

Christian Ministry Unit 1

Introduction to Theology

Week 2 – Christology

Introduction

The distinctive focus of biblical Christianity is Jesus Christ (Jesus the Messiah).

“Christology” means “the study of Christ”—the study of the Person of Jesus Christ. The study of the salvation that Jesus accomplished for us is called “Soteriology,” and will be covered in weeks 3-5. But, as we will see, the two subjects are closely related—who Jesus is will determine what kind of salvation he is able to accomplish for us.¹

Many views of Jesus

There is only one Jesus—the Jesus revealed by the Bible, the unique Savior and Lord of all humanity. But even in New Testament times, Paul could speak of “another Jesus” (2 Cor. 11:4)—a false Jesus portrayed by false teachers. Today, there are many such “Jesuses.” What have you heard people say about who Jesus is?

- “Jesus, like Buddha, Confucius, and Mohammed, was one of many great spiritual teachers who taught different, but equally valid, ways to God.”
- “Jesus was a man whom God elevated to divine status because of his obedience.”
- “Jesus was God’s firstborn creation, the brother of Lucifer.” (Mormonism)
- “Jesus was created by God and existed as the archangel Michael before taking human form.” (Jehovah’s Witnesses)
- “The real Jesus was very different from the account given in the New Testament. Other books gave the truth about Jesus—but they were suppressed by the Church elite.” (*The DaVinci Code*)
- “We have no idea who the real Jesus was, what he taught, or whether he even actually existed!”

Two key New Testament passages about Jesus

This week we will survey what the New Testament says about Jesus, introduce important terms that help describe him, and look at important events and roles in his ministry as Savior. Let’s start by looking at 2 key passages that provide a clear picture of who Jesus is.

John 1:1-18 – This passage teaches Jesus’ deity and humanity.

What does this passage say about “the Word?”

The Word is God (1:1).

The Word “became flesh” (1:14).

The Word is Jesus Christ (1:18).

¹ Christology has many other important theological implications beyond Soteriology, but this is the key implication because Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Lk. 19:10).

This passage describes what is called the Incarnation. “Incarnation” literally means “enfleshment.” The Incarnation is the enfleshment of God (the second Person of the Trinity), the point in history when God entered the human race in the Person of Jesus.

At the Incarnation, two *natures* (full deity and full, sinless humanity) were inseparably united in one *Person*, Jesus Christ. This union is call the Hypostatic Union.

NOTE: The Trinity is three Persons with one nature/essence—but the Hypostatic Union is two natures united in one Person.

Paul makes this same claim about Jesus in Col. 2:9*. Arguing against Gnostic false teachers who denied Jesus' deity and (probably) fleshly body, Paul insists that "in him dwells the fullness of DEITY in BODILY FORM."

The Old Testament also predicted that the Messiah would be both human and divine—see Isa. 9:6.

Why is the Incarnation/Hypostatic Union essential for our salvation?

Jesus had to be fully human in order to die for the sins of humanity (Heb. 2:17; 10:4-7). If he were not fully human, he could not be a true mediator-priest who could represent humanity before God.

Jesus had to be sinless in order to die for our sins (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:18). The penalty for sin is death (Rom. 6:23). The Old Testament sacrifices had to be without physical blemish in order to foreshadow the sinless sacrifice of the Messiah. If Jesus was not sinless, his death could have no atoning value.

Jesus had to be fully God in order for his death to pay for all of our sins (Heb. 10:10-12; Col. 2:9,13,14). God’s righteous wrath against sin is infinite, so only a sacrifice with infinite value could satisfy his wrath. Jesus’ death was such a sacrifice, so believers can know that they are permanently exempt from God’s judgment (1 Jn. 2:2).

Philippians 2:1-13 – This passage teaches an important implication of the Incarnation, and an important example for us as Jesus’ followers: God’s Son became a slave so that we could become God’s sons who serve like his Son.

Phil. 2:6,7* teaches that Jesus emptied himself of certain divine prerogatives when he became a human. This self-emptying is call the Kenosis (from the Greek word *kenoo*, which is translated “emptied”). What did Jesus lay aside?

