

**CHRISTOLOGY**

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**THE WORK OF THE GOD-MAN**

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## Introduction

The Apostle Paul proclaimed that Christ stands at the center of the center as both the one *through* Whom all things are made and the one *for* Whom they were made.<sup>1</sup> He is the hub of the wheel of God's cosmos and God's purpose. As God's beloved Son this is so, yet it is made even more evident by the central fact of human history, His incarnation. God made the creature man as He made no others, in His own image, at the center of his purpose for the earth and the steward of His creation. The Son of God through Whom and for Whom that world was made assumed human nature and became one of those creatures.

It is hardly surprising that fallen man would be prone to err concerning such a wonderful Person. His deity has been emphasized at the expense of His humanity. The humanity has been embraced in a way that falls short of a full confession of His deity. The union of God and man has been explained in a way that confused His two natures and endangered the proper understanding of His Person and the efficacy of His work.

The early Church was faced with the challenge of responding to the various heresies that jeopardized a comprehensively biblical view of Christ. At the Council of Nicea and in the years following, the Church formulated an unequivocal affirmation of the deity of Christ against the Arian heresy that wanted to define Him as a mere creature. But because of the continuing confusion about the God-Man and in the face of many conflicting voices on the nature of the union of God and man in the Person of Christ, it remained for the Church to clarify its definition of the God-Man. If He is true God, how must His assuming a human nature be understood, and in the constitution of His Person and the accomplishing of His work, what is the relationship between the natures and how do they function? The Council of Chalcedon was the vehicle for the issuance of a succinct but comprehensive definition of the Person of Christ and a

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<sup>1</sup> Colossians 1:16

definitive expression of the reality and interrelation of His two natures in one Person. That definition has proven itself to be profoundly biblical in its grasp of the witness of Holy Scripture to the living Word of God, not just in scattered proof texts, but in the fullness of the revelation of Christ.

The Chalcedonian definition proclaims that the one Person is the God-Man, truly God and truly man, and that two truths must be held in unity.<sup>2</sup> The first is that each nature remains true to its own attributes and must not be confused in understanding the constitution of the Person of Christ and His salvific work. The second is that Christ must not be divided if His work is to be conceived of properly. The one Person accomplished that work, and did so with both a human and a divine nature.

The purpose of the God-Man was twofold: (1) to reveal the Person of God to man, and (2) to save man who is estranged from God. The Christ who accomplished this work must be one Person who is possessed of both a divine and human nature. Such an understanding ought to undergird all that is to be comprehended in regard to His Person and work.

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Schaff enumerates seven conclusions in the Chalcedonian definition: (1) a true incarnation took place (2) the two natures must be distinguished, (3) the God-Man is the result of the incarnation, (4) the duality of the natures must be affirmed, (5) the Person of Christ is one, (6) the whole work of Christ is to be attributed to the one Person, and (7) the human nature assumed is non-personal (Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998], 30-34).

## Revelation

### Who Is Revealed

The Apostle John opens his magisterial Gospel with bold lines that cogently define the one Whom He wishes to present. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”<sup>3</sup> *Logos* speaks of something revealed.

This expression is the keynote and theme of the entire gospel. *Λογος* is from the root *λεγ*, appearing in *λεγω*, the primitive meaning of which is *to lay*; then, *to pick out, gather, pick up*; hence to gather or put words together, and so, *to speak*. It therefore signifies both the *outward form* by which the inward thought is expressed, and *the inward thought itself* . . . <sup>4</sup>

That revelation is understood to be God’s *self* revelation. For this Person is “with God” in terms of relationship but “is” God in terms of essence. St. John, a Jew, was not only accommodating his expression to the Hellenistic philosophical categories so as to make the truth understandable to a Gentile world, he was also adhering to the Hebrew understanding of the *Word of God*. For in Hebrew thinking,

a man’s word is used as a periphrasis for himself . . . The “word” is in fact the active expression of the rational character, and so may well stand for the person from whom it issues.<sup>5</sup>

The Word of God Who is with God is Himself God and thus the thing revealed to man is the Person and character of God Himself.<sup>6</sup> St. John writes that He Who

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<sup>3</sup> John 1:1. Unless otherwise indicated all Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (2001).

<sup>4</sup>Marvin Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), 2:25.

<sup>5</sup> B.F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St John* (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), xvi.

