

FUNDAMENTALS OF THE FAITH

CHRISTOLOGY

A. Introduction

1. Practical importance of Christology

a. Overview

The central importance of Christology should be evident to every believer since it is the study of the One on Whom our faith is built. Yet, too often, emphasis is placed on the work of Christ without stressing the foundational import of the person of Christ. Christians must realize that what Jesus accomplished on the cross is based on Who He is.

Orthodox Christianity has struggled with heresy since the foundation of the Church. Throughout church history individuals have surfaced who determined that they had clearer pictures of truth than that received from apostolic teaching. Thomas Oden notes that *God allows heresies to challenge the church in order to bring us to a fuller understanding of the truth.*¹ Today, the rules have changed. The issue is not heresy because all truth is considered equal with none superior. We are in the midst of frightening times clearly pictured by Oden,

*Oldline Protestantism at its tolerant and vulnerable zenith finally achieved what inquisitors and crusaders could not: the eradication of heresy...Rather than separate itself from the sinful and heterodox, the church now simply excludes sin and heresy from consideration...Today the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord requires a decisive repudiation of views that demean the atoning work of God the Son. The worshipping community cannot in the name of inclusiveness honestly allow this implication that the salvation accomplished once for all on the cross is one among many salvations.*²

The eradication of propositional truth in our day is all the more reason to clearly understand truth which is revealed in the person and work of Christ. We have truth which is foundational. The world of our day needs to see people who know and live the truth. One of the best ways to develop our understanding of the truth of Jesus Christ is to examine the teachings of those who struggled with heresy and left us with clear definitions of our faith.

b. Foundations from the Council of Chalcedon

Christological issues were at the center of church debate in the first five centuries after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The church initially dealt with the deity of our Lord at the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.). It was acknowledged that *in Christ's preincarnate being he was co-equal, co-eternal, and one essence with the Father.*³

¹Thomas C. Oden, "Why We Believe in Heresy," *Christianity Today* (March 4, 1996):12-13.

²Ibid.

³John D. Hannah, "The Historical Development of the Doctrine of Christ," *Walvoord: A Tribute*. ed. Donald K. Campbell. Chicago: Moody Press, 1982.

The Council of Nicea's high view of the Son - that He is not subordinate to the Father in His divine nature - paved the way for discussion of His incarnate nature, including the relationship of his deity and humanity at the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451). That gathering of 520 bishops near Constantinople hammered out a definition of the hypostatic union - the relationship of Christ's two natures. The creed reads in part,

...the same perfect in Godhead, the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the same of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father in Godhead, and the same consubstantial with us in manhood, like us in all things except sin...in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation--the difference of the natures being by no means taken away because of the union, but rather the distinctive character of each nature being preserved, and [each] combining in one Person.⁴

One can't overestimate the importance of Chalcedon in the formulation of orthodox Christology. Hannah notes, "*t may accurately be stated that Chalcedon established a formulation of the doctrine of the incarnate Christ that went without significant challenge from the fifth century through the prominent reformers of the sixteenth century.*"⁵

Of special interest today is the method of Christology implemented at Chalcedon which is foreign to the mindset of most today. Blaising identified two components which must not be overlooked, *...the central authority of Scripture and also...the necessity of making theological statements which are descriptive of Christ as He is revealed in the Scriptures in order to protect the church from misleading presentations of Him.*⁶

As church leaders, we must incorporate the methods of Chalcedon not those of our day who deny propositional truth. According to Blaising, *The basic reason Protestant evangelicalism has continued to make use of these formulations is not because of a doctrine of authority of tradition, but because those formulations are in fact descriptive of what is in Scripture.*⁷ A study of current trends in Christology reveals blatant disregard for Scripture in the understanding of theology.

2. Survey of Two Key Doctrines on the Person of Christ

a. Deity

Too often modern man assumes his intellect is superior to that of men in previous generations. As people created in the image of God and impacted by the Fall, we should not be surprised that Christianity's greatest theologians are not limited to this generation. Consider the following quotes which give clear definition to the person of Christ:

*We have also as a physician the Lord our God, Jesus the Christ, the only-begotten Son and Word, before time began, but who afterwards became also a man, of Mary the virgin.*⁸

⁴Translated by Edward R. Hardy, ed., *Christology of the Later Fathers*, The Library of Christian Classics. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954.

⁵John D. Hannah.

⁶Craig A. Blaising, "Chalcedon and Christology: a 1530th Anniversary," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Oct - Dec 1981):326-36.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ignatius of Antioch ©. 110), *Epistle to the Ephesians* 7.

