



# BIBLEFRAMEWORK

**for Worship and Obedience  
in an Age of Global Deception**

**Part V:  
CONFRONTATION WITH  
THE KING**

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## Introduction

The previous parts of this series on God's historical framework of revealed doctrine has completed the Old Testament (OT) period. The scientific, ethical, and cultural controversies between biblical and pagan thought have been presented. The stage has been carefully set for the greatest drama of human history—the entrance of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, King of Kings.

The present Part V will demonstrate that one cannot know or love Jesus apart from OT revelation given prior to His appearance and from revelation given in creation that dwells in and around each person continually. Starry-eyed, immature converts notwithstanding, one can never really appreciate Jesus in a God-pleasing manner until he looks at Him in a perspective like the framework presented in Parts II through IV. The first Christians had this framework; and, as a result, they “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6).

The method of organization of material used in the previous pamphlets has been slightly modified to deal with the life of Christ. In the second, third, and fourth parts, a key event or complex of events in biblical history was linked with one or more doctrines until the basic OT phase of the biblical framework was completed. In this pamphlet, as before, key events will be described; but the doctrines associated with these key events will be explicitly built from previously-taught OT doctrines. Such an approach forces the student to understand the basics before trying to understand Jesus. It also emphasizes that there is little new in the New Testament. All the basic doctrines, it will be seen, has been revealed in the OT.

The scope of the present study, the life of Christ, covers the period from His incarnation and virgin birth reported in the early chapters of the Gospels to His triumphant ascension into heaven reported in the first chapter of Acts. With the aid of this historical material one may construct a body of doctrine about Christ (Christology) in order that we can know Him as the “authentic God” and experience “eternal life” (I John 5:20).

Three appendices deal with extra material. Two of them cover major critical problems in the revelation of Christ: the nature of the Trinity and the historical titles of Christ. If one cannot handle these problems in a rationally consistent way, then he cannot make any case for orthodox Christian faith. On the other hand, if the triune nature of God and the descriptions of Christ's dual nature are understandable (at least in a non-contradictory fashion) then the orthodox Christian faith stands firm. A third appendix considers an aspect of Christ' atonement which has been in dispute since the Reformation.

## CHAPTER 1: WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

Lesson 105

Jesus once asked his disciples, “Who do men say that I am?” (Mark 8:27). The disciples responded with two of the many answers being given in their day, John the Baptist and Elijah. Over the centuries since that time we have given further answers. Some have said that Jesus was merely a good man, or even an angel, or, as the so-called intellectuals of our culture prefer to say, a fiction created by the early Christians. Jesus’ question has stirred continual strife.

Jesus taught that such discord does not reflect upon Him or the clarity of His revelation but reflects upon the world system. Many men who reject Jesus’ claims think to judge Jesus just as they do with the revelation of God in and around them. *If the light shines in the world and men say there is darkness, the problem is not with the light; the problem lies with the men who are blind to that light* (John 3:19-21). In particular, biographical studies of Jesus, including the articles in weekly news magazines each Christmas season, reflect the presuppositions of their authors. As one astute observer quipped, “By their lives of Jesus ye shall know them!”

When Jesus’ disciples gave the above answer, Jesus continued to press them: “But who say ye that I am?” (Mark 8:29). The disciples, most notably Peter, responded that Jesus was the Christ. When rightly understood, this is the correct answer to Jesus’ question. Jesus responded that such an answer reflected direct revelation from God. Both acceptance of true revelation and the many false responses to that revelation will be considered in the following section, not in relation to what they show Jesus to be but *in relation to what they show their authors to be*. The evidence will show just how loaded is the basic question, “Who do you say that I am?” which Jesus addresses to all men.

### THE CONTEXT OF JESUS’ CHALLENGE

Before considering the revelation concerning Jesus and the false response to that revelation, we must look at the historic situation in which Jesus’ challenge arose. His question arose only after very definite historical development had occurred in both Gentile and Jewish worlds, a development which was carefully designed to prepare men to face the question intelligently and maturely. After such prepared men faced the question, of course, there arose extensive and vigorous debate which has continued down to the present hour about Jesus’ real identity. In the next

few paragraphs I shall trace this historical preparation, the presentation of Jesus' challenge, and the response to the challenge. After covering these points, the final section will outline the details of the revelation concerning Christ and the false responses given to each of these details.

## **HISTORICAL PREPARATION FOR THE CHALLENGE**

The apostle Paul wrote that God sent His Son "when the fullness of the time came" (Gal. 4:4). Although in context Paul's expression concerned primarily the fitness of Christ's coming to Israel, it is possible to speak about a "fullness of time" in both Gentile and Jewish worlds because Israel's history was so entwined at this time with that of the surrounding pagan Gentile culture. If nothing else was made plain in the closing eras of OT history through the prophets and the apocalyptic texts, it was that God's sovereign plan encompassed all nations everywhere.

Historical Preparation of the Gentile (Pagan) World. The sequence of events in world history prepared the pagan world around Israel in a way that would have been impossible ages earlier in the Garden of Eden. First, the civilization begun by Noah upon the "reconstructed" planet after the flood event, departed from the then-known Word of God. God let Noahic civilization become paganized (Deut. 4:19; Acts 14:6; 17:30; Rom 1:24-32). The once simple monotheistic worship of El Elyon of the earliest post-flood communities (note Gen. 14:18-20) rapidly gave way to various idolatries of the fleshly mind. Fallen mankind insisted upon the impossible task of recreating the universe to make it safe for sinful living without having to give account to the holy sovereign Creator. The divine attributes which alone undergird the successful functioning of man created as a finite replica of his Creator were "relocated" inside man and nature. The pagan world spawned varied mythologies and many idols. The constellation and stars, for example, instead of being viewed as manifestations of God's glory (Ps. 19:1), were turned by the Gentiles into fatalistic instruments of astrology (Isa. 47:13; Amos 5:26). Fear of these idols' non-existent powers was a confession of man's physical limitations over against inevitable sickness, death, and the various evils in nature itself (storms, famines, earthquakes).

A second period of history further prepared the pagan world for Jesus' question. After the exile of Israel in the sixth century, B.C., as we studied in Part IV of this series, there was an explosion of new religions throughout the world along with the rise of philosophy in Greece. Seven world religions appeared within 50 years of each other all emphasizing man as his own savior in either pessimistic or optimistic forms. Each in their own way mirrored the transfer of political sovereignty to the Gentiles and the rise of an imperialist spirit in paganism. Of special interest to this study was the rise of Greek philosophy with its unique

conviction that a single rational order underlies all of reality. The great Hellenic scholar, F. E. Peters observes:

*“The rationalistic premise operative in much of Greek thought and life. . . was, at root, the belief that unaided human reason was an adequate instrument for both understanding and action. Very few Greeks. . . denied the existence of the gods. . . ; what the rationalist premise did suggest was that the operation of these gods was unnecessary for the acquisition of either truth by intellect or good by will.”[1]*

At bottom, however, the new thought was as equally sinful, pagan, and autonomous as the earlier mythologies. Greek philosophers before Christ were not the “open-minded” seekers after truth that they are usually presented as in the classroom. As Van Til notes:

*“It is taken for granted that the Greeks may fairly be compared to children who begin to wonder about things around them. But this comparison would be fair only if [the pagan notion of history] were true. The comparison presupposes that the human race was for the first time emerging into self-consciousness in the person of the Greeks. [It] takes for granted that the human race had never been in close contact with a God who was closer to them than the universe. [It] takes for granted that the physical facts would naturally be knowable first, and that if God is to be known he must be known later.”[2]*

The Greek adventure led to the rise of Rome, the fourth and final form of pagan kingdom in the vision of Daniel 2. In Rome all the contributions of the pagan kingdoms came together in one mighty organization. The supremacy of the city and the kingdom over every area of life can be illustrated in the very legend of Rome’s founding. Rousas Rushdoony notes:

*“Two boys, abandoned twins, set out to found a city. Romulus plowed a furrow as the first wall around the planned city, with the trench as the moat, and the overturned earth as the wall. His brother, Remus, express his contempt for the wall and moat by leaping across them into the City, whereupon Romulus killed him at once, declaring, ‘So perish all who ever cross my walls?’ Rome thus began, first, with two boys abandoned by their family, and, second, with the murder of a brother as its first sacrifice. The priority of the City to the family is emphatically set forth. But this is not all. Third, the first citizens were not members of a common family or clan but neighboring shepherds, outlaws, and stateless people. The City made them Romans, not ties of family or of blood. . . .”[3]*

While prominent Romans like Cicero wanted reason to control the state, the actual political conditions prompted brute force and power to

control the state. Under Caesar Augustus, Roman organization and unity reached its zenith (and it was under this Caesar Augustus that Jesus Christ was born [Lk 2:1]).

Although by the time of Jesus' birth Roman power had reached a peak, people were increasingly disillusioned with man's solutions to the practical and theoretical questions of life. Confidence in classical philosophy was waning. Masses of people sought answers in the numerous cults throughout the Empire. Men looked for a superman to bring stability to society. Since Jewish OT Scripture continued to circulate throughout the Roman Empire, its Messianic hope not unexpectedly influenced Gentile pagan writers. For example, Tacitus, the Roman author, wrote: "The majority were deeply impressed with a persuasion that was contained in the ancient writings of the priests that it would come to pass that at that very time, that the East would renew its strength and they that should go forth from Judea should be rulers of the world." [4] Likewise, Suetonius confirms this distorted Messianic expectation in pagan society during NT times: "A firm persuasion had long prevailed through all the East that it was fated for the empire of the world at that time to devolve on someone who should go forth from Judah. This prediction referred to a Roman emperor, as the event, showed, but the Jews applying it to themselves broke into rebellion." [5] The NT era had become a time in which great expectations for man's success were dissolving into a general pessimism and hope for some new miraculous solution was on the rise.

Thus in the period after 600 BC the fallen human race, dominated by Gentile rule which had been given an imperialist spirit by God, passed through the four kingdoms predicted in the book of Daniel. Each kingdom built upon the previous one until with Rome, the fourth kingdom, pagan society had thoroughly experimented with economic programs (Babylon), unification of culture (Persia), philosophy (Greece), and humanistic law (Rome). The deterioration of hope in Rome by Jesus' time, shown by the rise of mystery cults, loss of freedom for many in slavery, and arbitrary totalitarian power, gave ample proof of the mental limitations of man. This awareness, together with the previous sense of man's physical limitations prior to 600 BC, set the stage for the Coming of the Messiah. When He claimed to be the "Son of Man" and able to set up the ultimate Kingdom on earth, His claims would be met with a seasoned evaluation. Mankind had already glimpsed the possibilities, had strenuously tried in autonomous ways to fulfill those possibilities, and had failed.

## Historical Preparation of the Jewish World

[Lesson 106](#)

The Jewish world was prepared for the Messiah in a much more definite fashion than the Gentile world. As God's elect nation, Israel was singled out for special covenantal treatment as we have studied in Parts III and IV of this series.

The pre-exilic kingdom era of the first temple taught Jews the priority of ethical loyalty to God in every area of life. Under the judges, Jews learned that the people without firm leadership could not bring in kingdom conditions. Under the kings, Jews learned that fallen human leadership could not bring in kingdom conditions, either. They learned time and time again that neither society, kings, nor idols could accomplish the job; Yahweh alone was sufficient for every need. The exile and subsequent restoration reminded the Jews that redemption was an issue that involved all nations, not just Israel. They found that if Israel were ever to be delivered, God would have to work in some way with their Gentile overlords. His supremacy over all men, not just Hebrews, would have to become manifest. Moreover, the Hebrew prophets increasingly emphasized that God had future plans for the Gentiles. As the OT canon closed, the prophecies touching many Gentile nations became widely known in the world.

In the period directly preceding Jesus' day, a great time of testing occurred during the Maccabean Wars against the occupying forces of Syrian-Greeks.[6] The Jews sharply and bitterly resisted radical attempts to force them to amalgamate culturally with Hellenism. When Antiochus IV (who was the prophetic "foreview" of the Beast) demanded that unclean animals be sacrificed on Jewish altars, the Scriptures be destroyed, and Jewish boys not be circumcised, a priest called Mattathiah and his sons, who lived in the town of Modine in Western Judea, triggered a fierce war between the Jews and Antiochus IV. The exciting beginning of the war is reported by F. F. Bruce:

*"In [Modine], as in other [towns], a pagan alter was set up, and the inhabitants were summoned to participate in sacrifice thereat. The king's officer, who was present to supervise and enforce participation, invited Mattathiah to offer sacrifice first. . . .But Mattathiah loudly and contemptuously repudiated the suggestion, proclaiming that he and his family would maintain the ancestral covenant though all others should apostatize. Nor was this all, for when a more pliable citizen came up to the altar to offer sacrifice, Mattathiah ran forward and killed him and then killed the officer who stood by. The altar was then pulled down, and Mattathiah uttered his war cry: 'Let everyone who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me.'[7]*

After several years the Jewish forces won their independence from Syrian control and maintained their separateness from Hellenic culture. By Jesus' day, although the Romans had entered the region and brutally suppressed the Jews once again, the memory of the Maccabean Wars lingered on among the Jewish "Zealot" party.

During this era, called by Jesus the "times of the Gentiles" (cf. Luke 21:24), an uneasy truce existed between the forces of Jewish nationalism and the Gentile demand to unify all cultures into one great Kingdom of Man. Jewish culture was a constant political problem to Roman administrators because it was religiously exclusivist. The Kingdom of God program in Israel, as we learned in Part III, was from its very beginning with the call of Abraham out of Babylon exclusivist and a disruption to the paganized Noahic civilization. Although Roman officials would undoubtedly liked to have eliminated the troublesome Jewish nation altogether, they could not afford serious trouble like the Maccabean Wars on the strategic eastern border of the Roman Empire where the hostile Parthians dwelt just to the east.

On the other hand, Israel faced her own persistent inability to be wholly faithful to her exclusivist religion. God had gradually led the nation to look forward to a future Messianic Kingdom. In Roman times this Kingdom seemed very imminent. The Qumran sect, for example, separated from the rest of the nation to await the Teacher of Righteousness and the coming Judgment upon the world. Apocalyptic literature describing in gross details the end of the world became extremely popular among the Jews. Rabbi Abba Silver comments:

*"Prior to the first century the Messianic interest was not excessive, although such great historical events as the conquest of Persia by Alexander, the rule of the Ptolemies and Seleucides, the persecutions under Antiochus, the revolt of the Maccabees, and the Roman aggression find their mystic-Messianic echo in the apocalyptic writings of the first two pre-Christian centuries. . . .*

*The first century, however, especially the generation before the destruction, witnessed a remarkable outburst of Messianic emotionalism. This is to be attributed, as we shall see, not to an intensification of Roman persecution but to the prevalent belief induced by the popular chronology of that day that the age was on the threshold of the Millennium."*[8] (Emphasis supplied)

Israel, then, faced the predicament that the outside world despised her faith but that, at the same time, she was not living up to that faith. The situation dramatized the spiritual limitations of man. Jews would consider Jesus' claims in the light of how He would solved the external problem of Roman animosity and the internal problem of beginning a new Messianic Kingdom.[9]

The “fullness of time” came, therefore, to both Gentile and Jewish worlds. Historical experience had made mankind aware of its physical, mental, and spiritual limitations. Great leaders of both worlds—Thutmose III, Moses, Sargon, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Alexander, and Augustus—had failed to solve the problems. The Eastern religious cults promised nothing better. In this environment appeared the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lesson 107

## PRESENTATION OF THE CHALLENGE

Jesus challenged mankind by His method and by the content of His teaching. Jesus’ career was controlled carefully by a definite method of approach that in turn affected the way His challenge would come to mankind. First, Israel heard His challenge and responded to it. Then the Gentile nations heard the challenge and responded to the situation created by Israel’s previous response.

The teachings themselves had a remarkably comprehensive content. Jesus did not merely lecture as Plato had in the Academy at Athens. Instead, He showed by His miracles that He had a divine-human nature. Thus the content of His teachings was affected by His own nature. This startling claim constituted as much of the challenge as did His verbal teachings. The method and content of Jesus’ challenge will now be examined, although the content will be more fully developed in the rest of this Part V of the framework series.

The Method of Presentation. Careful students of the NT have often remarked over the strangely narrow outlook of Jesus during His ministry. He never traveled outside of Israel. In fact, He never visited the Greek cities inside the nation. For example, He never visited the Greek cities in the Decapolis area to the east and south of the Sea of Galilee whereas He visited the Jewish cities to the west and north of the Sea many times. Jesus went so far as to prohibit His disciples from preaching to, or having any contact with, Gentiles (Matt. 10:5-6). Gentiles were called “dogs” and “pigs” (Matt. 7:6; cf. 15:24-27). Obviously Jesus insisted upon the provincial Jewish outlook when, for example, He remarked to a Samaritan woman that salvation “is from the Jews” (John 4:22). [In doing so, of course, Jesus also refuted the view held today by certain pseudo-Christian cults that claims the “Jews” of the NT era were racially distinct from the “Hebrews” of the OT era.] As one Jewish scholar stated it:

*“Jesus was born a Jew; he lived on the ancestral soil of Palestine, never once setting his foot on alien territory; he taught a small group of disciples, all of whom were as Jewish as he; the language he spoke dripped with Jewish tradition and lore; the little children he loved were Jewish children; the sinners he associated with were Jewish sinners; he*

*healed Jewish bodies, fed Jewish hunger, poured out wine at a Jewish wedding, and when he died he quoted a passage from the Hebrew book of Psalms. . . .Jesus was a Jew, and his Jewishness was solid to the core. . . .Jesus was born into a definite thought life which was Jewish; he shared the Jewish system of ideas; the only Bible he was familiar with was the Hebrew Old Testament; his apocalyptic ideas were those of his own fellow Palestinians. No Jew was born and raised in the bosom of his people more completely than Jesus. . . .”[10]*

What was the purpose in this extremely Jewish outlook if Jesus indeed wished to reach all mankind? The answer lies in the great covenants that Yahweh had made with Israel. According to these covenants, Israel was not called into existence for her own sake; rather she was to be a channel through which “all the families of the earth [could] be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). Israel was to be God’s own possession, “a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:5-6). The Jewish nation was God’s appointed instrument to reach the world. As we discovered in Part III of this series, Israel was God’s “disruption” to the paganized Noahic civilization. From its origin, therefore, God would henceforth reach the nations indirectly through Israel rather than any longer speaking to the nations directly. George W. Peters writes:

*“Our Lord addressed Himself first to Israel in order to restore Jews to their place, purpose, and destiny. Israel was to have the opportunity to be made into a servant of the Lord in order to draw the world to the Lord. . . .It may seem at first that Christ failed in winning a hearing among his own people. . . .However, we must not interpret this as total failure. A substantial remnant came out of the rejection. The apostles, including Paul, were all Jews; the first Christian church was a Jewish Christian church in the city of Jerusalem. . . .The first missionaries to the nations were Jews. . . .Thus the Jews gave us the Bible, the gospel, the missionaries, and the first churches. Let us always keep this in mind.”[11]*

When Jesus brought his challenge to mankind, therefore, He brought it to Israel first so that His words and works would reach the rest of mankind through God’s elect nation. His method of presenting the challenge thus fulfilled the OT pattern.

The Comprehensiveness of the Presentation. Jesus’ challenge was not only addressed to mankind out of a Jewish context but was also enlarged beyond His verbal teachings to Jesus’ very nature and actions. He presented Himself as a unique Person in word, work, and being. Jesus’ entry into this world was unique according to the NT testimony. By the virgin birth Jesus succeeded in acquiring a legitimate humanity

without sin. Additionally, His full divine nature was successfully combined with true human nature in one person. Thus, while other religious teachers claimed to *represent* God or to be a manifestation of deity, Jesus claimed to *be* God. The implications of Jesus' supernatural entry into the world constitute a tremendous portion of his challenge.

During His life, of course, Jesus said and did many outstanding things. In later parts of this pamphlet a case will be made that one of the most outstanding features of Jesus' career was the authority He assumed over man and nature. Jesus challenged people to consider how He exercised control over the elements of nature and how He demanded that His words be accepted on His own implicit authority. Whereas other teachers justified what they taught by an appeal to a standard of truth outside of themselves, Jesus insisted that He was the standard of truth Himself!

Not only was Jesus' life unique; so was His death. Jesus was the only member of the human race who, without guilt of suicide, chose to die. When Jesus died, He accomplished what no other teacher ever accomplished and what no OT sacrifice ever did: He somehow bore the sins of the world upon Himself and received God's judgment upon them.

Finally, Jesus challenged mankind by His physical resurrection. He thus demonstrated that the long-promised "new creation" had begun to appear. The last chapter in cosmic history was now being written. Resurrection was no longer mere prophecy or speculation; it had become historical fact.

Jesus, therefore, in asking mankind to consider who He really was, forced man to consider His virgin birth, His miraculous life, His unique death, and His pioneering resurrection—not merely his verbal teachings. His challenge, mediated to humanity through Israel, was comprehensive.

## **RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGE**

Once Jesus' challenge became known in both Jewish and Gentile worlds, a spirited debate followed, one which continues to the present. Although the challenge came to a prepared humanity in the "fullness of time," it has not been well received by the majority of men. The response, first among the Jews and then among the Gentiles, has been largely negative.

Response Among the Jews. The Jews, it was seen above, had been prepared for their Messiah by OT history which should have made them clearly aware of God's high spiritual demands and the limitations of their flesh. Nevertheless, apart from a faithful remnant (John 12:19; Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14, 28), their official national response to Jesus indicated that they were still prisoners of the very spiritual limitations they had been trained to recognize. While Jews had become acutely aware, for example, of Gentile hostility to their exclusivistic way of life, this very Gentile hostility frightened them into trying to murder Jesus, a fellow Jew. Caiaphas, the High Priest, argued that if Jesus were allowed to continue his ministry He would stir up such controversy that Rome would militarily and politically intervene and take away what freedoms Israel had left (John 11:27-52).

In the same vein, the Jews had experienced over and over their own inability to keep the Law in a way that pleased Yahweh; but instead of driving them to God's grace, their inability had led them to mitigate the lofty demands of the Law. To replace the Torah and its vital gracious spirit, many of them substituted an intricate network of legalistic, human regulations. (Note the previous discussion of "law" versus "grace" in Part III of this series.) In a Talmudic passage for example, one reads the rabbinical instruction to pay more attention to these rules than the original Scripture or Torah:

*"My son, be more careful in [the observance of] the words of the Scribes than in the words of the Torah, for in the laws of the Torah there are positive and negative precepts. . . ; but as to the laws of the Scribes, who ever transgresses any of the enactments of the Scribes incurs the penalty of death."*[12]

By living within these rules as their primary authority over the OT Scripture itself, the Jews hoped they could attain a sufficient righteousness to enter God's kingdom.

Starting with John the Baptist, however, and continuing with Jesus, they were faced with the demand that their righteousness "must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). The righteousness of legalism was too superficial, too inferior, to please God (Matt. 23:23). To please God truly, according to Jesus, the Jew had to admit his inability to keep the Law and come by faith to Yahweh, trusting that God would justify him and enable him to live righteously (Luke 18:9-14; cf. Deut. 5:29; 10:16; 30:6; Ezk. 36:25-31). Jesus' constant assault upon the legalist rules deeply angered the Jewish leadership (Matt. 9:10-13; 12:1-14; 15:1-4; 23:13-39; John 9:16).

Moreover, the loyal devotion to Yahweh which was the very essence of Jewish historical preparation apparently had been transformed into a misplaced loyalty to exceedingly questionable interpretations of the OT. By Jesus' day, for instance, the Second Temple buildings had attained a pseudo-sanctity reminiscent of the sinful, "impregnable" image of the First Temple under the pre-exilic kings. Back in that era, if you recall Part IV of this series, the pre-exilic nation had forgotten the *conditions* of blessing under the Sinaitic Covenant in their desire to remember the nation's *unconditional* election of the Abrahamic Covenant. Jesus' remarks were thus construed as an attack upon God's sacred ground (Matt. 26:61; 27:40; cf. Acts 6:13-14; 21:28).

In addition to the false view of the Temple, the popular imagery of the Messiah pictured him as a glorious reigning king, not a suffering servant who would have to die vicariously for the nation (John 12:34). Although Isaiah 53 was interpreted Messianically (before this passage was used by Christians), interpretations did not always see a vicarious suffering in it. Some interpretations saw the Messiah suffering in conflict with the enemies of Israel. Another glaring example of a highly questionable OT interpretation that blocked Jewish acceptance of Jesus' claims was the idea that the Messiah was not in any way to be identified as Yahweh Himself. In spite of OT references to the contrary (see next Chapter), when Jesus did claim identity with Yahweh, the reaction was extremely violent (Matt. 26:64-66; John 8:58-59; 10:30-36). This misplaced loyalty to questionable OT passages is explained in the NT as a "hardening" that has come over Israel due to her past rejection of Yahweh (Rom. 11:25-27; cf. Isa. 6:9-12).

Since the first century national rejection of Jesus by Israel, mainline Jewish thought has further hardened its position and, in the case of its liberal wing, has come to deny the very existence or hope of a Messiah. The key OT passage in Isaiah 53, for example, is now said to refer, not at all to the Messiah, but to the Jewish people. Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum notes:

***"To interpret Isaiah 53 as speaking of Messiah is not non-Jewish. In fact, if we are to speak of the traditional Jewish interpretation, it would be that the passage speaks of the Messiah. The first one to expound the view that this referred to Israel rather than the Messiah was Shlomo Yizchaki, better known as Rashi (c. 1040-1105). He was followed by David Kimchi (1160-1235). But this was to go contrary to all rabbinical teaching of that day and of the preceding one thousand years. Today, Rashi's view has become dominant in Jewish and rabbi theology. But that is not the Jewish view. Nor is it the traditional Jewish view. Those closer to the original writings, and who had less contact with Christian apologists, interpreted it as speaking of the Messiah."***[13]

Other Jewish objections have been added to the first century ones. These include Jesus' "failure" to bring peace, the anti-Semitic behavior of groups identified with the Christian faith, the impossibility of a man become God, and the fear that a Jew who accepts Jesus will cease to be a Jew.

The Jewish response to Jesus' challenge has showed only too well that in spite of historical preparation under the sovereign grace of God, the Jews as sinful men have responded to the advent of Jesus in the same way as they responded to God's earlier revelation in the OT times—by rejection of God, albeit, perhaps more subtly. Their autonomous thought has become cloaked in the garb of biblical terminology and/or ethical concerns. As John the Apostle poignantly expressed it: "His own received Him not" (John 1:11).

Response among Gentiles. After the Jews nationally rejected Christ, the Gentiles had their turn to respond to Jesus' claims. Their response was no better than the Jew's response. Gentile pagan autonomy stubbornly resisted wholesale capitulation to Christ.

Gentiles continued their idolatry of nature and arrogant estimation of man's mental capacities. Pilate's remarks to Jesus epitomize the majority Gentile view:

*Pilate: "Whence art thou?"*

*Jesus: (no answer)*

*Pilate: "Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have the power to release thee, and I have the power to crucify thee?" (John 19:9-10)*

In other words, whatever importance and authority Jesus had, so the Gentile mind worked, He was beneath the importance and authority of the "almighty" state. Politically, Gentile thought has always tried to put Christ under the state. As an illustration, Arianism, the main heresy denying Jesus' full divine nature, was consistently popular with statist. Rushdoony writes: "By denying that Christ is Lord and Savior, Arianism . . . had made the state man's lord and savior, and the Arians were dedicated statist. The emperor, not Christ, His Word, and the Church, was central to the Arians." [14] He also points out:

*"In its modern form, statist theology goes further. It not only ignores Christ and the Church, it begins to deny their right to exist. A critical background is the issue of taxation. The modern state assumes the position of having a right to tax the Church as a corpus politicum, and then magnanimously forgoes this right on the ground that the Church is a charitable or non-profit institution. The hidden premise is that the Church is under the state and exists by its permission." [15]*

Like Pilate, modern pagan thought still says to Christ, “I have the power. . .”

Another issue is shown by an earlier dialogue between Pilate and Christ:

*Jesus: “Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice.”*

*Pilate: “What is truth?” (John 18:37-38)*

On a deeper level than the issue of statism, less viable but more lethal, modern pagan thought amplifies Pilate’s remark, “what is truth?” As architects of developed paganism, Gentile world leaders make all truth ultimately subjective. Truth to them is merely what one thinks is truth. Van Til describes the Greek fountainhead of this paganism:

*“Socrates discovered the principle of interpretation, which man ought best to follow, to lie within himself, in nous, rather than in water, in the indeterminate (aperion), in air or in anything else which was external to man. . . .Socrates possessed a voice which spoke to him, but its advice was actually internally consonant with his own consciousness; namely, if the gods ever told him anything, he would by himself, of necessity be relegated the task of judging the truth or falsity thereof. The principle was an internal one.”[16]*

Such a view of truth makes any kind of historical, verbal revelation from God to man impossible. Since all truth, according to this form of fleshly thinking, is ultimately subjective, one cannot reach real truth about God as Christ insists that one can do. Alan Richardson, for example, illustrates this kind of thinking:

*“The facts about the Jesus of history are accessible to us only through the apostles’ faith in him. The Gospel writers were not biographers or historians, and they chose to tell us only such things about the life and teaching of Jesus as seemed good to them to illuminate essential aspects of the Church’s faith in him.”[17]*

*In this modern unbelieving thought statements about Jesus would be merely autobiographical testimony about what early Christians thought; they would not be statements about objective reality external to their thoughts. Their views about Jesus would be more important in degree than what the early Christians ate and wore but are no different in kind. They all simply show ancient opinion and life.*

Thus the response to Jesus’ challenge in both Jewish and Gentile worlds has been largely a negative one. The majority of Jews have rejected Jesus’ claims on spiritual and ethical grounds; the majority of pagan Gentiles, on philosophic and theoretical grounds.

## THE ONLY TWO OPTIONS

Jesus presented His challenge in word, work, and deed. The Light of the world came to men, and some came to the Light while others fled from the Light. We now examine each of the four major areas of Jesus' challenge—His birth, life, death, and resurrection—so we can observe how the two responses interpret this revelation. In this way, we can see the full structure of belief and unbelief.

### The Birth of the King

The first event to be studied is the birth of Jesus Christ. Since the birth event brings into existence the God-man, the doctrine resulting from this historic fact centers upon the nature of Christ, i.e., what sets Him apart from all other teachers. The correct interpretation of the virgin birth claim depends for its validity upon the truthfulness of the prior biblical doctrines of God, man, and nature. If OT revelation is valid, then the virgin birth and incarnation of God fit neatly into the big picture.

On the other hand, the negative responses to this supernatural birth presuppose a radically different view of God, man, and nature. The pagan answer must be understood in terms of its prior "faith" that God and man are both part of the grand Continuity of Being from which both have arisen. On such a basis, no other response to Jesus' claim is possible except a thorough denial that a God like the biblical God has incarnated Himself in a man. Thus the nature of Jesus radically differs between the two options.

### The Life of the King

The second event in NT revelation of Jesus is his life, especially between His baptism and His death. This event brings into view the authority and sanctification of Jesus. Again the correct interpretation of Christ's life depends upon the OT doctrines of revelation and sanctification. If, for example, God truly speaks into history as the OT insists, then Jesus' claim to have implicit (self-authenticating) authority for what He taught is perfectly reasonable, given His accompanying claim to be God incarnate. The apparently real temptations and vexing decisions facing Christ, too, are reasonable if the OT picture of human sanctification is true.

On the contrary, negative critics unanimously deny Jesus' right to have inherent authority for His teaching. This unbelieving objection, however, rests upon the prior pagan position that God does not speak verbally into history as pictured by the OT. Moreover, Jesus' claims appear so incredible to these critics that they deny Jesus ever said them of state that, if He did, He must have been deluded or insane.

## The Death of the King

Besides the birth and life of Christ, His death is a third major point of revelation. Jesus' "execution" on the cross is the basis for His atoning work, according to the Bible. Jesus' atonement logically relates to previous OT pictures of judgment-salvation such as the flood and the Exodus. The major OT salvation-by-grace theme that so clearly is linked to blood sacrifices sets up the proper interpretation of Christ's death. The NT interpretation of Christ's death, therefore, continues smoothly the OT thinking on judgment-salvation.

In opposition to this presentation of Christ's efficacious death, pagan-based negative responses have always tended to minimize the work of the cross. Christ's death is presented as nothing more than a martyrdom or a tragic mistake. Its "effects," if any, on man are wholly subjective; therefore Christ's death can only stimulate or evoke some feeling in the human soul, in this thinking. The reason why unbelief so interprets the cross is that it lacks any sense of moral guilt before a justly wrathful God. Specific non-Christian views may differ in some details, but this denial of the efficacy of the cross holds true for all of them.

## The Resurrection of the King

Finally, the fourth event and major part of Jesus' challenge is His resurrection. This event is so astounding that only acceptance of the event as the one made possible by the OT view of historical progress makes sense. In the OT all history was seen as eventually culminating in one final judgment by Yahweh to be followed by life in His presence or by exclusion from His presence forever. Resurrection was seen to be part of this last great end to history. Thus when Jesus rose from the dead, it signaled to those thinking in OT terms the beginning of the end times. History had reached its final point in Jesus although it would continue outside of Him for a temporary interval.

For the negative critic the claim of resurrection cannot be dealt with in detail: it can only be dismissed as a wild and spurious claim. Either the resurrection is "spiritualized" in pagan thought, or it is denied. The pagan view of history is so radically at odds with the OT view of history which undergirds the true interpretation of Jesus' resurrection that anything like resurrection is wholly beyond its grasp.

## SUMMARY

The remainder of this pamphlet will take up in order the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ in order to present both the true and false

interpretation of each of these factual events. Man's responses to Christ's challenge serve to expose not Christ but the responders. Those accepting Christ positively fit into the flow of historic revelation begun in the OT. Those responding negatively fit into the age-old desire of autonomous man to exist independently of his Creator. Since Jesus Christ is the highest expression of revelation in the world, the difference in responses is seen with the utmost clarity. Think on the question, dear reader, who do you say that Jesus is?

## END NOTES FOR CHAPTER 1

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- 4.
5. Rousas J. Rushdoony, The One and the Many (Nutley, N.J.: Craig Press, 1971), p. 91.
- 6.
7. Tacitus, History, V.3.
- 8.
9. Suetonius, Life of Vespasian, 4:5.
- 10.
11. See any good history of this period such as F. F. Bruce, Israel and the Nations (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1963), pp. 128-196.
- 12.
13. Bruce, p. 148f.
- 14.
15. Cited from his work Messianic Speculation in Israel which is quoted in David L. Cooper, Messiah: His First Coming Scheduled (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 4005 Verdugo Road, 1939), p. 498.
- 16.
17. See Part IV of this series on revelation through OT prophets prior to the exile.
- 18.
19. Ernest R. Trattner, As A Jew Sees Jesus, as cited in Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, Jesus Was A Jew (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1974), p. 13.
- 20.
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25. Fruchtenbaum, p. 35.
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27. 14. Rushdoony, p. 155.
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29. Rousas J. Rushdoony, The Foundations of Social Order (Nutley, NJ: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1972), p. 73f.
- 30.
31. Cornelius Van Til, Who Do You Say That I Am? (Nutley, NJ: The Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1975), p. 12.
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## CHAPTER 2: THE BIRTH OF THE KING

Lesson 108

Jesus became controversial the day He was conceived! But Matthew (1:18-25) and Luke (1:26-38) explicitly state the early Christian claim that Jesus' very conception and birth were unique, i.e., that He was born of a young Jewish virgin Mary. Over the centuries of Church history orthodox Christians have insisted upon the truth of Christ's virgin birth and the NT interpretation of what this miraculous event secured. Heretics and unbelievers, on the contrary, have made it a point to deny either its reality or its NT interpretation.

One might be tempted to minimize the entire virgin birth debate as just a mere theological "fine point" if he did not understand the great doctrinal consequences that result from the orthodox position. When he appreciates these consequences, he remains indifferent to the importance of the virgin birth claim. Thus in the following sections the event of the virgin birth will be studied, and then the unbelieving responses to that event and the doctrinal consequences of the virgin birth will be given. The latter part will be a summary of the six-century discussion about the doctrine of Christ's nature. Read here Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2.)

Lesson 109

### THE HISTORICAL INCIDENT OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

The acceptance of the virgin birth is contingent upon one thinking in terms of the biblical framework we have been studying in Parts II through IV. Given the creation, fall, and other events together with their associated revealed truths, the virgin birth is not only possible, it is absolutely necessary to God's plan. The necessity of the virgin birth can be seen on three grounds—the prophetic, the legal-moral, and the spiritual. All three reasons, of course, refute the common liberal idea that the virgin birth is a mere "minor point" depending upon only two isolated NT passages without any other biblical backing.

### THE PROPHETIC NECESSITY

The first reason for the miraculous birth involves the biblical custom of proving God's faithfulness because He keeps His prophetic promises to man. Prophecy must be fulfilled that man may know that God has spoken (Isa. 41:22-23) and that man may therefore believe (John 14:29). Hence, if the virgin birth is contained in OT prophecy, then it had to occur, regardless of the supposedly "isolated" references in Matthew and Luke.

At least two OT prophecies require a virgin birth for Jesus to qualify as Israel's Messiah. In Isaiah 7:14 the context deals with a political-military crisis in the southern kingdom of Judah in the days of King Ahaz. The apostate northern kingdom had entered into an alliance with Syria to destroy Judah and the house of Ahaz (Isa. 7:1-2). Yahweh, through Isaiah the prophet, assured King Ahaz that this alliance would fail within one generation (7:7-9). To confirm His promise, Yahweh asked Ahaz to choose a miracle for Yahweh to do to prove that God was really behind His promise (7:10-11). After Ahaz hypocritically refused (7:12), Yahweh then addressed the entire royal house of David (7:13 where "you" is plural), commanding it to "behold" "the" virgin ("behold" in Hebrew with a present participle refers to a future event) would conceive and bear a son to the Davidic line and that in the time span it would take such a child to mature, the alliance of the North would be doomed (7:14-16). In giving this assurance of a quick demise of the hostile powers God, therefore, introduced also the idea that the Davidic royal line would survive well into the future until the virgin appeared. Thus Ahaz had a second assurance—not only a repeated promise of a quick demise for his enemies but also a promise of the survival of Judah's royal family.

You often will hear skeptics, even evangelical skeptics, say that the meaning of the Hebrew word almah in Isaiah 7:14 isn't "virgin" but simply "young woman." It was the Christian church, they say, that added the specialized meaning of virgin to the Hebrew word almah. The traditional Jewish view, they claim, is that almah means "young woman." However, the fact that the translators of the Septuagint (ca. 250-150 B.C.) deliberately translated the Hebrew word almah by the Greek word for virgin, parthenos, indicates that the miraculous virgin birth interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 is the traditional Jewish one. Consequently, when Matthew cites Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23, he was not inventing the interpretation; he was merely applying the traditional Jewish interpretation to Jesus.[1]

Later, when Christianity flourished, Jewish authorities in their own interests attacked this interpretation of Isaiah 7:14. One of these Jewish authorities, Rashi (ca. 1040-1105) denied the traditional interpretation and made the text refer to a young woman. As Fruchtenbaum notes, however:

***"It is true that Rashi interpreted Isaiah 7:14 to mean a young woman, perhaps for the same reason that he made Isaiah 53 refer to Israel and not to the Messiah. But this is not enough to prove Rashi always made almah to mean a young woman. This Hebrew word is also found in the Song of Solomon 1:3 and 6:8. In these passages Rashi admitted that many Jewish scholars of his day made Isaiah 7:14 to refer to a virgin. It can easily be seen that Rashi was trying to counteract Christian polemics with his interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 rather than being honest with the text itself."***[2]

If, therefore, in the OT God promised a virgin birth in David's line, such a virgin birth eventually had to come to pass, or God would be unfaithful.

A second OT prophecy also requires a virgin birth. In Jeremiah 22:30 God decrees that a member of the royal house of David descended through Solomon and the rest of the Southern Kingdom's royal line would never again sit on the throne of Israel. This prophecy which we discussed in Part IV of this series had to come to pass. If Jesus is the Messiah and is to sit on Israel's throne in the future, then He cannot be physically descended from David through Solomon and the Judean kings; Jesus must be descended from David through some other line than Solomonic. Thus, when Matthew's genealogy traces Joseph to David through Solomon (Matt. 1:2-17), Joseph is clearly disqualified from being the physical father of Jesus. By mentioning Joseph's lineage Matthew sets up his readers for the following passages in which he describes the virgin birth. It is the virgin birth which resolves the problem with Jesus' earthly father being in a cursed line.

