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KNOWING JESUS

The Portrait of Jesus in Hebrews

By Mr. Timothy Bertolet

Hebrews 1 is one of the most beautiful passages of Scripture. As a unit, the text lays out a complete picture of the person of Jesus Christ. It is to our benefit to be familiar with Hebrews chapter 1. In this respect, the chapter is a very useful chapter for both our devotional lives and for our articulation and defense of the Christian faith. Hebrews 1 presents Jesus both as the eternal Son of God, equal in his divinity with the Father, and as the exalted Son who has after his death, resurrection, and ascension been given dominion over all the creation.

In Hebrews 1, Jesus is portrayed as the uncreated eternal Son of God. As “Son,” there never was a time when Jesus did not exist. In fact, monotheism is attributed to the Son at the same time his person is distinguished from the person of the Father.

The Son is distinct from the Father as a unique person in Hebrews 1. First, in 1:1–2, just as God the Father spoke to the prophets in the Old Testament, He has in these “last days” spoken in the Son. The Father used the Son in the creation of all things (1:2b) as they worked together without division to make creation.

Second, throughout the chapter, God the Father addresses the Son in a personal way saying, “You are my Son ...” (1:5a) and again in vv. 8–12, “Your throne, O God ...” and “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth from the beginning ...” It is to the Son, not angels, to whom the Father says, “Sit at my right hand ...” These displays of personal address between the Father and the Son teach us that God the Father and God the Son are two distinct persons. Upon these truths are built the later articulations of the early Creeds.

Third, the Son is distinct from the Father by virtue of being the “radiance of the glory of God, and the exact imprint of his nature.” The Son radiates the glory of God as one who in the fullness of his deity possesses that glory. The Scriptures teach us that the Son does not share his glory with other beings (Isaiah 48:2,11) and so for the Son to radiate this glory (not, as some say, by mere reflection), he must possess this glory and himself be divine. He bears the eternal image of God not as a copy but as one who partakes in the full divine nature.

Hebrews further defends the deity of Christ by showing the Son’s participation in the Father’s works that the Son creates with his Father (1:2b) and sustains this creation by his Word (1:3), an allusion to the authority and power of God’s Word over creation evidenced in Genesis 1 and numerous subsequent biblical texts. The Son’s Word is the Word of God itself. The Son is identified as God (1:8) albeit distinct from God the Father who anointed him (1:9). Most convincingly 1:10–12 quotes Psalm 102:25–27 to show that the Son is the Lord (YHWH is the divine name of God used in the Hebrew of Psalm 102:22). He is uncreated, unchanging and unending. The Son is truly God in every respect of divine glory, majesty, power and nature. Like God the Father, he, too, receives worship (1:6a) — something that would be utterly blasphemous if the Son was not truly God.

The second theme in Hebrews 1 is the Son’s exaltation over all creation because of his suffering death (1:3b). The eternal Son of God who rules by virtue of deity, is exalted within creation in the human nature he takes upon himself for our sake. The Son stepped down into creation taking on true humanity (2:6–9, 14, 17), but now his rank within creation is that of full exaltation. Verse 4 describes the Son as “having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.”

As we have been saying, the Son is already superior by virtue of who he is, but he becomes superior in the rank that he holds within his creation. The same movement is seen in Philippians 2:6–11. The Son is equal with God but humbles himself in the

act of taking on human nature. Therefore, God exalts him within creation so that “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,” (Philippians. 2:10).

Jesus is the Son of God now exalted over all things. The “today I have begotten you” in 1:5 comes from Psalm 2:7 where the royal King is installed on Mt. Zion — fulfilled now in a heavenly Zion. Similarly, Psalm 110:1 (Heb. 1:13) was fulfilled when the Father said to the Son “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” The eternal Son of God who rules by virtue of his divine nature and creating power, now radiates this glory within his creation. He is the one who suffered and died for his people and in response, his eternal Father raised him and exalted him within the creation for which he suffered and died. He no longer veils his glory as a suffering servant. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

More importantly, Hebrews 1 leaves us with a sense of awe. It leaves us with a wonder that can only be expressed in worship. First, we are left to marvel at what God is like. There is one God but he is three external persons. In our passage, the Father and Son interact in ways that clearly distinguish them within the godhead. Yet the Son is identified as God just as is the Father elsewhere in Scripture. Second, we marvel in this passage at what happens to the Son: that he is raised up in authority and reigns over all creation. It is the wonder of wonders that the almighty, all-powerful God of the universe would step into his creation and take upon himself such a base and lowly rank within the creation. But now, oh blessed thing that it is, the Father has made it known to us who this Son truly is by raising him up and seating him in the throne room of the divine glory at the Father’s own right hand. Truly our God is like no other and has done what no other being would even consider doing, all to display his eternal glory and majesty.

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<http://www.alliancenet.org/placefortruth/column/theology-on-the-go/knowning-jesus-the-portrait-of-jesus-in-hebrews>

HOPE NOT YET FULFILLED

By Miss Dawn Rutan

As our choir was practicing one of our songs for Christmas, I was thinking about the seemingly conflicting messages we hear. One verse of “Tell the World” says, “Tell the hopeless He’s the Promise now fulfilled before their eyes. Tell the restless in His presence ev’ry need is satisfied.” But historically, the birth of Jesus didn’t exactly fulfill these promises, at least not on its own. The angels proclaimed to the shepherds, “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people ... ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased’ ” (Luke 2:10, 14 ESV). Although the Baby Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies of a child born of a virgin in Bethlehem, it wasn’t until roughly three decades later that Jesus himself said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the

blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18–19).

While Jesus' birth was a step closer to the completion of the good news, it would be more than 30 years before he would fulfill the requirements of being a Savior through his death and resurrection. But even that is not the end of the story. We still live in the between times — knowing that salvation has been made possible and sanctification has begun, but still awaiting the perfecting of the world and our bodies. It is good news that Jesus was born, but it's not the best news. It is good news that Jesus died on our behalf, but that's an inadequate message. And it is good news that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to the Father. But if the story ended there we would still be without hope in this world. The good news won't be completed until that day when Jesus returns. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:3).

In the meantime, we continue to live with brokenness, mourning, poverty, blindness and captivity. "And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved" (Romans 8:23–24).

We tend to approach Christmas as if the birth of Jesus is the whole story, the only good news needed in a fallen world. It's often implied that if you just believe that God was born as a baby in a manger then all your problems will go away and you'll be filled with peace and joy. It's little wonder that it can be an overwhelmingly depressing time of year. Not only are there cultural expectations that can be hard to live up to, but the message proclaimed by the church can sometimes add to the burden. If the Baby Jesus is the answer to all our problems, why is there still so much suffering in the world?

We cannot leave Jesus in the manger as a baby, nor can we leave him on the cross as a Savior. Neither is he still in the grave. He is in heaven for now, but one day he will return and make ev-

everything right. All the suffering will be ended and the world will be made new. Then the good news will be finished. Then we will rejoice wholeheartedly. Till then we hold on and endure by faith, awaiting with hope the second coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Until then: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Romans 15:13).

HARMARTIOLOGY

Some Observations on the Nature of Sin

By Dr. Kimon Nicolaides, III

Scripture tells us anything done apart from faith is sinful in God’s sight (Hebrews 11:6; Romans 14:23). Sin is mentioned some 465 times in the Bible (NIV). It translates the Hebrew word **חַטָּאת** and the Greek word **ἡμαρτεες** from which we derive the noun *hamartiology*. Its first explicit mention is in Genesis 4:7, where God admonishes Cain for his resentment upon discovering his offering to be unacceptable. “If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.” Human nature by then was already tainted by sin in the fall of Adam. According to Paul (Rom. 5:12), “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.” We are all, in our humanity, sinners from the moment of our conception. Having inherited a sinful nature from our parents, we stand on that account already condemned before a perfectly holy and righteous God. We experience that condemnation in

our fleshly nature resulting in our mortality, being under the dominion of death, without power to effect our own deliverance from that condition, and even being powerless to recognize its relentless grip upon and authority over us. We are in our natural condition as Paul declares to the Ephesians alienated from God and without hope in the world (Ephesians 2:12), “Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.” Or, as he had just mentioned previously in verse 1 of that chapter, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.”

Advent Christian thought generally has focused upon the anthropological consequences of sin, i.e., the meaning and condition of death, and the current state in which man finds himself, which may be expressed as having potential or conditional immortality. Sin and death, however, are so inter-related biblically that they are at times used interchangeably (e.g., Rom. 8:2; 1 Corinthians 15:56), and, as we have just seen above, the biblical term translated as death may extend to include man’s current state as well as the end to which his mortality naturally leads him. The application of a conditionalist’s perspective may serve, nonetheless, to bring clarity to our understanding of certain questions regarding the biblical nature of sin as well as the biblical understanding of death. In that perspective one application of the word “death” is that those under its curse will eventually become as if they had never been (Obadiah 16). The Bible’s semantic range of the word for “death,” however, is dependent not only upon its literary context,¹ or the various lexical nuances in which its diverse verbal forms are employed. It also depends on how we translate

¹ Because of such breadth of the range of fluidity among the meaning of words recent investigations into the best ways of acquiring a second language have suggested that learning phrases is much better than merely attempting to increase one’s vocabulary see e.g. <http://www.smartlanguagelearner.com/experts-reveal-method-learning-vocabulary>.

certain apparently idiomatic combinations of that term that may not find direct parallels in the English language.

One such idiomatic expression used in the Hebrew languages to define God's description of the consequences that befell Adam upon transgressing the explicit boundaries stipulated within God's creation covenant was that in the day of such transgression he would "surely die." The exact Hebrew phrase rendered in most English translations as "will surely die" is *מוֹת תָּמוּת: (mot tamut)*, which, were it to be translated literally, would be "to die, you will die" or "dying, you will die."

This is not an uncommon manner of combining the infinitive absolute with the non-perfective forms of the verb in biblical Hebrew to intensify or emphasize the certainty of a command or assertion (Waltke and O'Conner 1990, 584–5). Indeed, the very same combination of terms of this same verb is used at least another half a dozen times in the Old Testament (e.g. see 1 Samuel 22:16, 1 Kings 2:37, 42; 2 Kings 1:4; Ezekiel 3:18; 33:8, 14). In each case it's English renderings of "you will surely die" or "you can be sure you will die" or "you will certainly die" have been employed by numerous versions, e.g., NKJV, NIV, NLT, ESV, HCSB, ASV, NET, RSV, ASV, YLT, DBY, WEB and HNV. This may, however, lead us to assume a confidence in the accuracy of our understanding of its meaning that is not fully warranted. In both the LXX and Vulgate a more literal repetition of both the infinitive and imperfect verb forms are found.

In the "Message" paraphrase version we find "in the moment you eat of it, you're dead." This has led some to question the veracity of the text, while others to suggest that God must have relented from his initial decree because this assertion was not literally fulfilled in the sense that we normally understand the meaning of the verb "to die," particularly when it is put in the context of a specific reference point in time. While others still use these translations to infer that its meaning had to have been fulfilled in a manner that was not initially obvious. In other words Adam's death did occur in that moment, but only in a spiritual sense. His subsequent physical death was only a necessary

consequence of that. This understanding likely occurs because the verb “to die” in the English language is habitually used either in the perfect tense or with a focus upon its perfect state, i.e., its telic (or completed) state. That appears to be more the case when used in the context of the moment of expiration (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

On the other hand, some interpreters try to hurdle this obstacle by qualifying the time reference. The biblical term for “day” is found in other passages as being described to be in God’s perspective “like a thousand years.” Psalm 90 reads “A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.” And 2 Peter 3:8b reads “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.” Of those living during the ante-deluvian period, many had life spans that approached surprisingly close to a millennium, but none ever made it past that defining point in time. This interpretation of God’s warning in Gen. 2:17 is not quite entirely exegetically satisfying nor necessary if the full potential semantic range of the Hebrew verb forms used were correctly understood.