...the incomprehensible being made comprehensible, the impossible becoming capable of suffering, and the Word being made man.⁹

...we see plainly the twofold state, which is not confounded, not intermixed but conjoined in One person, Jesus, God and Man.¹⁰

In a later discussion, *Defining the Historical Jesus*, it becomes quite evident as to how far our society has gone from the principles which gave rise to the clear Christological teaching of the Church Fathers. Departure from the primacy of Scripture gives rise to a low view of the person of Christ. John Walvoord emphasizes that point, *The evidence of Scripture is so complete that one who denies the deity of Christ must necessarily reject the accuracy of Scriptures.*¹¹ Yet, despite such overwhelming evidence in Scripture, Nels Ferre states, *man's need to create gods made Jesus into a God, ...Jesus became the effective God of the Christian faith...From Judaism and Islam Christianity should learn to repent of its central idolatry: its substitution, in effect, of Jesus for God, its making Jesus God.*¹²

After such a blasphemous statement, the following summation of Scriptural truth concerning the person and work of Christ is refreshing.

*All divine names and title are applied to Him. He is called God, the Mighty God, the great God, God over all; Jehovah; Lord; the Lord of lords and King of Kings. All divine attributes are ascribed to Him. He is declared to be omnipresent, omniscient, almighty, and immutable, the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is set forth as the creator and upholder and ruler of the universe. All things were created by Him and for Him; and by Him all things consist. He is the object of worship to all intelligent creatures, even the highest; all angels (i.e., all creatures between man and God) are commanded to prostrate themselves before him. He is the object of all the religious sentiments; of reverence, love, faith, and devotion. To Him men and angels are responsible for their character and conduct. He required that men should honour Him as they honoured the Father; that they should exercise the same faith in him that they do in God. He declares that He and the Father are one; that those who have seen Him had seen the Father also. He calls all men unto Him; promises to forgive their sins; to send them the Holy Spirit; to give them rest and peace; to raise them up at the last day; and to give them eternal life. God is not more, and cannot promise more, or do more than Christ is said to be, to promise, to do. He has therefore, been the Christian's God from the beginning in all ages and in all places.*¹³

Scripture gives a clear picture to the uniqueness of our Lord Jesus Christ. In our day when Scripture is disregarded and repudiated, it is encouraging that some are writing of the reliability of God's Word. Dibelius states,

⁹Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.16.6.

¹⁰Tertullian of Carthage (160-220), *Against Praxeas* 27.

¹¹John F. Walvoord, "The Person of Christ, Part II: The Person of the Incarnate Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Apr 1960):99-107.

¹²Nels F. S. Ferre, *The Finality of Faith*. Quoted in John A. Witmer, "Did Jesus Claim to Be God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Apr 1968):147-56.

¹³Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II, 582.

*The doubt as to whether our Gospels have been preserved in their original form turns out to be more and more unwarranted...No book of antiquity has come down to us in such old, such numerous, and such relatively uniform texts as the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles.*¹⁴

The *Basic Outline of Christology* lists verses which substantiate Jesus' deity. The evidence is overwhelming yet many today state that Jesus never claimed to be equal with God. They would argue that only years after His death did His followers develop that Christology based on Roman and Greek influences. As Romans deified Caesar, so Christians deified their *teacher*.

Jesus' acknowledgment of deity may be clearly seen in three key passages of Scripture. First, note John 8:58, *Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.* Rowell notes the importance of this verse, *Jesus did not claim mere pre-existence to Abraham, which would have been expressed by the imperfect tense of the verb used concerning Abraham, but eternal existence, the self-existence that belongs to God alone.*¹⁵ Our Lord did not just pre-date Abraham, which is an amazing declaration itself, He pre-dates creation.

Second, consider John 10:30, *I and the Father are one.* Here the word *one* is neuter and not masculine gender. The emphasis is not that Jesus and the Father are one person but a *unity of essence.*¹⁶ Jesus is not only co-eternal but co-equal in nature with the Father.

Third, examine Matthew 26:63-66, especially verse 64, *...I tell you hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.* Jesus acknowledged that He is not only co-eternal and co-equal in nature but also co-equal in power.

The deity of Christ is foundational not only to proper Christology but to soteriology. As noted earlier, what Jesus accomplished on the cross is based on Who He is. Despite present-day confusion as to who He is, Jesus clearly understood that He is Immanuel, God with us.

b. The natures of Christ

1) Hypostatic union

The relationship of Jesus' divine and human natures was noted in the discussion on the Council of Chalcedon. It is a difficult but important concept which demands attention. Our Lord has a divine nature and a human nature in one person. Walvoord notes, *Though Christ sometimes operated in the sphere of His humanity and in other cases in the sphere of His deity, in all cases what He did and what He was could be attributed to his one person.*¹⁷ Charles Hodge emphasizes that *The Son of God did not unite Himself with a human person, but with a human nature.*¹⁸ Jesus must never be considered a dual personality.