Luke, on the other hand, traces Jesus' lineage back to David through Nathan (Luke 3:23-38). This genealogy has been understood to refer to Mary's ancestry. Note in 3:23 the qualifying phrase "being supposedly the son of Joseph." Fruchtenbaum tells us the Jewish background of using a husband's name in his wife's genealogy:

*"If, by Jewish law, you could not mention the name of a woman but you wished to trace a woman's line, how would you go about doing so? The answer is that you would use the name of her husband. That raises a second question. If you were to use the husband's name. . .how would [you] know whether the genealogy is that of the husband or that of the wife. . . ? . . . In the Greek text of Luke's genealogy, every single name mentioned has the Greek article the, with one exception, and that is the name of Joseph. Joseph's name does not have the definite article the in front of it, while all the other names do. What that would mean to someone reading the original is this: When he saw the definite article missing from Joseph's name, while it was present in all the other names, it would then mean that this was not really Joseph's genealogy but rather it is Mary's genealogy. But in keeping with Jewish law, it was the husband's name that was used. We have two examples of this in the Old Testament: Ezra 2:61 and Nehemiah 7:63."*[3]

The virgin birth, therefore, is necessary to fulfill the OT prophetic pattern about the Messiah. Isaiah 7:14 and Jeremiah 22:30 set up a situation in which the virgin birth is the only option that avoids violating God's promises.

## THE LEGAL-MORAL NECESSITY

A second necessity for the virgin birth lies in the creation design of the human race. Man was created with a legal-moral unity in Adam by which later generations, not yet born, somehow “participate” in the actions of earlier ones. In particular, the Bible says that all men fell in Adam in the Garden of Eden (Rom. 5:12-14). Adam’s original sin is credited or imputed to all his descendants as we studied in Part II of this series. All humanity, including Eve (note her unique creation in Genesis 2:21-22), are descended from Adam. Another well-known biblical illustration of mankind’s legal-moral unity is Hebrews 7:4-10. Levi, who lived many generations after Abraham, is considered by the author of Hebrews to have been “in the loins of Abraham” and to have thus participated in Abraham’s actions with Melchizedek. If the human race is bound together with its past history, how can Jesus acquire true humanity without also participating in this legal-moral sin?

The legal-moral unity appears to be caused by only the father, not the mother, of a child. In Hebrews 7 this unity is a feature involving only the males, Levi and Abraham, not their wives. Imputed sin seems to be credited through the father alone. The virgin birth, therefore, involving only Mary, not Joseph, avoids the imputation of sin to Jesus. Jesus thus acquired true humanity from His earthly mother without acquiring imputed sin from any earthly father. Again the virgin birth is required for reasons quite apart from the NT announcements.

## THE SPIRITUAL NECESSITY

Still yet another implicit reason for the virgin birth exists. Jesus is God incarnate. How can God in all His holiness fully dwell in sinful human flesh and at the same time provide the maximum possible revelation of His nature in mortal history? Obviously He cannot. (We speak here of a “full” indwelling of humanity through which He fully reveals Himself and fully accomplishes His work—unlike His present indwelling of sinful believers.) For that reason the Bible very consistently notes that Jesus was sent “in the *likeness* of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3) rather than in sinful flesh itself. The revelation of glory observed through Jesus was glory “as of the only begotten from the Father” (John 1:14), superior to every other revelation in history (Heb. 1:1-3). Jesus could claim in His true humanity: “I do always the things that are pleasing to [the Father]” (John 8:29). He could also claim to be wholly sinless (John 8:46). Jesus Christ, having a sinless through genuine humanity, could qualify as the sacrificial lamb “without spot” (1 Pet. 1:19).

The exact problem is how Jesus could gain true humanity without the indwelling sin nature (*inherent* sin to be distinguished from the previously-mentioned *imputed* sin [cf. Gen. 5:3; 8:21; Pss. 14:2-3; 51:5; Jer. 17:9; Eph. 2:3]). The Canadian physiologist, Dr. Arthur Custance has produced a fascinating study of the transmission of inherent sin from Adam to all humanity. He points out that the prophecy in Genesis 3:15 speaks of a “seed of the woman”, not the seed of Adam, which is a strange usage for “seed.” He utilizes modern anatomical research that points to the conditional immortality of the female ova. He writes:

***“The seed of the woman is the only remnant that has retained the original immortality possessed by our first parents. By contrast, the seed of man and the body cells of both the man and the woman have been mortalized. Furthermore, even the seed of the woman is fatally poisoned by fusion with the male seed. However, this poison affects only that portion of the woman’s seed which will develop into body cells: the remainder of her seed continues to form the immortal stream of germ plasm. Only if an ovum from this germ plasm reservoir can be fertilized by some means not natural to man can a body with the original endowment of potential immortality be recovered again.”[4]***

Since the sin nature is transmitted from the moment of conception (Psa. 51:5), a supernatural intervention is required for the seed of the woman to produce fruit independent of fallen man.

An analogy thus exists between the creation of the first Adam and the creation of the Second Adam, Jesus Christ. The female embryo was structured to bring forth mankind just as the original ground in the Garden of Eden was structured to bring forth Adam (note the language of Psa. 139:15 that utilizes the narrative of Gen. 2:7). The Second Adam was a special object of the Father’s direct creative work upon the womb or “earth” just as the first Adam was (Heb. 10:5). Moreover, it is fitting that just as the woman first brought sin into the world so she would first bring salvation into the world (Gen. 3:6, 20; I Tim. 2:13-14). Even today this prominent role of the woman is remembered in the Jewish Passover each year as the woman of the house initiates the actual seder by lighting the candle before the rest of the service proceeds.

The virgin birth is a spiritual necessity for the incarnation of God. Morris is right when he says:

***“It is not surprising, therefore, that the Christian doctrine of the Virgin Birth of Christ has always been a watershed between true Christians and either non-Christians or pseudo-Christians. Without such a miraculous birth, there could have been no true incarnation and therefore no salvation. The man Jesus would have been a sinner by birth and thus in need of a Savior Himself.”[5]***

## UNBELIEVING RESPONSES TO THE VIRGIN-BIRTH CLAIM

Lesson 110

Now that we've seen that the virgin birth is an integral part of the biblical framework--a requirement flowing out of prophecy, the created structure of mankind in Adam, and the effect of the fall—we want to look at why men reject it. First, let's look at *how* they reject the claim, and then we'll examine why such rejection is a *necessity* for unbelief to be consistent with itself.

### ANCIENT AND MODERN REJECTION OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Lesson 111

On the surface rejection of the virgin birth in modern times seems to be of a different kind than the rejection that occurred in NT times. Actually, it turns out, that at bottom both ancient and modern rejection flow out of the same cause.

Ancient Jewish Rejection. Within a few years after Jesus' birth, Jewish unbelievers were already calling the virgin-birth claim a fraudulent cover-up for Mary's alleged fornication. (John 8:41 may be an allusion to this kind of thinking.) In the Mishnah there is a suspicious passage about a certain rabbi who defined a bastard as "the offspring of any union for which the partakers are liable to death at the hands of the court," a passage which scholars believe refers to Jesus' birth because it is immediately followed by another cryptic passage:

*"R[abbi] Simeon b[en] Azzai said: I found a family register in Jerusalem and on it was written, 'Such-a-one is a bastard through [transgression of the law of] thy neighbor's wife.'"[6]*

Joseph Klausner, a Jewish scholar, writes of this Mishnaic section: "That Jesus is here referred to seems to be beyond all doubt." [7] Klausner notes that throughout the Jewish Talmud, including its Mishnaic section, Jesus is known as "Yeshu ben Pandera" (Jesus son of Pandera), a title which may refer to Mary's alleged paramour or to the virgin-birth claim itself (virgin in Greek is parthenos). Another Talmudic scholar, Herbert Danby, summarizes the entire Talmudic reference to the virgin-birth claim.

*"A Yeshu, called Notsri, so Son of Stada, or Son of Pantera [or Pandera] was born out of wedlock. His mother was called Miriam. She was a woman's hairdresser (the word here is M'gadd'la, a pun on the name Mary Magdalen). Her husband was Pappus, the son of Yehudah, and her paramour a Roman soldier, Pantera." [8]*

Thus ancient Jewish unbelief very clearly contradicted the actuality of the virgin birth by the clear counterclaim that Mary fornicated. Unwittingly, however, this very kind of reaction refutes the later unbelief among Gentile critics that the virgin-birth claim came later when the Church made it up to go along with a “deification” of a mere human Jewish rabbi. Ancient Jewish fornication theories testify that the virgin-birth claim occurred at the very beginning of the Church history.

Modern Gentile Rejection. After the Renaissance, unbelief became more clearly defined and widely expounded. A new breed of biblical scholars arose who followed the humanist philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and G. F. Hegel (1770-1831). These biblical scholars were no longer trying merely to express Christianity in up-to-date language (as John and Paul had done in the NT); they were trying to reconstruct wholesale the entire set of Christian beliefs after contemporary thought. Unlike John and Paul they presupposed the validity of their contemporary unbelieving thought. One of the earliest victims of this tailoring process was the virgin-birth claim. Professor J. W. Bowman, for example, a faculty member of Presbyterian Western Seminary in Pittsburg, wrote:

*“If Jesus knew of the tradition of his virgin birth, he never pressed it. After all, who should have decided between him and any number of demigods and heroes for whom such a birth was claimed. It was the Church that added these mundane traditions to its Gospels. [8]*

This revisionist or “Modernist” movement, as it is called, triggered great controversy in many American denominations in which thousands of orthodox believers opposed the denial of the historic Christian faith. These loyalists and conservatives were called Fundamentalists; and they vigorously defended, among other points, the belief in Jesus’ virgin birth. Finally, one Sunday morning in June, 1922, in the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church of New York City, a famous Baptist clergyman and author, Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, delivered a guest sermon entitled “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?,” a sermon which ignited a full public exposure of the simmering Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy. Fosdick’s sermon specifically attacked the Fundamentalist defense of the virgin-birth claim:

*“Here, for example, is one point of view: that the virgin birth is to be accepted as historical fact; it actually happened; there was no other way for a personality like the Master to come into this world except by a special biological miracle. That is one point of view, and many are the gracious and beautiful souls who hold it. But, side by side with them in the evangelical churches is a group of equally loyal and reverent people who would say that the virgin birth is not to be accepted as an historic fact. . . .*

*Here in the Christian Churches are these two groups and the question which the Fundamentalists raise is this, Shall one of them throw the other out? . . .*

*Is not the Christian Church large enough to hold within her hospitable fellowship people who differ in points like this. . . ? The Fundamentalists say not. They say the liberals must go. . . .”[9]*

Of course, the Fundamentalists failed in their attempt; instead they themselves were thrown out. Godly, Bible-believing scholars like the great Greek expert, J. Gresham Machen, were actually defrocked, disciplined, and kicked out of these denominations by the Modernists.

The same battle has occasionally flared up since the 1920s. In 1977 in England a group of Oxford-Cambridge scholars published The Myth of God Incarnate, ed. John Hick (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1977). Very quickly the conservatives responded with The Truth of God Incarnate, ed., Michael Green (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977). Debates have occurred over the past century in many churches as they aligned themselves with one side or the other.

The unbelieving responses to the virgin-birth claim have been strong and consistent from the ancient Jewish “fornication” theory to the modern Gentile “Church spin” approach. Always, at bottom, they share the rebellion against God’s authority over His creation and its implication for our personal, eternal responsibility before Him. Let’s look further at why unbelief must deny the virgin-birth claim of Christianity.

## UNBELIEF’S NEED TO REJECT THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Lesson 112

Unbelieving responses, both ancient and modern, flow out of a world-view that has definite presuppositions about God, man, and nature, the same presuppositions we have studied in previous parts of this series. This is especially apparent in modern rejection of the virgin-birth claim. Modern thought has increasingly adopted stronger versions of the basic pagan idea of the Continuity of Being and the normalcy of the presence of evil. Let’s listen to Charles W. Eliot, the famous Unitarian president of Harvard, who presented the following ideas to the Summer School of Theology of 1909 in his closing address, “The Religion of the Future”:

*“The new thought of God will be its most characteristic element. This ideal will comprehend the Jewish Jehovah, the Christian Universal Father, the modern physicist’s omnipresent and exhaustless Energy, and the biological conception of a Vital Force. . . . [Note here the Continuity of Being, treating the personal God as basically the same “stuff” as impersonal forces.] The new religion rejects absolutely the conception. . . that God is alienated from the world. It rejects also the entire conception of man as a fallen being. . . . [Note here the insistence upon the normalcy*

*of the present fallen world with its good and evil.] In all its theory and all its practice it [the religion of the future] will be completely natural. It will place no reliance on any sort of magic, or miracle, or other violation of, or exception to, the laws of nature.” [Note here the consequence of the abolition of the Creator/creature distinction] [10][Comments supplied.]*

Clearly, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the modern intellectual world had become thoroughly re-paganized at its fountain—the universities and seminaries. By 1930, for example, the Dean of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, Shailer Mathews wrote: “The Modernist starts with the assumption that scientists know more about nature and man than did the theologians who drew up the Creeds and Confessions.”[11]

Lesson 113

Because the virgin-birth critics have been committed to the pagan notion of the Continuity of Being, there *can* be no supernatural birth. Because they have believed in the normalcy of a world with evil in it, there *need* be no such act to produce a spiritually pure Messiah. As proponents of the “new religion”, to use Eliot’s words, who tolerate no “exception to the laws of nature,” they have *had* to deny the biblical report of the virgin birth. Moreover, to be consistent, they have had to deny every other miracle in the Bible. During the great Modernist-Fundamentalist debate in 1923, the great Bible-believing NT Greek Scholar of Princeton, J. Gresham Machen, pointed out this fact:

*“The overwhelming majority of those who reject the Virgin Birth reject also the whole supernatural content of the New Testament. . . .The issue does not concern individual miracles, even so important a miracle as the Virgin Birth. It really concerns all miracles. And the question concerning all miracles is simply the question of the acceptance or rejection of the Savior that the New Testament presents.”[12]*

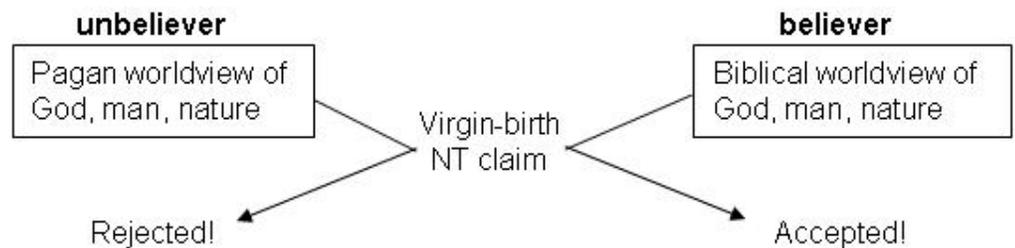
Following quickly on the heels of the denying the virgin birth, of course, came the denial of the incarnation, *i.e.*, the God-man nature of Jesus Christ. The virgin birth, we will see shortly, is the only means of establishing that mysterious union of the essence of God and the essence of man in Christ. Denial, therefore, of the so-called “peripheral” virgin birth *has* to lead to denial of the central doctrine of the Christian faith!

In opposition to this logical conclusion liberals have tried repeatedly to assure Christians that one could deny the virgin birth without affecting in the least the deity of Christ. As Machen says:

*“The liberal preacher insists on the possibility of believing in Christ no matter which view be adopted as to the manner of his entrance into the world. Is not the Person the same no matter how He was born? The impression is thus produced upon the plain man that the preacher is accepting the main outlines of the New Testament account of Jesus, but merely had difficulties with this particular element in the account. But*

*such an impression is radically false. It is true that some men have denied the Virgin Birth and yet have accepted the New Testament account of Jesus as a supernatural Person. But such men are exceedingly few and far between.”[13]*

The fact, therefore, of the virgin birth claim is clear; the early Jewish claim of Jesus’ illegitimacy points to the fact that such a claim was known. The interpretation of this fact differs radically, however, depending upon one’s world-view. Because unbelief requires the Continuity of Being and the ethical normalcy of the present world as its foundation, it must deny the truthfulness of the virgin-birth claim. Biblical thinking, in contrast, readily accepts the virgin birth as necessarily flowing out of God’s previous revelation. Figure One illustrates the controversy:



**Figure 1.** *The fact of the virgin-birth claim is interpreted in accordance with one’s worldview of God, man, and nature.*

The question previously cited from the Modernist Harry Emerson Fosdick is a clear example of what Machen means. Fosdick repeatedly spoke of “the personality of the Master” rather than the God-Man Savior of Christian orthodoxy. This Baptist liberal simply could not question the virgin birth without simultaneously transforming the divine Christ into a merely human “Master.”

The negative responses to the birth of Jesus Christ, therefore, represent no theological “quibble” or “fine point.” Things are more serious than calling Mary a fornicator and Jesus a bastard. Denial of the virgin-birth is tantamount to a complete denial of all miracles and the deity of Christ. Fundamentalists who have used the virgin birth as a theological touchstone since the days of great controversy have been absolutely correct. Your view of the virgin birth is a “litmus test” of your view of who Christ is.

## DOCTRINAL CONSEQUENCE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH: THE HYPOSTATIC UNION

Lesson 114

The virgin birth, when understood and interpreted in its biblical context, is seen to have given rise to the most complex person of all time, the God-man King. The doctrine of Christ is so complex that in modern times certain ill-informed cultists like the Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, have insisted that the doctrine was made up by men and does not come from the Bible. Others, even Christians in ignorance of Christ's true nature, naively accept dangerously erroneous views of who Christ really is. For these reasons the present study of Christ's nature will cover, first, the biblical data pointing toward Christ's divine-human makeup, and then the careful formulation from those data of the doctrine of the hypostatic union itself.

### BIBLICAL DATA INVOLVED

When the wise believers of the early Church sought ways of describing Christ's nature, they found masses of revelatory data in both Old and New Testaments. For ease of study these data are grouped below into three categories: the two OT streams of revelation, the NT Christ-for-Yahweh substitutions in OT citations, and the NT Christ-for-God substitutions in historical roles.

The Two OT Streams of Revelation. The data of OT revelation concerning God and man in relationship to each other flow in two parallel streams. One stream emphasizes that God's ultimate place is with man, i.e., that God and man could have face-to-face fellowship at a definite place in the universe. In Genesis 3:8 God "walked" in the Garden of Eden, and in Genesis 3:23-24 He excluded man from this garden and its tree of life, thereby picturing how very literally sin separates man from the presence of God. We studied in Part Three of this series the days of the Tabernacle when this same theme of man's fellowship with God on a face-to-face basis reappeared in connection with the dwelling of God's glory in Israel's worship cultus (Exod. 25:22; 33:7-11; 40:34-38). Later, in Part Four, we saw God's glory indwell the Solomonic temple (I Kings 8:10-11).

In the bleak days of the pre-exilic prophets, when Israel's sins seemingly would forever separate God and man from any face-to-face fellowship, Isaiah spoke of a future time that would see God swelling again among men. That day would come when at last God Himself, rather than any sinful human king, would reign over Israel (Isa. 52:7). The report of that future event when God would become Israel's king was called "good news" or a "gospel" (cf. Isa. 52:7; Rom. 10:15). In the OT the final gospel of history would be the climatic announcement that "God reigns!" To celebrate that future end of history a number of Psalms were

written, known as Enthronement Psalms (Pss. 47; 93; 97; 98; 99), which, in the words of the OT scholar Franz Delitzsch, speak “not of the advent of a human king, but of Jahve Himself, with the kingdom of God manifest in all its glory.” [14]

The insistence that history can end justly only when God and man are restored to face-to-face fellowship is clearly one OT revelatory stream, but another stream runs parallel to it. This second stream insists that Israel’s King in that final restoration will be a descendant of David and, therefore, truly human. By the Davidic Covenant the Davidic Dynasty is to last forever (II Sam. 7:12-16; Psa. 89:4, 36). OT prophets like Isaiah developed the picture of this future son of David and linked him definitely with the coming golden era (Isa. 11:1-10). The idea of this millennial reign of David’s son was reiterated during the exile by Ezekiel (34:23-24; 37:24-25). Many ancient rabbis believed that Psalms 2 and 72 also spoke of this same event. [15]

In addition to OT passages speaking of a future glorious King, other OT passages spoke of a suffering servant of Yahweh who was also involved in the end of history. Rabbis saw Psalm 22:1-10 and Isaiah 52:13-53:12 in this light. While they artificially separated the suffering figure from the reigning king, calling the former the son of Joseph and the latter the son of David, they agreed with ancient Christian commentators that all of these OT passages spoke unambiguously of a real human being, not of some half-angel, half-phantom.

In the OT revelation there was some evidence that these two streams—the one speaking of God’s future place on earth and the other of a great human leader—would converge in one person. A hint of such convergence occurs in Psalm 2 where the future king is called the Son of God rather than merely the son of David. Another hint occurs in Proverbs 30:4. Fruchtenbaum notes:

*“When we look at the events described in these four questions, it is obvious that only one person could possibly do all those things: God himself. . . . We first had four questions asking who did these great things. The answer was: God did all those things. The fifth question was: What is God’s name? The answer: YHVH, the great I AM is his name. . . .The [sixth] question is: “What is his son’s name, if you know?” The obvious meaning here is that this great God, the great I AM, has a son. . . .No one knew the name of the Son of God throughout Old Testament Judaism. But Old Testament Judaism did know that God had a son.”[16]*

In some way this mysterious person is linked to both of the previously mentioned streams of prophecy. In Isaiah 7:14 the virgin's human son is called Immanuel, a term meaning "God-with-us" and speaking clearly of that future era when, in Zephaniah's words:

***"The King of Israel, even Jehovah, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not fear any more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not; O Zion, let not thy hands be slack. Jehovah thy God is in the midst of thee, a mighty one who will save. . . .(3:15-17a)***

Thus the human child is linked in name to the future era when God will come to dwell in Israel face-to-face. In Isaiah 9:6-7 a child is "born," but a son is "given," and His nature is that of God because He is called by names used only of God. The term "mighty God", although interpreted by amateur critics like the Jehovah's Witnesses as "god-like" but not wholly God, clearly refers to Jehovah as a simple check of the context in 10:21 shows. Thus again a human child is related to God's ultimate reign on earth.

In Jeremiah the Davidic descendant and king of Israel is called "Jehovah our Righteousness!" (Jer. 23:5-6). As further evidence of a convergence in the two streams of prophecy, note that the human king appears with a divine name. Micah 5:2 gives the birthplace of the Messiah (note that this interpretation of the passage was commonly accepted in Israel, even by Herod himself—Matt. 2:4-6); it also states that He has pre-existed His human birth. Thus He is presented as born truly human, yet having the eternal nature of God.

Finally, the most famous OT passage pointing to a convergence of the future Messiah and Yahweh Himself is Psalm 110, which is cited directly or alluded to many times in the NT (e.g., Matt. 22:41-45; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44; Acts 2:34-35; Heb. 1:13; 10:12-13). In Psalm 110 David calls the future king not "my son" but "my lord," signifying that this future human king in some way has divine authority over even David, who himself had the highest earthly authority in the state. The venerable OT scholar Delitzsch points out:

***"The fact that among all the Davidic psalms there is only one, viz., Ps. 110, in which David. . . looks forth into the future of his seed and has the Messiah definitely before his mind, can only be explained by the consideration, that he was hitherto himself the object of Messianic hope, and that this hope was first gradually. . . separated from himself individually, and then transferred to the future."*[17]**

The two OT streams of revelation, therefore, speak of real deity and real humanity, and, while not explicitly stating a meeting, imply convergence in prophecy concerning the future end of history and the reign of Messiah king. In Jesus' day these two streams were not thought

to actually meet; consequently the Messiah was believed to be only human. Messiah would be a human king reigning in the end time when God would meet men again face-to-face. Jesus taught the nation otherwise: the two streams actually did meet in Himself. *He thus clarified what was only hinted at in the OT, viz., the Messiah is both the human king reigning in the final days and God Himself living with mankind.* This convergence Paul called a “mystery” which meant a new revealed truth hidden until NT times (I Tim. 3:16). (Further discussion of Jesus’ method of revealing this truth is given in Appendix B.)

NT Christ-for-Yahweh Substitutions in OT Citations. Whereas the first category of biblical data concerns OT evidences, the second category displays NT evidences. The way NT authors so easily substitute Christ for Yahweh in their citations from the OT proves these writers indeed are claiming full deity for Christ. This point is especially significant in view of the strong monotheistic atmosphere in Israel during NT times. When, for example, Jesus set forth His claims to deity, there was a sharp monotheistic reaction (Mark 14:61-64; Luke 18:19; John 5:18; 8:58-59; 10:33). Elsewhere in the NT whenever men worshipped anyone less than God in the NT, they were quickly rebuked (Acts 14:11-18; Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9), yet Jesus accepted worship of Himself. This monotheistic NT atmosphere is a vital “background” for understanding these Christ-for-Yahweh substitutions.

These substitutions weren’t careless religious talk in a pagan environment where the Creator-creature distinction was fuzzy; they were made in exactly the opposite environment where that distinction was crystal clear. The silly opinion, often voiced in classroom discussions, that claims of Christ’s deity developed from the pagan world outside Israel is refuted by Michael Green:

***“The plain fact is that there is no parallel whatever in the Graeco-Roman world to the exclusive claims to deity made for Jesus Christ. What is more, there could not be because their religion was sychretistic and polytheist. How could it give birth to a faith in an incarnate Lord which was passionately monotheist. . . .?[18]***

To teach about Christ by substituting Him in Yahweh’s place in OT citations and allusions was a method the apostles apparently learned from Jesus Himself (Luke 24:44-48). During the first days of the Church the apostles developed Christian doctrine and wrote the NT under Jesus’ authority using His method of interpreting OT texts about Himself. Six illustrations of this teaching system are given in Table One below. Half of them come from the Apostle Paul, who wrote first among the apostles, showing how early this method of OT citation became public in the Church. One must wonder how the apostles could have taught in this

manner so easily in a heavily monotheistic environment unless they were deliberately trying to assert full deity for Jesus Christ.

NT Location of Citation	OT Passage Cited	Christ-for Yahweh Substitution
Acts 2:17-21,33,38-39	Joel 2:28-32	Christ/Yahweh pours out the Spirit Christ/Yahweh called upon by men
I Corinthians 10:9	Number 21:5-6	Lord (Jesus)/Yahweh test by rebellious people
Ephesians 4:7-11	Psalms 68:18	Christ/Yahweh descended and arose
Philippians 2:9-11	Isaiah 45:23	Christ/Yahweh object of oathing
Hebrews 1:8a,10-12	Psalms 102:25-27	Christ/Yahweh the immutable Creator
Revelation 1:8; 2:8; 22:13	Isaiah 44:6; 48:12	Christ/Yahweh the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of history

**Table 1. – Six sample OT citations and allusions in the NT showing the apostolic method of substituting Christ for Yahweh in crucial passages.**

NT Christ-for-God Substitutions in Historic Roles. Very similar to the second category of biblical data about the hypostatic union is the third remaining category. NT authors show their apprehension of Christ's full deity by unashamedly and courageously reporting Christ in roles which God alone could perform. John says Christ is the Creator of all things (John 1:3). Paul claims He is the "firstborn of all creation" which refers not to the first created here, as the Jehovah's Witness try to claim (who ignore the fact that had Paul wanted to say that he would have used the term "protokristos" that means the first created), but to the first in rank (cf. Ps. 89:27), i.e., Christ is heir of the universe.

Moreover, Christ is said to *forgive* sins (not merely to *pronounce forgiveness* of sins as a priest would do), an act which once prompted Jewish onlookers to remark, "Who can forgive sins but one, even God?" (Mark 2:5-7). *Only the one offended can do the forgiving.* To forgive sins, therefore, Christ was identifying Himself with Yahweh Who was the One Offended. Christ identified His teaching with God's Word in contrast to the prophets to whom the Word of God only sporadically came (cf. Isa. 40:8; Mark 13:31; John 7:16). Furthermore, at times Jesus indicated He was omniscient (John 8:48), omnipotent (Matt. 8:23-27; cf. Ps. 89:9), omnipresent (John 3:13), and eternal (John 8:58).

In addition, Jesus' free use of the very intimate OT title for God, "I AM," (which we studied in Part III of this series) expressed in the Greek OT (LXX) as ego eimi (Exod. 3:14) is a strong claim. Examples of Jesus' claiming this title for Himself are John 8:58 and 18:5-6. In the same vein, when Jesus was confronted with a would-be worshipper, *He*,

*unlike other biblical monotheists, permitted the worship to occur with no rebuke* (Luke 5:8; John 20:28; cf. Acts 14:11-15; Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9). Jesus even claimed the divine glory of the Father (John 17:5 cf. I Cor. 2:8), a glory which was, according to the OT, the exclusive property of Yahweh (Isa. 42:8; 48:11).

Finally, in at least three, and perhaps five, passages in the NT, *Jesus is very clearly and unambiguously called God*. John 1:1 teaches his full divinity (predicate noun of quality defined by theological context of NT). Titus 2:13 claims that Jesus is both God and Savior (Granville Sharpe Rule: whenever a single person is referred to with two nouns of the same case and the article precedes the first noun but not the second, then both nouns apply to the same person). I John 5:20 calls Him God in an immediate context where false gods or idols are mentioned (5:21), signifying that Jesus was deliberately called the one true God. A fourth explicit reference to Jesus' full deity could be Romans 9:5 if one of the several acceptable punctuations is taken. Hebrews 1:8 is a possible fifth passage, but the full force of meaning of the word of God in this OT citation could more easily be questioned by a determined skeptic than the other verses cited.

The biblical data, therefore, are sufficient to show Jesus' full deity and real humanity. The early Church fathers, contrary to modern ill-informed critics, knew quite well what they were doing in formulating this doctrine, called the "hypostatic union." Every possible combination of ideas, including those suggested by modern heretics, was tested by the Scripture and found wanting save the one orthodox statement to be studied presently.

## **FORMULATION OF THE DOCTRINE**

The Church took nearly six hundred years to summarize all the Scriptural data about Christ into a consistent doctrinal statement. The story of that struggle will now be briefly surveyed from the perspective of four great conclusions that were eventually reached concerning the nature of Christ. To attain these conclusions the early Christians discarded one false concept of God after another in their search to explain all the NT revelation in a logically consistent manner. To argue, as liberals and cultists do, that the Trinity was "imported" from Greek philosophy by the early Church is quite contrary to historical fact. On the contrary, the Trinity was an original concept coming from within the Church only after all the "imported" concepts of God from outside the culture had failed to correlate with NT revelation.

Christ as Son is a Divine Person Distinct from the Father. The first erroneous attempt to describe Christ doctrinally was known as Monarchianism. Monarchianism failed because it approached the NT data with a wrong concept of God, a concept that saw God not as only one in essence but one in person, too. God was thus conceived by Monarchianists as later Judaism and Islam were to conceive Him: *a lone, solitary being*. Monarchianists at bottom saw God as a “monarch” who reigned over all other persons, including the Son.

One version of Monarchianism, known as Modal Monarchianism, held that all three persons--Father, Son, and Spirit—were not really separate persons but only appearances or masks that the solitary God put on Himself to meet man. Sabellius, for example, taught that “He himself is the Father; he himself is the Son; he himself is the Spirit—as I say there are three names in one object. . . .”[19] God, therefore, had three labels, no one of which expressed what God was really like. Man saw Him in one situation as the Father, in another situation as the Son, and so forth; but man never saw Him as he really is. Modal Monarchianism tried to maintain the truth of monotheism, but it used a defective monotheist “model” and thus failed to fit the obvious NT data that speak of the Father and the Son as two distinct persons. As one instance, consider Jesus’ praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Was He talking to Himself in a sort of make-believe monologue put on for man’s benefit? Modal Monarchianism can’t escape this conclusion, whether in its ancient form or in a modern form (like the Local Church movement of Witness Lee--see Table Two). NT data about these two distinct persons had to be taken seriously as telling man something real concerning the nature of God.

When a second version of Monarchianism arose, it came to be known as “Dynamic Monarchianism.” This new version took the NT distinction between the Father and Son seriously, but it failed to correct the same faulty monotheism of Modal Monarchianism and thus incorrectly described Christ. Since God was one in person, the Dynamic Monarchians reasoned, both the Father and the Son could not be this one person. They made the Father the real God, leaving the Son as a mere human vessel of an impersonal divine power (Greek word: dunamis). The Dynamic Monarchian Theodotus taught that Jesus, born of a virgin, was a true man, into whom at His baptism a divine power called Christ entered. Although this version of Monarchianism better explained the NT data concerning the Father-Son distinction, it left unexplained other NT data affirming Christ’s deity, His role in salvation, and His authority to reveal directly God’s Word. Interestingly, this second version of Monarchianism corresponds to modern liberal ideas about Jesus. The renowned Roman Catholic Christologist, Karl Adam, has commented: “Modern liberal assessments of Jesus as the great, unique, but purely human means of divine revelation are remarkably close of this heretical dynamism. . . .”[20] (see Table Two.)

These two Monarchian, erroneous attempts to describe Christ, therefore, failed *because of their common starting assumption of a personal, solitary monotheistic God*. NT data demand a multiplicity of persons in the Godhead. After rejecting these two versions of Monarchianism, the Church recognized that Christ is a divine person—wholly God--distinct from the Father. Left unsolved at this point, however, is the inner relationship between the Father and the Son.

<b>Ancient Heresy Title</b>	<b>Modern Counterpart</b>	<b>Error</b>
Modal Monarchianism	“Local Church” of Witness Lee	<u>Solitary monotheism</u> : three persons only masks of appearance.
Dynamic Monarchianism	Unitarianism; old liberal theology; later Judaism; Islam	<u>Solitary monotheism</u> : only the Father is God.
Arianism	Jehovah’s Witnesses	<u>Pure Ideal called “God” that can only communicate with non-ideal world through an intermediary being</u> : Son less in essence than the Father.
Docetism	Extreme Calvinism	<u>Only the Pure Ideal called “God” is real</u> : physical history, including Christ’s humanity, not “real” existence; only an illusion.
Nestorianism	Neo-orthodoxy	<u>God limited by His creation</u> : Son’s divine nature only loosely associated with his human nature.
Monophysitism	Oriental claims of “incarnations” of Krishna; modern liberal/pagan theology	<u>God and Creation are basically one (Monism)</u> : Son’s two natures mixed together into one nature.

**Table 2.—Six ancient Christological heresies with their modern counterparts listed. Unbiblical presuppositions about God’s being are underlined.**

Christ’s Subordination to the Father is Not One of Essence. NT references such as Matthew 19:17; Mark 13:32; Luke 18:19; John 14:28; I Corinthians 11:3, 15:28, as well as Paul’s use of the term God (theos) for the Father and the term Lord (kurios) for the Son, argue for some sort of subordination of the Son to the Father. Other NT data discussed earlier in this chapter, however, equally demand full deity for the Son. Thus the question is the nature of that subordination, and the new debate which

followed the Monarchian concerned the tension between Christ's deity and His subordination to the Father.

The Arian heresy, the most popular answer to the dilemma, dominated the Church for a limited period. Arians taught that Christ's subordination to the Father was a subordination of essence. Christ was made of like substance (Greek: homoiousion) as the Father but not the same substance (homoousion) as the Father. The Arians, however, like the Monarchians before them, had imported an outside, unbiblical idea of God into the discussion. They relied upon Platonism in which "God" was the name for pure essence, above and separate from the world. In Platonic tradition this one "God" could communicate with the world only through some intermediary being, a half-god/half-man, called the Logos (unfortunately, the very word used in John 1 to describe Christ). When Arians borrowed this Platonic concept of God and used the intermediary being idea to solve the subordination dilemma, they naturally identified Christ the Son as this intermediary being, making Him "divine", but not in the true biblical sense.

By ignoring the NT data supporting Christ's full deity and, therefore, His role in revelation and salvation, Arians were led by their error into a serious problem. They so separated God the Father in the Ideal world from God the Son Who spoke in this world that neither the Son nor mankind who listened to Him could really "know" God. Nor could God the Father, isolated in His Ideal world, touch mankind and redeem it. By the resistless force of logic, the Arians were driven into making God unknowable and unredemptive. The founder of Arianism, Arius, made this result very clear in his official writings:

*"God Himself, then, in His own nature, in ineffable, unknowable by all men. Equal or like Himself He alone has none, or one in glory. . . .The Unbegun made the Son a beginning of things originated; and advanced Him as a Son to Himself by adoption. He has nothing proper to God in substance. For He is not equal, no, nor one in essence with Him. . . .God is ineffable, unknowable, to His Son. For He is to Himself what He is, that is, unspeakable. So that nothing which is called comprehensible does the Son know to speak about; for it is impossible for Him to investigate the Father, Who is by Himself. For the Son does not know His own essence, for being Son, He really existed, at the will of the Father."*[21]

*Denial of Christ's full deity had to lead the Arians into a morass in which God is unknowable, in which revelation about Him is only historically relative, and in which salvation is impossible from the Son. The anti-Arians who insisted on the sharp Creator/creature distinction without any such "intermediary" being, asked why Jesus Christ was being worshipped if He were not full deity: "Who said to them that, having*

abandoned the worship of the created universe they should proceed again to worship something created and made?"[22] They further argued that if the semi-divine Logos/Christ were not fully God, he had to be mutable. "How can he who beholds the mutable think that he is beholding the immutable?"[23] In short, the anti-Arians, led by Athanasius, the Alexandrian Christian deacon, argued that if Jesus be not God, then Christians are not saved. Karl Adams summarizes the debate:

***"The dogmatic result of the Arian disputes could be summarized thus: Christ is not a god of secondary order. . . . He is God himself. . . . This was the basis of the formulation "God-man". . . . What Christ does, thinks, utters, works, has absolute validity. All Christianity is thereby exalted above the mere human and historically conditioned."***[23]

To oppose Arianism, the Nicene Creed was adopted. In its original form it reads:

***"We believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, only begotten of the Father, that is, of the substance of the Father, God of God, begotten, not made, being of the same substance with the Father. . . ."***[24]  
*(Emphasis supplied.)*

In this creed the Church used every vocabulary word that it could find to deny the Arian heresy that Jesus' subordination to the Father was one of essence. The Son was of the same essence (homoousion) as the Father; He was not merely of like essence (homoiousion). The mere difference of one little Greek letter, iota, between these two terms in the debate gave rise to a sarcastic footnote in Gibbon's famous history The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire in which he ridiculed the whole discussion. From his sarcasm there arose the expression "it doesn't matter one iota." [25] According to this creed man could, through the fully divine Son, meet God, know Him, and be saved. In rejecting Arianism the Church rejected all modern resurgent versions of Arianism such as that of the Jehovah's Witnesses (see Table 2).

The Church's answer to Arius, therefore, was a strong "no!" It stated what the Son's subordination is not, but did not state positively what it was. To illuminate the nature of the subordination, the Church had to look further than the short history of Christ's early life for a full model of the Trinity relationship. The Father-Son relationship had to be viewed from eternity. When this was done, the fact became clear that the subordination is two-fold and is not one of essence. First, it is an eternal subordination of *role*. The Son is begotten or proceeds from the Father as the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son (see Appendix A). Second, it is also a subordination of One Who has a human nature to One Who is God His Father. This latter aspect of subordination results from

the virgin birth and the incarnation. When the Church realized that the subordination observed in the NT data is a special case of involving the complexities of incarnation, it faced new possibilities of understanding the subordination in a positive way.

Christ Has Full Humanity. The debate then shifted to the matter of Christ's incarnation. If Christ is of the same essence as the Father, how was this divine nature incarnated? Did God acquire full human nature? One early failure to answer this question was the heresy of Docetism. Docetism answered the question very simply by denying that Christ ever had any humanity at all—body, soul, or spirit. In this view He had only what appeared to be a human nature. Docetism arrived at this wrong answer by importing from the pagan culture a Platonic and oriental dualism that believed the empirical world was not real. Once again we observe a vital biblical question answered wrongly because concepts from outside the Bible were brought into the discussion. NT revelation, of course, requires a real humanity for Christ regardless of such pagan dualism in order for Christ to generate legitimate historical righteousness (e.g., Heb. 5:7-9), His priestly qualifications (e.g., Heb. 4:14-16), His representative position as the Second Adam (see Appendix B), His efficacious death (e.g., John 19:33-35), His absolute revelation of God (e.g., John 1:14; I John 1:1), and His fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant (II Sam. 7:12-16). The function of the virgin birth was to introduce Christ's human nature into the world. In opposing Docetic interpretations of Christ the Church opposed in principle all tendencies to downgrade and make illusory real physical history (such as sometimes occurs in extreme Calvinism in which there is so much focus on God's decrees that their historical manifestations are of no account)(see Table 2).

