

## STUDY SEVEN

# The Person of Christ–2

### CHRIST’S WORK AND HIS PERSON

We can see that the one we call Christ, for convenience’s sake, is the one who was (and is) Son and the Word. In eternity he must have shared in the counsels of God, of the Godhead. We know that the Holy Spirit, also, must have shared in these counsels. The statement of Matthew 28:19, ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’, is a fine exposition of the Trinity.<sup>1</sup> Christ then had his work before creation. At creation he also worked. John 5:17 suggests he and the Father have *always worked*, and *worked together*. Hence Christ is the mediator of creation, of salvation and of the final restitution or summing up of all things (Eph. 1:9–10). That is, we cannot truly understand the nature of the work of Christ until (and unless) we see it in its full context of salvation history.

In this sense his person is only known by and in his work, especially as man experiences the fruits and benefits

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<sup>1</sup> For fuller treatment of this subject see the study C.T.S. 3, ‘The Meaning and Significance of the Trinity’ (G. Bingham, NCPI, Blackwood, 2004).

of that work. In this way his person is truly revealed. The degree to which we can apprehend that, is the degree of faith. As faith knows Christ, so faith also experiences him, and vice versa. Nevertheless, for our part we have to do surveys and gather objective categories of what he was occupied in doing. This is an aid to knowing the work of Christ.

One of the keys to understanding this work is to know his relationship with the Father. Eternally he is Son of the Father (Heb. 1:2; Col. 1:12–17), and in that context he does his work. It is not simply a task given but a plan shared, in fact *the* plan, which he shared with his Father, God.

### THE GOALS OF THE WORK

The goals of Messiah's work must be the goals of God. These have to be looked at from various angles. In Ephesians chapter 1, Paul nominates some of these goals. In verse 4 he says that God chose us in him (Christ) before the foundation of the world. This choice was with a view to us being (ultimately) 'holy and blameless before Him'. Secondly, 'He [pre]destined us [in love] to be His sons *through Jesus Christ*'. Thirdly He has planned 'for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth'. These three elements are important, for they come together at the end of time.

In Galatians 3, Paul discusses *promise* and *the covenant*. The promise is covenantal. The covenant is Abrahamic. *All the nations of the earth are to be blessed by Abraham's seed*. This seed is primarily singular, that is, Christ. So God's goal is to bring the covenantal promise and blessings to all nations, via Christ. This, too, is a great theme of

salvation history. The final chapters of Revelation display this crux to history when the glory of the nations is brought into everlasting habitations.

What we have quoted from Ephesians indicates that salvation of the elect and the gathering together of the Father's family are the primary goals of history. With these, however, are other subsidiary goals, such as the defeat of evil. For example, 1 John 3:8 says that the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the work of the devil, and 1 Corinthians 15:24–28 (cf. Rev. 11:15) shows this in its ultimate completion. This involves the lordship of the man Jesus (Phil. 2:9–11). The ultimate defeat of evil springs from the incarnation and the cross. With it also must be included the purging of the old heavens and earth. Creation is renewed and this, as it is indicated in Revelation chapter 5, is through Christ crucified (the 'Lamb as though it had been slain').

At this point these goals are sufficient for our purposes. When we realise that this is what the Father is about, then we can understand the person of the Son and so can understand much of his person from his work, and much of his work from his person. We need to see, continually, that this is primarily the Father's work, and Messiah's being can only be understood as we see him related to the Father and His goals.

### THE NATURE OF CHRIST'S PERSON

In our very sketchy treatment of the deity and humanity of Christ, and of the coexistence of these two natures in the one person, we have seen that because his person is unique as to both deity and humanity, therefore it is difficult to

spell out the various offices or functions of his person, as he is incarnate in this world. Now we are going to attempt to do that. In doing so, we have to remember that we can only understand what is relative to us as human beings and the extent to which we know and understand creation. In this is included, of course, that revelation of God which helps us to comprehend beyond categories which are ordinarily available to man. That revelation will nevertheless not be esoteric, mysterious and available only to some spiritually elite coterie. What is revealed will be revealed in sensible human understanding. With this in mind let us go to the variety of ways in which the person of Christ is represented to us.

### **Son of Man**

In order to understand many of the titles we are discussing, we need to have an understanding of contemporary Judaism. The concept of Messiah was high. Judaism knew of no 'sacred' and 'secular' division. The religious, social and political were all of one. Messiah would therefore be a religious and political unity. Jewish nationalism was identified with the temple. Basically a theocracy, even with monarchy or a monarchical hierarchy, it looked to Messiah to liberate it from national bondage, to restore the former glory of Israel and to enlarge and enhance it. The Messiah was to establish true righteousness and justice. The word 'Messiah' meant the 'anointed one' and designated a king. In the apocalyptic and apocryphal literature, and also in the Qumran texts, we see the picture of one who will usher in the new age and set up his kingdom.