In the Hebrew text, the non perfective form of the verb is used. The Hebrew use of either a non perfective or a perfective verb form, does not determine the specific temporal sense as found in English verb tenses, i.e., either past, present or future. The actual tense in which it should be translated depends primarily upon the context. In our text that would be the future. That will determine, however, only when the condition or the action described by the verb will begin. If the full or complete effects of the condition or action described by the verb must be accomplished before the expiration of the time referenced therein, however, one would expect to find a perfective verb form. We do not. Therefore, although “to die,” is a stative verb and has a definite ultimate state towards which it progresses, i.e., the state of being dead, we would not be wrong to assume the meaning of the Hebrew term for dying in this case may include in it the incipient condition of simply becoming mortal or of losing one’s potential for becoming immortal. This would seem to be the

simplest way of satisfying an exegetical dilemma otherwise requiring some rather dubious verbal acrobatics.

The immediate loss of that potential was shortly restored through God's gracious provision (Gen. 3:15) although from that point on it could only be realized through an entirely different mode of achievement. That mode would require an accommodation to the entrance of sin which had already made its seemingly indelible mark. The New Testament sheds much more light on the nature of sin and its relationship to death. On the one hand we are naturally born "dead in our sins and trespasses" (Eph. 2:1, 5). On the otherhand there is a sin that does not lead to death, (1 John 5:16-17). We should, nevertheless, always be on guard against "entering into temptation" (Matthew 26:41) because according to James any sin that is fully developed will eventually result in death (James 1:15). James also tells us that sins are conceived and given birth when our own carnal desires entice us and drag us away (1:14).

Paul gives the most comprehensive treatment of the subject in his epistle to the Romans telling us that just "as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:21). Any reconciliation of these seemingly contradictory statements about its nature would have to consider what is being meant by the notion of death and whether regeneration has occurred. It may refer to the whole person or that the born again Christian continues to struggle in his battle against some residual sin of his carnal nature throughout his mortal existence. Sin here is viewed as having a certain degree of vitality or the manifestation of a vestige of life inside us that exists to the extent that we do not rule over it and keep it under our own subjection. We are essentially powerless to do that apart from the grace of the Holy Spirit, but even with the Spirit we must continue to exercise constraint because the Spirit will never impose itself over our own will (1 Cor. 14:32). That struggle can be described as "ruling over" (Gen. 4:7), "putting off" (Eph. 4:22, 24; Colossians 2:11), "laying aside" (Heb. 12:1); "putting to death" (Rom. 8:13, Col. 3:5) the

misdeeds of the body or whatever belongs to our carnal nature; to “die to sins” (1 Pet. 2:24); “dying to what once bound us” (Rom. 7:6); “denying oneself and taking up one’s cross” (Luke 9:23) “bearing one’s own cross” (Luke 14:27); “hating one’s own life” (Luke 14:26; John 12:25); “renouncing all one has” (Luke 14:33); “losing one’s life” (Matt. 10:39, 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 17:33); “being crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20); “always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus” (2 Corinthians 4:10); “disciplining one’s body and keeping it under control” (1 Cor. 9:27); “being dead” (Col. 3:3); “fighting the good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7); or simply to “struggle against sin” (Heb. 12:4).

Despite the fact that the sinful nature may be described as having been crucified, or put to death in the heart, or mind, or life of the believer, this struggle is described as ongoing throughout the life of the Christian (2 Cor. 4:10; 1 Jn. 1:8) and occurring on a daily basis (Luke 9:23, 1 Cor. 15:31). Therefore it is necessary to understand some of the language that is used to describe how the Christian deals with the manifestation of sin in his or her life in a metaphorical sense. When Paul says he dies daily, he must mean that he dies to his sinful nature, or he puts it down, or puts to death his own will by overriding it and making it subject to that of the Spirit.

One means of describing the manifestation of sin could therefore be as anything that has the appearance of life but which does not acknowledge the absolute sovereignty of, or is not in full submission to, the Lordship of Christ, (Matt. 12:30). This appearance of life (James 4:14), although real, may be described by using the term “illusion” because Jesus said that he was the source of life (John 14:6) and that in him was life (John 1:4), and he who has the Son has life, but he who does not have the Son does not have life (1 John 5:12). Therefore one may say that those who are without Christ are abiding in death and have yet to pass from death to life (1 John 3:14). This description fits the model that anticipates the very near and inexorable advent, and the inescapable inevitability of the total reign of Christ over all

of his rightful dominion at which time all vestiges of apparent resistance to that reign will have been completely subdued or eliminated. That means that there will then no longer be any manner of ongoing life that represents any form of opposition to that reign. It follows that it would therefore be impossible for those who presently but adamantly persist in their resistance to that rule to survive in any place or form or under any circumstances. At that time both sin and death itself will have been completely destroyed, abolished and eliminated, having served the purpose for which they were once granted an impression of position within that domain (Revelation 21:4).

Reference:

Waltke, Bruce K. and M. O’Conner. 1990. *An introduction to biblical Hebrew syntax*. Eisenbrauns. Winona Lake, Indiana.

Dr. Kimon Nicolaidis is a retired military chaplain. He and his wife, Chin Lee, are planting an Advent Christian Church in Hawaii.

**REVIEW OF “TAKEDOWN”
From Communists to Progressives,
how the Left has Sabotaged Family and Marriage**

By Paul Kengor; Reviewed by Dr. Bob Hughes

This book offers a well-documented overview of how the traditional view of marriage (one man and one woman) has

morphed, been forced, and “taken down” into a vastly different form. Though this form at present is best seen through the clamorous call for same-sex unions, Kengor fears that this is only the opening salvo to marshal in other forms such as one man with several women, one woman with several men, groups of three or more “marrying,” and perhaps even “marriage” to animals. (Kengor documents one case in Thailand where, not a couple of men, but a “triple” have “married,” and as he fears, perhaps adoption of children into this group is next.)

Kengor recounts how Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the “Communist Manifesto” of 1848 called for the abolition of the family as one of the hallmarks of achieving the utopia they envisioned communism would bring. This line of reasoning saw the traditional family as a huge roadblock on the path to installing full-fledged communist ideals within existing cultures. Trying to pry the traditional pattern of family and marriage loose from their foundational attachments, however, was proving very difficult.

The book chronicles how this difficulty was lessened and largely overcome, when the far-left, socialist, so-called “progressives” (and particularly in the United States) began stringently lobbying in super-loud tirades for the acceptance of same-sex “marriages.” They did their work so well, that many liberals were duped into joining the cause under labels of “fairness,” “tolerance,” “freedom,” and “equality” without considering the ultimate results on society. Even the Supreme Court of the United States has now found that the Constitution sanctions such.

In “TAKEDOWN,” Kengor names names (Marx, Engels, Margaret Sanger, Herbert Marcuse, Frank Marshall Davis, the Bernardine Dohrn-Bill Ayers group, and other radicals from the 1960s), and proves his points well. In all fairness to his approach, when he suspects and/or deduces something from circumstantial or hearsay evidence, he is quick to insert a disclaimer such as, “... no real proof to support that claim, ...” or, “... we cannot overstate things in this discussion, but it would also be a mistake to understate or ignore them.”

The author is a genuine word-smith writing with an engaging style, but he offers no quick or easy delivery from this quagmire. He does strongly suggest that ignorance of communist and progressive movements, and the unwitting support of liberals as dupes, are largely responsible for this lapse into frivolity where traditional-natural-biblical marriage and family are concerned. He shows how the culture-at-large got to where it is. So, though he offers no simple extrication process, it is clear that what is to be done about it, and how to react to it, must come from God and God's servants.

Dr. Paul Kengor, a dedicated Christian, is author of some dozen books and scores of articles in referred, scholarly journals and other national and international publications. He regularly appears on major radio and television programs as a respected commentator. His Ph.D. is from the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs.

Dr. Bob Hughes is pastor of Pembroke Advent Christian Church in Pembroke, Georgia.

SURPRISED BY SCRIPTURE **Engaging Contemporary Issues**

Reviewed by Dr. Robert J. Mayer

Perhaps the most prolific theological writer of the past 20 years has been Nicholas Thomas (N.T.) Wright, past Anglican

Bishop of Durham and now the Chair of New Testament and Early Christianity at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. Wright's production has been nothing short of amazing, especially his multivolume series "Christian Origins and the Question of God," which represents some of the best biblical scholarship and New Testament historical research of our time. Serious Christians everywhere are grateful for Wright's masterful defense of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ and his contention that Christian faith has strong historical and reasonable support.

But the good Bishop has not limited his work to scholarly audiences. He has published a host of books for educated Christian laypeople including what I think is perhaps the best book on eschatology that I have read in my lifetime, "Surprised by Hope" (Harper One, 2008). While this reviewer deeply respects Wright's work — that does not mean that everything he writes merits agreement. That is true in terms of his understanding of the doctrine of justification where I think Wright misinterprets Martin Luther to some degree. And in this book, a collection of essays on different biblical, theological and ethical subjects, I am sure that readers will find much to like and some to not like.

Wright establishes his framework for engagement of these desperate matters in the preface. Christians, secularists, indeed all of us whether we know it or not have uncritically embraced the core teachings of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. "I have come to the view that, unless we glimpse the roots of what today is taken for granted in our world, we will not understand why we see problems the way we do, and will not appreciate what the Bible might have to say about them. When people think of "living in the modern world," very often what they are doing is embracing one particular ancient philosophy (Epicureanism) in a modern guise (x). For Wright, this ancient philosophy dressed up in Enlightenment garb is "the worldview in which God, or the gods, may perhaps exist, but if they do, they are far away and remain uninvolved with the world" (6). And it is a worldview that those who are well-off economically and socially whether

they are Christians or secularists seem almost unconsciously drawn to.

Uncritical embrace of an Enlightenment/Epicurean worldview has not only led to oppositional conflicts in the political realm of life in the United States and Europe, but they gave rise to the Fundamentalist-Modernist debates of the early 20th century as well as the ongoing oppositional debates we see among Christians over a host of matters. Nowhere is this seen more than in how many Christians and secularists perceive the relationship between science and faith. Because of this, many Christians and secularists do not read Gen. 1 and 2 in the way that the text intends and that the apostle Paul and other New Testament writers see them. Wright sees Paul as integrating the first three chapters of Genesis into his writing in 1 Cor. 15 with the point being “that God put his wonderful world into human hands; that the human hands messed up the project; and that the human hands of Jesus the Messiah have now picked it up, sorted it out, and got it back on track” (35).

Wright challenges Christians and secularists both to reject this Enlightenment/Epicurean worldview and do the hard intellectual work that gets beyond casting them in oppositional terms. One of the best places for that to happen is in terms of what we say about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Wright passionately argues that Jesus was raised in bodily form and that his resurrection was not hidden but public in a historical sense. “What I am suggesting,” according to Wright, “is that faith in Jesus risen from the dead *transcends but includes* what we call history and what we call science. Faith of this sort is not blind belief that rejects all history and science. Nor is it simply ... a belief that inhabits a totally different sphere” (61). Instead, it is shaped by our faith in the God “who has raised Jesus from the dead *within* history” with evidence that can be investigated by all people, scientists included. Faith and history are not divorced from one another because God acts in human history, and Resurrection provides a paradigm for our own resurrection at the return of Christ and the consummation of the kingdom of God.

Wright's chapter regarding the second coming of Christ is a nice summary of "Surprised by Hope," and his argument that our Lord's future return does not negate our responsibility to care for the earth. As followers of Christ, we are citizens of God's kingdom and our kingdom citizenship means that we start "to take up our responsibility as God's image-bearing human beings, sharing God's rule over creation" even if only in an imperfect sense before the return of Christ. "We should take responsibility in the present time for God's groaning creation ... We are not to regard the created order as random, nor to see its present disarray as somehow its own fault, but to understand it in terms of an initially good creation now radically spoiled [by the fall] but awaiting redemption" (90) as expressed in Genesis 1. We sin when we abrogate our responsibility for the welfare of creation. Hence, Christians must care about environmental matters like global warming and abuse of the earth's resources simply because that is integral to our fundamental identity as humans created in the image of God. Too often, many evangelical Christians have seen environmental stewardship as some kind of "liberal plot" and while I agree that proposals related to matters like global warming should be carefully critiqued, Wright's corrective to our dismissive tendencies is important.