Later, more sophisticated versions of Docetism occurred which held that although Jesus' body was real, He did not have a true human soul (Arius's idea) or a true human spirit (Appollinaris' idea). The former error challenged Matthew 26:38; and the later, John 13:21. The Logos, according to these schemes, actually replaced the "higher" parts of Jesus' humanity. All such schemes were rejected by orthodox theologians. The famous Church historian Philip Schaff wrote:

*“The Church could not possibly accept such a half Docetistic incarnation, such a mutilated and stunted humanity of Christ, despoiled of its royal head, and such a merely partial redemption has this inevitably involved. The incarnation of the Logos is His becoming completely man. . . . This was the weighty doctrinal result of the Appollinarian controversy.”[26]*

The conclusion of this stage of the controversy was that Christ is not only fully divine; He is also fully human. This conclusion was not arbitrarily determined; it was required by a full, centuries-long consideration of all NT data.

Christ's Two Natures Are United Without Mixture in One Person.

With Christ's divine and human natures firmly recognized, early Church discussion concentrated more and more upon the matter of how these two natures were brought together. The person who is a casual student of the subject will dismiss such discussion as impractical "theological quibbling" or as "irrelevant to my life" because he fails to see what is at stake. The issue is ultimately nothing less than God the Creator's relationship with His created universe. It concerns the vital Creator-creature distinction that sets biblical thought apart from all pagan thought. A wrong answer here will distort all other truths. This final phase of Christological controversy, therefore, was no "theological quibble" nor was it "irrelevant" to everyday life. Literally everything was at stake: the doctrines of God, man, and nature.

One erroneous attempt to define the union of Christ's two natures was the heretical Nestorian position. Nestorianism erred by starting at the wrong point with the wrong question. Nestorius and his followers began to analyze the union problem from the creature's limited viewpoint within history. Nestorius thought that the question was how the divine nature united with Jesus' humanity after than humanity had already come into existence. *History*, rather than *God's plan for history*, was the starting point, according to his error. The issue was then how God's plan fitted into this pre-established history. Nestorianism viewed the matter as one of God's accommodating himself to the so-called "limitations" of history. According to this error Mary bore Jesus the anointed one as a human baby, not as God already united with humanity in one person. Nestorianism held that Jesus was a human person; God was a divine person. They came together after Jesus' birth in *moral* union but not in *physical* union. The two persons with two natures formed a sort of company that could be viewed as two parallel lines that never physically met. Schaff summarizes Nestorianism:

*"It asserted indeed, rightly, the duality of the natures, and the continued distinction between them; it denied, with equal correctness, that God, as such, could either be born, or suffer and die: but it pressed the distinction of the two natures to double personality. It substituted for the idea of the incarnation the idea of an assumption of . . . an entire man into fellowship with the Logos. . . . Instead of God-man, we have here the idea of a mere God-bearing man. . . . The two natures form not a personal unity, but only a . . . conjunction."*[27]

The logical results of the Nestorian conjunction of natures in Christ rather than the real union of natures would have been disastrous to Christianity. Everything Jesus did, thought, and said, on this basis, would have been mere creaturely activity, only accompanied by God but not in

any way done by God. God would have been forever distant from His creation; for *if this event of Jesus Christ were not a union, no other event in history could have been any closer*. Moreover, mankind would be found worshipping a man rather than a God-man. Nestorianism is similar to the modern heresy of neo-orthodoxy which separates God so strongly from the world that He can never verbally speak to it (see Table 2).

The other erroneous attempt to define the union of Christ's two natures—monophysitism (meaning “one nature”)—went in the opposite direction from Nestorianism. Where Nestorianism exaggerated the duality of the two natures into a duality of persons, Monophysitism exaggerated the unity of Christ's person into a unity of one nature. Eutyches, the leading Monophysitist, used the slogan: “before the incarnation two natures. . .after it one nature.”[28] Adam describes this heresy:

*“Eutyches. . .defended the doctrine that both natures were transformed into the divine, which implied a unity and a homogeneity in the nature of Christ. Like Gregory of Nyssa, Eutyches made use of the metaphor of the sea and the drop of vinegar to illustrate his doctrine of transformation. Jesus as a drop of vinegar poured into the sea will take on the nature of the sea, just so human nature was transformed into the divine. So Christ was certainly made up out of two natures originally, but after the union he no longer persists in two natures, but only in one.”[29]*

Obviously Monophysitism destroyed the Creator-creature distinction which is the basic distinction underneath all truth. Biblical thought differs from all pagan religion and philosophy at precisely this point. Adam adds to his previous statement the critical observation: “This Monophysite heresy recalls the Indian myth of the god Krishna, who has the power to transform himself into men, or even into beasts.”[30] Oriental so-called “incarnations” far from being parallel examples of the biblical God's incarnation in Christ, are in reality examples of the old Monophysitist heresy. In the 1960s, when eastern religious influence came strongly into the American culture, it was no accident that George Harrison's then popular song “My Sweet Lord” alternated the use of the words “Halleluyah” and “Halle Krishna”. It was pure oriental Monophysitism, but naïve evangelical Christians, lacking a knowledge of biblical truth, thought it was a wonderful hymn!

The Nestorian and Monophysitist controversies finally led to one of the most important Church councils in history, the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451. The Council molded its terminology by the requirements of NT revelation rather than by the imported viewpoints and terms of Greek thought. Of chief importance are the terms *nature* and *person*

(hypostasis) which carefully distinguish what it is that unites in Christ from what it is that remains separate. The Creator’s divine nature which Christ has could never be mixed with His created humanity after the fashion of Monophysitism. On the other hand, there has to be a real physical unity to avoid the problem of Nestorianism. The solution comes in recognizing that the Second Person of the Trinity, the Logos or Son, can be distinguished from the Divine Essence because all three persons—Father, Son, and Spirit—share the same Essence and, therefore, are distinguished within the Trinity. The Second Person, therefore, can be distinguished from both the Divine Essence and the human nature; and it can become the real focal point for unity in Christ. The Chalcedon Creed states the matter thusly:

*“Following the holy fathers, we unanimously teach. . .one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, known in two natures, without confusion, without conversion, without severance, and without division; the distinction of natures being in no wise abolished by their union, but the peculiarity of each nature being maintained, and both concurring in one person and hypostasis. . .”[31]*

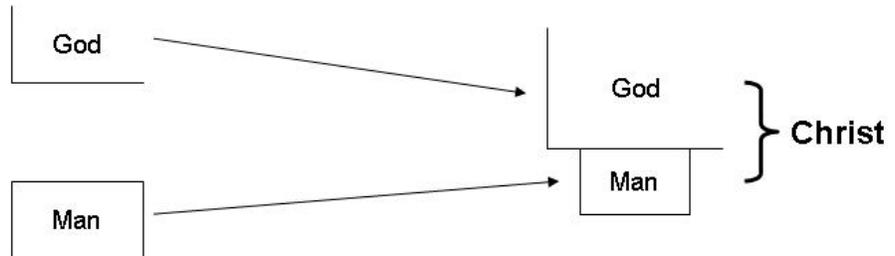
In summary, the doctrine of the hypostatic union is that Christ is **“UNDIMINISHED DEITY UNITED WITH TRUE HUMANITY WITHOUT CONFUSION IN ONE PERSON FOREVER.”** As Table Two illustrates, this doctrine denies liberalism, the Modalism of Witness Lee, the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ recycled Arianism, neo-orthodoxy, and Oriental imitations of the incarnation.

For six hundred years students of the Scripture fought to summarize without contradiction all the NT revelation about Christ. The doctrine of the hypostatic union is the only view that has survived *the greatest theological discussion man has ever undertaken*. It is the only one that has no contradiction with the NT revelation. This doctrine alone does not complete one’s understanding of Christ’s nature, but it forms the basis for other doctrines to be discussed in the next chapter. One must remember that Christ’s nature is an infinite mystery only partially revealed (I Tim. 3:16) and is rooted in the fundamental incomprehensibility of God (see Part II discussion of incomprehensibility).

## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE DOCTRINE**

A doctrine as important and central as the doctrine of the hypostatic union carries overwhelming implications. We will now study four of these. First, the hypostatic union implies that the Creator-creature distinction is eternally fundamental. If in the Person of Christ there is no confusion of these categories, how much more so must it be true of any other Creator-creature relationship! The OT position is thus reinforced

powerfully by the hypostatic union of Christ. There can be no intermingling, no evolutionary upward development in which a creature can merge into the Godhead, or no new intermediate existence. Christians, therefore, who point to I Corinthians 13:12 as indicating their future acquisition of omniscience are fundamentally in error. The OT doctrines of God and man are preserved in the hypostatic union of Christ.



A second equally powerful implication of this doctrine is that the Creator cannot meet His creation any more fully than he does in man. When He appeared to His creation, He did not incarnate Himself in a rock, a tree, or an animal. As we studied in Part II man was created as a finite replica of God, an analog in both the material and immaterial parts, a “theomorphism.” This original design was established for the ultimate incarnation that would occur thousands of years later. Remember the words of the ancient Church father Tertullian as he wrote of God creating man in Eden: “Whatever was the form and expression which was then given to the clay by the Creator, Christ was in his thoughts as one day to become Man, because the Word, too, was to be both clay and flesh. . . .”[32]

The two OT streams of revelation thus converge into the Person of Jesus Christ. He is “God with us” and He is the ideal human king. The universe is scheduled to be ruled by a human from planet earth, not an angel from heaven or some extra-terrestrial being from Star Trek! With all due apologies to science fiction writers’ imaginations and certain popular cosmologists, the ultimate truth will be found in Christ and nowhere else.

A third implication of the hypostatic union doctrine is that history has eternal significance. By the incarnation the Trinity has acquired a new aspect: not a change in Its essence, but union with a created human nature in Christ. God the Son now bears in His Person not only the created human nature but a nature with the marks of historical experience, including scars from His atonement work (John 20:27; Rev. 5:6). History is real and outside of the Godhead and has significance. It is not just a dream in the mind of God as eastern thought sometimes espouses and as some rationalistic hyper-Calvinist seem to maintain. God’s sovereign plan doesn’t exist outside of His Omniscience until it comes about

historically. History then has eternal significance because it is the arena of the activity of the God-man.

Finally, a fourth implication of this doctrine was mentioned by Paul in Colossians 2:8. Paul elevates Christ as the God-man to a status over all philosophical reasoning of man. He specifically urges believers to replace the basic presuppositions of human thought (stoicheia) with Christ. Why and how? We have just studied how the revelation of Jesus Christ forced a radical revision in the categories of Church theology. Every basic idea of God and man was challenged until finally the Church had to confess the Creator-creature distinction and the Triune nature of God. All human words and thoughts had to be remolded by the revelation of Christ. In Appendix A we will examine some more implications of the doctrine of the Trinity that correlates with the doctrine of the hypostatic union.

## SUMMARY

In this chapter you have viewed the first event in Christ's life—His virgin birth. You have studied how the hypostatic union doctrine flows out of this historical union of man and God. The virgin birth and the full deity of Christ have been accepted by mainstream Christianity from the NT era, through the great Christological creeds, through the Reformation, until the recent century. Those who are truly regenerate and who pause to study the revelatory data of the NT will recognize the truth. They will rejoice in the virgin birth and trust in the Christ of the hypostatic union, aware of the powerful implications this truth has on human thought and life.

What is your response? Are you in league with the modern ridiculers of the virgin birth and deniers of the incarnation, or do you stand in the ranks of those myriad of saints who have confessed that Christ, the God-man, was born to a virgin in Bethlehem 19 centuries ago? By now you should understand better the vast difference between the two positions.

## END NOTES FOR CHAPTER 2

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37. Arthur C. Custance, The Seed of the Woman (Brockville, Ontario: Doorway Publications, 1981), p. 277.
38. Henry M. Morris, Impact Series No. 30, "Creation and the Virgin Birth." (San Diego, CA: Institute for Creation Research, 1975), p. ii.

39. Mishnah, Yebamoth 4,13, trans. Herbert Danby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 225.
40. Joseph Klausner, Jesus of Nazareth (New York: Macmillan Co., 1925), p. 35.
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42. 8a. Ernest Gordon, The Leaven of the Sadducees as cited by George W. Dollar, A History of Fundamentalism in America (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1973), p. 100.
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46. J. Gresham Machen, Christianity and Liberalism (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1968 [1923]), pp. 108-9.
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48. Franz Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Psalms, I, trans. Francis Bolton (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, n.d.[1867]) 67.
49. See Fruchenbaum, Jesus Was A Jew, pp. 57-60.
50. Ibid., pp. 61-2.
51. Delitzsch, I, 66.
52. Michael Green, "Jesus in the New Testament," The Truth of God Incarnate (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), pp. 38f.
53. Cited in Reinhold Seebert, Text-book of the History of Doctrines, trans. Charles E. Hay, I (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1964), 168.
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55. Arius. Thalia, cited in Rousas J. Rushdoony, The Foundations of Social Order (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1972), p. 12.
56. Cited in Seeberg, I, 207.
57. Ibid., Athansius asked, "How, if the Logos was a creature, would he be able to dissolve a decree of God and forgive sin?"
58. Cited in Rushdoony, p. 15.
59. Ibid., p. 14.
60. Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, III (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1950), 739.
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62. Cited in Rushdoony, p. 42.
63. Adam, p. 240.
64. Ibid.
65. Schaff, 768

## CHAPTER 3: THE LIFE OF THE KING

Lesson 120

The NT portrait of the King omits most of His childhood and begins its detailed description with Jesus' baptism by John. From that baptism until His death approximately three years later, the NT records the God-Man's appearance with a narrative of miracles, stories, and sermons.

As with the virgin birth event, so also with this period in the King's life. Men vary radically in their response. The NT pictures the King living out such an odd life, making such stupendous claims, that critics either consider Jesus imbalanced or that the NT simply presents a false picture of him, concocted by Church leaders after the fact. In this chapter we will discuss the life of the King, the responses of unbelief to it, and the doctrinal truths revealed through His life for us. Included among these truths is a discussion of how Christ's life contributes to an inerrant, infallible Bible. (Read here at least two of the following gospel sections-- Matt. 3-25; Mark 1-13; Luke 3-21; and John 1-17).

### THE HISTORICAL APPEARANCE OF THE KING

As in the case of the virgin birth, so is the case with Jesus' life. Acceptance of the NT interpretation proceeds out of a prior biblical world view. Although Jesus' life was the most concentrated revelation of the Word of God in history, it was really a continuation of the OT revelation. OT revelation, built upon the imagehood of God in man, was manifestly verbal. When God spoke to Abraham, Moses, and the others, He obviously spoke words. In fact, most of the OT would be meaningless apart from verbal revelation since the verbal covenants between God and Israel form the basis of most OT books. God did not leave Israel to guess what He was doing in history; He repeatedly gave her verbal explanations of these and future events. God as the Designer of human speech could even speak through an ass, if necessary (Num. 22:21-35)!

Those sympathetic to this OT view of revelation, therefore, have not been hostile to the King, neither physically in ancient times, nor philosophically in modern times. They have understood the King as the pinnacle of revelation. He is God Incarnate, the Word-become-flesh (John 1:14). His momentous claims, seen in this light, are just what rational men would expect of the authoritative OT God of Creation!

Such believers in Jesus view the NT documents, therefore, as generated by the Holy Spirit to picture accurately the King and to bring out exactly the details willed by God the Father for our information and response. This NT picture of Jesus is often called the “kerygmatic Christ” from the Greek word for a preached message (*kerygma*). The NT is the kerygma of the early Christians that gives the true interpretation of the King’s life for mankind. In orthodox faith there is identity between the NT picture and “what really happened” in the life of Jesus, the “historical Jesus.” (Unbelief, as we shall see shortly, sharply divides between the “kerygmatic Christ” and the “historic Jesus.”)

It is not just a matter of revelation and authoritative Scripture that is at issue here. The NT picture of the King shows that He “pioneered” a new, righteous way of life for mankind through the filling of the Holy Spirit that had never occurred before in history. No human being since the fall ever successfully lived a perfect life in Satan’s world until Jesus made the “breakthrough.” The NT details of His life are very important to “see” what righteousness and godliness look like amidst the details of everyday life. Only if the kerygmatic Christ is the same as the historic Jesus can we know what God expects of us, what His “standard” really is, and what the Holy Spirit seeks to create in believers today.

## UNBELIEVING RESPONSES TO THE KING’S LIFE

As we did in the previous chapter, we will do again here. We’ll look first at how unbelief has rejected the King’s life, both in ancient times as well as in modern times. Then we’ll show why such rejection is a necessity for unbelief to be consistent with itself. Unbelief is a pathology of the mind and heart born from mankind’s sin. It shows over and over that mankind judges itself when it tries to judge the King.

### ANCIENT AND MODERN REJECTION OF THE PERFECT LIFE

The responses of unbelief have varied little over the ages. The ancient responses to Jesus may have been a bit more provincial than modern unbelief; but, as I will demonstrate below, it exhibited the same disdain for God’s self-authenticating, authoritative Word.

Ancient Jewish Responses. During the days when the King spoke and performed miracles, a Jewish backlash arose from His threatening challenge to their popular religious views of the day. Jesus’ threat can be seen in many areas: His assault upon Pharisaic legalism, His radical interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures (particularly His innovative picture

of the OT Messiah), and His stubborn, bold claim of implicit authority for whatever He taught.

Much to the offense of the leading legalists of the day, Jesus lived socially in a manner considered sinful for a rabbi. Jesus spoke with many women in public, once drank out of the same vessel as a woman of questionable reputation by the Well of Jacob (John 4: 7-27), and freely permitted other women to loosen their hair in His presence (Luke 7:36-50; John 12:1-8).[1] Jesus seemed to go out of His way to collide with other bureaucratic “regulations” of His day. In one of the most clear-cut cases in the NT He and his disciples broke the regulatory details of Sabbath living (Matt. 12:1-13; John 9:1-16).

Jesus claimed that such traditions as the public behavior of rabbis and the detailed Sabbatical regulations were mere human distortions of the original revelation given by God in the OT. Only God’s Word, not man’s traditions, was the proper base of human action according to Jesus. He insisted, for example, that the Ten Commandments of the OT had to be recovered from obscuring tradition and retaught once again in their original spiritual sharpness (Matt. 5-7). The fourth commandment (“Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy:--Exod. 20:8) must be understood as establishing a day of refreshing rest for man rather than a day of further religious burden (Matt. 12:1-13). The fifth commandment (“Honor thy father and thy mother”—Exod. 20:12) had to be rescued from the religious gimmicks which were destroying its force (Matt. 15:4-6). The sixth and seventh commandments (“Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not commit adultery”—Exod. 20:13-14) had basically to do with the deep mental attitudes and not with just the actual overt acts, according to Jesus (Matt. 5:21-32).

More startling to His contemporaries than His challenge of their legalism was Jesus’ radical interpretation of the OT. Although He interpreted the Scriptures in their original literal sense as many contemporary rabbis did, Jesus insisted that all revelation was fulfilled in Himself! Jesus saw Himself anticipated typologically in Jonah (Matt. 12:39-41; Luke 11:29-32), Solomon (Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31), David (Matt. 12:3-4; Mark 2:25-26; Luke 6:3-4), and Isaiah (Matt. 13:13; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10). He also saw Himself anticipated typologically in the national experience of the nation Israel. Like Israel, Jesus came out of Egypt (Matt. 2:13-23) and encountered a testing period in the wilderness which He met using Scriptures from the wilderness-wandering period of Israel’s history (Matt. 4:1-11; cf. Deut. 6:13, 16; 8:3). Additionally, Jesus predicted His resurrection on the third day based apparently upon prophecy that the nation Israel would be restored on the third day (Hos. 6:1-3). After studying this use of Scripture by Jesus, Dr. R. T. France concluded:

***“Jesus saw his mission as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures; not just of those which predicted a coming redeemer, but of the whole sweep of Old Testament ideas. The patterns of God’s working which the discerning eye could trace in the history and institutions of Israel were all preparing for the great climax. . . which the prophets foretold. And in the coming of Jesus all this was fulfilled.”[2]***

In stressing fulfillment of all the OT in himself, Jesus wove together OT passages in a way new to His generation. He drew the key ingredient from the suffering servant picture in Isaiah 53, which He then combined with other OT passages such as Daniel 7 with its picture of the Son of Man. Jesus relied heavily upon further Messianic pictures in Psalm 110 and Zechariah 9-14. These OT pictures, when assembled together, formed a composite picture of the Messiah which perfectly fit Jesus’ life and death. France rightly notes:

***“In the Jewish world of the first century AD Jesus of Nazareth was a man apart. . . . While second to none in his reverence for the Scriptures, his diligent study of them and his acceptance of their teachings, . . . he yet applied the Old Testament in a way which was quite unparalleled. The essence of his new application was that he saw the fulfillment of the predictions and foreshadowings of the Old Testament in himself and his work. . . . Such a use of the Old Testament was not only original; it was revolutionary. It was such that a Jew who did not accept it must violently oppose it. It is not surprising that a community founded on this teaching soon found itself irreconcilably divided from those Jews who still looked forward to a coming Messiah.”[3]***

Of course, behind Jesus’ disregard for the secondary and tertiary religious regulations and His innovative interpretation of the OT, was *His basic implicit authority*. He boldly spoke forth His position without justifying references from rabbinical traditions (Matt. 7:28-29). In a way startlingly similar to Yahweh on Mt. Sinai, Jesus ascended a mountain and gave His “law” in the famous Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). Jesus clearly claimed implicit authority to originate the Word of God in this sermon because of the repeated statement, “Ye have heard it said to them of old time. . . .but I say unto you” (Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44). He did not say, “Thus saith the Lord” after the manner of OT prophets; He said, “Thus saith I.” Jesus even claimed to add to the OT revelation in Matthew 13:1-52 when He taught His disciples certain mysteries or previously unrevealed truths about the OT Kingdom of God. When He uttered these prophecies, especially in the closing days of His life (Matt. 24-25) not as words from God but as His own words.

Sinful men, even religious men, could not help but be offended that Truth existed independently of their interpretation, that they were responsible to a transcendental standard external to themselves. In a way analogous to the modern legal community, the Jewish Pharisees had virtually ignored Truth in favor of endless quibbling about judicial technicalities. They were forcibly reminded of the OT pattern of God's words and works through the way the King lived and taught. *To this apparent "intrusion" into their conventional society, they responded deeply and violently* (e.g., Matt. 12:14-15; John 8:59).

Lesson 121

Modern Unbelieving Responses. For all their vehemence the ancient opponents of Jesus did not deny the historical existence of their hated object. They did not pretend that He was otherwise than He was. Modern opponents, however, have tried to precisely this thing. They have concentrated upon denying that the NT Jesus ever really existed and have tried to replace Him with a reconstructed model better suited to the requirements of their unbelief.

A clear example of how modern unbelief has denied the existence of the biblical Jesus is shown in this address a generation ago by philosophy professor Avrum Stroll at the University of British Columbia. As you read this excerpts, note the flow of logic:

*"In contemporary philosophical theology one of the most widely debated questions concerns the relation between the historical Jesus, a man supposedly living in Palestine sometime between 9 B.C. and AD 32, and the Jesus described in the Gospel writings. . . .*

*One may, I think, not unfairly summarize the scholarly opinion on this question as follows: the existence of Jesus is beyond question; but the information we have about him is a composite of fact and legend which cannot be reliably untangled. . . .*

*These passages from Josephus [Antiquities, VIII.3; XX.9], and the passage from Tacitus [Annals, XV.44], contain the only information we have about the existence of Christ from non-Christian sources in the first century. It is clear that neither writer could have been an eye witness to the events he describes. . . .*

*The Gospels, of course, purport to contain descriptions of the life and activities of Christ, from the time of his nativity, through his baptism, crucifixion and resurrection. Until the attention of historical scholarship was directed to these documents early in the nineteenth century, it was commonly assumed that they contained eye witness reports of the events described. . . .*

*It is extremely unlikely that the writers of the documents we now possess would have been eye witnesses to the activities of Jesus. . . .*

*Even if there were reason to believe some of the material to express eye witness accounts of Jesus' life, the accretion of legend, the description of miracles performed by Jesus, which exist in these writings [sic] make it difficult, if not impossible, to extract from them any reliable historical testimony about the events described. . . .It seems to me likely that during*

*this [NT] period a prophet arose. . . .; but an accretion of legends grew up about this figure, was incorporated into the Gospels by various devotees of the movement, was rapidly spread throughout the Mediterranean world by the ministry of St. Paul; and that because this is so, it is impossible to separate these legendary elements in the purported descriptions of Jesus from those which in fact were true of him.[4]*

In this address one can clearly see the unbelieving presupposition in Dr. Stroll's statement that "the descriptions of miracles performed by Jesus, which exist in these writings make it difficult, if not impossible, to extract from them any reliable historic testimony. . . ." In other words, Stroll tries to interpret the Gospels within his pre-established, pagan worldview rather than interpret the Gospels within the biblical worldview that emerges from the Old Testament in anticipation of the New. Instead of submitting to the biblical view of God, man, and nature, Stroll follows out his naturalistic worldview and changes the NT picture to fit it. He, with a host of other modern unbelieving critics, denies that the NT picture records what "really" happened in the historic appearance of Jesus Christ.

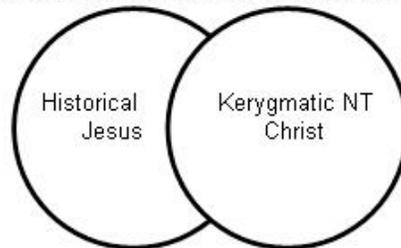
Modern NT criticism, therefore, has sought to reconstruct the supposedly "true" situation. The actual historic person of Jesus is often affirmed, but He has been carefully distinguished from His NT picture. Some of the critics have believed that historic research was capable of "going behind" the NT documents into first century Palestine and recovering some idea of what the "real" Jesus was like. Others, like Stroll, have refused to search for Him, believing that the methods of historical research simply could not apprehend a specific individual who lived so long ago. In both cases, however, the critics have never identified the real Jesus with the NT picture of Him.

This NT picture of Jesus is often called the "kerygmatic Christ" as mentioned above. It contrasts with the "real" historic Jesus. Figure Two shows how this pagan sort of thinking contrasts with biblical thinking on the issue. Some of the more extreme critics hold to position "A" in which the kerygmatic Christ has no connection whatsoever with the historic Jesus. In their worldview man experiences religious emotions and responds in his imagination by generating religious images. No communication exists between a Creator and his creature because at bottom all is one impersonal cosmos, a grand Continuity of Being. NT writers, in this view, merely created the kerygmatic Christ out of their religious imaginations. Christ, in this view, is a like a chameleon that takes on the qualities of the observer's theology.

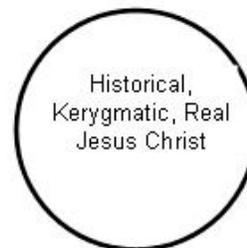
Other critics haven't been quite so extreme. They hold to position "B" in Figure Two. They claim that the kerygmatic Christ has some sort of relationship to the historic Jesus, but they aren't sure of the correspondence. They fervently desire to have some objective historic fact underneath the kerygmatic Christ, but because of their pagan commitments they cannot give up the idea that the NT must be a product of human thought. Both positions "A" and "B" differ profoundly from historic, orthodox Christianity which is shown in position "C" and which was explained above.



Position A: complete divorce between the historical Jesus and the NT picture.



Position B: partial divorce between the historical Jesus and the NT picture.



Position C: Identity between the historical Jesus and the NT picture.

**Figure 2. Three views of the relationship between the "real" historical Jesus and the NT picture of him (the so-called "kerygmatic Christ"). Positions A and B show paganized viewpoints whereas Position C shows the biblical worldview. The same three positions could be extended to the entire canon of Scripture.**

Unbelief's Need to Reject the Life of Jesus Christ. All the unbelieving responses to the King's appearance have displayed the same apostate background as the unbelieving responses to the virgin birth

discussed earlier. In the virgin birth debate, it will be remembered, the pagan ideas of God, man, and nature led critics to either call Jesus a bastard or the virgin birth a physical impossibility. The pagan Continuity of Being motif further led critics to misstate the doctrine of the God-man character of Jesus Christ. In the present debate over the life of Christ in general it is the pagan denial of biblical revelation that has misled the critics.

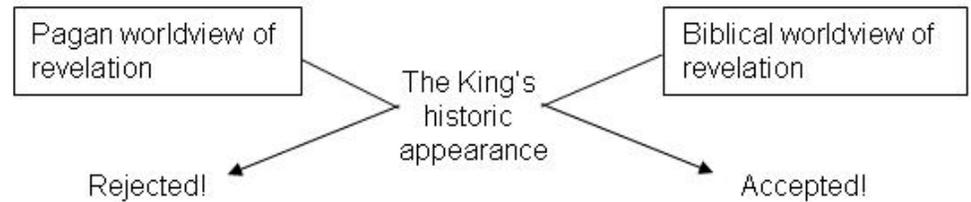
The ancient Jewish critics insisted that the OT Scripture was to be viewed as literature that required authoritative interpretation by the rabbis. In actual practice the Jewish interpretation traditions and detailed applications to social life had long since replaced the Scripture itself. Fallen, sinful teachers' fleshly minds had effectively separated the ordinary Jew from knowing God in a direct, personal way (cf. John 12:37-41; Rom. 11:25-27; I Cor. 1:18-2:9). When, therefore, these Jewish critics faced Jesus Who claimed to bring the original OT Scripture to the forefront over and above the contemporary traditions, they were profoundly offended. Particularly galling to them was the idea that Jesus asserted direct revelational authority, placing His words on a par with the OT Scripture (and therefore above those of the rabbis).

Modern critics have followed a similar path. Having turned from the pieces of biblical truth mixed into Western civilization, they deny the possibility of any verbal revelation. One of the most famous theologians of the twentieth century, Dr. Paul Tillich, wrote: "There are no revealed doctrines, but there are revelatory events and situations which can be described in doctrinal terms. . . .The 'Word of God' contains neither revealed commandments nor revealed doctrines." [5] Such denials of divine revelation parrot the same denials found in eastern religion. [6] Paganism is basically the same whether western or eastern.

Instead of replacing the Scripture with the Jewish rabbinical traditions, modern Gentile critics replace the Scripture with pagan beliefs that have grown up since mankind received the "Noahic Bible" at the beginning of civilization. Figure Two could be drawn to represent the entire Bible, not just the NT picture of Jesus. The Bible's view of history couldn't possibly be "real" history; these critics, therefore, demand the right to reconstruct the "true" picture of universal history as in positions "A" and "B".

The King made His appearance in history; that is fact. Men receptive to God's revelation have accepted that record. Other men, in their self-deception of unbelief, try again and again to reinterpret that record to preserve some sense of safety from an interfering God. Men, therefore,

have divided themselves over Jesus Christ. They have been forced to expose their hearts' innermost views of God. In the words of John the Apostle, they have judged themselves (John 3:18-21). Figure Three pictures the process.



**Figure 3.** *The fact of the King's historic appearance is interpreted in accordance with one's worldview of revelation.*

Because biblical revelation immediately renders the recipient accountable to the God Who has revealed himself, it is the sinner's desperate desire to somehow deny that it has taken place. All the gimmicks—from some of the ancient Jewish religious traditions to modern intellectual paganism—have the aim to safeguard the self-proclaimed “innocence” of fallen man.

### **DOCTRINAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE KING'S APPEARANCE: KENOSIS, IMPECCABILITY, AND INFALLIBILITY**

Lesson 122

Even as the virgin birth pictures the doctrine of the hypostatic union, the life of the King pictures additional doctrinal truths. While the overall motif is the issue of revelation, when that revelation comes through a human being the issue of sanctification comes to the fore. Jesus Christ was involved in sanctification because of his true humanity. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews put it this way: “It was fitting for [the Father]. . .in bringing many sons to glory to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings” (Heb. 2:10). When we discuss the doctrine of sanctification in connection with the God-man, we do so under the doctrinal titles “kenosis” and “impeccability.” After studying these truths we will move on to the end result of Jesus' sanctification, His revelational infallibility.

## THE DOCTRINE OF KENOSIS

In Parts III and IV of this series we defined the goal of the believer's life as the development of loyalty to God; that is the aim of sanctification. We also made the point that sanctification is not primarily directed against sin; it is the training of the soul in obedience to God's will in every area. It follows, therefore, *that even a sinless human (like Christ) would have to experience sanctification to accomplish His mission as a man.* Since He is the King of the Kingdom of God, Jesus Christ must be perfectly sanctified to carry out this leadership role. In undergoing sanctification Christ fulfills the ideal pointed out by OT King David who was the first type of the Messiah.

David's experiences provide some analogy with Christ's human experiences. In particular, the long struggle of David to accede to his throne (I Samuel 16 to II Samuel 4) is analogous to Christ's struggle to win His kingdom during His earthly life. Just as David's prophetic anointing by the prophet Samuel was not enough to effect throne succession in Israel, so Jesus' anointing by the prophet John was not enough to place Him immediately as reigning king. David had to endure the acid tests of experience before the nation would recognize his throne claim. So, too, Jesus had to endure trials before His kingly character would be revealed. Finally, just as David had to endure the attacks of incumbent king Saul in spite of the fact that he, David, was the rightful heir, so Christ had to endure the attacks of the god of this world (Satan) even though He was the Messiah Who is to reign upon earth.

Jesus' manner of meeting these trials and attacks during His life is held up by the Apostle Paul as a model for every believer today in Philippians 2:5-11. Obviously, if Christ was true man as well as God and if His sanctification was perfect, *He is the example for believers.* In explaining how Christ is the perfect example Paul developed the doctrine of kenosis. This doctrine can best be understood by first looking at the NT data, then studying a statement of the doctrine, and finally examining applications of the doctrine.

Lesson 123

Biblical Data on Kenosis. The word kenosis comes from the Greek verb "to empty" used in Philippians 2:7. How did Christ empty Himself? This question is difficult to answer because Christ is God, and God is immutable. The Bible, however, insists that Christ did give up something related to His divine nature while He lived on earth under the conditions of trial and pressure.

One part of the biblical data concerns Christ's divine attribute of omniscience. Passages such as Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32 proclaim that Christ did not have access to, nor did not exercise, omniscience on at least some occasions. Other texts (e.g., Mark 5:9; 6:38; 9:21; John 6:6) indicate Jesus genuinely asked for information from people without searching their hearts with His omniscience. In fact, a prophetic passage about the Messiah found in Isaiah 50:4-11, speaks of Christ learning from God the Father: "He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as they that are taught" (50:4b). Hengstenberg, the great student of OT Christology, commented on this text that "the figure is taken from a teacher, who, in the morning, before he commences his instruction, summons his pupils to him"[7]. If Jesus was God, critics ask, why was His omniscience so "hidden"? The early Arian heretics wrongly concluded that Jesus could not have been full deity. Obviously on other occasions in the NT Jesus clearly manifested His omniscience (John 1:48; 2:24-25; 16:30; 21:17). Something was emptied here, yet without changing Jesus' divine nature.

Another part of the biblical data concerns Christ's omnipotence. In Matthew 4:1-4 Christ refused to show His omnipotence to answer Satan's challenge to make stones into bread. Matthew 12:28 says Christ cast demons out, not by His omnipotence, but by God's Spirit dwelling in His as a man. Luke 4:14,18 likewise proclaims that Christ did His wonderful works by the indwelling Spirit rather than by His own omnipotence. Nevertheless, other passages equally proclaim that Christ occasionally used His omnipotence (Matt. 8:26-27; John 2:7-11). Again, something appears to be emptied; yet Jesus' divine nature still seems to have existed.

The biblical data, then, present an ambiguous picture. Sometimes Christ shows His divine nature, but on most occasions He does not. Paul in Philippians 2:5-11 explains this situation as some sort of "emptying" or kenosis. Jesus Himself refers to the problem as being without His eternal glory (John 17:5).

The Doctrine of Kenosis Stated. Theologians have been concerned in stating the doctrine of kenosis not to dilute the divine nature of Christ on one hand, yet to give due weight to the restricted use of this divine nature during Christ's trials on the other hand. If His divine nature is diluted, then the hypostatic union is denied. If His divine nature is not restricted, then Christ cannot be a model for believers in sanctification since His would have an advantage not shared by any other man. The question is how to describe what was going on in the incarnation that avoids these two errors. Some have defined kenosis as the giving up of some or all of the divine attributes. Others, particularly Reformed Conservatives ones, have defined kenosis as the non-use of the divine attributes. The best definition, however, is that kenosis refers to the

giving up of the independent use of the divine attributes. This definition fits best with the principle found in Acts 1:7 which was used by Jesus to justify the withholding of information from the disciples. The principle is that the Father's decree controls all things, even the flow of revelation. Christ's kenosis, therefore, is a result of His subjection to the Father's will. He subordinated Himself to the Father by giving up the independent use of His divine nature.

The Roman Catholic Christologist Karl Adam tries to visualize kenosis in the area of Jesus' use of His omniscience:

*“Because Jesus’ human soul belonged to the self of the Logos, all knowledge is objectively and in principle available to it. His possession of it was potential. Every time his messianic mission made it necessary, he could draw with the cup of his human intellect from the infinite spring of divine wisdom. . . Usually, it remained potential knowledge, not actual knowledge. It remained in his unconscious, hidden beneath the threshold of his daylight consciousness. Only when his hour was come, could he and might he by way of contemplation realize this potential knowledge.”[8]*

The subordination that we saw in the doctrine of the hypostatic union is thus clarified with the doctrine of kenosis. As the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son has some sort of inherent, eternal subordination to the First Person insofar as His role and relationship to the Father is concerned, though not insofar as His essence is concerned. During the period of His life on earth, He acquired a created nature (His true humanity) which gave additional cause for subordination. *The kenotic state, then, can be viewed as a special, extreme case of the general intra-Trinity subordination.*

Lesson 124

Implications of Kenosis. Of what practical use is the doctrine of kenosis in the Christian life? Paul, at least, thought it must have had some application as he revealed it in Philippians 2. Three major implications can be seen beginning with Paul's discussion.

In Philippians 2 Paul is concerned with the heart of sanctification: the goal of loyalty toward God regardless of what He asks. Such loyalty comes from a primary virtue: humility of the creature before the Creator. The foundational virtue in the biblical worldview is not courage or self-righteousness as in certain pagan worldviews; *the basic virtue underlying all other virtues is humility before God.* Christ, in His kenosis, models what this humility ought to look like for mankind. Christ submitted wholly to the Father's plan even when that plan required “devaluation” or “emptying” of the independent use of His own divine attributes. He faced at this point the biggest temptation to pride ever faced in human history: would He humble Himself to endure the abuse of rebellious creatures and the wages of their sin when He could have remained in the tranquility and

purity of heaven? Note the frequent NT references to Christ's humiliation before His exaltation:

*“Now that ‘He ascended’, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? (Eph. 4:9)*

*“For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” (Heb. 4:10)*

*“Who. . .endured the cross, despising the shame. . .that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself. . .”(Heb. 12:3)*

*“Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example. . . who did no sin. . . Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.” (1 Pet. 2:21-23)*

Christ modeled for us the cardinal virtue of humility before God in all situations. *Humility before God is the basis of faith.* When Christ was demeaned by evil men, Peter says “he committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.” Now Christ assumed this humble mental attitude while at the same time being God. We may sometimes think we are gods, but He WAS and IS God. The implication is clear: if Christ had to stoop that low to obey God, there is nothing that God can ask us to do that is too low or too humble. Thus, says Paul, “Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5).

The great Puritan pastor, Richard Baxter (1615-91), made a skillful use of the application of the doctrine of kenosis while exhorting fellow pastors to do their job. Watch his powerful use of the truth of kenosis in a very practical setting:

*“O, then, let us hear those arguments of Christ whenever we feel ourselves growing dull and lifeless. Can you hear him saying, ‘Did I die for those people, and will you then refuse to look after them? Were they worthy of my blood, and are they not worth your labor? Did I come down from Heaven to seek and to save that which was lost, and will you refuse to go next door, or to the next street or village to seek them? How small is your labor or condescension compared to mine! I debased myself to do this, but it is your honor to be so employed. Have I done and suffered so much for their salvation, and will you refuse that little that lies upon your hands?’[9]*

A second implication of kenosis concerns subordination in human relationships. Much of modern rebellion against authority in the home and in society, though triggered perhaps by poor leadership situations, comes from a misperception of subordination. The popular myth views subordination as one individual's being constitutionally inferior to

another. This myth flies in the face of the Trinity and kenosis. Even in the extreme case of subordination in kenosis, the Son was not constitutionally inferior to the Father. The subordination, obviously, remained one of role only. The kenotic state of Christ did not involve His giving up His attributes so that He had to resume them after ascending into heaven! Kenosis involved giving up independent (unsubmissive) use of the attributes for the sake of a role under the Father.

