vice-regent over the earth, it was necessary that God send His Son, the God-man, to establish a spiritual kingdom in the hearts of His elect people. It is through this spiritual kingdom which starts imperceptibly (unnoticeably) as a small mustard seed that Jesus Christ through the work of His church, and His personal victorious return will destroy every competing kingdom on earth until all His enemies will be a footstool for His feet. It is this glorious end to which every believer is predestined and to which he should focus his attention (Col. 3).

Hodge goes on to mention several passages of Scripture which establish the fact of Christ's present kingship on earth (Ps. 2; 2 Sam. 7: 16; Isa. 9: 6-7; Psalms 45; 72; and 110; Dan. 7: 13-14; Micah 5:2; Zech. 9: 9; Lk. 1: 31-33) (Hodge, pp. 597-598). In none of these passages is there any hint of the postponement of Christ's kingdom until some future millennium. Legitimate questions do arise concerning the nature of the fulfillment of the kingdom of Christ. If the Davidic kingdom is the type of the kingdom of Christ, then why do we not see the conquering of Christ's enemies during the time of Christ on earth? During the height of David's reign, God gave him rest on all sides from His enemies and Solomon, his successor enjoyed a time of peace unprecedented (never occurred before) during the history of Israel (1 Kings 4: 24). In contrast to this, Christ was crucified by His enemies, and His followers have been harassed, tortured and killed throughout the history of the church, especially in the 20th century to the present day. A partial answer to this question will be given below. ***We will be following the work of Berkhof, Systematic Theology, pp.406-411, including the use of his outline.***

A. "The Spiritual Kingship of Christ."

1. "The nature of this kingship."

The kingdom of Christ is a spiritual kingdom in which He rules over His church. He does so not by external force but through the Word and Spirit. Presently, the kingdom of Christ is primarily manifested (demonstrated) in the community of God's people which gather together as the church in worship and in the performance of good deeds toward one another and the world (Gal. 6: 9-10; Matt. 25: 31-46). It is also exhibited in the government of the church, in its discipline and protection of its members from spiritual harm (Matt. 18: 15-20; 1 Cor. 5; 2 Thes. 3: 6-12; Acts 20: 28; Heb. 13: 17). Christ is called the head of the church in Eph. 1: 22; 4: 15; 5: 23; Col 1: 18 and 2: 19 which implies an organic connection between Christ and His church in the same way the head is attached to the body. As Berkhof explains, "The two ideas are most intimately connected. It is just because Christ is the Head of the Church that He can rule it as King in an organic and spiritual way."

2. "The Kingdom over which it extends." This kingdom has the following characteristics.

a. "It is grounded in the work of redemption." The kingdom of grace did not originate in creation. No one can be a member of this kingdom by virtue of his humanity. Remember what Jesus told Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." One enters the universal rule of God through being born the first time, but he can only enter the spiritual kingdom of Christ by being born the second time.

b. "It is a spiritual kingdom." By virtue of their being the children of Abraham and members of the Israelite theocracy, the Jews of the OT mistakenly assumed their right to the kingdom of God, but Jesus, and the apostle Paul after Him, set the record straight by clearly limiting the kingdom to those who were Jews inwardly (Matt. 8: 11-12; 21: 43; Rom. 9: 6-8). Paul states in Romans 14: 17 that the kingdom of God is "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" and Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5) clearly demonstrates that His kingdom is not of this world by limiting membership in the kingdom to those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn over their sinfulness, the gentle or meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, are merciful, pure in heart,

peaceable, and those who are persecuted because they are righteous—hardly the predominant characteristics of typical earthly kings or kingdoms. Indeed, as Berkhof notes, “...if all those who are now citizens of the Kingdom would actually obey its laws in every domain of life, the world would be so different that it would hardly be recognized” (p. 408).

c. “It is a kingdom that is both present and future.” Now we can be more to the point in answering the question posed above. If Jesus is reigning as king, why does this kingdom have such a humble veneer (appearance on the surface)? Why does Paul say, “For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered” and “we are afflicted in every way...persecuted...always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus...” (Rom. 8: 36; 2 Cor. 4: 8-10)? A partial answer is found in the last half of 2 Cor. 4: 10, namely, “that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.” Jesus conquered the world of sin not by riding in on a white horse leading multitudes of warrior angels and lopping off heads, but by being crucified. We continue to conquer the world in the same way—through self-sacrifice and even death. But this does not answer the whole question. The kingdom of Christ is both a present reality and a future reality. There are present manifestations of this kingdom which reflect the humility of the kingdom and, in light of all the evil in the world today, we are tempted to believe that the spiritual dimension is all there is. But there will be a future manifestation of this kingdom in which the power and might of the kingdom will be fully revealed even to the eyes of unbelievers. By that time, it will be too late to embrace this kingdom with the heart; it will only be an unquestionable, horrible reality for those who call upon the rocks and mountains to fall on them to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb (Rev. 6: 12-17).

d. “It is closely related to the Church, though not altogether identical with it.” The citizenship of the kingdom is co-extensive with the membership in the invisible Church.” By “invisible Church”, Berkhof is recognizing the fact that the kingdom belongs only to those who are born again of the Spirit, not to those who simply have a church membership. However, the visible church is the outward expression of the invisible church, and is “the most important, and the only divinely instituted, external organization of the kingdom. At the same time it is also the God-given means *par excellence* for the extension of the kingdom of God on earth. It is well to note that the term “kingdom of God” is sometimes employed in a sense which makes it practically equivalent [equal] to the visible Church, Matt. 8: 12; 13: 24-30, 47-50” (*Systematic Theology*, p. 409, emphasis his).