¹⁴Martin Dibelius, *Jesus*, p. 13

¹⁵J. B. Rowell, "The Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ Vindicated, *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Jan 1957):71-77.

¹⁶Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, V, 158-59.

¹⁷John F. Walvoord.

¹⁸Charles Hodge, page 391.

The relationship of the natures demands that neither be mixed. Jesus' human nature remains human and His divine nature remains divine. *Christ is therefore both God and man, no less God because of His humanity and no less human because of His deity.*¹⁹ Passages of special import to hypostasis include Phil. 2:6-11; John 1:1-14; Rom. 1:2-5; Rom. 9:5; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 2:14; and 1 John 1:1-3. The subordination of His divine nature to His human nature during the incarnation - kenosis- is the next Christological topic.

2) Kenosis

Another theological term used for kenosis is *humiliation*. The primary text is found in Philippians 2:5-7. The emphasis of that term is on the nature in which God became man and how the two natures relate in one person. Walvoord describes the tension with the following question,

*If it is true that Christ did not give up any divine attribute or any essential quality of deity in becoming man, how can the act of emptying Himself be defined? First, it may be stated that the humiliation of Christ consisted in the veiling of His preincarnate glory. It was necessary to give up the outer appearance of God in order to take upon Himself the form of man...The humanity to which Christ was united was not glorified humanity, but one subject to temptation, distress, weakness, pain, sorrow, and limitation...while it is not true that Christ in the incarnation surrendered the relative attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience, He did embark upon a program where it was necessary to submit to a voluntary nonuse of these attributes in order to obtain His objectives"*²⁰

The key issue of kenosis is that Jesus gave up the independent exercise of divine attributes. Walvoord puts the issue in proper perspective, "Much necessarily remains inscrutable in the person of Christ. The problem of the theologian is not to understand completely, but to state the facts revealed in Scripture in such a way as to fully honor the person of Christ."²¹ It is difficult to understand but the results are of eternal benefit.

B. Current Issues in Christology

1. Introduction

As noted, the key method for studying Christology in the past was to examine Scripture. A proper response to Jesus' question, "*But who do you say that I am?*"²² would come from a study of God's Word tied to personal faith in Jesus Christ. Today, many scholars say that method is futile because the text is inaccurate if not deceptive. McCullough describes how the rules have changed for many,

¹⁹John F. Walvoord, "The Person of the Incarnate Christ, III," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July 1960).

²⁰John F. Walvoord, "The Proper Doctrine of Kenosis," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Apr 1961):104-106.

²¹John F. Walvoord, "The Person of the Incarnate Christ, III."

²²Matthew 16:15; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20.

*Where, then, do we encounter Jesus Christ? Perhaps in history? No, not exactly, though many have attempted to find him there, trying by means of "objective" research to get behind the Bible in the "quest for the historical Jesus" (nineteenth century), and the "new quest for the historical Jesus" (mid-twentieth century), and most recently in the quests of John P. Meier, John Dominic Crossan, and the notorious 'Jesus Seminar'...Jesus Christ is encountered only in the relationship of faith. The first disciples met him in faith, and now through their faith we meet him with our own.*²³

The quest for Jesus is a worthy one. But, we need not construct a view of him limited to historical limits. Jesus Christ can't be contained by historical accounts. He is above history yet chose to enter our historical setting at the incarnation. His death and resurrection give ultimate meaning and direction to history yet future. The Apostle John noted, *And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written.*²⁴

Pressure to abandon Christological truth is strong. It is alarming to what degree theologians try to undermine the foundational truths of our faith. McGrath summarizes several *reasons* advanced against orthodox Christology,

*The agenda now circulating in North America includes assertions that (1) belief in Christ as Lord should be abandoned, since it implies a religious hegemony in which Christ is sovereign over the world; (2) Christian claims to truth are xenophobic and culturally genocidal; and (3) the cross ought to be eliminated from Christianity, as it entails an atonement in which God abuses his son, glorifies suffering and encourages victims to be subservient.*²⁵

McGrath encourages Christians to stand firm on the foundational issues of Christology. He recommends five points for consideration:

*First, evangelicalism has always maintained that it is impossible to remain faithful to the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ without thinking and speaking of him in terms that transcend all normal human categories...Second, the total evangelical commitment to the divinity of Jesus Christ is seen as vitally important for safeguarding a cluster of theological and spiritual insights...Third, evangelicalism places a special emphasis on the centrality of the cross of Christ...Fourth, this emphasis on the majesty of Christ finds its expression in the doctrine of justification by faith...Fifth, and finally, this emphasis on the majesty of Christ leads naturally into evangelism.*²⁶

Current discussions of the person of Christ are distressing. Yet, it should motivate Christians to know what we believe. Discussion is taking place concerning Christological issues. Evangelicals must take advantage of every opportunity to proclaim the truth that Jesus is Lord.

