

The Present Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

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Chapter 1

The Ascension of Christ

In the general theology of the historic church, the ascension of Christ has not been given much attention. It has been overshadowed, on the one hand, by the importance of the incarnation, the death, and the resurrection of Christ; and, on the other hand, it has been eclipsed by the present work and future work of Christ. Considerable confusion has arisen relative to the nature of the ascension itself, coupled with disagreement concerning the nature of the present age stemming from the conflict between postmillennial, amillennial, and premillennial theology. In the light of these facts, the ascension becomes important, not only for its obvious significance, but also as an introduction to the present work of Christ in that it lays down a number of guidelines concerning the nature of His work prior to His second advent.

Some important distinctions must be observed if the doctrine of ascension is to be properly delineated. The present lordship of Christ in heaven should be distinguished from His future lordship, the former being introduced by the ascension and the latter being introduced by His second coming. In a similar way, the work of Christ in heaven should be distinguished from the work of Christ indwelling the saint in the present age, and both should be distinguished from the present ministry of the Holy Spirit. Each of these categories of truth must be kept in its proper bounds and yet related to each other. that Hebrews 9:12 states that Christ presented His blood in heaven seems to lack support in Scripture and creates many difficulties which are not easily dismissed.

Another important argument for an ascension prior to Acts 1 is derived from John 20:17 in connection with Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene. Mary mistook Christ for the gardener, but when she recognized Him, in her ecstasy she apparently clung to Him. It is for this reason that Christ said to her, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended unto the Father: but go unto my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and to your Father, and to my God and your God." The expression "Touch me not" could be translated literally, "Stop clinging to me," or "Stop holding me."

The command of Christ to Mary is made more significant by the fact that when He met the women, not too long after His appearance to Mary, it is recorded that the women "came and took hold of his feet, and worshipped him" (Matt 28:9). Some have held that between these two events, His appearance to Mary and His appearance to the women, Christ ascended into heaven and that this accounts for His allowing the women to grasp Him by the feet. It is more probable that Christ rebuked Mary when she touched or clung to Him (Gr. *hapto*) because this was improper for her to do. By contrast, the women in Matthew 28:9 worshipped Him, bowing at His feet in a way that was in keeping with His person. The rebuke to Mary, therefore, is on the grounds that her embrace was not proper and Christ attempts instead to get her mind on the task ahead by referring to His future ascension.

Christ added to His statement to Mary the explanation, "I am not yet ascended unto the father." The word "ascend" (Gr. *anabaino*) is in the present tense, which permits at least two interpretations. It could be the inchoative use of the present tense, meaning that Christ was even at that moment in the process of His ascending and she was retaining Him. It is more probable, however, that it is the futuristic use of the present tense as A. T. Robertson points out.² In his discussion of the futuristic use of the present, Robertson states "the futuristic pres. startles and arrests attention. It affirms and not merely predicts. It gives a sense of certainty."³

This fits the situation. Christ wanted to startle Mary, causing her to cease clinging to Him, and for this reason used the present tense implying certainty and spoke of the future as if it were already present. In heaven, it would be possible for

Mary, as well as other saints, to have a relation to Christ which would be impossible in a material world. There is no need for an immediate ascension, but rather it is implied that a delay in the ascension would take place during which certain things would be done including Mary telling the disciples about the Lord.

One of the major difficulties in postulating an ascension on the day of resurrection is that, as the account is reconstructed, it would be necessary for this ascension to take place between the appearance to Mary and the appearance to the other women, a period of time probably less than an hour. If it is true that Christ rose from the dead shortly after sundown on the preceding day, which actually began the first day of the week, it would mean that He had lingered in the earthly sphere for a number of hours prior to meeting Mary and then had made His ascension to heaven and return in comparatively a few minutes. While it is undoubtedly possible for Christ to do something of this character, it would seem to be irreverent haste for such a tremendous act to be sandwiched in between two appearances of Christ only by minutes apart. It is, therefore, more probable that the present tense of “I ascend” refers to the ascension in Acts 1, as there does not seem to be any other ascension indicated.

There are a number of other cases where Christ used the present tense to speak of a future event. For instance, in John 14:2, “I go to prepare a place for you.” It is quite clear that He did not go at that moment, nor for many days thereafter. He was referring to His going to heaven on the day of His ascension in Acts 1. The same is true of John 14:3 where Christ said “I will come again,” literally, “I come again.” The present tense here refers to a distant event, namely, the rapture of the church, when Christ will come for His own. It is for these and similar reasons that men who have made a careful study of this particular problem, such as W. H. Griffith Thomas,⁴ A. T. Robertson,⁵ B. F. Westcott,⁶ N. Dimock,⁷ and John Owen,⁸ agree that Christ did not ascend to heaven to present His blood on the day of resurrection.

If Christ did not ascend on the day of His resurrection, it remains to be proved conclusively that He did ascend into heaven forty days later as recorded in the first chapter of Acts . This historic event is confirmed, first of all, by the anticipation of Christ, by the historic record of the ascension, and by the allusions in the epistles to the ascension as a fact.

In the Gospels, there are a number of indications where Christ is anticipating His return to glory, which He referred to as the return to the glory which He once had (Luke 9:51; John 6:62; 7:33 ; 14:12, 28 ; 16:5, 10, 16, 17, 28). The ascension, because of these many references, was undoubtedly an important event in the life of Christ marking the conclusion of His earthly ministry and bringing to culmination that series of events which had begun with His incarnation. The fact that it is singled out in the thinking and prophetic ministry of Christ makes clear that the ascension was important.

Three passages of Scripture are dedicated to record this historic event, Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:6-12. Though the Mark passage is sometimes questioned on textual grounds, the Luke passage is quite clear, as is noted in Luke 24:51. “And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven.” As Kelly points out, there is no textual basis for contradicting Luke’s statements.⁹ In the Luke passage, the Greek word *anaphero*, translated “carried up,” is used to describe the ascension. It is of interest that this is a different word than any of the words used in Acts 1.

The classic passage on the ascension, of course, is Acts 1:6-12 where four Greek words are used to describe various aspects of the ascension. (a) In verse 9 , it is stated, “As they were looking, he was taken up.” The Greek for “taken up” is *epairō*. This verb is commonly used to indicate something which is lifted up, and the word is used, for instance, in relation to hoisting a sail in Acts 27:40. (b) In verse 9 also, it is revealed that “a cloud received him out of their sight.” The Greek word for “received up” is *hupelaben*. As A. T. Robertson points out, it is found in the “second aorist active indicative of *hupelabano*, literally here ‘took under him.’ He seemed to be supported by the cloud.”¹⁰ There seems to be some significance in the fact that clouds are mentioned not only in connection with the ascension of Christ, but also in relation to His return in power and glory to the earth (Matt 24:30; 26:64 ; Mark 13:26; 14:62 ; Luke 21:27; Rev 1:7). The reference in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 in connection with the rapture is regarded by some as not a reference to literal clouds but to the saints being raptured as constituting themselves a cloud or large group of translated saints.

(c) In verse 10 of Acts 1 , a third word is used, *poruomenou*, translated “as he went.” It was a common word meaning to

pursue a journey which would lead to the conclusion that the ascension is regarded as a departure from earth and also a journey to heaven.

(d) A fourth Greek word is used in Acts 1:11, *analemphtēs*, translated “received up” (cf. Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51). This is, of course, a climactic concept, the resultant action springing from the preceding event. It is almost identical in meaning to *epēthe* in verse 9 and is used in Acts 20:13-14 of being taken aboard a ship.

Combining the concept of the four words, the entire picture of the ascension is given. The first word, *aperthe* in Acts 1:9, in the passive form in which it is used, makes clear that the ascension is upward and that the Father is taking His Son to heaven. The second word, *hupelaben*, indicates that once Christ was in the atmospheric heaven He was received by clouds, probably a natural cloud though some, like A. C. Gaebelein, believe it is a supernatural cloud similar to that on the Mount of Transfiguration and that which filled Solomon’s temple. There is no indication in the text that the cloud is other than a natural one. The third word connotes that the ascension was a journey, not merely a disappearance or a change of state, but an actual transmission from earth to heaven. The fourth word, *analemphtēs*, concludes the picture by indicating that Christ was received into heaven as the destination of His journey.

Subsequent to Acts 1, it is constantly assumed in Scripture that Christ is in heaven. According to Hebrews 4:14, we have “a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the son of God.” In a similar manner in 1 Peter 3:22, Jesus Christ is described as one “who is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.” The historic record of the ascension in Acts 1 is, therefore, confirmed by subsequent statements in the New Testament.

The Arrival of Christ in Heaven

In addition to the allusions in the epistles to the ascension, there are many specific references where Christ is seen in heaven after His ascension which confirms the statement of Mark 16:19 and Acts 1:11 that Christ arrived in heaven. Such an arrival is in keeping with the prophecies in which Christ anticipated this event (Luke 24:51; John 6:62; 7:33 ; 14:12, 28 ; 16:5, 10, 28).

In many passages in the New Testament, Christ is seen in heaven subsequent to His ascension. The passages are so numerous any other interpretation seems to be without foundation (Acts 2:33-36; 3:21 ; 7:55-56 ; 9:3-6 ; 22:6-8 ; 26:13-15 ; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20-22; 4:8-10 ; Phil 2:6-11; 3:20 ; 1 Thess 1:10; 4:16 ; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:3, 13; 2:7 ; 4:14 ; 6:20 ; 7:26 ; 8:1 ; 9:24 ; 10:12-13 ; 12:2 ; 1 John 2:1; Rev 1:7, 13-18; 5:5-12 ; 6:9-17 ; 7:9-17 ; 14:1-5 ; 19:11-16). This mass of Scriptural evidence is one of the reasons why there has been so little question in orthodoxy concerning the reality of the ascension of Christ. The ascension was a natural sequence of His resurrection and the details given to us concerning it are in harmony with the general truth. The ascension was (a) gradual, (b) visible, (c) bodily, and (d) Christ was received with clouds. This is of great significance because when Christ returns to the earth to establish His kingdom, His second advent has all of these same characteristics, namely, gradual, visible, bodily, and with clouds.

The Theological Significance of the Ascension

The ascension of Jesus Christ is significant for at least four reasons: (a) it was the end of the period of His self-limitation, characteristic of His life on earth; (b) it was the occasion for exaltation and glorification; (c) it marked the entrance of resurrected humanity in heaven; (d) it introduced His present work in heaven.

In many respects, the ascension marked the transition from the old sphere of ministry under the self-limitations of the kenosis which Christ endured on earth and the new sphere of release and glory of the ministry of Christ in heaven. While the resurrection was perhaps more important—in that it was the first step in the self-exaltation of Christ which freed Him from humiliation, weakness, and the limitations of the flesh—in the ascension, Christ returned to His infinite glory which was veiled not only during His lifetime but during the forty days of His post-resurrection ministry.

Not only did the ascension mark the end of the period of Christ's humiliation but also the end of the important ministries carried on while on earth. Completed now was His sacrificial work on the cross in which He provided a propitiation for our sins. Ended too was His prophetic work which now was to be carried on by the Holy Spirit, though His office as a prophet continued. Christ no longer was to do miracles in His bodily presence on earth, though miracles continued to be done in His name and power. The ascension, therefore, provided a climax to the period of kenosis which characterized Christ's entire life on earth.

The ascension of Christ was also an anticipation of the exaltation and glory which was to follow. The ascension, in some respects, bears the same relation to His glorification as His birth did to His humiliation. Both indicated a passage from one state to another. The new glorification which Christ entered upon His ascension included a number of important factors. (1) It marked the resumption of His preincarnate glory in keeping with His prayer in John 17:5 that He receive the glory that was His before the foundation of the world. This meant that He not only cast aside the limitations which characterized His life on earth, but that He added a positive quality of manifestation of His inherent glory of the Second Person of the Trinity. (2) In His glorifications, there was the added glory of being the Savior and Mediator who had triumphed over sin and death. While His inherent glory was unchanged, the new glory as given to Christ was based on His work rather than His person, though it included now victorious humanity as well as deity. His glorification also had the aspect of reward, in that the Father bestowed upon Him added glory in recognition of His triumph over death and sin. Hence, in Ephesians 1:20-23, it is declared that all things are under His control or dominion (cf. Heb 2:8), and Philippians 2:19 states that God "hath highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name." (4) The glorification included His position at the right hand of the Father's throne in which He would share the dominion and glory of the Father (Ps 110:1) and would be in a position to plead for believers on the basis of His finished work on the cross.

As in the case of Enoch and Elijah in the Old Testament, the ascension of Christ indicates that Christ entered heaven bodily as a type of the rapture of the church. In the ascension, however, for the first time a resurrected man entered heaven. As such, Christ is the forerunner (Heb 6:20) of believers who would thus enter heaven either through resurrection or translation, and His presence in heaven is a pledge that every believer in Christ would also enter into the heavenly sphere. The entrance into heaven, therefore, was not simply a return to the preincarnate glory of deity but it constituted, for the first time, a glorification of humanity. As Charles Hodge expressed it, "the subject of this exaltation was the Theanthropos; not the Logos especially or distinctively; not the human nature exclusively; but the Theanthropic person."¹¹

As previously indicated, the ascension also marked the beginning of His present work which differs dramatically from that which occurred between the incarnation and the ascension. In the present age, Christ is carrying out the peculiar purpose of God for this age, namely, the calling out of the church from both Jew and Gentile, bringing to consummation the revealed will of God for creation, for the Gentiles, as well as for other aspects of the divine program. The nature of His new work implies His presence in heaven in glory and the administration of the plan of God from heaven rather than from the earthly sphere.

² A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 880.

³ *Ibid.*, 870.

⁴ Cf. International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, "Ascension."

⁵ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, V, 312.

⁶ B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 232.

⁷ N. Dimock, *Our One High Priest on High*, 17-43.

⁸ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, XV, 231-32.

⁹ William Kelly, *Exposition of the Gospel of Luke*, 375.

¹⁰ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, III, 11.

¹¹ C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II, 635.

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Chapter 2

The Present Universal Lordship of Christ

The lordship of Christ in the present age is revealed in two distinct areas; (1) His lordship over creation in general; (2) His lordship over the church as its Head. In this study, attention will be directed to the first of these two aspects as the other will properly be considered in discussion of His work for the church.

The difference of point of view in regard to eschatology has had an unfortunate effect upon the proper statement of the present lordship of Christ. If amillennialism and postmillennialism are correct that Christ must, in the present age, fulfill promises of universal rule over the earth by means of the church and the preaching of the gospel, they would contradict the concept that He is now seated at the Father's throne waiting for that future time when He will return to earth in power and glory to set up His earthly rule. The premillennial position is fully in harmony with the Scriptural revelation given concerning the present universal lordship of Christ and relieves much of the confusion that is brought in when attempts are made to fulfill millennial prophecies in the present age.

A study of the passages dealing with the lordship of Christ provides additional evidence for the validity of the premillennial interpretation. Scriptures pertaining to this subject reveal a threefold division of the subject: (1) the present position of Christ at the right hand of the Father; (2) the extent of His present authority; and (3) the expectation of Christ as revealed in Scriptures which anticipate a future aspect of His Lordship, which will be discussed in connection with Christ's reign on earth.

The Present Position of Christ

There has been a tendency to neglect what the Scriptures actually say concerning the present position of Christ at the right hand of the Father, mentioned in many Scriptures (Ps 110:1; Matt 22:44; Mark 12:36; 16:19; Luke 20:42-43; 22:69; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3-13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22).

The position described as being seated at the right hand of the Father is obviously one of highest possible honor and involves possession of the throne without dispossession of the Father. The implication is that all glory, authority, and power is shared by the Father with the Son. The throne is definitely a heavenly throne, not the Davidic throne, and not an earthly throne. It is over all the universe and its creatures.