- He laid aside his *position* as Ruler to become a servant (Phil. 2:7,8).
- He laid aside his perfect *environment* to enter a sinful and broken world.
- He laid aside the *independent use of his divine attributes* to live in dependent obedience to God the Father (Phil. 2:8). This explains why, although Jesus was fully God, he had to grow in wisdom (Lk. 2:52), he was subject to human hunger, thirst and fatigue (Jn. 4:3-7), and he did not know the day or hour of his return (Matt. 24:36).

How then did Jesus perform miracles? The New Testament indicates that he was empowered by the Holy Spirit to perform miracles (Acts 10:38)—although he may have been permitted at times by the Father to exercise his own divine power (Mk. 4:39).

Why did Jesus lay aside his rights? He did this because he loved us, and because this sacrifice was necessary for our salvation. He did this because his Father promised to exalt him for his sacrificial service (2:9-11).

Because Jesus has loved us this way, we are to lay down our rights and serve others in sacrificial love (2:3,4). Just as Jesus voluntarily left his perfect world to come all the way down here to rescue us, we are to follow him out of our comfort and into the lives of people far from God. As we choose by faith to follow Jesus' example, God promises to provide us the motivation and power to live this life of sacrificial service (2:12,13). And he promises that as we humble ourselves in this way, he will exalt us at the proper time (1 Pet. 5:6)!

Jesus' resurrection

The Bible teaches that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. This does not mean that Jesus was resuscitated from the dead with his same mortal body (like Lazarus in Jn. 11). Nor does it mean that he merely continued conscious existence without a body (see Lk. 24:36-43). It means that he defeated death and was given a gloriously transformed body that left his grave empty.

Why is Jesus' resurrection so important? The New Testament gives us several answers to this question, most of which are mentioned in 1 Cor. 15:1-23**.

- *It validates the AUTHORITY AND TRUTHFULNESS of Jesus and his message (15:13-15).* Jesus made a unique claim for himself (that he was the Messiah), and he offered to provide unique evidence for those claims (that he would be resurrected). If Jesus was not raised from the dead, he was a false messiah, the apostles were liars, and Christians are fools to be pitied. Jesus is Lord!
- *It demonstrates that GOD ACCEPTED Jesus' atoning sacrifice (15:17).* In the Old Testament, the fact that the High Priest emerged alive from the Holy of Holies demonstrated that the sacrifice had been accepted by God. If his sacrifice had been unacceptable, he would have been killed (Lev. 16:1,2). In the same way, Jesus' resurrection demonstrated that his death was fully accepted by the Father as payment for our sins. Jesus has forgiven us!
- *It guarantees our FUTURE RESURRECTION (15:18-23).* Paul refers to Jesus' resurrection as the "first fruits." This is a reference to the Old Testament festival of First Fruits. The earliest fruits were the tangible evidence that God would grant them a full harvest. In the same way, Paul says that Jesus' resurrection is the tangible evidence that those who belong to him will be resurrected at his coming. We will be raised with Jesus!

What is the evidence that Jesus was resurrected? While we obviously do not possess empirical proof (evidence from observation through our five senses) for Jesus' resurrection, the apostles did receive this kind of proof (Acts 1:3; 1 John 1:1; John

20:25,27), and Jesus states that their eye-witness testimony is an adequate basis for our faith (John 20:29; Acts 17:31).²

Positive evidence for Christ's resurrection:³ Aside from the testimony of the apostles, there is a wealth of historical evidence for the resurrection. This evidence is forensic—the kind of evidence used in a court of law and verifying a past historical event. We can conclude by several lines of reasoning based on the data available to us that the best explanation for what happened is that Jesus rose from the dead.