Finally, Wright challenges his readers to engage Scripture in an integrated as opposed to a truncated manner. First, we need to read Scripture in its proper narrative and literary context. Many people (including many in our churches) assume that science and technology provide the only real knowledge and that theology, poetry and art are merely soft knowledge, "subjective musings without any purchase on solid reality" (133). Nothing is further from the truth, according to Wright as Scripture in all of its narrative and literary forms speaks to the reality of God, his creation and our human existence.

Second, when we read the Bible, we often assume a "split-level" understanding of reality that divorces the spiritual from the natural. When this happens, "the Bible is first privatized, then dismembered." Modern biblical criticism of both liberal

and conservative varieties tends to reinforce this dichotomy and force us away from reading Scripture in ways that speak to our living in the world in which we find ourselves. The problem is that when we read Scripture in this split-level way, we miss the essence of its message which is the gospel message, “that this is the story of how the creator God launched his rescue operation for the whole of creation” (138).

The consequences of these truncated readings of Scripture are represented in our “all-or-nothing” descriptions of events and realities within creation. “We in the contemporary Western world have all but lost the ability, conceptually as well as practically, to affirm simultaneously that rulers are corrupt and must be confronted and that they are God-given and must be obeyed” (176). Indeed. Wise words as we engage in a presidential election year. And politics is only one arena where a lack of integrated Christian thought damages both church and society.

In the past several months I have heard Christians claim that in response to the Supreme Court decision regarding homosexual marriage, churches need to be communities of resistance to cultural trends like this and that we should encourage Christians to disobey this ruling. My response to this line of thinking has been, “It will never work!” Why? Because as William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas argued 25 years ago, you cannot build an alternative community when the church is culturally compromised in so many areas of life and when our unconscious habits of life are shaped more by Enlightenment reason than by Holy Scripture. We live with a truncated understanding of life and faith, and according to Wright we will need a holistic understanding of Christian faith as both private and public. Here Wright echoes the 20th century missionary theologian Lesslie Newbigin who described the gospel as “Public Truth.”

Seeing the gospel as “public truth” means that Christian faith does speak to environmental concerns, to how we educate our children and young people, to why we condemn racism and discrimination, to the immorality of war and violence, and to the various issues that relate to human life. In all of this, we learn

to become “people of hope.” We can become people of hope because Jesus Christ has been bodily raised from the dead. Because Jesus is alive, we can simply follow him and bring the gospel to bear on all of life. We don’t have to conform to some left-wing or right-wing political orthodoxy. Resurrection cannot be reduced to ideology.

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CHRISTOLOGY: THE PERSON AND ROLE OF JESUS CHRIST

By Rev. Jefferson Vann

Christ is the center of any theology that derives from the Bible, because he is the chief character in God’s story from Genesis to Revelation. The Old Testament is his story concealed; the New Testament is his story revealed. He stands as the central person in all history. He is our way to God and God’s way of reconciling himself to us. He is the truth, and knowing him will set us free. He is the life, because he made the way for humanity to live again.

John described him as the Logos — the Word. He said “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”¹ John was referring to Jesus, because he said, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the

¹ John 1:1–2.

only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”² With those few words John explained that the person who became Jesus of Nazareth pre-existed his birth at Bethlehem, and became God incarnate (in human flesh) at his birth.³

The Old Testament Witness

Jesus once spoke to his disciples about “everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms.”⁴ One would expect there to be a witness to Christ’s pre-existence in those Old Testament books.

Consider, for example, Psalm 2. This psalm speaks of the LORD, the God who created the nations. It also speaks of another, whom the LORD calls “my Son.” The LORD speaks to the Son and chooses somehow to beget him on a certain day. The LORD does not create him as a person; he brings him into existence as a human. The One to whom the LORD is speaking is already in existence as a divine being. He is the Son — the “anointed” who is to become King of Zion. The LORD warns the kings of the nations to kiss the Son, lest he be angry and they suffer his coming wrath.

When the Old Testament predicts the birth of this Son, it reveals his pre-existence at the same time. Micah encourages the little town of Bethlehem by saying, “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.”⁵

Isaiah says, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”⁶ Here again, there is the Lord (divine per-

² John 1:14.

³ Technically, it was at Christ’s conception in the uterus of Mary that he became flesh.

⁴ Luke 24:44.

⁵ Micah 5:2.

⁶ Isaiah 7:14.

son #1) and the son (divine person #2) whom his earthly mother will call Immanuel (God with us). Later Isaiah reveals the titles of this divine son. He predicts “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”⁷ The son will have all the attributes of his Father, including that of *Mighty God* (omnipotence) and *Everlasting Father* (infinity). For a mere created being to accept those titles would be blasphemy. But if the Immanuel who is to come is the same eternal being spoken of in Psalm 2, then it is not blasphemous to give him these divine titles.

Malachi predicts that the Israelites will see “the Lord whom they seek,” and that he will be preceded by a messenger who will “prepare the way before me ... says the LORD of hosts.”⁸ That means that the Lord that the Israelites seek is the same as “the LORD of hosts.” It is not merely a human Messiah, but an incarnation of the living LORD himself who will appear.

John the Baptist’s Witness

John the Baptist was this messenger to whom Malachi was referring. Centuries later, John was born to Elizabeth and Zechariah. A few months later, Elizabeth’s relative, Mary, also had a son. We know this because Mary was pregnant with Jesus and visited Elizabeth, but was still able to travel back to Nazareth just before John was born.⁹ Travelling forward in time about 30 years, we find that John has become a great prophet, and people come from all over Israel to hear him speak of the Lord who is coming.

Among the many things John says about this one who is to come, two things stand out: he says that the coming one ranks before him, because he was before him.¹⁰ The one who is to come

⁷ Isaiah 9:6.

⁸ Malachi 3:1.

⁹ Luke 1:56–57.

¹⁰ John 1:15, 30.

ranks before John because John is merely the messenger, but the one who is to come is the Lord. John said, “He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry.”¹¹ But that does not explain why John said that this coming Lord “was before me.” John was born first. He was the oldest. John knew that Jesus “was” before him, because Jesus pre-existed his birth.

John the Evangelist’s Witness

The author of John’s Gospel also bears witness that Christ pre-existed his birth. He said, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”¹² Before his birth, he was “at the Father’s side.”¹³ Then, the Father sent him into the world.¹⁴ While upon this planet, Jesus knew “that he had come from God and was going back to God.”¹⁵

In one of his epistles, this same author would explain how God’s love had devised the plan to send his Son to earth, to bring reconciliation to those who accept his sacrifice on the cross. He said, “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”¹⁶ The cross was not a mistake. It was the reason that Christ entered time itself.

The vision John sees of Christ on Patmos fills in the picture even more of who Christ is. He is “the Alpha and the Omega,

¹¹ Matthew 3:11.

¹² John 1:1–2.

¹³ John 1:18.

¹⁴ John 3:16, 34; 4:34, 5:23, 30, 37, 38; 6:29, 38, 39, 44, 57; 7:16, 18, 28, 29, 33; 8:16, 18, 26, 29, 42; 9:4; 10:36; 11:42; 12:44, 45, 49; 13:20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21.

¹⁵ John 13:3.

¹⁶ 1 John 4:9–10.

the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”¹⁷ He was the child that the woman gave birth to, whom the dragon sought to devour, but who was caught up to God and his throne.¹⁸ But he is also the living one, who died, and is alive forevermore.¹⁹

Paul’s Witness

The apostle Paul refers to Christ in his pre-existent state when he said that although he was rich (in heaven) he became poor for our sake (by coming to earth).²⁰ Paul encourages believers to “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”²¹

Paul also refers to the incarnation when he says, “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”²² He speaks of Christ’s role in creation by saying, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”²³ Paul essentially agrees with every point that John had made of Jesus being both the Son of God who was born of Mary, and God the Son who created all things.

¹⁷ Revelation 1:8, 17; 2:8; 21:6; 22:13.

¹⁸ Revelation 12:2, 4, 5, 13.

¹⁹ Revelation 1:18.

²⁰ 2 Corinthians 8:9.

²¹ Philippians 2:5–8.

²² Galatians 4:4–5.

²³ Colossians 1:15–17.

The Author of Hebrews' Witness

The author of Hebrews speaks of Christ as God's "Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."²⁴ He expresses again that Christ was involved in creation before he came to this world to bring about redemption. Of particular importance is this author's exegesis of Psalm 2 in Hebrews 5:5–10.

Melchizedek was a shadowy character in the book of Genesis who appears out of nowhere and Abraham gives him a tenth of everything he owns. The psalms predict that the Messiah will be a priest after the order of Melchizedek.²⁵ The author of Hebrews brings these two predictions together. He asserts that God's Messiah would be a Son of God who would have "days of his flesh." During those days he would suffer, and become "the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him."

Jesus' Witness

Jesus himself also testified to his pre-existence as the Son of God. His favorite title for himself was "Son of Man."²⁶ It is assumed that mostly this title refers to Christ's true humanity, but the title can also be translated "Son among men," which fits into the whole emphasis in the Bible on the Messiah as God among us. Jesus accepted the title "Son of God" as well.²⁷ Those who

²⁴ Hebrews 1:2.

²⁵ Psalm 110:4.

²⁶ Matthew 8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8, 32, 40; 13:37, 41; 16:13, 27f; 17:9, 12, 22; 19:28; 20:18, 28; 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44; 25:31; 26:2, 24, 45, 64; Mark 2:10, 28; 8:31, 38; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 13:26; 14:21, 41, 62; Luke 5:24; 6:5, 22; 7:34; 9:22, 26, 44, 58; 11:30; 12:8, 10, 40; 17:22, 24, 26, 30; 18:8, 31; 19:10; 21:27, 36; 22:22, 48, 69; 24:7; John 1:51; 3:13f; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28; 9:35; 12:23, 34; 13:31.

²⁷ Matthew 4:3, 6; 8:29; 14:33; 26:63; 27:40, 43, 54; Mark 1:1; 3:11; 15:39; Luke 1:35; 3:38; 4:3, 9, 41; 22:70; John 1:34, 49; 3:18; 5:25; 10:36; 11:4, 27; 19:7; 20:31.

testified to his gospel often used this term for him.²⁸ He is never said to have become the Son of God. It had been his title before he came, and continues to be his title now.

One day when Jesus was arguing with the Jewish leaders who were opposing his message, he let slip the fact that he was alive back in the days of Abraham. He told them that “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.”²⁹ That was enough for them. They were convinced he was crazy. They said, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?”³⁰ If Jesus did not pre-exist his human birth, they would be right.

Jesus ended the argument by saying “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”³¹ This opened a whole new can of worms for the Jews. The title “I am” was a special one for them, because it had been used by God to refer to himself when he revealed himself to Moses. Moses had asked what name he should use when offering God’s deliverance to the Israelites in Egypt. God said, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”³² By using this title, Jesus was claiming to have been the God of the exodus.

Jesus actually used that term “I AM” (Greek *ego eimi*) several times in his discourses in which he described himself.

²⁸ Acts 9:20; Rom. 1:4; 2 Cor. 1:19; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 4:13; Heb. 4:14; 6:6; 7:3; 10:29; 1 John 3:8; 4:15; 5:5, 10, 12f, 20; Rev. 2:18.

²⁹ John 8:56.

³⁰ John 8:57.

³¹ John 8:58.

³² Exodus 3:14.

“I AM ... ”	Reference
“The Bread of Life”	John 6:35, 41, 48, 51
“The Light of the World”	John 8:12; 9:5
“The Door of the Sheep” and “The Good Shepherd”	John 10:7, 9, 11, 14
“The Resurrection and the Life”	John 11:25
“The Way, the Truth and The Life”	John 14:6
“The True Vine”	John 15:1, 5

Each of these statements identified Jesus as the LORD of the Old Testament, and thus implied that he was more than he seemed; that he pre-existed his birth.

There was another time when Jesus let it slip that he has been around a while. It was during his high priestly prayer for his disciples and the church that would come from their testimony. He prayed, “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.”³³ Later he prayed, “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”³⁴ Twice he referred to being with God before the world was created. John would remember those words, and describe his Savior as the Word who was with God, and who was God.

