

The Work of Christ—5

CONCLUSION

There are many elements of the person and work of Christ which we have been unable to cover. The materials in these studies are but the bare beginning of the whole subject. Our treatment should not be merely theological, or a gathering of valuable information. We come under the person and work of Christ by reason of the prior action of the Father and the Spirit. So our understanding arises primarily from the devotional and relational approach to Christ. Where this is lacking, a study of Christology is merely formal. In fact its living qualities evade us. Hence our minds must remain humbled and our hearts and wills obedient to Him as Saviour, Lord and brother.

Let us then look at the value of the person and work of Christ to man and, in particular, redeemed man.

The Effected Work of Christ

We have seen that in the pre-time counsels of God the plan was formed to create and redeem man, and of him

make the family of the Father (Eph. 1:4–14). We have seen the Creator–Mediator work of the eternal Son and Word, and the time of ‘prehistory’ leading from creation to the Abrahamic covenant, and the subsequent working out of redemption and the familial plan. The Son works in the Old Testament, but is incarnate in the New Testament and through his birth, ministry, death and resurrection, completes that work which redeems man, reconciles him to God, and incorporates him into the family of God. The work of session at the right hand of God determines the future of history and its successful consummation. This leads us to the present work of Christ.

The Work of Christ Being Effected

We have seen that the ascension and the session in heaven is protecting, guiding, and directing the people of God. However we must see three aspects of the present work of Christ:

- (a) The continuing victory, or the outworking of the fruits of the cross and resurrection.
- (b) The present preparation of the home for the people of God, in eternity, and
- (c) The coming, reigning, and completion of all things by the Son, so that history is now consummated.

Let us look at these separately and in some detail.

The Continuing Victory

We know that the sins of the world, until the end, were borne by Christ on the cross. We know that the total defeat

of all evil powers was sealed on the cross. Nevertheless there is a working out in time of forgiveness, and the breaking of the power of sin, Satan and the evil powers. This victory, sealed at the cross and the tomb, is now being worked out. The redeemed people of God have a factual basis on which to defy sin and evil powers, and live in holiness and obedience.

Passages such as 1 Corinthians 15:24–28, Philippians 2:9–11, Revelation 11:15, and 10:1–7, amongst many more, show us that Christ is working out his plan, step by step, and doing this through his body, the church, which itself is under the guidance, inspiration and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Christ then is working all the time. Acts 1:8 and the commission passages at the end of the Gospels show us that the people of God are commissioned in the ministry of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God *is*. It is not added to, extended, or enlarged. It itself is the power, the reign and rule which comes upon disobedient mankind and evil powers. In some cases it redeems and in others judges and destroys.

Revelation 5:1–14 describes the scroll of history, sealed with seven seals. The one who opens it is the one in control, and indeed the one who initiates the outworking of its sealed nature. There is only one found worthy within the entire creation, and it is Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, in fact that ‘Lamb standing, as though it had been slain’. Hence the work-out of 1 Corinthians 15:24–28 is now explicated by the events which relate to the breaking of the seals, in fact the remainder of the book of the Revelation. This is the continuing victory, although seen from some vantage points it might even at times appear to be defeat. However it is not defeat but true victory.

The Present Preparation of the Home

For redeemed man, Christ is currently preparing a place and this place is eternal. In Revelation 5:10, man reigns on the earth. In Revelation 21 and 22, the City of God has come down to earth and God dwells with His people. Heaven and earth have affinity. Spatial differences, as such, seem not to be significant.

The indications of John 14:1–6 are that the redeemed have a wonderful place prepared for them. This is in the Father's house, and accords with the fact of the ultimate family, and Revelation 21:1–5 where God dwells with His people (cf. 1 Peter 2:9–10). Notice that it is the work Christ is currently doing, and will complete for the end-time. From creation to the new creation then, the Son's person and work is indispensable for our benefit and fulfilment, let alone the widest work and fulfilment of the Father's cosmic plan.