<sup>6</sup> By the time of Christ the Jews had already developed a concept of God’s word, expression, or revelation as being the unfolding of His own Person to man. This Word was conceived as having a mediatorial role in God’s dealings with men. This trend was codified in the Targumim. It is rising from these, and somewhat mysteriously, that a distinctly Hebrew philosophy of *Logos* is derived. Here it is *Memra Yhwh*, the “Word of Yhwh.” *Memra* is employed when God reveals Himself to man, it is the medium through which the revelation is accomplished. Interaction between God and man is mediated through the *Memra*. Thus when God concluded His covenant with Abraham it is said that His Word did so (Genesis 17:2). When He promised to help Abraham and be with Him it was His Word that would accompany him (Genesis 26:3). Likewise

is unseen revealed Himself in a way that could be seen—that Christ came to unveil the hidden God: “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”<sup>7</sup> The Apostle proceeds to describe the revelation of God as a revelation of essential Life and Light.

## God as Life

According to St. John, the one Who came to reveal is none other than the Creator: “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. . . . He was in the world, and the world was made through him.”<sup>8</sup> John does not proclaim one who merely imparts life, or sustains it, but one Who is Himself life essential. He is the Creator and Source of life, He in fact who kindles the life of every man coming into the world.<sup>9</sup> Jesus proclaimed this of Himself while standing before the tomb of His friend Lazarus, and He proceeded to demonstrate the veracity of the claim by calling Lazarus forth from death.<sup>10</sup> Man lives in the realm of spiritual death, and when the Logos came to reveal God, He revealed that God is the Source of Life, both biological and spiritual. The Apostle repeated the revelatory aspect of Christ’s mission in his first epistle: “the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life.”<sup>11</sup>

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the promise confirmed with Jacob and the blessing of His presence and help to Ishmael were said to be done by the Word of God (Genesis 28:21; 31:20). Furthermore it was the Word of *Yhwh* to Whom Moses brought the people (Exodus 19:1). The Word was said to be the consuming fire of God’s presence (Deuteronomy 3:2; 4:24). (John Lightfoot, *Commentary on the Talmud and Hebraica*, [Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995], 3:238.)

<sup>7</sup> John 1:18

<sup>8</sup> John 1:3-4, 10a

<sup>9</sup> John 1:9

<sup>10</sup> John 11:25, 43-44

<sup>11</sup> 1 John 1:2

## God as Light

If Jesus came to reveal, it is only natural that He would be called the light. Light, as St. John describes it, must be understood in a twofold sense. It is first, truth, and because it is essential truth, it either hardens those who reject it, or illumines those that embrace it. Whatever the response, it cannot be conquered for it is the unconquerable light of God: “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”<sup>12</sup> John the Baptizer, as a witness to the Person of Christ, is contrasted with Christ Himself, as an instrument of light is to be differentiated from the essence of light itself:

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.<sup>13</sup>

The one Whom St. John presents is essential light, truth and its source, objective truth that remains unconquerable whatever the attitude of those to whom the truth is given. In another of his writings the Apostle proclaimed that “God is light,”<sup>14</sup> so that it is understood that the one He proclaims in His Gospel is none other than God.

But if He is the revelation of essential light and truth, He is the revelation of the God of glory. In seeing Christ, says the Apostle, “we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”<sup>15</sup> The notion of “glory” with all its multifaceted Biblical richness—radiance, splendor, weight, richness, honor—is summed up in this Person Who perfectly manifests to man the splendor and rectitude of God in His essential character as the source of uncompromising truth and the giver of unmerited favor. The revelation was of

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<sup>12</sup> John 1:4-5

<sup>13</sup> John 1:6-9

<sup>14</sup> 1 John 1:5

<sup>15</sup> John 1:14

the one of absolute holiness in Whom resides no darkness, but the revelation came in mercy to the undeserving who needed the light God's truth.

## How He was Revealed

If then the Logos, the supreme and perfect expression of the Father, was made manifest to man as the essential life, truth, and glory, it remains to be asked, "How was this one revealed, what method was employed?" St. John answers this question in a statement of profound but direct simplicity: "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father."<sup>16</sup> God was revealed to man by incarnation. God revealed Himself to man by becoming a man and living among men.<sup>17</sup> The one Who came was life and light itself, the unsullied splendor and glory of God. Such a dazzling revelation, shining in its naked terror upon finite and fallen man, would have utterly overwhelmed and destroyed those to whom He came. "For this purpose, then," writes Athanasius,

the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God entered our world. In one sense, indeed, He was not far from it before, for no part of creation had ever been without Him Who, while ever abiding in union with the Father, yet fills all things that are. But now He entered the world in a new way, stooping to our level in His love and Self-revealing to us.<sup>18</sup>

When Jesus was with His disciples in the upper room on the night His Passion began, He was asked by Philip, "Lord show us the Father." Jesus replied, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."<sup>19</sup> The revelation was on the human wavelength, a revelation that would not overwhelm man, but a revelation that was utterly true, that truly revealed the Person of God. Because the one Person of Christ was both God and man He could accurately reveal God

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<sup>16</sup> John 1:14

<sup>17</sup> The term "dwelt" employed by St. John is *σκηνοω*, and is used in the LXX to describe the Tabernacle where God descended to dwell with His covenant people.