The pre-existence of Christ as the eternal Logos is not an easy doctrine to grasp logically. Many have sought after some doctrinal compromise that would allow Christ to be less than what these Scriptures imply. Some have done so out of the mistaken notion that to call Christ equal with the Father is blasphemy. The Scriptures must be the standard to judge all theological premises. The Scriptures affirm that Christ is equal with the Father in deity.

³³ John 17:5.

³⁴ John 17:24.

However, that is only half of the story. The Scriptures affirm as well that Christ was (and is) fully human. Both of those realities must be held in balance if Christ's identity is to be understood.

There have been those who have problems understanding and believing what the Bible says about Christ's pre-existence and deity as the eternal Logos. There have also been those who cannot quite accept the flip-side of the issue. The Bible insists that Christ was (and is and always will be) fully human as well. In the same chapter where he writes of the Logos coming to earth, John says that he "became flesh" and pitched his tent among us.³⁵

Jesus was called (among other things) a Nazarene.³⁶ The title referred to the fact that he grew up in Nazareth, a town in Galilee. Except for a few miracles connected with his birth and one particular incident when he was 12,³⁷ we know nothing about that childhood. The Scriptures leave us to assume that the early years of Christ's life were relatively insignificant. Jesus did not take advantage of his divine nature during these years. Instead, being human, he submitted entirely to his human nature and became a servant instead of the Master.

Jesus Got Hungry

One of the signs of Jesus' full humanity was that he became hungry.³⁸ The Scriptures indicate that his body worked like every other body, being subject to the same limitations and needs. One of the first needs any person feels is hunger. Immediately after birth most babies instinctively search for their mother's breast. One day when Jesus was hungry he walked up to a fig tree, but found it empty. Matthew tells us that "... he said to (the tree), 'May no fruit ever come from you again!' And the fig tree with-

³⁵ John 1:14.

³⁶ Matthew 2:23; Mark 14:67.

³⁷ See Luke 1-2.

³⁸ Matthew 4:2.

ered at once.”³⁹ Perhaps Jesus was doing something symbolic there — indicating his disgust at Israel. His own nation was being like that fig tree — pretending to bear fruit but bearing nothing. But Jesus’ hunger was real. He was like any one of us.

Jesus got Tired

Jesus and his disciples traveled a great deal, and almost always walked wherever they went.⁴⁰ His encounter with the woman of Samaria happened because Jesus was tired after a long day of walking, so was sitting at the well.⁴¹ The human body was created with a mechanism for self-renewal, and fatigue is part of that mechanism. The urge to rest showed that Jesus was completely human. He was not pretending to be human, nor was his humanity completely under the control of his divine nature. Weariness showed that he was real.

Jesus got Emotional

Another clue that Jesus was completely human was the way he reacted to the things that happened around him. Even though Jesus knew that Lazarus was asleep (dead) and he was going to wake him up (by raising him from the dead), Jesus still wept and was overcome by sorrow at his friend’s grave.⁴² In the same way, we Christians weep over the deaths of our loved ones. Even though we know that their deaths are not permanent. Our sorrow is not like that of unbelievers who have no hope.⁴³ Yet we do sorrow, because we know that death is real and the loss is real.

³⁹ Matthew 21:19.

⁴⁰ The only exception I can think of is Jesus’ riding the donkey’s colt during the triumphal entry (Matt. 21; Mark 11; Luke 19; John 12).

⁴¹ John 4:6.

⁴² John 11:11, 35, 38.

⁴³ 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

Jesus was called a man of sorrows.⁴⁴ The Scriptures tell us that he wept, but it is not recorded that he laughed. Doubtless he did. He surely experienced the full range of emotions. The writer of Hebrews implied that Jesus experienced all aspects of humanity so that he could be a sympathetic high priest.⁴⁵

Jesus Experienced Limited Knowledge

As the divine Logos, Jesus was omniscient. Throughout eternity he knew all things. But for the short time between his incarnation and his ascension, Jesus apparently limited his own knowledge of certain facts. At one time during his ministry he was surrounded by crowds, and a woman seeking healing touched his garment. He asked who it was.⁴⁶ This may have been only to draw the woman out so that he could heal her, but it certainly suggests that Jesus' knowledge was limited during his earthly life.

When Jesus was teaching about his second coming, he indicated that the exact timing of this future event was known only to his heavenly Father. He said that “concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”⁴⁷ The New Testament says a great deal about this event, but nowhere does it tell us when it will occur. In God's wisdom, this fact is hidden from us. Jesus could live with that. He did not have to have all his questions answered. It was enough for him to know that the Father knew. It should be enough for us as believers as well to know that Christ is coming again, and to seek to live our lives in such a way that we are prepared for him when he comes.

⁴⁴ Isaiah 53:3.

⁴⁵ Hebrews 4:15.

⁴⁶ Luke 8:45–48.

⁴⁷ Mark 13:32.

Jesus Experienced Psychological Anguish

Jesus was born in the shadow of his own cross. He described his coming suffering as a baptism that he is destined for, and said, “How great is my distress until it is accomplished!”⁴⁸ Imagine going through life knowing that you are destined to die a horrible painful death, and there is nothing you can do about it. He knew that his own people would turn against him. He knew that his own disciples would run in fear at his arrest. He knew that he would be betrayed by one of his own students.

The apex of Christ’s lifetime of mental suffering came on the night of his betrayal, when he was praying alone in the garden called Gethsemane. That night Jesus said, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.”⁴⁹ He prayed to God alone while his heart was breaking. Luke tells us that “being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”⁵⁰

A tremendous spiritual battle was being fought that night. The devil, having been defeated when he tried to tempt Jesus years before, had only “departed from him until an opportune time.”⁵¹ Now Satan was giving Jesus all that he had. Men who have undergone great physical torture and endured it without breaking have been known to fall apart when they felt that their loved ones were in danger. Possibly Jesus’ ordeal in Gethsemane involved the fact that he knew the eternal lives of multitudes of people rested upon his shoulders. The rescue of the entire human race depended upon his ability to withstand the temptations of the devil that night.

The writer of Hebrews showed how this terrible event fit within the plan of God for Christ and those he would redeem.⁵²

⁴⁸ Luke 12:50.

⁴⁹ Matthew 26:38.

⁵⁰ Luke 22:44.

⁵¹ Luke 4:13.

⁵² Hebrews 5:7–10.

What was at stake was Jesus' qualification to be "the source of eternal salvation." If Jesus had not endured and overcome the anguish of that fateful night, he would not have been qualified to go to the cross to purchase salvation for humanity. He had to endure the worst and remain the best so that he could redeem his own.

That psychological anguish continued while Jesus endured the cross. Even as his life's blood poured from him, he had to face the fact that his mother would be left alone. He also felt the horrible emptiness that even his heavenly Father was going to turn his back upon his suffering. When he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"⁵³ he was not just quoting Scripture. He was expressing how he felt.

Jesus Experienced Temptation

Before Jesus began his ministry with his disciples, he underwent a time of prayer and fasting in the wilderness alone. There Satan joined him and tried to thwart God's purposes by tempting Christ to sin.⁵⁴ This ordeal in the desert was not the only time Jesus was tempted. He was completely human, so there were many times when the enemy sought to overcome him through this tactic. Once the devil even utilized the apostle Peter to convince Jesus that he could achieve God's will without going to the cross. Matthew records that Jesus "turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.'"⁵⁵

It was God's will that "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."⁵⁶ That "in every respect" suggests that there will be no temptation that

⁵³ Matthew 27:46.

⁵⁴ Matthew 4:1-11.

⁵⁵ Matthew 16:23.

⁵⁶ Hebrews 4:15.

any of us have to endure that Jesus has not already endured and was victorious over. His victory was a human victory. He did not utilize his divine powers to overcome temptation because that would have disqualified him to be our high priest.⁵⁷

Jesus Experienced Physical Pain

Jesus took on humanity in order to save humanity. He did not just take on the appearance of humanity. The Bible presents him as a babe in a manger, but the Bible does not say “no crying he makes.” He was what Pinocchio wanted to be; he was a real boy. Real boys and laugh and snuggle and wet themselves. They also cry, because they experience discomfort. Eight days after his birth, Jesus was circumcised. He felt pain.

Before having his flesh nailed to the wooden beams of the cross, Jesus had already been beaten almost to death by the Roman guards. On the cross, every breath was an experience in agony. Every movement accentuated the pain. He spoke several times, and each word was paid for by pain. Just as the sacrifices suffered when being slaughtered outside the gate of Jerusalem, so Christ suffered outside the gate “in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.”⁵⁸

The fact that Christ, as a completely human being, was able to suffer and remain sinless is an example for those of us who choose to follow him. Peter says, “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”⁵⁹ If Christ were some divine being posing as human, his suffering and death could hardly serve as an example for his followers.

⁵⁷ Hebrews 2:17–18; 4:15–16; 5:2, 7; 7:25.

⁵⁸ Hebrews 13:12.

⁵⁹ 1 Peter 2:21–23.

Because Christ was who he was — what he did matters. Even in the first century — during the time of the apostle John — some were beginning to doubt that Christ was fully human. John attacked this heresy by proclaiming that “every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.”⁶⁰ He had to teach this doctrine because “many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh.”⁶¹ To deny that Christ was fully human was to deny Christ.

Yet this was the same John who had declared that Christ was God and with God in the beginning.⁶² The apostle encourages believers to hold to two seemingly opposite truths at the same time. Christ is simultaneously both fully divine and fully human.

Since the incarnation, Christ has possessed two complete natures, fully incorporated into his being. He is not a half-man, half-god hybrid. He is 100% human and 100% God. His deity is infinite, and was never lost — even when he walked upon earth as a human. His humanity began at his incarnation but it, too, is eternal. He will never cease to be our human Savior. This union of the two natures, or substances, is referred to as the hypostatic union. The term comes from the Greek word *hupostasis*, meaning substance.

The author of Hebrews uses the term *hupostasis* to express how Christ is the exact imprint of the Father’s *nature*.⁶³ The ESV Study Bible explains, “Thus the Son is identical in substance to God, being himself fully God. In all attributes and abilities, the Son is exactly like the Father.”⁶⁴ Already this work has shown that Christ possesses both deity and humanity. It remains to explain why that is necessary.

⁶⁰ 1 John 4:2–3.

⁶¹ 2 John 1:7.

⁶² John 1:1–2.

⁶³ Hebrews 1:3.

⁶⁴ ESV Study Bible, electronic edition (Heb.1:3).

God's Plan

It was God's plan from the beginning that the eternal Logos would become a human being and dwell here on earth with other human beings. He came down among us so that we could see his glory, a glory that only he and the Father share.⁶⁵ He became one of us because that was the way to the cross. As Paul put it, "Though he was in the form of God, (he) did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."⁶⁶ God's plan required that the Logos retain his full deity while also becoming fully human.

Our Need

Humanity needed a redeemer who was one of us, "yet without sin."⁶⁷ We were in a catch-22 situation. We could be redeemed from sin only by a sacrifice who identified entirely with our species. The sacrifice had to be human. But the catch was that our entire species had been defiled by original sin. Paul told the Romans that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."⁶⁸ What we needed was both necessary for us to provide ourselves, and impossible for us to provide for ourselves.

God stepped in with his grace, and with himself. The Son of God became a Son of Man. With that one step of grace, it became possible once again for humanity to receive eternal life.

Not a Third Thing

Some have suggested that Christ was actually a fusion of God's Spirit (the Logos) with human flesh (Jesus). They imagine

⁶⁵ John 1:14.

⁶⁶ Philippians 2:6-8.

⁶⁷ Hebrews 4:15.

⁶⁸ Romans 3:23.

that Jesus was a *tertium quid* (Latin for *third thing*). The Christian church has argued against this idea. One example of this idea was Eutychianism.⁶⁹ This view held that Jesus' human nature was overwhelmed by that of the divine Logos, and the result was a divine being who was different in nature from the Father. In its attempt to preserve the distinction between Christ and the Father, it denied what the Bible says about both.