One example of the misunderstanding of subordination is the view of it within the Women's Liberation movement. This movement assumes that woman's subordination in marriage to the husband is one of constitution, not of role. Christian feminist writers like Scanzoni and Hardesty try hard to defend their notion that all subordination is repulsive so they seek to refashion the subordination of the Trinity and kenosis:

***“Is Christ subordinate to the Father? . . . Christ as God and man both rules and submits. He voluntarily, out of love, set aside the privileges of the Godhead to assume the work of redemption as a man, but he has now ascended into heaven to resume all his divine attributes. He is no longer subordinate to the Father as he was on earth, but coequal, as the creed says, “very God of very God” (see Heb. 1:3; I Cor. 15:27-28).”***[10][*Emphasis supplied.*]

Their theology is heretical. Christ did not ascend into heaven “to resume all his divine attributes” because he had them always while on earth as John's gospel particularly shows. As the second Person of the Trinity in heaven now the Son has an ordered relationship with the Father that can be understood only in terms of subordination of earthly sons to earthly fathers. The words “son” and “father” have been chosen by the Holy Spirit as the author of Scripture, not by “patriarchal”, biased male authors of the text. Scanzoni and Hardesty so confuse constitutional subordination with role subordination that they cannot comprehend orthodox Christianity! Their very citation of I Corinthians 15:27-28 refutes their point: the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father, not just when He was under kenosis.

The doctrine of kenosis, therefore, offers clear evidence of what subordination in social structures is and is not. No legitimate subordination—whether in marriage, in family, in business, in the military, or in the local church—ought to imply constitutional inferiority. A struggle with pride may be involved, but to destroy such false pride is to imitate “the mind of Christ.”

A third implication of the kenosis doctrine has to do with the problem of the difference between the Creator's knowledge (omniscience) and the creature's knowledge (finite). NT writers cite the sympathy and understanding of Christ as the great High Priest (Heb.

4:14-15). Had the Son not come down to earth to live as a man under kenosis, He would not have this special “sympathy” and “understanding.” When He became man, while still God, Christ encountered finite creature knowledge as a creature. While living on earth, He learned as a man (Heb. 2:10; 5:7-8). He was on the “receiving end” of revelation (Isa. 50:4). Consequently, He can see things from the creature’s perspective of experienced, learned truth. Behaviorally, then, kenosis ought to encourage us to come to the Father through the Son as our spokesman in prayer, knowing that besides being God He is one in nature and understanding with us.

Some would argue that because God is omniscient, He must know how creatures know, and therefore the kenosis experience of Christ does not really add new knowledge to the Second Person. This argument, of course, is but a specific example of the general position that regards history as insignificant. This position borders on Docetism which we studied under the hypostatic union debate earlier. There, you remember, we noted that history brought about a lasting actual change in the Second Person. He became God and man in one person, and carries the scars of crucifixion on His eternal resurrected body. This denial of historical significance is sometimes found in extreme Calvinist circles. By way of contrast, the Bible insists that while God can know what the creature knows, He thus knows from the infinite standpoint of omniscience, not from the finite standpoint of the creature. God’s omniscience cannot be identified with creature knowledge. To do that would be to surrender to Pantheism, a variant of paganism. Kenosis, therefore, fills in more details of just what is meant when “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Kenosis adds to the hypostatic union doctrine more implications of Christ’s humanity.

Because Christ knows what it is like to be a creature who must walk by faith, the Father has made Him to be our judge (John 5:22). We are to be tried at the bar of judgment by our Peer, One whose judgments we cannot refute as “unsympathetic” and “unknowing”. Unlike adherents of post-biblical Judaism or Islam with their sole monotheistic gods, we have the God Who walked on this planet, experienced fatigue, faced evil, and successfully fulfilled the mission of His human life without “cheating” by using His attributes where we have nothing. He lived as a creature in every detail, constantly walking by the same humble faith we are directed to use.

To sum up implications of the doctrine of kenosis: Christ is the perfect model of sanctification. He modeled the cardinal virtue of humility toward God. He showed us what true submission to authority is.

And because He had to utilize the filling of the Holy Spirit in His faith walk, He has become an emphatic Intercessor for us with His Father. Like a test pilot puts a new airplane through its paces, beyond the envelop of normal everyday flight, *Jesus Christ demonstrated the Christian life perfectly in every area beyond levels we are likely to experience.*

Lesson 125

## THE DOCTRINE OF IMPECCABILITY

If Christ's hypostatic union means He had true humanity, and if His kenosis means that this true humanity met every trial without reliance upon His divine nature, then what was the situation whenever Christ was tempted? Was He always successful? If so, how? Like the doctrine of kenosis the doctrine of impeccability will be viewed below under three headings: biblical data, doctrinal statement, and applications.

Biblical Data on Impeccability. That Christ was morally perfect is central to the Christian faith and one repeatedly mentioned in the NT. The following verses are just a few that confirm the point: Luke 1:35; John 8:46; Romans 8:3; II Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:14; 7:26; I Peter 1:19; and I John 3:5. Nevertheless, many other verses seem to show Christ behaving in a fashion considered today as rude, impolite, and even eccentric. The gospel of Matthew particularly notes this behavior. Jesus call His opponents "snakes," "hypocrites," "adulterers," "children of hell," and "whitewashed gravestones" (Matt. 12:34; 15:7; 16:4; 23:15, 27). In spite of His own teaching not to call people fools in Matthew 5:22, Jesus calls His enemies fools in Matthew 23:17.19.[11] In Mark 11:13-14 Jesus curses a defenseless fig tree. In Matthew 15:26. He calls a seeking Gentile woman "a dog." At least twice He appears abrupt with His own mother (Matt. 12:48; John 2:4). In Matthew 8:21 Jesus is harsh toward traditional Jewish family loyalties, and in John 2:15 He assaults businessmen, damages their wares, and blocks public access.

Before someone naively talks about being "Christlike," he ought to explain this apparent discrepancy between Jesus' claimed sinlessness and His reported behavior. Modern observers, so heavily conditioned by present-day psychological models of "ideal" personality, are upset by this discrepancy. Psychologist Paul Vitz is right when he notes "Certainly Jesus Christ neither lived nor advocated a life that would qualify by today's standards as 'self-actualized.'"[12] The problem, however, doesn't lie with Jesus; it lies with present-day personality theories. Vitz notes in his book the anti-biblical assumptions behind these modern (and mostly existentialist) theories. Describing Jesus' sinless but disturbing personality, Karl Adam writes:

*“From a purely psychological point of view, this humanity is characterized by an enormously powerful will. Jesus knew what he wanted. He knew it as no one else did. In this entire public ministry. . .we cannot point to a single moment when he pauses to consider, or where he reflects, or where he takes back any word or deed. From the beginning he appears as a finished, mature man.[13]*

Jesus’ personality is disturbing because it is perfectly holy and in active contact with the sinful, unholy world. Being “Christlike” is not necessarily, therefore, being conformed to what modern psychological theory regards as the ideal or healthiest personality. For this reason Christian psychologists ought to develop new standards for the model personality, based not upon man’s speculations or statistical distributions, but upon the objective revelation of Christ. Would Christ, for example, be hired by a modern corporation which filtered job applicants on the basis of what modern theories consider mentally healthy personality?

Biblical data supply not only a clear picture of Jesus’ holy and sinless personality, but they provide other clear light on His human nature. Matthew 4:1-11 related how Jesus explicitly refused the use of His divine nature to meet temptation. Matthew 26:36-46 tells how Jesus struggled in Gethsemane without using His divine nature to meet the temptation to avoid the Cross. On the other hand, in the same situation John 8:5-6 notes that Jesus ever so briefly flashed forth His deity with the utterance of the divine name I AM (cf. Exod. 3:14). James 1:13 makes it plain that Jesus, to be tempted by these trials at all, had to have been tempted through His human nature exclusively, never through His divine nature. Finally, Hebrews 4:15 insists that Jesus was tempted in every part of His true humanity—His spirit, His body, and His soul.

The Doctrine of Impeccability Stated. To state the doctrine of impeccability, one has to examine these two expressions: (1) “not able to sin” (non posse peccare); and (2) “able not to sin” (posse non peccare). The first statement means that one is not able to sin at all, while the second statement means that one is able to avoid sin although he is able to sin as well. The second statement clearly applies to Adam before the fall. The major question in discussing Christ’s impeccability is to determine which statement applies to Christ.

Good Reformed theologians have taken both sides of this question. Charles Hodge, for example, thought that statement (2) must apply to Christ because he held that it must be possible for one to fall or sin in order to insure that any temptation would be real. William Shedd, however, held that statement (1) applies to Christ because he observed it was impossible for Christ as God-man to sin without fracturing the hypostatic union and the sovereign plan of God.

Hodge was obviously trying to protect human responsibility. Shedd focused upon divine sovereignty. The problem of resolving these two truths arises again and again in biblical thought. (In the next chapter we encounter the dilemma in connection with the death of Christ—for whom did Christ die?) To clarify matters we must dig a little deeper into the language and logic being used to discuss the question, using our knowledge of the Creator-creature distinction and the Trinity (see Appendix A). (Remember what we learned in Part II of this series? . . . Always check on how a question is stated before you try to answer.)

The biblical question doesn't involve abstract categories such as "free will" and "determinism". To phrase the question as though free will and determinism are locked in mortal combat, implies that both categories are universal and apply to all existence, including the Creator and the creature, in the same way. Saying that, however, puts the speaker solidly in the pagan camp believing in the Continuity of Being. The question rather is: how do the analogous qualities of the Creator's choice and the creature's choice coexist? One expresses the incomprehensible nature of God; the other describes human design.

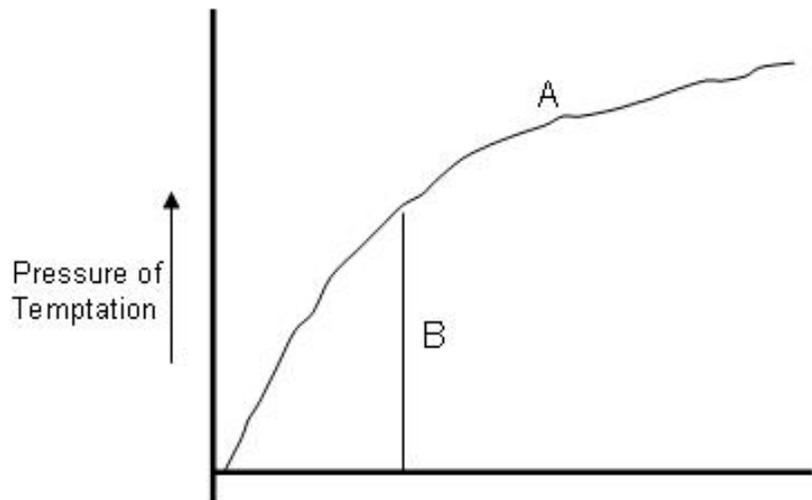
To avoid drifting into the logical contradiction of free will versus determinism, it is better to use the terms "divine sovereignty" and "human responsibility." The adjectives "divine" and "human" remind us of the fundamental Creator-creature distinction that underlies all our experience. As undiminished deity, Jesus possessed divine sovereignty; as true humanity He possessed human responsibility. In the first statement above "not able to sin" refers to the uncreated divine nature. The verb "able" here takes on meaning from divine sovereignty. The second statement "able not to sin" refers to created human nature. In this statement the verb "able" takes on meaning from human experience. Because of the hypostatic union, both must apply to Jesus Christ. *The verb "able", therefore, has different meanings in the two statements. No logical contradiction exists.* Other Scripture supports this truth that Jesus was constrained (John 5:19) and free (John 8:35-36) at the same time.

Genuine temptation, therefore, does not require the possibility of failure if by "possibility of failure" we mean that history is indeterminate, that its final outcome is *ultimately* the result of creature choices, atomic motions, and a plethora of other "causes." If instead we mean by "possibility of failure" *an unknown piece of the overall plan of the Creator*, then temptation is adequately pictured.

In the case of Jesus Christ, however, we must further ask about whether temptation under the "not able to sin" condition (i.e., it wasn't in the plan of God for Him to sin) is somehow less of a problem than temptation is for fallen beings like ourselves. Did Jesus, in other words, not really enter in to the struggles we face? B. F. Westcott, who lived in

the nineteenth century along with Hodge and Shedd, gives us insight into what it means for a sinless being to be tempted. His classic commentary on the epistle to the Hebrews puts the matter well: “Sympathy with the sinner in this trial does not depend on the experience of sin but on the experience of the strength of the temptation to sin which only the sinless can know in its full intensity.”[14]

Following Westcott, one can imagine a “temptation pressure”, pictured in Figure Four, which rises with resistance to the temptation. The pressure is relieved when one gives in and sins (line “B”). A sinless creature such as Jesus never gives in and, under the sovereign plan of God, might continue to experience the temptation and experience an intensity never encountered by a creature who sins (line “A”).



**Figure 4. Temptation pressure of a sinless creature (A) and a sinful creature (B) who succumbs and sins.**

The doctrine of impeccability, therefore, states that Jesus Christ, though genuinely tempted beyond anything any other creature ever experienced, could not sin. As the One having true humanity and undiminished deity coexisting in one Person forever, Christ would always be victorious, even though kenotic during His life on earth.

Implications of Impeccability. Like the Christological doctrines we have already discussed (hypostatic union and kenosis), impeccability has deep implications that turn out to have very practical, everyday consequences for us. First, it reveals something about evil and human responsibility. Often well-intentioned Christians try to answer the evil

problem by claiming that it was a necessary corollary to having genuine human choice in history. In Jesus' case, however, there was genuine human choice without evil. Was Jesus supposed to sin in order to prove He had genuine choice? Certainly not. To err is not a necessary quality of being human; or, to put it another way, probation does not require the possibility of sin. Whatever the ultimate cause of evil (see Part II of this series for the foundational discussion of the problem of evil), it is not to "prove" genuine responsibility exists.

A second very practical implication of impeccability follows from the first. If created humanity does not require evil, and if Jesus was the "test case" that proves this in history, then what happens when we share His nature? After Christ arose, ascended, and sent the Holy Spirit to start the Church Age, His nature through regeneration was given to every believer. His nature was proven out historically to be impeccable so in us it remains impeccable. *Jesus Christ was ordained in the plan of God to live the perfectly righteous life, being victorious in his sanctification at every point and the model of what man should be.* Later, in Part VI to this series, we will apply this truth to difficult NT passages like I John 3:5-6,9 which seem to teach "perfectionism."

A third implication of impeccability is that it demonstrates that the hypostatic union successfully combined the "troublesome" pair of qualities: divine sovereignty (the (Q)uality of God's choice) and human responsibility (the quality of creature choice) in one person. *If this pair is supposedly a set of "irreconcilable opposites", how is it that they worked together historically in the person of the God-Man?* Jesus Christ showed during his life on earth freedom of choice (Matt. 26:39, 53; John 8:35-36) while simultaneously "constrained" by God's sovereignty (Matt. 26:54; John 5:19).

## THE DOCTRINE OF INFALLIBILITY

Lesson 126

Kenosis and impeccability are truths about the King's sanctification. The NT amply testifies that the King lived a perfectly righteously life utilizing the spiritual assets of a creature without "cheating" and drawing upon His divine attributes to get out of trials and temptations. As the righteous role model for humans, Jesus Christ's life also demonstrated a crucial truth about revelation: inerrancy or infallibility.

In Part III of this series we studied the doctrine of revelation in connection with the event of Mt. Sinai. We noted that biblical revelation is verbal, personal, historical, comprehensive, and prophetic. Now we add another characteristic: biblical revelation is always considered to be inerrant or infallible. The Word of God as the OT and NT scripture is the

final authority and standard for truth in Christian thought over against experience and reason. Unfortunately, during the last few decades among some evangelicals, there has arisen an attack upon the authority of revelation. Repeating the same basic error of modernism that came about in the nineteenth century, these evangelical critics insist that revelation may contain historical and scientific errors. To engage this controversy, we'll now look at the God-Man as ultimate revelation. What does His life demonstrate about historical and scientific validity?

Jesus' Historical and Scientific Claims. Since revelation is necessarily comprehensive, it should be no surprise that Jesus spoke about many things open to historical and scientific investigation. Did He err in doing so? Was He right in affirming that Genesis 1 and 2 both form a coherent account of creation (Matt. 19:4-6)? Was He right in believing in a literal Abel, the son of a literal Adam (Matt. 23:35)? Did Jesus speak the truth about a literal flood with a literal Noah (Matt. 24:37-39)? Did He correctly insist on the Mosaic authorship of the Law (Luke 27:24). Modern criticism certainly thinks that Jesus was wrong on these matters.

Several decades ago, G. C. Berkouwer, the famous Reformed theologian in Holland, has argued that one must distinguish genuine sin which involves willful turning from the truth, from technical error which involves ignorance and misinformation. Jesus might have been impeccable and the perfectly righteous One, according to this view, but He was not necessarily free in His humanity from ignorance and misinformation. Jesus' belief in a literal Adam, Berkouwer thinks, is an instance of a technical error. The purpose of the Bible and Jesus, Berkouwer writes, "is not at all to provide a scientific gnosis in order to convey and increase human knowledge and wisdom, but to witness of the salvation of God unto faith." [15] Occurrence of technical errors, he supposes, does not hinder the purpose of revelation.

According to such critics, Jesus' righteousness coexists with ignorance that causes technical errors. Can this be true? It certainly is true of ourselves. The limitations of human knowledge jeopardize every thought and statement we make. Is it true, however, of Jesus? If Jesus functions as a prophet of revelation, as one who carries out God's prosecution against those breaking His covenants, can technical errors be tolerated? In Berkouwer's language, is it possible "to witness of the salvation of God unto faith" while erroneously reporting God's actions in history? How many errors are permitted in the testimony of a courtroom witness before his testimony becomes worthless, especially when the testimony lies in the area of the witness' self-proclaimed competence? In John 3:11-12 Jesus proclaims that He is testifying to God's work. His life's ministry is spent citing historic acts and words of God to convict Israel of its sin. If Jesus' testimony, therefore, is full of technical errors in

those areas which can be checked by men (“earthly things”—3:12), what credibility is left in those areas which are not verifiable by men (“heavenly things”). In legal testimony, technical errors cannot be tolerated.

A critic might reply at this point that I’ve falsely constructed the purpose of Jesus’ teachings. He did not intend at all, the critic says, to function in the legal sense of testifying. The critic ignores the biblical context of revelation. He isolates a piece of the Bible and reinterprets it inside his unbelieving frame of reference (ref. Fig. 3). One must recognize that Jesus’ testimony and the Bible itself are not casually touching historical data. Revelation “to witness of the salvation of God” must consist of a legal record. The very titles, “Old Testament” and “New Testament,” show the Bible’s legal character and thus the legal character of Jesus’ testimony. The format found in Deuteronomy 32 and in many of the prophets makes the legal nature of the record clear. Recall our discussions in Parts III and IV of this series. That record is to be used in the ultimate trial: God’s faithfulness versus man’s unfaithfulness. *The historical details form precisely the core of the evidence!* It is not a peripheral matter whether God saved Jonah miraculously or how long a certain king reigned. Technical errors in the midst of the very evidence needed in a legal record destroy the usefulness of that record. Jesus’ use of the OT record in His day to convict Israel demands that the whole revelation be inerrant—free of technical errors.

Moreover, it is very dubious that any line can be drawn between harmful sin and supposedly harmless technical error in Jesus’ case. Jesus not only functioned like an OT prophet, but He set Himself up as the self-authenticating authority as we studied earlier in this chapter. He used no references or sources for His claims outside of Himself other than OT references interpreted around His Messianic concept. If *on this basis* He made His case that God performed a certain act historically in the OT, when God in fact did no such thing, He committed the sin of bearing false witness (cf. Exod. 20:16). He then sinned and no longer should be considered the perfectly righteous role model. Impeccability dissolves and the hypostatic union turns into a fiction.

Why would a technical error in testimony about God be considered a sin in Jesus case? Jesus claimed to be higher than the OT prophets (Matt. 11:25-27). Even in their case false testimony about the works of God was punishable by death (Deut. 18:20-22). In the NT Paul the Apostle submitted to the same legal ethic. Paul admitted that if he were technically wrong in reporting the physical resurrection Christ, he and the rest of the apostles would be “found false witnesses of God”(I Cor. 15:15). *In the special context of Jesus, therefore, lack of technical error in reporting the works of God (inerrancy) is absolutely required by His moral perfection and impeccability.*

The Unavoidable Nature of Infallibility. Either Jesus and the Bible are infallible, or man becomes the one considered infallible. *For there to be genuine knowledge of anything, infallibility must be located somewhere.* Even critics of infallibility admit this point when they say, like Beegle, that God's Word “in all essential matters of faith and practice” is “authentic, accurate, and trustworthy.”[16] Such a statement momentarily seems to solve the problem until someone asks, “who then determines the “essential matters of faith and practice”?” Some evangelical proponents of errancy say that the rules of women’s behavior in churches given in such passages as I Corinthians 11 are wrong. Since at least 50% of most Christian congregations are female, is this matter not “essential for faith and practice”?” Professor Paul Jewett, for one, thinks not so that it can be considered as a technical error.[17] Jewett has thus placed himself above the Scripture as an infallible critic. Infallibility has not disappeared; *it has only been transferred from Jesus and the Bible to man.*

This phenomenon of a moveable location of infallibility led Rushdoony to call infallibility “an inescapable concept.”[18] Noting how infallibility has been ascribed by unbelieving writers to the cosmic evolutionary process (de Chardin), to the general will of society (Rousseau), and to the ruling political party (Communism), he says, “The word infallibility is not normally used in these transfers; the concept is disguised and veiled, but, in a variety of ways, infallibility is ascribed to concepts, things, men, and institutions.”[19] One observes this movement of infallibility away from Jesus and the Bible to man in the conflict between Genesis and historical science. Modern schemes of earth history are basically considered infallible in that no amount of data will radically alter them toward the view of early Genesis. Another instance is the view that apparent discrepancies between the historical data of the Bible and the records of secular history will never be resolved by future data in favor of the Bible. In these cases Bible critics presume an inherent infallibility in modern world views. Infallibility has thus not been eliminated at all; it has simply been absorbed by unbelieving thought and transferred to man so as to confirm his autonomy.

The Only Basis of Infallibility. Although unbelieving thought unwittingly relocates infallibility in man, it has no basis to support infallibility. Infallibility presumes either omniscience or submission to omniscience. Paganism, however, has no Creator and hence no omniscience. Thus in the final analysis unbelieving paganism cuts itself off from the only basis of infallibility and is left with its “castle” floating in midair.

Biblical thought on the other hand solidly grounds infallibility in the Creator Who speaks and reveals truths (review Fig. 3). As Paul insisted in Colossians 2:8, we must formulate our basic categories from the hypostatic union of Jesus Christ rather than from alleged “universals” projected out of the finite and sinful human mind. When we do this, human knowledge fits neatly within divine omniscience as seen in Jesus’ historic incarnation. Thoughts pass from omniscience to human consciousness as seen in Jesus. Language is no barrier to thought because human language derives from God’s language. Moreover, not only do thoughts pass from God to man, but in Jesus there was spiritual perfection, impeccability, uninterrupted communion, total infallibility. Compared to Jesus the prophetic authors of the Bible through whom the Holy Spirit created infallible Scripture were lesser examples. The prophets were infallible only in the very limited areas of oracles and writings. As the Christian philosopher Gordon Clark observed:

“A sinless Christ is an example of such concurrence [of God and man] more stupendous than the errorless writings of an apostle. . . . If the Second Person can become man without sin, the lesser miracle of Paul’s inerrancy is all the more possible.”[20]

The doctrine of infallibility or inerrancy of revelation, then, assumes a rightful place alongside the kenosis and impeccability doctrines. Together these doctrines represent Christological expansions of the OT doctrines of revelation and sanctification. They are the results of studying carefully the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. While walking about on earth, the King of Kings provided mankind with a picture of infallible authority and perfect sanctification. As Figure Two illustrates, the NT Christ was historically real and therefore secured the foundation for revelation and sanctification.

## SUMMARY

The NT portrait of the King of God’s Kingdom carries far reaching implications. The gospel narratives, when viewed from a biblical worldview, reveal the Word of God as never before witnessed in history. What will be your response? Will you align yourself with the unbelieving critics who reject the entire principle of revelation and who, therefore, try to rework Christ’s life into something less threatening for them? Or do you instead accept fully the NT picture of Christ? Without reservation can you call Jesus Christ Lord of all, the infallible authority over every area of life? Are you yet convinced that if you have seen Christ, you have seen the Father (John 14:9)?

**END NOTES FOR CHAPTER 3**

66. See documentation of extreme animosity of ancient Judaism to this practise in Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1971), p. 274 n 68.
- 67.
68. R. T. France, Jesus and the Old Testament (London: The Tyndale Press, 1971), p. 79f.
- 69.
70. Ibid., pp. 223-4.
- 71.
72. Dr. Stroll's full address appears in John Warwick Montgomery, Where Is History Going? (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969). Exerpts cited are from pages 210, 213, 216, 218, 219, 221.
- 73.
74. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, I, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 125.
- 75.
76. See the presentation by Lit-Sen Chang in his work Zen Existentialism (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1969), p32f.
- 77.
78. E. L. Hengstenberg, Christology of the Old Testament (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1970 [1847]), p. 227.
- 79.
80. Karl Adam, The Christ of Faith (New York: Mentor Omega Books, 1962 [1957]), p. 312.
- 81.
82. Richard Baxter, The Reformed Pastor (Marshallton, Delaware: Jay Green Publisher, n.d.), p.55.
- 83.
84. Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, All We're Meant To Be (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1974), p. 22.
- 85.
86. This apparent conflict in the NT between the Sermon on the Mount and behavior of Jesus and his apostles merely shows that the teaching technique of the Sermon on the Mount involved calculated exaggeration (e.g., 5:29-30), a fact which ought to be kept in remembrance in reading passages like 5:39.
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88. Paul C. Vitz, Psychology As Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977), p. 91.
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90. Adam, p. 282.
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92. B. F. Wescott, The Epistle to the Hebrews (2d ed. repr. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub Co., 1965 [1892]), p. 59.
- 93.
94. G. C. Berkouwer, Holy Scripture, trans. Jack B. Rogers (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1975), p. 180.
- 95.

96. Dewey Beegle, Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1973), p. 308.
- 97.
98. Paul Jewett, Man As Male and Female (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1975)
- 99.
100. Rousas J. Rushdoony, Infallibility: An Inescapable Concept (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1978)
- 101.
102. Ibid., p. 2.
- 103.
104. Gordon H. Clark, "Beegle on the Bible," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, XX, 3 (Sept., 1977), p. 276.

## CHAPTER 4: THE DEATH OF THE KING

Lesson 130

So far, we have covered the birth and life of the King, developed several key doctrines, and showed the unbelieving responses. All of these insights will help in understanding and appreciating the climatic death of the King. More than His birth, His life, or even His resurrection, the death of Christ permeates the NT. In his classic study of the cross, a study referred to frequently in this chapter, Leon Morris writes:

*“The cross dominates the New Testament. Notice how naturally it is referred to as summing up the content of Christianity. “We preach Christ crucified” (I Cor. 1:23); “I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified” (I Cor. 2:2); “I delivered unto you first of all. . . how that Christ died for our sin” (I Cor 15:3); “far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14). The Gospel is “the word of the cross” (I Cor. 1:18). The enemies of Christianity are “the enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phil. 3:18). Baptism is baptism into Christ’s death (Rom. 6:3), and it is not without interest that, while Christ did not enjoin His followers to commemorate His birth, or any even in His life, He did call on them to remember His death.”[1]*

We now move into study of His death using the same approach we have used in the previous chapters. We first cover the event, the unbelieving responses to it, and finally the doctrinal truths revealed in the event. The great truth revealed through the death of the King is the substitutionary blood atonement and what that atonement accomplishes. (Read here Matthew 26-27; Mark 14-15; Luke 22-23; John 18-19.)

### THE EVENT OF CHRIST’S DEATH

Why did the Messiah die? Did He have to, or was it a tragic accident? Or, does the death show that Jesus really wasn’t the Messiah after all? Was His death meant to be merely inspirational, or did it actually accomplish something before God concerning our salvation? These are questions the NT authors go to great lengths to answer. Their writings explain the event of Christ’s death as the fulfillment of OT revelation concerning God’s holiness and man’s sin. They presuppose a view of justice that originates in the holiness of God, *a view of justice that today has almost totally disappeared from human consciousness*. Let’s first look at the OT view of divine justice, and then move on to the NT writers’ reports and explanations of the cross.

## OT JUSTICE

Lesson 131

The first revelation of God's justice occurred in Eden after man sinned. In Genesis 3:21, God takes the first life away when He kills an animal with which to clothe the fallen man and woman with a leather tunic. Just to emphasize the problem here, let's consider that the animal had to be skinned. Blood had to be spilled. What had the animal to do with the couple's sin? Their sin immediately resulted in the slaughter of an innocent animal--the first physical death in the universe and one directly caused by the animal's Creator! What is this cruelty all about? We need to know two things about this cruel, bloody sacrificial motif: it reveals what real justice looks like and it is linked to the Coming Messiah.

Justice by Blood Atonement. Animal sacrifice for human sin continued after Eden and was central to worship not only in Israel but in other cultures. The second generation of mankind, Cain and Abel, learned very quickly about the centrality of animal sacrifice (Gen. 4:2-5). All religious worship that attempts to by-pass bloody atonement for sin is categorically rejected by the God of the Bible. Such apostasy is derisively referred to as "the way of Cain" (Jude 1:11). At the founding of present civilization, the forefathers of every people group on earth knew that bloody animal sacrifice was central to worship of the one True God (Gen. 8:20).

It was continued over the centuries, through Abraham's time, into the period of the law where animal sacrifice is set into a larger context. The law, as we learned in Part III of this series, defined "right" and "wrong" in terms of whether it pleased Yahweh or not. No legislative body existed in Israel to define "justice"; it was defined solely with reference to God's revealed codex to the nation. We noted in Part III that the law of Israel differed radically from the laws of the pagan nations in that it mixed the normal "casuistic" format ("if one does this. . . then the punishment is this") with a format of personal address. Law was actually a contract with the Personal Creator. It was not a mere set of social rules or values. Yahweh was righteous and just among other things. To get along with Him, creatures must meet His righteous and just standard. *Yahweh's character defines justice, not man's ethical, subjective, and varying opinions.*

It is clear from the law of Israel that injustice was ultimately against Yahweh, not a neighbor (e.g., Num. 5:5-10; Lev. 5:14-6:7; Ps. 51:4). The neighbor can't define justice anymore than any other person. The neighbor, apart from his creation in the image of God, has no intrinsic value. On the other hand, God is the One Who made the universe and all creatures therein. Offense against any of them is an offense against Him (note the logic in Matt. 18 and Jas. 3:9). Modern court proceedings still reflect this truth that the lawmaker, not the immediate victim, is the real

target of the crime. Thus criminal court cases are presented today as “John Q. versus the State of \_\_\_\_\_” to indicate that the crime is really against the particular state as the law-making authority. The Leviticus and Numbers passages indicate that crime in Israel was against Yahweh as Lawgiver.

Lesson 132

The response toward injustice is expressed in the OT as a demand for restitution. *Restitution is the paradigm of all justice in God’s plan.* The well-known passages calling for “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” present the heart of restitutionary justice (Exod. 21:24; Lev. 24:20). That this passage expressed a principle rather than a directive for bodily mutilation is clear from the absence of such mutilation in OT passages. Restitution says that after evil has occurred, the original godly order must be restored. To restore godly order, someone must recompense the damage to the victim of the crime. Examples of the all-permeating nature of restitution in biblical justice are easy to find. In Exodus 22:1-15 numerous restitutionary cases are given, primarily cases involving theft. One can observe in this passage that the victims are restored from their losses by the criminals.

In the prototype crime of the fall in the Garden of Eden, man destroyed the life that God had given him turning it from an obedient one into a rebellious one. The pre-announced result was death—the termination of such a ruined life (Gen. 2:17). That was the damage, and the “victim” in this case was God. Man had ruined his life. Restitutionary justice, therefore, demanded that this ruined life be replaced as compensation to God. The question now arose, “where can a replacement life come from?”

In Genesis 3:21 God establishes the first revelation of the answer to this question. *The life must come from a source other than fallen man.* Another life must be given—a blood atonement. As Adam and Eve watched the first slaying, the first spilled blood, they must have reacted the way any of us would have reacted to a cruel death of a pet. Whenever they wore the leather tunics God had made from the animal’s skin, they were reminded of the first blood-letting. That OT saints reacted precisely in this fashion to animal slaughter is clear from Nathan-the-prophet’s story to David (II Sam. 12:1-6). Animals raised for worship sacrifice could not be treated as pets to minimize the acute sense of pain and horror over their death.

Later in history, at the dawn of present civilization with the New World covenant of Noah, mankind was given permission to eat meat (Gen. 9:3). As we learned in Part II of this series, our present civilization is built upon a constant dying of animals that we may live. Thanks to modern technology most of us in the developed countries no longer slaughter animals directly for food. We buy it neatly packaged. We,

therefore, have become callous to the thousands of animals who have given their lives for our lives. From the beginning, God directed that we respect this life lost for us by carefully draining the blood from each carcass before eating it (Gen. 9:4). This “ceremony” was to draw us back to our sin and why such animal cruelty is necessary (note context in Gen. 8:21).

The detailed directions of blood sacrifices throughout Exodus and Leviticus clearly tie animal death to human sin. Through these sacrifices fallen men observed the horror and pain of lives taken because of the demands of restitutionary justice. Animal life is close enough to human life that it can serve this revelatory function. Life ruined by human sin had to be compensated to the Creator of life. Yet, this God-directed practice was only a revelation of a yet greater truth. The animal sacrifices pictured blood atonement for sin and accomplished ceremonial cleansing for the citizens of Israel, but they never could accomplish actual restitution before God for human sin (Heb. 9:9-14). What was the final solution?

Blood Atonement and the Messiah. The OT also linked the atonement to the progressively revealed portrait of the Messiah. First, in the so-called “protoevangelium” of Genesis 3:15, the woman’s seed, God prophesied, would be struck down. The seed of the woman was closely related to the Messiah in the minds of first century Jews.[2] Narration of the first atonement--recorded in Genesis 3:21--occurs in the immediate context of the protoevangelium.

Another OT feature exhibiting the close relationship between the coming Messiah and restitutionary atonement is the inaugural requirements of the biblical covenants. The Noahic, Abrahamic, and Sinaitic Covenants required a blood sacrifice before they went into legal effect (see, respectively, Gen. 8:20-22; Exod. 24:3-8; Heb. 9:16-18). Since in the “last days” of the Messianic period Yahweh was going to establish a new covenant with the nation Israel (Jer. 31:31-40), it follows that an appropriate blood sacrifice would have to be made prior to the legal inauguration of this new covenant. It ought to have come as no surprise, then, when on the eve of His death Christ identified the Passover sacrifice which pointed to Him (see next paragraph) with the inauguration of this new covenant (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; I Cor. 11:25). As the Messiah, Jesus’ work included making the founding sacrifice of the new covenant.

A third part of the OT evidence linking the Messiah to an atoning sacrifice was the very Passover celebration going on at the time Christ died. Israel’s birth as a national group with its own redeemed identity in Egypt was made possible only by a blood atonement (Exod. 12:1-13). The blood “satisfied” in some way God’s judgment so that the angel of

death passed over those homes with blood on their doors. Israel was commanded to keep alive the memory of this great event of judgment/salvation by the annual festival of Passover (Exod. 12:14-28). Since the Messiah's work was to free and redeem Israel again and permanently, there should have been no surprise that blood atonement once again became involved. Why should there have been surprise at the Messiah's personal involvement in such an atonement when Christ died on the very day of this annual celebration (see next section)?

Lesson 133

Finally, the fourth piece of the OT link between the Messiah and sacrifice occurs in Isaiah 53:

*“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all. . . by the knowledge of himself shall my righteous servant justify many; and he shall bear their iniquities. . . .”(Isa. 53:4-6,11)*

Evidence abounds that first century Jews interpreted this passage messianically.[3] Not until the Middle Ages did the rabbis shift to what is claimed today as “the” Jewish interpretation, *viz.*, that Isaiah 53 speaks of the nation Israel alone, not of an individual within the nation (see my discussion in Chapter One above).

Some Gentile Christian scholars, however, insist that first-century Jews did not recognize any vicarious suffering of the Messiah in this passage.[4] (By “vicarious” we mean suffering in place of others, another way of saying “substitutionary atonement”.) These scholars are opposed by most Hebrew Christian scholars, who claim the contrary. Dr. Fruchtenbaum, for example, notes that the Zohar, written about A.D.110, preserves an old first-century Jewish interpretation of Isaiah 53:4: “Where it not that [Messiah] had thus lighted [sickness, pain, chastisement] off Israel and taken them upon himself, there had been no man able to bear Israel's chastisement for transgression of the law.”[5] Surely, there is the element of vicarious or substitutionary Messianic suffering in this non-Christian, Jewish first-century tradition. Furthermore, Fruchtenbaum points out, this interpretative tradition of Isaiah 53 continued in Jewish circles well into the Christian era, occurring in remarkable places such as the Yom Kippur Musaf Prayer written around the seventh century, A.D.: “Messiah our Righteousness is departed from us. . . .He hath borne the yoke of our iniquities, and our transgression. . . .He beareth our sins. . . .that he may find pardon for our iniquities.”[6] The allusion to Isaiah 53 is unmistakable.

The OT, then, provided much information about God's justice, blood sacrifice, and the involvement of the Messiah. The underlying concept of justice as derived from God's attributes of holiness as well as the inherent demand for restitution is clear. It is also clear that to make restitution to God for the sin-caused destruction of life, some source of restitution outside the fallen human race is required. NT narratives of the crucifixion of Jesus built upon this OT background and *cannot be interpreted without it*. The NT reports, in fact, that some Jews, at least, had "put it all together" and knew that Messiah would have to die for the sin (John 1:29; I Pet. 1:11).

## NT CRUCIFIXION NARRATIVES

Of the many aspects to the death of the King in the NT, we will survey four of them.

The Executed King Cursed by God. First, through Paul (Gal. 3:13) we are made to understand that the cross, as a tool of public execution in Israel at the time, fell under the purview of the Mosaic Law (Deut. 21:22-23). Under the laws pertaining to public execution, the body of the criminal had to be on display long enough so the public would "get the message" but not so long that it would defile the land. It had to be buried before sunset on the day of the execution. The entire rationale for this procedure is that execution under the civil authority of Israel expressed the curse of God (note the clause in Deut. 21:23). The public display of the body was to remind everyone that God is just.

From this criminal justice procedure, Paul directly concludes that Christ became a curse at the Cross, that He actually became sin (Gal. 3:13). The Father, says Paul, made the Son "sin for us, who knew no sin" (II Cor. 5:21). The King's death is explained in the NT as somehow accomplishing a cursing for sin upon the sinless God-man.

The King Chooses to Die. A second aspect to the NT presentation of the King's death is its peculiar manner. "Peculiar manner" does not mean the nature of crucifixion nor even Jesus' remarkably early expiration on the cross.[7] The term refers instead to Jesus' unique control over the exact moment of His death. Whereas all mankind remains powerless to dismiss the spirit at will (Eccles. 8:8), the NT reports that Jesus by an act of His will chose to die: "I lay down by life. . . .No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again (John 10:17-18). "He bowed his head, and gave up his spirit" (John 19:30). "He offered up himself" (Heb. 7:27).

His death, therefore, was in a peculiar manner, unique in history. Jesus was not merely the lamb being offered (passive) but was at the same time the priest making the offering (active). He chose, on the cross, in a way no man had ever done before or would ever do again, the exact moment of His death. It is not surprising, then, that the experienced Roman army officer at the cross proclaimed his faith in Christ (Matt. 27:54).