<sup>18</sup> St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, trans. and ed. a Religious of C.S.M.V. (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 33.

<sup>19</sup> John 14:8, 9

and do so in such a way that man might receive the revelation. St. John bore witness to the fact that by virtue of the incarnation, they were able to hear with their ears, see with their eyes, and handle with their hands the very Word of life.<sup>20</sup> God became a man, and while the hands that touched Him touched real warm flesh, they also came into contact with the Son of God. In the words of St. Paul, “in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.”<sup>21</sup>

## Salvation

Jesus the God-Man reveals God to man, but if that had been His sole purpose, it would have been to man’s condemnation. God, absolute in His holiness, pure in His truth, and terrible in His majesty, took to Himself human nature which was sinless. As man Jesus “knew no sin.”<sup>22</sup> Such a revelation, far from helping man, damns him. It shows him what he ought to be but is not nor can be of his own power. Yet Jesus did not come to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.<sup>23</sup> It is because of Who He is that He was able effect salvation for His people. The New Testament is replete with statements indicating that Christ does not merely give the saving benefits He won in His work, but that He *is* those things to those in union with Him.

When St. John was granted the symbolic vision of the Throne Room of Almighty God in Heaven, he saw the Lamb in the center of that Throne Who was declared to be the only one worthy to break open the seals of the New Covenant scroll and unleash its dual sanctions upon the earth.<sup>24</sup> Because Jesus alone is both God and Man in one Person, He is uniquely capable of accomplishing God’s

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<sup>20</sup> 1 John 1:1

<sup>21</sup> Colossians 2:9

<sup>22</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21

<sup>23</sup> John 3:17

<sup>24</sup> Revelation 5:6-10. The passage underscores the unique position of the Lamb. No one in heaven above, on the earth beneath, or under the earth was in a position to open the scroll. Such a prospect caused the Apostle to weep until his attention was turned to the Lamb.

saving purpose. By virtue of the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in His Person, He may accomplish the great union that is necessary to save sinful man and bring Him back into legal and organic union with God. This union is accomplished in His incarnation, but completed in the great reconciliation He concluded upon the cross, His resurrection from the dead, and His ascension into Heaven and session there as High Priest.

## **Union by Incarnation**

### **A Work Wrought Within the Race**

Seven centuries before the coming of Christ the prophet Isaiah proclaimed that when God came to save he would do so as a Child born into the stream of the human race.<sup>25</sup> After that grand miracle had taken place, the writer to the Hebrews was at great pains to demonstrate the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old to those tempted to revert back to the Jewish sacrificial economy under the threat of persecution. He brilliantly argues for the superiority of the New Covenant by showing how Christ has completed all the conditions of the Old. Under the Old Covenant the people had a sacramental tent to confirm the covenant promise of His blessed presence. But when God initiated the New Covenant, He Himself came in the flesh. The writer was at pains to demonstrate that Christ did not merely appear to be in human form but that He actually came into relation with human beings so as to become the Brother of those whom He saves:

For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying,

“I will tell of your name to my  
brothers;  
in the midst of the  
congregation I will sing  
your praise.”

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<sup>25</sup> Isaiah 9:6

And again

“I will put my trust in him.”

And again,

“Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things . . .<sup>26</sup>

God in Christ entered the stream of humanity, assumed a true human nature, with all that that encompasses: mind, soul, emotions, flesh, bones, blood. He has truly become the Brother of a family. By virtue of His deity He is one with the Father. By virtue of His humanity He may unite God to man and man to God.