Not two Different Persons

Others, seeking to preserve the similarity between Christ and the Father, suggested that the human Jesus and the divine Logos were two separate beings. This idea is attributed to the Nestorians.⁷⁰ Again, historically, such ideas have been rejected by Christianity because they do not fit the biblical facts. If Christ were two separate persons, then the human half could not have been sinless enough to die for our sins.

So What?

The significance of the Christ's two natures in his one being cannot be overstated. When the eternal Logos became flesh he added humanity to his divinity permanently. This was an act of divine grace, and shows how valuable humanity is to our creator. God so loved the world that he divested himself of the prerogatives of his divinity — though still retaining his divine nature. He became obedient even to the point of taking on mortality, though he did not deserve it. He embraced mortality and the cross for us.

There are no human analogies that could explain exactly what the eternal Logos did at the incarnation. Perhaps one that comes closest is a physician who infects herself with a disease in

⁶⁹ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eutychianism>

⁷⁰ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nestorianism>

order to cure the disease. Humanity itself was a disease, and it had infected the planet. Christ humbled himself to become one of us in order to affect the restoration and healing that was needed. So Paul says that “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”⁷¹

Having Christ’s Mind

Paul gives his explanation of Christ’s becoming human in the context of encouraging the Church at Philippi to become more Christ-like.⁷² The mind that Christ had is the one that believers can have. It is a mind that cares more about helping others than about looking out for number one. It is a mind that is willing to sacrifice what one deserves so that others can get the grace that they do not deserve. Paul says that this mind is ours in Christ Jesus. It is that mind, and the selfless actions it produces, that will lead this fallen world back to its creator.

Systematic theologies usually contain a section — like this — on Christology. They usually divide that section into two parts: the person of Christ (where they discuss his nature) and the works of Christ (where they describe what he has done). There is an issue that falls somewhat between these two categories, which is often missing: the teachings and commands of Christ. One does not really know someone else unless one knows that person’s message. For that reason, it is helpful to spend some time learning what Jesus taught while among us.

Jesus affirmed that his disciples were right in calling him “Teacher.”⁷³ He came not just to die on the cross but also to share God’s word with humanity. The messages that he taught explained the heart of the Scriptures and charted a new path for us all to follow. He also taught about our future. Both the path we

⁷¹ 2 Corinthians 5:21.

⁷² Philippians 2:4–15.

⁷³ John 13:13.

are to follow in obedience to his teachings and the hope that his teachings gave us are called the same thing: the kingdom of God.

Savior of the World

Christ taught that he is the Savior of the world. He answered the question that he posed to his disciples: “But who do you say that I am?”⁷⁴ “With keen anticipation, he guided the conversation toward the crucial issue of their understanding of his identity. . . . He knew that their eternal destiny and the success of his mission on earth depended on their accurate perception of him and his ministry.”⁷⁵ Likewise, today the church needs an accurate understanding of who Jesus was and is. Jesus provided a clear picture of his identity, but it takes faith to keep that picture in one’s mind because there are plenty of substitute pictures of Jesus that contend with it.

“This same question rings down through the centuries. ‘Who is Jesus Christ?’ ‘Is He just a man?’ ‘Is He a religious prophet?’ ‘Is he a great moral teacher?’ ”⁷⁶ Jesus taught that he was more than that. The angels declared when he was born that he was “a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”⁷⁷ The people saw and heard him speak and do miracles and then proclaimed, “We have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”⁷⁸

Jesus said it this way: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”⁷⁹ By so doing, he placed himself above every prophet, every sage, every guru, every religion, every philosophy and every political movement. If one’s goal is a relationship with God, then Jesus Christ is the only way.

⁷⁴ Matthew 16:15.

⁷⁵ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Community 101: Reclaiming the Local Church as Community of Oneness*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 169.

⁷⁶ Dan Story, *Defending Your Faith: Reliable Answers for a New Generation of Seekers and Skeptics*. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997), 75.

⁷⁷ Luke 2:11.

⁷⁸ John 4:42.

⁷⁹ John 14:6.

God has given bread to sustain us from heaven, and Jesus Christ is it. Jesus said, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”⁸⁰ He was talking about the hope of eternal life, which no normal bread can offer. If we eat bread from the local bakery, we will hunger again. But God offers a bread that promises eternal sustenance. The manna that the Israelites ate in the wilderness was a sign promising that gift. Jesus was the gift. The manna sustained the temporary lives of the Israelites. Jesus will sustain us permanently. The Israelites accepted the manna by eating it; we accept Christ by believing in him.

Other teachers have claimed to have insight from the divine, but Jesus claimed more than that. He said “I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me.”⁸¹ His knowledge of God was not learned through meditation or study. It was the result of an eternal relationship with his Father. What he taught us can be trusted because it came directly from the source.

Other teachers have claimed to have solutions to the world’s problems, but Jesus claims to be the solution. He said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”⁸² The darkness that threatens to destroy this planet is no problem for him. He is the light, and his followers have access to that light for their journey. He is called the light of life because the end of the journey will be eternal life. The metaphor of light speaks of both the path we follow today, and the hope we have for eternity.

Christ claimed to be of an entirely different category than all the other inhabitants of this planet. He said, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.”⁸³ If his claim was not true, and he was just another hu-

⁸⁰ John 6:35.

⁸¹ John 7:29.

⁸² John 8:12.

⁸³ John 8:23.

man being and nothing else, then there is no salvation and no hope for humanity. If he is merely one of several who are divinely inspired, then he is a divinely inspired liar, because he claims more of himself than just insight.

Entering his Kingdom

The metaphor Christ used most to explain spiritual things was that of the kingdom of God. Christ is king in God's kingdom. Christ explained how to enter his kingdom. To enter his kingdom is to believe and follow Christ as the kingdom's king, and to be prepared when that kingdom comes to earth to rule over the planet. The kingdom of God is not a metaphor for heaven. Heaven is where God is, but the kingdom of God is about where God wants to be. His throne in heaven is secure, but it is on earth that Satan's rebellion had dared to supplant God's dominion.

Jesus claimed that it is possible for human beings to become part of God's kingdom today. He called it entering the kingdom. In a sense, what he was talking about is a kind of insurgency. People who have entered God's kingdom before it comes to earth are like rebels. They live among the established nations but their allegiance is to the coming kingdom. Their goal is not to destroy the kingdoms of men, but to promote and recruit for the coming kingdom and its Lord. There were a number of groups in Jesus' day who thought that in order to enter the kingdom one had to be just a little bit more righteous than the next guy. So they established rules to follow to make sure everybody could tell the difference. The problem is, Jesus warned, those super-spiritual groups did not make the cut! He said, "... unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Matthew 5:20.

Living in his Kingdom

Christ explained how the subjects of his kingdom are supposed to live. Central to living Jesus' way is the doing of good works as a witness to the new life within. He tells his followers to "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."⁸⁵ But, unlike the super-spiritual groups of his day, Jesus warned against doing good works just for show. He told them to "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven."⁸⁶ A good work is only a true good work if it springs from the Holy Spirit within, and is done for the benefit of others, not to put notches on one's spiritual belt.

Miracles are expected as kingdom citizens go about their lives. Jesus said to his disciples, "If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you." The idea is not that we have to build up our faith until it gets strong enough. Just a little faith — the size of a mustard seed — will do. What matters is not the size of our faith but the power of our king. We are citizens of his kingdom, so when the king wants a mountain moved, nothing is going to stand in his way. What our king requires of us is the courage to stand before the mountain and risk making fools of ourselves by telling it to scam.

Living in the kingdom means making the kingdom itself our priority and all other things become second place.⁸⁷ Jesus compares citizens in his kingdom to the other nations of the world. God knows the people in the nations and he sees to it that they get the things that they spend their lives worrying about. But citizens in Christ's kingdom are to seek *the kingdom itself*, and

⁸⁵ Matthew 5:16.

⁸⁶ Matthew 6:1.

⁸⁷ Luke 12:29–32.

not to get caught up in the rat race for those insignificant things, like their next meal.

Christ taught us to seek the kingdom for two reasons. First, the kingdom of God is going to manifest as dominion over the whole universe when Jesus comes again. To seek the kingdom is to strive to be in that number when the saints go marching in. Nothing should be a higher priority than being there. Second, to seek the kingdom is to allow the king to live his life through you. It is striving to live the way of life expected of a kingdom citizen. That is a full-time job. No wonder that Jesus added to his counsel that we should not fear because the Father wants to give us his kingdom.

Living in the kingdom is simply a matter of obeying the commands of our king. Jesus gave us those commands as part of his teaching ministry. The Great Commission from Christ includes the order to pass on those commands to those we bring into the kingdom. Jesus told us to make disciples by baptizing believers in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to “observe all that I have commanded you.”⁸⁸

It is amazing how the church teaches about so many things, and even exegetes the texts of the New Testament, but so often ignores these foundational principles — the ones found in the commands of Christ. The commands can be summarized as follows:

1. Make your choices based on God’s permanent realities, rather than the world’s temporary ones. Invest your life in eternity.
2. Put Christ and his kingdom first in your life. Be devoted to him.
3. Be genuine: don’t pretend to be something you are not, and don’t forget who you are in Christ. Be what you claim to be.

⁸⁸ Matthew 28:20.

4. Trust your heavenly Father to take care of your needs, and to win your battles. Rely on God to do what you cannot do.
5. Keep in contact and communication with God through prayer.
6. Concentrate on learning, living and proclaiming the truth.
7. Expect the power of the Holy Spirit to make up for your weaknesses and insufficiencies. Be used by God to fulfill his will.
8. Live in expectancy because the king is coming! Be alert, and ready for his arrival.⁸⁹

Besides these, and foundational to them are the two greatest commandments from the Old Testament (that we should love God with all that we are and love our neighbors as ourselves). The third greatest commandment is that which we call the Great Commission, that disciples of Christ should make more disciples of Christ.

Enemies of his Kingdom

Christ denounced his enemies as well. It is interesting to see who is on that list, and who is not. Caesar, the emperor of the Roman world, is mentioned in 19 verses of Scripture, but Jesus never calls him his enemy.⁹⁰ In ancient times a prophet would identify God's enemies by pronouncing a woe upon them — a kind of prophetic curse.⁹¹ Jesus pronounced woes upon his enemies, and so identified the enemies of his kingdom.

⁸⁹ See Jefferson Vann, *The Commands of Christ* (<http://commandsofchrist.wordpress.com/>).

⁹⁰ Matthew 22:17, 21; Mark 12:14, 17; Luke 2:1; 3:1; 20:22, 25; 23:2; John 19:12, 15; Acts 17:7; 25:8, 11f, 21; 26:32; 27:24; 28:19.

⁹¹ Num. 21:29; 1 Sam. 4:7f; Isa. 3:9, 11; 5:8, 11, 18, 20ff; 6:5; 10:1; 24:16; 31:1; 45:9f; Jer. 4:13, 31; 6:4; 10:19; 13:27; 15:10; 22:13; 23:1; 45:3; 48:1, 46; 50:27; Lam. 5:16; Ezek. 2:10; 13:3, 18; 16:23; 24:6, 9; Hos. 7:13; 9:12; Amos 5:18; 6:1, 4; Mic. 2:1; 7:1; Nah. 3:1; Hab. 2:6, 9, 12, 15, 19; Zeph. 2:5; 3:1; Zech. 11:17.

Counted among the enemies of Christ's kingdom are those places where the gospel is preached, but the people respond with indifference or rejection.⁹² The miracles accompanied the message, but for the inhabitants of those cities, the miracles were not enough. They refused to seek the kingdom about which Jesus preached. They probably prided themselves on the fact that a great prophet had been among them, and enjoyed telling stories about his miracles. But on the judgment day, the ancient enemies of God's people to the north — Tyre and Sidon — will fare better than them. Even Sodom will suffer less.

Also counted among the enemies of Christ's kingdom are the people, institutions and things that cause sin. Sin cannot endure where Christ's kingdom reigns, and Christ's kingdom cannot abide where sin reigns.⁹³ Any system (whether political or religious, economic or social) that encourages sin and tempts people to transgress God's will is set against the gospel and against the kingdom of Christ. These are all identified by Christ as his enemies. Christ taught that we cannot escape the temptations because we will have to live in the world, and so we will have to operate within those systems. He said, "It is necessary that temptations come."⁹⁴ But he warns us not to be part of the problem. He said, "Woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!" People will not be judged for the sinfulness of their society, but they will be judged for their personal contribution to it.

