

Systematic Theology, Lesson 22: Christology: The Doctrine of Christ, Part 5

1. Life of Christ
2. Death of Christ
 - a. The cause of the atonement: God
 - b. The necessity of the atonement: consequent absolute necessity
 - c. The nature of the atonement: nine key words

 - d. The extent of the atonement
 - i. Doctrinal formulation: As a church, that is, according to our doctrinal statement, we embrace the view that is commonly called “limited atonement.” **GCBC doctrinal statement:** “We teach that our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished the redemption of His elect . . .”

 - ii. Historical survey
 1. The phrase “limited atonement” comes from the acronym TULIP, which stands for the five points of Calvinism.
 - a. T = Total depravity
 - b. U = Unconditional election
 - c. L = Limited atonement
 - d. I = Irresistible grace
 - e. P = Perseverance of the saints
 2. The five points of Calvinism are the five articles that the Reformed Churches in Europe agreed on in response to a group of believers known as the Remonstrants. The Synod of Dort (1618-19) produced five articles (Canons of Dort) in response to the Remonstrants.
 3. The acronym TULIP was not actually used as a label for the Canons of Dort until the early 20th century as a helpful way of summarizing the five points of the Synod of Dort.
 4. But, frankly, the “L” in “limited atonement” stinks, not because of what the “L” stands for, but because the word “limited” does not

helpfully convey the meaning of the issue in extent of the atonement. In addition, the phrase “limited atonement” if you don’t know what it means is inherently offensive: no one wants to “limit” God’s love and Christ’s work!

5. I prefer the term “definite atonement” or “particular redemption,” for three reasons:
 - a. These words “definite” and “particular” were used in the Canons of Dort.
 - b. The phrases “definite atonement” and “particular redemption” are inherently less offensive.
 - c. The words “definite” and “particular” do a better job at communicating the heart of the issue.

iii. Theological argument

1. The extent of the atonement is bound up in the nature of the atonement, namely, that the atonement is actual and effective. Because the atonement is actual and effective it demands a “definite atonement.”
2. Christ’s death actually and effectively accomplishes salvation.
 - a. **Rom 3:25a**: whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.
 - b. **Rom 5:10a**: For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, . . .
 - c. **Eph 1:7**: In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.
 - d. **Eph 2:16**: and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.
 - e. **Col 1:22**: yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.

- f. **Heb 9:26:** Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.
 - g. **1 Pet 2:24a:** and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, . . .
3. Since Christ's death actually and effectively saves people, and since only some people are saved, therefore, Christ died only to save some people.
 4. This conclusion makes sense if we look the alternatives:
 - a. Alternative 1: Christ's death accomplished salvation for *all* the sins of *all* people. But this is not true because not all people are saved because some people will suffer the punishment of sins.
 - b. Alternative 2: Christ death accomplished the salvation for *some* of the sins of *all* people. But this is not true because all men have some sins to answer for and thus none are saved.
 - c. Alternative 3: Christ's death accomplished the salvation of *all* the sins of *some* people. This is true because Christ's death actually accomplished the forgiveness of all the sins of some people.
 5. Thus, in summary, definite atonement teaches that Christ died only for the sins of believers.

iv. Biblical support

1. **Matt 1:21:** She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."
2. **John 10:11, 15:** "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. . . . even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep."
3. **John 17:2-3, 6, 9:** "even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God,

and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. . . . I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. . . . I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours.

4. **Acts 20:28**: Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.
 5. **Rom 8:32-34**: He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.
 6. **Eph 5:25**: Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.
- v. Objection: what about the "world" and "all" passages of the Bible?
Answer: we have to let words be determined by context.
1. **John 1:29**: The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"
 2. **2 Cor 5:19**: namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.
 3. **1 Tim 2:6**: who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *given* at the proper time.

vi. Clarification and caution

1. Definite atonement does not mean . . .
 - a. That Christ's death is insufficient to save all people without exception. Christ's death is of infinite value to cover the sins of a multitude of worlds.
 - b. That people do not have to believe in Jesus Christ to be saved. The Bible clearly teaches that the sinner must

believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved (Acts 16:31; Rom 10:13).

- c. That people who believe on Jesus Christ will not be saved because Christ did not die for them. No, if they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, Christ died for them. “Whoever will” may come to Christ for salvation, and no one who comes will be turned away.
- d. That the free offer of the gospel should not be given to all people without exception. We should proclaim the gospel to every person indiscriminately.

- 2. Be careful how you interact with others on this topic. Don’t ram definite atonement down people’s throats. Be patience with them. The issue of definite atonement is important and has many practical implications but be gracious with how you handle it.

3. Resurrection of Christ

a. The evidence for the resurrection

- i. All four Gospel contain accounts of the resurrection (**Matt 28:1-20; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-53; John 20:1-21:25**).
- ii. The book of **Acts** is a story of the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ. Furthermore, the birth and growth of the early church is evidence of the resurrection.
- iii. The historical evidence and arguments outside the Bible attest to the resurrection.

b. The nature of the resurrection

- i. _____: Christ’s resurrection was a physical resurrection from the dead.
 - 1. **Luke 24:39**: See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.
 - 2. **Acts 10:41**: not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, *that is*, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.

- ii. _____: Christ's resurrection was not only rising physically from the dead, but a transformation of his human life.
1. **1 Cor 15:20, 23**: But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. . . . But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming.
 2. **1 Cor 15:42-44**: So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable *body*, it is raised an imperishable *body*; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual *body*.
- iii. _____: Christ's resurrection was product of both the Father and the Son.
1. **Rom 6:4**: Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.
 2. **John 10:17-18**: For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.
- c. The significance of the resurrection
- i. The resurrection accomplishes our salvation.
 1. **Rom 4:25**: *He* who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.
 2. **Eph 2:5-6**: even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus,
 3. **1 Pet 1:3**: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again

to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

ii. The resurrection _____ that we will receive resurrection bodies.

1. **1 Cor 6:14**: Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power.
2. **1 Cor 15:20**: But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

iii. The resurrection attests that the material creation is good.

1. **Gen 1:31**: God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.
2. **2 Pet 3:13**: But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

4. Ascension of Christ

a. The nature of the ascension

i. Christ ascended to a place—_____.

1. **Luke 24:50-51**: And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven.
2. **Acts 1:9-11**: And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

ii. Christ was seated in heaven (aka, the session of Christ).

1. **Eph 1:20**: which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.

2. **1 Pet 3:22:** who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

b. The significance of the ascension

- i. The ascension _____ our salvation.

1. **Ps 110:1:** The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”
2. **Heb 1:3:** And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

- ii. The ascension _____ us that we will ascend into heaven with Christ.

1. **John 14:3:** If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also.
2. **1 Thess 4:17:** Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

5. **GCBC Statement of Faith:** Under “God” subsection “God the Son”:

(Paragraph 9) We teach that our justification is made sure by His literal, physical resurrection from the dead and that He is now ascended to the right hand of the Father, where He now mediates as our Advocate and High Priest.

(Paragraph 10): We teach that in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave, God confirmed the deity of His Son and gave proof that God has accepted the atoning work of Christ on the cross, Jesus' bodily resurrection is also the guarantee of a future resurrection life for all believers.

6. Summary of Christology

“The study of Jesus Christ is the noblest subject that ever a soul spent itself upon. The angels stoop to look into this deep abyss. The truths discovered in Christ are the secrets

that from eternity lay hid in the bosom of God. Studying Christ stamps a heavenly glory upon the contemplating soul.”¹

¹ John Flavel; quoted in: Richard Rushing, ed., *Voices from the Past: Puritan Devotional Readings* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 5.