Three issues are in view in considering the Incarnation. First, the salvation of God is not something executed in a manner external to the race. John Nevin writes, “That the race might be saved, it was necessary that a work should be wrought not beyond it, but in it.”<sup>27</sup> Second, it was to *Adam’s* race that God came. Anselm of Canterbury considers the necessity of this:

It remains now to investigate from what source, and how, God will take human nature upon himself. For either he will take on this nature from Adam, or he will create a new man, just as he created Adam from no other human being. But if he creates a new man who is not from the race of Adam, this new man will not belong to the human race which is descended from Adam.<sup>28</sup>

Third, it was necessary that the *imago Dei*, so marred by the Fall be restored. Christ the Image of God assumed a human nature created in God’s image to heal that which had been damaged. Irenaeus wrote:

when He became incarnate, and was made man, He commenced afresh the long line of human beings, and furnished us in a brief, comprehensive manner, with salvation; so that what we had lost in Adam—namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God—that we might recover in Christ Jesus.<sup>29</sup>

Athanasius drives this point home:

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<sup>26</sup> Hebrews 2:11-14a

<sup>27</sup> John Nevin, *The Mystical Presence: A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, ed. Augustine Thompson, O.P. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), 156.

<sup>28</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Why God Became Man*, trans. Janet Fairweather, in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G.R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 321.

<sup>29</sup> Irenaeus, *Irenaeus Against Heresies in Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 1:446.

What, then, was God to do? What else could He possibly do, being God, but renew His Image in mankind so that through it men might once more come to know Him? And how could this be done save by the coming of the very Image Himself, our Saviour Jesus Christ? Men could not have done it for they are only made after the Image; nor could angels have done it, for they are not the images of God. The Word of God came in His own Person, because it was He alone, the Image of the Father, Who could recreate man made after His own Image.<sup>30</sup>

### **A Work Wrought for global Redemption**

St. Paul declares that Christ came to “reconcile to himself all things.”<sup>31</sup> The incarnation was essential within the divine program for the accomplishment of this objective. When God created man and woman in His image, He placed the entire earth with both its inanimate resources and living creatures under their dominion.<sup>32</sup> The writer to the Hebrews emphasizes the global dimension of the dominion given to man: “Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control.”<sup>33</sup> Yet the writer is also conscious of the disparity between the original condition of the world and its present fallen state. Man was given dominion over cosmos but finds the world now in a state of chaos. “At present,” he explains, “we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.”<sup>34</sup> The dilemma is clear. Man is designated by God to be the one who must bring the earthly order into subjection—his office was never rescinded after the Fall. But man finds himself unable to execute his designated assignment in the sin dominated world that is in rebellion against God and under the sway of the evil one. God will not swerve from his purpose to place the earth under the dominion of man, but man cannot take dominion. What is the answer? The Hebrews epistle supplies the answer: “We do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely

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<sup>30</sup> Athanasius, *ibid.*, 41.

<sup>31</sup> Colossians 1:20

<sup>32</sup> Genesis 1:26

<sup>33</sup> Hebrews 2:8

<sup>34</sup> Hebrews 2:8

Jesus....<sup>35</sup> This Jesus, he argues, was made like His brethren, became a man of flesh while at the same time He is the one through Whom the Father created the world.<sup>36</sup> The dilemma was solved in the incarnation which brought God the Son into an inseparable bond with His created order. He took human nature to Himself thus making it possible to take dominion of the earth by a double bond: as God its Creator, and as man to whom dominion was given.

## **Union through Reconciliation**

### **The Mediation of the God-Man**

The terrible sentence passed upon man when he turned His back upon His Maker was death. This death was two-fold, a spiritual death which occurred immediately, and a physical death to come at the end of their lives. For those that remain estranged from God who is Life, there is a death in judgement beyond the grave, God's final sentence of condemnation.<sup>37</sup> The purpose of Christ's coming was to die, to take man's penalty upon Himself. As He began to suffer in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said to His Father, "what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' But for this purpose I have come to this hour."<sup>38</sup>

John the Baptizer identified the Messiah as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."<sup>39</sup> The symbol was rich in meaning to the Jews with their long history of God's covenant sacrifices depicting the remission of sins through the sacrifice of a spotless substitute. Christ won the redemption of His people from sin as the spotless Lamb of God, a cost without measure.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Hebrews 2:8-9

<sup>36</sup> Hebrews 1:2

<sup>37</sup> It is the Second Death, the eternal fulfillment of the spiritual death which is experienced in this life (Revelation 21:8).

<sup>38</sup> John 12:27

<sup>39</sup> John 1:29

<sup>40</sup> 1 Peter 1:19

Christ's work, including that of His sacrifice upon the cross, was executed by His entire Person as a whole. Its efficacy on behalf of those in union with Him is derived from His divine and human natures in the one work of atonement.