One of the constant assumptions of the postmillennial and amillennial interpreters is that the throne which Christ is now occupying is the throne of David. An examination of the New Testament discloses that not a single instance can be found where the present position of Christ is identified with David's throne. In view of the many references to the fact that Christ is now seated at the right hand of the Father, it is inconceivable that these two positions are identical, as none of the passages cited above use the expression *throne of David* as a proper representation of the present position of Christ. If Christ is now on the throne of David, it is without any Scriptural support whatever.

The impossibility of David's throne and the Father's throne being one and the same is readily demonstrated by the simple question of whether David could sit on the Father's throne. The answer is obvious. David's throne pertained to the earth, to the land of Israel, and to the people of Israel. It never contemplated any universality, and it never was anything more than an earthly throne.

The description of the throne of David in the Old Testament makes this clear. David's throne had to do with his rule over the people of Israel during his generation. That it was promised that it would continue was interpreted by the Jews as a promise of a future earthly kingdom. By contrast, every reference to the throne of the Father pictures it as in heaven. In point of time, the throne of the Father was eternal, that is, it existed long before David was born or his kingdom or throne began. In all of these points, there is dissimilarity between the throne of David and the throne of God the Father which Christ now occupies.

The distinction between the two thrones is also brought out by examination of their characteristics. The throne in heaven on which Christ is now seated is obviously one of supreme honor, glory, victory, power, and authority. No power on earth or in heaven could possibly have a higher position nor could there be one of more honor and privilege than that which the Lord Jesus Christ now possesses. The throne of God is in keeping with the divine attributes of the eternal God and is supported by infinite power and authority in keeping with the position and work of the second Person of the Trinity. It is because such a one is on the throne in glory that the saint is able to have victory in this world and can be assured that though the power of Satan and the temptations of the world are very real, and though there may be weakness in flesh, it is still true that Christ is on the throne and a higher power is able to sustain the believer in his hour of need.

The position of Christ on the throne is also theologically important because it reveals the present position of the body of Christ. The church is in Christ and therefore has the position which Christ already possesses, namely, being in the presence of God and assured of ultimate vindication even as Christ is. The locality of Christ in heaven on the throne does not interfere with His divine omnipresence so that He at once can be on the throne on behalf of the believer and be in communion with the believer on earth. His presence on the throne, however, is our guarantee that we will be with Christ bodily in heaven subsequent to the resurrection and translation of the church and will reign with Him (Rev 3:21).

By contrast, these factors cannot be said of the throne of David. The church has no relationship to the throne of David nor was the throne of David one of infinite power and authority. Conceivably it could be lost and destroyed though David was assured that it would not be. To confuse such dissimilar positions is to bring confusion to the Word of God. spirit world.”¹ It apparently refers to angelic beings, whether holy angels or fallen. The word “powers” (dunameon) has the same idea but the added thought of inherent power. Arndt and Gingrich define it as “a personal supernatural spirit or angel.”² Thayer gives a more specific definition, “inherent power, power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature, or which a person or thing exerts and puts forth.”³ Taking the three words together, they reveal that Jesus Christ in His position at the right hand of the Father has lordship over all creative beings superior to man and specifically over angels, whether fallen or unfallen. In this passage, nothing specific is said concerning His authority over man, but, of course, this is implied because man also is the object of divine creation. It is most important to observe, however, that while Christ has the authority over this area of creation He manifestly is not exerting it to the full as He is permitting evil forces to continue their dominance of the world and Satan is yet unbound.

Another important passage bearing on this subject is found in Ephesians 1:20-22 where, in addition to the thoughts provided in 1 Peter, it is revealed that the present authority of Christ stems from His resurrection. Paul prays that the Ephesian church might know “the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Eph 1:19-21). Paul adds the climax to the whole concept of Christ's authority in Ephesians 1:22-23: “And he put all things in subjection under his feet and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” This statement excludes nothing and makes clear that Christ's power extends to all creatures and all aspects of the universe. The word translated “rule” in verse 21 (arxes) literally means “first place,” and reveals that Christ is first before all others. Added to the meaning of this word is the phrase “far above” indicating not only supremacy but that Christ is infinitely above any others who might be considered, such as angels or men. The words “authority” and “power” are the same words used in 1 Peter 3:22 (exousias and dunameos), though they are singular here instead of plural.

Another word is introduced, however, in the expression “dominion” (kuriotetos). This translated literally means lordship,

coming from kurios. It teaches that Christ is Lord over all other lords, or Lord of lords. The Apostle Paul puts a final superlative touch upon his description of the authority of Christ in stating that the rule, authority, power, and dominion of Christ is far above “every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.” There is no competition whatever to the present position and lordship of Christ. He is supreme now and He always will be supreme. The reference to “world” is literally a reference to “age” and represents a time idea. In the present time as well as in the future Christ is supreme in power and authority.

The concluding statement of Ephesians 1:22 is that God put all things in subjection under His feet. The expression is probably derived from Psalm 8:6, “Thou makest him to have dominion over the works of thy hand; thou hast put all things under his feet.” Because Psalm 8 deals with God’s commission to the “son of man” (v. 4) the implication is that Christ will rule over the earth as man rather than as God. In the original creation of man, God gave to Adam the responsibility of exercising authority over the earth. This was spoiled by the entrance of sin in the human race. Now Christ, as the second Adam, is qualified by His perfect life, victory over death and sin, and His resurrection to rule over the earth. This is the ultimate intent of God, namely, that His son should rule as indicated in Psalm 2:8-9. Though it is true that today this authority is not fully manifested in that we live in an evil world, Christ nevertheless has power and authority to put down evil and is waiting only the proper time for the consummation of the present age to fulfill this purpose of God. The expression “put in subjection” (hupetaxen) is used in the sense of the positional ingressive aorist, that is, it indicates that Christ has come into this position where all things are in subjection under Him. Other Scriptures clearly show that the realization of absolute subjection of all creation which will ultimately come is a part of God’s future program (1 Cor 15:25). At the present time, Christ is, however, exercising His lordship over the church and this ultimately will be extended to the entire universe.

Much has been made in the philosophic consideration of Christianity of the fact the present world is not a good world in many respects. Philosophers, therefore, considered it an irresolvable problem that if God were both omnipotent and good, He would not permit an evil world. Both attributes, according to the philosophic point of view, could not be true. Therefore, they chose a finite God but one who was good, a God who could not control the universe but who desired to bring good into it.

The solution of this problem is found in Scripture in the fact that the Bible clearly recognizes the present age, judged by present standards, as not necessarily good. No book in all the world more frankly faces the sinfulness of the human heart and the evil and sorrow of life than the Bible. The situation is resolved, however, in that the Bible anticipates that ultimately sin will be judged and righteousness will triumph and with it the omnipotence and goodness of God will both be fully demonstrated.

In keeping with this, in Psalm 110:1, Christ is seen seated at the right hand of God awaiting the subjugation of His enemies: “Jehovah saith unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” According to Hebrews 10:13, this is a position characterized by rest rather than by activity, “Henceforth expecting till his enemies be made the footstool of his feet.” While Christ in His present position has authority and power to do everything necessary to put down evil and is assured of ultimate victory, it is also evident that the present exercise of this power is being withheld to some extent to permit a future consummation of His universal rule over creation. The Scriptures represent the present age, therefore, as a period of waiting for a future display of the power of Christ. This is precisely what is anticipated in the premillennial interpretation of Scripture. The present age is a parenthesis in the program of God in which the ultimate domination of Christ over the earth, as its supreme ruler, is withheld in some aspects that God might fulfill His present purpose of calling out of the world a heavenly people.

The present age is, however, not one of complete inactivity as is made clear in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28. The program leading to the ultimate subjugation of His enemies is underway, but the final triumph will not come until the end, as there is rebellion even at the end of the millennium against the government of Christ. Meanwhile, however, Christ is on the throne awaiting His hour of triumph in which history will come to its close, and the power, sovereignty, and majesty of Christ will be obvious to every creature.

¹ Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*.

² *Ibid.*

³ Thayer, *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

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Chapter 3

The Present Work of Christ in Heaven (Part 1)

In considering the present work of Christ, the dominating fact is that Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father and that primarily His present work is a heavenly work. Because Christ is, however, also omnipresent, it is legitimate to consider certain aspects of His work as done on earth. There is naturally an integration of all that Christ is undertaking to do in the present age even though His heavenly work is distinguished by the fact that it is accomplished in virtue of His position at the right hand of the Father, and His earthly work is accomplished from His position as indwelling the church.

It is considered normal in the theological discussion of the present work of Christ to think of it as principally an expression of His office as priest. While undoubtedly this is an important aspect, it is not difficult to demonstrate that this is only a partial analysis of His present work. Many of the present undertakings of Christ do not have the character of a priestly work and, in fact, His work as our high priest is only one of seven figures used in the Scripture relating Christ to His present ministry. These seven figures suggested by Lewis Sperry Chafer in his *Systematic Theology* are as follows: (1) the last Adam and the new creation; (2) the head and the body; (3) the shepherd and the sheep; (4) the vine and the branches; (5) the chief cornerstone and stones of the building; (6) the high priest and the royal priesthood; (7) the bridegroom and the bride.

The Last Adam and the New Creation

The work of Christ as revealed in the figure of the last Adam and the new creation cannot be related exclusively to either the heavenly sphere or the earthly sphere. It rather involves the broad divine purpose for Christ's present ministry which includes both. The ministry of Christ as the last Adam is part of a whole family of doctrine which includes such important aspects of Christ as His position as the head of the new creation in contrast to Adam as head of the old, the doctrine of imputation, the distinctive purpose of God for the church, the relation of Christ to the human race as a whole, the dominion of the world as given to Christ and similar doctrines. The purpose of this discussion will be to present the concept of Christ as the last Adam and His present work related to it.

The term *last Adam* is found only once in the Bible (1 Cor 15:45) and is generally considered synonymous to the expression *second man*, found also in this passage in 1 Corinthians 15:47. The idea involved in this terminology is that Christ is head of the new creation composed of all those who are in Christ as compared to Adam, head of the old creation, composed of all those who are in Adam.

The term *new creation* occurs only twice in the Bible (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), but the doctrine relating to it is discussed under other terminology elsewhere. The concept of creation (Gr. ktisis) is found quite often in the Bible (Mark 10:6; 13:19; Rom 1:20; 8:22; 2 Pet 3:4; Rev 3:14). The thought behind it, of course, is that the entity involved is a creation or a work of God. When the word *new* (kainos) has the thought of new in respect to quality, it is to be contrasted to *neos* which is new in the sense of being recent. While the new creation chronologically follows the old, the thought is not that it is new in time but new in quality and, therefore, a distinct work of God.

The new creation in the two instances found in the Bible seems to refer in both cases to an individual person who is in Christ as a new creature. The thought is that just as the old creation partakes of physical birth, the sin nature, and spiritual death in Adam, so one who is a new creature partakes of new birth, a new nature, righteousness, and sanctification, and inherits certain wonderful promises in the future such as a spiritual body, ultimate incorruption, and glory. Each individual in Christ

is a new creation. The sum of all individuals who are new creatures and Christ Himself form a theological concept which corporately is titled the new creation. The new creation includes Christ and all who are in Him, that is, the church, even as Adam in the old creation included all who were his descendants.

There is general agreement that Christ is the last Adam and that His ministry in this category began in relation to His incarnation. The exact time of its beginning, however, is a subject of difference of opinion. Three major views have been advanced. Some, like Thomas C. Edward, believe that Christ began His work as the last Adam immediately upon becoming incarnate. Edward writes: "As Adam was created a living soul, so Christ's person was essentially the source of all supernatural grace. His incarnation was the intrusion of a Divine Force into humanity."¹ There is, however, no Scriptural support for the concept that the work of Christ as the last Adam began with the act of incarnation. Though the incarnation was necessary to it, just as it was to His death and resurrection, it is no more proper to say that He began His work as the last Adam at the incarnation than it is to say He began His work in death and resurrection at the incarnation.

The second view is that He entered His work as last Adam upon His baptism and bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon Him. Here again, there is no Scriptural support, however. It can hardly be demonstrated that Christ was accomplishing His work relating to the forming of the new creation during His public ministry.

The third view, and probably the best, is that Christ entered His new work as the last Adam in His resurrection from the dead. The bulk of the evidence is in support of this idea. The passages which refer to Christ as the last Adam and the second man are found in the resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians 15. Inasmuch as the central concept of His work as the last Adam is the bestowal of life, it seems proper to relate the new life of the new creation to the victory which Christ won in His resurrection.

The nature of the present work of the last Adam is revealed in 1 Corinthians 15:45 where Christ as the last Adam is said to become "a life-giving spirit." Just as in the old creation Adam gave his life to his posterity, so Christ gives spiritual life to those in the new creation. The bestowal of life is the essence of the concept of creation. Just as Adam, when formed of the dust of the earth, did not become a man until life was given to him, so members of the creation formed of those who were spiritually dead do not become a part of the new creation until spiritual life is imparted. That life imparted is the eternal life which resides in Christ (John 1:4) and is in fulfillment of the chief purpose of the incarnation that Christ might be able to bestow life (John 6:54) and give life to His sheep (John 10:28; 17:2). The bestowal of life then is inseparable from the work of the new creation.

One of the definitive problems relating to the work of Christ and the new creation concerns the work of Christ in bestowing life in its relation to the Holy Spirit as the agent of regeneration. The problem is, of course, related to the inscrutable operation of the Trinity as one and yet three persons. It is true at the same time that the believer in Christ has God, the First Person, as his Father, the life received is that of Christ, the Second Person, and yet the Holy Spirit is the agent of regeneration. An analogy is afforded in the incarnation itself in that when Christ was born the First Person was His Father, the life was that of the eternal Second Person, and yet He was conceived of the Holy Spirit. The operation of regeneration and bestowal of life is, in any case, inscrutable, but the resultant new life is related to all three persons of the Trinity.

In addition to the revelation given in 1 Corinthians 15, another major passage relating to this subject is found in Romans 5:12-21. In this passage, the old creation of which Adam is the head is described as the source of sin, judgment, condemnation, and death, brought about by "the trespass of one" (Rom 5:19). By contrast, the work of Christ as the last Adam issues in justification, abundance of grace, righteousness, and life. The contrast between death and the old creation and life in the new is found in most of the principal passages dealing with the subject. In 1 Corinthians 15:22, it is stated, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ so shall all be made alive." In Ephesians 2:1-10 the old creation is described as "dead through your trespasses and sin." The Authorized Version on this passage is perhaps more accurate, "dead in trespasses and sin," carrying out the idea of our position spiritually as being dead. In addition, however, to our position in the old Adam, we also were "by nature the children of wrath even as the rest" (Eph 2:3) in contrast to what we were in Christ, i.e., made alive and made the objects of the grace of God. The outworking of the new life is manifested in new work as stated in Ephesians 2:10, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has afore prepared that we should

walk in them.” Attending the bestowal of life from God in the new creation is also the indwelling presence of Christ inseparable from the impartation of life (John 14:19-20).

Though the concept of the last Adam and the new creation is basically theological and related to our position, it has many outworkings and is the theological basis for the remaining work of Christ as it relates to the believer in the present age. It is because the believer is in Christ, and has new life, and the abiding presence of Christ, that the other wonderful promises and realities assured the believer can be appropriated. The very fact that this work of God is defined as a new creation implies that God is the source of its power, execution, and consummation and in this demonstration of grace and power the believer can rest his present as well as his eternal future.

Christ as the Head of the Body of Christ

One of the important figures used in Scripture to describe the relationship between Christ and the church is the analogy of the human body in which Christ is revealed as the head of the body, the church. The use of this figure emphasizes the living character of the church and its living union with Christ as head as well as the pre-eminence and direction of the body by Christ.