²³Donald W. McCullough, *The Trivivization of God*, pages 73-74.

²⁴John 21:25.

²⁵Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, page 62.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 67.

2. Defining the historical Jesus

Christological doctrines affirmed at the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon are a far cry from those proposed today concerning the person of Jesus Christ. It is interesting to note that the feature article in a current issue of *Christianity Today* was entitled "Who Do Scholars Say that I Am?"²⁷ The article notes that many scholars are receiving much publicity for their discussions on Christology, notably those involved in the "Jesus Seminar."

...the Jesus Seminar, a highly publicized scholarly think tank that has met twice yearly since 1985 to vote on the historical accuracy of the sayings attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. The Jesus Seminar has made Jesus into a media event. Seminar members cast ballots on each saying attributed to Jesus in the Gospels...A red ballot indicates that a given statement (or something like it) was spoken by Jesus; a pink ballot, that statement resembles something Jesus might have said; a gray ballot, that, although the ideas may be close to those of Jesus, the statement did not originate with him. A black ballot is a definite negative--the statement was derived from later tradition. All sayings, it is assumed, are black unless they can be "proven" to be a different hue. The result of the voting is a sensation for the media, but dismal for Bible-believing Christian: 82 percent of the words attributed to Jesus were not spoken by him. Only one statement in the Gospel of Mark (generally regarded by most New Testament scholars to be the earliest and most reliable Gospel) is judged to have come from Jesus: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Mark 12:17)...As for the Gospel of John, "the Fellows of the Seminar were unable to fund a single saying they could with certainty trace back to the historical Jesus. The seminar, in facet, regards "the Fourth Gospel as alien to the real Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth...In reality, what is new in the Jesus Seminar is not its low opinion of the historical reliability of the Gospels. The seminar employs the same methods and reaches conclusions similar to those reached by liberal scholarship for decades. What is new--in addition to the marketing mania--is a theological bias against church, faith, and creed. The "church" is portrayed as a medieval backdrop of inquisition and censorship. By contrast, "The Five Gospels," the seminar's translation of the Gospels, is "not bound by the dictates of church councils" or "the church's stranglehold over learning."...the seminar hails itself as liberator from the "tyranny," "oppression," and "blindness" of Jesus' Babylonian captivity by orthodox Christianity.

The *Jesus Seminar* is the outgrowth of human wisdom nurtured by those who reject the authority of Scripture. It was preceded by the 19th century desire to define the "historical Jesus" sourced in Albert Schweitzer's book, *Quest of the Historical Jesus*. His goal was to uncover the "real Jesus beneath the layers of dogma and ritual that had accumulated over the centuries."²⁸ Hannah details the methodology foundational to the "historical" quest.

...this quest is dominated by the presuppositions and methods of naturalism. Admissible evidence is "from below" only, that is, what can be known about Jesus from history, literary sources, anthropology, and reason. Evidence "from above"--the faith claims of the Apostles' Creed, for instance--falls outside admissible evidence, unless such evidence can be verified apart from the authority of church, creed, and confession.²⁹

A key link between 19th century liberal views toward Scripture and the resulting Christological views of the *Jesus Seminar*" may be found in the book, *The Myth of God Incarnate*. It vaulted liberal views to the forefront of Christological discussion. Blaising expresses legitimate concern regarding this book's impact.

²⁷James R. Edwards. "Who do Scholars Say that I Am?" *Christianity Today* (March 4 and 18, 1996), 2 parts.

²⁸John D. Hannah.

²⁹Ibid.

*In 1977 a group of seven Anglican theologians, later labeled "the seven against Christ," launched a full scale attack on traditional Chalcedonian Christology. Their manifesto was entitled *The Myth of God Incarnate* and was edited by John Hick...In the preface Hick admits that the contributors accept the basic presuppositions of nineteenth-century liberalism which include a dynamic view of God and the world and the judgment that "the books of the Bible. . . cannot be accorded a verbal divine authority...The low view of Scripture on the part of these theologians combined with a theory about the evolution of religion apparently prevents them from appreciating the high view of Scripture maintained by the Fathers at Chalcedon and the central stabilizing role played by Scripture in the development of the early conciliar theology..." which believed 'that the sayings of Scripture are divinely inspired.'³⁰*

The rejection of Scriptural authority has opened a "Pandora's box" of Christological aberrations. It is frightening to read current responses to Jesus' question, "But who do you say that I am?" What follows is a sampling of theologians' answers to Jesus pointed question.