That Christ's sacrifice was vicarious seems impossible to avoid in light of the entire Old Testament sacrificial system where the principle held sway that the life of the sacrifice died in the stead of the one bringing it. From the substitution of the ram in Isaac's place to the Passover lamb who died in the place of the firstborn to the scapegoat which sacramentally bore the sins of the people into the wilderness, the principle of substitution is vividly portrayed. The prophet Isaiah proclaimed that the chastisement sinners deserve would fall upon the Suffering Servant of the Lord.<sup>41</sup>

Yet some recoil at the very notion of substitution.<sup>42</sup> In so doing, they reject, not the Biblical doctrine, but its caricature. The gruesome picture of a guilty race spared because God has chosen to punish an innocent third party is rightfully rejected. But that is not the picture painted in the New Testament. The key is found in St. Paul's succinct phrase: "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself."<sup>43</sup> Christ is no third party:

Any notion of penal substitution in which three independent actors play a role—the guilty part, the punitive judge and the innocent victim—is to be repudiated with the utmost vehemence. It would not only be unjust in itself but would also reflect a defective Christology. For Christ is not an independent third person, but the eternal Son of the Father, who is one with the Father in his essential being.<sup>44</sup>

For the atonement of the cross to accomplish its purpose, Jesus had to be and function as God. The Old Testament had already declared in numerous passages that only God can save, that God is the only Savior of His people, and that He would come personally to save.<sup>45</sup> The New Testament proclaims the fulfillment

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<sup>41</sup> Isaiah 53:4-6

<sup>42</sup> In the fourth chapter of *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis dislikes substitution and would like to label it as only one theory among many theories of the atonement.

<sup>43</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:19

<sup>44</sup> John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 158.

<sup>45</sup> Isaiah 43:3; 45:21; 49:26; 59:16; Hosea 13:4;

of these promises by showing that in Christ, God self-substituted Himself to bear the sins of His people. Only if Christ is God can His sacrifice be of infinite value. If Jesus was a mere man He could not have stood in the place of countless sinners.

Hence St. Paul could say that the Church has been purchased with the blood of God.<sup>46</sup> Not that God “died” in any crass sense of that notion. But that in the God-Man Jesus Christ, God took upon Himself the penalty of death that He had imposed upon man for his sin. The Judge took the penalty He had determined.

Because Jesus is God, His sacrifice was of infinite value. Yet for it to have value for man and to satisfy the justice of God, the Son of God joined to Himself a truly human nature that man might be saved. This was necessary for several reasons. First, as God He possesses immortality, and cannot die:

The Word perceived that corruption could not be got rid of otherwise than through death; yet He Himself, as the Word, being immortal and the Father’s Son, was such as could not die. For this reason, therefore, He assumed a body capable of death . . .<sup>47</sup>

Second, the penalty of death was due to man, and man must bear the penalty. Anselm of Canterbury argued the necessity of the human nature being joined to the divine. His reasoning closely adheres to the Chalcedonian paradigm:

If . . . these two natures, as wholes, are said to be somehow conjoined to a limited extent whereby man and God are distinct from one another and not one and the same, it is impossible that both should bring about what it is necessary should happen. For God will not do it because it will not be his obligation to do it, and a man will not do it because he will not be able to. In order, therefore, that a God-Man should bring about what is necessary, it is essential that the same one person who will make the recompense should be perfect God and perfect man. For he cannot do this if he is not true God, and he has no obligation to do so if he is not a true man.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Acts 20:28

<sup>47</sup> Athanasius, *ibid.*, 35

<sup>48</sup> Anselm, *ibid.*, 321

Because man had rebelled against God and merited the penalty of death, His representative must be man and pay what is due.<sup>49</sup> Athanasius says that the Word Who is the Creator “assumed a human body, expressly in order that He might offer it in sacrifice for other like bodies.”<sup>50</sup>

It was by surrendering to death the body which he had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from every stain, that He forthwith abolished death for His human brethren by the offering of the equivalent. For naturally, since the word of God was above all, when He offered His own temple and bodily instrument as a substitute for the life of all, He fulfilled in death all that was required.<sup>51</sup>

John Stott summarizes:

Our substitute, then, who took our place and died our death on the cross, was neither Christ alone (since that would make him a third party thrust in between God and us), nor God alone (since that would undermine the historical incarnation), but *God in Christ*, who was truly and fully both God and man, and who on that account was uniquely qualified to represent both God and man and to mediate between them.<sup>52</sup>

Christ came to a world at war with its God, a race at enmity with its Creator. He came to “reconcile to himself all things,” and He is worthy to do so as God and Man. But the peace could only be established through “the blood of his cross.”<sup>53</sup> His substitution was the self-substitution of God for man, and the offering unto death of Himself as man for men who deserve God’s condemnation that they might be rescued from that sentence of condemnation.