- The Christian movement began in the very city where its founder had been executed and buried only days earlier. This movement was based solely on the apostles' claim (along with 500 other people—see 1 Cor. 15:6) that they had witnessed Jesus alive after his execution. The leaders of the city (both Jewish and Roman) were hostile to this movement, and could have easily refuted this claim by exhuming the body. The best explanation for this historical fact is that the tomb was indeed empty and that the witnesses were telling the truth. “If the birth of Christianity leaves a hole in history the size of Jesus' resurrection, with what do you propose to fill it?”⁴
- With the possible exception of John, the apostles were all executed rather than retract their claims that they had witnessed Jesus alive after his execution. It is very difficult to believe that they would all have done this if they knew were lying. Chuck Colson points out that all of those involved in the Watergate cover-up spoke up as soon as they were threatened with imprisonment. How much more would at least some of the apostles have broken ranks if they knew they were lying about Jesus' resurrection?
- The conversion of Paul is difficult to explain apart from his own explanation. He was a leading enemy of the Christian movement, completely hostile to the Christians' claim that Jesus was the Messiah. Yet, in a very short period of time, he became convinced that converted that Jesus was the Messiah and he became Christianity's most eloquent and adamant proponent. He claimed that his conversion was the result of an encounter with the risen Jesus (Acts 9,22,26). Attempts to explain Paul's conversion apart from Jesus' appearance (guilt complex; epileptic seizures; etc.) are inadequate.

Inadequate explanations: Theories that deny Jesus' resurrection are inadequate because they fail to provide a plausible explanation for what happened.

- **Stolen Body Theory:** Someone stole the body, which explains the disciples' belief in the resurrection as well as the empty tomb. *But who would steal it?* The Romans and the Jews wanted Jesus to be provably dead. A practical

² “A basic principle of evidence is that personal knowledge of the witness or declarant is essential to admissibility. The speaker must have seen, heard, or otherwise perceived the event about which he speaks.” Graham Lilly, “An Introduction to the Law of Evidence.”

³ For more information on this topic, see Lee Strobel, *The Case For Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* (Zondervan, 1998).

⁴ NEED REFERENCE

jokester wouldn't risk death. The disciples wouldn't risk imprisonment and execution for what they knew to be a lie.

- **Swoon Theory:** Jesus didn't really die. He was given a drug while on the cross which simulated death, and later recovered, passed himself off to his disciples as resurrected, and then lived out the rest of his life in hiding. *But Jesus would not have had the strength to leave the tomb.* After hanging on a cross for several hours, being pierced in his side and wrapped mummy-style, how did he break the burial linen, roll the stone away, overpower the guards, and after crawling to the upper room (on his elbows and knees), succeed in convincing his disciples that he was resurrected?
- **Hallucination Theory:** The disciples didn't really see Jesus rise from the dead. They hallucinated seeing him, because they wanted so badly for him to be alive. *But this still doesn't deal with the empty tomb.* And evidence for the existence of mass hallucinations under any circumstances is lacking. In addition, Jesus' disciples were not inclined to look for a resurrection (Lk. 24:11). They sometimes didn't even recognize him at first (Lk. 24:16,31). Jesus went out of his way to make sure they knew he wasn't a spirit or hallucination (Jn. 20:25,27; Lk. 24:36-43).
- **Legend Theory:** The story of the resurrection is not factual, but reflects a legend which the early church came to believe. *But the gospels and epistles have been accurately dated to 50-95 AD.* There was not enough time for such a false legend to arise, since eyewitnesses could easily discredit it. Paul speaks of 500 witnesses, most of whom were still alive—thus inviting investigation. Also, this does not explain why the disciples were willing to die for their message when they knew full well that it was a lie.

Jesus' ascension

After his resurrection, Jesus was removed bodily from earth and is in the presence of God the Father, where he continues to work out God's redemptive plan.

- He intercedes for his followers (Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34). We need never fear that our present or future sins will separate us from God the Father because Jesus continues to personally apply his death for our sins.
- He pours out his Spirit on his followers (Jn. 7:37-39; Acts 2:32,33). Because his death has reconciled us to God, he gives his us his Spirit so that we may experience God's love and receive power to extend his love to others.
- He leads his followers to spread the good news of his victory over sin and Satan (Lk. 24:46-51; 2 Cor. 5:14-20; Eph. 1:20-23). We can count on Jesus to open doors for us to share our faith, and to overcome our enemy's attacks as we follow his leadership.

Jesus' return

At the end of the age, after some from every people-group have become his followers, Jesus will return bodily to earth to establish God's kingdom. We will study this subject in detail in Unit 1, Module 2.

Memory verses

Colossians 2:9* – Jesus is fully God and fully human

Philippians 2:6,7* – Jesus laid aside his divine privileges (including the USE of certain divine attributes) at the Incarnation

1 Corinthians 15:1-23 – Jesus has been resurrected, and his resurrection proves he is Messiah and assures our salvation

Assignment