The formation and increase of the body. The New Testament emphasizes that the body of Christ is a new entity, a new undertaking of God in the broad program of salvation for the elect. A number of Scripture passages are dedicated to describe the formation of the body and its subsequent increase (Acts 2:47; Eph 2:16; 4:4, 5, 16 ; 5:30-32 ; Col 1:24; 2:19 ; 1 Cor 6:15; 12:12-14). The formation of the body according to these passages results in the church being a living organic whole sharing common life and related activity with its various members.

A new work of God, namely, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, is that which forms the new entity. The Holy Spirit is the active agent in the formation of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13), and the Father is said to participate in the undertaking by placing Christ as the head of the body (Eph 1:22). Christ does not form the body, but is, nevertheless, the source of its life and the one who directs its activity. In keeping with this doctrine, the Spirit regenerates the individual believer with the same eternal life which abides in Christ (John 10:28; 1 John 5:11-12). The time of the formation of the body of Christ is properly traced to the Day of Pentecost when, for the first time, the baptism of the Holy Spirit took place. According to Acts 1:5, Christ declared on the day of His ascension, “John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in [by] the Holy Spirit not many days hence.” The expression “in the Holy Spirit” is the instrumental use of the en and is properly translated “by” or “with.” The expression is identical in meaning to that found in 1 Corinthians 12:13. Up to this time there is no indication in Scripture that the Holy Spirit had ever baptized believers. All the references in the Gospels are prophetic of the future. Though Old Testament saints were born again and in individual cases indwelt by the Spirit, there is no Scriptural revelation prior to the Day of Pentecost of binding believers together in a living union comparable to that of the church. There were saints in the Old Testament, that is, holy ones, but not believers baptized into the body of Christ. What the Scriptures teach is that a new entity is now being formed beginning on the Day of Pentecost.

Though a few extreme dispensationalists attempt to place the beginning of the church subsequent to Pentecost, it is made evident from Acts 10 and 11 in the account with Cornelius’ conversion that the baptism of the Spirit which took place when Cornelius believed was identical with that which occurred on the Day of Pentecost. As Peter recited his experience in Acts 11:15-16, he stated: “And as I began to speak the Holy Spirit fell on them, even as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit.” Peter refers to “the beginning,” obviously a reference to Pentecost, and in verse 16 to the prediction of Acts 1:5 which he likewise claims was fulfilled at Pentecost and subsequently. Even nondispensationalists are willing to recognize that something began on the Day of Pentecost, namely, the New Testament church.

Although the work of the formation of the body is primarily attributed to the Holy Spirit, Scriptures seem to indicate that the increase of the body is related to the work of Christ. According to Acts 2:47, in relation to the growth of the New Testament church, it is stated, “And the Lord added to them day by day those that were saved.” As individuals believe in Christ as Savior, they are baptized into His body and therefore added to the church. The vital union of the church is indicated in the

expression of Ephesians 5:30, “We are members of his body,” and therefore are cut off from former relationships and should cleave to Christ as a wife cleaves to her husband. This is brought out in Ephesians 5:31-32: “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church.”

The figure of the union of the body is further described in Colossians 2:19 where the body is related to the head in these words, “The Head, from whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God.” Using the analogy of the human body, the members of the church are declared to be joined together just as the human body is by joints and bands, having a mutual relationship of life and nourishing ministry to each other, being knit together. The union of the church results in the growth of the body.

On the basis of this intimate union with one another and with Christ, the head of the body, believers in Christ are called unto the holiness of Christ in keeping with this intimate relationship. In 1 Corinthians 6:15 the Corinthians are challenged: “Know ye not the your bodies are members of Christ? shall I then take away the members of Christ, and make them members of an harlot, God forbid.”

Christ as head directs the body. The concept of Christ as head has various usages in the New Testament and a sixfold headship can be indicated: (1) *Dispensationally*, Christ is the head of the corner to Israel at His second coming (Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:7). (2) *Racially*, Christ is the head of every man (1 Cor 11:3). (3) *Ecclesiologically*, Christ is the head of the church, His bride (Eph 5:23; Rev 19:6-8). (4) *Physiologically*, Christ is the head of the body, the church (cp. all Scripture in this context). (5) *Cosmically*, Christ is the head of principalities and powers and has the universal lordship (Col 2:10). (6) *Representatively*, Christ is the head of the new creation (Rom 5:12-21), though the word *head* does not appear in the context. Accordingly it should be observed that when Christ is referred to as the head, it contextually should be classified according to its proper relationship.

Common to the concept of a headship, however, is the thought of being Lord or having the power to direct. As the head of the corner, for instance, Christ will lead Israel. As the head of every man, He is in authority over the race. As the head of the church, His bride, He takes the place of lordship as a husband. In relationship to the universe, Christ is head over all other powers. As the head of the race, Christ again takes the place of leadership over humanity in the same way that Adam did.

The Scriptures frequently refer directly to the headship of Christ over His church as His body (Eph 1:22-23; 5:23-24 ; Col 1:18; 1 Cor 11:3). The headship over the body in Ephesians 1:22-23 is revealed to be an important subdivision of His universal lordship. William Graham distinguishes between Christ as the head of the church and Christ as the head over the church.² As head over the church, Christ is directing the body. As head of the church, Christ is a part of the union and the body of Christ becomes essential to the life of Christ as the head of the body and its principal expression. In Colossians 1:18, Christ is pictured as the Creator, who in this capacity is head over the church. In Ephesians 5:23-24, the analogy of a husband's direction of a wife is carried over to the direction of the body by Christ the head. Just as a wife should be in subjection to her husband, so the church is described as in subjection to Christ. The direction of the body by Christ is, therefore, not an arbitrary and unreasonable lordship over the church, but rather a loving direction of its members for whom He died. The analogy to the human body, however, becomes dramatically evident in this relationship. Just as the human body is utterly dependent upon the human mind to direct it into coherent action, not only to attain any desirable end but also to minister to itself, so Christ is likewise revealed to direct the members of His body, and the members in turn are utterly dependent upon Him for coherent and intelligent action. An effective member of the body of Christ, therefore, must submit to the direction of Christ as head of the body or the value of His relationship to the body is lowered to that of being a paralyzed member, i.e., one which is alive but not obedient. The emphasis in Scripture seems to be on Christ as the head of the body and, though believers should be obedient to the Spirit and to the Father, there is no tension as the will of one is the will of the other. And if the believer is pleasing to one, he will be pleasing to the other. It is noteworthy that the figure of the head and the body does not describe any ecclesiastical organization, but represents the direct relationship of the individual believer to Christ as His head. While this does not contradict organization in the local church, it would seem clear that the relationship of Christ to His body should take supremacy over any organizational relationship.

The nurture of the body. In keeping with the analogy of the human body in which there is a constant process of nurture, there is a corresponding ministry of Christ to His church embodied in three important passages (Eph 5:29; Phil 4:13; Col 2:19). The love of Christ for His church, corresponding to the love of a husband for his wife, is revealed in Ephesians 5:29; “For no man ever hateth his own flesh; but nourisheth it and cherisheth it, even as Christ also the church.” The Greek word for “nourish” according to Arndt and Gingrich means to “nourish” or “rear” or “bring up” as it is used in its only other New Testament occurrence in Ephesians 6:4.³ It therefore describes the general purpose of God to bring the body to maturity in the development of its individual members and their relationship one to another.

The word “cherish” (thalpei) means literally to “keep warm” and figuratively, “cherish, comfort.”⁴ Its only other New Testament occurrence is in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 in relation to a mother cherishing her child. The thought here is that Christ not only provides that which will lead to maturity in the way of spiritual nourishment, but also provides the love and compassion and tender care such as a mother provides for her child. The figure is, therefore, rich in its spiritual connotation and reveals the heart of Christ for His own.

An added concept is given in Colossians 2:19 where the ministry of the members to each other is also brought out: “The head, from whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God.” As one member of the body of Christ is strengthened, it results in other members also being strengthened and also has the effect of increasing the body by adding new members. In Philippians 4:13, it is indicated that the strength ultimately comes from Christ Himself, for Paul gives his testimony, “I can do all things in him that strengthens me.”

In theology, as well as in Christian doctrine, the nurture and care of the body of Christ has often been a neglected theme. The figure takes the Christian life out of the realm of self-effort, reveals our own insufficiency as individuals, and on the other hand the complete sufficiency we have in Christ and in our union with our fellow members of the body of Christ.

The sanctification of the body. In ordinary human experience, the well-being of the body is necessarily related to its cleanliness. This is also true of the body of Christ. God’s work of cleansing in sanctification is portrayed in Scripture in a threefold time relationship: (1) positional sanctification; (2) progressive or experiential sanctification; (3) ultimate or final sanctification. The emphasis in the doctrine of sanctification in relation to the body is in the present tense, namely, the progressive aspect which is experiential. The work of sanctification is one of the great ministries of God to His own in which the three members of the Trinity are severally involved. The principal passage dealing with the subject is Ephesians 5:25-27 which is supplemented by collateral references (Heb 2:11; 9:12, 14 ; 13:12). In Ephesians 5:26, it is indicated that Christ gave Himself sacrificially on the cross with the purpose “that he might sanctify it [the church], having cleansed it by the washing of water with word.” This act of progressive sanctification has in view the ultimate presentation of “the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27). A common view of expositors is that this passage refers to cleansing as revealed in the baptismal ordinance. The relation of this passage to water baptism, however, is entirely based on the use of the word *water*. The frequent use of water as a figure in the Scriptures, however, would make such a preliminary assumption hazardous. A careful examination of the passage does not support the interpretation that water baptism is here in view. The expression “washing” (loutroi) is commonly used for bathing or partial washing with no thought of a sacrament or ordinance (Acts 9:37; 16:33 ; Rev 1:5). The washing here, however, seems to be a spiritual rather than a physical cleansing and water is used in a nonliteral sense as frequently in Scripture (cp. John 4:10, 11, 14, 15; 7:38 ; Heb 10:22; Rev 7:17; 21:6 ; 22:1, 17). In a similar way, the expression, “washing of regeneration” (Titus 3:5), should be noted, where the washing is obviously not water but related to the Holy Spirit and His renewing as the passage itself states.

Because of these considerations, it is preferable to consider the phrase “with the word” not as a reference to the baptismal formula but rather to the Word of God itself. This is in keeping with other Scriptures which indicate the sanctifying ministry of the Word of God. The thought of Ephesians 5:26 is, therefore, that Christ will sanctify His church through cleansing by application of the truth of the Word of God. It relates to the present work of sanctification rather than to the initial act of sanctification at the new birth or the ultimate sanctification which will be the believer’s portion in heaven. The present cleansing of the body, however, has not only in view its present health, and prosperity, and usefulness in the hands of Christ, but also the ultimate state when the church, the body of Christ, will be purged of every taint of defilement or anything that

would mar its perfect beauty.

The gifts of Christ to His body. The subject of spiritual gifts in the Scripture is a major revelation of God. In relation to spiritual gifts bestowed by Christ on His church, three major passages are found (Eph 4:7-16; 1 Cor 12:27-28; Rom 12:3-8). A threefold outline may be observed in this doctrine as found in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6: (1) gifts differ from one another; (2) the administration of the gifts differs; (3) the actual operation or workings of the gifts differ. This is stated plainly in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are diversities of ministrations, and the same Lord. And there are diversities of workings, but the same God, who worketh all things in all.” This passage not only supports this threefold outline but reveals that God the Father and the Holy Spirit join with Christ in this important work.

As in other undertakings of God, there is sometimes a distinction between the ministries of the various persons of the Trinity. In a general way, the ministry of Christ seems to be that of bestowing gifted men on the church, in contrast to the work of the Holy Spirit who bestows the gifts on the men as individuals. This distinction, however, cannot always be maintained. In Ephesians 4:7-16, four types of gifted members bestowed on the church by Christ are indicated. (1) Apostles were given to the church by Christ for its necessary human leadership and as witnesses sent by God. In the strict sense of apostleship, they were usually limited to those who were eye witnesses of Christ’s resurrection, though some like Barnabas may have been an exception. Their ministry seems to have ceased with the first century and the death of the first generation.

(2) Another form of gifted members bestowed upon the church were prophets who were the chosen channel of revelation. In the early church, the New Testament was not yet complete. It was necessary to have a means of communication of divine truth to the people, and prophets were this medium. Sometimes their ministry consisted of direct revelation from God including the element of the prophetic future, though not exclusively so (cp. Acts 11:27; 13:1 ; 15:32 ; 21:10), and in other cases they exhorted the people, applying the truth to the particular situation. Like the gift of apostleship, the gift of prophets was limited to the first generation of the church, and once the New Testament was complete no further direct revelation from God was given to any special men chosen for the purpose of being a channel.

(3) One of the abiding gifts, however, was that of evangelism defined as the special gift of proclaiming the gospel effectively (Acts 21:8; Eph 4:11; 2 Tim 4:5).

(4) A fourth group of gifted men consisted of pastors and teachers. It is significant that the “and” is the Greek *kai*, a different form of expression than that used in itemizing the other gifted people, indicating that pastors and teachers are inseparable. The thought seems to be that those who are good pastors will be teachers, and that good teachers will be pastors, and both aspects are essential to the complete gift, even though there may be emphasis in one area or the other. The word “pastors” (*poimenas*) carries with it connotations of similarity between the work of a pastor and that of a shepherd. As the shepherd devotes himself to the care of his sheep, especially providing food, protection, and shelter, so the pastor who desires to be pastor of his flock must be a teacher who feeds the flock as well as caring for it in other ways. Emphasis is placed upon the teaching ministry which is confirmed by the words of Christ to Peter, “Feed my sheep” (John 21:17).

Gifts of lesser character are indicated elsewhere in the Scripture and men possessing such gifts were bestowed by Christ upon His church. In 1 Corinthians 12:28 five additional gifts are mentioned: (5) miracles, or the gift of performing miracles; (6) the gift of healing, the power to perform healing; (7) helps, the gift of assisting others as illustrated in the work of a deacon; (8) governments, the gift of ruling or administration as illustrated in the work of elders; (9) diversity of tongues, the gift of speaking in tongues. While it is proper to consider the gifts as bestowed by God upon the individual (1 Cor 12:28), it is also true that Christ gives such gifted men to the church for their particular contribution to the welfare as a whole. Additional light is cast upon these matters in Romans 12:3-8 which also has a list of gifts which may be classified under the various gifts mentioned in the previous passages considered.

It is most significant that the sovereign purpose of God in bestowing gifts as well as gifted men is specified in Ephesians 4:12 to be “for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ.” The ultimate purpose is to “attain unto the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). The result of such a process is that spiritual maturity

may be attained and a steady testimony amidst the deceiving work of evil doers as explained in the verses which follow. The possession of spiritual gifts, therefore, instead of being a basis for pride is rather a solemn trust which should be used by the individual to the glory of God for the purposes revealed in His Word.

¹ T. C. Edward, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 413-44.

² William Graham, *Lectures on Ephesians*, 100.

³ Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

⁴ *Ibid.*

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The Present Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

Chapter 4

The Present Work of Christ in Heaven (Part 2)

The Great Shepherd and the Sheep

One of the important figures used to depict the relationship between Christ and His church is that of the Great Shepherd and the sheep. From the time of Abraham, Israel, as a nation, was known as a people who raised cattle and sheep and, therefore, it was a part of their culture to know the characteristics of the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. It was a natural development that the term *shepherd* should be used to represent a spiritual overseer who would care for his congregation in much the same way as a shepherd would care for his sheep. There are, accordingly, frequent allusions in the Bible to a shepherd with this significance (Ps 23:1; 80:1; Eccl 12:11; Isa 40:11; 63:14; Jer 31:10; Ezek 34:23; 37:24; John 21:15-17; Eph 4:11; 1 Pet 5:1-4).¹ Those who took places of leadership, even in nonspiritual contexts, were sometimes called shepherds (Isa 44:28; 63:11). Accordingly, it was a common expression that “sheep without a shepherd” represented individuals or nations who had forgotten God (Num 27:17; 1 Kings 22:17; 2 Chron 18:16; Ezek 34:5, 8; Zech 10:2; Matt 9:36; Mark 6:34). Even in modern times the term *shepherd* has been perpetuated in the term *pastor* as applied to a pastor as the shepherd of a church. The word *sheep*, in the sense of one who is offered as a sacrifice, is used of Christ, referred to as a lamb (Isa 53:7; John 1:29; Rev 5:6, etc).