If the number of woes applied to them is the standard of judging who gets the "worst enemy status" then the Pharisees and scribes win that title. Jesus pronounces seven woes against them in Matthew 23.⁹⁵ From what Jesus said about them, it is clear that what made them kingdom enemy #1 is their hypocritical attempt to replace God's kingdom with one that looked righteous on the outside, but was corrupt within.

⁹² Matthew 11:21–24.

⁹³ Matthew 18:7–9.

⁹⁴ Matthew 18:7.

⁹⁵ Matthew 23:13,15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29.

In the kingdom of God, our biggest enemies are going to be the groups that want to be our friends. They will want to snuggle up to us and work with us on community development projects, and things like that. They will want to join with us in community minister's organizations, and will praise us for our social welfare programs. But they will draw the line at proclaiming Jesus as Lord. When push comes to shove, they will show themselves our enemies, because they are his enemies.

Equipping his Church

As a teacher, Christ equipped his disciples to lead the church. The church was not a mistake. It was Christ's intention to found it, and he spent years of his earthly life preparing the people who would lead it. On one particular occasion, he brought his disciples together and pointed out how the Gentile rulers led by intimidation and domination. He told his disciples, "It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."⁹⁶ Christ himself was to serve as the example for Christian leadership. He taught leadership with a towel and wash basin.

He trained by discipling. That is, he did things and his disciples watched, he said things and the disciples learned — and eventually it was their turn. When they were ready, he set them loose to preach and cast out demons. They did what they had learned.

Preparing his Church for Suffering

As a teacher, Christ prepared his disciples for the difficulties they would face as well. He let them know that they would not

⁹⁶ Matthew 20:26–28.

always have the honor of his personal presence among them. He told them, “I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me.”⁹⁷ They would need to learn to face the challenges that they would face without his personal counsel. Instead, he would leave them with the third person of the Trinity: the other counselor.

It was he, the Holy Spirit, who would be with them as they faced trials and persecution. Jesus assured them that “... the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”⁹⁸ He would also help the disciples to remember and take in the tremendous lessons that Jesus had taught and the significance of the events the disciples witnessed. Jesus said, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.”⁹⁹ And because Jesus suffered in doing God’s will, they understood it when they suffered themselves.

His Role as Messiah

As teacher, Christ predicted the events concerning his own life, death and resurrection. There were no surprises with him. Everything that happened in his life was scripted and pre-measured to fit God’s plan. Perhaps the disciples did not quite make the connections when Jesus promised that “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself”¹⁰⁰ but Jesus repeated detailed descriptions of his crucifixion to them several times.¹⁰¹ And after his resurrection he made the connections by going back to the Old Testament Scriptures and showing how his death and resurrection were necessary.

⁹⁷ John 7:33.

⁹⁸ Luke 12:12.

⁹⁹ John 13:7.

¹⁰⁰ John 12:32.

¹⁰¹ Matthew 17:12; 20:19; 26:2; Mark 8:31; 9:12; Luke 9:22; 17:25; 22:15.

His Return as Messiah

Christ also predicted current and future eschatological events. He understood his times, and marveled that those around him did not. He told them, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.”¹⁰² He spoke of his own generation in Jerusalem and how they were going to suffer God’s judgment because so many would reject him.

He went on to describe that judgment in detail in his eschatological discourse on the Mount of Olives. He called them God’s “days of vengeance” upon Jerusalem.¹⁰³ Little did his listeners know that in a mere 40 years, those days of vengeance would come. Jesus predicted that Roman armies would surround Jerusalem.¹⁰⁴ The armies of Rome laid siege to Jerusalem and starved it for a matter of years. Jesus predicted that Jerusalem and its temple would be destroyed.¹⁰⁵ That fateful event happened in 70 AD. He also predicted that the Jews would undergo another exile, being scattered in other nations, trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until God’s vengeance is completed. It happened just as he predicted.

The great teacher of the future was just as accurate when he described the age that precedes his second coming. We are living in that age now, so it is easy to see the signs all around us that Jesus called birth pains.¹⁰⁶ Birth pains all have two things in common: they are intermittent, and they indicate that a birth is happening. The signs Jesus mentioned are: false Messiahs, warfare and its threat, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, persecution of

¹⁰² Matthew 16:2–3.

¹⁰³ Luke 21:22.

¹⁰⁴ Luke 21:20.

¹⁰⁵ Matthew 24:2; Mark 13:2; Luke 21:6.

¹⁰⁶ Matthew 24:8; Mark 13:8.

believers, and divisions among families because of Christ. These realities have been with us intermittently for the past two thousand years.

But Jesus was even more specific in his predictions. He described his second coming in detail as well.¹⁰⁷ It is clear from these predictions that Christ is going to come physically, visibly and gloriously. His return will be a time of great joy for those who have entered his kingdom, but terrible distress and shame for those who have not. Like Jesus, the church should encourage believers with the hope of the full deliverance we will experience at the second advent, and also warn unbelievers of the great calamity they will face if they are not found in him.

Scope and Balance

The Teacher taught the kingdom of God as the king's rule present and continuously expanding in the lives of believers and also their future hope. Christian teaching should seek the same scope and balance.

It is an axiom that “no good deed goes unpunished,” and that was true in the life of Jesus. John records in chapter 9 of his Gospel that Jesus did the good deed of restoring sight to a blind man. The Pharisees learned about it and concluded that Jesus was “not from God.”¹⁰⁸ They reasoned that a leader sent from God would have the good sense not to heal anyone on the Sabbath.

They could not see beyond their narrow, legalistic worldview to recognize who Jesus really was. Jesus commented on this event by saying, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”¹⁰⁹ When the Pharisees who overheard what he said figured out that he might have been referring to them — the leaders in Israel — they asked him if that were the case. He responded, “If you were

¹⁰⁷ Matthew 24:29–31; Luke 21:25–28.

¹⁰⁸ John 9:16.

¹⁰⁹ John 9:39.

blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see, your guilt remains.’¹¹⁰ Their guilt was in claiming to lead people to God when, in fact, they were leading them away from Christ.

That is the context in which Jesus gives his “Good Shepherd” monologue. It can be found in the first 18 verses of John 10. A shepherd is a person who is trusted and appointed by the owner of the sheep and goats to look after them. He provides for their needs by leading them to where they can find sustenance. He protects them from predators and their own foolish tendency to get lost. If he is a good shepherd, he is even willing to put his own life on the line to protect and save his sheep from danger. In his Good Shepherd monologue, Jesus asserted that he is the divinely appointed leader of God’s people, and that the Pharisees and others like them are not.

The Door

Again, it must be understood that Jesus was talking to the Pharisees, who fancied themselves the super-spiritual leaders of God’s people. In the first 10 verses of his Good Shepherd monologue, Jesus is explaining to the bad shepherds why they are bad shepherds. To do that, he uses the metaphor of a door. The door of which he speaks is not the door to a house, but is something that shepherds are familiar with. In Bible times a shepherd would sleep in the opening of a desert pen to personally guard the only access to his precious livestock. With this cultural context in mind, Jesus could as easily say, “I am the gate” as “I am the Good Shepherd.” As a symbolic gate, the shepherd was the only means by which someone could have access to the fold.¹¹¹

The Pharisees assumed that — since they studied and revered the Torah — God had automatically qualified them for spiritual leadership. Jesus affirmed the reality of spiritual leader-

¹¹⁰ John 9:41.

¹¹¹ Timothy S. Laniak, *While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks*. (Higher Life Development Services, Inc., 2007), 141.

ship of God's flock, but denied that the Pharisees were qualified. The reason: those Pharisees had not entered through the door. They did not have a relationship with God through his only Son.

Not having entered through the door, the Pharisees were seeking to gain access to the flock some other way. That makes them not shepherds, but thieves. They were attempting to steal something that was not theirs: the sheep. They were attempting to gain the loyalty and obedience of God's people. The result of this attempted robbery would be bad for the sheep. The good shepherd would come (to the fold) in order to ensure abundant life for them. They would "go in and out and find pasture."¹¹² The false shepherds come (into the pen) only for the purpose of stealing, killing and destroying the flock.¹¹³ Jesus was referring to the false leaders of his day, but the same is true of all those who attempt to lead God's people without having first established a relationship with God through Jesus, the door.

The Protector

From verse 11, Jesus takes up the question, which is undoubtedly on the minds of the Pharisees as they listen to Jesus condemn them as false shepherds: "What makes you the good shepherd?" To answer that question, Jesus changes the scenario a little bit. Now, the danger is not from false shepherds seeking to steal the sheep, but from the wolf who wants to snatch and scatter them.

Jesus continues to be the door of protection for the sheep, but now he is called on to put his own life in danger to protect his sheep. He qualifies as the good shepherd because he "lays down his life for the sheep."¹¹⁴ He is willing to do whatever it takes to ensure the safety of the flock. It is obvious that Jesus refers to his own impending death on the cross here. The sheep needed more

¹¹² John 10:9.

¹¹³ John 10:10.

¹¹⁴ John 10:11.

than just protection. They needed deliverance. Only by sacrificing his own life would the good shepherd ensure the preservation of the lives of those he was responsible for.

The Owner

Why does Jesus lay down his life for the sheep? He does it because his relationship with God's people is not the same as that of the false shepherds. The false shepherds are hired hands. He is the owner of the sheep. When the wolf comes, the hired hands run away because they are not willing to pay the ultimate price to protect those under their charge. The owner knows the sheep and cares for them. The sheep know the owner, and respond to him when he calls them by name.

As the owner of the sheep, Jesus has plans to increase his flock. He has other sheep who are not part of the present fold. He has plans to bring those other sheep into the fold so that there will be "one flock, one shepherd."¹¹⁵ Those who advocate forms of universalism see this statement by Jesus as affirming that there are several ways to God. We must understand, however, that the context in which Jesus speaks does not allow that interpretation of his words.

The whole intent of Jesus' Good Shepherd monologue is to show that God has specifically chosen his only Son to be the only way to salvation. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for — in a sense — taking his place and attempting to steal the sheep. He insisted on being the door through which everyone must pass in order to be a part of the flock.

Likewise, as the only Son of the owner (the Father) Jesus is uniquely qualified as the Good Shepherd because only he will lay down his life for the sheep. No one in the past or the future will be able to do this — only Jesus Christ.

¹¹⁵ John 10:16.

The Son

Unlike all those leaders who had gone before Jesus, and all of us who come after him, only the Son is uniquely qualified to give his life as an atoning sacrifice to rescue the entire flock from the ravening wolf — sin and death.¹¹⁶

He has a unique relationship with God the Father. He says, “The Father knows me and I know the Father.”¹¹⁷ His relationship with the Father implies that there is no impediment — nothing comes between the two. For the rest of us, sin keeps us from having that kind of relationship with God. For Christ, eternally sinless, no such impediment exists. This sinless state puts Christ in the unique position in that only he can be the sacrifice to undo the damage that sin has done to humanity.

Only Christ has been charged by the Father with the task of redeeming humanity by his blood. How it must have enraged the Pharisees when Jesus told them that he has received that special charge from his Father!¹¹⁸ From that moment, many who had probably been open to Jesus’ message turned against him completely, claiming that he was either insane or demon possessed.¹¹⁹

They might have accepted that Jesus was a good teacher, or even a good moral leader, but Jesus would not allow them to stay there. He must either be the sinless sacrifice that God exclusively uses for the rescue of humanity, or not. Accept him or reject him, but either way he is the Good Shepherd and there is no other.

As the Son, Jesus is the only one with the legal right (authority) to lay down his own life to atone for humanity’s sin, and to

¹¹⁶ Neither the thief of verse 10 nor the wolf of verse 12 is a direct reference to Satan. Jesus is not teaching about Satan but himself.

As the Door he protects us from false leaders, as the sacrificing Son he took on sin and death and defeated them at the cross.

¹¹⁷ John 10:15.

¹¹⁸ John 10:18.