It may well be because of the association of political ideas that Jesus avoided—to a great extent—the word

Messiah or Christ (see below), but chose rather the less emotional expression 'son of man'. This had its strong Messianic associations but was less liable to ignite the highly charged nationalistic atmosphere. In places such as Psalm 8:4, 'son of man' simply means man. In Ezekiel it simply refers to the prophet and is innocuous. In Daniel 7:13 the title is of a heavenly figure, a true representative of Israel who will come to judge the nations and rule over them.

In Jewish apocalyptic literature the 'son of man' is a significant figure. In Daniel he is associated with the saints, possessing the kingdom and the four beasts who are kings of other nations or at least representative of those nations. Thus 'son of man' has political connotations.

In apocryphal apocalyptic literature, the son of man arises out of the sea and rides upon the clouds. He has pre-existence, comes to deliver creation, but in the interim is entirely hidden, and then in the last is put forward by God. In this literature it is difficult to say whether he is Messiah or replaces Messiah. It does show the strong concept the Jews had prior to our Lord's use of the term.

In the Gospels the 'Son of man' references have three divisions:

- (a) Those verses which simply refer to him as 'man'—see Matthew 8:20, 'Foxes have holes . . . but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head'—this 'Son of man' probably simply means, 'I'.
- (b) These references may be identified with the figure of Daniel—a heavenly Son of man coming in glory, that is, Jesus the Messiah at his second coming—'And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory'

(Mark 13:26). This is repeated to the high priest at his judgement (Mark 14:62). This *authority* is already resident in Jesus and is emphasised—see Mark 2:10, 28. Some debate these two verses, saying they simply refer generically to man and not just in particular to Jesus. The content of the verses makes it apparent that it is not just that man may forgive sins or be lord of the Sabbath. Matthew 16:28 conveys the sense of authority—‘will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom’. Luke 12:10 seems to start between (a) and (b), giving primary place to the Holy Spirit. However the Son of man is not depreciated, because it is not he but the *medium* (the Holy Spirit) who is in question.

- (c) There is a series of references which refer to the suffering and humility of the Son of man—see Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34, 45; 14:21; Luke 19:10 (cf. 9:58). The concepts of servant and of suffering are found here. The Son of man is clearly linked with the cross, suffering and resurrection. Knowing the cross and suffering were for victory over Satan, we cannot say that the title ‘Son of man’ is not Messianic, even if it is not wholly synonymous with the title ‘Messiah’. However, in the context (b) it cannot be claimed to be an *incognito* for Messiah, as the language is quite strong.

In John’s Gospel the title ‘Son of man’ differs somewhat to that of the synoptics. References 1:51; 3:13–14; 5:27; 6:27, 53; 8:28; 12:34 have some similarity to ‘Messiah’, a word incidentally used infrequently in the fourth Gospel. In all of these references, no less significance than that of

the son of man of Daniel 7:13 is found—he is to link heaven and earth, commonly the angelic traffic; he is to suffer for man (cf. Mark 8:31; etc.), he gives the bread (himself) of eternal life; he is to be lifted up (on the cross—John 3:14) to be truly known, and this lifting up is that of Messiah's crucified elevation.

Stephen in Acts 7:56 uses the title 'Son of man'. Here Jesus is *standing* at God's right hand. This is in accord with Psalm 110 and unites the concept (surely) with Daniel 7:13. Whatever is the doctrine of Christ's intercession in the New Testament (see Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25), it is certain that the risen Jesus is here active for Stephen—another kind of advocate or witness to that of the murderous Saul of Tarsus!

The nominated 'Son of man' is not again found in the New Testament, except Paul's use of the 'man from heaven' or the 'second Adam' (see Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:49). Here he is not just the 'ideal man' but the man (true man) who comes as the one who gives obedience and so releases man from condemnation and death, bringing him into resurrection.

The concept of Mark 10:45, 'Redeemer-Servant', is certainly found in Paul's letters, particularly in Philippians 2:5–11 and Romans 5:12ff. Here servanthip and obedience are found in the atonement. His being man in these references is also connected with being a servant. It is clear that concepts 'Son of man', 'Messiah' and 'Son of God', whilst not wholly synonymous or co-extensive, do overlap and merge and often are difficult to distinguish one from the other.

THE PERSON OF CHRIST