B. “The Kingship of Christ over the Universe.”

Theologians speak of the present and future manifestations as the “now” and the “not yet” of the kingdom of God. There are aspects of this kingdom which are manifest to us “now”. For example, the worship of the corporate church, deeds of charity and kindness, joy, love, peace, and righteousness which are the characteristics of those who have truly entered the kingdom (the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount and the fruit of the Spirit). There is also the civil justice, democracy, and freedom which are enjoyed by nations which have tasted of the fruits of the gospel. All truth is God’s truth, and wherever the truth comes to expression, it has a beneficial impact on all of life, including economic and social life. The reason we have democracy in any form in the world today is the result of the out-working of the gospel into the fabric of human societies producing the concepts of human freedom and justice. By nature men are slaves to their own inward corruptions. They are also naturally inclined either to enslave others or to be enslaved by others. The triumph of democratic forms of government which are gradually replacing the despotic regimes of tyrants is a

testimony to the spread of ideals which find their roots in Christianity. These roots are not often acknowledged by predominantly non-Christian societies, but they are the beneficiaries none the less. Thus, we may say that not only is the kingdom of God has come and will come, but we may say that the kingdom of God is *in process*—that is, it is *progressively coming in stages*.

The final consummation (final and complete revelation) of the kingdom is reserved for the future. Consider the following passages: Ps. 2; Isa. 9: 6-7; Jer. 23: 5-6; Matt. 28: 18; Phil. 2: 10-11; 1 Cor. 6: 2-3; Rev. 19: 11-21, to mention only a few, which indicate the full sway of the authority of Christ which has yet to be fully realized. On the other hand, just because the kingdom is not fully realized now does not mean that it is not being realized at all. This would deny the present universal reign of Christ. When Christ was seated at the right hand of God the Father, God placed the whole world at His disposal in the interests of His church for whom He died. It has been said that the whole world a stage upon which the drama of redemption is being played out. If the “wealth of the wicked is being stored up for the righteous”, then by implication the whole world is being used by God to serve the interests of His people. Christians have been willing throughout the centuries to lose their lives for the sake of the kingdom, but by doing so they have gained the world.

As King of the universe the Mediator so guides the destinies of individuals, of social groups, and of nations, as to promote the growth, the gradual purification, and the final perfection of the people which He has redeemed by His blood. In that capacity He also protects His own against the dangers to which they are exposed in the world, and vindicates His righteousness by the subjection and destruction of all His enemies (Berkhof, p.410).

Premillennialists, on the other hand, insist that Christ is now in a waiting mode and will not reign over His universe until the start of the thousand year millennium. Referring to this position, Berkhof has this to say,

The idea that Christ now rules the destinies of individuals and nations in the interest of is blood-bought Church, is a far more comforting thought than the notion that He is now “a refugee on the throne of heaven” (p. 410).

The demise (downfall) of oppressive regimes in this century alone (Soviet Union, Hitler, Idi Amin, Saddam Hussein, etc.) should be a warning to all that the kingdoms of the earth will one day become the kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ. The days of tyrants are numbered. The Bible says that Christ “must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet” (1 Cor. 15: 25). In the same chapter, Paul says that all things will be subjected to Christ until His enemies are subdued, at which time Christ will hand over the kingdom to God the Father who will be all in all” (vv. 25-28). There will be no bribes, kickbacks, and corruption in His government. We see imperfect glimpses of this righteous reign *now* wherever there are free elections in countries which are ruled by law and not by men. But perfection in any government does not exist now and never did, even when Israel was ruled by David, a man after God’s own heart, but a man equally capable of taking another man’s wife, lying about it, and exposing her husband and a hundred other men to death (corruption). We are still waiting for the *not yet* of the kingdom of God when the object of the Lord’s prayer will be realized, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6). Jesus taught us in this prayer that there was a now and a not yet to His kingdom. But this is no idle prayer. If Jesus never expected the full sway of His authority to be realized *on earth*, He never would have instructed us to pray this way. We should notice that the kingdom coming on earth is inseparably connected with the will of God being done on earth. This is not the decreed will of God about which Jesus commands us to pray. We are never asked to pray for the decreed will of God. If this were so, we would be

praying for many things which are sinful (adultery, murder, etc. things which God uses sinlessly in the accomplishment of his decreed will). Jesus is referring to the perceptive or moral will of God to be done on earth. It is for this that we should pray.