¹¹⁹ John 10:20.

take it up again by resurrection.¹²⁰ For anyone else to presume to die for humanity's sin would be madness indeed. Only a perfect sacrifice can ever cover the sins and pay the debt of another. Even if you or I dared to go to the cross ourselves, we could not atone for our sin. The only way a sinful human could ever pay for his sins is by suffering and destruction in hell.

Therefore, if you want to do it your way, hell is your only option. Either you enter by door number one, the divinely ordained Door that leads to abundant and eternal life through resurrection — or you take the exit door that leads to misery and destruction. There is no door number three.

Jesus' death was no accident. In his Good Shepherd monologue, he indicated that he would intentionally lay it down (on the cross) and would intentionally take it up again (through the resurrection).¹²¹ It was part of the Father's plan to rescue all his lost sheep and bring them all back into the fold — into an eternal relationship with him.

How Jesus Taught

Jesus demonstrated that he is the Good Shepherd by how he taught. Mark mentioned that those who heard him teaching “were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.”¹²² He was not merely passing on information that could be read in a book. He was reflecting a relationship that he had with his Father in heaven. He was reflecting a relationship that he had with his followers (sheep) here on earth. His authority was intrinsic, not derived.

¹²⁰ John 10:17.

¹²¹ John 10:18.

¹²² Mark 1:22.

What he Did

Jesus demonstrated that he is the Good Shepherd by doing what no other shepherds could do. He brought deliverance by healing and rescuing the demon possessed, and passed on the authority for his followers to do the same. Believers today can minister healing and deliverance as well, but we must be careful to do so for the same purpose. We are to demonstrate not that we are something, or that the power to heal and exorcise demons is something, but that Jesus is something. The miracles should enforce the message, and the message must be who Jesus Christ is.

Jesus demonstrated that he is the Good Shepherd by laying down his life for the sheep. Only he was qualified to do that. Only his blood could atone for the sins of lost humanity. Only his blood, and not anything else added to it!¹²³ The Good Shepherd alone is responsible for the preservation and protection of the sheep. The sheep cannot take credit for following. They cannot claim superior position in the flock because of their wisdom or status. Every one of the sheep are safe because of the faithfulness of the shepherd — and nothing else.

Access to the Father

Paul was probably thinking of Jesus as the Door of the sheep when he said that “through him we both (Jews and Gentiles) have access in one Spirit to the Father.”¹²⁴ It was he (Paul) who answered definitively who the other sheep were that Jesus had alluded to.¹²⁵ The flock to whom Jesus was speaking were Jews. The other sheep would be the Gentiles, because the door would allow them access to the sheep-pen as well. The law was a barrier to keep Gentiles out. Jesus was a door that would open to let all

¹²³ <http://vitaminforthesoul.blogspot.com/2010/06/blood-alone-saves-by-joseph-prince.html>

¹²⁴ Ephesians 2:18.

¹²⁵ John 10:16

believers — Jew and Gentile — in. He provided access to the Father. So the Jewish Paul could encourage the Gentile Ephesians by saying, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”¹²⁶

The Blood of the Eternal Covenant

The author of Hebrews mentions that Jesus is “the great shepherd of the sheep” and “the blood of the eternal covenant” in the same sentence.¹²⁷ He was apparently drawing attention to the fact that Jesus, in fulfilling his role as the divinely appointed shepherd laid down his life for the sheep. He ties this act of sacrifice with the eternal covenant. That means that what Jesus did was not just sufficient to repeal the effects of sin for a time, but forever. What Jesus did on the cross will never have to be repeated. Once paid, the price need never be brought forth again.

Under-shepherds

Leaders in the new covenant community would come to see themselves as under-shepherds — responsible to provide and protect the flock until Christ the Chief Shepherd appears.¹²⁸ Peter’s advice to the elders shows how under-shepherds are supposed to exercise oversight:

1. Their work must be voluntary, not under compulsion. They must do what they do for the same reason that the Good Shepherd did what he was called to do: out of compassion and love for the sheep.
2. Their work must be a labor of love, not a job for a salary. Peter was not arguing against compensation. He would

¹²⁶ Ephesians 2:19.

¹²⁷ Hebrews 13:20.

¹²⁸ 1 Peter 5:1–4.

- agree with Paul that the church must not “muzzle the ox while it treads the grain.”¹²⁹ Peter himself probably received funds to sustain his apostolic work.¹³⁰ But he also knew the danger of the temptation to do ministry for profit. He warns that passion for the work itself should motivate ministry, not passion for profit. The undershepherd works ultimately for the unfading crown of glory that the Chief Shepherd will give when he appears.
3. Their work must be in demonstration of submission, not a demand for submission. They were to be examples to the flock, not domineering over those in their charge. Jesus offered himself as an example of how his disciples were to do that. “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”¹³¹

Secure in the Shepherd’s Hand

Jesus went on to describe his role as the Good Shepherd and what that would mean for the sheep. He said he was in the process of giving his sheep “eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who

¹²⁹ 1 Corinthians 9:9; I Timothy 5:18.

¹³⁰ This assumption is based on the fact that Paul argued in 1 Corinthians 9 that “those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel” (14), but that Paul said that he and the others on his missionary team “have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ” (12). Peter and the other apostles probably made use of the right to receive compensation for ministry.

¹³¹ Matthew 20:25–28.

has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."¹³² He talks about salvation in terms of certainty and security — yes, eternal security.

The reason for that promise of eternal security is not that the sheep have done something, but that the shepherd has done something. That is why — on the one hand — believers can talk about being eternally secure — because once God saves you, you are always saved. On the other hand, unbelievers who have half-heartedly prayed a sinner's prayer, and then have gone on to live the same sinful, unrepentant life that they lived before cannot claim eternal security. Salvation is not based on what the believer does but what the Good Shepherd did. It is not based on my response to the call of God to repent. It is based on Christ's response to the call of God to die.

Those who have truly repented — and endeavor to live the life of repentance that the Good Shepherd called them to will know the security of living in the shepherd's hand. They will know that they are safe, and that no one will be able to snatch them from the protective grasp of their Savior. This security will not give them license to sin, but will encourage them not to sin. If they sin, they will feel the displeasure of the Shepherd who holds them firmly. Because of their relationship, they will strive to obey their Shepherd, not to take advantage of his grace.

When Jesus asked his disciples who he was, Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."¹³³ His answer not only covered the person and nature of Christ, but described his role and work as well. That one word "Christ" says it all. It is helpful to "unpack" that term, because it has a long history, and it reveals much about what Jesus was called to accomplish.

¹³² John 10:28–29.

¹³³ Matthew 16:16.

Anointed

The word Christos is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew *Mashiach*, a noun related to the verb *Mashach*, meaning to spread or smear with oil. In ancient times, oil was used as a means of keeping the head clean of lice, and to preserve cleanliness. Those associated with worship were anointed for this purpose, in order to keep the process of ritual sacrifice pure and untainted.

Somewhere early on in history, other persons whose work was deemed as important as that of the priests were anointed as well. The symbol took on enhanced meaning. It came to be understood that an anointed priest, or ruler or prophet has not only the ritual purity and holiness needed for the job, but special abilities as well. Therefore, to acknowledge someone as anointed is to acknowledge his or her divine calling and enablement.

The title suggested both the authority to function in accordance with one's calling, and the responsibility to do such in a righteous and wise manner. Those who were anointed were considered under the special protection of God, and as having a divine mission that should not be interfered with.

The Coming Messiah

Very early in the Old Testament it became clear that all of these anointed individuals are but types of the one anointed one to come: the Messiah, who would appear in history and affect salvation for God's people. The Bible weaves together many pictures of this coming leader, not all of which are directly connected to the term Messiah, but all of them accurately describe Christ and his work.

He will Give Himself for God's Purpose

The earliest hint of the Messiah's ministry is the LORD's prediction to Satan that he would encounter a foe in battle from among the children of Eve. God tells the serpent, "I will put enmi-

ty between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”¹³⁴ The prophecy is obscure, but it is clear that some conflict will take place in the future in which both parties will suffer harm, but the serpent’s harm will be the most severe. Christians understand this to be a reference to the fact that Jesus came to give up his life by crucifixion in order to rescue us from Satan’s grasp.

Jesus affirmed that “the Son of Man came ... to give his life as a ransom for many.”¹³⁵ He came not to find himself but to lose himself, to give himself so that others might live. His role was to be a sacrifice. As God’s anointed one, he was particularly qualified for that task. As the sinless Son of the Father, he had the holiness and sinlessness necessary for his life to serve as the ransom for ours. By his blood he “ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”¹³⁶

The night in which this great sacrifice happened, Jesus got together with his disciples and shared a special meal with them. It was the Passover meal, which celebrated God’s deliverance of the Israelites from God’s judgment through the death-angel. They were celebrating deliverance through the death of the sacrificed lamb. But Jesus added to the ritual. “And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’”¹³⁷

Suddenly, the Passover event itself becomes a symbol of a much greater event. The unleavened bread of the Passover was originally a symbol of the haste in which the Israelites would suddenly be delivered from their captivity. They would not even have time to properly leaven their bread and let it rise. It was to be eaten without yeast. Now, however, Jesus tells his disciples

¹³⁴ Genesis 3:15.

¹³⁵ Matthew 20:28.

¹³⁶ Revelation 5:9.

¹³⁷ Luke 22:19.

that this bread was a symbol of his own body, which he was going to give for them — and us. The absence of leaven in the bread is a symbol of the absence of sin in the Savior. Here again is evidence that the Messiah would give his life for those whom he rescues.

Another Old Testament story took on new significance as Jesus explained its meaning in relation to himself and his work.¹³⁸ Most modern readers find this discourse a little too creepy to handle. But they might take comfort in the fact that the ancients who heard Jesus say these things were just as troubled. Jesus was not encouraging cannibalism. He was trying to make a similar point to the one he had made about the Passover bread. The Manna in the wilderness was God's gift to his people who had a need they could not fill by themselves. They needed God's grace to sustain them. In the same way, Jesus body and blood would meet the human need for deliverance and eternal life.

Jesus was once again predicting his death on the cross. To feed upon Christ's flesh and drink his blood was not to partake in communion. It was to *believe* in his death as an atonement for sin. The context of this passage is the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:1–15). Later, the people were pursuing Jesus because they wanted another meal. Jesus tells them, “Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.”¹³⁹ They respond to this by asking what they should do to labor for that food. Jesus says, “This is the work of God, that you *believe* in him whom he has sent.”¹⁴⁰

Central to the work of Jesus as the Messiah is that he would come down from heaven, just like the Manna did. His death on the cross was a gift of God's grace. All anyone has to do to accept that free gift is to believe. Like the Manna, those who refuse to believe and receive what God freely provided would die, because

¹³⁸ John 6:48–58.

¹³⁹ John 6:27.

¹⁴⁰ John 6:29 {emphasis mine}.

there was no other option. The Messiah would freely give his life. But that sacrifice would only suffice to bring eternal life if it was believed and received.

The good news tells us that Christ's death is sufficient to pay the sin-debt owed by everyone. Paul tells us that Christ died for all.¹⁴¹ He gave his life as a ransom for all.¹⁴² That does not mean that everyone will be saved, but does mean that everyone could have been saved. If all had believed and received the gift of Christ's death, then all would have received the promise of eternal life, along with the hope of the resurrection that would begin that eternal life.¹⁴³ As the Messiah, Jesus made the resurrection possible for all by giving of himself at Calvary.

The Messiah's giving of himself began long before that fateful day when he was crucified. His entire life was an act of giving and a sign of his grace. He had all the riches of heaven, yet he chose to forsake them and come to earth to save us. When the apostle Paul was encouraging the Corinthians to be generous, he pointed out that they should imitate Christ, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."¹⁴⁴ Christ's giving began with the incarnation, and culminated on the cross.

The Messiah had us in mind when he came to this world to die. He was the sacrificial lamb who "gave himself for our sins to deliver us."¹⁴⁵ The lives we now live in the flesh we should live by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us.¹⁴⁶ We should "walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."¹⁴⁷ Husbands should "love (their) wives, as Christ loved the church and gave

¹⁴¹ 2 Corinthians 5:14–15.