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The Cross Affects the Universe. A third facet to the NT interpretation of the cross is its comprehensive efficacy. Too frequently, modern theological studies limit themselves to a few generalities about Christ's death redeeming believers from sin. However, the NT, in addition to revealing that the cross was a complete judging of human sin (John 1:29; Heb. 9:28; I Pet. 2:24), also insists that it had wide-ranging effects beyond this redemption affecting the whole created universe.

1. Changes Final Condemnation of Unbelievers. Unbelievers are affected whether they believe or not: their condemnation now includes the specific rejection of the gospel besides all their other sin. If they die in unbelief, their condemnation is not because God did not provide; they are condemned because they rejected what God did provide (John 3:36).

2. Dooms Fallen Angels. In some way the Cross dooms the fallen angels, particularly Satan. It carries out the promise of Genesis 3:15 and mortally wounds the "serpent's seed." It spoils the evil spirits that rule this world (Col. 2:15). It neutralizes the authority Satan gained at the fall over the creation (Heb. 2:14). Morris says:

*"[This triumph over evil powers] was prized in the early church, as we see from the exuberance with which it was used and the picturesque, even grotesque, imagery that was employed to express it. Thus Satan was pictured as caught in a fish-hook, and as snared in a mouse-trap. . . . For the first Christians the victory that Christ had won for them mattered intensely. They were mostly from the depressed classes with little to hope for in this world. And they pictured a host of demons as dominating life anyway. It came as a welcome relief to have assurance that the last word was not with their oppressors, human or supernatural. So the note of victory was sounded with joyous confidence. And we in our day need it no less than they."*[8]

There is a tradition of NT interpretation that Jesus visited the lower depths of Sheol between His death and resurrection, a place called Tartarus where certain fallen angels were confined after the flood, in order to announce His triumph at the Cross (I Pet. 3:19).

The King's Death Fulfills OT Passover. The NT seems to contradict itself in reporting the day of the crucifixion. The Apostle John, who had close ties with the Judean Temple establishment (John 18:15), notes that Jesus died in the afternoon preceding the eating of the Passover lambs (John 18:28; 19:14,26). Thus Christ died at the same time the Passover lambs were being sacrificed. To this timing the Babylonian Talmud agrees: "On the even of the Passover Yeshu was hanged." [9] Other NT passages, however, seem to imply that the slaying of the Passover lamb occurred in the previous day's afternoon and that the Last Supper was eaten as a Passover meal the night prior to Jesus' trials and death (Matt. 26:17; Mark 14:12; and Luke 22:7-8). As always with alleged "contradictions" in Scripture, the faithful believer will discover further revelation if he or she digs a little.

Dr. Harold Hoehner undertook a detailed study of this apparent contradiction in the date of the crucifixion relative to the Passover. He concluded his study by echoing previous proposals that in Jesus' day there were two systems of reckoning the day.

*"The Galileans used a different method of reckoning the Passover than the Judeans. The Galileans and Pharisees used the sunrise-to-sunrise reckoning whereas the Judeans and the Sadducees used the sunset-to-sunset reckoning. Thus, according to the Synoptics [the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called by scholars the "synoptic" gospels whose viewpoints do not center upon Jerusalem as does the gospel of John], the last supper was a Passover meal. Since the day was to be reckoned from sunrise, the Galileans, and with them Jesus and His disciples, had the Paschal lamb slaughtered in the late afternoon of Thursday, Nisan 14, and later than evening they ate the Passover with the unleavened bread. On the other hand, the Judean Jews who reckoned from sunset to sunset would slay the lamb on Friday afternoon which marked the end of Nisan 14 and would eat the Passover Lamb with the unleavened bread that night which became Nisan 15. Thus, Jesus had eaten the Passover meal [Galilean reckoning reported by the Synoptics] when His enemies, who had not as yet had the Passover, arrested him." [10]*

Thus the NT reports Jesus' death as the literal fulfillment of the OT passover imagery (see discussion of the prophetic significance of Israel's calendar in Appendix B of Part IV of this series). With the calendar discrepancy between Jerusalem and the northern areas of Galilee, Jesus could both invest the Passover meal ceremony with its fulfilled meaning and accomplish the work of the cross necessary to do the actual fulfillment. His work is explicitly called an "exodus" in Luke 9:13. All these features in the NT narratives tie the Messiah unmistakably to the final sacrifice for sin.

The Bible presents the death of the King in terms of revealed doctrinal truths surrounding the concept of God's justice and man's sin. God, not man, is the source of true justice. Man's ideas of justice reflect to varying degrees God's essence. Man's conscience witnesses to his imagehood, his theomorphic character. With a sense of his own sin man looks for reconciliation but finds no way to make restitution that is acceptable to God. God, however, initiates toward man from Eden onward pointing to blood atonement of another for man. The Messiah's career is prophesied to intertwine with sacrificial atonement for mankind in some way. With Jesus' death the Messiah's role is suddenly revealed: He is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!

Lesson 135

## UNBELIEVING RESPONSES TO THE KING'S DEATH

Few people deny the factualness of Christ's death. Even most proponents of the "historical Jesus / kerygmatic Christ" distinction hold that the historical Jesus was executed upon a cross, although they deny the NT interpretation that this death was the atonement for man's sins. As in previous chapters, I will present the ancient and modern unbelieving responses to Christ's death and then follow that with how such rejection is required by unbelief.

### ANCIENT AND MODERN PERVERSIONS OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST

Both ancient and modern unbelievers stumble over the cross for the same reason. At bottom both types of unbelievers suppress their knowledge of the holiness of God and, in doing so, try to remove the necessity for any such atoning death.

Ancient Jewish Responses. NT-era Jews who first heard the Christian explanation of the Messiah's death on a cross were repelled. Just as they rejected Jesus' virgin birth claim and the authority of His life, so also they rejected the entire idea that the Jewish Messiah would have to die such an ignominious death. Let's remember throughout this discussion, however, that 99% of the people who did accept Jesus in the NT gospels were Jews!

One reason for their negative response was their perception of the role of the Messiah. Many Jews looked forward to a Messiah who would restore the Davidic Kingdom and triumphantly save Israel (e.g., Luke 1:32-33, 46-55, 67-79). They balked at the idea that this Messiah was to suffer cruelly and would die, and particularly that it was for their sins that He would die! The NT text reports that many of Jesus' closest followers

could not accept this part of His mission when they first heard of it (Matt. 16:21-23; Luke 24:19-21; John 2:19-22; 14:1-5).

What was wrong? Was the OT foreview of the Messiah wrong, or was Jesus a false Messiah? The NT explains the surprise over this facet of the Messiah as due to Israel's "blindness." Whereas Israel correctly perceived the OT predictions about a gloriously triumphant Messiah, she failed to see also the predictions about this same Messiah's suffering and dying. Israel's blindness apparently began over seven hundred years prior to Christ's death in the days of Isaiah the prophet. Yahweh told Isaiah:

***"Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed. . . . Until cities waste without inhabitant, and houses with man, and the land become utterly waste." Isa. 6:10-11***

Isaiah, according to God, was to preach the Word to the nation Israel in such a way that her sinful predilection to listen selectively to prophecy would progressively blind her (cf. Isa. 30:9-11). Thus Isaiah preached about the glorious side of the coming Messiah on many occasions (e.g., Isa. 4:2-6; 9:6-7; 11:1-16; 32:1-5; 33:17-24; 66:1-11). Israel rejoiced in these optimistic pictures of her Messiah, building up a distorted view of Him while neglecting the pessimistic suffering pictures which Isaiah also preached (e.g., Isa. 52:13-53:12).

The problem, then, in Israel's response to Jesus' death did not lie in the nature of OT prophecy. Both the glorious and suffering aspects of the Messiah's role were featured (cf. I Pet. 1:10-11). Moreover, the problem did not lie with Jesus or the apostles. The problem lay with Israel's own sinful selective perception of the OT prophecies. According to the NT writers, this blindness to a suffering Messiah was a leading factor in the rejection of Christ both in Palestine before His death and in the Diaspora after His death (Matt. 13:10-17; Mark 4:11-12; Luke 8:10; John 12:37-41; Acts 28:24-28; I Cor. 1:23). Paul said it would continue among the Jewish nation until a time just prior to Christ's second advent (Rom. 11:8, 25).

Another reason for the largely negative response in Israel toward a dying Messiah was the awful nature of the way He died. According to OT criminal law, display of the body of a criminal who had suffered capital punishment was to show that he had been cursed by Yahweh (Deut. 21:22-23). How could the Messiah, they reasoned, be actually cursed by God so that He suffered capital punishment by one of the most cruel and public means of execution? Traces of this revulsion over the means of Christ's death appear in Philippians 2:8: "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross." (Emphasis supplied. See also Galatians 3:13.)

Clearly, then, the ancient rejection of the dying Messiah was grounded on a perceived contradiction between the predicted Messianic glory and His actual death by public criminal execution. Below, however, it will be seen that the underlying cause of this apparent contradiction was a prior rejection of the biblical doctrine of judgment and salvation.

Modern Unbelieving Responses. In recent centuries the unbelieving response to Christ's death has involved a perversion very much related to the ancient rejection. Just as the atoning work of the Messiah's death was overlooked in ancient times by Jewish critics, so in modern times Gentile critics also have denied this atoning function. The only major difference between the two groups of critics is that whereas the Jews claimed an atoning death was incompatible with a glorious, reigning Messiah, Gentiles have claimed that an atoning death is incompatible with the love of God. God, being a God of love, these liberals reason, does not require a bloody atonement before He forgives. Forgiveness, they insist, can be granted merely on the basis of repentance without any atonement. Thus the liberal theologian Hasting Rashdall, for example, writes: "That sin ought to be forgiven when there is [only] sincere repentance is a truth which, like all ultimate ethical truths, must be accepted simply because it is self-evident." [11]

Once it is granted that atonement is no longer required for forgiveness, *the death of Christ becomes less than necessary*. In fact, the only accomplishment of the death of Christ is its exemplary force to man. The cross exerts "moral influence" upon man in some way, recent liberals believe. It testifies to Christ's love for man in pursuing His mission all the way to the grave. Jesus, according to this liberal model, demonstrates sincerity in dying for His convictions. Rashdall illustrates this belief in his paraphrase of Acts 4:12: "There is none other ideal given among men by which we may be saved except the moral ideal which Christ. . .illustrated by His. . .death of love. . . ." [12]

## **UNBELIEF'S NEED TO REJECT THE RATIONALE FOR THE DEATH OF CHRIST**

Both ancient and modern unbelieving responses to the death of Christ are ultimately based upon a perverted understanding of the justice of God. As I showed above, the Cross of Christ was given with the understanding that it would be interpreted in light of the OT revelation of God's justice and its link to the Messiah. To so interpret the Cross, however, forces one to confront God's wrath against our sin—something our fleshly mind would like to suppress (cf. Rom. 1:32).

Failure to accept this biblical view of justice leads to failure to understand God's judgment / salvation. *When God saves, He saves within the bounds of His own justice.* The sinner is given salvation, but the salvation consists of a graciously-provided restitution, not an avoidance of restitution. For restitution to occur, however, another life must be substituted which means it must be judged according to the model shown in Genesis 3. The death-sentence against the sinner's life passes to the substitute life, and the life of obedience in the substitute replaces the sinner's disobedient life. The original judgment and God's justice behind it are never nullified; they are satisfied in a totally surprising way that man could never have anticipated. Thus salvation and judgment go together. Earlier historical revelation of this "paired concept" occurs in both the flood in Noah's era and the Exodus. *The fleshly mind, however, always wants salvation without the necessarily accompanying judgment.*

No wonder the cross of Christ is misinterpreted by ancient and modern critics alike! Being blinded to the restitutionary nature of justice, these critics balk at acknowledging any atoning effects of Christ's death. The cross of Christ, according to them, must be "reinterpreted" for their own time in a manner that is acceptable to the autonomous principle. Even the conservative Baptist theologian Fisher Humphries, for example, tries to abandon the substitutionary atonement model of Christ's death:

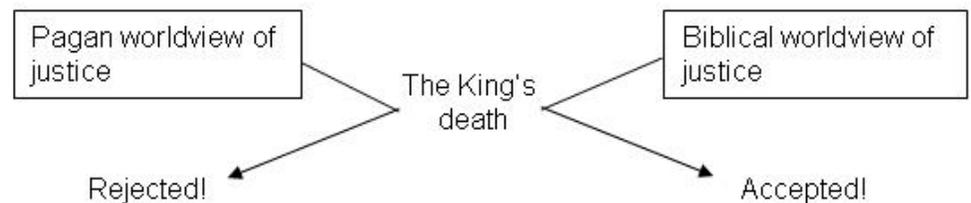
***"The idea of reparation [restitution] has become questionable today since it seems associated with irrational vengeance. It is true that people today still have a largely unconscious desire to see certain kinds of criminals pay for their crimes. . . .But few people will consciously acknowledge that they believe in a general principle of making reparation."*[13]**

Clearly, Humphries recognizes that the background idea of justice has shifted in our time so his "solution" is to go along with the general abandonment of biblical justice rather than correct the basic perversion. Once taken, this path leads unavoidably to a radical reinterpretation of the death of the King. Figure Five shows the situation.

Interestingly, once the biblical idea of justice is lost, not only is man cut off from reconciliation with God, *but he is also left with no effective way to deal with ordinary social crime.* At one extreme, society can try to exact cruel retribution against the criminal ranging from physical to psychological torture in the hopes that it will deter further crime. Such an approach, however, feeds on fear, hatred, and other character vices. It denigrates the nature of man who is made in God's image. Eventually it either breeds a spirit of rebellion, or it eradicates social compassion and hope of personal repentance and change.

At the other extreme, society can redefine crime as an “illness” to be dealt with using various “therapies.” The long-term success record of proposed therapies, however, is sadly lacking. Penal institutions, while called “correctional facilities”, have not corrected their inmates as the recidivism statistics show. Out of frustration at their failure, many such facilities are reverting to the retributive approach. The “illness” approach, like its opposite extreme, also demeans the nature of man made in God’s image by denying personal responsibility. The criminal is treated as though he or she is a passive victim of the environment or of their genes.

The Bible deals with societal crime in several ways, all of which heavily acknowledge personal responsibility before God as ultimate Lawgiver. As we saw above, crimes of theft were always handled with literal, economic restitution. The criminal not only compensated the victim, but he or she had their previously weak work ethic reinforced through having to labor in the process (note Paul’s use of this idea in his counseling in Eph. 4:28). Violent crimes were punishable by execution since under the restitution principle there was no other way to compensate for the crime done. Even here, the execution was to be done in a way that honored God and man as Joshua demonstrated with Achan (Josh. 7:16-26).



**Figure 5.** *The fact of the King’s death is interpreted in accordance with one’s worldview of justice.*

## THE DOCTRINAL CONSEQUENCE OF THE KING’S DEATH: SUBSTITUTIONARY BLOOD ATONEMENT

Lesson 136

To aid in the organizing the NT doctrine associated with the King’s death, the subsequent discussion will have two parts: First, there I will discuss the basic nature of the death, tying together the OT data on judgment/salvation with the NT event of Christ’s death. Secondly, there is another discussion concerning an often emotionally-charged topic, the

extent of the atonement. This latter issue deals largely with the question of how the atonement relates to the fallen creation—both that part that is redeemed and that part that is not.

## THE BASIC NATURE OF THE ATONEMENT

Lesson 137

For many centuries Christian thinkers have sought to interpret the character of Christ's death in light of the overall message of the Bible, i.e., in terms of basic biblical doctrine. Since the death contains a rich variety of themes, more often than not discussions on the subject have been weakened due to reductionism. (A reductionist error is made whenever attention is devoted only to one aspect of a matter while all other aspects are downplayed or ignored.) In the matter of the cross Bible students have tended to isolate one or two aspects of Christ's death and then go on to deny all others. The present discussion seeks to avoid the reductionist error by determining only which characteristic of the cross is most basic while allowing all the others to exist. This discussion is arranged in two parts: first, I present the three major classes of theories about Christ's death held by the Church; then, using the OT pictures of judgment/salvation, I determine the basic—but not exclusive---characteristic of that death.

The Three Kinds of Theories. One may look at Christ's death from various standpoints: its objective effect upon God's relationship with man; its subjective effect upon man in an individual sense, or its subjective effect upon man in a corporate sense. Theories which look at Christ's death from the standpoint of its objective effect upon God's relationship with man fall into the category of the Satisfaction Theories. Satisfaction theories of varying sophistication can be found throughout Church history. The Apologist fathers of the early second century held to them. Origen (ca. A.D. 185-254) believed in a primitive Satisfaction theory [14]. It took Anselm (A.D. 1033-1109), however, in his classical work Cur Deus Homo? [Why the God-Man?] to present the first systematic interpretation of Christ's death, and it was a Satisfaction viewpoint. Anselm's position is paraphrased by Seeburg:

*“Since the most trifling sin, as an improper glance, weighs more than the whole world, a satisfaction must be rendered to God which is more than all things outside of God. . . .As, on the one hand, man is absolutely incapable of rendering it, for whatever good he may do he is already under obligation to render to God, and it cannot be therefore taken into consideration as satisfactio. Satisfaction of the character demanded only God can render. But a man must render it, one who is of the same race, in kindredship with humanity. . . .It is necessary that the God-man render it.”[15]*

Anselm's Satisfaction viewpoint had several shortcomings which were later remedied by the Reformers who stressed that the necessary requirement for satisfaction was an actual payment of penal judgment or restitution because of outraged divine justice. Luther (1483-1546) wrote:

*“But if the wrath of God is to be taken from me and I am to obtain grace and forgiveness, then it must be merited from him by someone; for God cannot be favorable nor gracious toward sins, nor removed penalty and wrath, unless payment be made and satisfaction rendered for them.”[16]*

Calvin (1509-1564) taught:

*“[Christ] procures for us the grace of God by making atonement for us through his sacrifice and appeasing the wrath of the Father. He poured out his sacred blood as the price of redemption, by which was extinguished the wrath of God burning against us, and our iniquities also were purged.”[17]*

Thus the satisfaction kind of theories interpret Christ's death from the standpoint of its primary effect upon God and express that God rather than man must be satisfied. This kind of theory carries in the background the idea of restitutionary justice.

Three sub-doctrines describe this kind of theory—the doctrines of redemption, propitiation, and reconciliation. Each of these was discussed in Part III of this series when we studied the Exodus. Redemption, it will be remembered, speaks in economic terms about indebted slaves being freed due to payment of their debt. By analogy it speaks of our indebtedness to God and the payment of Christ's death for our debt to Him. Propitiation speaks in personal terms about rejection and acceptance due to an effort to measure up to standards of acceptance. By analogy it speaks of our rejection by God's holiness and the effect of Christ's death in satisfying God's holy standards. Reconciliation speaks in social terms of hostile relationships being transformed into peaceful ones. By analogy it speaks of our treasonous war against God's authority and Christ's death as a “peace initiative” to end the conflict.

In contrast to the Satisfaction theories there arose the Human Influence theories. These theories stress the subjective effect of Christ's death as somehow influencing men, rather than satisfying God. The first of these theories appeared just after, and in reaction to, Anselm's Satisfaction theory through the efforts of Peter Abelard (1079-1142). Walvoord comments:

*“This point of view, which has much support in modern liberal theology, was introduced first by Abelard in opposition to the . . . theory of Anselm. It proceeds on the premise that God does not necessarily require the death of Christ as an expiation for sin, but rather*

*has chosen this means to manifest His love and to show His fellowship with them in their sufferings. The death of Christ therefore demonstrates the love of God in such a way as to win sinners to Himself. . . . Liberal and neo-orthodox theologians today adopt in one form or another the moral influence theory of Abelard. . . .”[18]*

Later examples of this kind of theory include that of Rashdall, cited earlier: “There is none other ideal given among men by which we may be saved except the moral ideal which Christ. . .illustrated by His. . .death of love. . . .”[19] The Human Influence theories, therefore, stress the subjective revelatory effect upon man as the primary good of Christ’s death rather than the objective effect upon God’s relationship with man as in the Satisfaction theories.

The third kind of theory about the significance of Christ’s death is the Government kind of theory. This kind is an intermediate one between the Satisfaction and the Human Influence kinds. Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), a Dutch jurist, tried to redesign the Satisfaction theories of Anselm and the Reformers so that criticism against their “dogmatic” legal concepts of justice would be blunted. Grotius argued that God’s nature in itself did not demand Christ’s death for sinners. What did demand that death was God’s commitment to the moral government of the universe. If God were going to insist that evil be punished, Grotius reasoned, God had to offer some recognition of this principle when He exercised grace toward sinners. In Grotius’ view God’s just nature does not require restitution. The death of Christ, therefore, was not a substitutionary penal judgment for sins; it was a demonstration that God’s grace toward sinner had not annihilated His moral government.

Lewis S. Chafer summarizes the position:

*“The Rectoral or Governmental theory contends that in His death Christ provided a vicarious suffering, but that it was in no way a bearing of punishment. The advocates of this theory object to the doctrine of imputation in all its forms, especially that human sin was ever imputed to Christ or that the righteousness of God is ever imputed to those who believe. They declare that a true substitution must be absolute and thus, of necessity, it must automatically remit the penalty of these for whom Christ died. Therefore, it is asserted that, since Christ died for all men and yet not all men are saved, the Satisfaction theory fails.”[20]*

The Governmental theory historically influenced Arminian theology, and it made temporary inroads into Scottish and New England Calvinist thought. This theory separates God’s personal nature from His governmental processes and views Christ’s death from the standpoint of its subjective effect upon man corporately, *i.e.*, it preserves a just picture of God to all men, influencing some to repentance.

Theories of the nature of Christ's death, then, divide into three major classes: Satisfaction, Human Influence, and Government. The next problem is the matter of how to choose the kind of theory closest to Scripture.

The Correct Theory and the Basic Characteristic. All three kinds of theories point to true characteristics of Christ's death. Each kind of theory is not totally wrong. Regarding the Satisfaction theories, the NT clearly records Christ's statement that he came "to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45 where the Greek preposition *anti* is used). The previous discussion has shown that the NT response to Christ's death is saturated with this restitutionary character of God's justice. The Satisfaction theories properly recognize this trait. Regarding the Human Influence theories, the NT also says that the cross does impress men as a revelation of God (John 12:32), and it stands as a model of love forever (1 John 4:9). The Human Influence theories rightly preserve this aspect of God's work. Regarding the Government Theory, Paul notes that God set forth Christ "to show his righteousness. . .that he might himself be just and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). NT data do agree that vindication of God's moral government is demanded. The Government Theory cannot be faulted for pointing out this truth.

What is wrong about some of these theories is their reductionist tendency to deny validity to every other characteristic except the one emphasized in that particular theory. To the extent that a theory denies all the other characteristics given in the biblical text, to that extent it errs. The question of the correct theory, then, becomes the question of the basic characteristic. In other words, given a characteristic of Christ's death, can it support the other characteristics? Can the work of restitutionary satisfaction, for example, support the human influence and governmental aspects? Or can the governmental aspect support restitutionary atonement and the human influence?

To control the reasoning process, two ready biblical events are at hand. Both OT major examples of judgment/salvation—the flood in Noah's day and the Exodus—provide good controlling pictures (see Parts II and III of this series for discussion of these events). In the Noahic flood there was real judgment from which the Ark saved its eight passengers. The destruction of the earth during the flood was not only to preserve God's moral government or to impress mankind; it was to destroy indeed the real evil world of that time. Again, in the Exodus event the sacrificial lamb's blood saved Israel's first born sons from real lethal judgment. The Exodus was not revelatory only. If there had not

been an actual judgment in each of these incidents, there would have been nothing to bear witness of! The influence on man is dependent upon the real salvation from judgment that occurred. Furthermore, these events bear testimony to God's moral government only insofar as they actually accomplish their purpose. Thus, the most basic characteristic of the OT saving vehicles—whether Ark or lamb's blood—was protection from God's wrathful judgment. Their influence on men and their revelation of God's moral judgment follow from this protection.

Which kind of atonement theory, then, is most basic? The OT pictures differ in some respect from Christ's atonement. Whereas the OT counterparts acted only in a partial manner, Christ's death acts in the perfectly complete manner. Whereas the OT vehicles of the Ark and lamb's blood saved men from temporal judgment, Christ's atonement saves men from eternal judgment. Nevertheless, Christ's atonement and its OT counterparts are alike in that their saving effect dominates all other characteristics. In the doctrine of judgment/salvation, it has been previously learned (Part III of this series and discussion above), there is only one way of salvation; and that way is by a substitutionary blood sacrifice. Substitutionary blood atonement reflects the basic quality of God's just nature: the demand for restitution. The conclusion, therefore, is that the correct kind of theory of Christ's death is the Satisfaction kind.

The Satisfaction theories allow for other effects—human influence and witness to God's moral judgment. The Human Influence and Governmental theories, however, while pointing to partial truths, err in excluding restitutionary justice from the picture. These latter theories are structured on false perceptions of what justice is. They fail because of their reductionism. All modern attempts to “reinterpret” the death of Christ in a way “understandable to present [paganized] society” must be stoutly resisted. His death must be repeatedly explained until men understand, but it must be explained within the biblical framework. It must be seen as a voluntary death by the God-man acting simultaneously as priest and sacrifice in the context of God's justice.

Substitutionary Atonement as Resolution of a Theological “Contradiction.” In our earlier studies we mentioned the problem of apparent contradictions that appear in biblical revelation, particularly the so-called “problem of evil” (Part II of this series). There we noted that as Creator God has the (Q)ualities of omniscience and holiness (righteousness and justice) whereas man as creature has the (q)ualities of human knowledge and conscience. The human intellect and moral sense are similar to God's omniscience and holiness so that we yearn for a reason and for a justification of the present evil world. There must be

one. The Bible doesn't present us with an irrational, existential absurdity (in spite of some modern theologians' claims).

Nonetheless, the human intellect and moral sense are not identical to omniscience and holiness so that "the" reason and justification, though existing in the mind of the Triune Creator, may never fully be grasped by and exist in the mind of the creature. There are, after all, two levels of reality in the biblical worldview. As creatures, therefore, we finally have to trust in the revealed rationality and holiness of God as Job was finally forced to do once he met God face-to-face yet still did not get a specific reason for his suffering. Unlike, Job, however, you and I live on this side of the greatest revelation God has so far done in history: the Incarnation and the Cross of His Son. The substitutionary atonement of Christ is the first part of solving the so-called "evil problem."

The Cross, rightly interpreted, resolves the apparent conflict in the OT between the holiness of God and His forgiveness of evil. Frame puts the matter this way:

***"Justice, as defined by the prophets, cannot be merciful, or so it seems. But God does solve the problem, in a way that none of us would likely have expected, in a way that amazes us and provokes from us shouts of praise. . . . Here is the lesson for us: If God could vindicate his justice and mercy in a situation where such vindication seemed impossible, if he could vindicate them in a way that went far beyond our expectations and understanding, can we not trust him to vindicate himself again?"[21]***

Notice I said the Cross *rightly interpreted*. The Satisfaction theory of substitution alone resolves the logical tension between justice and grace. The other kinds of theories begin from a compromised view of justice and therefore leave justice and grace still in tension. The Human Influence theories deal only with human subjective responses to grace without dealing with the resolution of divine justice. The question of how forgiveness can be given is left unanswered. How, then, can we be sure we really are forgiven by Him? The Governmental theories correctly note that there is some sort of logical resolution at the Cross, but it is resolution between "God's moral reign" and grace rather than between God's just nature and grace. The Cross, rightly interpreted as satisfactory substitution, reveals a logic of omniscience that defies human comprehension and predictability.

The Cross thus becomes a powerful assurance that the "evil problem" would not be a contradiction at all if we could see it from inside God's mind. Our logical thought processes are only finite replicas of His

omniscient “hyperlogic.” With that in mind, let’s turn to the next topic, the extent of the atonement.

## THE EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT

Closely related to the nature of the atonement is its extent. By extent is meant the application and result of the Cross throughout the creation toward both the non-elect men who remain unredeemed at the end of history and the elect who have been redeemed by the end of history. (To review the doctrine of election, see Part III of this series where we studied the call of Abraham.) When we discussed the Governmental theory, we noted that its proponents often try to discredit the Satisfaction theory by positing the following dilemma: if Christ died for all men and all men are not saved, then his atonement cannot be a satisfactory and substitutionary one. Either we must accept an unlimited atonement (applying to all men) and non-satisfactory one or, such critics reason, if we insist upon a substitutionary atonement, we must accept its limited extent (applying to only the elect). The extent of the atonement is thus related to the nature of the atonement.

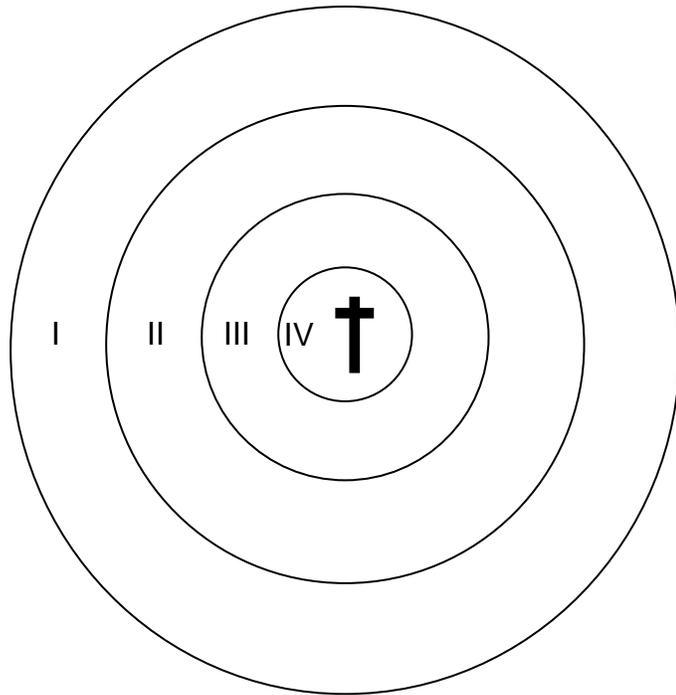
NT texts seem to affirm both the limited extent and the unlimited extent. Many verses reveal that Christ came to save “his people”, the elect, and not the whole world (Matt. 1:21; Rom. 5:6ff; Eph. 2:15-17; 5:25; Tit. 2:14). Other verses insist that He died for all men (II Cor. 5:15; I Tim. 2:6; 4:10; Tit. 2:11; I John 2:2). The Church, especially after the Reformation, has vigorously debated the issue of the extent of the atonement. Appendix C surveys that debate and provides a logical analysis of the issue. In the following paragraphs, therefore, I will simply present four theses or claims that address the extent of the atonement. These four claims, together with the previous claim above concerning the restitutionary nature of the atonement, constitute an outline of the doctrine of the substitutionary blood atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Atonement is the Sole Legal Basis of All Grace. All mankind this side of the fall receives some grace from God. In certain cases this grace restrains much of the result of the fall cursing; in other cases this grace restrains very little. Grace does not always save, but it always blesses fallen man to some degree. Major Bible passages which speak of the non-salvation aspects of grace (often called “common grace”) are Psalm 145:9; Matthew 5:44-48; John 1:9; and Acts 14:16-17. The last passage in Acts 14 occurs in the context of missionary evangelization where Paul uses such common grace as a point of contact with the unsaved. Elsewhere in the NT this grace is shown in a universal call of the gospel to all men everywhere (Matt. 28:19-20; John 16:8-11; and Acts 17:30).

How can God be gracious to sinful man? We have already pointed out that He is Holy and Just and Immutable. Thus His just standards can never be changed, modified, or lessened. Paganism, Christian cults, and modern liberal theology all fail at this basic starting point. All of them deny the just nature of God when they whine about the “unfairness” of the Cross as being the only way to God. Whichever way God is gracious toward the fallen world, it must be in such a manner that His holy and just character is never compromised. He has absolute integrity.

The answer to this crucial question lies in the death of the King. The very first biblical covenant, the New World Covenant in Noah’s day, clearly showed the atonement basis of God’s grace to all men, saved and unsaved alike. In Genesis 8:20 the sacrifice occurs before the blessings of physical preservation come into force. All the later biblical covenants except possibly the Davidic were installed with founding sacrifices (see Parts II-IV of this series). Each of these covenants revealed that an atonement of some sort was at the root of God’s grace just as the sacrificed animal in Eden was at the root of God’s grace to Adam and Eve. Always the biblical emphasis is upon the integrity of divine justice. In the NT, Hebrews 10:29 speaks of certain physical blessings short of salvation which accrue to man because of Christ’s atonement (they were “sanctified” in some sense by the blood of the New Covenant). The Protestant Reformation strongly stressed this truth, as Nicole notes: “The Reformers as well as others admit, yea are eager to acknowledge, that there are certain blessings short of salvation, which are the fruits of the work of Christ, which may terminate upon. . .all men.”[22]

Figure Six illustrates how the atonement is the sole legal basis for all grace poured out to mankind, whether saving or non-saving. The series of nested spheres show the increasing “extent” of grace made possible by the Cross. Area I is the greatest in extent of this grace, consisting of God’s providential preservation of the fallen world as revealed in the New World Covenant of Genesis 8-9 and the apostolic preaching of Acts 14 and Romans 1. Area II depicts the extent of gospel penetration into the world since Pentecost where God is warning men that without Christ’s Cross they face judgment (cf. John 16, Acts 17). Area III is the area of salvation and sanctification of the elect as shown in Romans 4-8. Finally, Area IV is the greatest display of grace in advanced sanctification such as that revealed in John 17. The Cross stands between God’s unchangeable justice and fallen creatures in need of His grace.



*Figure 6. A series of nested spheres that depict the varying extent of God's grace that flows from the death of the King. See discussion in the text.*

God Calls Mankind to Repentance with an Atonement Sufficient for All. Not only is the atonement the basis of all grace, but it is sufficient to save every man in the entire human race. As even the strongly Calvinistic Canons of Dort (1619) state: “The death of the Son of God. . .is. . .abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the world.”[23] The universal call of the gospel is backed up by an atonement sufficient to save completely all men if they were to believe.

For this reason the Bible reveals the “optimistic” attitude of God toward mankind again and again, whereby He longs that all men be saved. The sphere of redemption (Areas III and IV in Fig. 6) is not revealed immediately as being significantly less than the one which encompasses all to whom God speaks at particular historical moments. In the Garden of Eden God offered both Adam and Eve eternal life. After the flood, God established His New World Covenant with all of the human race. In Abraham's time, God spoke of those whom He would bless in the plural, whereas He spoke of those whom He would curse in the singular (Gen. 12:3). At Mt. Sinai God described Himself to Moses as the One showing love to thousands of generations but showing judgment to only four generations (Exod. 20:5-6).

Throughout Israel's history God repeatedly gave optimistic exhortation to Israel to ready herself for His Kingdom in the immediate, not far-off, future. Israel's entrance into Canaan, for example, was originally to have been immediate and by the direct route from the south, but it was postponed nearly forty years for an indirect route from the east (Num. 13-14). Israel's political structure was unheard of in the ancient world in its wonderful freedom from centralized civil government. Only reluctantly in response to men's sin was the centralized monarchy installed (Deut. 17:14-20; cf. I Sam 8). The exile originally was to have been only seventy years and to be followed by total restoration into the climatic Kingdom of God, yet it was extended to 490 years (Deut. 30:1-10; Jer. 25:11; cf. Dan. 9:24-27).

In NT history God offered the Kingdom to Israel through John and Jesus as an immediately available thing which was postponed only after Israel rejected her Messiah (Matt. 3:1-12; 4:17; 11:7-19; John 3:16; 12:47). In fact, Jesus pointed out that had Israel accepted him and received his Kingdom, John would have been the Kingdom precursor, Elijah, as prophesied in Malachi 4:5. Clearly, then, God foresees "hypothetical" optimistic options to history in which the extent of His grace is wide and unrestricted. He truly desires that all men be saved (Matt. 28:19-20; John 16:8-11; Acts 17:30). The reduced sphere of grace observed in the minority of humankind that eventually are saved comes only after there has been a wider offer.

This optimistic attitude of God can also be observed in the Bible when the end conditions of the blessed elect and cursed non-elect come into view. For example, Matthew 25 states that the blessed state of the elect has been at the heart of God's attention from eternity past (v. 34b), while the cursed state of the non-elect is said to have been prepared not for them but for the demonic powers (v. 41). Romans 9 says that the elect have been prepared directly by God in eternity past (v. 23), whereas the non-elect are said merely to be prepared or to prepare themselves (v. 22). Although these kinds of passages do not deny that God is sovereign over all, good and evil alike (Isa. 45:7; Prov. 16:4; Rom. 9:21), they do reveal something significant about God's character.

At this point someone will try to argue, that this optimistic attitude can't be taken seriously. If God has this optimistic attitude and these options don't come to pass, then doesn't this failure undercut God's sovereignty and power? Or if He is truly sovereign and omnipotent, this optimism must be an illusion, a deception to hide His wrath from us.

As I point out in Appendix C, we must be careful here to remember the Creator-creature distinction between His sovereignty and our human choice. *Whereas human choice is a finite replica of divine sovereignty, it is not identical to it.* We cannot reason as the pagans do, following Aristotle, assuming that there exists some sort of abstract category of “free will” that applies to the Creator in the same manner as it applies to the creature. God’s sovereignty is mysterious and incomprehensible. Remembering that we are not gods will prevent us from falsely thinking of his sovereignty as exactly identical to our attribute of choice.

We are back, once again, to the same ground we covered in Part II of this series when we studied the problem of evil (how can a God Who is omnipotent be loving when evil exists?). It is the same ground we looked at in the last chapter when we studied the impeccability of Christ (is the God man not able to sin or merely able not to sin?). So it is here: how can God call all men to trust in an atonement sufficient for all when, in the end, it is not efficient for all? I comment on this topic in more detail in Appendix C.

The Saving Benefits of the Atonement are Received Through Faith. While all agree that the saving benefits of the atonement are received through faith, there is disagreement about this faith “condition.” Two opposite errors are possible here. On the one hand, extreme Calvinism sometimes erases the historical significance of faith. American Puritanism suffered, for example, from this problem because children were not clearly evangelized; and the Christian culture was, therefore, weakened in the second and third generations. The elect, some of the Puritans thought, would somehow automatically be saved without there being an emphasis on the need for the individual to believe. Faith, in this extreme Calvinism, is sometimes considered as differing in no way from the other aspects of the fruit of the Spirit. Yet the Bible does treat faith as unique in some respect. Nowhere do the Scriptures tell man to “love and be saved” or to “hope and be saved”; they tell man to “believe and be saved.” Faith holds a unique place because it is the initial condition in the individual of eternal salvation. Faith is a significant act of the creature in space-time history. Paul could say that he, as a responsible creature, “was not disobedient” to God’s call (Acts 26:19). Surely, he means at least that it was a necessary and significant act which defined his meaning in history.

On the other hand, the opposite error is that of Arminian theology which so exalts faith that it often becomes a work in and of itself, a meritorious thing that one does to gain the merits of Christ or at least to co-determine with God the course of history. Under this Arminian influence, contemporary evangelism too often pictures the cross of Christ as a directionless act of God which requires the addition of human faith in order to gain any particular direction toward individuals. In this view

God does what He can in an abstract sense divorced from any particular human beings and awaits their response to determine the final outcome of history. Divine sovereignty is thus suspended in favor of man, and the doctrine of election is denied (see the call of Abraham in Part III of this series). The Bible, however, strongly differs from this view. The cross in its very nature influences men to varying degrees. In the previous section it was pointed out that while the moral influence theory is not the most basic, it does preserve a truth: the cross itself calls to men (John 12:32). Berkouwer states it well:

*“The message of salvation does not consist in the communication of an occurrence which must then be accepted by man in faith. For the salvation of God concerns a historic act of God which itself gives direction, and which has an appealing, inviting, promising, and commanding force.”[24]*

In other words, faith cannot be so disconnected from the death of Christ as much Arminian theology insists. Faith requires both the verbal Word of God (Matt. 11:27; John 6:35-44; Rom. 10:17) and the historic work of God (Matt. 11:20-21; 24:22; I Cor. 10:13) (see discussion in Part III of this series). Since the atonement is both the Word and the work of God, it can be considered as a means of faith. No one can believe by himself.