The presentation of Christ as the shepherd is divided into three time relations: (1) Christ as the Good Shepherd giving His life for His sheep (Ps 22; John 10); (2) Christ as the Great Shepherd in His present work (Heb 13:20; (3) Christ as the Chief Shepherd who will be manifested as the King of glory caring for His own at His second coming (1 Pet 5:4).² Of particular significance in the present discussion is the second time relationship, that of Christ as the Great Shepherd.

Christ as the Great Shepherd who seeks and find His sheep. One of the natural situations arising in the lives of shepherds in Israel was that of a shepherd seeking and finding a sheep which was lost. Christ used this concept in the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7). In this parable is depicted the work of Christ before the cross, especially in seeking and finding the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but the presentation extends beyond this immediate context to the work of Christ which reveals the heart of God in seeking those who are lost.

In John 10:1-28, a more extended revelation of the present work of Christ as shepherd is given. In verse 11 the present work of Christ is based upon His work as the Good Shepherd who “layeth down his life for the sheep.” The work of Christ in seeking the lost, as indicated in the parable in Luke 15, is also mentioned in verse 16: “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and they shall become one flock, one shepherd.” This verse is of great importance because it indicates that Christ’s purpose as a shepherd is not simply to win the lost of the house of Israel but also to bring others into the knowledge of Christ, namely, those who would be saved from the Gentiles. Those “not of this fold” refers to Gentile Christians. The reference to the “one flock, one shepherd” has in view the church of the present age composed of Jew and Gentile alike.³ This passage, therefore, reveals the present work of Christ in winning the lost to Himself based upon His sufficient work as the Good Shepherd in dying for the sins of the whole world. For His sheep, there is accordingly the ministry of leading the sheep in the path of the will of God. Only as sheep are willing to follow Christ will they find their complete spiritual needs supplied. It is their privilege to follow the shepherd, completely trusting Him for all the things that characterize their needs, such as food, water, shelter, and protection from their enemies. Just as natural sheep follow their shepherd, so believers in the Lord should follow Christ as the Great Shepherd and have their spiritual needs completely supplied.

One of the significant facts characterizing the relationship of sheep to a shepherd is that sheep, in spite of their insufficiency in other areas, have a capacity and a desire to follow the shepherd and know his call (John 10:3, 4, 14, 16, 27). One of the characteristics of sheep is that they know their own shepherd and hear his voice. Shepherds were accustomed to call their sheep by a peculiar guttural sound, which to human ears did not seem to be distinct in character, but sheep would readily distinguish the call of their own shepherd from that of others. In like manner, true Christians can distinguish the voice of the true shepherd from other voices and can be led if they are willing to listen. The leading of Christ is often administered by the Holy Spirit as stated in Romans 8:14, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” If sheep are identified as belonging to the shepherd by the fact that they hear the shepherd’s voice,⁴ So Christians can demonstrate that they belong to Christ by listening to His voice as He attempts to lead them.

Christ as the Great Shepherd who provides for His sheep. The ultimate purpose of the Great Shepherd in calling and leading His sheep is to provide for them a more abundant and satisfying life. The other ministries of the Great Shepherd are directed to this end that the sheep might have pastures which are abundant in their spiritual food and drink. Christ stated this in John 10:10: “The thief cometh not, but that he may steal, and kill, and destroy: I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.” Just as the Good Shepherd died that the sheep might have life, so the Great Shepherd lives that the human spirit might have life more abundantly. This is beautifully depicted in Psalm 23 where David gives his testimony of how God, as the Great Shepherd, cared for him. The green pastures and still waters are to be found by those who are near the shepherd.

In addition to providing the elements of abundant life in spiritual food and drink, the Great Shepherd, in contrast to the hireling, also protects the sheep from wolves, that is, the spiritual enemies of the sheep. In the ordinary life of a shepherd caring for his sheep, this was one of the great hazards as wolves would attack the sheep if there was the slightest carelessness on the part of the shepherd. Sheep by their nature are not able to protect themselves from wolves, and this is where the shepherd by his rod and staff came in. Likewise, in the spiritual relationship of the believer to Christ, the attacks of the evil one, whether human or demonic, require the protecting care of the Shepherd for all those who follow Him. Obviously, the place of greatest security and greatest blessing is to be near the Shepherd where the sheep can avail themselves of the still waters and green pastures which are provided for them.

Taken as a whole, the figure of the Great Shepherd in relationship to his sheep is a beautiful picture of the faithful, loving Savior and his relationship to those for whom He died. He depicts, on the one hand, the wonderful divine provision and, on the other hand, the utter need of the sheep for that which God alone can supply.

Christ as the True Vine in Relation to the Branches

In the Upper Room Discourse on the night before His crucifixion, the Lord Jesus used the figure of the vine and the branches to describe His relationship to His disciples. This revelation of the ministry of Christ to and through His disciples portrays the conditions for fruit bearing as well as the ministry of the Father, the privilege of the branches in relationship to the vine, and the danger of superficial connection. As in other figures that are used to describe spiritual truth, it is an illustration which should not be pressed beyond proper bounds.⁵ Seen within the limitation described in the Scriptures themselves, the figure provides another important means of revealing the relationship between Christ and His own.

Christ as the true vine. In its New Testament usage, the word for vine (Gr., *ampelos*) is always associated with fruit bearing (Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18; Jas 3:12). Christ is the true vine in contrast to that which would be false or not a true vine. The word for true (Gr., *alethine*) has the connotation of that which is ultimate, perfect, or infinite. It refers to that which not only bears the name or resemblance but corresponds in its real nature to that which it is called. Christ as the true vine is in contrast to Israel, which has proved to be a false vine which did not bear proper fruit for God (Judg 9:7-15; Ps 80:8; Isa 5:1-7; Ezek 15:2; Hos 10:1). Christ is the true vine in the same sense that He is the true life and the true bread. Those who are properly related to Christ, therefore, have a true fruitfulness and an abundant life.

The true branches. Expositors of the figure of the vine and the branches, as given in John 15, have often erred by attempting to pursue the figure beyond that of its intention. It is obvious that every figure of speech or illustration is designed to teach a

particular truth, and the figure cannot in all its particulars be made to agree with its corresponding spiritual counterpart. Accordingly, those who press this figure beyond reasonable bounds end with an explanation which is contradicted by other portions of Scripture.

In any attempt at exposition of this passage, it is necessary first to state clearly the purpose of the figure. The theme of the passage is indicated in the sixfold repetition of the word *fruit*. The major concept, therefore, is fruitfulness, such as normally would be expected of a branch properly related to the vine. Inasmuch as fruitfulness is in view, it is, therefore, an error to attempt to make this an illustration of salvation, condemnation, or imputation, as these great doctrines are not in view. The central thought is that fruitfulness depends on the kind of branch. A fruitful branch must have a counterpart in regenerated souls who are supernaturally united to Christ and members of His true body as well as true sheep of His flock, members of the new creation, and in other ways qualified to bring forth fruit.

The major problem in exegesis of this figure is to determine the character of the unfruitful branches. The unfruitful branches, of course, do not reveal any true ministry of Christ, as they do not in any real sense partake of the ministry of the vine. They are described as being cast into a fire where they are burned. Various explanations have been advanced to account for the character of these unfruitful branches.

Some have attempted to describe the unfruitful branches as genuinely saved Christians who, because of fruitlessness, are taken from this life because they have committed the sin unto death (1 John 5:16). This point of view regards the ministry of these branches as being useless to the extent that God takes them out of this world.

A second view is advanced by A. C. Gaebel⁶ who considers the fruitless branches as professing Christians joined to the professing church who outwardly appear to be in union with Christ but actually not joined to the true vine. This lack of vital connection is revealed in the fact that they are cut off and in the end reveal that they are fitted for destruction instead of fruitfulness.⁷

A third view, probably the least satisfactory, is that the unfruitful branches have reference to Israel and Judas in particular who are cut off to make way for fruitful believers in Christ. A parallel is cited in Romans 11:17 where the unfruitful branches are broken off the olive tree and new branches are grafted in which will bear fruit. Undoubtedly, the major problem in the exposition of this passage is the attempt to make explicit that which is only implied. The practice of pruning the vine and cutting out unfruitful branches was common in the care of natural vines. The major point is that true fruitfulness is derived from proper connection to the true vine. It apparently was not the intent of the passage to develop at length the precise relationship of the unfruitful branches. In John 15:6 the appeal is made to human customs rather than to divine activity in this regard.

The ministry of the true vine to the true branches. The main thought of the figure of the vine and the branches is to emphasize the truth that Christ is the source of life and fruitfulness for all who are related to Him. Although it is not stated in the figure, the implication is that the branches have both their existence and life because they are joined to Christ. Apart from Christ they can do nothing. Just as there was a union of life between Christ as the Head of the body, so there is union of life between the vine and branches. The branches live and are able to bear fruit because they derive nourishment from the vine.

The thought of sanctification is obviously indicated in the passage as it states that the branches are purged by a work of the Father as well as by the word of Christ (John 15:2-3). In natural life, vines are seldom fruitful unless properly pruned, and the work of God in relationship to the vine is therefore indicated. The work of Christ through His word is designed primarily to make fruitful branches bear more fruit, and it is pruning action rather than that of the cutting off of the vine. The implication is plain that fruitfulness is hindered by dead wood and that sanctification is essential to abundant spiritual life.

The main condition for fruitfulness is embodied in the words, "Abide in me" (John 15:4). Abiding in Christ describes the relationship in which a believer has the full benefit of a union with Christ. Implicit in such relationship is obedience to the Lord as stated in the command: "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's

commandments, and abide in his love” (John 15:10). The fruitful branch must not only be yielded to Christ but in complete dependence upon Him.⁸

Among the wonderful promises given those who are in proper relationship to Christ, which makes possible a full answer, and the limitation of the will of God as embodied in the Word of God, which teaches that prayer is always answered according to divine revelation. A believer who is abiding in Christ and praying according to the will of God can be assured that his prayers will be answered. Abiding in the love of God has the significance of being in such a relationship that God is free to manifest His love.

The passage emphasizes degrees of fruitfulness which are stated as (1) fruit, (2) more fruit, and (3) much fruit. Attending fruitfulness is the wonderful joy of serving the Lord as indicated in John 15:11, “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.” The joy of the Christian is in sharp contrast to the pleasure of the world. True Christian joy is the by-product of fruitfulness and is wrought in the heart by the Spirit who produced His own fruit of love, joy, and peace.

It is most significant that the branches of the vine are useless for anything other than bearing fruit (Ezek 15:2-5). The character of branches of the vine makes it impossible to use them for building. They are of no use as firewood, and their beauty as branches is negligible. Only in fruitfulness can a branch related to the vine fulfill its divine purpose and function. In a similar way in Christian experience, the secret of an effective service does not lie in natural endowments or in advancement of self-interests but is rather expressed fully in permitting the life and fruitfulness of Christ to be manifested through the believer. The result of abiding in Christ as symbolized in the vine and the branches has been summarized in the triad, “fruit perpetual; joy celestial; prayer effectual.” The joy mentioned is given special character by Christ as being “my joy” (v. 11), that is, the joy that was in the heart of Christ in fulfilling the will of God in His life.

When understood in its proper significance, the vine and the branches teach the basic lessons of proper relationship to Christ, dependence, faith, and fruitfulness together with the wonderful spiritual by-products of joy and answered prayer which are realized by the true branches.

Christ as the Chief Cornerstone and the Stones of the Building

Frequently in Scripture a stone or rock is used to portray spiritual truths and is usually used in relationship to Christ. Christ is symbolized in the smitten rock from which flows rivers of living water (Exod 17:6; cp. 1 Cor 10:4; John 4:13, 14; 7:37-39). In relation to His first coming to the earth, he was a “stumbling stone” to the Jews (Rom 9:32-33; 1 Cor 1:23; 1 Pet 2:8). At His second coming, He will be the “headstone of the corner” in His relationship to Israel (Zech 4:7; cp. 1 Pet 2:7). In the present age, He is the foundation and chief cornerstone for the church (Eph 2:20; cp. 1 Pet 2:6). Christ is also the stone of destruction to unbelievers (Matt 21:44). In some contexts, the idea of a stone is used of other spiritual truths; for instance, it symbolizes the kingdom of God which is to fill the whole earth (Dan 2:35),⁹ and which is introduced by the reference to the “stone cut out without hands” (Dan 2:34) which depicts the second coming of Christ in judgment, much as in Matthew 21:44. From these many allusions to Christ as a stone and related revelations, it is clear that the concept of the stone has many connotations of spiritual significance.

Christ as the foundation stone. In describing the necessity of Christ as the foundation of the Christian life, the figure of a building is used in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. There it is stated that all must be based upon the foundation which is Christ: “For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” This thought is used in an introductory way as the only proper preparation for the kind of life that will count for eternity. Christian life must be based upon the foundation which is supplied, namely, Christ, and only after this is appropriated can the Christian life be erected upon the foundation. The word *stone* does not occur in this context but the thought is similar to that of other passages such as Isaiah 28:16, where the prophecy was given: “Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious-stone of sure foundation: he that believeth shall not be in haste.” In the Isaiah passage, their concept of foundation and stone are one and the same, the terms *foundation* and *corner* indicating use, and the term *stone* indicating character. In the entire figure, Christ is portrayed as indispensable, with all the building depending upon Him. He is indeed

the only foundation stone for Christian life and faith in time or eternity.

Christ as the cornerstone. In Ephesians 2:20, a further revelation is given describing Christ as the cornerstone: “Being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone.” Here as in 1 Corinthians 3 the word *stone* is not in the original but is properly supplied by the translator. The thought of Christ as the foundation is repeated in this passage, but with added idea that He is also a cornerstone. Although it is not entirely clear as to the complete connotation of this expression, it may be assumed that it reveals Christ as essential to the structure of the building and to its symmetry, indicates the degree of the corner, and gives significance to the whole building. In modern times, the cornerstone is often employed to state the essential facts relating to the purpose of the building and is accordingly the most prominent and significant portion of the building. Christ as the chief cornerstone reveals the purpose of the building which is His church, and apostles and New Testament prophets form the foundation along with Christ, although Christ is the most important stone. This may be a part of the explanation of Matthew 16:18 where the symbolism of a rock is related to Peter’s testimony.

Christ as the living stone. Probably the most important passage in the New Testament on Christ as the stone is found in 1 Peter 2:4-8. Here are repeated most of the factors mentioned in earlier revelation and Isaiah 28:16 is quoted. An additional thought is provided in this passage in the concept that Christ is a living stone. When Christ was in the tomb, His body was lifeless and in this respect was similar to an inanimate stone. In His resurrection, however, Christ became the living stone, a supernatural figure of speech embodying the natural qualities such as permanence and value of precious stones but also the supernatural in the sense that the stone is alive and has a living character.¹⁰

The living character of Christ as stone is carried over into the description of the stones of the building which represent individual Christians. Some take Ephesians 2:21 as an individual believer and others as the whole church corporately. In the Petrine passage, however, clearly the whole church is in view. The stones of the building are like Christ in the tomb, that is, dead and without life. Now in resurrection life, like Christ, they becoming living stones. They not only have the quality of life but fitted together form as a corporate group a living unit, the church, the body of Christ which is one with Christ in life and structure. The figure, therefore, implies that our relationship to Christ includes eternal life, oneness, the security of being on a sure foundation, and the privilege of being a spiritual house (1 Pet 2:5). Christ is also evidently present within the building as well as its chief cornerstone. The building has the quality of growth which continues throughout the present age, not only in the fact that additional stones are being added as the lost are won to Christ, but also that individual Christians grow in their capacity and usefulness.