¹⁴² 1 Timothy 2:6.

¹⁴³ John 6:39.

¹⁴⁴ 2 Corinthians 8:9.

¹⁴⁵ Galatians 1:4.

¹⁴⁶ Galatians 2:20.

¹⁴⁷ Ephesians 5:2.

himself up for her.”¹⁴⁸ Since “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, (then we should) die to sin and live to righteousness.”¹⁴⁹ Since “he laid down his life for us, (then) we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”¹⁵⁰

The Messiah’s purpose was to deliver us from the consequences of sin. Paul says, “For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.”¹⁵¹ He “gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”¹⁵² He “has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father.”¹⁵³

He Will Proclaim God’s Prophecies

Another function that the Messiah was to perform was to be God’s ultimate prophet. He would proclaim God’s Word as no one had before, and no one would after. The LORD had promised Moses, “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.”¹⁵⁴ Out of that prediction there emerged an entire institution of the prophets who spoke for God for centuries. Some prophets were true prophets, and some were false prophets. Some merely spoke God’s words; others backed up what they said with miracles. But the people of God were always expecting *the prophet* to arrive. They expected the Messiah to speak for God in a way unlike any of the other prophets.

¹⁴⁸ Ephesians 5:25.

¹⁴⁹ 1 Peter 2:24.

¹⁵⁰ 1 John 3:16.

¹⁵¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:9–10.

¹⁵² Titus 2:14.

¹⁵³ Revelation 1:5–6.

¹⁵⁴ Deuteronomy 18:18 (see also 18:15).

The Mosaic corpus ends with these words: “And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.”¹⁵⁵

The people expected more than a spokesman for God. They looked for someone who knew God intimately like Moses did. They expected a man who could wield the staff of God in his hands, and separate the waters of the red sea. They longed for a prophet who could command the quail and Manna to appear to feed them. They expected power.

Yet, ironically, for the prophet to be like Moses, he must also be a man of peace. He must have possession of power, yet operate in humility. He must be a great leader, yet also be God’s servant. He must have the ability to lead skillfully, which means that he must endure the faithlessness and complaining of his followers. He must have the brilliance to know God’s thoughts, and yet be capable of communicating those thoughts on the people’s level.

Jesus communicated God’s prophecies to his generation with clarity and power. He had the advantage of being the one and only Son of the Father. He said, “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”¹⁵⁶

The prophet was to be a kind of person who would reveal how God felt in any given situation. He or she had to have a hand on God’s pulse. If God was angry, the prophet needed to express that anger. If God was compassionate, the prophet was to show that mercy and pity. The prophet’s job was to know God and to make him known.

¹⁵⁵ Deuteronomy 34:10–12.

¹⁵⁶ Matthew 11:27.

John describes Jesus' messianic ministry in this way: "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."¹⁵⁷ Through the Messiah, God's Word "became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."¹⁵⁸ Like no one else — not even Moses — Jesus revealed God to us.

Jesus described God as our Father who is in heaven.¹⁵⁹ The phrase signifies both intimacy and distance. It speaks of one with whom we can have a relationship, yet not as though among equals. The relationship he describes is son-ship. If we imitate the character of our heavenly Father, then we are acting like his sons. When our Father sees our acts of righteousness done merely to please him, then he will reward us. But if we do our acts of righteousness merely to please other humans, he knows and withholds his reward. We should fear our Father in heaven. Our relationship is such that his will is our first consideration. Even though Christ sends us out like sheep among wolves, we should not fear the wolves. They can only kill us. The Father has power to destroy us in hell. So we should fear his displeasure above all other fears.¹⁶⁰

Jesus' words are to be the basis for our lives. He told us to make disciples of all nations by baptizing people into his name and teaching them all his commands. He fulfills the role of the ultimate prophet. The writer of Hebrews tells us that "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."¹⁶¹ Now, at last, we know how God feels. He reacts to things just as his Son did.

¹⁵⁷ John 1:18.

¹⁵⁸ John 1:14.

¹⁵⁹ Matthew 5:16, 45, 48; 6:9, 14, 26, 32; 7:11; 23:9.

¹⁶⁰ Matthew 10:16–28.

¹⁶¹ Hebrews 1:1–2.

He Will Mediate God's Provisions

The Messiah would not only be the ultimate prophet, but he would also be the ultimate priest. He is the only being ever capable of serving in that exalted position, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all.”¹⁶² That personal relationship with God that allows us to call him our heavenly Father could never have happened if it were not for Christ’s mediation.

As our great high priest, the Messiah can empathize with us when we are tempted to fall short of God’s perfection, “For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”¹⁶³ He understands the thoughts that go through our minds. He does not just know those thoughts like someone who memorizes a song. He understands the thoughts and feelings like the original author of the song.

Jesus is appointed high priest after the order of Melchizedek. Like the high priest under Aaron’s priesthood, he could empathize with God’s people because he was one of them.¹⁶⁴ But unlike the ordinary priests, Jesus could mediate God’s position perfectly because he never sinned. He never stopped being God the Son. Since he now has resurrected eternal life, he is able to “save to the uttermost” all those who put their faith in him, since he is able to intercede for them continually.¹⁶⁵ He does so on the basis of new promises God has offered as part of his new covenant.¹⁶⁶

The provisions of this new covenant speak to a new relationship with God in the present, and a new inheritance from God in the future. Jesus is “the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the

¹⁶² 1 Timothy 2:5–6.

¹⁶³ Hebrews 2:18.

¹⁶⁴ Hebrews 5:1–10.

¹⁶⁵ Hebrews 7:25.

¹⁶⁶ Hebrews 8:6.

transgressions committed under the first covenant.”¹⁶⁷ If Jesus had not died on the cross, the transgressions that kept us tied to the laws of the old covenant would still be hanging over all humanity, keeping us at enmity with God. Since Jesus has taken the guilt for those transgressions away, we are free to inherit eternal blessing instead of eternal shame and destruction.

Under the old covenant, the blood of the innocent cried out for retribution and seeks justice. That was the blood of Abel: the first person murdered. Under the new covenant, the blood of the innocent cries out for repentance and offers grace. That is the blood of Christ on the cross. Believers who claim to be under the new covenant of grace should be careful to live up to its provisions offered by Christ.¹⁶⁸ The most dangerous kind of life to live is that of a “Christian” who does not fear God. Such a person claims that Jesus is his Messiah, yet refuses to follow him. The author of Hebrews says that such a person is worse off than those who pretended to live under the provisions of the Old Covenant, mediated by Moses. Our mediator is the Son of God himself.

He Will Lead God’s People

Another role expected of God’s Messiah is that of leadership and guidance. The One who was to come was to be the Good Shepherd, who leads, guides, protects and provides for God’s people. This aspect of Messiah’s leadership was clearly seen in the analysis of the shepherd texts mentioned earlier.

The leadership role of the Messiah was also described in royal terms. Jeremiah prophesied: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by

¹⁶⁷ Hebrews 9:15.

¹⁶⁸ Hebrews 12:22–25.

which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’”¹⁶⁹ Isaiah adds: “Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.”¹⁷⁰

Jesus admitted that he was the king that the Old Testament prophets had predicted. When Pilate asked him if he was the king of Israel, Jesus replied, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world — to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”¹⁷¹ He was not evading the question. He was affirming that his was divinely ordained leadership, and that other leaders (like Herod, Caesar and Pilate himself) were leading people away from the truth.

The wise men came to Jerusalem looking for the new “king of the Jews” who had been born.¹⁷² Nathaniel’s reaction to Jesus was “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”¹⁷³ The Gentiles sought to have Christians brought to justice for treason against Caesar, because they were “all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.”¹⁷⁴

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem for his triumphal entry, he chose a donkey’s colt, specifically because he was fulfilling a Scripture about the Messiah as a king.¹⁷⁵ But ultimately it will be known by all that Jesus is more than just king of one ethnic group. He will reign over all ethnic groups. When the song is sung praising Christ for his leadership, it will sound like this: “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty!

¹⁶⁹ Jeremiah 23:5–6.

¹⁷⁰ Isaiah 9:7.

¹⁷¹ John 18:37.

¹⁷² Matthew 2:2.

¹⁷³ John 1:49.

¹⁷⁴ Acts 17:7.

¹⁷⁵ John 12:13.

Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!”¹⁷⁶ He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.¹⁷⁷

He Will Fulfill God’s Plan

God had planned for his Son to be born on earth¹⁷⁸ to a virgin.¹⁷⁹ He would be from the lineage of Jesse,¹⁸⁰ and be a descendant of King David.¹⁸¹ He would be born in the little town of Bethlehem, in Judah¹⁸² but raised in Nazareth, a town in Galilee.¹⁸³ News of this birth would cause a massacre of infant boys in a town called Ramah, north of Jerusalem.¹⁸⁴ As a child, this son would go to Egypt, and then return from it.¹⁸⁵

After growing up, this young man would take on a mission to both restore the tribes of Jacob and to be a light to the Gentile nations as well.¹⁸⁶ He would deliver people from physical ailments,¹⁸⁷ and also set them free from spiritual bondage.¹⁸⁸ He would then be rejected,¹⁸⁹ betrayed,¹⁹⁰ and killed for the transgressions of God’s people.¹⁹¹

After fulfilling God’s plan in all these (and many other) details, Jesus was raised from the dead, which was also part of God’s

¹⁷⁶ Revelation 15:3 {The word for nations is the same word often rendered Gentiles}.

¹⁷⁷ 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14; 19:16.

¹⁷⁸ Isaiah 9:6–7; Mark 1:1; John 1:1–3, 14.

¹⁷⁹ Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:1–2, 16.

¹⁸⁰ Isaiah 11:1–5, 10; Romans 15:12; Matthew 1:6, 16.

¹⁸¹ Isaiah 16:5; Matthew 1:1–2a, 6, 16.

¹⁸² Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1.

¹⁸³ Isaiah 9:1–2; Matthew 2:22–23; 4:13–16.

¹⁸⁴ Jeremiah 31:15; Matthew 2:16–18.

¹⁸⁵ Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:14–15.

¹⁸⁶ Isaiah 49:6; 42:1–4, 6; Matthew 12:14–21.

¹⁸⁷ Isaiah 29:18; 35:5–6a; Luke 7:20–22.

¹⁸⁸ Isaiah 61:1–2; Luke 4:16–21.

¹⁸⁹ Psalms 69:8; Matthew 21:42.

¹⁹⁰ Zechariah 11:12; Matthew 26:14–15.

¹⁹¹ Isaiah 53:8; 1 Peter 2:24.

plan.¹⁹² He commissioned his church to continue making disciples of all nations because he is not yet finished fulfilling God's plan. One day Christ will suddenly return to this earth to claim his rightful place as king of the universe. This is Christ's destiny. It is what he was anointed for.

This article is an abridgement of chapters 31 – 36 of “An Advent Christian Systematic Theology,” by Advent Christian missionary Jefferson Vann. The e-book is available in Kindle format, and can be purchased online at Amazon.com.

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¹⁹² Isaiah 53:8, 11; Matthew 28:2, 5–7, 9.

HOLY GHOST?

(Looking ahead to issue XLII/2)

by Rev. Jefferson Vann

- The theme for the fall issue 2016 will be Pneumatology: the person and role of The Holy Spirit. We are looking for articles and papers that ask who the Holy Spirit is, and how he is relevant to us. That includes the topics of charismatic experiences, the spiritual gifts, the fruit of the Spirit, etc.
- If you find anything written on Pneumatology, feel free to review it, pro, and/or con.
- Letters to the editor will be read, and will probably be printed, unless they simply say — in a lot of words — that you disagree with something someone else said. But, if you take the time to actually interact with something you have read here, we would love to print that!
- Reviews of Advent Christian or conditionalist writings are always welcomed.
- Any biblical or theological papers (regardless of topic) are also encouraged.

PLEASE SUBMIT ALL LETTERS, ARTICLES OR REVIEWS
BY EMAIL TO jeffersonvann@yahoo.com AND SPECIFY
WHICH ISSUE THE ARTICLE IS INTENDED FOR OR
WHICH ARTICLE THE LETTER IS RESPONDING TO.