The Ultimate Consummation: The Finally Effected Work

We do not have time or opportunity here to develop the whole of that branch of theology called eschatology or the doctrine of the last things, but Jesus' teaching on this is most important. Matthew 24 and 25, Mark 13, and Luke 21 give direct teaching on the fate of Israel as a nation, and Jerusalem in particular, moving on to the final end-time when the Son of man shall reappear in the glory of the angels in the new world, the time of the regeneration of all things, and the final judgement shall take place. The Epistles in various ways anticipate this return, whilst the book of the Revelation, in apocalyptic language, describes the events leading up to the end-time, and then the end-time itself.

Many interpretations of the times and events have taken place, and there are various schemes of prophecy. To be confronted by them is most bewildering. Can one be wholly right, and so the others be wholly wrong? That is the question. One problem is the use in some parts of prophetic teaching of apocalyptic (revelational) language, and the use of symbolic terms. Sometimes symbols are taken literally, and sometimes literal terms are taken symbolically; hence the confusion. However, the general thrust of prophecy, that of both the Old Testament and the New Testament, is never in doubt. God's history, beginning with creation, ends in the triumph of God, the vindication of His person and work, and the total unification of all things.

In this total unification Christ is primary. Ephesians 2:9–10, 4:10, and Colossians 1:19–21, amongst other Scriptures, speak of the unification, filling up, and reconciling of all things, in fact the things created in and by the Son, for the Father. Hence the work of the Son is to do the Father's will and accomplish His purposes.

Man's Response to the Person and Work of Christ

Now we come to the crux and climax of our studies—man's response, or reaction, to the person and work of Christ. It is dangerous to ignore this Messiah, if he is indeed Messiah. To lose by default, to neglect rather than deliberately reject, is reprehensible, but to know who he is and then to ignore or reject, that is more reprehensible. Hence to have discovered his offices, to have examined his person and work, is to invite judgement of the deepest kind if we reject what we have recognised to be so.

Let us then look at who and what he is, and how we must relate to that office or work, and where that places us in relationship to him, and what it demands of us who should respond and submit:

He Is Cosmocrator

That is, he is creator of all things (John 1:1–3; Col. 1:15–17; Heb. 1:1–2; 1 Cor. 8:6). He is Lord of all his creation. Hence we as his creatures must submit. Our loyalty and obedience to him should be no less than his to his Father. To refuse our creaturely position is to invite deadly judgement. To accede to it is to experience the sweetest, deepest sense of creatureliness and the full joy of creation.

He Is Saviour

For this purpose he came into the world—to save sinners. Hence he was called Jesus. More, he accomplished by his suffering all that was needed to save man. To reject this Saviour is to neglect or spurn his redemptive work. This is to invite judgement. To accept it is to be redeemed, liberated, freed and reconciled to the Father.

He Is Lord

For this cause he both died and revived. Lord by creation, he is now Lord by the redemptive work of the cross—as man. He is Lord in his manhood because of what he has done as man. His eternal lordship is jointed by his lordship as man. Every knee will ultimately bow, and every tongue confess him Lord, albeit many will do it unwillingly whilst unable to deny it. To reject this lordship is to be ultimately overcome by it, and judged

through it. To accept it is to know the unspeakable joy of union with him and obedience to him.

He Is High Priest

Not only has he offered the perfect sacrifice, one which is for all sins for all time, an offering never to be repeated, but he himself has had that offering accepted within the heavenly sanctuary.

He has outmoded all religions, all systems of sacrifice; he has both fulfilled and transcended the sacrifices and covenant of Israel. All is new. Now he intercedes for his own. Not to have this intercession is to be exposed to evil and final judgement. To have that intercession means we need never fear to enter into the holiest of holies, now and in the end-time.