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<sup>49</sup> Anselm is criticized by modern theologians for being bound within the confines of his feudal paradigm. John Stott criticizes him for over-emphasizing the human aspect of the atonement when the New Testament emphasis is upon the divine initiative (Stott, *ibid.*). The criticism hardly seems fair. Anselm’s work is entitled *Why God Became Man*. His purpose was to demonstrate the necessity of the incarnation—assuming Christ is God why did He have to become man to save man? More relevant is Charles Hodge’s criticism that Anselm confuses pecuniary and legal satisfaction, though to Anselm’s mind the two might have been closer than they are in our modern understanding (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrikson Publishers, 1999], 2:487). One may give Anselm the benefit of the doubt—perhaps he was not seeing the atonement in purely feudal terms but employing the paradigm of his day to enable his contemporaries to understand the work of Christ more fully.

<sup>50</sup> Athanasius, *ibid.*, 36.

<sup>51</sup> Athanasius, *ibid.*, 35.

<sup>52</sup> Stott, *ibid.*, 156

<sup>53</sup> Colossians 1:20

### **The Covenant-Bond Mediated**

The reconciliation accomplished by God in Christ creates a life of reconciliation lived out by the people of God in the pilgrimage of this world on their way to Heaven. That reconciled life is a bond and that bond between God and man effected through Christ in His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension is a covenant bond. That bond is one which involves both a legal and organic union so deep that it can only be conceived of as an exchange of persons, as a union between two parties that makes them one without ceasing to be two.

It is clear even from a cursory reading of the New Testament that a man receives the benefit of Christ's work through a lively faith in Him.<sup>54</sup> "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved"<sup>55</sup> is the clarion call of the Gospel. Yet to maintain a theology that would affirm the inward, spiritual union demanded by the Gospel without at the same time participating in the outward, visible, and physical aspect of God's covenant bond, would be to make the same error as the Docetists of old. Such a perspective would be akin to acknowledging the spiritual and divine, but negating the physical and human, to embrace Christ as God but to be reticent to affirm His incarnation.

God administers His Gospel in and through the context of a believing community of men, the Church, and that community is a community not just of Word (Logos) but of Sacrament (incarnation) as well. The Church is indwelt by the Spirit of God, but it is not called the Spirit, but the *Body* of Christ.<sup>56</sup>

A believer's participation in the Covenant of Grace within the Body of Christ must mirror that of the classical Christology since the Church is united to Christ. Both the spiritual/divine side and the physical/human side must be embraced as a whole without the two aspects being confused. Sacramentology must be seen along these lines in order to do justice to the way the life in Christ is revealed to God's people in the Church. The sacramental life of the Church is a

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<sup>54</sup> Ephesians 2:8

<sup>55</sup> Acts 16:31

<sup>56</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 4:4, 12

life in union with the God-Man and must be embraced in the manner in which He is revealed. One exercises a lively faith toward God through Christ for He is God and the spiritual union with Him through faith is essential. Yet that union is mediated and sealed in a physical manner, for the Son of God through Whom the world was made has entered that world and assumed human nature. God's salvation is spiritual and it is physical, and because of the incarnation it is accomplished through physical things.

Thus the sacraments instituted by Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, may be joyfully received in the confidence that God does not lie in what He promises. But they cannot be taken as mechanical means devoid of the divine and spiritual life of union with Him. The one error is to deny Christ's divinity, the other to reject His humanity.

Baptism is the objective means by which a man is united to Christ. To reveal His gracious embrace of sinners Christ Himself submitted to Baptism. In that event, every Person of the triune God was active.<sup>57</sup> God the Father proclaimed His Son from Heaven, the Holy Spirit descended, and the one stepping into the water was the Son of God incarnate. His human body, as human as those He came to save, was baptized. As Calvin says, "he dedicated and sanctified baptism in his own body in order that he might have it in common with us as the firmest bond of the union and fellowship which he has deigned to form with us."<sup>58</sup>

The Holy Supper is the covenantal appointment where believers are promised reception of the Body and Blood of their Lord. Christ instituted this memorial supper in the context of the age honored Passover instituted by God

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<sup>57</sup> Martin Luther applied this idea, not just to Christ's Baptism, but also to every Christian's Baptism: "We should not doubt at all that wherever one is being baptized the heavens are assuredly open and the entire Trinity is present and through its own presence sanctifies and blesses the person being baptized." (*What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian*, ed. Ewald M. Plass [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959], 47.)