As depicting the present work of Christ, the figure of Christ as the foundation and cornerstone related to the stones of the building as believers is rich with spiritual significance. It makes clear that the only important aspects of life are those that are related to Christ. Only as life is founded upon Him can a true building be erected for time and eternity.

¹ Cp. James Patch, *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* s.v., “Shepherd.”

² Cp. L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, IV, 56-59.

³ F. B. Meyer comments: “These other sheep must be the Gentiles—ourselves. Though He belonged by birth to the most exclusive race that has ever existed, our Lord’s sympathies overflowed the narrow limits of national prejudice. He was the Son of Man; and in these words He not only showed that his heart was set on us, but He sketched the work which was to occupy Him through the ages” (F. B. Meyer, *The Gospel of John*, 158).

⁴ John Calvin comments on the expression, “They know his voice” (v. 4), “We must attend to the reason why it is said that *the sheep follow*; it is, because *they know* how to *distinguish shepherds* from wolves by *the voice*. This is the spirit of discernment, by which the elect discriminate between the truth of God and the false inventions of men” (John Calvin,

Commentary on the Gospel According to John, 396-97).

⁵ Hugh MacMillan, for instance, in his work, *The True Vine*, is rich in his presentation of the spiritual truth in this figure, but falls short of a satisfactory doctrinal exposition. For a better exposition of this passage, see A. C. Gaebelien, *The Gospel of John*, 292-300, and William Kelly, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, 303-17.

⁶ A. C. Gaebelien, 296-97.

⁷ R. H. Lightfoot states what is probably the best view: “Since true discipleship is bound to show itself in fruit-bearing (15:8), any unfruitful branch is removed (15:2, 6 there is perhaps an indirect reference to the defection of Judas, as being typical of all faithless discipleship), and fruitful branches are pruned, to increase their capacity to bear fruit” (R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John’s Gospel, A Commentary*, 282).

⁸ L. S. Chafer summarizes the meaning of this figure in these words, “The contribution which the figure of the Vine and its branches makes to the doctrine of the Church is particularly that, by the unbroken communion of the believer with His Lord, the enabling power of God rests upon him both for his own priceless experience of joyous fellowship and for fruitfulness by prayer and testimony unto the completion of the Body of Christ, (*Systematic Theology*, IV, 61).

⁹ Cp. H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on Daniel the Prophet*, 38-39.

¹⁰ William Kelly comments: “In Nature no object lies more obviously void of life than a stone. But this only makes the power of grace the more impressive. Even John the Baptist could tell the haughty Pharisees and Sadducees, who pleaded their descent from Abraham, that God was able of the stone to raise up children to Abraham” (William Kelly, *First Epistle of Peter*, 127).

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The Present Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

Chapter 5

The Present Work of Christ in Heaven (Part 3)

Christ, The High Priest and the Royal Priesthood

The Scriptural revelation of the work of Christ as our great High Priest is one of the most important aspects of His present work. Frequently it is considered to be the total of His present work, and other ministries, such as are here being discussed, are made subdivisions of His larger work as our High Priest. It is clear, however, that the priesthood of Christ is one of a number of figures which reveal to us the present work of Christ. Actually His priesthood is something more than a mere figure or symbol of truth as Christ is, indeed, a priest in a more literal sense than He is a vine or a shepherd, although the priesthood of Christ is revealed in type and antitype throughout the Scriptures. The Epistle to the Hebrews is its principal exposition in the New Testament. The truth relating to this area of divine revelation falls into four divisions: first, the nature of His high priesthood; second, His sacrifice as High Priest; third, His intercession as High Priest; fourth, the royal priesthood of the believer related to Christ the High Priest.

The Nature of the High Priesthood of Christ

The essentials of priesthood. In order to understand the nature of priesthood, it is necessary, first of all, to define what is meant by a priest. W. G. Moorehead defines a priest in this way: "One who is duly qualified to minister in sacred things, particularly to offer sacrifices at the altar, and to act as mediator between men and God."¹ According to Scripture, Christ fulfilled all of the essential qualities of a priest. He ministered in sacred things (Heb 5:1). His life and ministry were concerned with "things pertaining to God." Christ was made a priest by God Himself (Heb 5:4-10) in contrast to contemporary high priests who were elected under authority of the Roman government in a manner unrecognized by the Scriptures. According to 1 Timothy 2:5, Christ was a true mediator. He offered sacrifice to God (Heb 9:26). On the basis of His sacrifice, Christ offered intercession to God (Heb 7:25). In all of these respects, it is evident that the priesthood of Christ unquestionably is established as valid and fulfilling the full-orbed ministry of a priest.

Christ in His priesthood as the antitype of Melchizedek. According to the Epistle to the Hebrews, Christ fulfilled that which was anticipated in Melchizedek, the priest, to whom Abraham gave tithes. Many similarities can be traced between Melchizedek and Christ, which are brought out in the argument of Hebrews supporting the teaching that Christ is superior to and supplanted the Aaronic priesthood.

1. According to the general argument of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Christ is supreme over all other priesthoods and especially superior in every way to the Aaronic priesthood. The ministry of Christ as priest, both in His person and work, was not an improvement of the Aaronic system, but a new order entirely. Christ in His *work* as a high priest fulfilled much that was anticipated in the Aaronic priesthood. Christ in His *person* and *order* as a priest fulfilled that which was anticipated by Melchizedek. The supremacy of Christ's priesthood is supported by its principal characteristics, namely, that it is eternal, untransmissible, and based on supernatural resurrection.

2. The eternity of the priesthood of Christ is in contrast to the Aaronic priesthood which had a beginning when God appointed Aaron and his descendants to be priests for Israel. In the eternal quality of His priesthood, Christ fulfilled that which was anticipated in part in Melchizedek, who according to the Scriptures was "without father, without mother, without

genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually” (Heb 7:3). Although some have thought that Melchizedek was actually a theophany, that is, an appearance of Christ in the form of Melchizedek to Abraham, the more probable view is that Hebrews means only that Melchizedek, unlike Aaronic priests, had no recorded genealogy. He was a priest independent of his father or his successor. In other words, he was not dependent on his genealogy, in sharp contrast to the Aaronic priesthood which depended upon it completely. The predecessors and successors of Melchizedek are not mentioned in the Bible, and the validity of the Melchizedek priesthood does not rest upon this background.

Typically, Melchizedek represented an eternal priesthood, such as is fulfilled in Christ, whose priesthood is not dependent upon either predecessors nor successors. The eternal priesthood of Christ in the Melchizedek type is brought out in Hebrews 5:5, 6, 9 which states that Christ fulfilled Psalm 110:4: “Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent: Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” It is for this reason that Christ is revealed to be “the author of eternal salvation” (Heb 5:9). According to Hebrews 7:16-17, Christ’s priesthood is “after the power of an endless life.” In like manner, in Hebrews 7:23-26, in contrast to the Aaronic priesthood, Christ is revealed to continue eternally in His office as a priest as well as in His work of intercession. It is for this reason that He needs no successors.

One of the problems which are raised concerning the eternal priesthood of Christ is the question of the point in time when Christ assumed His priestly office. Probably the most common tendency has been to assume that His priestly work began with the cross and the glorification that followed His resurrection. As William Milligan points out: “Such writers as Tholuck, Riehm, Hofmann, Delitzsch, Davidson, and Westcott admit with more or less distinctness that the High-priesthood of our Lord began with His Glorification; but they cannot allow that the death upon the cross was not ‘an essential part of His Highpriest’s work, performed in the outer court, that is, in this world,’ and they are thus driven to the expedient of saying that, Highpriestly as that act was, the Priesthood of Christ only attained its completeness after His resurrection. This distinction, however, between incompleteness and completeness cannot be maintained; and the true solution appears to be suggested by our Lord’s own words. It began upon the cross, and the cross was the beginning of His glory.”²

It is clear from Scripture, however, that Christ long before His dying on the cross served as a priest in the sense of interceding for man and acting as mediator. On occasion He prayed all night, and specifically, according to Luke 22:32, Christ declared of Peter, “I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not.” Inasmuch as intercession is a priestly function, Christ was doing the work of a priest.

Another suggestion which has been offered is that the baptism of Christ by John the Baptist was His induction into the priestly office, fulfilling that which was represented in the induction to the Aaronic priesthood of the Old Testament where the priest was given a bath. Still others point to the incarnation as the beginning of His priestly work in that the union of God and man was necessary for Christ to be the true mediator. While each of these points of view has some factors to commend it, the solution seems to be that Christ’s priesthood is eternal as to its office, and temporal in its fulfillment as far as ministry is concerned. It is true that the priesthood of Christ depended upon His incarnation, sacrifice, and glorification, all of which was prerequisite to His work as priest at the right hand of the Father. The office of Christ as priest, however, can be considered eternal in the same sense that Christ is the Savior eternally. In support of this point of view, Psalm 110:4 is quoted in Hebrews 7:20-21: “Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent: Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” Here the argument is that Christ as a priest was so constituted, not by ordinary appointment in time, but was made a priest by the eternal oath of God. As Psalm 110 was written a thousand years before the birth of Christ, it would seem at that time that Christ was already regarded as a priest and hence, His priesthood did not begin at some later time, such as the time of His incarnation, baptism, or death on the cross. The priesthood of Christ, then, instead of resting on an earthly lineage, historic beginning, ordinances, or sacrifice, instead, originated in the eternal oath of God.

3. Not only was Christ’s priesthood eternal, but it also was untransmissible. In other words, it was not passed on to another as was characteristic of the Aaronic priesthood. An eternal priesthood is by nature based on the eternal oath of God, a priesthood which cannot and is not passed to a successor. This is the thought of Hebrews 7:24, “But he, because he abideth for ever, hath his priesthood unchangeable.” The argument, however, hinges in part on the word *unchangeable* (aparabaton). Westcott insists, however, that the word does not mean untransmissible, but only *inviolable*, and he would translate the

passage, “He, because He abideth for ever, hath His priesthood inviolable.”³ Thayer, however, while admitting the force of the argument of Westcott believes the context indicates that the word here is used in the sense of being “*unchangeable* and therefore not liable to pass to a successor.”⁴ Cp. also Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s. v. *aparabatos*. Even Westcott agrees that Christ’s priesthood is, as a matter of fact, not transmitted and only argues that the verse itself does not say this in so many words. The discussion which immediately follows in Hebrews 7:25 states the fact that the resurrection of Christ makes possible His eternal function as a priest and intercessor: “Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” Most orthodox scholars consider it self-evident that the priesthood of Christ is never transmitted to another and that this therefore contradicts the Roman Catholic concept of the idea of priests and succession of popes as proceeding from Christ, the High Priest. The priesthood of the believer as delineated in the Bible is based not on succession of priesthood, either by birth or by action of a church council, but on the believer’s position in Christ assured to him from the moment of his conversion. The nature of Christ’s priesthood which is based on the eternal oath is eternal in its nature, and therefore cannot be passed on to another. No one else is a high priest in the sense that Christ is.

4. The continued high priesthood of Christ is based according to the Scriptures on the fact of His resurrection. The Melchizedek type calls special attention to this while affirming that the work of Christ in sacrifice is the basis for all of His priestly work. The resurrection of Christ is the first step of His glorification which leads to His present exercise of His priesthood in heaven. This is brought out also in the symbolism of the ceremony recorded in Genesis 14:18-19 where it is recorded: “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth.” The bread and wine as indicated in the Lord’s Supper had the thought of a memorial rather than a sacrifice, and therefore refer to His present work in heaven rather than to the work of Christ on the cross. Melchizedek is not recorded to have offered any sacrifices because he depicted the present work of Christ in contrast to that work of Christ when He died on the cross as the Lamb of God.

The priesthood of Christ as the antitype of Aaron. In the Epistle to the Hebrews’ the Aaronic priesthood is discussed as the type of which Christ’s priesthood is the antitype. The emphasis is on the similarity of their work with Christ revealed to be superior to and superseding Aaron in His offering of sacrifices. Just as Aaron met the requirements of a priest based on genealogy and divine appointment, so Christ is revealed to be a priest because He possessed the spiritual qualifications for a priest. In every respect Christ was superior to Aaron in the duration of His priesthood, in the method of His induction into the office of priest by God, and in the fact that He possessed an untransmissible priesthood. By contrast, Aaron’s priesthood terminated, had to be succeeded by those who followed him in the priestly office, and was a temporary instead of an eternal office.

Christ is the fulfillment of the Aaronic priesthood in that it fulfills all that was anticipated in the functioning of the Aaronic priesthood. Hence Christ is said (1) to minister in the heavenly sphere as did Aaron (Heb 8:1-5); (2) Christ served the realities rather than the shadows (Heb 8:5); (3) Christ administered a new and better covenant than the Mosaic covenant (Heb 8:6); (4) Christ offered a final and complete sacrifice for sin rather than the daily offerings of Aaron (Heb 7:27). In a word, Christ fulfilled all that Aaron was and did. It should be borne in mind that the principal concept here is not that Christ’s priesthood was designed to fulfill Aaron’s, but rather that the Aaronic priesthood was designed by God in the first place as that which would point to Christ and which would require the sacrifice and work of Christ as priest to fulfill completely. Hence, the work of Christ as a priest does away with the former Aaronic system completely and replaces it. This is important to the argument of Hebrews, which is to demonstrate that Christ is superior to all others, be they angels, Moses, or Aaron.

One of the concepts emphasized in the Aaronic type of priesthood is that Christ is presented in His true humanity as the last Adam. According to Hebrews 4:15, Christ knew temptations except those rising from a sin nature: “For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” It may be admitted that Christ knew weakness and limitations which were unmoral in character, such as is natural to the humanity. There was, however, no involvement with sin, which led to the fact that He could “bear gently with the ignorant” (Heb 5:2). He did not have a sin nature and could not be tempted precisely as a Christian is tempted today who has a sin nature. The temptations of Christ, however, on the other hand, far exceeded those which a Christian faces today, as

He made choices and faced alternatives which a Christian does not have to face. Christ, because He was human, knew agonizing prayer and suffering, and for this reason can sympathize with those who struggle (Heb 5:7-8). Christ is a part of the human race while He acted as high priest much in the same sense that Aaron remained a part of Israel while he served them as their high priest. The humanity of Christ is therefore an essential part of His priesthood.

The Work of Christ as the Great High Priest in His Sacrifice

The work of Christ as our great high priest was fulfilled in two major aspects: first, His work in His sacrifice on the cross; and, second, His work of intercession which includes His ministry as our Advocate. In His sacrifice Christ is both the sacrificer and the sacrifice as He is both the Lamb and the Priest. As all of His priestly work depended upon His sacrifice, it is most important that this be carefully examined and the nature of His offering be fully realized.

The nature of the offering of Christ. In the discussion of the death of Christ, His sacrifice was presented objectively as fulfilling three major works. First, Christ in His sacrifice accomplished the redemption which God demanded in that He paid the price of ransom from sin involved in the purchase, deliverance, and freedom of sinners from sin. Second, Christ in His sacrifice is revealed to be our propitiation in that He met all the righteous demands of a Holy God relating to judgment upon human sin. In this connection, Christ fulfilled that which was anticipated in both the sweet savor and the non-sweet savor offerings which atoned for our guilt and provided a righteous basis by which God could receive the believer in Christ. Third, Christ in His sacrifice accomplished reconciliation in a provisional sense for the entire world, making it possible for a believer to be placed in the new creation wherein all ground for separation from God is removed and a new living and eternal union of man to God is effective. The offering accomplished once and for all on the cross has its resulting benefits continuing forever. It is important to the concept of redemption, propitiation, and reconciliation to recognize that these were completely and finally wrought by Christ when He died on the cross and declared, "It is finished."