The evidence of the New Testament is "not assigning Jesus equality of status with God, and certainly did not intend to say that ontologically he was truly God. They mean that he was 'God functionally...(there is) the need for a reappraisal of the traditional interpretation of New Testament christology.'³¹

Jesus' arch enemy is "malestream" theology.³²

Jesus was a Greek sage and the Gospel of Mark is a sorry plot...a remarkably pitiful moment of early Christian condemnation of the world.³³

Jesus was the evil priest of Qumran who eloped with Mary Magdalene and survived crucifixion by drinking snake poison.³⁴

Jesus was a charismatic shaman.³⁵

³⁰Craig A. Blaising.

³¹G.H. Boobyer, "Jesus as 'Theos' in the New Testament," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* (1968):247-61.

³²Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child and Sophia's Prophet*.

³³Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins*.

³⁴Barbara Thiering, *Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Unlocking the Secrets of His Life*.

³⁵Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*.

*Jesus was a peasant Jewish cynic.*³⁶

Jesus was a magician.³⁷

*...the best overall categorization of the man is that he was a sage.*³⁸

A portrait of Jesus based on current theological trends is presented by Edwards. It reveals their presuppositions which lead to such confusing pictures of our Lord.

Supernatural miracles are out, although Jesus is often granted certain psychic powers.

Conspicuously absent is any sense of Jesus' self-consciousness as Messiah or Son of God, as One standing in a unique relationship to the Father endowed with authority to speak and act for God.

Equally absent is any saving significance of his death. To be sure, Jesus was crucified as a suspected political subversive, but his death has no atoning significance.

Nor is there a resurrection. The accounts of his resurrection and exaltation to the right hand of God are said to be all the result of wishful thinking by the early church.

*The chief flaw in this new quest is its lack of openness to, or even interest in, the possibility that Jesus was God incarnate, as the New Testament clearly indicates.*³⁹

Several recent works have entered the arena of Christological study. The names of Kung⁴⁰ and Pannenberg⁴¹ top the list of those demanding a hearing. The person of Christ is critically important. The world desperately needs to know the proper answer to Jesus' question, "But who do you say that I am?" May the world not only hear the answer from us but see it in the way we live.

3. Conforming to Jesus' image

Confusion concerning the person of Christ is prevalent today. But, believers are confident that faith in Jesus Christ is true, evidenced by the testimony of Scripture and the indwelling Spirit of God. Evangelicals respond to Jesus' question, *But who do you say that I am*, with a resounding declaration that Jesus is Lord. The pressing issue for Christians is not that He is Lord but what does it mean personally that He is Lord.

Darrell Bock expresses this concern as he examined his spiritual life. The dilemma is Christological in nature. It causes believers to search their hearts and examine attitudes and actions. Bock comments,

³⁶John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*. San Francisco: Harper, 1994.

³⁷Morton Smith, "Jesus the Magician."

³⁸Ben Witherington III, "Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom."

³⁹James R. Edwards.

⁴⁰Hans Kung, *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future*. Continuum, 1995.

⁴¹Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2*. Eerdmans, 1995.

As baby boomers, *The essence of our spirituality was to do all we could for God in the 40 or so years we had. I do not know when I began to question seeing the spiritual life in terms of tasks to be managed and completed. Nor do I remember exactly when I came to see how subtly cultural values had shaped my original vision of God's call...But at some point, the focus changed, the direction altered. I began to consider whether the race I was running was the race God had called me to run. Was I on the track he had led me to, or on one I had designed?...But there is a difference in my view of God's call. The tasks and great expectations are no longer the priority they were. Winning is not so important, and triumph is defined in terms the world does not relate to well. Issues of personal fulfillment, so central to our culture and to those early years of pursuit, have been redefined. Thinking about the heart and relationships has become more central..."Many pews on Sunday morning are filled with people seeking God, praying like mad, studying the Word, but who still wonder why God seems so distant. Maybe it is because our culture has taught us to pursue goals that do not bring us closer to Him. Perhaps those goals undermine the relationships we are to have with him and with others.*⁴²

His struggle is one which points to the primary Christological issue after placing faith in Christ, conformity to the image of Christ. Our focus must not be placed on doing but being. Our call is to become like Him regardless of our calling or vocation. But, how can a believer hope to attain that goal expressed in Galatians 4:19, Romans 8:29, and 2 Corinthians 3:18 when there is such confusion as to Who He is? Our hope is in the truth of Scriptures. They reliably present Jesus Christ as Lord and supply the Christian with all that is needed *that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*⁴³

How can a Christian participate with God in his transformation? It must begin with a commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord. Next, it demands a negative and a positive process defined in Romans 12:2. Negatively, Christians are to resist conformity to the world, its standards and pressures. Positively, we are to renew our minds daily to the things of God which demands constant submission of the will to God (Romans 12:1).