<sup>58</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 2:1307-1308.

when He delivered His people from the slavery of Egypt in the great exodus. It is a real physical meal with real solids and liquids, but it is no common meal. It is rather a means of communication of, and participation in the Body and Blood of Christ given for His people.<sup>59</sup> As with Baptism, two extreme errors are to be avoided in appreciating the Supper. One error would be to assert that merely by eating and drinking one receives the benefit of the Supper irrespective of faith. The outward and physical participation is enough without a spiritual union with God by a lively faith in His Son. The other extreme would be to spiritualize the Supper by asserting that it is no participation in Christ's humanity at all, only a communion in the Spirit, or a calling to mind of past events. In this view the spiritual union with the divine is asserted to the exclusion of Christ's humanity. This view sees salvation as coming from God *immediately*, whereas it has been revealed in Holy Scripture as coming *mediately* by virtue of the incarnation. Only a view that embraces a faithful participation in the whole Person of Christ is worthy of the Sacrament instituted by the God-Man. John Nevin stresses this point:

Will any one pretend to say, that we are joined in *real* life-unity with the everlasting *Logos*, apart from Christ's manhood, in the way of direct personal mutual inbeing? . . . The Word became flesh in Christ, for the very purpose of reaching us in a real way. The incarnation constitutes the only medium by which, the only form under which, this divine life of the world can ever find its way over into our person. . . . The life of Christ was *one*. To enter us at all in a real way, it must enter us in its totality. To divide the humanity of Christ, is to destroy it; to take it away, and lay it no one can tell where. What God has joined together, we have no right thus to put asunder. . . . *As the mystical union embraces the whole Christ, so we too are embraced by it not in a partial but WHOLE way.*<sup>60</sup>

In partaking of the Supper, the believer must embrace Christ as God His life and exercise a lively faith in Him Who alone can save. He must also embrace Christ as Man, as the incarnate God, the Mediator who saves by assuming human nature and spilling real blood for the salvation of body and soul.

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<sup>59</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:16

<sup>60</sup> Nevin, *ibid.*, 160

This approach also applies to one's understanding of the nature of the elements being served and the reality being communicated. In coming to a real feast with real bread and wine one is also, by faith, partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ. The feast is not one where the elements are transfigured into the realities they exhibit any more than the Logos' assumption of a human nature means the change of His divine nature or the obliteration of that human nature. The two natures of Christ are never to be separated and never to be confused. So in the Supper, the outward and the inward are both embraced but never confused. Calvin's exhortation is wise:

Now here we ought to guard against two faults. First, we should not, by too little regard for the signs, divorce them from their mysteries, to which they are so to speak attached. Secondly, we should not, by extolling them immoderately seem to obscure somewhat the mysteries themselves.<sup>61</sup>

Calvin applies Chalcedonian thinking to the Holy Supper:

Let us never (I say) allow these two limitations to be taken away from us: (1) Let nothing be withdrawn from Christ's heavenly glory—as happens when he is brought under the corruptible elements of this world, or bound to any earthly creatures. (2) Let nothing inappropriate to human nature be ascribed to his body, as happens when it is said either to be infinite or to be put in a number of places at once.<sup>62</sup>

The dual nature of the Supper follows the principle of the dual natures of Christ: "There is then in the Lord's Supper a double *meat* and drink. One *external*, visible and terrene, namely, bread and wine; and another *internal*."<sup>63</sup>

Living within God's covenant bond concluded and mediated by Christ the God-Man thus involves an holistic approach that neither ignores the inward, spiritual union with God, nor the outward physical means by which God binds us to Himself. A phrase written by Ignatius proves helpful in comprehending this holistic approach. He exhorted his readers, "Let your baptism serve as a

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<sup>61</sup> Calvin, *ibid.*, 1364. Calvin is adamant that his view is congruent with the Church Fathers who "all everywhere clearly proclaim that the Sacred Supper consists of two parts, the earthly and the heavenly . . ." (Calvin, *ibid.*, 1375).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 1381-1382

<sup>63</sup> Zacharias Ursinus, quoted by Nevin, *ibid.*, 86

shield, faith as a helmet . . .”<sup>64</sup> Both the external, covenantal means of grace, and the inner embrace of that covenant by faith, are essential parts of the Christian’s armor.