The false doctrine of perpetual offering. One of the familiar doctrines of Roman Catholic theology is the belief that not only the priesthood of Christ but also the sacrifice of Christ are perpetual, inasmuch as they hold that sacrifice is an essential function of priesthood and therefore continuous offerings for sin must be made. Support for this fallacious position is found in a mistranslation by Jerome of the key passages of Hebrews 1:3; 8:3 ; 10:11 . In its early history, the Roman Church held that the doctrine of the mass representing the sacrifice of Christ was in fact a continual offering. They supported the concept of the mass on the ground that sacrifice was unsuited for heaven and that therefore priests on earth representing Christ could hold the mass on the earth, in effect reoffering His sacrifice. Their position shifted later to the point of view that Christ offered a perpetual offering in heaven and hence an earthly representation of the sacrifice in the mass is permissible and in fact required. Their whole position, however, depends upon support for the theory that there is of necessity a perpetual offering if there is to be a perpetual priesthood.

Although the Roman Catholic Church has been the principal propagator of the doctrine of perpetual offering, it has raised a sympathetic chord in certain Protestant scholars. For instance, William Milligan takes the position that the work of Christ in sacrifice cannot be limited to earth and therefore has an element of continuance in his present ministry in heaven.⁵ In a similar way, Henry B. Swete, although he accepts the idea of a sacrifice once for all, believes that the process of propitiation is in some sense continued and thereby detracts from the concept of the work of propitiation as finished on the cross.⁶

However, in defense of the concept that the offering of Christ was finished once and for all, a number of solid works can be cited, such as that by Arthur J. Tait⁷ and two works by Nathaniel Dimock,⁸ which in their entirety support the concept of a finished propitiation on the cross.

At least seven arguments can be advanced in refutation of the Roman Catholic position.

1. The Roman doctrine of perpetual offering is based on a wrong premise. It is not true that a perpetual offering is essential to perpetual priesthood. If Christ was a priest from all eternity past without making an offering for sin in anticipation of the completion of that offering on the cross at the close of His life on earth, it should be clear that His priesthood was not

dependent upon continuous offering. As a matter of fact, Old Testament saints were forgiven and given mercy in anticipation of that future sacrifice which had not yet been enacted. Up until the time that Christ died on the cross, all forgiveness anticipated the future one act of Christ dying, and His sacrifice according to Romans 3:25-26 justified God in His forgiveness of the Old Testament saints. If it were possible for God to anticipate the act of Christ on the cross from eternity past in planning the redemption of man, it is also possible for God to look back on the one act of sacrifice on the cross as sufficient for all future dealings with men.

2. In the Roman Catholic theory, there is confusion of the offering or sacrifice with the intercession which follows the offering. Although both sacrifice and intercession are essential to priesthood, they are not one and the same ministry, that is, the sacrifice in itself is not intercession and intercession is not in itself sacrifice. It is rather that intercession is based on sacrifice.

3. The Roman theory also confuses the offering with the offerer. The presence of Christ in heaven does not in itself indicate the presence of the offering in heaven. While Christ is both the priest and the sacrifice the entities must not be confused.

4. The Roman theory also confuses typology by making the priest and the sacrificial lamb the same. While this is an outgrowth of the confusion of the offering with the offerer, in the Old Testament the types are clear, distinguishing the lamb which is offered and the priest who offered it. The priest, indeed, identified himself with the offering when he laid his hands upon it, but everyone understands that this is identification by imputation, rather than making them one and the same. The lamb died and the priest did not.

5. The theory of perpetual offering is refuted by direct statements of the Bible which affirm that Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice once for all. According to 1 Corinthians 15:4, the gospel included not only that Christ died for our sins, but that He was buried, signifying completion of the act of sacrifice. According to Hebrews 1:3, Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice first and on the basis of the completion of the sacrifice was seated on the throne: "Who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

6. The theory of perpetual offering is directly contradicted by Hebrews 8:3 which supports the previous references to the one sacrifice of Christ: "For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is necessary that this high priest also have somewhat to offer." In the translation of this verse, the copula "it is" is omitted in the Greek, and it has to be supplied as is commonly done in many other instances. It is probable that what was intended was the past tense, "it was," as it is found in the ancient Peshito Syriac version.⁹ John Owen also holds that the past tense is intended here, that is, that the necessity of the offering is now past, citing Beza as well as the Syriac version as proof.¹⁰ Even if the present tense were inserted, however, it would not be destructive to the doctrine that Christ died once for all, but would be stating simply a general truth.

In Hebrews 10:10-14, in the discussion of the priestly work of Christ, it is clearly stated in verse 14 that Christ by His one act of dying provided an eternal basis for forgiveness, "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." This concept is provided additional support in Hebrews 7:27 where it is stated explicitly: "Who needeth not daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people: for this he did once for all, when he offered up himself." It should be obvious from these many references that, if the Scriptures are allowed to speak, their witness is clearly against the concept of perpetual offering and in favor of a sacrifice completed by Christ on the cross.

7. The supposed support of the typology of Hebrews 9:7 has also been cited in favor of the theory of perpetual offering, according to the Roman version and by some Protestant theologians. Christ took His blood into heaven when He entered it by ascension. This is seemingly supported by Hebrews 9:7: "But into the second the high priest alone, once in the year, not without blood, which he offereth for himself, and for the errors of the people." This passage is related to Hebrews 9:24: "For Christ entered not into a holy place made with hands, like in pattern to the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us." Based on these references to the work of the high priest on the Day of Atonement, who offered

sacrifices and then brought the blood into the holy of holies, it is assumed that Christ also brought His blood into heaven itself, which would seem to support the idea that offering in heaven was a part of a sacrificial ministry.

While the explanation of these passages is not simple, a number of facts help to demonstrate that Christ never offered His blood in heaven in any physical way and that the sacrifice of His blood was complete on the cross. The proper interpretation is that in the Old Testament the high priest completed the sacrifice on the altar and took the blood with him merely to make application of the sacrifice. Hence, while the priest took the blood into the holy of holies according to the Old Testament ritual, it was to be considered a means of entrance rather than a completion of the sacrifice. In the Epistle to the Hebrews there is careful avoidance of the thought of bringing blood into heaven. The word for *offered* (propherei) in Hebrews 9:7 does not mean offering in the sense of a sacrifice, but rather of *bringing near*. While the blood was brought into the holy of holies in the Old Testament ritual, it was not in a sacrificial sense. Sustaining this contention is the fact that the high priest in the Old Testament was allowed to enter the holy of holies on the ground of a completed sin offering on the altar in the open air. In other words, the sacrifice was complete before he entered.

The uniform manner of reference in the Epistle to the Hebrews is that Christ entered *through* His blood, rather than *with* His blood. In Hebrews 9:12 and 13:12 the use of *dia* with the genitive is found. A similar expression can be noted in the use of *en* with the locative (Heb 9:25; 10:19 ; 13:20). The thought is that Christ entered not as one bringing blood to complete a sacrifice, but as one who is clothed in blood, entering on the basis of the sacrifice. Dimock concluded accordingly: “Is it too much to say—and to say with confidence—that, in full view of the teaching of this truth, the idea of anything like a sacrificial oblation, or offering for sin by the Saviour in Heaven is quite inadmissible—is, to the soul fully enlightened by this truth, utterly inconceivable?”¹¹

From these arguments and the precise use of prepositions in the New Testament, it may be concluded that the sacrifice of Christ was completed on the cross once and for all, that Christ did not present literal blood in heaven any more than His literal blood is applied to the believer now (cp. 1 John 1:7), that all cleansing in earth and heaven is on the basis of the blood shed on Calvary, and that the work of Christ in sacrifice was finished when He died.

¹ W. G. Moorehead, *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, “Priest.”

² William Milligan, *The Ascension and Heavenly Priesthood of our Lord*, p. 81.

³ Westcott, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 192.

⁴ Thayer’s *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. *aparabatos*

⁵ William Milligan, *The Ascension and Heavenly Priesthood of Our Lord*, pp. 133-34.

⁶ H. B. Swete, *The Ascended Christ*, p. 50.

⁷ Arthur J. Tait, *The Heavenly Ascension of Our Lord*.

⁸ Nathaniel Dimock, *The Sacerdotium of Christ and Our One Priest on High*; cp. B. F. Westcott, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, which also supports the concept of a finished offering.

⁹ N. Dimock, *Our One High Priest on High*, p. 9.

¹⁰ *The Works of John Owen*, XV. 28.

¹¹ Dimock, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

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The Present Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

Chapter 6

The Present Work of Christ in Heaven (Part 4)

The Work of Christ as the Great High Priest in His Sacrifice (continued)

The false doctrine of perpetual offering by Christ's presence in heaven. Another point of view which has been advanced by some Protestants is a variation of the Roman view. Adherents of this position deny that Christ today is offering a sacrifice in heaven, but they affirm that Christ's sacrifice is essentially one of life and that in this sense Christ is now offering His life on our behalf in heaven. This concept is expanded by pointing out that on Calvary Christ gave His life for us and that in heaven He is living for us to make intercession. Hence, the presence of Christ in heaven is held to constitute a sacrifice which continues in some sense His sacrificial work.¹

The objections to this theory are just as real as those against the Roman position. In brief, this viewpoint of a heavenly sacrifice destroys the objective reality of Christ's one act of dying on the cross and minimizes its transcendent importance. It should be obvious that the work of Christ on the cross has to do with our guilt of sin, whereas His work in heaven is entirely different. Their viewpoint would make the work of Christ on the cross only one phase of a broad sacrificial ministry. Second, this theory of heavenly sacrifice would destroy the substitutional character of the work of Christ on the cross. In the Scriptures, Christ's death on the cross is represented as one of bearing the sins of the world in His sacrifice. In thus bearing the sins of the world, He is temporarily estranged from God and cries out that God has forsaken Him. He also states at the conclusion of His work on the cross, "It is finished."

By contrast, the heavenly intercession of Christ is not a distinctive event accomplished in one day and is not substitutional. It is part of the exercise of privileges obtained through His previous act of dying on the cross. It claims the merit of this sacrifice in its application to the individual believer. While this Protestant viewpoint is less serious an error than the Roman Catholic position, it is, nevertheless, destructive to a proper view of the atonement and the humiliation of Christ on the cross.

The orthodox view of the offering of Christ. The proper Christian doctrine of the offering of Christ is the doctrine of the Scripture that Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin on the cross and that this offering was complete at the moment of His death. On the basis of this accomplished sacrifice, Christ can forever intercede for those who trust in Him and in this way fulfill His complete work as a priest. This view is the only one which fully satisfies all the related Scripture, gives to His work of sacrifice its proper place, and gives a suitable distinction between the sacrifice and the intercession which follows.

Christ as Our Great High Priest in His Intercession

How shall intercession be defined? In its theological significance, intercession is the entire work of Christ in His present work of mediation in heaven. The work of intercession presents believers to the Father as the objects of the Father's grace, and concerns their entire need. In its Biblical usage, the concept of intercession has particular reference to the work of Christ on behalf of the believer's weakness and temptation with the end in view of preventing sin. As such, intercession is to be contrasted in its Biblical connotation with advocacy (1 John 2:1) which deals especially with the problem of sin in the believer's life after the sin is committed. Both Biblical intercession and advocacy are included in the theological term

intercession,.

The difference of opinion relative to the nature of intercession hinges largely on the question of whether intercession is both vocal and real as some Lutheran theologians hold, or the opposite view that intercession is merely the presence of God in heaven. The proper Biblical definition seems to be between these two extremes, and the Bible's presentation of intercession would lead to the conclusion that intercession is real though not necessarily vocal, that is, in actual words.

In attempting to clarify this difficult problem, there is further complication due to the fact that the nature of intercession has sometimes been confused with propitiation, and some have held that intercession is merely continuous propitiation. Tait points out, for instance, that intercession was little discussed until it became involved in the Arian controversy in the East and the doctrine of continuous propitiation in the West.² The proper Scriptural doctrine seems to be that propitiation was wrought by Christ in His one act of dying on the cross to satisfy all of God's just demands for the sinner. Like redemption and reconciliation, it is therefore a finished work, the benefits of which can now be extended to those who trust in Christ. Intercession, on the other hand, is a continuous present ministry of Christ, which is a function of His office of priest and is based on this finished sacrifice.

The theory that Christ's intercession is His presence in heaven. Both Milligan and Swete hold that the intercession of Christ consists in a continuous presentation of the glorified life of Christ and therefore, does not involve the element of vocal prayer. Swete writes, "For the intercession of the ascended Christ is not a prayer, but a life. The New Testament does not represent Him as an *orante*, standing ever before the Father, and with outstretched arms, like the figures in the Mosaics of the catacombs, and with strong crying and tears pleading our cause in the presence of a reluctant God; but as the throne Priest-King asking what He will from a Father who always hears and grants His request. Our Lord's life in heaven is His prayer."³ In other words, Swete holds that the presence of Christ in heaven in itself constitutes intercession, and, therefore, he denies that intercession as such is either real, that is, actual prayer, or vocal, that is, expressed in words.

The theory that Christ's intercession is real and vocal. In contrast to the view of Swete and Milligan is the Lutheran position that the intercession of Christ is *vocalis et realis*, i.e., real and vocal. The Lutheran view is that Christ in heaven offers real intercession and that this is characterized by the same qualities found in all prayer. Reformed theologians other than Lutherans took a middle view between the two extremes, affirming on the one hand that intercession is not necessarily vocal, as the presence of Christ in heaven is sufficient, but holding on the other hand that such intercession is real and effective. They also separated propitiation from intercession, supporting the idea that propitiation was finished on the cross, but that intercession is continuous. Those who follow closely Biblical usage will probably agree with the reformers as against the Lutheran view.

Intercession as revealed in the Scriptures. Only two direct references to intercession of Christ are found in the New Testament (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25). These passages in themselves do not settle the controversy as they simply state that Christ makes intercession for us and that this intercession is continuous in that He "ever liveth." In both cases the Greek word is *entugcano*. There are, however, two other instances where a noun form *enteuxis* is used, (1 Tim 2:1, 4:5), in which instances the word is translated *intercession* and *prayer* respectively, being used for the prayers of men to God. It is significant that the same word, which is used of Christ's intercession in its verb form, is used of the prayer of men in its noun form. This would imply a close resemblance and would justify the conclusion that the intercession of Christ in some sense is similar to that of human prayer and, therefore, more than mere presence in heaven.

This conclusion is confirmed by the reference in the Scriptures to the intercession of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:26-27. The intercession of the Spirit is prompted by the fact that believers do not know how to pray as they should and the Holy Spirit therefore presents their petitions. If it may be concluded from this that the Holy Spirit is engaged in real intercession, it would imply that the intercession of Christ is equally real.

Some problems remain, regardless of which view is taken. It may be conceded that the Father does not need to be reminded by the Son of any needs of saints on earth as the Father is equally omniscient and is fully mindful of all the facts which are on the heart of the Son and, like the Son, desires the same end. While this is true, it is nevertheless recorded in the Scriptures

that the Son, while on earth, prayed to the Father with all that characterized prayer, even though the Father knew what the Son would pray from all eternity past. The prayer of Christ on earth is further characterized by human factors as is illustrated in Hebrews 5:7 where in reference to Christ it is stated: “Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and having been heard for his godly fear.” While it may be assumed that Christ is not now praying with the same importunity and characteristics which prevailed during the period of humiliation on earth, it is nevertheless true that, if prayer was necessary while He was on earth, it is not improper to hold that Christ may be engaged now in intercession which is also real.