This renewing process requires a growing understanding of what Christ's image is. Richard Strauss declares that God,

*...wants to reproduce in His followers the character of His Son -- His love, His kindness, His compassion, His holiness, His humility, His unselfishness, His servant attitude, his willingness to suffer wrongfully, His ability to forgive, and so much more that characterized His life on earth.*⁴⁴

God's Word needs to be carefully studied with the purpose of knowing the Lord better so we can be more closely conformed to His image. It is one thing to call Him Lord, it is another to desire His character in the way one thinks, feels, and acts. Also, Richard Foster notes that this conformity to Christ must be accomplished in community.

⁴²Darrell Bock, "My Un-American Faith," *Christianity Today* (January 8, 1996).

⁴³2 Timothy 3:17.

⁴⁴Richard L. Strauss, "Like Christ: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:13, *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July - Sept 1986).

Christlikeness is not merely the work of the individual; it grows out of the matrix of a loving fellowship. We are the body of Christ together, called to watch over one another in love. Unfortunately, in our day there is an abysmal ignorance of how we as individuals and as a community of faith actually move forward into Christlikeness. We today lack a theology of growth. And so we need to learn how we "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).⁴⁵

Foster continues by listing 3 major means by which Christians may be conformed into Christ's image. What follows is a condensation in outline form which follows his article's focus on experiential, formal and instrumental means.⁴⁶

Formed by experiential means: *God works first through the ordinary experiences of daily life to form the character of Christ in us.*

1. Work as sacrament, *In saying this, I am not referring to sharing our faith at work or praying throughout our work. Both of these are good, to be sure; but I am referring to the sacredness of the work itself. Col. 3:23.*
2. Trials, tribulations, and difficulties, James 1:2-4; 2 Tim 3:12.
3. Working of the Holy Spirit, *our interaction with the movings of the Holy Spirit upon our hearts.*

Conformed by formal means: *The formal means of grace refers to well-recognized disciplines of the spiritual life...formal ways of arranging our lives for training in the spiritual life. 1 Tim. 4:7.*

1. Service
2. Worship
3. Inward disciplines
 - a. Meditation, *...the ability to hear God's voice and obey his word.*
 - b. Prayer, *...ongoing dialogue with the Father about what we and God are doing together.*
 - c. Fasting, *...the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity.*
 - d. Study, *...the process through which we bring the mind to conform to the order of whatever we are concentrating upon.*
4. Outward disciplines
 - a. Simplicity, *...an inward reality of single-eyed focus on God that results in an outward lifestyle free from "cumber, as William Penn put it.*
 - b. Solitude, *...involves creating an open, empty space for God that undercuts all the false support systems we use to shore up our lives.*
 - c. Submission, *...is the ability to lay down the everlasting burden of needing to get our own way.*

⁴⁵Richard J. Foster, "Becoming Like Christ: What is supposed to happen in the Christian Life," *Christianity Today* (1995).

⁴⁶Ibid.

5. Corporate disciplines

- a. Confession, ...*the grace through which the sins and sorrows of the past are forgiven.*
- b. Guidance, ...*the experience of knowing the theocratic rule of God over our lives.*
- c. Celebration, as Augustine said, *an alleluia from head to foot!*

Transformed by instrumental means: ...*the various physical and human instruments God uses to transform us.*

1. Baptism
2. Preaching
3. Laying on of hands
4. Anointing with oil
5. Intercessory prayer
6. Scripture reading, study, and meditation
7. Communion

The motivation for the study of Christology should be greater understanding of what Jesus is like since it is God's will that we become like His Son. Hiebert's study of Romans 8:28-29 emphasizes how important it is,

This blessed hope--that believers will be conformed to the image of His own Son--explains God's dealings with them as His chosen sons in this present age. He is ever at work to reproduce the moral image of Christ in them. All that now comes into their lives He uses for their good to further that glorious goal. His aim for them now is not to make them happy, materially prosperous, or famous, but to make them Christlike.⁴⁷

For those who confess Jesus as Lord, there is no greater goal in life than to be conformed to His image. The beauty of a believer corresponds to how closely he is conformed to the image of Christ. Christians are responsible to pursue that goal which is possible because God chooses to *transform sinful, depraved, reprobate, human beings into the image of His glorified son.*⁴⁸

C. Basic Outline of Christology

1. The Person of Christ

a. Historical views

1) Apollinarians

- a) Jesus had a true human body and soul but not a human mind.
- b) The Logos filled the place of human intelligence.