He Is King

The kingdom of God is 'the kingdom of the Son of His love' (Col. 1:13, lit.). Jesus is King. He is the King set upon the holy hill of Zion (Ps. 2:6). He has asked for and has been given the nations as his inheritance, and the uttermost part of the earth for his possession. He has sent his people to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the uttermost part to claim his kingdom for him. To submit to the King is to have his protection against all evil powers. To obey his will is to share in his plan and its fulfilment. To oppose the king is to be defeated in the final battle, and brought to irreversible judgement. Finally it is to enter 'the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'.

He Is Judge

It is he who finally judges (John 5:22–29). It is he who is on the great white throne, that judgement place of shining

purity which shames the impure and brings fear to the formerly fearless. Already he has judged his own people, and acquitted them because he has borne their judgement, and they have accepted gratefully, if with awe, their acquittal. For one he is the object of reverent delight, for the other dreadful doom.

He Is Final Reconciler and Renewer

He cries, at the last, as he makes a new heavens and a new earth, 'Behold, I make all things new'! That is true. He reconciles, he unifies, he fills up all things to the fullness of himself. He gives access here to the Father, and there he leads his people to fountains of living water. To reject him is to know the sorrow of unending separation from the Father—the dry harsh abandonment to what one is without God. To know him is to be led to fountains of living water, never to thirst nor hunger anymore, for he said he would take us to where he is and we would be with him and would behold his glory, given to him by the Father before the foundation of the world. There, too, his love would be in his own. To be under him is to know eternal bliss and everlasting usefulness and worship.

Who, then, could reject this Man, this Eternal One, this everlasting Son of the Father, this Elder Brother, the First-born amongst many brethren? Who, then, knowing him, could reject him? Who?

Theories of the Atonement

It is clear that the cross (and resurrection) in the New Testament are saving events. Men are saved by this double event (cf. Rom. 4:25). No theory, as such, saves. A theory—or better, a *rationale*—of the death simply sets out, as coherently and helpfully as possible, the reasons for and mode of the death. Even John the Baptist (John 1:29; cf. Mark 1:4) saw the death (‘the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’), and Jesus (Matt. 26:28) gave some rationale to the cross. Of course the Epistles set out their rationale in even stronger terms, but theology—that which comes after the canon of Scripture—seeks to give a full rationale to the death–resurrection events. These theories may be found in any comprehensive systematic theology, for example, Berkhof and Strong.

Very briefly, these theories are as follows:

- (a) ***The Ransom Theory.*** The earliest of all, originating with the Early Church Fathers, claiming that Christ offered himself as ransom (Mark 10:45), which of course he did. It was debated as to what the ransom was, and to whom it was given. Some views were quite bizarre. It relates to the later views of victory called variously:

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- (b) ***The Victory Theory.*** ‘*Christus Victor*’ by Bishop Aulen propounds this view, held to a great degree by Luther and some reformed theologians. However, this is a richer view than that of the Fathers.
- (c) ***The Satisfaction View.*** Its main proponent was Archbishop Anselm, who wrote ‘*Cur Deus Homo*’ (‘Why God Became Man’). He says that God’s offended honour and dignity was restored or rehabilitated. Later theories incorporate the idea of *satisfaction*. The satisfaction is given by Christ in his suffering.
- (d) ***The Moral Theory.*** First propounded by Abelard and Origen, it was later reshaped by men such as Scheiermacher, Ritschl, Bushnell and Campbell. Briefly, it insists that no satisfaction for sin (or God’s dignity) was required. The death of the cross identified God with man in man’s grief and suffering. Such an example inspires to great (responsive) love. Obviously there are great weaknesses here.
- (e) ***The Governmental Theory.*** God is Governor. He is able to determine what He requires. He can abrogate the law, or rather its total punishment. Christ on the cross bears a nominal punishment, thus showing that God views sin seriously. However, He forgives, having put this safeguard around His law.
- (f) ***The Example Theory.*** Man, as well as God, needs to be reconciled. Expiation is pagan, and not Christian. Christ dies, not effectively as an expiatory

sacrifice, but as a noble martyr, and provides the example for us. We are inspired to repent, and to reform by the act of the (influenced) will. Propounded by Socinus in the 16th century, it has a unitarian background.