Accordingly, it may be concluded that while intercession may not necessarily take the form of words and may not carry out all the forms of human expression used on earth, the fact that similar words for intercession are used both for the intercession of Christ and the prayers of men implies that the reality of intercession is more than the presence of Christ in heaven. Intercession, therefore, may be considered an act not merely an inevitability due to the nature of His person and circumstances, but an active presentation in some form of the needs of believers on earth. While the nature of communication between two glorified omniscient beings, such as the Father and the Son, is beyond human powers to understand, the fact that this is inscrutable and beyond our comprehension is not necessarily an argument against its reality. The conclusion therefore is that the intercession of Christ is (1) real; (2) more than mere presence of the life of the glorified Man; (3) may be vocal, but not necessarily; (4) involves active communication between the Son and the Father.

The results of the intercession of Christ. For those prepared to enter into its wonderful truth, the fact that Christ intercedes for His own in heaven is another guarantee of the security of the believer. While the hope of the believer for eternal salvation rests essentially on his possession of eternal life and the finished character of the death of Christ, it is undoubtedly strengthened by the fact of the intercession of Christ. In His intercession in heaven Christ sustains the believer and keeps him from many of the spiritual dangers of life. Such intercession pleads the fact that the believer is in Christ and a partaker of His righteousness. The work of Christ in intercession also pledges the ultimate sanctification of the believer and all that is necessary to effect this end. The doctrine of intercession taken as a whole makes clear that salvation is progressive. While the ultimate purpose of God is sure from the beginning in all of its time factors, salvation is a work of God for man through Christ which once begun is carried on triumphantly to its conclusion in eternity.

The intercession of Christ is also most significant as providing the secret for keeping the believer from the sin of the world. The nature of Christ’s intercession is indicated in His prayer in John 17:11, 15 in which He prays that believers might be kept from evil. Undoubtedly many a spiritual triumph and many a godly life are explainable not by human factors, but by the faithfulness of the Son of God as He intercedes for His own.

The intercession of Christ is also vitally related to the matter of the believer’s fellowship with God. By preventing sin, a basis for continued fellowship is provided. When a believer does sin, Christ in His advocacy provides a way for restoration. On the divine side, adjustment is always made immediately when the believers sin. God is never out of adjustment in His part of His relationship to the believer. On the experiential side, however, that is, the human side, fellowship is conditioned on the believer’s response to the pleadings of God, his confession of his sin, and his resulting restoration through the sanctifying blood of Christ. Accordingly, the continued fellowship of the believer according to 1 John 1:5—2:2 is based on the blood of Christ and conditioned on confession of known sin.

The doctrine of intercession emphasizes the great truth that Christ never ceases to intercede for His own. While human prayers on earth are limited in both extent and power, the intercession of Christ knows no limits within the will of God. As an infinite person Christ is able to concentrate His intercession wholly on each individual believer without any diminution or detracting from the needs of any other. In effect, the believer is assured of the intercession of Christ in such a manner as would be true if Christ centered all His love and all His intercession on that one believer. Whatever may be the limitation of human prayers, the believer is assured that there is One who never ceases to pray to him and his needs and that this Intercessor has all power and favor with the Father and, accordingly, “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph 3:20).

The Royal Priesthood of the Believer

As an important corollary of Christ in His office and work as priest, the priesthood of individual believers is revealed in Scripture. Frequent mention is found in the Bible of the believer's work as a priest under Christ the High Priest (Rom 12:1; Heb 13:15-16; 1 Pet 2:5; Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). Other passages may be added to these basic texts which relate to exhortations to pray and similar doctrines. The priesthood of the believer is one of the important areas of spiritual life presented in the Bible and one of the great truths reclaimed in the Protestant Reformation. The work of the believer priest, like the work of Christ, is divided into two areas, one the believer's sacrifices and the other the believer's intercession.

At least four sacrifices are mentioned as belonging properly to the believer priest. The first of these, which is the foundation for others to follow, is that of the sacrifice of our body mentioned in Romans 12:1. In contrast to animals of sacrifice in the Old Testament who gave their lives in death in their sacrifice on the altar, the believer is exhorted to give his body in a living sacrifice. Such a sacrifice is regarded as holy and acceptable to God because of the fact that the believer has been cleansed by the blood of Christ. It is also a reasonable sacrifice, that is, one which can be properly expected, in view of all that God has done on behalf of the believer. This foundational exhortation obviously enters into any true exercise of priestly function on the part of the believer in Christ and until the individual has surrendered his heart, mind, and body to the Lord as a living sacrifice, there can be no proper exercise of his priestly prerogatives. From this experience of yieldedness flow all the possibilities of usefulness and joyous experience of the Christian life.

A second sacrifice which the believer priest can offer to the Lord is the sacrifice of praise (1 Pet 2:5, 9; Heb 13:15). Just as the altar of incense lent its fragrance to the air of the tabernacle and later the temple and gave itself wholly to the recognition of the perfections of God, so the believer as a priest should be offering constantly to God a sacrifice of praise. Such praise involves recognition of the nature of God and His wonderful works and especially His grace manifested to those who have trusted Him. Such a sacrifice is of course possible only for a believer who has offered himself to God first and who has experienced a life of yieldedness which knows the joy of the Holy Spirit and has spiritual understanding of the gracious dealings of God. Such a sacrifice of praise has depth and meaning only as the believer priest recognizes the perfections of God and devotes his heart and mind to worship, adoration, and praise. This work of the believer priest on earth will undoubtedly be continued in heaven and constitutes a major aspect of his experience in eternity.

A third sacrifice is that indicated in Hebrews 13:16, namely, a sacrifice of good works or doing good. This is an all-inclusive sacrifice and comprehends all the service rendered to God in the path of His divine will. The whole Christian life in a sense is a sacrifice of good works. In a similar way the Levites performed their function in the Old Testament as they assisted the priests. Though not specifically offering sacrifice and doing priestly works, nevertheless, they offered in a sense a sacrifice of good works to God. Likewise the present work of a believer priest, though not always engaged specifically in intercession or sacrifices of a priestly character, is nevertheless that of offering a sacrifice to God whenever he is accomplishing God's will in his life. Such a point of view adds dignity to even the humble tasks which are insignificant in their character and, though in some particulars may not seem to resemble a priestly ministry, nevertheless contemplates the Christian life as one fundamentally fulfilling the will of God rather than self-satisfaction.

The fourth sacrifice mentioned in Hebrews 13:16 is that of the sacrifice of substance. This sacrifice has in view the fact that all earthly goods are a solemn trust which should be used to the glory of God. The New Testament saint, while not obligated to keep the details of the Mosaic law in which God required Israelites to give a specific portion of their worldly goods, should nevertheless according to the Bible offer his sacrifice of substance (1) systematically, (2) regularly (1 Cor 16:2), (3) proportionately (1 Cor 16:2), (4) sacrificially (2 Cor 8:2), (5) liberally (2 Cor 9:6, 13), (6) cheerfully (2 Cor 9:7), (7) trusting God to supply his own needs (2 Cor 9:8).

In addition to offering the four sacrifices outlined in the Scriptures, the believer priest should offer intercession to God. This aspect of his priestly work involves all his work in prayer, regardless of its particular character. In view of the individual's position in Christ which has constituted him a member of a royal priesthood, he may pray in Christ's name (John 14:13-14). He also has the right to bring his own personal needs to God and expect God to supply (Phil 4:6-7, 19). The believer priest, however, should not be occupied only with his own needs, but also with the needs of others (Eph 6:18). His prayer should be characterized as being continual, i.e., uninterrupted (1 Thess 5:17). As priests, believers have the right to enter into the heavenly holy of holies (Heb 10:19-22) and there may plead their case and intercede before a mercy seat made gracious by

the shed blood of Christ. In offering his sacrifices and intercession, the believer priest is fulfilling in large measure his total effective ministry for God in this world. The fulfillment of his priestly responsibilities is integral in any vital Christian experience and effective witness for God.

¹ This view is supported by Henry B. Swete in his work, *The Ascended Christ*, and also by William Milligan in his book, *The Ascension and Heavenly Priesthood of Christ*.

² Tait, *The Heavenly Session of Our Lord*, pp. 149-51.

³ Swete, *The Ascended Christ*, pp. 95-96.

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The Present Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

Chapter 7

The Present Work of Christ in Heaven (Part 5)

Christ the Bridegroom and His Bride

The figure of the bridegroom and the bride picturing Christ in His relationship to the church is properly included in His present work, but is more eschatological in its character than any other. While the consummation of this truth is in the future, the present activity of Christ for His church has in view this future goal and for this reason it is also related to His present work. The present work of Christ is designed to prepare the church to be His bride and to prepare a place for their eternal fellowship in glory.

The Church as the Bride

Some confusion has arisen concerning the nature of the church as the bride of Christ stemming from the larger problem of the nature of the church itself. The viewpoint of covenant theology, which regards the church as the term including the saints of all ages, tends to obscure the particular line of truth relating to the church as the bride including only the saints of the present age. At the other extreme is the viewpoint of Bullinger and Sir Robert Anderson who distinguish two bodies of believers in this present age, namely Israel and the church, and limit the concept of the bride to Israel only in the New Testament.¹ This view is usually associated with the distinction between the apostolic church as being Israel, the true bride, and the later or postapostolic church as a Gentile church, the body of Christ, but not the bride. If the church is considered a term properly applied to the saints of this present age beginning at Pentecost, then the body of Christ and the bride of Christ, are identical in reference and refer to the same believers.

Even if these premises, however, be granted, there is still a measure of confusion in the figure of the bride as related to the church because of the fact that marriage is used to illustrate many spiritual truths in the Scriptures. In the Old Testament Israel is regarded as married to Jehovah. Her disobedience to the law and worship of idols is regarded as being spiritually unfaithful to her husband and a violation of her marriage vows (Isa 54:1-17; Jer 3:1, 14, 20; Hos 2:1-23).

In contrast to the use of the marriage figure as it relates to Israel in the Old Testament, the church in the New Testament is referred to as a bride, but not yet joined to her husband (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:25-27; Rev 19:6-8). This is especially evident in 2 Corinthians 11:2 where Paul writes the Corinthians: "For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy: for I espoused you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ." In Ephesians 5 and Revelation 19, however, the bride is referred to as a wife. This is not, however, a contradiction as some have imagined, as in the oriental custom a bride betrothed to a husband is also considered a wife even though she has not assumed that role completely. In the Orient, when the parents of the bride and the bridegroom agreed in a formal way on the future marriage of their children, such an agreement was the legal marriage even though years might elapse before husband and wife might begin living together and assume the full responsibility of marriage. Because of this, the church in one sense is a bride in that she is on earth and Christ is in heaven; on the other hand, she is a wife because she has been betrothed to Christ and set apart for Him.

The fact that the bride and the body of Christ are one seem to be clearly taught in Ephesians 5:23-32 in that the church is referred to as the body and yet the marriage relationship is the main theme of the passage. This is revealed in the present ministry of the bridegroom for the bride as well as in the future fulfillment of this figure.

Preparing a Place for the Bride

While the Old Testament does not discuss theologically the church as the bride of Christ, it does furnish a background in its typology in some of its prominent marriages. Some expositors have found, for instance, in the marriages of Isaac and Rebekah, Joseph and Asenath, Moses and Zipporah, and Boaz and Ruth a typical representation of the plan of God to present Christ with a bride, the church, composed largely of Gentiles.² In each of these illustrations the bride is non-Jewish, that is, not a descendant of Jacob. Many beautiful spiritual truths can be derived from God's gracious provision of brides for their respective bridegrooms.

It is only in the New Testament, however, that the program of God for His church as the bride of Christ is revealed in a formal way. Two major aspects are presented, the first of which is that Christ in the present age is preparing a place for His bride to be occupied in the future. This is predicted in John 14:2 where Christ said: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." No explanation is given in the Scripture concerning precisely what is meant by preparing a place for His bride. Some have referred this to the creation of the New Jerusalem which is later revealed in the eternal state. The important fact, however, is that Christ has a particular place for this group of saints. Whatever the purpose and character of their dwelling place, their eschatological hope is somewhat different than that of Israel which is looking forward to the kingdom of Christ on earth as a primary objective, even though they will share with the church the New Jerusalem in eternity. Some have thought that the work of preparing a place for the church is simply that of His sacrifice on the cross. The wording, however, indicates a place rather than a way to the place. This has a relationship to heaven itself, even though it is also true that Christ opened the way to heaven by His sacrifice.

While we do not know the nature of the place which Christ is preparing except for scattered references to heaven and the description of the New Jerusalem itself, it may be concluded that the infinite power and love of Christ will prepare adequately for His bride. The church may anticipate heavenly surroundings which will be infinitely beautiful and perfectly adapted to their fellowship with Christ and their worship of Him. the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." When the work of Christ for His church has been consummated, the church will be in heaven without any evidence of sin which spoiled its testimony in this world. There will be no spot, that is, visible defilement; no wrinkle that is, no evidence of age or corruption, or anything of a similar nature such as a blemish. Instead, the whole church will be completely holy and adapted to the environment of heaven.

A further thought is introduced in the description of the bride as the wife of Christ in Revelation 19:8 where after the announcement of the coming marriage feast and the declaration in verse 7, "his wife hath made herself ready," the passage declares: "and it shall be given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." Here the result of the present work of Christ is defined as clothing the bride in fine linen, namely, the righteous acts which stemmed from the present work of the sanctifying application of the Word of God.

The work of Christ for the church in this present age therefore partakes of the character of the loving ministry anticipating that future joyous occasion when the bride will stand complete in heaven with every beauty and grace. The bride is already joined to Christ in legal marriage and in recognition of the price that was paid at Calvary and the acceptance of the offer of salvation. This is the first phase of the marriage relationship. The bride is now awaiting the coming of her bridegroom, which will be fulfilled at the rapture of the church and which is the second phase. Subsequent to the rapture, the marriage feast will be observed which is anticipated in Revelation 19:7-9, which is the third phase. The present work of Christ will therefore have its consummation in these future events and ultimately the church, which is now incomplete and with many deficiencies, will stand perfect in heaven in every beauty and grace. The figure of the bridegroom and the bride is a proper conclusion to all the other figures which depict the relationship of Christ to His church and especially emphasizes that which is yet ahead.

¹ E. W. Bullinger, *How to Enjoy the Bible*, pp. 94-96; *The Companion Bible*, Part VI, 1769, 1912.

² L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, IV, 136-41.

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The Present Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

Chapter 8

The Present Work of Christ on Earth

In the theological discussion of the work of Christ the tendency has been to emphasize His present work in heaven rather than His present work on earth. This is a natural outgrowth of the fact that the work of God on earth is largely through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Some have gone so far as to identify the present work of Christ on earth with that of the Spirit; as if they were one and the same. There is, however, a valid area which may be described as Christ's present work on earth which is in contrast to His heavenly work stemming from His position at the right hand of the Father. The present earthly work of Christ originates from His presence in the church on earth and involves three aspects: (1) the presence of Christ in the church; (2) the work of Christ in the church; (3) the relation of the present work of Christ to the present work of the Holy Spirit.

The Presence of Christ in the Church

Four major problems are related to the concept of the presence of Christ in the church: (1) the relation of the presence of Christ to the doctrine of omnipresence; (2) the relation of the presence of Christ to the presence of the Holy Spirit; (3) the relation of the presence of Christ to the elements of the Lord's Supper; (4) the relation of the presence of Christ to His indwelling the church.

The presence of Christ in relation to His omnipresence. In orthodox theology, the doctrine of omnipresence is considered a fundamental relative attribute of deity which belongs equally to each person of the Trinity. In the sense of being omnipresent, it is evident that Christ must be present in the earth even though He is at the same time present in heaven. The question is pertinent, however, as to whether Christ is present in any sense in the earth which is beyond the concept of omnipresence.

In the case of the Second Person of the Trinity, there is the complication arising from His possessing a human body. Most Reformed theologians hold that the body of Christ is in heaven at the right hand of the Father. In contrast to this view, the Lutheran position considers the human body of Christ as omnipresent as they extend the divine attribute of omnipresence to the human nature. To explain a body as omnipresent, however, ends in a concept of a body which has lost all of its distinguishing qualities, and it becomes the same as a spirit. For this reason, it is preferable to regard the qualities of the human nature of Christ as finite. The body, soul, and spirit have locality, but do not have the infinite qualities that belong to the divine nature.