2) Arians

- a) Jesus was neither fully God nor fully man.
- b) Before time was, Christ was created, the Logos of God.

3) Ebionites

- a) Judaizing Christians who denied the deity and virgin birth of Jesus.
- b) God chose Jesus to be Messiah at His baptism when He received the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁷Edmond D. Hiebert, "Romans 8:28-29 and the Assurance of the Believer," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Apr 1991).

⁴⁸F. Duane Lindsey, "The Beautiful Christian Life, III," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Oct 1974).

- 4) Eutychians
 - a) Jesus had only one nature.
 - b) All of Christ was divine, even His body.

- 5) Gnostics
 - a) Greek Christian view which considered the flesh evil.
 - b) Jesus' body was a kind of phantom; only the appearance of flesh.

- 6) Nestorians
 - a) Denial of the real union of the two natures of Christ into one person.
 - b) Jesus Christ was a two-fold personality.

- b. Orthodox view
 - 1) The Council of Chalcedon, 451 A.D., affirmed that Jesus Christ is one person with two natures, human and divine.
 - 2) Jesus is consubstantial (having the same substance or essential nature) with the Father in His deity and consubstantial with man in His humanity except for the absence of sin.

- c. Preincarnate Christ
 - 1) Son, Psalm 2:7
 - 2) Jehovah, Gen. 19:24
 - 3) God, Psalm 45:6
 - 4) Angel of the Lord, Gen. 16:7-14
 - 5) Creator, Hebrews 1:3

- d. Incarnate Christ
 - 1) Reasons for incarnation
 - a) To confirm God's promises
 - 1] To send His Son into the world, Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2.
 - 2] Two lines of prediction concerning the coming of Christ
 - a] Servant (Savior), Isaiah 52 - 53.
 - b] King, Isaiah 11:1-10.
 - b) To reveal the Father, John 14:9.
 - c) To become our High Priest, Hebrews 4.
 - d) To put away sin, Hebrews 9:26; 2 Corinthians 5:21.
 - e) To destroy the works of the Devil, 1 John 3:8; Hebrews 2:14.
 - f) To give an example of a holy life, 1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6.
 - g) To prepare for the Second Advent, Hebrews 9:28.

 - 2) Historicity
 - a) The pre-existent Son became man, John 1:14; Galatians 4:4; Philippians 2:6; Hebrews 2:14.
 - b) Nativity accounts, Matthew 1 - 2; Luke 1 - 2.
 - c) Apostolic preaching, Acts 17:3.
 - d) Secular history
 - 1] Jewish historian Josephus, 75 A.D.
 - 2] Roman historian Tacitus, 112 A.D.

- 3) Nature of the incarnation
 - a) Deity of Jesus
 - 1] Attributes of deity
 - a] Eternality, John 1:15.
 - b] Omnipresence, John 3:13; Matthew 18:20.
 - c] Omniscience, John 16:30; Colossians 2:3
 - d] Immutability, Hebrews 1:12; 13:8.
 - 2] Prerogatives
 - a] Creator, John 1:3; Hebrews 1:2.
 - b] Forgiver of sins, Matthew 9:2.
 - c] Judge, John 5:22.
 - d] Life giver, John 5:25-29.
 - e] Recipient of worship, Matthew 14:33.
 - 3] Identification with Old Testament Yahweh
 - a] Creator, Psalm 102:24-27.
 - b] Seen by Isaiah, Isaiah 6:1-4.
 - c] Preceded by a forerunner, Isaiah 40:3.
 - d] Disciplines His people, Numbers 21:6f.
 - e] Regarded as holy, Isaiah 8:13.
 - f] Object of faith, Joel 2:32.
 - 4] Names implying deity
 - a] "I Am," John 8:58.
 - b] "Alpha and Omega," Revelation 22:13.
 - c] "Immanuel," Matthew applies Isaiah 7:14 to Jesus, Matthew 1:22.
 - d] "the Word," John 1:1-14.
 - e] "God," John 1:1; 20:28; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; 2 Peter 1:1; 1 John 5:20.
 - 5] Relationships proving deity
 - a] Baptismal formula, Matthew 28:19.
 - b] Apostolic benediction, 2 Corinthians 13:14.
 - c] Essence, John 10:31 (construction in Greek demands unity of substance not person).
 - b) Humanity of Jesus
 - 1] In form, Colossians 2:9.
 - 2] In birth, Galatians 4:4.
 - 3] In identity, 1 Timothy 2:5.
 - 3] In limitations
 - a] Weary, John 4:2f.
 - b] Hungry, Matthew 4:2.
 - c] Thirsty, John 19:28.
 - d] Death, Luke 23:46.
 - c) Hypostatic union
 - 1] The relationship of Jesus' human and divine natures.
 - 2] It is personal whereby the two natures constitute one person.
 - 3] It insures the constant presence of both humanity and deity.