- (g) ***The Mystical Theory (Gradual Extirpation of Depravity)***. Christ enters the world in the flesh of fallen humanity, but brought a new factor, a new kind of life, which destroys original depravity on the cross, so that a new humanity emerges through Christ. By identification with us, and we with him, man is gradually sanctified, and his sanctification becomes, in fact, his justification.
- (h) ***Vicarious Repentance Theory***. This theory was evolved by McLeod Campbell, and claimed that perfect repentance is all that is required for forgiveness. Christ effects this in the cross, where he identifies with man under condemnation. Man, thus being forgiven, has an impetus to holiness.
- (i) ***The Substitutionary Theory of the Atonement***. Generally expounded by the Reformers, and held by evangelicals, though with varying modifications, it says simply that Christ died for man, in man's place, taking his sins and bearing them for him. The bearing of the sins takes the punishment of them, and sets the believer free from the penal demands of the law. The righteousness of the law and the holiness of God are satisfied by this substitution. Opponents of this theory say that expiation or propitiation are pagan concepts, and that in fact such substitution is immoral. Exponents reply that

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substitution was a principle of the Jewish economy, and that current (Greek) views rejected expiation whilst Christianity (and Judaism) espoused it.

The Fruits of the Cross

FORGIVENESS OF SINS¹

This is linked primarily with covenant, and in particular the new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:24–28; Matt. 26:28; Luke 1:69f.; Gal. 3:13–14). The forgiveness of sins is linked with *justification* in Romans 4:1–4, 25, Psalm 32:1–5, Acts 13:38, and other references. Forgiveness is based upon the work of the cross (Matt. 26:28; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:13–14; Rev. 1:5). However, as a fruit of that work, it means that man can now know the experience of total forgiveness for all his sins. In fact, whilst *repentance* and *faith* are essential for receiving forgiveness of sins, they too are gifts of God—other fruits of the cross. Forgiveness is a gift (Acts 5:31; 10:43) and must be received. When God forgives man, man is expected to forgive his fellow-man (Matt. 18:21f.; Col. 3:13; Eph. 4:30–32). If he does not forgive, his forgiveness dies on him; that is, his sense of forgiveness. He must never forget he is purged from his sins (2 Pet. 1:9) for this is the mainspring of his

¹ An extended treatment is given in Geoffrey Bingham's *Living Faith Studies*, study no. 2, 'The Whole of Forgiveness' (NCPI, Blackwood, 1981).

love (Luke 7:47). Also he is committed to spread the message of forgiveness (Luke 24:46f.; John 20:19–23). Again, if he does not, then his sense of forgiveness will become stale. Forgiveness is the way we know God, and know Him as love (cf. Jer. 31:31–34; 1 John 4:10; Luke 7:47; etc.). Forgiveness maintains man’s true relationship with God, and is, in fact, his life.²

William Telfer says:

Now the proclamation of ‘power on earth to forgive sins’ would have no virtue if it were not power to disengage the sinner from the earthly chains that he has made for himself by his sins . . . *the assurance of pardon restores moral liberty to the soul.*³

LIBERATION AND LIBERTY

Liberation is something enacted over enslaved man. He is liberated (cf. John 8:31–36; Luke 4:17ff.). Jesus said he came to effect man’s liberation. This is effected in the whole person of man. His guilt is destroyed, his pollution is cleansed, his penalty is lifted, his dread of judgement is finished. Hence he is liberated. However, his liberation is only with a view to liberty—that is, to live freely (cf. 2 Cor. 3:6–17; Gal. 5:1f.; then see Gal. 5:13; 2 Pet. 2:19). A key passage on Christian freedom is Romans 6. In this, man is shown to be liberated, and by recognising this and yielding his members for righteousness, he is free to obey and free to bring forth the fruits of righteousness. The same drive is in 1 Peter 2:24, ‘live to righteousness’, when the believer is ‘dead to sin’. Likewise in 2 Corinthians

² See Living Faith Study no. 2, pp. 10–11.