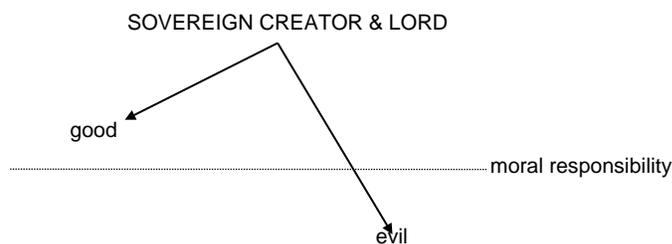
In what direction and how far does the cross influence mankind? It has been shown above that the atonement is the basis of all grace shown to mankind and is sufficient to save all if they would believe. These truths, however, are static; they do not take into account dynamic, temporally-progressing history. In this on-going process decreed by God from before creation, God offers salvation to all mankind before it becomes differentiated in time into the elect and non-elect. In this earlier undifferentiated stage of invitation, the atonement reveals God’s optimistic attitude toward all men. In this early stage of the temporal process the love of God appears toward all men. Calvinist theologian Van Til warns that one must not downplay this early revelation of God just because one knows “in the end” only the elect are saved. He writes:

*“We should not argue that the general invitation reveals nothing of the attitude of God, on the ground that God’s particular will is back of all. . . . We may, like the impatient disciples, anticipate the course of history and deal with men as though they were already that which by God’s eternal decree they one day will be. Yet God bids us bid our time and hold to the common.”[25]*

As time progresses, the undifferentiated mass of men under the eternal plan of God becomes differentiated into the elect and non-elect as men respond or reject the grace of God coming to them from the

atonement. As a means of faith, then, the atonement influences some men to believe unto salvation (in the case of the elect) and leaves the rest of men to reject it and face judgment without its eternally saving benefit (the non-elect. Faith is the “condition” *on the creature level* that marks the reception of the eternal saving benefits of the atonement. It is not, however, a “condition” that operates *at the Creator level* like the sovereignty of God. Always we must keep in mind the two-level view of existence, acknowledging the Creator-creature distinction.

The Moral Responsibility For Judgment and Salvation is Asymmetrical. Who bears the responsibility for those saved by the atonement and those who die without it? Extreme Calvinists sometimes seem to argue that God is directly responsible for both; but if He should be thus responsible, then he would also be the author of evil, and man could not longer be judged. Such determinist thinking clashes with the Bible as I show further in Appendix C. In the Bible not only is God a “living” God Who responds to man in history; He is also a God Who is sovereign over all in different ways. Although He is clearly the ultimate cause of all—good and evil alike (Gen. 1:1; Prov. 16:4; Isa. 45:7; Rom. 9:21; Eph. 1:11)—He is sovereign over good in a different way than He is sovereign over evil. Figure Seven shows how God is sovereign and morally responsible for the good produced in fallen history whereas He is sovereign and not morally responsible for the evil produced.



**Figure 7. God is sovereign over good and evil but not in the same way. He cannot be held morally responsible for evil.**

Looking at the atonement from the end point of history, one can see that it was designed in line with this asymmetrical sovereignty of God. God’s asymmetrical sovereignty can be observed in the Bible from the beginning of history to its account of the end. Even in Genesis 1 where the physical elements of light/darkness and order/chaos (features which are used later metaphorically to communicate the moral nature of good and evil) first originate, there is asymmetry. Light is called into existence by a direct command of God whereas the darkness originates in mystery. In the flood narrative of Genesis 6-8 God assumes credit for saving Noah’s family while mankind bears the responsibility for the sin leading to judgment. The same asymmetry of responsibility occurs with the Tower of Babel judgment in Genesis 11 and in the call of Abraham in

Genesis 12 (cf. Deut. 4:19-20). Salvation is always due to God's gracious and "disruptive" interference into the sinful state of affairs; judgment is always due to man's sin reaping its fruit. Such asymmetry occurs again with the Exodus and in every subsequent act of judgment/salvation. The terminal conditions of Matthew 25:34, 41 and Romans 9:22-23, discussed previously, continue this asymmetry to the very end of history.

## SUMMARY

This chapter has dealt with the most emphasized event in the NT: the death of the King. Your view of justice largely determines your response to this death. If you hold to the restitutionary nature of justice as derivative from God's attributes, you will comprehend the cross. If, on the other hand, you hold to the various pagan notions of justice as something originated by society or an elite, you cannot understand what the King's death is all about.

Only biblical Christianity offers the resolution of the justice and grace. As the basis of all grace, the atonement stands underneath every gospel message. Your view of the atonement seriously determines the shape of the gospel you believe and talk about. Is the gospel you believe a weak, impotent statement by a begging Jesus whose atonement can be thwarted by creature unbelief, or is it a commanding call by a Savior whose death as it touches all men, calls the elect into existence through faith?

## END NOTES FOR CHAPTER 4

105. Leon Morris, The Cross in the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1965), p. 365.
106. See Charles L. Feinberg, Is the Virgin Birth in the Old Testament? (Whittier, CA. 90603: Emeth Publications, 1967), pp. 22-33; and see the early part of the Book of Enoch, 62:5.
107. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, Jesus Was A Jew (Nashville: Boardman Press, 1974), p. 13.
108. For example, see George E. Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1974), pp. 156, 319.
109. Fruchtenbaum, p. 27.
110. Ibid., p. 28.
111. See Mark 15:44. Canadian physiologist Arthur C. Custance has made a good case that Christ probably died with (not because of) a heart that had ruptured the previous night at Gethesemane (cf. Luke 22:44; John 19:34). His discussion was privately published as Doorway Paper, No. 17, "How Did Jesus Die?" years ago and are no longer available to my knowledge.

112. Morris, pp. 381-2.
113. Sanhedrin 43a cited Harold Hoehner, Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), p. 75.
114. Ibid., p. 87.
115. Hastings Rashdall, The Idea of the Atonement in Christian Theology (London: MacMillan & Co., 1920), p. 49.
116. Ibid., p. 463. Of course, once having entered this speculative pathway, how can we be sure that the whole crucifixion wasn't an example of a plan gone wrong at the last minute as suggested by Hugh J. Schonfield in his book The Passover Plot (ppbk ed., New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1967)?
117. Fisher Humphries, The Death of Christ (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1978), p. 54. The real answer is exactly opposite to that of Humphries' capitulation to unbelieving society: restitution must be restored to criminal justice. The many humane and economic advantages, in addition to the spiritual advantages, are given in Roger Campbell, Justice Through Restitution (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1977).
118. See discussions in any good history of Christian doctrine. My quotes are from Reinhold Seeberg, Textbook of the History of Doctrines (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1964), I, 26.
119. Ibid., II, 67.
120. Ibid., II, 266.
121. Ibid., II, 400.
122. John Walvoord, Jesus Christ Our Lord (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 158f.
123. Rashdall, p. 463.
124. Lewis S. Chafer, Systematic Theology (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), III, 143f.
125. John M. Frame, Apologetics to the Glory of God (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1994), p. 184.
126. Roger Nicole, "The Case for Definite Atonement," Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society, X (1967), 199.
127. Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom (4<sup>th</sup> ed., rev., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977 [1877]), III, 586.
128. G. C. Berkouwer, Divine Election (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1960), pp. 2-3.
129. Cornelius Van Til, Common Grace and the Gospel (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1977), pp. 80,83.

## CHAPTER 5: THE RESURRECTION OF THE KING

Lesson 144

This chapter completes the present study of the King by discussing the last of the four topics introduced in Chapter One of this section—His resurrection. As in the case of the previous events, the event of the King’s resurrection elicits either biblically-based acceptance and understanding or pagan denial and reinterpretation of it. The resurrection forms the end point of the Christian vision of history just as the creation forms the starting point for that history. It is not surprising, therefore, that just as biblical creation is opposed by pagan evolution, in like manner resurrection is sharply resisted by unbelief. This study will present the claims surrounding the resurrection, the pagan responses to those claims, and the doctrinal consequences of Christ’s resurrection and ascension. Some of the powerful applications of those doctrinal consequences to the Christian life will then be briefly explained. (Read here Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21; Acts 1:1-11; I Corinthians 15; Revelation 21-22.)

### THE HISTORICAL INCIDENT OF THE RESURRECTION

No other religious leader or founder ever claimed to rise from the dead in an utterly new body. Moses’ body was buried and did not rise (Deut. 34:5-6; cf. Jude 1:16). Buddha died as any other man, and so did Mohammed. Indeed, as Dr. Wilbur Smith says, “All the millions and millions of Jews, Buddhists, and Mohammedans agree that their founders have never come up out of the dust of the earth in resurrection.”[1] The King’s resurrection and his subsequent ascent into heaven in his resurrection body, then, is an absolutely unique phenomenon in human history.

Christ’s resurrection claim is a central portion of the Christian position. It must be distinguished from possible resuscitation claims or claims that a “spiritual” resurrection took place. After carefully observing the claim, biblical faith interprets it within the framework revealed from the OT and from Christ’s teachings given prior to His death.

### AFFIRMATION OF THE FACT OF THE RESURRECTION

Rather than vainly trying to explain the empty tomb with theft, hallucination, or swoon-plot theories, orthodox Christianity has always insisted upon the King’s real, historic resurrection and ascension. Not only has this claim been present from the earliest days of Christianity, *but it has always been considered as a central Christian truth.* [2] So central

to Christianity has it been that liberal theologians have tried desperately to undermine this claim to avoid conflict with modern unbelief. One can quickly see the dilemma of modern unbelieving liberals in this remark of Richard R. Niebuhr:

*“The intense analysis of the New Testament produced by the great age of historical investigation has emphasized, among other things, this fact that belief in Jesus as the risen Lord informs every part of the early church’s thought. But the rise of historical criticism has also made it increasingly difficult for theologians and biblical scholars to accept the New Testament order of thought. They have felt obligated to remove the resurrection of Jesus from its central position and to place it on the periphery of Christian teaching and proclamation, because the primitive resurrection faith conflicts disastrously with modern canons of historicity.”[3]*

Unfortunately, however, all such attempts “to remove the resurrection of Jesus from its central position” reverse the true cause-effect of the Church’s origin. These unbelieving attempts try to make the Church the originator of the “primitive resurrection faith” instead of making the resurrection the originating cause of the Church. As Ladd correctly remarks:

*“That which brought the church into being and gave it a message was not hope of the persistence of life beyond the grave, a confidence in God’s supremacy over death, a conviction of the immortality of the human spirit. It was belief in an event in time and space: Jesus of Nazareth was risen from the dead. . . .*

*But we must go further to the final and crucial fact. Something happened to create in the disciples belief in Jesus’ resurrection. Here is the crucial issue. It was not the disciples’ faith that created stories of the resurrection; it was an event lying behind these stories that created their faith. . . .*

*Here is the heart of the problem for twentieth-century man: What is the fact of the resurrection? What happened to produce the disciples’ faith?”[4]*

Besides the centrality of the resurrection claim, there is the matter of the nature of Jesus’ resurrection body. On the one hand, it was a body, not merely a spirit or hallucination. It was observable to all three senses of sight, sound, and touch (Luke 24:33-43; John 20:24-30; I Cor. 15:1-8; I John 1:1-4). Luke even goes so far as to describe Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances in this language: “[Jesus] also showed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing unto them. . . .” (Acts 1:3; emphasis supplied). On the other hand, this body was not a body like that given to all men since creation. It was not a mere restoration of his previous natural body; it was not a resuscitation as in previous biblical cases (e.g., I Kings 17:17-23; II Kings 4:18-27; John 11:1-44). Jesus’ resurrection body could appear and disappear (Luke 24:31; John 20:19, 26). Again,

Ladd notes: “The resurrection of Jesus was a bodily resurrection; but his resurrection body possessed strange powers that transcended physical limitations. It could interact with the natural order, but it at the same time transcended this order.”[5] The resurrection body, then, was similar in outward features to Jesus’ prior natural body, but it was differently constructed.

## AFFIRMATION OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESURRECTION

Lesson 145

Once the resurrection claim is received and studied, it must be interpreted within a larger frame of reference. Unbelief, as will be demonstrated later, can absorb a literal resurrection within its larger framework of change. The resurrection then becomes an item for something like Ripley’s Believe It or Not. Biblical faith, however, accepts and understands the resurrection within the framework given in the OT and in Jesus’ own teachings.

According to Jesus the resurrection is presupposed from the earliest parts of the OT. In Luke 20:27-40 Jesus answered the Sadducees who denied the possibility of resurrection. Instead of citing a clear-cut reference to resurrection out later OT books, Jesus cited Moses in Exodus 3:6: “But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the place concerning the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live unto him.” Jesus’ argument here is that God elected Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Abrahamic Covenant for all eternity (cf. Gen. 17:7). This election was to eternal living fellowship with Himself. Man—the whole man—could not have fellowship with God through his spirit and soul. Living fellowship meant life with God consisting of a real body indwelt by a spirit producing a soul (Gen. 2:7). Thus if Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were truly eternal parties to the Abrahamic Covenant, there had to be a resurrection sometime in the future to fulfill the Covenant’s promises.

Many other biblical authors echo Jesus’ insistence that God’s promises require a resurrection for their fulfillment. OT theologian J. Barton Payne summarizes the biblical evidence:

*“The Old Testament had already presented the fact of the dichotomy of the human nature: a body that returns to dust, and of the soul or spirit, that at death returns to God. But at the same time, the Old Testament also teaches the unity of man’s whole person, and it was by means of this latter truth that God seems to have lead the thinking of His people toward an appreciation of an eventual restoration of the entire man, body and spirit reunited.”[6]*

In this manner Genesis 3:22-24 implies that man could live with his body forever if the effects of the fall were neutralized. In Genesis 5:24 Enoch is raptured, body and all (cf. Heb. 11:5) as was Elijah in II Kings 2:11. OT saints knew of existence after death (e.g., Gene. 25:8-9; 37:35; II Sam. 12:23), but full enjoyment of God's promises demanded eventual resurrection of physical life for eternity (John 19:26-27; Ps. 16:9-11; 49; 73:24-26). The enigmatic passage in Psalm 110:1-4 quoted so frequently in the NT forms part of the argument of the author of Hebrews who insists upon an eternal physical reality (Heb. 2:5ff; 5:5-10ff; etc.).

The resurrection idea, therefore, is *implicit* in the OT. As OT revelation progressed, however, it also became *explicit*. Israel's ultimate salvation demanded clear promises of resurrection for believers (Isa. 26:19) and unbelievers (Dan. 12:2). There had to be a new universe wholly free of the curse; death had to be removed forever (Isa. 25:8; 66:22-24; Hos. 13:14). Thus OT saints not only clearly anticipated resurrection but also knew some specific details about it.

In this sort of milieu came Jesus, preaching His own resurrection. At His conception Mary insisted that He would sit upon the literal, physical throne of David forever (Luke 1:32-33). After He was rejected by Israel, He began to prophesy clearly of His death and resurrection (e.g., Matt. 16:21; 10:19; John 10:16-18). The new element in Jesus' teaching concerned His solitary resurrection in advance of the general, end-time resurrection of all other men. Jesus' resurrection was the beginning of the end-time. Ladd puts it well:

*“Jesus’ resurrection is not an isolated event that gives to men the warm confidence and hope of a future resurrection; it is the beginning of the eschatological resurrection itself. If we may use crude terms to try to describe sublime realities, we might say that a piece of the eschatological resurrection has been split off and planted in the midst of history. The first act of the drama of the Last day has taken place before the Day of the Lord.”[7]*

What is the significance, then, of Jesus' resurrection within biblical thought? *It is the presence of the ultimate goal of history within history today* (cf. I Cor. 15:20-23; II Cor. 4:14; Col. 1:18). No other religion or philosophy of history can point man to what the final goal of history looks like. Communism, for example, makes stupendous claims of the future “redeemed” classless society, but it cannot offer today an actual concrete example of the kind of person who will live in that society. Biblical Christianity, on the contrary, can point to the resurrected God-man King as the kind of person who will inhabit the Kingdom of God forever (I John 3:2).

Moreover, not only is the ultimate goal clear; its moral content is clear. Christ arose in order to ascend to His Father in heaven and thus

complete the original creation goal of mankind to subdue all things (John 20:17; I Cor. 15:21-28). In His natural body before dying on the cross, Christ individually had subdued His environment insofar as it was possible to do in a fallen world (John 8:46; Heb. 5:8-9). In His resurrection body after death, He ascended in order to subdue the very powers of evil which ruled over man in the fallen world. Jesus now wages a holy war against evil spirits. He has become the second Adam, the head of a new transformed creation (Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:15-18). Man now faces the certain elimination of all evil, including his own (John 16:8-11; Acts 17:30-31; Rev. 19-20). This truth adds pressure to the announcement of the Cross in gospel preaching (cf. Acts 17:31; I Cor. 15:4-8).

## UNBELIEVING RESPONSES TO THE KING'S RESURRECTION

Lesson 146

Theoretically, unbelief could respond to the resurrection in either of two possible ways. It could deny the fact of the resurrection, or it could deny its significance. The mainstream of pagan unbelief has by far preferred to deny the fact rather than to allow the fact and reinterpret its significance. Both possibilities, however, will be covered here for insight into the apologetic process.

### DENIAL OF THE FACT OF THE RESURRECTION

From the time of the actual event itself unbelief has sought another explanation for the empty tomb on Easter morning. Matthew 28:11-15 records the first attempted theory, one which claimed that Jesus' body was stolen (the Theft Theory). The weaknesses of the Theft Theory were rapidly exposed. The Church Father John Chrysostom (347-407 AD) summarized its weaknesses:

*“For indeed even this establishes the resurrection. . . . For this is the language of men confessing, that the body was not there. When therefore they confess the body was not there, but the stealing of it is shown to be false and incredible, by their watching it, and by the seals, and by the timidity of the disciples, the proof of the resurrection even hence appears incontrovertible.”[8]*

Chrysostom showed that the Theft Theory simply could not handle the contradictory evidence surrounding the empty tomb and moreover admitted to the empty tomb. This evidence made the theft proposal unbelievable.

Another early unbelieving response to the empty tomb was the Hallucination Theory. This theory argued that Christ's post-resurrection appearances were all merely subjective experiences in the minds of the early believers. This Hallucination Theory arose early enough that the NT writers actively opposed it with notices concerning the burial garments of Jesus (John 20:5-9), mention of the clear physical nature of Christ's resurrection body (Luke 24:33-43; John 20:24-29), statements concerning the masses of people simultaneously viewing him after the resurrection (I Cor. 15:6), and the repeated insistence that they were reporting historical objective fact rather than subjective myth (II Pet. 1:16; I John 1:1-4). The Hallucination Theory, however, has persisted over the centuries until today in modified form it dominates most modern theology. Carl Henry records an encounter with Karl Barth, the father of the neo-orthodox school of liberal theology, in 1963:

*“When the question period began, I asked about the factualness, the historicity of the resurrection. ‘Over at the table are newspaper reporters,’ I noted, ‘the religion editor of United Press International, the Religious News Service correspondent, and the religion editors of the Washington papers. If they had these present responsibilities in the first century, was the event of the resurrection of Jesus Christ of such a nature that covering it would have fallen into the area of their reportorial responsibility? That is, was it news and history in the sense in which the man in the street understands new and history?’ Barth became angry. Since I had identified myself as editor of Christianity Today, he retorted, ‘Did you say Christianity Today or Christianity Yesterday? Rather taken aback, I replied only by quoting the Scripture text ‘yesterday, today, and forever,’ certainly a hurried misappropriation. Barth then responded to the question obliquely: ‘The resurrection had significance for the disciples of Jesus Christ! It was to the disciples that he appeared!’ But this wasn’t in question at all. On the way out, the United Press correspondent remarked to me, ‘We got his answer. His answer was no.’”[9]*

Karl Barth thus rejects the fact of the resurrection. It was not a reportable objective historical event, he claims. It was only a subjective experience in the minds of the first Christian disciples.

Clark Pinnock comments further on the subjective view of the resurrection which dominates modern theology:

*“The offensive character of the resurrection as a literal event reversing the normal course of nature in the decomposition of a body in death remains equally strong for the new theology. The insistence of both Tillich and Bultmann on its symbolic non-literal meaning is well known. Tillich admits the existentialist encounters which led the disciples to apply the resurrection as a symbol to Jesus crucified. He even lists the physical theory as a possible explanation for faith in the New Being. But candidly he regards it as a crude rationalization developed rather late in the first century. He much prefers a new theory of his own, which he*

*wishes to distinguish from the simply psychological explanation. The real miracle was the creation of faith in the New Being. The orthodox alternative he treats with disdain as ‘absurdity compounded with blasphemy.’ Perhaps it is more apt to turn this pejorative expression onto the implications of his own thesis which depicts the disciples confusing their inner experience with an event in the past, deceiving both themselves and Christians since.”[10]*

Thus the second unbelieving attempt to deny the resurrection fact tries to use the idea of confusion or hallucination among the early Christian disciples.

Many unbelieving and pagan critics, however, grew to doubt the likelihood of both the Theft and the Hallucination Theories and sought another explanation. In the eighteenth century a man named Venturini suggested that Jesus never really died on the cross. Venturini believed that Christ swooned from his massive physical injuries and later revived in the cool air of the tomb.[11] Somehow he got out of the tomb in spite of the guards, and his absence spawned the resurrection reports, this view supposes. In 1967 Hugh J. Schonfield, a Hebrew ex-Christian, has tried to popularize this Swoon Theory in his book *The Passover Plot* by adding the explanation that Jesus got out of the tomb through a conspiracy involving himself and a few close acquaintances. Writes Schonfield:

*“It is by no means a novel theory that Jesus was not dead when taken from the Cross, and some will have it that he subsequently recovered. The idea was used in fiction by George Moore in *The Brook Kerith* and by D. H. Lawrence in *The Man Who Died*. . . . We have only to allow that in this as in other instances Jesus made private arrangements with someone he could trust, who would be in a position to accomplish his design. . . .*

*There is no cause to doubt the crucifixion of Jesus, or that he had assistants to aid him in his bid for survival. We may accept that one of them was a member of the Sanhedrin, and we may agree to speak of him as Joseph of Arimathea, even if we cannot be positive that this was his name. . . .*

*The first stage of the present action was the cross. We are told that there were bystanders there, and that one of them saturated a sponge with vinegar. . . . There was nothing unusual for a vessel containing a refreshing liquid to be at the place of exhaustion, and it presented no problem to doctor the drink that was offered to Jesus. . . .*

*Directly it was seen that the drug had worked. The man hastened to Joseph who was anxiously awaiting for the news. At once he sought an audience with Pilate. . . . and requested the body of Jesus. . . .*

*Jesus lay in the tomb over the Sabbath. He would not regain consciousness for many hours, and in the meantime the spices and kinen bandages provided the best dressing for his injuries. . . .*

*A plan was being followed which was worked out in advance by Jesus himself and which he had not divulged to his close disciples. What seems probable is that in the darkness of Saturday night when Jesus was brought out of the tomb by those concerned in the plan he regained consciousness temporarily, but finally succumbed.”[12]*

Schonfield believes that Jesus’ plot to project himself as the OT Messiah misfired when the soldier accidentally pierced his side with a spear. His secret comrades, however, had a further option to play. At critical times one of them would “appear” to the disciples to simulate a resurrection appearance. Schonfield says:

*“A likely explanation of the circumstances is that all along, beginning with the young man first seen at the tomb by the women, one and the same man was being seen, and he was not Jesus. This man was bent on fulfilling what was perhaps a promise to Jesus when he lay dying after his removal from the tomb. . . . There was no deliberate untruth in the witness of the followers of Jesus to his resurrection. On the evidence they had the conclusion they reached seemed inescapable. . . . Neither had there been any fraud on the part of Jesus himself. He had schemed in faith for his physical recovery, and what he expected had been frustrated by circumstances quite beyond his control. . . .”[13]*

To deny the fact of the resurrection, therefore, unbelief has tried three alternative re-interpretations of the empty tomb: the body was stolen (Theft Theory); the body decayed, but the early Christians thought they saw a risen Jesus (Hallucination Theory); and the body was removed from the tomb according to prearrangement together with a conspiracy to simulate resurrection appearances (Swoon-Plot Theory).

## **DENIAL OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESURRECTION**

To those unbelieving critics who reject all of the above explanations for the empty tomb there remains yet another possible approach. Instead of agreeing that the resurrection is a fulfillment of God’s sovereign plan revealed in the OT and in the ministry of the King, such critics would try to conceive of the resurrection as a “freak accident” in nature. Although to date no major unbelieving critic has exercised this option, mention of it will alert the student to the structure of unbelief. Of this option Van Til writes, using an imaginary conversation with an unbeliever “Mr. Black”:

*“Now as for accepting the resurrection of Jesus,’ continued Mr. Black, ‘as thus properly separated from the traditional system of theology, I do not in the least mind doing that. To tell the truth, I have accepted the resurrection as a fact for some time. The evidence for it is overwhelming.*

*This is a strange universe. All kinds of ‘miracles’ happen in it. The universe is ‘open’. So why should not there be some resurrections here and there? The resurrection of Jesus would be a fine item for Ripley’s Believe It or Not. Why not send it in?”[14]*

This discussion should warn us if we think that the battle is won the moment we have proved the “fact” of some biblical event. Even with the factualness accepted by the unbeliever, there remains the crucial matter of interpretation of such facts. *Mere facts—even biblical events—are not the whole story until they are set in the context and framework of God’s plan in history.* After all, did not the Exodus generation try to “reinterpret” the significance of their miraculous escape from the world power of their day as the work of pagan gods (Exod. 32:1-6)? Both the fact and the biblical framework are necessary or the significance of any miracle is wholly neutralized. And so we arrive at the same place with respect to the King’s resurrection as we did with respect to the King’s birth, life, and death. Each fact can be interpreted in a radically different way depending upon the framework with which one comes to the event.

## **UNBELIEF’S NEED TO REJECT THE “THREAT” OF THE RESURRECTION**

Rejection of either the fact and significance of the resurrection or of the significance alone is based ultimately upon a perverted view of history. The apostle Paul confronted the academic center of first century paganism with the threat of the resurrection (Acts 17:31). It was precisely the resurrection that caused tremendous offense (Acts 17:32). Rather than preach the crucifixion of Christ to a Gentile audience, Paul chose to preach the resurrection to them. Why?

We learned in the previous chapter that denial of the significance of the crucifixion was tied up with perverted views of justice and its root in the holiness of God. Apparently Paul judged his Athenian hearers to be so profoundly deceived that rather than try to show God’s holy requirement for restitution through blood atonement it would be more direct to show the threat of the end of history.

As a “preview” of the ultimate goal of history, the resurrection confronts each one of us with our future permanent state. As I will develop under the doctrinal consequences of the resurrection below, it reminds each of us that we will have an everlasting, immortal existence. At bottom we already “know” that it is coming to each of us. Pilkey puts it well:

*“[The resurrection] sheds eternal light on the heroic dimension of human existence. The connection between the grandeur of the Egyptian pyramids and Egyptian beliefs about resurrection is quite apparent. Men have always known, through the subjective power of the human spirit, that they are destined for one kind of immortality or another. Those who doubt the resurrection are to be pitied because they have allowed the elegiac spirit of mortality to take possession of their souls. Doubt of the resurrection is the intellectual correlative of simple depression; and modern materialist skeptics have sunk below the level of the Noahic pagans. . . .”[15]*

Because our imagehood anticipates the resurrection with the issue of our personal eternal destiny, its mention within hearing distance of a fallen heart threatens to unleash the suppressed knowledge of ultimate accountability to our Creator. Pilkey has developed its threatening character very well. Speaking of the need to confront unbelief and how C.S. Lewis so ably did it in his day, Pilkey notes:

*“Lewis’ apologetic approach, grounded in reason, is not well adapted to those parts of the world where apostasy has advanced so far that anarchy reigns and Freud’s “dark power of the Id” vies for immediate social supremacy. Confrontation with such satanic power was the specialty of Charles Williams. The final form of apologetics is supernaturalistic, apocalyptic, and judgmental. It threatens the enemies of Christianity with the consequences of unrepentent death, requiring them to choose heaven or hell today and experience one or the other tomorrow. . . . Although most apostates are infuriated by threats of judgment, the human conscience remains open to this very elemental sort of conviction. . . .”*

*In Christian apologetics, the greatest of all doctrines is the resurrection of the dead, an idea so powerful that it, rather than sex, holds the key to the mystery of human existence. Wherever it is clearly conceived as a metaphysical reality, resurrection annihilates every premise and every conclusion of the Marxist, Freudian, and Darwinian schools of thought. It erases the premise of Marxism by positing a version of humanity independent of the natural food chain; it cancels the premise of Freudianism by furnishing a degree of vitality so absolute that temporary sexual euphoria loses all meaning; and it destroys the whole point of evolution by bringing mankind to absolute physical perfection in an instant of transformation.”[16]*

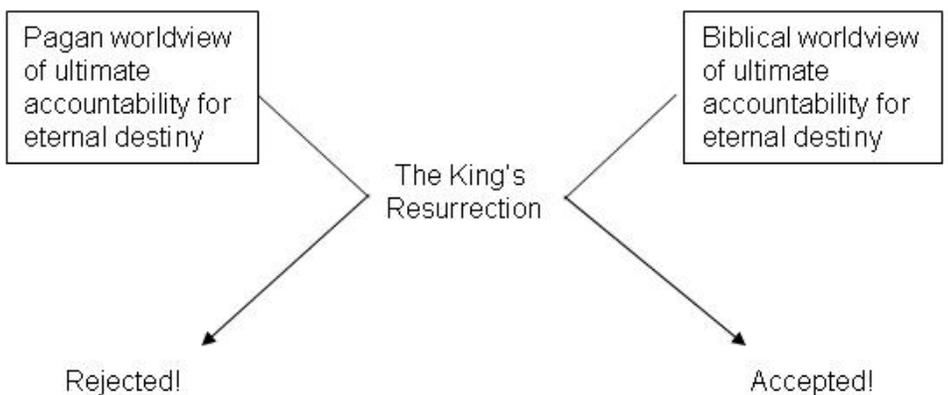
Chuck Colson narrates the ironic situation where the resurrection met Caesar in Red Square on May Day, 1990:

*“As the throng passed directly in front of [Mikhail Gorbachev] standing in his place of honor, the priests hoisted their heavy burden toward the sky. The cross emerged from the crowd. As it did, the figure of Jesus Christ obscured the giant poster faces of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Vladimir Lenin that provided the backdrop for Gorbachev’s reviewing stand.*

*‘Mikhail Sergeyeovich!’ one of the priests shouted, his deep voice cleaving the clamor of the protesters and piercing straight toward the angry Soviet leader. ‘Mikhail Sergeyeovich! Christ is risen!’*

*In a matter of months after that final May Day celebration, the Soviet Union was officially dissolved.”[17]*

Against the impact of the resurrection, paganism has nothing but a hodge-podge of self-willed deceptions about historical existence that attempt to deny ultimate accountability to the Creator. Somehow, the terror of facing the coming eternal separation of good and evil must be assuaged. Each person faces the resurrection with a belief-system in line with everlasting accountability or in denial of it. Again, *each person’s reaction to the King exposes their own worldviews.*



**Figure 7.** *The fact of the King’s resurrection is interpreted in accordance with one’s worldview of ultimate responsibility.*

## THE DOCTRINAL CONSEQUENCE OF THE RESURRECTION: GLORIFICATION

Lesson 147

Jesus' resurrection confronts man with the ultimate goal of all things just as the creation account in Genesis confronts man with the ultimate origin of all things. When we studied the creation event in Part II of this series, the doctrinal consequences associated with creation were the doctrines of God, man, and nature. Now that we've studied the resurrection event, these same doctrines will be surveyed again, this time under one general heading called glorification. Each of first three sections below presents one area of glorification. An application section concludes the presentation. (More details of the meaning of the resurrection for the believer today will be found in the sixth pamphlet of this series.)

### THE GLORIFICATION OF GOD

The infinite personal Creator must finally be glorified in full view of all His creation. His attributes will eventually be understood as thoroughly as it is possible for the creature to do so. Thus, in anticipation of the ending phase of history, the Day of the Lord, the occupants of heaven sing:

*“Worthy are thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power: for thou didst create all things, and because of thy will they are and were created. . . . Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honor, and glory, and blessing.”(Rev. 4:11; 5:12)*

As the Day of the Lord approaches, God's revelation nears completion in mortal history. In particular, God's character becomes every more clearly visible to the creatures as worthy of their praise. The creatures recognize His worthiness from historical experience. God has shown His character both through natural creation (Cf. Ps 19:1-6; Acts 14:15-17; 17:24-29; Rom. 1:18-32) and through His special program of revelation culminating in the King of Kings, the “Lamb that hath been slain.” Thus time-space history will eventually become saturated with revelation of God's character.

God's Glorification Through Time. The creatures ought to have trusted God at the beginning of history. That is why God held Satan and Adam responsible for their sin. The creatures, however, at the beginning of history could not truly adore or worship God in depth because of their lack of historical experience with Him. Thus the angels' first apparent source of praise was the latter portion of creation (Job 38:7). Moreover, at least an entire generation passed after Adam before men truly

worshipped God (Gen. 4:26)/ Throughout history more and more revelation occurred so that adoration as well as trust developed.

God's name Yahweh, for example, was not really appreciated until the Exodus event (Exod. 6:3). In the NT Jesus mentioned that until he came, God's full character, especially His gracious love, was not revealed to man (John 17). Paul says that until the Church was formed, God's wisdom was not fully appreciated by the angels (Eph. 3:10). The passage of time, therefore, accumulates revelation of God's nature to personal creatures. Mankind thus corporately comes to know God better and better until history is complete. This process of glorification of God results in fuller worship until the creatures cry at the Day of the Lord that He is worthy of complete adoration.

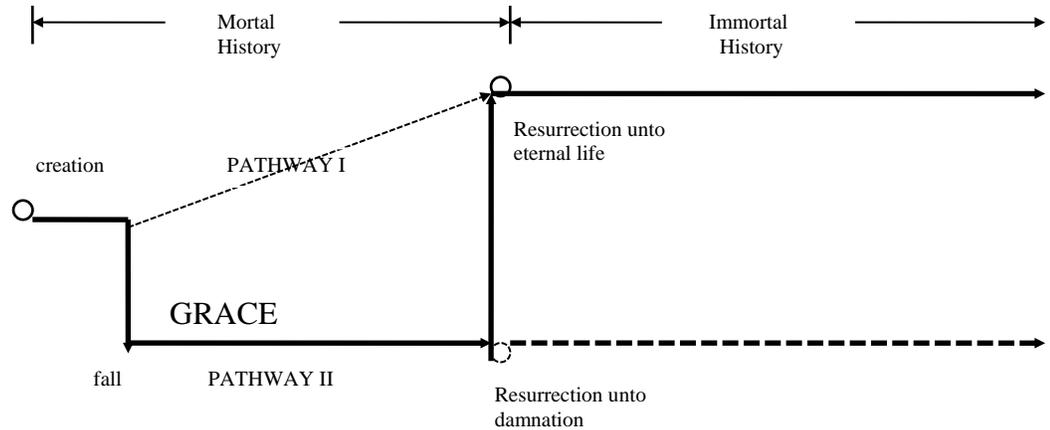
God's Glorification Throughout Space. The glorification of God must not be looked at just from the standpoint of time but also from the standpoint of space. God is omnipresent and is revealed throughout all His creation to both the rebellious and the submissive beings. David argued that God's revelation of Himself extended into the grave and into every imaginable evil situation (Ps. 139:7-12). Isaiah taught that every spiritually responsible creature would bow its knee eventually to Yahweh, God of Israel (Isa. 45:23), and Paul applied that truth to Christ:

*“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth: and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil 2:9-11)*

Every creature, therefore, whether in hell or in heaven, will eventually bow before God's glorification.

God's Glorification in the Final State. Revelation 21-22 pictures the final state during which God is fully glorified. God then will be so fully visible to the new resurrected creation that the long-promised eternal fellowship of God with man will have become a reality. The Kingdom of God which promised eternal dwelling in His Presence will have become a permanent creation feature. God will center His rule visibly on the planet earth (Rev. 21:1-4). Physical light directly from God as Creator will lighten the abode of men instead of the created partial light from nature (Rev. 21:22-23). Men will gaze directly at God and live (Rev. 22:4). Then God will be “all in all” (I Cor. 15:28). Alva McClain summarizes:

*“This does not mean the end of our Lord's regal activity, but rather that from here onward in the unity of the Godhead he reigns with the Father as the eternal Son. There are no longer two thrones, one His Messianic throne and the other the Father's throne, as our Lord indicated in Revelation 3:21. In the final Kingdom there is but one throne, and it is the “throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 22:3).”[18]*



*Figure 8. Creature history in both mortal and immortal phases. See text for discussion.*

## THE GLORIFICATION OF MAN

Lesson 148

Not only is God directly glorified, but He is indirectly glorified through the perfection of His handiwork. When His created beings shine forth in fulfillment of their creature roles, their glorification reflects God's glorification. Man, as one of God's spiritually responsible creatures, was made from the beginning subject to the possibility of death by sin. Since the fall, of course, the subjection to death has been an actual condition. Throughout the period of history from the initial creation through the fall until the final resurrection, man exists in an unglorified state. In Figure Eight this period is called, therefore, mortal history, signifying that death is either potential or actual. Man becomes glorified, however, beginning with the resurrection unto eternal life when he is no longer subject to death (I Cor. 15:20ff). This second period in Figure Eight is called immortal history, signifying that death is no longer either potential or actual for the elect resurrected man.

Sadly, there is another aspect to resurrection, one which Jesus taught in John 5:27 concerning the resurrection unto damnation. This resurrection, which we will have more to say about in Part VI of this series, moves creatures into a state called the "second death" (Rev. 20:6). I hesitate to label this state "immortal history" since these words denote impossibility of death. Yet the resurrection unto damnation shares with the other resurrection type a common quality—*everlasting immutability, an unchangeable fixed state of existence*.

Man in Mortal Unglorified History. At creation God gave man the mandate to subdue the earth (Gen. 1:28-30). This mandate was finite in that it had a definite beginning and a definite goal or end-point. In Figure Eight that goal is seen as reachable by two pathways. Pathway I is the theoretically possible pathway available to man in Adam had sin and fall not occurred. Pathway II pictures the pathway of real history

made actual by the fall into sin and God's gracious redemption. Both pathways begin and end at the same points. Pathway II, however, includes revelation of God's grace in Christ which would not have occurred had history followed Pathway I.

The process of mankind's subduing the earth is a process of man's intelligently controlling his environment in a God-pleasing way. Man was not created as a passive component of nature as certain modern ecologists seem to suggest; he was created to be lord over nature. When sin occurred and God cursed the earth (Gen. 3:19), man faced the hopeless situation of Pathway II of trying to impose God's rule upon a rebellious environment, an environment that included himself. Man had to learn loyalty to God in a very devere manner by relying upon God's gracious initiative. Upon regeneration the saved man gegins a lifetime struggle against the resistance of the earth manifest in his own body (Rom 7:5-8:23; I Cor. 9:24-27; 15:28-57).

Pathway II of Figure Eight, however, would be impossible unless mankind had outside help. Yet this outside help must somehow qualify as being under the mandate given to mankind to subdue the earth. Here again one views the necessity of the hypostatic union of the King—He must be a genuine member of the human race in Adam (without sharing the imputed and inherent sin of Adam). Christ did what Adam had failed to do. He perfectly obeyed the Father (Impeccability) and secured victory over the evil powers through His infinite death on the Cross. Because He is God, the victory was sufficient; because He is a man, the victory is in the name of mankind. Pathway II, therefore, is the pathway of mankind, for Christ now stands as the new Adam and head of mankind.

The period of mortal history thus ends with Christ the King having led mankind to full obedience to the original mandate to subdue the earth through the Church Age, Tribulation, and Millennial Kingdom. Man is then glorified in that he shows forth his true creature function as lord of the earth. That is why the creatures cry out in Revelation 5:9 that the God-man is "worthy" because He has led redeemed men to become kings and priests to reign upon the earth.

Man in Immortal Glorified History. The Bible gives very little revelation about man's existence beyond the end of mortal history. The damned face eternity in the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:41,46; Rev. 20:14-15). There they must acknowledge God's glory (Phil. 2:9-11). The redeemed, however, center their existence in god's eternal city, the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22). Far from the rural setting in the Garden of Eden, far from the apostate pagan attempts at urbanization since Cain and Nimrod, far from the underlying motive of the Kingdom of Man, God's new eternal city houses man forever and ever. Although he is not a conservative theologian, Jacques Eullul puts the matter well:

*“From the beginning man worked desperately to have his own little world, independent of all that God desired. And God will give him the perfect work which he himself could not bring about. God will realize man’s setting. But in his new world one of man’s desires will not be satisfied: the desire for the absence of God. Man wanted to build a city from which God would be absent, but he never managed. God will make for him the perfect city, where he will be all in all.”[19]*

In immortal history all redeemed men will be closely together in an urban society in the immediate presence of God. And they will be from every people group, with every “racial” characteristic, and from every “language” (Rev. 5:9). In this eternal state men are not viewed only as a group; their individuality is respected because each has his own name known only to himself and the Lord alone (Rev. 2:17).