- d) Kenosis
 - 1] The subordination of Jesus' divine attributes.
 - 2] His divine power was veiled but not surrendered, John 1:14; 17:5.
 - 3] He voluntarily relinquished independent use of His divine attributes, Phil.. 2:7f.
 - 4] Definition: Jesus surrendered no attributes of deity but He did voluntarily subordinate His use of them in keeping with His purpose of living among men and their limitations.

2. The Work of Christ

a. Death

1) Importance

a) Fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy

- 1] Subject of typology, Genesis 3:21.
- 2] Crucifixion, Psalm 22
- 3] Resurrection, Psalm 16:8-11.

b) Prominence in New Testament

- 1] Chief purpose of incarnation, Mark 10:45; Hebrews 2:9.
- 2] Essential for salvation, 1 Corinthians 15.

2) Purpose

a) Misinterpretations of the death of Christ

- 1] An accident
- 2] A martyr - Jesus is an example of devotion to beliefs.
- 3] Moral influence - the natural consequence of being a finite human.
- 4] Governmental theory - God revealed the importance of law and His hatred for sin.
- 5] Commercial theory - sin violates God's infinite honor and deserves infinite punishment.

b) Proper interpretation

- 1] Vicarious - Jesus died for the sins of others, 2 Corinthians 5:21.
- 2] Reconciliation - Jesus' death permits restoration of man to God, Romans 5:1.
- 3] Satisfaction
 - a] Of the justice of God - Jesus paid the penalty due for sin.
 - b] Of the law of God - Jesus fulfilled all the demands of the Law.
 - c] Of the wrath of God - Jesus is our propitiation, 1 John 2:2.

3) Extent of Christ's death

a) Problem

- 1) Christ died for the elect, 1 Timothy 4:10.
- 2) Christ died for the whole world, 1 John 2:2.

b) Solution: Christ's death is sufficient for all but efficient only for the elect.

b. Resurrection

1) Importance

- a) Fundamental doctrine of Christianity, 1 Corinthians 15:12-19.
- b) Essential for believers, 1 Corinthians 15.
- c) Exhibition of divine power available to believers, Eph.1:20-22.
- d) Necessary for nation of Israel, Acts 5:31.

2) Nature

a) Actual

- 1] Declared dead by soldiers, Mark 15:45.
- 2] Blood and water flowed from His side, John 19:34.
- 3] Surprise by disciples at His resurrection, Matthew 28:17.

- 4] Paul the Apostle declared His resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15:20.
 - 5] Angels declared His resurrection, Luke 24:6-8.
 - 6] Jesus declared His own resurrection, Revelation 1:18.
- b) Bodily
 - 1] He had flesh and bones, Luke 24:39.
 - 2] He ate food, Luke 24:41-43.
 - c) Unique
 - 1] All who were resurrected died again.
 - 2] Jesus received a resurrection body.
 - a] Eternal, Rev. 1:18.
 - b] Supernatural abilities, Acts 1:9-11.
- 3) Results
- a) Affirmed His deity, Romans 1:4.
 - b) Confirmed the Father's acceptance of His work, Romans 4:25.
 - c) Established Him as our High Priest, Romans 5:9f.
 - d) Supplies blessings to believers
 - 1] Guarantees our resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15.
 - 2] Established work of Holy Spirit, Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8.
 - 3] Made divine power available, Ephesians 1:20-22.
- c. Ascension - Jesus' return to Heaven in His resurrection body, Luke 24:50f.; Acts 1:9.
 - d. Exaltation
 - 1) The assignment of honor and power by the Father to the risen Christ.
 - 2) Importance
 - a) Jesus is Head of the Church, Ephesians 1:22.
 - b) He is our High Priest, Hebrews 4:14.
 - c) Everything is subject to Jesus, 1 Peter 3:22.

D. Summary

The study of Christology too often focuses on the work of Christ without confirming His person. Jesus' question, "But who do you say that I am?" is as relevant today as when He asked it to His disciples. Evangelicals may confidently declare that He is Lord based on the sure authority of Scripture.

May we never think that affirmation alone is enough. Confirmation must take place through conformation to His image. The world not only needs to hear about our Lord but see Him in us. Christological issues become relevant when we remind ourselves that our calling is not locational, not vocational, but personal - personal conformity to the One Who died that we might live.

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