### **Union in Triumph**

To be in union with Christ the God-Man is to be tied to every aspect of His work. Christ did not come to earth to be unique, a stand alone Savior, but to place redeemed sinners in union with Himself so that what is His may become theirs. All that He accomplished in His death applies to Christians: atonement is concluded and the old corrupted nature is put to death in His death. But Christians are also tied to Christ in His triumph over death, His ascension to the Father, and they receive in that covenant bond with Him all the benefits of His session at the Father’s right hand on the Throne of God.

### **Resurrection**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was to the vindication of His claims and His mission.<sup>65</sup> It was His triumph over death which removed the sting of death. The victory that He won was on behalf of His people.<sup>66</sup> St. Paul exclaimed, “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>67</sup> God did not intend the resurrection of His Son to be a unique event. Jesus is the first fruit of those who have died, and He brings a rich harvest of followers with Him.<sup>68</sup> Jesus came to undo what Adam had done. He came as Representative Man that all in Him might share in His triumph. Thus the Apostle teaches that where the first man, Adam, ushered in death for those in union with him, Christ ushered in life: “For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the

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<sup>64</sup> Ignatius, *ibid.*, 117

<sup>65</sup> Romans 1:4

<sup>66</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:55

<sup>67</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:56

<sup>68</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23

dead.”<sup>69</sup> St. Paul teaches that “if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”<sup>70</sup> For the believer, the resurrection of his Lord is a guarantee of his own resurrection.

### **Ascension and Session**

The resurrection was not the consummation of Christ’s work. Jesus’ purpose in coming to save was so that His followers would be with Him where He is with His Father.<sup>71</sup> Christ ascended into Heaven. In so doing He accomplished several things. First, His entrance into the very Holy of Holies, the Throne Room of Almighty God, was the taking of human nature, unsullied by sin, and representative in nature, into Heaven itself as a guarantee that man may be glorified and brought to live in the Presence of God. It is a guarantee of the victory of God’s purpose that He might dwell with His people in the fullest and truest sense. Second, the ascension of Christ was the taking of His blood and the efficacy of His atoning work before the Mercy Seat, the Throne of God, to present His accomplished work of reconciliation on sinners’ behalf before His Father. The writer to the Hebrews stresses that He entered, not a man made edifice, but Heaven itself to present His sprinkled blood.<sup>72</sup> Third, it was an ascension of victory, for it brought Him to the Throne of God and spoiled all evil powers that hold rebellious man captive.<sup>73</sup> Fourth, the ascension resulted in the sending of the Holy Spirit upon Christ’s Church, the Paraclete that would be the agent of His perpetual presence on earth until His coming again.<sup>74</sup> Fifth, it made possible Christian worship, that in union with Christ the Mediator, His people may even now ascend to Heaven and worship the Father through Him in the Spirit,

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<sup>69</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:21

<sup>70</sup> Romans 6:5

<sup>71</sup> John 17:24

<sup>72</sup> Hebrews 4:14; 8:1; 9:11-14, 24-28

<sup>73</sup> Ephesians 4:8

<sup>74</sup> John 16:1-15

approaching the very Throne of God to offer spiritual sacrifices and to partake of the powers to come at His Table.<sup>75</sup>

Sixth, the ascension made possible Christ's session on the right hand of the Father as High Priest for His people. He sits on the Throne of God to perpetually mediate for man. By His very presence as God-Man and in light of what He accomplished on earth, He perpetually makes intercession for those in union with Him so that all that is said in prayer to the Father through Him, all worship that is offered in union with Him, and all work done in His name is sanctified and purified and directed to the Father Who will not reject His Son. Because He is both God and Man in one divine Person, He alone is mediator between God and man as High Priest in Heaven.

Finally, the ascension and session of Christ guarantees His rule over all things now until the time when the completion of His victory by the subjugation of His enemies is brought to a close. "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet."<sup>76</sup> God has ordained that the earth be under man's dominion, and His Son took on human nature to accomplish what man could not.<sup>77</sup> At the same time His is one with His Father, and as God, He is Lord of all, and the Throne from which He rules is God's Throne.<sup>78</sup> He is King of all kings, Lord of all lords, and He will execute the victory of God over all things. He has now taken in hand and will bring to fruition the grand purpose of God that will bring glory to Him as His people revel in His presence forever.

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<sup>75</sup> 1 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 5:16; 6:5; 12:22-24

<sup>76</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:25

<sup>77</sup> Hebrews 2:5-9

<sup>78</sup> Hebrews 8:1; Revelation 22:2

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