³ William Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, SCM Pr., London, 1959, pp. 144f. (emphasis mine).

5:21, where Christ has died that 'in him we might become the righteousness of God'. Liberty is simply obedience (cf. Ps. 119:45; James 1:25; 2:12).

SANCTIFICATION

The basis of sanctification is, of course, cleansing (cf. Heb. 1:3; 9:14; 10:22; Titus 2:14; 3:5; 1 Cor. 6:11; etc.). The cleansed heart now has a *new disposition* (Rom. 7:22), but the new power is the Spirit indwelling. Yet the word of the cross goes on being the power of God to the believer (1 Cor. 1:18). Only because our old humanity was destroyed (paralysed) at the cross (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20) and the flesh was crucified (Gal. 5:24) and Satan defeated (Heb. 2:14–15; Col. 2:14–15) is the new man in Christ able to live a life of holiness. Sin has been defeated by grace (Rom. 6:14) and so has lost its power to control. Yet this is not all of sanctification. First Timothy 1:5 shows that love now issues from the purified heart and conscience. Holiness is motivated by love (see 2 Cor. 5:14; John 14: 15; 1 John 4: 19). Liberated man joyfully obeys, and holiness is the natural result of loving obedience. In fact this is true holiness.

LOVE AND RECONCILIATION

God loves and at the cross effects reconciliation. We see His love primarily at the cross. Then we love (see 1 John 4:11–12, 19). He who is forgiven little, loves little; he who is forgiven much, loves much. Since we are forgiven all, we will love fully. The mainspring of our love for God and man is the cross. When guilt is removed, barriers

fall, and we are free to love. Love, as we have seen, works itself out in the life of obedience, of reconciliation and of holiness. It expresses itself primarily in proclaiming God's love.⁴ This love must not be seen from human criteria of love, but the criteria of divine love (*agape*).

FATHERHOOD AND FAMILYHOOD

Ephesians 1:4–14 outlines God's plan for His family. John 11:5ff. shows that the work of the cross was to bring this family together. Ephesians 2:11ff. shows that the cross effected this. A reading of the Acts lets us see the human family—Jew, Samaritan and Gentile—coming together in the one household of God. This could not have been effected apart from the cross. The order is given in Galatians 4:4–6 (cf. Gal. 3:13–14): first justification, and then sonship (adoption). Sonship infers familyhood, hence 'the brethren'. First John 4:7–12 shows us that only through the cross do we begin to love as brethren (cf. 1 John 3:14). Revelation 7:9–14 shows the family at the end of the age, and all have 'washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb'. The present family lives in holiness (1 Peter 2:9–10; Heb. 12:14) as it does in love. It is His holy people.

THE POWER OF HISTORY

First Corinthians 15:24–28 (cf. Rev. 11:15) indicates that Christ works on, even after the cross, on which he had

⁴ See Living Faith Study no.1 for the subject, 'The Nature and Meaning of Love'.

cried, 'It is finished!' His work of propitiation was finished, but the outworking of the cross in power (1 Cor. 1:18) has to complete the subjugation, in history, of all evil powers who originally received their death-knell at the cross, but are still seeking to live and defeat the will of God. Revelation 5 shows us that the 'Lamb who was slain' is the one who now controls history and its workings. He is the Lord of lords of Revelation 19:15–21, who metes out to evil its ultimate death-blow. Hence it is by virtue of the power of his cross that he completes history victoriously. Nothing can ever defeat that power of the cross—Galatians 6:14.