According to this view, Christ, as far as His human nature is concerned, is in heaven. It is only in His divine nature that He is present in the entire world. Even though the human body has been glorified and has become spiritual in its nature, it cannot assume the attribute of omnipresence without losing its essential human quality. This concept is supported in the Scripture by the doctrine of ascension in which Christ bodily ascended into heaven, and in the teaching of the second coming of Christ in which Christ is revealed to return bodily to the earth. The Scripture seems to take for granted that during the present age Christ is bodily absent from the earth, even though He is spiritually present everywhere in His divine nature. The fact that His human nature is limited, however, and does not have the attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience which belong only to God, does not prohibit the concept that Christ is present in the earth and active as this relates to a fundamental attribute of deity. The doctrine of omnipresence, therefore, while it is not identical to the idea of Christ's presence in the earth, makes any other position quite untenable.

The presence of Christ in contrast with the presence of the Spirit. The concept of the presence of Christ in the earth has undoubtedly suffered from confusion with the doctrine of the presence of Holy Spirit which in turn has been caused by a faulty understanding of the relationship of the persons of the Trinity. While orthodox theology has fully recognized the doctrine of the Trinity including the concept of one God existing in three persons, the exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity has not always been clear as to how the activity of one member of the Trinity relates to the activity of another. The proper point of view is that while the three persons of the Trinity are one God they are nevertheless three persons, and it is not proper or Scriptural to confuse their persons or their activity even though often they are interrelated.

The danger involved in confusing the persons of the Trinity is illustrated in the erroneous view that the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost fulfilled the promises that Christ would come again. This view, of course, is unmindful of the fact that all the Scriptures of the New Testament were written after Pentecost and consider the coming of Christ as yet future even though Pentecost had already taken place. In spite of the untenable character of this point of view, Hugh Thompson Kerr expresses this view in the following statement: "The Holy Spirit is the living Christ. Pentecost is the fulfillment of the promise that He would come again."¹ Confusion of the persons of the Trinity in this manner is never justified and reveals a faulty understanding of what constitutes the distinction of the persons of the Trinity.

The confusion of the Person of Christ with that of the Holy Spirit is a very common one, however. Milligan writes: "The Spirit bestowed by our Lord in His glorified condition is not really the Spirit but the Spirit in which He Himself is filled; or, in other words, His own spirit."² Such a view of the Holy Spirit of course tends toward a Unitarian point of view which in essence denies that there are distinct persons in the Trinity. The proper view is that the three persons are identified in essence in that they are one God, but in their persons they are triune. Frederic Platt also confuses this concept when he writes: "As Christ being God is identical with God, so the Holy Spirit being God is identical with God.... The indwelling Spirit therefore, is the indwelling of God-in-Christ."³ Such confusion of the persons of the Trinity is not justified by the Scriptural revelation and is a variation from what is normally considered orthodox.

The problem is not one of easy solution, however, as it may be conceded that in some Scriptures it is not always clear which Person of the Trinity is in view. The term *Spirit of Christ* grammatically permits the thought of Spirit of Christ in the sense of being the Spirit *of* the Second Person (genitive), or in the sense of being the Spirit *from* Christ (ablative) i.e., the Third Person. The form is the same in either case (Cristou). The occasions where this expression is found in Scripture (Rom 8:2-3; 2 Cor 3:17; Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19; 1 Pet 1:11) must be interpreted by their context, but in every case it is either one or the other, that is, either Christ or the Holy Spirit, not both or a combination of both. W. H. Griffith Thomas states the proper point of view in these words: "It is essential to preserve with care both sides of this truth. Christ and the Spirit are different yet the same, the same yet different. Perhaps the best expression we can give is that while their Personalities are never identical, their presence also is."⁴ The presence of Christ must therefore be distinguished from the presence of the Holy Spirit and likewise their respective indwellings of the believer. In a similar way, the indwelling of the Father must not be made identical with the indwelling of Christ or of the Holy Spirit (John 14:23; Eph 4:6; 2 John 9). The fact is that all three persons of the Trinity indwell the believer, and, as W. H. Griffith Thomas states, if one is present the other is also present although their persons can be distinguished and in some cases their ministries. It may be concluded that Christ is present in the world, not because the Holy Spirit is present in the world, but because both are present.

The presence of Christ in relation to the Lord's Supper. The doctrine of the presence of Christ in the earth in the present age is related somewhat to the interpretation of the Lord's Supper. The Roman Catholic Church, holding to the doctrine of transubstantiation which involves the identity of the elements of the Lord's Supper with the body of Christ, obviously teaches that Christ is present in the earth bodily and specifically in the elements of the Lord's Supper. The Lutheran church has held a similar doctrine which has been called consubstantiation for want of a better title, which has viewed the body of Christ as present in the elements, but without change in their substance. This has been in keeping with their doctrine of the omnipresence of the body of Christ. The Zwinglian view of the Lord's Supper holds that Christ is not bodily present in the elements and in fact is absent, being in heaven bodily. For this reason the elements represent His presence though not constituting His presence in the earthly scene. The Zwinglian view does not deny the spiritual presence of Christ in the earth, but denies that His presence is identified in any special sense with the elements of the Lord's Supper. Calvin seems to

have held a position somewhat between the Zwinglian and the Lutheran views in that he believed that the elements held the spiritual presence of Christ, but not the bodily presence of Christ.

All views of the Lord's Supper, however, take for granted that Christ is in the world in some sense. They differ in defining the precise sense in which Christ is related to the Lord's Supper. Both the Zwinglian and the Calvinistic points of view seem to be in harmony with the complete revelation of the presence of Christ as afforded in the New Testament.

The presence of Christ in relation to His indwelling of the church. The doctrine that Christ is present in the world in keeping with His omnipresence is not quite the same concept, however, as the thought of Christ indwelling the church. The Scriptures seem to teach that Christ's presence in the church is presence in a special sense, and for this reason it is designated indwelling as in contrast to the more general idea of His omnipresence. Indwelling by its nature involves a special association, union, and activity. Christ is present in heaven in that He is seated at the right hand of the Father on His throne. The presence of Christ in the earth is in a special sense in the church which He indwells. Christ indwells the individual believer in the same way that the Holy Spirit indwells him. There is a corresponding activity relating to this indwelling in that Christ is active in the earth in virtue of His presence spiritually in the body of believers in much the same sense that He is active in heaven because of His presence bodily at the right hand of the Father. While the evidence of the New Testament points to the conclusion that most of the divine ministries of God are given to the believer through the indwelling Holy Spirit, nevertheless, there is frequent mention of the fact that Christ Himself is present in the believer.

The doctrine of the indwelling presence of Christ is easily established as a doctrine of the Scripture, as there are many Scriptural references (Matt 28:20; John 14:18, 20, 23; 15:4-5 ; 17:23, 26 ; Gal 2:20; Col 1:26-27; 1 John 3:24). The key passage is Colossians 1:26-27 where the indwelling of Christ is declared to be a mystery (cp. Rom 16:25-26), that is, a New Testament truth not revealed in the Old Testament. The idea of Christ indwelling the saints is not found in the Old Testament. The teaching of these passages is sufficiently plain to demonstrate beyond doubt that Christ does indeed indwell His church corporately as well as the individuals who are members of the church. The very fact of Christ's presence is the believer's assurance that he belongs to Him and is the object of divine love and ministry.

The Work of Christ in the Church

The indwelling presence of Christ is reflected in three aspects of His present work in the earth. Lewis Sperry Chafer has summarized these as follows: "It may be concluded, therefore, that the phrase *I in you* is to be received as referring to the whole divine Person—Father, Son, and Spirit. The result of this indwelling of Christ is three-fold: (1) A new divine life, (2) A new enabling power and (3) A new 'hope of glory.'"⁵ As each of these aspects of the present work of Christ on earth is extensive, they carry with them a number of further ministries which are related to them.

The indwelling Christ our imparted divine life. Every believer in Christ is born again at the moment of saving faith by the act of regeneration which is properly the work of the Holy Spirit. That eternal life which is imparted, however, is inseparably related to Christ Himself, for Christ is introduced as "the life" (John 1:4). This is in fulfillment of the purpose of the incarnation that believers in Him might have life (John 10:10). In a similar way, Christ said to Martha, "I am the resurrection, and the life" (John 11:25). In the upper room Christ also said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). According to 1 John 5:12, "He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life." In Colossians 3:4 Christ is referred to as "our life." In all of these passages it is evident that, while a believer receives eternal life by the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit, the life which is imparted is the eternal life which is in Christ.

A parallel can be found in the conception of Christ in connection with His incarnation.. It is clear from the Scripture that Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit, yet the life which is imparted was that of the Second Person of the Trinity existing from eternity past, and the First Person is spoken of as His Father. In a similar way the believer who is born again is born by the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit. The eternal life which is imparted seems to be related to the Second Person of the Trinity, and yet the First Person of the Trinity is truly His Father.

A number of the figures which reveal the ministry of Christ in relationship to the church, such as the vine and the branches,

the head and the body, and the Last Adam and the new creation, involve a similar concept of a common life shared by Christ and those who are in Him. In the other figures, however, the believer has life because of being in Christ, while in the present truth of the indwelling presence of Christ, the believer is said to have life because Christ is in him. These two truths are companions in every way as Christ Himself has indicated in the expression in John 14:20, “Ye in me, and I in you.” It is nevertheless true that the presence of Christ and the life which He imparts are not identical. While without Christ we could not have life and the work of regeneration is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, with Christ we have life (1 John 5:12), but this life is an imparted life which is our own possession in addition to the fact that Christ is present in us.

The indwelling Christ, our strength. In one of the great texts of Scripture in Philippians 4:13, the indwelling Christ is declared to be the fountain of our strength, “I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me.” The expression “in Christ” is a translation of *en* with the locative, but could also be translated *through* Christ or in virtue of His presence. Some manuscripts omit the word *Christ* entirely, but the reference is obviously to Christ. Christ is revealed as the source of strength to the believer and the One through whom Paul declares he can “do all things.” The omnipotence of Christ, which is the source of strength to the believer, is related both to the believer’s position in Christ and the position of Christ in the believer. It is because of this fact that Christ commanded His followers to go into all the world saying, “And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt 28:20). Earlier in the passage He reminded them, “All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matt 28:18). The indwelling presence of Christ as well as the believer being in Christ is therefore a constant source of strength and makes possible the impossible task of living to the glory of God in a sinful world.

In Revelation 3:20 an added thought is given relative to the presence of Christ, namely, that with Christ in the heart there is a constant spiritual banquet, hence Christ declares: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” The invitation, of course, is to partake experientially of that which is a fact theologically and to have a rich and wonderful fellowship with the indwelling Christ. In such a spiritual feast, Christ and the believer partake of the same spiritual food and thereby Christians are “strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might” (Eph 6:10).

The indwelling Christ, the ground for hope. According to Colossians 1:27, the indwelling Christ is also the believer’s hope, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” The presence of Christ in the believer’s body is evidence of God’s ultimate purpose to transform that body and make it suitable for His presence in glory. For deliverance from this present limitation all creation groans and especially the believer who is awaiting “the redemption of our body.” (cp. Rom 8:20-23). The same hope is expressed in 1 John 3:2 where believers are assured, “Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it is not yet manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is.” The believer is promised therefore that he will be like Christ when Christ comes for him. Until that day, according to Ephesians 4:30, the Holy Spirit is the One who seals us unto “the day of redemption,” that is, the redemption of our body. Just as the Holy Spirit is the seal of our redemption, so Christ is the ground for our hope of glory.

The importance of the indwelling presence of Christ has been generally overlooked in theology, but it should be reinstated as a vital Christian truth. It is the proper ground for a victorious Christian experience and is the proper link between the historic Christ of the past and the Christ who is seated on the throne of God in the present and the future. A Christian should enter by faith into the full reality of the fact that Christ is within him and is present to provide not only eternal life, but also strength and the hope of glory. His presence is without complication an added factor of God’s present ministry to the saints in addition to all that the Holy Spirit supplies.

The Relation of the Present Work of Christ to the Present Work of the Holy Spirit

It is inevitable that the present work of Christ and the present work of the Spirit should be interrelated, and it is not necessary completely to separate one from the other. In most important undertakings of God, all three Persons of the Trinity are involved in some way and, while distinctions may be observed, nevertheless the Father, the Son, and the Spirit combine in their efforts to attain their sovereign will. There are, however, some distinctions which need to be made between the present work of Christ and the present work of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit sent by Christ to His church. The entire present work of the Holy Spirit should be seen in the light of the fact that He was sent to the earth by Christ Himself to minister on Christ's behalf to those who put their trust in Him (Luke 24:49; John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26 ; 16:7-15 ; Acts 1:8; 2:38). The fact that the Holy Spirit is sent by Christ should make it self-evident that Christ did not "send" Himself. The coming of the Holy Spirit with His intended ministry is obviously something in addition to the presence and ministry of Christ Himself. It does, however, give a special character to the work of the Holy Spirit and makes clear that the Holy Spirit is in the world to fulfill the will of Christ in the present age in a similar way to the fulfillment of the will of the Father by Christ when He was on earth. The work of the Holy Spirit is in this sense the work of Christ just as Christ also did the Father's work when He was on earth.

The work of the Holy Spirit as the agent of Christ. The Holy Spirit was sent by Christ in fulfillment of His promise that He would send the Spirit to minister to His disciples. For this reason all the work of the Spirit could be properly included in the present work of Christ, but it seems preferable in order to keep their ministries in their proper place to observe the distinction of persons of the Trinity which is involved and which is reflected in their ministries. Christ accomplishes certain ministries on His own behalf and others are accomplished for Him through the Holy Spirit.

The work of the Holy Spirit interrelated to the work of Christ. As has been previously indicated, though the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of Christ are not one and the same, nevertheless, they are interrelated and combined to form a full-orbed ministry to the believer in Christ. The presence of Christ in the Christian has the character of co-operation and supervision of the work of the Holy Spirit. The three ministries previously discussed relating to the indwelling Christ are similar to corresponding works of the Holy Spirit. There is an evident relation between the regeneration of the Holy Spirit and the ministry of Christ as our life. As previously noted, the relationship of the Trinity to the birth of Christ is similar to the relationship of the Trinity to the new birth of the believer. Both the Holy Spirit and Christ are sources of strength to the child of God in this age. The strengthening work of the Spirit, for instance, is mentioned especially in Romans 15:13, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit." There is similarity in expression concerning the work of the Spirit empowering the believer in Romans 15:13 and the work of Christ in Philippians 4:13.

In a similar way also the Holy Spirit and Christ are sources of hope for the believer. Christ is our "hope of glory" (Col 1:27), while the Spirit causes us to "abound in hope" (Rom 15:13) and is our hope of ultimate redemption of the body (Eph 4:30). The works of Christ and the Spirit are similar, but not identical. We enjoy the double satisfaction of having hope based on the ministry of both Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The present work of Christ accordingly involves a great undertaking in the earthly sphere. In many respects, it is the extension of that which He undertook when on earth Himself. Though it may be granted that the principal activity of God in the present age is through the Third Person, the Holy Spirit, nevertheless the believer may look to Christ Himself as well as God the Father for fellowship, strength, and comfort and may anticipate the consummation when the glory of Christ will be manifest in the whole world and the believer in Christ will be glorified with Him.

¹ Hugh Thompson Kerr, *After He Had Risen*, p. 93. cp, review by R. T. Chafer, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, October 1934, 488.

² Milligan, *The Ascension and Heavenly Priesthood of Our Lord*, 179.

³ Frederic Platt, *Immanence and Christian Thought*, 452.

⁴ W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Holy Spirit of God*, 144.

⁵ L. S. Chafer, *Grace*, p. 336.

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