The eternal redeemed society will exist to serve and worship God. Wilbur M. Smith summarizes:

*“Here the promise of God to tabernacle with mankind finds its ultimate and permanent fulfillment. Both positively and negatively some of the greatest themes of Scripture are brought to their final conclusion. Life, divinely bestowed, then lost through sin, replaced by death, restored to us in Jesus Christ, is here set forth in the concept of the water of life and the tree of life, with the total disappearance forever of any aspect of death. . . . Here glory replaces everything that can be called shameful, fragmentary, disappointing or polluting. This time the new will remain for eternity. At last God and man will be dwelling together, a communion never to be interrupted. Here at last we shall behold the face of Christ and shall be like Him when we see Him as He is.”[20]*

Not only will man face the implicitly trustworthy Word of God, but he will face God as fully revealed as possible so that adoration can occur in a way quite impossible during mortal history. So much will man’s spiritual character blossom that in spite of possessing a material body he will be known primarily as spiritual (I Cor. 15:46-58).

## THE GLORIFICATION OF NATURE

Lesson 148

God is indirectly glorified through the final perfection of nature as well as through the final perfection of mankind. It is very necessary to mention the glorification of nature specifically because of the nearly universal tendency to visualize the new heavens and new earth in immaterial terms. The term spiritual is too often equated with the term immaterial. That is why Christ so sharply displayed the material nature of His spiritual resurrected body. With that body He ate (Luke 24:30,41-43; John 21:13) and made physical contact with the disciples (Luke 24:39-40; John 20:17,27; 21:13). Nature includes the material, and the material elements are glorified in the eternal state. Revelation 21-22 speaks of a material city with physical trees and water. The city’s gates are inscribed with letters. The trees have bark and leaves. The water moves in a stream.

Nature is part of God's handiwork and exists as a means of revealing His nature to man. This function will be no less necessary through eternity. There is a kind of continuity, therefore, between the present heavens and earth and the new heavens and earth. This continuity is like that of Jesus's natural and resurrection bodies. Both were of the same stature, had the same basic features, and had the same scars. Though there is an utterly different composition, there is continuity. Men in the eternal state will resemble men today. Trees and water in the eternal state will resemble trees and water today.

That which is not continuous from the old to the new is the composition. According to II Peter 3:12 the present universe has a basic set of structures called in the Bible stoicheal (translated in most English versions as 'elements'). These structures will be radically altered in the transition from the present universe to the new universe. Nature, then, will exist forever and ever in physical form similar to, but not identical with, the present universe.

## **THE APPLICATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF GLORIFICATION**

Many applications of the doctrine of glorification are given in the NT (see Part VI of this series). One basic application is the long-range, future-orientation of biblical faith. Paul, for example, grounds the Christian's long-range hope on the future glorification of his body (Rom. 8:18-39). Because of the certain future glorification of the body, one ought to be able to survive the present pressures which are chiefly experienced upon the body. God's elective plan will certainly terminate, say Paul, in glorification. The Christian, therefore, cannot conclude, as unbelieving often have, that the body is a hopeless entity because it is so obviously corrupt and full of pain. The ultimate "healing in the Atonement" is resurrection, not recovery from mortal illnesses.

Another application of the doctrine of glorification in everyday crises in the Christian life comes from using the principle seen in Figure Eight. Mankind in Figure Eight started at a certain level before the crisis of the fall. After the fall, through the abounding grace of God, a portion of mankind reached a higher level of blessing than before the crisis. Grace, in other words, did not merely restore mankind to the prior condition; it elevated mankind above the prior condition. Jay Adams writes concerning this concept in counselling:

*"The counsellee must be given a vision of overcoming evil with good, of turning tragedy into triumph. He must see that it is God's purpose to use crosses to lead to resurrections. When sin abounds—and we must be entirely realistic about the abounding nature of sin—nevertheless, the*

*counsellor must point out, grace even more abounds. There is a solution to every problem! But that is not all. It is a solution that is designed to lead one beyond the place where he was before the problem emerged. Though man was created lower than the angels, and by sin descended into a still lower position, Christ's redemption did not merely put man back again into his original condition; He has raised him far above the angels. . . .Job learned it at length: 'the Lord bless the latter days of Job more than his beginning,' we read (Job 42:12). Joseph experienced it, and Jesus accomplished it!"[21]*

Figure Eight, in other words, is repeated on a microscale in every Christian's sanctification.

A third application occurs in evangelism. As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, over and over again in the NT the gospel announcement is not a mere invitation to be considered neutrally; it is an announcement that the Cross has occurred backed up with the beginning event of the eternal state, the resurrection of Christ. (Note here Acts 17:31; I Cor. 15:3-7) The end process has begun. The resurrection as the first fruits of the end of history "pressures" the non-Christian to consider urgently the call of the gospel.

C.S. Lewis has captured the sobering effect of knowing that the resurrection has already begun:

*"It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree helping each other to one or the other destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours. This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously—no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption. And our charity must be real and costly love, with deep feeling for the sins in spite of which we love the sinner—no mere tolerance or indulgence which parodies love as flippant merriment. Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object present to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbor he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also Christ vere latitat—the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself, is truly hidden."[22]*

Finally, a fourth application of the doctrine of glorification concerns the matter of learning and education. What is the purpose of learning things? Often the pagan answer is given: to discover what is true. The first part of this series, however, has shown that paganism cannot justify the existence of truth “out there” to be discovered; it can only invent surrogate truth. Biblical faith, instead of trying the self-frustrating effort to determine truth out of finite resources, knows that the “fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 1:7). Moreover, deep down in their heart all men already have come into contact with truth which they seek to suppress according to Paul in Romans 1:18-20. Defining education as seeking truth, therefore, is devoid of real meaning unless you clarify what the “truth” is that we are seeking.

The proper goal of such activity ought to be appreciation of God’s character. What is the difference, biblically, between Adam a few minutes after creation and the last man on earth a few minutes before the end of mortal history? It cannot be that Adam did not know truth and the last man will know truth because *both are held accountable to God*. The difference is that whereas Adam did not know enough of God’s nature through historical revelation to adore and worship Him properly, the last man will have seen enough of God’s revelation to be held accountable to worship God with deep appreciation. All learning and education, then, exists for the purpose of worship, not for the purpose of determining truth. This is a far cry from the present-day goal of secularist education which aims for increased development of the Kingdom of Man, a revived Nimrod-style of social order.

## SUMMARY

The resurrection of the King in history before the end-time revealed to man the final state of history ahead of time. Christians, unlike any other group, have historical revelation of the end of history. The risen King shows mankind that history will certainly end in the glorification of God directly through His own self-revelation and indirectly through the perfection of man and nature.

The has gone on ahead and reached the finish line. You can trust Him to help you, too, reach the finish line. Do you want to meet the requirements of the finish line? Do you desire to know God better so you can worship and enjoy Him better? The famous Westminster Larger Catechism of 1648 asked men the following question and gave the indicated answer:

Question 1: What is the chief and highest end of man?

Answer: Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God and to fully enjoy him forever.

Notice the phrase “fully enjoy Him.” That ought to be your end.

## CONCLUSION OF PART V

Part V of the framework series has dealt with the confrontation all mankind faces with God's candidate for His long-promised Kingdom, the Lord Jesus Christ. Previous pamphlets gave the OT background revelation, and this pamphlet has presented the culmination of that revelation in the person of the God-man King (cf. Heb. 1:1-3). No further public revelation will be given to the world at large until the King returns in judgment. As the sixth pamphlet will show, the further revelation given through the NT apostles and prophets after Christ left the earth concerns the Church and her private knowledge. With the advent of the King, however, the Kingdom program of God has gone as far as it can go in a rebellious world without destroying that world in judgment.

## APPENDIX A: THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

Lesson 115

In Chapter Two we saw that the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ in history forced the Church to think deeply about the nature of God Himself. Heretical conclusions about who Jesus Christ was were thrown out. Each of these heresies, it turned out, had a false view of the nature of God. They either compromised the Creator-creature distinction, or they insisted upon a solitary monotheism. The Church finally realized that only a Trinitarian monotheism “fit” the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In this appendix we will explore more fully this Trinitarian doctrine. Critics, of course, have strongly and consistently attacked this truth all through Church history. They sense the threat it poses to their rebellion against God because it is the foundation of the authority, saving work, and final judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their primary attack has been to ridicule it as contradictory religious nonsense. We will show that far from being illogical, the Trinity is the very basis for human language and logic! The Trinity, in fact, is the presupposition of all of Christianity.

Following that discussion we will look at specific biblical passages and then present the doctrine of the Trinity. After that, we will look at some illustrations of the triunity of God in the creation around us. Finally, the appendix will close with an exhortation to apply this doctrine in a very practical way in the Christian life.

### THE TRIUNITY OF GOD AS THE BASIS OF LANGUAGE AND LOGIC

The pagan mind, as we saw in Part II of this series, always seeks to be its own autonomous authority, a wholly self-centered perspective, “free” of any submission to God. It recapitulates the fall by seeking to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil rather than submit to the authority of the Word of God. Inevitably, such a perspective produces some version of the Continuity of Being in which all reality is viewed as one. The pagan mind of flesh creates its own divine vision which contains everything from the gods and goddesses to man to animals to the elements. However, because man’s mind is limited or finite, such a vision can go only so far. Beyond that limit lies Pure Chance or Fate.

### THE BASIC QUESTION OF THE ONE AND THE MANY

Such thinking keeps unbelievers from being able to justify their two major tools: language and logic. Both of these tools are tied up with a

vexing problem, the question of the “One and Many.” This question asks whether that which unifies (the One) or that which distinguishes (the Many) is the most ultimate. If the One is most important, then differences between good and evil, lightness and darkness, personality and non-personality are merely insignificant surface features of one great amorphous unity—the Continuity of Being. On the other hand, if the Many are most important, then all of the pieces of the universe are not tied together; Pure Chance or Fate reigns. As we’ve seen in previous parts of this series, pagan thought rides a perpetual see-saw, oscillating between these two extreme positions.

Very practical results follow from which extreme is taken. In politics, for example, advocates of the One generally promote totalitarianism (such as King Ahab in the OT who demanded that Baalism be the spiritual unifier of his kingdom), whereas advocates of the Many gravitate to ideological or ethnic splinter groups and finally toward outright anarchy (such as the epoch of the Judges in which everyone did what was right in their own eyes). In family life, advocates of the One practically erase individuality in order to save the family at all costs while those who advocate the Many break up the home for the sake of individual “rights.” In fact, right now the United States is heading toward both extremes very rapidly. The “hippie” generation is now in power with its selfish emphasis upon individual rights—rights to divorce, to abort fetuses, and to do drugs. To keep society together, however, there is increasing emphasis upon totalitarian rules and regulations that progressively destroy liberty—rules that impose secularism upon all school children, that take away guns from everyone, and that establish universal identity in terms of a Social Security number. Common experience teaches us that somehow there has to be a “balance” between the extremes.

Language Requires the One and the Many in Balance. The most serious problem, however, concerns the very foundational tools of thought itself. [1] Let’s look at a simple predicative sentence such as “the sky is blue” or “my car is blue.” We all use these type of sentences every day without any thought about what we are assuming reality is like. These simplest of assertions assume that we can know individual things such as the sky or a car. Here are the Many. These assertions also assume that such individual things can be classified and share common characteristics. They are part of a One. Such classification is daily taken as universally common to all mankind. The One and the Many seem to be in perfect balance for if we dared to overemphasize the Many—the individual objects themselves—we would wind up knowing nothing about everything (since each object couldn’t be classified with any other with knowable properties). On the other hand, if we dared to overemphasize the One—the properties or classes—we would wind up knowing everything about nothing (since the properties would become

mere abstractions divorced from everyday occurrences). Again there has to be a balance.

Further illustrations of the language problem can be seen in your ordinary filing system and accounting. Why have filing systems? We want lots of individual things and pieces of information (the Many), but we also want to see the “big picture”, the meaning of all the individual things (the One). Why have accounting formats? We need records of individual transactions (the Many), but we also need to get an overall view of net worth, debt ratios, and trends (*i.e.*, the meaning or value of the whole, the One). In filing things and doing accounting we all intuitively assume some sort of balance between the One and the Many, whether we give it much thought or not.

The problem for the pagan is this: he has never been able to *give an account* for this fundamentally needful balance in the very heart of his thinking. In moments of elation and optimism, he worships the One like Nimrod built Babel. In moments of despair and pessimism, he submerges himself in the Many like Solomon in Ecclesiastes. Nevertheless, throughout all his days, *every sentence he speaks bears witness to an elusive balance of the One and the Many that is at utter odds with his professed beliefs.*

Logic Requires the One and the Many in Balance. The other foundation tool of human thought is logic. Logic works on language, and it, too, needs a balance between the One and the Many. Like language, however, it is left by unbelief without a foundation. From the ancient pagan philosopher Aristotle down to modern logicians like Russell and Whitehead formal logic has relied upon ideal, abstract, “pure” categories, symbolized by “empty” marks on paper (the One again). These categories must be perfectly stable and sharp, or the rules of inference don’t work.

This extreme adherence to the One, however, is perpetually frustrated with the Many circumstances in everyday life. A few decades ago when the “new math” replaced traditional arithmetic in American schools, parents and students alike found that its heavy emphasis upon abstract formal logic didn’t help at all in making change at the local store. In fact many students (and their parents!) didn’t understand it. A given instance involving numbers or inference in the everyday world is often a complicated mixture of opinion, perspective, and associated meanings. A classroom test that seemed clear to the teacher often comes back with surprising interpretations by the students, interpretations the teacher never expected. The “pure” categories of Aristotle simply don’t exist in the real world.

Pagan thought, therefore, finds itself relying upon logical rules of inference (the One) in the midst of a world of instances (the Many) with *absolutely no explanation of why logic works so much of the time.*

## **THE TRIUNITY OF GOD BEHIND THE ONE AND THE MANY**

As we've noted repeatedly in this series, the difference between pagan and biblical thinking lies in the Creator-creature distinction. The pagan insists upon *one* kind of reality, *one* level of being; the Christian insists upon *two* kinds of reality and *two* levels of being. How, then, do the pagan and the Christian differ in dealing with the One and the Many question?

We have seen a number of times in this series that the pagan is inevitably left with a never-ending oscillation between his Continuity of Being (One) and his idea of Chance or Fate (Many). In this view the One and the Many are competitive. Some pagan thinkers, therefore, such as Aristotle try desperately to seek a temporary peace between the two, a sort of "cease-fire" around a golden mean. Pagans have to do something like Aristotle in order to utilize language, logic, filing systems, accounting, and social stability.

The Bible-believing Christian, on the other hand, sees the One and the Many in creation as derivative of the One and Many in the Creator. How do the One and the Many fit together in Him? *After rephrasing the question in these terms, it is immediately apparent that the Triunity of God provides the answer.* The Trinity doctrine states that in God's being, which is ultimate reality, both the One and the Many coexist in non-competitive harmony. God has absolute unity and has absolute individuality. No Aristotelian "cease-fire" is needed; eternal harmony prevails.

As we shall see shortly, the Triune Creator, existing as One and as Three, thinks and speaks with unity and diversity. Man as a finite replica of his Creator thinks and speaks in a similar fashion. His language and logic, therefore, bear witness to their origin in the Triune Creator. Out of this view, historically, have come the only human political structures that have honored simultaneously the authority of the state and the authority (rights) of the individual. As Rushdoony writes: "Whatever other influences may have been at work, it is apparent that, in the shaping of the United States, a truly Christian concept of the one and the many was a decisive, if often unrecognized, presupposition." [2]

Thus to the hasty critics who call the Trinity as a contradiction we respond by saying that, just as he lacks a basis for knowledge and ethics, his language and logic are floating in thin air. Somehow they are "just

there” barely able to survive the tug-of-war between the One and the Many in everyday use. Moreover, the pagan can’t even back up his claim of a contradiction in the Trinity doctrine without violating his own “pure” abstract logic categories. To apply his logic, he must invest the terms “God,” “Trinity,” “three,” and “one” with meanings that he brings from his own worldview which contaminates the “purity” of his abstract, objective categories! To tell us of his unbelief he resorts to using language like the One and the Many coexist after all just as the Trinity doctrine implies!

Lesson 116

## BIBLICAL DATA SUPPORTING THE TRINITY DOCTRINE

In light of the often repeated criticism that the Trinity doctrine was imported into the Church from the surrounding pagan culture, the believer should be well aware of the biblical data supporting this doctrine. In the present section the OT data will be presented first, then the NT data.

**OT SUPPORTING DATA.** Most people err concerning OT monotheistic through because they read the OT through the eyes of medieval and modern Judaism. The OT, they believe, teaches that God is a simple unity and that His triune nature is only revealed beginning in the NT. This picture of OT monotheism, however, is one that was built up after OT times by Judaism in reaction against Christian Trinitarian claims. The late-medieval rabbi, Maimonides, for example, taught that God was “absolutely one” using the Hebrew word yachid to describe what he thought was proper Jewish monotheism. Maimonides, however, went far beyond the ancient Jewish OT sources. Even the famous Sh’ma (Deut. 6:4) uses the Hebrew word echad not yachid. Echad means “one” like yachid, but it allows for an inner multiplicity in that oneness. Echad is used in such OT passages as Genesis 1:5 and 2:24 where it clearly refers to a “one” in which there is differentiation. Yachid, on the other hand, is never used in the OT to describe God’s personal essence.[3] The OT obviously taught clear-cut monotheism, but it did not teach the rigid, absolutely unified monotheism of post-biblical Judaism.[4] *The OT differentiation within the “unity” of God appears in at least four ways.*

**Plurality of God’s Self-References.** One body of relevant OT data consists of the use of the plural pronouns by God when speaking of Himself (Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8). What is the explanation for these first person plurals? Some have argued that the plurals in the creation narrative (Gen. 1:26) must refer to God and the angels. This view is contradicted by Psalm 8:5 and Hebrews 2:5-18 that expressly deny that man was created after the pattern of the angels. It also conflicts with clear statements that God *alone* created man (Gen. 2:7, 22; Isa.

44:24). Therefore, this plurality in Genesis 1:26 must be a plurality within His Being, not a plurality of the divine council made up of God and angels as shown in I Kings 22:19-22. Others seek to explain this plurality as “merely” a plural of majesty or the “regal ‘we’”. Such an explanation is thoughtlessly shallow. Why should there have arisen in human language a plurality of majesty if it wasn’t due to the prior truth of the plurality of God? It is not “merely” a plural of majesty; it is a plural of majesty that is incomprehensible in depth and richness—referring to the plurality of Being in God.

The Angel of Yahweh. Another OT indication of the plurality within the one God surrounds the mysterious Angel of Yahweh figure. To perceive what this strange figure reveals, one must thoroughly appreciate the extreme antagonism through the Bible to worship of any created being, including any angel (Isa. 42:8; Acts 10:26; 14:11-15; Rev. 19:10). As a figure apparently distinct from God, the Angel of Yahweh occurs throughout the OT carefully distinguished as a person having his own identity (e.g., Gen. 24:7, 40; I Chron. 21:15-18; Isa. 63:9; Zech. 1:12-13). Nevertheless, this very figure is at the same time identified with and worshipped Yahweh God Himself (Gen. 16:7-13; 22:11-18; 31:11-13; 48:15-16; Exod. 13:21 cf. 14:19; Judg. 6:11-23; 13:9-20)! One can easily conclude that in this instance the OT teaches that at least two persons of some sort are distinguishable within the one God.

In light of NT insistence that no one has ever seen God in His fullness (John 1:18; 6:46; I Tim. 6:15-16; I John 4:12), one can only conclude that this Angel of Yahweh who was seen face to face was the Second Person of the Trinity, God the Son, in preincarnate form. The word God in the four passages just quoted can then be understood to refer to the First Person of the Trinity, God the Father, Who is never really seen.

The Wisdom or Word of Yahweh. A third type of relevant OT data concerns the Wisdom or Word of Yahweh. When God reveals Himself to his OT prophets, it is declared that the “Word of Yahweh came” to them (e.g., Isa. 2:1; 38:4; Jer. 2:2,4,11,13; Ezk. 20:2; Hos. 1:1). This Word is sent to do things for God (Isa. 55:10-11). It delivers the elect from judgment (Ps. 107:20) and controls nature (Ps. 147:15). Moreover, this Word is clearly distinguished from every part of creation (Ps. 33:6-9). Not only is the Word distinguished from all of creation, but it is distinguished from the Creator in Proverbs 8:22-31. Before creation the Word existed, yet it existed with an identity separate from Yahweh (Prov. 8:22-26).

By the end of the OT era Jewish thought had developed this concept of the Word of Yahweh. Aramaic translations and commentaries on the OT, called Targums, frequently mentioned the divine Word of Yahweh. Dr. David L. Cooper relates some of this early Jewish thinking:

*“We shall begin with Genesis 19:24 which reads in the American Revised Version as follows: ‘Then Jehovah rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Jehovah out of heaven. . . .’ Jonathan Ben Uzziel [a Targum] renders the original text of this passage as follows: ‘And the Word of the Lord caused to descend upon the people of Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord of heaven.’ Here we see that the Jehovah who rained the fire is called ‘the Word of Jehovah.’ The translator then used the term, ‘the Word of Jehovah,’ in referring to the One in the sacred text called Jehovah.”[5]*

After mentioning many such instances in the Targums concerning the Word of Jehovah as well as other instances where the same practice of translation was used concerning the Spirit of Jehovah, Cooper concludes:

*“From the quotations I have noted, it becomes clear that the official ancient interpretation of the synagogue was that the Word of Jehovah and the Holy Spirit were divine personalities and were distinguished from the one who is called Jehovah. From all the facts which we have learned thus far, we see that Moses and the Prophets were Trinitarians, and the great leaders of Israel in pre-Christian times were likewise Trinitarians. In view of these facts, then, we can assert with all confidence that Christians who worship the Holy Trinity. . . are simply worshipping the same God who revealed himself to Abraham.”[6]*

Explicit OT References to the Trinity. At least two OT passages explicitly mention the three divine persons of the Trinity. In Isaiah 48:16 Yahweh speaks (note context in 48:12): “From the time that it was, there I am: and now the Lord Jehovah has sent me and his spirit.” Three divine figures are thus seen: Jehovah the First and Last (the Son; cf. Rev. 1:17), the Lord Jehovah (the Father), and his Spirit (the Holy Spirit). Isaiah 61:1 also mentions the Trinity: “The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me; because Jehovah has anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek. . . .” Three divine figures are here again observed: the anointed Jehovah (see the immediate context of “me” in 60:22 where the noun antecedent of pronoun is clearly Jehovah; and see also Jesus’ use of the passage in Luke 4:16-21), the anointing Jehovah (the Father), and the Spirit of Jehovah (the Holy Spirit).

The OT, therefore, has a very definite complexity to its monotheism, a complexity that anticipated greater revelation in NT times about the Trinity. During OT times, when God was giving the biblical framework to this people, He did not emphasize His triune nature, probably because of the surrounding pagan tendencies toward polytheism. (One observes the same danger in the Church age when the Trinity is dissolved into gross tri-theism by Mormonism.) Nevertheless, God did reveal enough of His inner complexity that future revelation would hang together with the OT revelation as one recognizable body of truth.

Lesson 117

NT SUPPORTING DATA. Since Chapter Two provided the NT data supporting the full deity of Jesus Christ, the only remaining area of NT pro-Trinity data concerns the full deity of the Holy Spirit. Is the Holy Spirit in the NT text fully a divine Person, or is the Holy Spirit only an impersonal, shadowy influence, a vague “it”? If He is a fully divine person within the Godhead together with the divine Father and Son, the Trinity is present in the NT.

Conceptually, the general term spirit is visualized in the Bible as breath or wind, something that is active but that is never seen directly (John 3:8). Humankind is sometimes seen as a body of water stirred up and blown about by spiritual forces (Daniel 7; Eph. 4:14). When a speaker would verbally teach someone, he would be said to “pour out his spirit” (Prov. 1:23). In simple physical terms the speaker would be using his breath to form words with his throat, mouth, and lips. “Pouring out of the spirit”, scripturally, does not refer to some non-verbal outburst. To the contrary, *it emphasizes revelation and communication of thought content through spoken human language*. Three agents are thus involved in any self-disclosure: the speaker, the words, and the spirit. Since it already has been shown in the OT that Yahweh had His Word, it should not be surprising that Yahweh had His Spirit which, like the Word, was fully divine, yet distinct. The NT continued that OT picture.

NT verses speak of the Holy Spirit as fully divine. In Acts 5:3-4 Ananias and his wife lie to the Spirit which is described by Peter as lying to God Himself. Clearly the Spirit cannot be vague impersonal influence from God because one cannot be said to lie to an “it.” In II Corinthians 3:17 the terms Lord and Spirit are used synonymously. In I Thessalonians 3:11-13, besides God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, another Lord is mentioned who sanctifies the believer into holiness before the other two figures. This other Lord can be none other than the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 5:5). A similar picture occurs in II Thessalonians 3:5 where one Lord directs believers’ hearts toward God the Father and Jesus Christ. In Acts 28:25-27 the Holy Spirit is claimed to be the speaker of the words of Isaiah 6:9-10, words which the OT clearly ascribes to Yahweh Himself (Isa. 6:8). Again in Hebrews 10:15-17 OT words ascribed to Yahweh (Jer. 31:31-34) are ascribed instead to the Holy

Spirit. These NT verses are not accidental slips; they portray consistent biblical teaching about the deity of the Holy Spirit.[7]

Two NT passages provide classical locations where everything but the word Trinity is used. In Matthew 28:19 the baptismal formula is said to be in the name (note singular form) of the three persons together. Such a sacred formula would never include a mere creature in such close association with the Creator. All three persons are being called God together in this NT reference. Besides this baptismal formula, the famous Pauline benediction of II Corinthians 13:14, too, brings all three persons together as a unity.

In both the OT and the NT, therefore, ample data exists to support the Trinity doctrine. These evidences together with the obvious lack of any similar idea in the surrounding pagan world show why the Church finally settled upon the Trinity doctrine in its great creeds. Critics are wrong to say that this great doctrine was not originally in Israel and the early Church but only came into prominence within the Church from outside pagan sources.

## THE TRINITY DOCTRINE STATED

Lesson 118

We've looked at the preliminary issue of how the Trinity concept is related to the greatest philosophic problem of all time, the One and Many dilemma. We've also seen that this truth emerges from both the OT and NT texts. Now we will take care to state the doctrine so that it will be clear what the Trinity is and what it isn't.

## THE HISTORIC CREEDS

Mainstream Christianity (until recent years when Modernism destroyed orthodox theology everywhere) had always held to the Trinity doctrine. The Nicene Creed as usually recited in Western churches says:

*“I believe in one God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible:  
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God; Begotten of His Father before all worlds [God of God], Light of Light, Very God of Very God; Begotten, not made; Being of one substance [essence] with the Father; by whom all things were made. . . .  
And [I believe] is the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; . . .”[8]*

The Articles of Religion of the Protestant Episcopal Church also states the Trinity doctrine clearly:

***“Article I: There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in the unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”[9]***

The Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith defines the Trinity in these words:

***“There is but one only, living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute. . . .***

***In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost: the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.”[10]***

I will state the classical Trinity doctrine in five distinct propositions:

I. God is Absolutely One. God cannot be divided into parts. He is not a divine being who can be described (as pagan thought tries inevitably to do) by prior categories or attributes. As stated in Part II of this series, God is not made up of a menu of (Q)ualities such as righteousness, justice, omniscience, and love. Isaiah 40:25 clearly denies that there is any such prior category to which God can be likened or classified. Any such categories comprehended by man are (q)ualities that themselves derive from the Creator. Our sense of geometry and space derive from His Omnipresence. Our sense of time derives from His Eternality. His attributes, therefore, are not impersonal Ideals thought by man; they are (Q)ualities of His personal character. God *is* each one of these characteristics entirely. *All* of God is involved in righteousness, *all* of God is involved in justice, and so on.

II. God is Absolutely Three. God always has and always will exist with three distinguishable persons, not one or two or four, but three. There was no change at the creation of the universe. Before creation He had this threeness; after history ends He still will have this triunity. Dr. Vern Poythress, with earned doctorates in both mathematics and theology, discusses this part of triunity with great insight:

***“God has an aggregative nature, in the sense that the various Persons of the Godhead, and His attributes, are distinguished from one another. This is the eternal foundation for the science of set theory. . . .’Believe in God, believe also in me’ (John 14:1). . . .’[The Father] will give you another Counselor. . .’ (14:16). . . .The personal names Father, Son, and Spirit already imply that there are distinct ‘aggregates’ within the Godhead.’[11]***

### III. God's Threeness Refers to Modes of Being, Not Just Roles.

While it is true that one can distinguish the roles the Father, Son, and Spirit play in the plan of salvation, these role differences are not all of what distinguishes the three. Theologians refer to these role differences as the “economic trinity.” However, even if there were no plan of salvation, God would still have a distinguishable threeness. It is, in fact, from this prior threeness, called the “ontological trinity,” that the different roles of the Father, Son, and Spirit in the plan of salvation come from. Defining the threeness of God only in terms of roles leaves the door open to the heresy of Modal Monarchianism discussed in Chapter Two.

### VI. The Subordination Within the Trinity Does Not Refer to Essence.

Although the Son “is begotten” from the Father, and the Spirit “proceeds” from both the Father and the Son, this subordination within the Trinity doesn’t diminish the essence of either the Son or the Spirit. The term “only begotten” in no way refers to a creative act as the Nicean Creed made clear (“Begotten, *not made*”). This term, instead, has in view the love of the Father for the Son modeled on a finite scale by Abraham’s love for his miraculously born son Isaac (Gen. 22:2,12)(see Appendix B). It describes the relationship between the Father and the Son, not the derivation of the Son from the Father. The term “proceeds” in no way refers to origination as the Westminster Creed made clear (“the Holy Ghost *eternally* proceeding from the Father and the Son”). This term has in view the sending of the Spirit to do the work planned by the Father such as in creation (Gen. 1:2) and building the Church (John 14:16; 16:7), and this work is work that God alone can perform. It describes the relationship of the Spirit to the Son and the Father. The apparent subordination of the Son and the Spirit cannot, therefore, refer to any lesser essence in these Divine Persons.

V. With Respect to the Salvation of Man the Triunity Is Perceived With Both Threeness and Oneness. The workings of the Trinity in the plan of salvation as revealed to man (i.e., revelation of the “economic Trinity”) show both threeness and oneness. The Father is never seen according to John 1:18. Dr. Leon Morris comments on this text:

*“There are some passages like Exod. 24:9-11 which explicitly affirm that some men have seen God. What then does John mean? Surely that in His essential being God has never yet been seen of men. Men had their visions of God, but these were all partial. The theophanies of the Old Testament did not and could not reveal God’s essential being. But Christ has now made such a revelation. As Calvin puts it, ‘when he says that none has seen God, it is not to be understood of the outward seeing of the physical eye. He means generally that, since God dwells in inaccessible light, He cannot be known except in Christ, His lively image.’”[12]*

The Son is the center of revelation whether as the Angel of Yahweh in the OT or as Jesus Christ in the NT. The Holy Spirit, like the Father, is never seen directly. The Father is looked upon as the source of every blessing (Eph. 1:3) whereas the Son is perceived as bringing the blessings about in history (Eph. 1:6-10). The Holy Spirit applies and reveals the Son's work (Rom. 8:26; I Cor. 2:6-16). Thus the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are seen in three distinct roles.

Nevertheless, as difficult as it is to understand, this threeness alternates with a oneness. Poythress expresses it well:

*“The incomprehensibility of God’s aggregative nature is expressed by facts such as the mutual indwelling of members of the Trinity, and the inter-penetration of attributes. . . .(John 14:10-11). Somehow we find that all the members of the Trinity participate, in their own ways, in even those works which we associate most distinctly with one particular member of the Trinity. In a certain sense, the members of the Trinity are not distinguished, because there is only one Lord (Deut. 6:4-5).”[13]*

The Trinity doctrine cannot be stated as a comprehensively clear concept because of man's finiteness and its limitations on attaining the godlike universal categories Aristotle and other pagan thinkers required for their autonomous logic but never found. Biblical logic, on the other hand, by recognizing its creature limitations knows that it has a firm foundation in God's triune nature as we shall see below.

## DOCTRINAL ILLUSTRATIONS

Of the numerous attempts to illustrate the Trinity from the created order the most intriguing examples were first noted by Professor Nathan R. Wood over sixty years ago in a little book entitled, The Secret of the Universe.<sup>[14]</sup> Chief among Wood's illustrations was the triunity of space, mass/energy, and time. These three terms can basically describe any natural phenomenon.<sup>[15]</sup> We can evaluate proposed illustrations of the Trinity such as Dr. Wood's by substituting its features into the five Trinitarian propositions discussed above.

The first proposition stated that God is absolutely one; He cannot be divided into parts; He *is* each attribute and person entirely. Wood speaks to this feature:

*“Each one of the three [space, matter/energy, and time] is itself the whole. For the physical universe is all of it space. . . realized in motion and in successiveness. It is also all of it matter or motion, embodying space, and existing as successiveness. It is also all of it time, space, and motion in the form of successiveness.”[16]*

The universe is absolutely one; it cannot be divided into parts; it is each part entirely.

The second Trinitarian proposition stated that God is absolutely three; He always has and always will exist with three distinguishable persons, not one or two or four. Wood notes the absolute threeness of the universe:

*“The three are so much three that no one of the three can exist without the other two. For space, potential activity, comes into full existence only in actual motion; and this motion exists inevitably as successiveness, which is time. . . .Secondly, matter or motion is of course that potential activity of space realized. It cannot exist except as the embodiment of space. And on the other hand motion exists as successiveness, or time. . . .Thirdly, time in turn exists only as space comes into motion and motion into successiveness. Time in the physical world cannot exist except as the result of space and motion.”[17]*

The third proposition describing the Trinity insisted that the threeness refers to modes of God’s being, not just god’s various roles. Quite obviously in Wood’s illustration of the universe, the threeness does not refer to roles the universe does but to modes of being of the universe. Space, matter- energy, and time denote things the universe is, not things it does.

The fourth proposition mentioned above specified that the subordination within the Trinity does not refer to essence. The Son and the Spirit are not any less God than the Father. Nevertheless, there is a certain progression revealed in the Bible that moves from the Father through the Son to the Spirit. The cosmic triune model of Wood also demonstrates this same kind of subordination. Wood points out:

*“Space is the source. It is space which is traversed and measured or divided up by the rate of motion, with time as a result. Motion links space and time together; it emerges from space and issues in time; and it can be measured and expressed only in terms of both space and time. Time is commensurate with space to this extent, and only to this extent, that since time is the product when motion emerges and traverses space, time is commensurate with space through motion.”[18]*

Thus Wood has shown that there is a parallel triunity in the universe which has a certain progression that moves from space through motion to time. Nonetheless, one cannot argue that space is superior to motion or time. All are equally true essence.

Finally, the fifth proposition about the Trinity noted that the three divine persons are perceived by man distinctively. Perception centers in the Son; the Father and the Spirit remain unseen. In wood's model man's direct observation centers on matter/energy; space and time are invisible in themselves.

Wood further showed that each one of the cosmic trinity—space, matter/energy, and time—is a triunity in itself. Space and time each have three dimensions. Wood argued that matter/energy, too, has three dimensions, *viz.*, energy itself, motion which is energy manifested, and phenomena which are differentiations in motion. Wood's model is one of the most complete illustrations of the Trinity known. Other models of the Trinity can be compared by using the five Trinitarian propositions discussed previously. The fact that such models exist can never be used to prove the Trinity, but their existence can be used to illustrate the Trinity and to show that the concept is not utterly foreign to everyday experience in the real universe. Indeed, everyday experience due to creation reveals the nature of the Creator!

Lesson 119

## **PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE TRINITY DOCTRINE**

If the Trinity doctrine expounds the heart of God's character, the implications must be momentous. What do these momentous implications look like in everyday life? We shall look at three areas: the One and the Many problem in everyday life; the core of personal relationships; and the nature of logic in everyday thinking.

### **THE ONE AND MANY IN EVERYDAY LIFE**

We said above that the Trinity lies behind the One and the Many dilemma. On the Creature level of being the One and the Many eternally exist in balance and harmony: God is at once One Person and also Three. On the creature level of being examples of the One and the Many abound from filing systems to accounting, from language to logic, and in each political structure. In everyday life involving these activities all men—believer and unbeliever alike—intuitively assume a balance between the One and the Many.

Let's observe further examples that show even more details of the One/Many Trinity in everyday life. We noted in Part II of this series that human society is built upon certain structures or "divine institutions": (DI#1) responsible labor; (DI#2) marriage; (DI#3) family; and (DI#4) civil government. To marriage, family, and civil government Professor Henry Krabbendam adds the local church and the work place. He calls these "one and many spheres" which possess "authority structures" that

define relationships between superior and inferior participants (husband-wife, parent-child, government-subject, elder-member, and employer-employee). Such spheres and structures, writes Krabbendam, constitute part of the knowledge of God constantly seen mentioned in Romans 1:18-20:

*“[They] are so endemic to created reality and are such an indelible part of its tapestry that any individual at any given place and at any given time finds himself without fail in one or more [of them]. Nobody can ever extricate himself from them. . . .The tapestry of created reality with [these spheres and structures] is a reflection of the Trinitarian God. Because God is God, he puts the stamp of his being inevitably and indelibly upon all of his creation. . . .Literally, every part, every aspect, every phrase, every sphere, every structure reflects the being of God. All men ‘bump’ into God at all times, in all places, in all settings, and in all circumstances. Divine manifestation, in short, in spite of any and all attempts to hold it at arms’ length or to suppress it, is irrepressible.”[19]*

Indeed every attempt of sinful man to live out his independent impulse conflicts with these spheres and structures and the Trinity behind them.

*“Self centeredness in the one-and-many spheres, and self assertion in the authority structures are declarations of war against both God and the neighbor. They are marked by hate and conflict, and result in sin and chaos. On the other hand, the God-centeredness and neighbor-centeredness that image the Triune God in self-denial, self-sacrifice, and submission promote peace. They display love and harmony and produce holiness and prosperity.”[20](Emphasis added)*

When modern feminism began in the 1970s with its attack upon the divine institution of marriage (DI#2), some evangelical female authors tried to import it into the evangelical movement. To accept secular feminism, however, required one to deny that equality of being could coexist with the classic husband-wife relationship. Yet if the classic marriage authority structure is grounded in the Trinity structure, then *overturning it logically forces one to deny the Trinity!* As I discuss in Chapter Three, these authors tried hard to get around this problem but in the end failed. They had become so confused about the subordination issue that they couldn’t comprehend the central doctrine of the Christian faith.[21]

## **PRIMACY OF THOUGHT AND VERBAL COMMUNICATION IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

The Trinity provides the archetype for personal relationships. What implications follow from this fact? One key area of personal relationships which is strongly downgraded today in pagan society is the area of shared thinking and verbal communication between creatures

made in God's image. This is so both at the philosophical level where language as a truth carrier is under tremendous attack and at the street level where emotional outbursts are substituted for thoughtful speech. In evangelical circles the same trend is occurring even with respect to the greatest of all personal relationships—that between God and man! God's Word to man, the Bible, is no longer taught systematically and in depth; and man's verbal response to God, prayer, often ranges from trite babble to unintelligible sounds mislabeled as "speaking in tongues." Modern hymnbooks as tools of corporate worship reflect increasingly a *substitution of the song writer's private feelings for God's publicly revealed truths*.