The question remains, *when* will this happen, and *how* will it happen. Evangelical theologians are not divided over the question of *if* the kingdom of God will come in power and glory so that even unbelievers will see it. They are divided as to the *when* and the *how*. This is the subject of eschatology and must be reserved for a later time. Berkhof, an amillennialist, indicates that the present kingdom will not merge into the future kingdom without much upheaval and violence. He cites the following verses as evidence of this fact: Matt. 24: 21-44; Lk. 17: 22-37; 1 Thes. 5: 2-3; 2 Pet. 3: 10-12. We have discussed some of these passages at length elsewhere, but the analogy which keeps coming up in Scripture is the analogy of the flood (See also 2 Pet. 3: 1-9) in which people were going about their normal routines when destruction came upon them. This does not seem to imply the total triumph of Christianity in the world presented by the postmillennialists nor does it support the separation in time between the coming destruction of the wicked and the salvation of the righteous.

C. Application of the Kingdom of Christ

1. The kingdom governs our attitudes

The kingdom of God occupies a large portion of the preaching and teaching of Christ; therefore, we may safely assume that it occupied a place of priority in His thinking. If this is so, it should also occupy a large portion of our thinking and take priority in our lives. Jesus said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” This implies several things. First, it implies that our attitudes and actions should be governed for the purpose of promoting the interests of God in the world, and not our own interests. Seek first the kingdom of God, not your own personal kingdom. The latter is simply the sin of Adam revisited in which he sought to interpret life independently of God. Setting up your own selfish, self-centered kingdom is simply the sin of wanting to be your own God. As Christians, we are members of God’s kingdom and everything we have been given by God as His stewards is owned by God and available for His service.

2. The kingdom governs our actions

Second, membership in the kingdom of God implies that we do not live by our own self-made rules but by the rules of the kingdom—the law of God as revealed in the Old and New Testaments and which is brought to ultimate expression in the person of Christ and later in the epistles. As we have seen from our study of the law, what *constitutes* (makes up) moral law and *how* this moral law is to be applied is sometimes difficult to determine. Nevertheless, seeking the kingdom and seeking the righteousness of the kingdom are inseparable. One who is not interested in personal holiness is not interested in the kingdom of God, however much he enjoys theological discussions. If Christ is our king, we will obey Him. “Not all who say, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the *will* [moral will] of my Father in heaven.” “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

3. The kingdom should permeate (spread) throughout society

Third, as Christians we must be concerned about public justice and righteousness and not simply private, personal holiness. Jesus would not have us be like the ostrich which sticks his head in the sand. We cannot claim an interest in the kingdom of God if we are unconcerned that the will of God (His moral will) is being done on earth as it is in heaven. Consequently, we should not be content simply to evangelize and increase the roles of the church, but should be working for the permeation (absorption) of the gospel into every corner of society. Every institution and discipline is the object of the saving work of Christ: government, education, judicial law, economics, etc. If our leaders in high places are guilty of corruption and immorality, we should be seeking to replace them with leaders who fear God and keep His commandments, not simply those who claim to be Christians but don't produce the fruit thereof. (It is now an admitted fact by the liberal media in the US that George W. Bush, a professing believer, was reelected to a second term because the majority of American people did not approve the liberal agenda of the Democratic Party which pushed for abortion rights, homosexuality, stem cell research using the tissues of aborted fetuses, and a number of other leftist causes. A righteous man is now the US president because enough God-fearing people got out and voted.) If a public official on the national, district, or local level is found guilty of stealing public funds, he should be prosecuted by the full extent of the law and made to pay back everything he stole, not simply slapped on the wrist and told to be a good boy. As long as public thievery is tolerated in a society as something normal and expected, we cannot expect God's blessing for the nation.

4. The kingdom is the object of our meditation

Fourth, the kingdom of God should be the object of our meditation. Christ did not want His followers consumed with the worry of the world: “‘What shall we eat?’ Or ‘What shall we drink?’ Or ‘With what shall we clothe ourselves?’” He wanted our minds and hearts occupied with intense concern for His interests in the world which He called “the kingdom of God.” He knows that we need food, clothing, and shelter and He promised that if His kingdom is made our priority, He would see to it that we would have what we need (Matt. 6: 32-33). The Apostle Paul instructed us to “keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, and not on the things that are on earth. For you have died [that is, you have died with Christ and are dead to the world] and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory” (Col. 3: 1b-4). The application of all this meditation on the glory of Christ and the future glory of the believer is moral purity (See vv. 5-17). If the kingdom of God is our focus rather than the kingdom of man or our own personal kingdom, this focus will have amazing results on our moral behavior. We will not live as if this life is all there is, grasping for everything we can get out of life materially, but we will live in light of the fact that this world is temporary and will soon be replaced by another one. Rather, our grasp upon the world will be light and easily relinquished (given up), mindful of the fact that our citizenship is in heaven, in a different kingdom which will never end.