Such tendencies simply recapitulate what pagan oriental religions experienced centuries ago. *Without a personal Triune Creator, there is no eternal, absolute basis for interpersonal communication: the gods, men, and nature all coexist inside a vast impersonal cosmos.* Dr. Lit-sen Change, a Christian convert from Zen Buddhism wrote of this oriental viewpoint:

"The following statement ascribed to Bodhi-Dharma, the founder of Zen in China, is most clear on this point:

*A special transmission outside the scriptures,  
No dependence upon words and letters,  
Direct pointing to the soul of man,  
Seeing into the nature and attainment of Buddhahood.  
To Zen, scriptures are only so-called 'fingers pointing to the moon' or a 'ferry boat in which to cross a stream.' As the finger and boat are simply the means and not the ends, so are the scriptures or words. [Zen teachers] never take them as the canon of truth. Therefore, to Zen, neither logic nor metaphysics is to be relied upon for insight."*[22]

The pagan mind tends to establish a barrier between verbal expression and its accompanying emotion. In modern literature classes, obsessed as they are with twentieth century linguistic theory, prose and poetry are often separated in this regard with poetic form being treated as "beyond" verbal communication. This error was noted decades ago by evangelical apologist Francis Schaeffer:

*"What form is to the artist, words are in general communication. The use of words clearly defined and dealt with rationally gives form and certainty in communication. . . .Poetry undoubtedly adds something to prose form. In the Psalms something is communicated to us which would not be so in a bare prose account. . . .However, if there is an absolute divorce between the defined verbalization rationally comprehended on the one hand and (for example) bare poetic form on the other, no certain communication comes across to the reader. The most the reader can do is to use the bare poetic form as a quarry out of which his own emotions can create something."*[23]

In other words, there is no longer a personal relationship between the author and the reader. Such a void follows from the pagan deception that there can be no personal relationship between the divine Author of Scripture and the human reader because the God of the Bible, in this view, doesn't exist.

By contrast the biblical position is that "it is not good that man be alone" (Gen. 2:18). Adam through the thought and verbal expression of naming animals learned of his need for a helper made like him to whom he voiced the first human conversation (Gen. 2:23). Analogously, at the Creator's level of being, the Triune God is not alone. The Father and the Son had eternal conversation (John 17:5, 24; I Pet. 1:20). At the *core* of personal relationships whether at the Creator level or at the creature level lies thought and language, twentieth century philosophers to the contrary notwithstanding.

The Trinity of God, therefore, preserves His self-sufficiency. He depends upon no being outside of Himself for functioning as a communicating person. By contrast, the solitary monotheism of later Judaism and Islam, virtually *require* God to create beings outside of Himself in order that He might not be alone. Such denials of the Trinity thus deny also the self-sufficiency of the personal God.

### **LOGIC IN EVERYDAY THINKING**

A third practical implication of the truth of the Trinity concerns how we all use logic in ordinary everyday thinking. Such street use of logic is quite unlike the "modern math" that was injected into public education a decade ago. Such formal logic consists of mechanical rules to manipulate symbols on paper (or now on computer screens!). Symbolic manipulation, however, even though it might be valid by specified rules, cannot yield meaning until the symbols are interpreted in terms of everyday language. We need to know specific cases or occurrences in the real world in order to fill in any abstract formal logic with meaningful content. The clerk in the corner store has to work with specific currency to make change, has to recognize genuine dollar bills from counterfeit bills, and has to relate the money to the items purchased.

Poythress has shown how the Trinity is the basis for all such logic in everyday life. Using such passages as John 5:19 ("The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise") he notes that it compares to formal implication: "the Father does 'x'  $\supset$  the Son does 'x'". The symbol " $\supset$ " is the symbol for formal implication. Thus if the Father resurrects, the Son resurrects (John 5:21). Clearly, however, this formal

implication doesn't work for every imaginable 'x'. If the Father begets the Son, it is not true that the Son begets the Son.

*“Such a substitution is obviously not an appropriate instance within the intended range of (x). The universality of “(x)” extends over all the usual attributes of God, but does not include actions unique to one Person of the Trinity. Since God is incomprehensible, we cannot specify beforehand exhaustively all the instances that will or will not be within the range of (x), though we have a general idea. In general, we may say that [a specific predicate] must be a genuine instantiation of the generality expressed in [the implication statement]. A genuine instantiation of something. . . is what it is by virtue of being in analogical relation to the [Creator level truth], namely the Word as an instantiation of God in John 1:1.”[24]*

Poythress here uses “instantiation” to refer to the quality of the Trinity manifest in John 1:1 where the Word exists as a specific Person, an instance or *instantiation* of God. He notes further that “the Word was with God” showing an *associational* aspect of the Trinity: the personal context in which the Word exists. Finally Poythress notes the *classificational* aspect in the clause “and the Word was God” where the category “God” is given. Thus from the Trinity, there is revealed three aspects to all genuine logic rather than the one classificational aspect Aristotle and his pagan followers have insisted upon.

Poythress continues:

*“The point of these observations is that derivation by substitution is never the merely mechanical process that many specialists in logic imagine it to be. . . . We must always judge whether a given case has the right sorts of instantiation, classification, and association. The judgment relies on appeal to a standard. And the ultimate standard is no other than God Himself, in his Triunal character. . . . Within a Christian framework, the analogical character of categories makes it necessary to check on the content or meaning of each statement, and to evaluate it within a larger network of contexts, including the context of persons who are reasoning, the situation being reasoned about, and ultimately the context of God himself. . . . Within a biblical worldview, logic is. . . Trinitarian.”[25]*

## SUMMARY

Without the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity obtained from the data of Scripture, man is left in a morass of confusion: the claims of Jesus Christ mean nothing intelligible; the problem of the One and Many lies unsolved; man's personal relationships lack a clear model; and logical thought has no foundation. The orthodox Trinity doctrine of the Christian Church did not arise from outside Greek philosophy for the simple reason that the pagan world never had such an idea. On the contrary, the Trinity doctrine was painfully articulated only after centuries of discussion

during which many of the cultic heresies were tested by the Scriptures and found wanting.

*Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!  
Early in the morning out song shall rise to Thee;  
Holy, Holy, Holy! Merciful and Mighty!  
God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity.*

## END NOTES FOR APPENDIX A

130. Credit for this insight goes to scholars in the Van Til camp such as R. J. Rushdoony, Vern S. Poythress, and Greg L. Bahnsen.
131. Rousas J. Rushdoony, The One and The Many, Nutley, NJ: The Craig Press, 1971, p. 19.
132. Years ago an excellent study of this point was published by the American Board of Missions to the Jews. The author was a Hebrew Christian rabbi, Leopold Cohn and it was entitled “Do Christians Worship Three Gods?”
133. Aubrey Johnson, The One and The Many in the Israelite Conception of God, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961 [1942], p. 37.
134. David L. Cooper, The God of Israel, Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 1945, p. 89.
135. Ibid., p. 93.
136. Further discussion of the personal deity of the Holy Spirit may be found in any standard work of pneumatology such as those by Kuyper, Walvoord, and Ryrie.
137. Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 [1877], II, 58f.
138. The Book of Common Prayer (New York: Morehouse-Gorham Co., 1944, p. 603.
139. The Confession of Faith (Inverness, Scotland: Eccleslitho, North Church Place, 1970), pp. 24-27. The Confession was issued in 1647.
140. Vern S. Poythress, “A Biblical View of Mathematics,” Foundations of Christian Scholarship, Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1976, p. 181.
141. Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1971, p. 113.
142. Poythress, p. 181.
143. Nathan R. Wood, The Secret of the Universe, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1955 [1936].
144. Some phenomena are described indirectly in terms of motion of matter in space over time such as temperature and electric charge.
145. Wood., p. 139.
146. Ibid., p. 138.
147. Ibid., p. 160.
148. Henry Krabbendam, “Cornelius Van Til: The Methodological Objective of a Biblical Apologetics,” The Westminster Theological Journal, Westminster Theological Seminary, 57 (1995), 130-131.
149. Ibid., p. 132.
150. Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, All We’re Meant To Be, Waco, TX: Word Books, 1974.

151. Lit-Sen Chang, Zen Existentialism, Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1969, p. 32f.
152. Francis Schaeffer, The God Who Is There, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968, p. 112f.
153. Vern S. Poythress, "Reforming Ontology and Logic in the Light of the Trinity: An Application of Van Til's Idea of Analogy," The Westminster Theological Journal, Westminster Theological Seminary, 57 (1995), 206.
154. Ibid., 206f.

## APPENDIX B: JESUS' USAGE OF THE TERMS "SON OF GOD" AND "SON OF MAN"

Lesson 129

In Chapter Two we learned that there were two parallel streams of OT revelation—one stream speaking of God's future place on earth among men and the other stream, of a godly Davidic king in this future age. We also learned that Jesus brought together in Himself these two streams, following the converging tendency observed in OT passages such as Psalm 2; Proverbs 30:4; Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Micah 5:2; and Psalm 110. To show how Jesus accomplished this new revelation by merely extending trends already present in the OT is the object of this appendix. We will now study Jesus' usage of the OT terms "Son of God" and "Son of Man."

### JESUS' USAGE OF THE TERM "SON OF GOD"

The title Son of God apparently originated in the antediluvian era when the primary function of civil government (capital punishment) was reserved for angels. In this previous world, men could be executed by angels for trying to violate God's boundaries around the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24). These angelic rulers, however, apparently corrupted their way with mankind and were judged in the great flood of Noah's day (Gen. 6:2).

After the present Noahic civilization began and capital punishment was transferred to mankind, God refers to civil rulers as "gods" (Ps. 82), a point Jesus refers to in His defense of the title "Son of God" (John 10:34-36). Eventually, in the days following the making of the Davidic Covenant, the Scripture looks forward to a special king who would rule the Kingdom of God (note the ruling authority expressed in Pss. 2, 72, 89). As history continued, it became evident that only a very special person, a sinless perfect king, could rule God's Kingdom successfully. Gradually by Jesus' day, an ideal Son-of-God/Messiah figure had come to exist in popular imagination. Jesus revealed the truth of the incarnation by enlarging this term to refer to a human king who was not only perfect but who literally was the essence of God. The term "Son of God" now was no longer a metaphor.

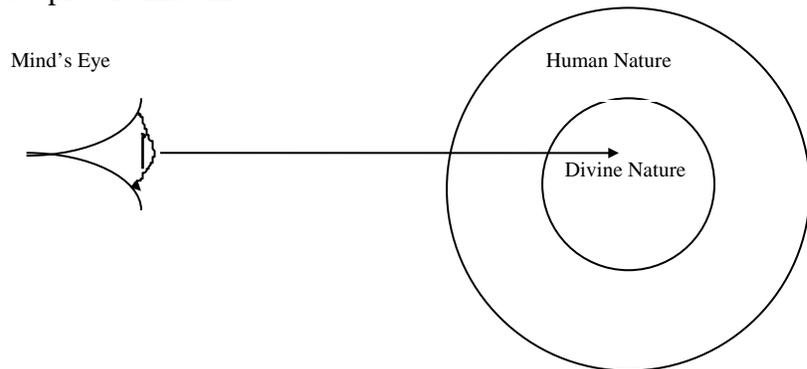
Of this advance in meaning, Professor Karl Adam has written:

*"At the time of Jesus the Messiah was also called the Son of God. . . . Jesus took it over in those circles where it was familiar to his listeners."*

*But he gave it a new, profound sense. He transformed it into a metaphysical expression. . . . We repeat: It is Jesus' original act, out of his consciousness of his divine nature, that he should have called himself 'Son' in a metaphysical sense."*[1]

Jesus, then, originated the NT sense of the term, Son of God, but He did so in line with the potential sense already existing in the OT. The two streams of revelation mentioned above had already tended to converge as we learned in Chapter Two. In fact, the OT passage in Proverbs 30:4 already spoke of a literal son of God. What Jesus did was to make such a convergence actual instead of potential. Students of the Word of God in Jesus' day were expected to be ready for this new revelation, based as it was upon the very passages they had studied. Had they studied with the intent of meeting the Lord, they would have been prepared to meet His Son.

Conceptually, the term, Son of God, emphasizes Jesus' deity but not in the way most people seem to think when they make this statement. The term looks at the human king sitting on David's throne and pierces into the king's inner nature which is found to be divine. Schematically, one has a picture like this:



The end point of the arrow rests on the divine nature rather than on the human nature, emphasizing deity. The viewing of this divine nature, however, is through the human nature of a reigning authority with the power of judgment over all. The Son-of-God term, therefore, is a means of revelation concerning who Jesus really is.

### **JESUS' USAGE OF THE TERM "SON OF MAN"**

The second title Jesus used to reveal the incarnation, the Son of Man, had a different development. It apparently originated in Daniel 7 where the spiritual-ethical character of the five successive kingdoms in history was pictured. Each kingdom was pictured by a living creature. Only the fifth kingdom, the Kingdom of God, was pictured by a human. It alone is revealed as a kingdom that truly fits the created function of humanity.

The previous four kingdoms listed in Daniel 7 were all to be sub-human or animal in their spiritual-ethical character. Although the son of man symbol in Daniel 7 pictured the people of this fifth kingdom, it also pictured the founder of the kingdom. Each of the previous four kingdoms had a founder (cf. Dan. 2:37ff), and it was to be the same with the fifth one, too. Thus the son of man picture had a potential sense of a coming historical founder. Eventually, according to Professor Adam:

***“[Late Jewish apocalyptic writings] regarded the one like the son of man not simply as the symbol of the people of the saints, but also as their original representative, and they ascribed to him a personal pre-existence in the Ancient of Days.”[2]***

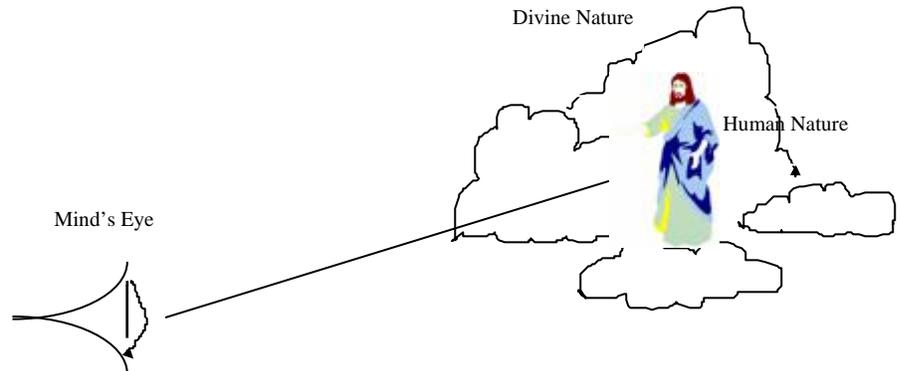
The founder of the future fifth kingdom, the Kingdom of God on earth, therefore, was seen to have existed from eternity in heaven.

Jesus, then, had the Son-of-Man term available to Him to indicate His pre-existence and descent from heaven to earth to establish His kingdom. His kingdom, unlike all those of previous history, would alone be fit for man to live the way God had created him to live. To this concept Jesus added the “suffering servant” motif from Isaiah 53 because the fifth kingdom would be set up on earth only after sin had been dealt with righteously (see Matt. 16:21; 17:9,12,22; 20:18; 26:45). The Son of Man, according to Jesus’ new view, had come to earth from above to suffer for sins and later to found His kingdom. Again Adam writes:

***“This [concept of the Son of Man] is his original creation. . .going beyond all the prophets, and concentrating their scattered illumination into one consciousness that he is the judge and lord of mankind. . . . If Jesus had called himself God from the very beginning of his activities, he would have been stoned on the first day. If he called himself the Son of God, he would have turned the thoughts of his contemporaries not towards heaven and the right hand of the Ancient of Days, but to the earth and to man. . . .”[3]***

Jesus, therefore, picked up another term from the OT, pregnant with prophetic meaning, and enlarged it to include the new revelation of the incarnation.

Conceptually, the Son-of-Man term emphasizes Jesus’ humanity but again not in the way people often think it does. The term looks at the eternal, pre-existing God who undertakes to establish a kingdom headed by a man created in His image. This kingdom fulfills the creation mandate that man will subdue the world for God. Paul picks up on this fulfillment theme when he refers to Jesus as the Second Adam in Romans 5:12-21 and I Corinthians 15:20ff. The picture looks like this:



the end point of the arrow rests upon humanity rather than upon the clouds of God's Majesty, but it reaches that point only by first entering into God's designs and intents. That Jesus' contemporaries realized the stupendous claims implicit in the Son-of-Man term note the reaction of the high priest in Matthew 23:65.

### SUMMARY

Jesus revealed His divine-human nature, the truth of the incarnation, by pulling out of the Son-of-God and Son-of-Man terms the truths implicit in them. As the Son of God, Jesus fulfills the stream of revelation concerning God's place with man in the universe. As the Son of Man, Jesus fulfills the stream of revelation that says man will one day reach the goal set for him at creation. Both streams of revelation converge in Christ, the God-man.

## APPENDIX C: THE PROTESTANT DEBATE OVER THE EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT

Lesson 141

In Chapter Four as we studied the death of the King I mentioned that there arose in Church history, following the clarification of the nature of the atonement, a debate over the extent of the atonement. Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy never have been too concerned about this question because in their theologies the extent of the atonement is contingent upon one's good works and penitence. The Protestant Reformers, however, on the basis of Scripture, took a very hard stand that the atonement completely satisfied God's justice. Once this point was made, the question was raised that if the atonement satisfied God's justice, why do some men remain unsaved? In trying to answer this question, a division occurred among Protestants that remains until this day. In this appendix I briefly note why this issue is important in evangelism and sanctification, how the debate developed in Protestant circles, and the present approach of many biblical fundamentalists, including myself.

### WHY ARGUE OVER THIS ISSUE? . . .

Let's examine the issue a little bit before talking about its importance. If the atonement "satisfies" God's justice, why are not all men thereby saved? If all men are not saved, then isn't the atonement limited after all—limited to only those who believe? If its benefits accrue only to those who believe, the elect, then in what sense is the King's death a "propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (I Jn. 2:2)? If it is thus limited by men's belief or unbelief, isn't it merely a provisional and potential saving action but not an actual one? If potential, then doesn't it follow that something more must be *added* to the so-called *finished* work of Christ? If something must be added, what is it? Human choice? Virtue? Faith? Good works? Right here we come face to face with the basic doctrines of election, justification, faith, and sanctification!

### . . . BECAUSE IT SHAPES THE BASIC TRUTHS UNDERLYING EVANGELISM AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE!

Let's look at each of the four basic doctrines and their relationship to the atonement question.

The Doctrine of Election. We studied the doctrine of election as it was revealed through the call of Abraham in Part III of this series. Election has to do with God's sovereign choices. It insists that God "calls the shots", not man. If, then, God intended to save all men by having His Son die for their sins but in the end all are not saved, what does this fact

do to our view of His sovereignty? Are His intentions in conflict with His sovereign choices? And how can He remain sovereign if men's decisions to accept or reject the Cross in the end control the extent of the atonement? If we say that He elected upon the basis of His foreknowledge of men's response to the Cross, isn't this the saying the same thing—men initiate the action and God “seconds” it? Suppose we take the other approach and postulate that the atonement is limited to only the elect. Then, the preaching of the Cross to those who reject, to the non-elect, cannot be a valid “call.” As a strong Reformed theology professor acquaintance of mine once said “if I knew who the non-elect were, I wouldn't bother to preach to them.” Obviously, the extent of the atonement is closely linked to the truths of election.

The Doctrine of Justification. If justification is somehow based upon the atonement and it is not sufficient to remove all my sin when I initially believe in Christ, isn't the atonement in some fashion limited in my life? If we die physically after being justified, aren't we still under the Edenic death sentence for sin? If we all have to appear before the judgment seat of Christ in the future, aren't we still in some way identified with sin? If the atonement is thus limited in those who believe and apparently only partially effective, how can we ever be sure we are wholly justified before God?

The Doctrine of Faith. If the atonement is limited and saving for the elect, what role does faith play in appropriating salvation? Is it necessary? Or, from our human perspective how do we know that we are of the elect? If false faith of mere “professing” Christians exists, how is genuine faith to be distinguished from the false? If, to answer this question, I must ponder my faithfulness, then what role does the Cross play as an object of faith? On the other hand, if the atonement is unlimited but ineffective without faith, then isn't faith again the center of action rather than the Cross? In this case, doesn't faith somehow become a meritorious good work?

The Doctrine of Sanctification. Are post-salvation sins covered in the atonement, or is it limited in this respect? If the benefits of the atonement must be appropriated by faith, what happens when this faith fails? Do these benefits fluctuate with the ups and downs in the Christian life? If, however, the atonement is not so limited, why must we forgive in order to be forgiven, confess our sins, repent, and be disciplined when we sin?

## THE HISTORY OF THE DEBATE

Lesson 142

This debate is not an easy one to follow. The reason for the difficulty is that the various parties to the debate use the same terms in different ways. Perhaps a better way of saying it is that the disputants bring to the table different sets of ideological “baggage.” Hopefully,

therefore, if I clarify some of this “baggage” that accompanies the terms used, the debate will be a bit easier to follow.

Preliminary Considerations. With a Satisfactory Atonement along side the obvious continuation of evil in history, the Protestant mentality centered upon the plan behind the atonement. A plan involves the choice of the planner. In this case, God’s sovereignty came to the fore. How is this sovereign attribute to be viewed? Do we think of it abstractly, as a prime quality “cleansed” from all historical connotation? Or do we view it in light of the Creator-creature distinction?

If we think of sovereignty as an abstract property or a universal classification that belongs to both God and the creation, then we haven’t broken with Aristotelian logic. We are still enmeshed in the pagan idea of the Continuity of Being wherein both God and man are on the same level of existence. Immediately, we find ourselves with an internal logical contradiction: two beings on the same level cannot have total sovereignty.

If, however, we think of the Creator-creature distinction and derive our view of sovereignty within that distinction, we find no such contradiction. God’s divine (Q)uality of sovereignty is distinct from man’s human (q)uality of choice. The two are on different levels of existence. We still are no closer to explaining how this condition can be, but we no longer have an internal logical contradiction. In the ensuing brief narration of the Protestant debate keep these two ways of viewing sovereignty in mind.

Development of the Debate. In Luther and Calvin (1509-1564) there is little or no evidence of the limited atonement idea. Their focus is upon Christ as the believer’s savior and source of assurance, *viz.*, that Christ died for him. Wrote Calvin: “if we have been chosen in Him, we shall not find assurance of our election in ourselves. . . .Christ [Himself] is the mirror wherein we must. . . .contemplate our election”[1]. Thus each person at the point of saving faith knows without doubt that Christ died for him or her. The elect are those creatures who come to this faith in post-fall history. However God in eternity past viewed His plan, He viewed it as involving real history in which there was a fall.

Following Calvin a number of Reformers, such as Theodore Beza (1519-1605) entertained an abstract approach to God’s sovereignty that led to the limited atonement doctrine. Their reasoning was simple. God from all eternity had a plan expressed in His “eternal decrees.” Since only the elect are saved, it must be that the atonement was designed only for them. In essence, their argument was a straightforward reasoning from effect to cause. This approach, however, quickly affected faith and assurance. If Christ died only for the elect, then how can I know He died

for me? I can't know that He died for me directly—that would require omniscience—so my assurance must come from inspecting my “fruit”, the evidences of the Holy Spirit's work in my heart. Luther and Calvin had argued earlier that looking inwardly at my fallen nature only leads to anxiety so that one must look *outwardly* to the Cross of Christ instead! The “second generation” Reformers coming after Luther and Calvin, because of their system, had to look *inwardly* for assurance. Thus the limited atonement doctrine effectively divorced faith and assurance. In the days of Luther and Calvin, faith *was* assurance that Christ died for me; in the later days of the Reformers assurance could only follow and reinforce faith—to show evidence of election and the coverage of my sin by the atonement. Assurance thus became for them “faith in faith” or persevering faith evidenced by the fruit in one's life.

Soon after limited atonement had become dominant in Reformed circles, one of the Reformers, Jacob Arminius (1559-1609), rejected limited atonement and taught:

*“that. . . Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, died for all men and for every man, so that he has obtained for them all, by his death on the cross, redemption and the forgiveness of sin; yet that no one actually enjoys this forgiveness of sins except the believer, according to the word of the gospel of John iii.16: ‘God so loved the world. . .’ And in the First Epistle of John ii.2: ‘And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world.’”[2]*

The unlimited atonement, according to Arminius, is for all men potentially, but not actually. What makes it actually apply to me is my act of faith. God chose the elect, in this view, upon the basis of foreseen persevering faith. Arminius then added that one could lose this faith, in which case it would be shown that he did not have true persevering faith and was not of the elect.

Arminius' teachings were rejected because they seemed to depose God from His sovereignty and replace Him with man's choice. At the Synod of Dort (1619) it was stated over against Arminius that:

*“It was by the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross. . . should effectively redeem. . . all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation. . . ; that he should confer upon them faith, which, together with all other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, he purchased for them by his death”[3].*

In this view man's response to the Cross is clearly a passive one, derived from the Holy Spirit's regenerating work. Later, the Westminster Confession (1643) systematized Reformed thought into the form it continues in today. Summarized by the abbreviation “TULIP”, it included (T)otal depravity, (U)nconditional election, (L)imited atonement, (I)rresistable grace, and (P)erseverance of faith.

All Calvinists were not happy with the Dort statement against Arminianism. They were troubled by the texts Arminius had used which did emphasize the atonement's application to all men (e.g., John 3:16; 4:42; Rom. 5:15-18; II Cor. 5:14-20; I Tim. 2:4-6; II Pet. 2:1; 3:9; I John 2:2). One of these people was Moise Amyraut (1596-1664) who taught theology at Saumer, France. Although his teachings were called heretical in Holland, they were accepted by Calvinists in France. His position was this: "God wills all men to be saved, on condition they believe—a condition in which they could well fulfill in the abstract, but which, in fact, owing to inherited corruption, they stubbornly reject, so that this universal will for salvation actually saves no one" [4]

In the centuries since the Reformation, Protestantism has been divided over this issue. Until modern liberalism destroyed orthodoxy in most denominations, Arminianism prevailed in Methodist and Pentecostal circles while Calvinism in Presbyterian and Reformed circles. Since present day "Bible fundamentalism" is largely dispensational which originated in the Calvinist camp (broadly speaking), it tends to follow a mild version of Calvinism that resembles Amyraldianism.

Observations about the Debate. The second generation Reformers in their desire to strengthen Protestantism over against the Roman Catholic anti-Protestant reaction tried to "systematize" Protestant doctrine after the manner of scholastic logic inherited from Rome. In other words, they mixed scriptural truths (newly re-discovered in the Reformation) with a methodology shared with their opponents. They had not yet reformed their methodological tools. The problem with these scholastic tools is that they bore the stamp of the pagan philosopher Aristotle. Aristotle's logic is tightly linked to his philosophical categories, categories which reflect earthly thinking, not heavenly thinking (cf. Col. 2:8).

Calvin's successor, Beza, for example, devoted more weight to an argument from effect to cause in discussing the atonement rather than to exegesis of the Scriptural texts. In so doing, he absorbs the Aristotelian concepts of universal categories which apply to Creator and creature in the same fashion. God's sovereignty, therefore, for Beza and those who follow his approach is conceived of as an abstract "cause." This focus tends to obliterate created history. At the end of history, what about the vast community of unbelieving men who go without the eternal benefits of the atonement? That condition must have been caused by God's sovereignty. If so, then it seems to follow that God could never have intended to save them with the atonement. And if that is true, the atonement must always have been limited. Christ could not have died "for all." Thus Scriptural texts that seem to argue for an unlimited atonement cannot "really" teach what they appear to teach.

Another example is the tendency of the later Reformers to alter Luther's and Calvin's teaching on faith. Catholicism counter-attacked the original teaching of Luther and Calvin (that faith *was* assurance) as an incentive to loose living. To defend Protestantism, the later Reformers began to argue that we cannot be assured that we have believed unto salvation unless there are evidences of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. The famous Civil War era Southern Reformed theologian, Robert Dabney pointed out that later Reformers separated faith and assurance:

*“[The first Reformers] defined saving faith as a belief that ‘Christ saved me,’ making the assurance of hope of its necessary essence. Now, the later Reformers, and those learned, holy and modest teachers of the Reformed Churches. . . have subjected this view to searching examination, and rejected it (as does the Westminster Assembly) on scriptural grounds.”[4]*

Christ, in this view, died only for the elect, and neither you nor I can be sure we are of the elect company until we can experientially prove out in our lives that we have “persevering faith”, *i.e.*, faith that never fails until we die.

As Dillow has pointed out, this later Reformed Calvinism is strangely akin to Arminianism because both agree in the end that whosoever whose faith does not persevere are non-elect reprobates--the Calvinists because they had a temporary false “professing” faith and the Arminian because God foresaw in His election that they would not persevere.[5] The Calvinists hold to a limited atonement that applies in its eternal benefits only to the elect who will persevere; the Arminians to an unlimited atonement that applies eternally only to those whose perseverance was foreseen by God when He elected them.

If the later Reformers and the Arminians had re-examined the intellectual tools they were using to argue with and subjected them to correction from the Scriptural text, they might have avoided much of the divisive debates. If instead they had seen their way more clearly from the Creator-creature distinction revealed in Genesis, they might have questioned the scholastic logic inherited from Aristotle. They might have noticed that the Creator, although knowable, is incomprehensible. “My thoughts are not your thoughts saith the Lord” (Isa. 55:8). “To whom then will ye liken Me? saith the Holy One” (Isa. 40:25). Logical categories, therefore, cannot be “universal” for God and man. And if this is so, then there is no such thing as a “universal cause.” God has sovereignty over all things as Creator; man has responsible choice as creature, a finite analog to God's sovereignty. Then it follows that *the atonement can be unlimited toward all to whatever degree God chooses*, and that man has genuine choice in responding to the Cross yet so as never to alter the Creator-creature order.

To sum up the debate: it looks as if the second generation Reformers did not exploit the open door to Scripture that Luther and Calvin provided. They did not carry forward the principle of sola scriptura into the areas of philosophical categories and logical propositions as Paul urged in Colossians 2:8. In such a hurry to defend their new movement against Catholic counterattacks they prematurely systematized Protestant truths before enough exegetical work had been completed.

## FUNDAMENTALISM AND THE ATONEMENT TODAY

Lesson 143

Modern fundamentalism with its heavy emphasis upon careful exegesis of the biblical text is more open to the significance of creature history than classical Reformed thought. As I noted in Chapter One above, the Incarnation of the Son of God implies eternal significance to history. The Second Person of the Trinity acquired genuine human nature with a body scarred from its historical experience. History has “made a difference.” As I noted in Chapter Four, there are numerous textual references to both optimistic and pessimistic “options” to history. An additional feature to note is how human prayers resulted in God “repenting” and altering the apparent course of history. This view of creature history leaves room for an atonement with unlimited options of application under the Creator’s sovereign will.

To expound such a view of the atonement I summarize the doctrine under the four points covered in Chapter Four:

- The atonement is the sole legal basis for all grace (there can be no “bloodless forgiveness” in view of the biblical notion of restitutionary justice);
- God calls mankind to repentance with an atonement sufficient for all (the status of all mankind, every person, has been eternally changed by such an atonement—either for good or for evil);
- The saving benefits of the atonement are received through faith (a human act of reception is necessary to enjoy eternal salvation);
- The moral responsibility for judgment and salvation is asymmetrical (God’s sovereignty has an incomprehensible complexity that violates all attempts to describe it in terms of an abstract universal cause after Aristotle).

This view of the atonement resolves some questions asked above about the four doctrines we have learned: election, justification, faith, and sanctification. It resolves election questions in a fallen world because the atonement gives God total freedom to save whomever He chooses however He chooses. It calls to all men, not just some men. It resolves justification questions because it leaves to God the extent of implementing its blessings. The existence of physical death as well as believers’ discipline and judgment cannot undermine the atonement’s

efficacy if God deems to thus limit its application. It resolves faith questions because it provides a sufficient basis for forgiveness as well as convincing evidence of God's love toward each person. It provides our external upward focus to replace our inward self reflection. It provides the powerful motivation of God's gracious love toward us rather than the self-frustration of trying to earn acceptability with God. It resolves sanctification questions because it allows God freedom to deal with each of us as individuals without erasing the possibility of failures and temporal discipline. It provides a historical foundation for stability in a world of flux and chaos.

### IN CONCLUSION

The extent of the atonement challenges our comprehension of God's sovereignty and love. It affects every man by removing the necessity of eternal judgment for our sins. For those who reject God's grace, it reveals them to be stubborn fools. For those who accept, it calls for eternal thankfulness.

### END NOTES FOR APPENDIX C

155. John Calvin, Institutes, 3.24.5.
156. Phillip Schaff, Creeds of Christendom (ppbk ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 [1877]), iii, 546.
157. Schaff, iii, 586.
158. Ernest F. K. Mueller, "Amyraud," The New Schaff-Herzog Religious Encyclopedia (New York, 1908), I. 161.
159. Joseph C. Dillow, The Reign of the Servant Kings (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1993), p. 266.

## SUMMARY OF "EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT" DISCUSSION WITHIN FRAMEWORK CLASS.

1. BEGIN with CREATION & BIRTH AND LIFE OF THE KING: Creator/creature distinction and man made in God's image. Therefore human choice is finite analog of Divine Sovereignty—they are alike but not identical. Jesus Christ. God & man in ONE person—shows perfect compatibility. Man created to produce good works (historical righteousness borne of obedience). Christ's Impeccability— shows how genuine temptation coexists with God's sovereign will. Point: we don't start with pagan philosophical categories of "causation" borrowed from Aristotle that try to include both God and man together. We start with the historic revelation of the text of Scripture.
2. GO to the FALL & FLOOD & EXODUS: Evil begins with rebellion and disobedience. Evil brings on death and chaos in spite of creature's urge to be "productive." Evil is "bracketed" in the biblical worldview by God's sovereign plan so that it will eventually be divided permanently from the good. This division involved inter linked judgment and salvation, shown by the Flood and the Exodus. God's justice requires restitution of the life which occurs by blood atonement.
3. ATONEMENT & JUDGMENT: The Fall-Flood-Exodus model shows that the atonement delivers through judgment. John 3:16-21 shows that because of the atonement the basis of condemnation for all people has shifted from being sinners without an extended pardon to being sinners who in addition to being sinners also reject the pardon made possible by the sacrifice of the only begotten Son. Thus the judgmental side of the atonement extends to all who disbelieve. It does so because it is sufficient to save all men, including those who disbelieve (1 John 2:2).
4. ATONEMENT & SALVATION: The Fall-Flood-Exodus model shows that the atonement delivers through judgment. Romans 3:25-26 shows that the atonement resolves the apparent OT conflict between God's holiness and His gracious love. God can forgive sin without compromising His holiness. Romans 3:25-26 also shows that the saving side of the atonement extends to all who believe.
5. GO to CALL OF ABRAHAM: The extent of the atonement is wrapped up with the issue of saving faith. How does saving faith originate? God's call to Adam and his wife after they fell while hiding in the garden shows His initiating gracious calling to faith extended to sinners (Gen. 3:8ff). God's call to Abraham to leave pagan culture and start a new counter-culture shows clearly His initiative. This call to fallen sinners is a prerequisite to saving faith (Rom. 10:17). Moreover, God controls the time and manner of this call, calling "louder" to some and less so to others (Matt. 11:20-24). Why some believe and others do not in the final analysis is hidden in the Creator's incomprehensibility (Rom. 9-10). Thus the extent of the atonement rests upon the intent of the Creator which is not open for viewing in the present time. Reformed thought speculates when it hypothesizes about "divine decrees" using abstract reasoning from effect to cause. Likewise, Arminian thought speculates when it hypothesizes about election based upon some sort of preview knowledge of man's "free will" exercised in a virtual vacuum independent of God's creation.
6. EXTENT OF ATONEMENT: Like the blood on the doors in Egypt, the atonement covers all who receive it from God's eternal wrath. It does not, however, cover all sin. It doesn't cover the curse upon mankind in Eden (because a new human race in Christ has been created to which we are "translated" and in which we are "adopted")—mortal flesh dies regardless of the atonement, the present earth remains cursed, and believers can be judged for their works both in this life and upon entrance into the next. It doesn't cover the sin of final unbelief. These are ways the atonement is limited. On the other hand, the atonement, like the blood on the doors in Egypt, is for all who will come. It is the basis on which God "forbears" from consummating the separation of good from evil allowing days of grace for men to seek Him. It has become the new reason for eternal condemnation of all who disbelieve. These are the ways the atonement is unlimited.

## ANALYSIS SHEET OF PAUL'S AREOPAGUS SPEECH

Lesson 150

Point: Paul's testimonial defense of the Christian faith is a model for us in dealing with public paganism and private fleshly temptations. Both are manifestations of the historical clash of truth and deception. Paul's model shows clearly that he used a biblical framework of truth in this conflict. His approach **CONTRASTED POINT BY POINT** the biblical framework with the pagan framework **AND** demolished the pagan framework as foolishness (see below).

<i>Acts 17 text</i>	<i>"Jerusalem" - biblical truth</i>	<i>"Athens" - pagan deception (Paul's target)</i>
17:22	<u>Creation</u> : all men are God-conscious (doctrine of God, man, nature). establishes true "point of contact" as G-c. NOT common notions	<u>denies</u> : G-c <b>but admits</b> : some consequences of G-c such as moral judgments and capacity to reason in 1 terms of universal categories
17:23	<u>Creation</u> : man limited in knowing (doctrine of God, man, nature)	<u>denies</u> : need to rely upon source of rationality in the Creator <b>but admits</b> : "gaps" in human knowledge at crucial points
17:24-25	<u>Creation</u> : Isa 42:5; Exod 20: 11 (Creator/creature distinction); <u>Golden Era of Solomon</u> : 1 K 8:27; Ps. 50:12 ("high culture" expression of C/c in terms of architecture and literature)	<u>denies</u> : human capacities for intellectual and imaginative art/architecture/speculation/service derive from Creator <b>but admits</b> : need to form a "central authority" for one's worldview. define it & serve it.
17:26-27	<u>Creation &amp; Noachic Covenant</u> : Gen 1:9-10 (racial unity of mankind); <u>Call of Abraham</u> : Gen 12 cf. Deut 32:8; Ps. 50:9-12 (purpose of historical experience) (doctrine of God, man, nature) <u>Decline &amp; Fall of Kingdom</u> (w/ <u>Fall</u> ): Isa 55:6; Jer 23:23; mankind is blind but still God-conscious	<u>denies</u> : vulnerability of nations in history is due to purpose of Creator: monogenetic origin of all human cultures; <b>but admits</b> : "interbreeding" capacity of all peoples (same kind); vulnerability of civilizations and nation
17:28	<u>Creation</u> : image of God in man (doctrine of God and man) emerges in pagan cultural expressions in spite of suppression of G-c	<u>denies</u> : likeness to God the Creator <b>but affirms</b> : similarity between man and the gods
17:29" DISRUPTION OF PAGANISM !!	<u>Decline &amp; Fall of Kingdom</u> : Isa 40; 18-20 critique of fleshly mind via 2 <sup>LKI</sup> commandment but places himself under this authority as well as his hearers (note use of 1* person plural "we")	<u>denies</u> : man derives from God the Creator so cannot submit to "outside" revelation; <b>but affirms</b> : need to understand the "big picture"
17:30	<u>Call of Abraham</u> : Gen 12; Deut 4:19 (dispensations of gentiles and of Israel); <u>Pentecost</u> : Acts 2 (dispensation of the Church) (doctrine of missions)	<u>denies</u> : abnormality of the human intellect & need to radically change total picture; <b>but affirms</b> : (by implication) that human intellect has shown no ability to "get" the big picture by itself without help or that man lives by what he knows to be right
17:31	<u>Fall, Resurrection, Ascension</u> : Gospels, Acts 1 (doctrines of glorification, of evil)	<u>denies</u> : universal and ultimate responsibility of man to his Creator; existence of miraculous workings of Creator in history <b>but affirms</b> : personal sense of guilt, power of empirical observations

Paul has now "explained" the two terms "Jesus" and "resurrection" that lie at the heart of his gospel message (Acts 17: IS). The "simple gospel" is simple WHEN IT IS CORRECTLY UNDERSTOOD; otherwise it IS NOT "SIMPLE."

#### PAUL'S FURTHER THOUGHTS: I COR 1-2

The gospel is "power" only to those who believe (cf, Rom. 1:16-17). Understood inside the pagan framework of unbelief it is foolish (i.e., it seems irrational, unworkable, incredible)

There is a clash between truth that appears to be foolish to unbelief and foolishness that appears to be truthful to unbelief.

Isa. 29:13-16 quoted in I Cor. 1:19. Unbelief is to be REPLACED with faith, not allowed to remain in unending conflict with faith. Here is a central truth in the "walk by faith", the "faith-rest drill", or whatever else you call it

WE MUST AIM TO OVERTHROW THE FOUNDATIONS OF UNBELIEF IN OUR HEARTS JUST AS PAUL AIMED TO OVERTHROW IT IN THE THOUGHTS OF PAGAN INTELLIGENCE.

HENCE..... THE BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK.....

"a three fold cord that is not quickly broken", the way the Bible was used by biblical writers,...

- a prophetic, Holy-Spirit inspired view of history
- reasoned-through systematization of doctrine
- aggressive agenda against unbelief