

Who Is The Unique Savior? – Part 1

Preached by W.E.Best on August 24, 2003 at Kingwood Assembly, Texas, USA

Jesus Christ is not only one Person with two Natures, but He has two Sonships, two Begettings, two Forms, and two Advents. He is not God in man, because that term applies to a regenerated man. "...God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27 NASB). He is not God and man, because that means two persons rather than two natures. He is the God-Man, which means the second Person of the Godhead did not take the person of man. However, He did take the nature of man into subsistence with Himself. We cannot properly state that the virgin bore, John baptized, Pilate condemned, and the Jews crucified Jesus Christ. However, we can accurately say the Trinitarian was born of the virgin, baptized by John the Baptist, condemned by Pilate, and crucified by the uncircumcised Jews, because it was His human nature that made His eternal Person capable to have those experiences.

The two natures of Christ have the same support—one Person and two natures. The nearly two thousand years of debate over the "hypostatic union" of Christ's two natures has reached a new intensity. The debate is over where one nature stops and the other begins. We know that two natures are united in one Person, but to what extent the Divine nature operated in Jesus Christ so as not to overshadow the human nature is impossible for us to explain. However, we do know that the holy, human nature was never in conflict with the Divine nature. Furthermore, we know that the perfect human nature grew, and Jesus Christ increased (progressed) in wisdom and stature (age). "And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52 NASB).

Growth does not imply imperfection. Therefore, "...in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:7 NASB). Our present spiritual elevation is for the purpose of displaying His immeasurable grace in the coming ages (*aiosin*, noun, locative case, masculine plural of *aión*, meaning age to come, long time, or eternity). Paul uses the compound verb, made up of the preposition *epi* and the verb *erchomai*, to refer to the riches of His grace coming upon His people in Christ.

The eternal Son is the revelation of the Godhead, and His incarnation made no change in the Divine Trinity. This unique Person was equal with the Father, even though He possessed a human nature. Furthermore, He is more than man, because He is God manifested in the flesh. Three distinctions must be observed in Jesus Christ:

- (1) Christ spoke as God—"I and the Father are one" (John 10:30 NASB).
- (2) Christ spoke as man—"After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, I am thirsty" (John 19:28 NASB). Only man gets thirsty. God absolutely considered has never been thirsty.
- (3) Christ spoke as the God-Man—"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28 NASB).

The following are the major similarities and dissimilarities of Jesus Christ as He is compared to men:

1. He was born of a woman who was a virgin versus a woman who conceives in sin (Luke 1:35; Ps. 51:5).
2. Christ was given the Spirit without measure versus going forth from the womb speaking lies (John 3:34; Ps. 58:3).

3. In Christ dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily versus man being guilty of fourteen horrible indictments (Col. 2:9; Rom. 3:10-18).
4. Christ was impeccable (could not sin) versus man who is peccable (capable of sinning).
5. Christ could not be tempted, because He is impeccable, versus man who is tempted because he is peccable (John 8:46 and James 1:13; Eph. 5:8).
6. Christ's holiness is sinless, because it is a positive virtue, versus man's depraved condition is sinful, because he was conceived in sin (John 8:46; Rom. 3:23).
7. The Divine nature of Christ is the foundation of His Person versus the human nature is the foundation of man's sinful condition.

The Lord Jesus Christ is one Person with two Sonships. He is both the Son of God and the Son of Man. The Son of God in the bosom of the Father was pleased to condescend to become the Son of Man. He willingly assumed human nature in order to reveal the Father, redeem the elect, and communicate the knowledge of God to the elect. (Read John 1:1-18.)

Beginning with the title "Son of God" is the correct approach to this aspect of our study. Whatever subject one is considering, the approach begins with God absolutely considered. In the study of creation, it is "In the beginning God created..." (Gen. 1:1 NASB). The study of salvation begins with God: "...who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity" (II Tim. 1:9 NASB). Christian living also begins with God: "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13 NASB).

Glorying in the Son of Man may be compared with the high priest of Israel passing the outer veil of the tabernacle. He enjoyed the first enclosure reserved for the feet of the covenant people. The holy place was for the anointed of God. However, when the priest went through the second veil, he gloried not only in the Son of Man but the Son of God. He penetrated the veil which symbolized the human nature of Jesus Christ. New Testament Scripture says, "Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:19-22 NASB). The writer beheld the mercy seat which foreshadowed the Son of God whom the Father sent to be His propitiation (Rom. 3:25). As we stand before the Son of Man, it is as though we stood before the second veil of the tabernacle which shrouds the mysteries of the Son of God. Let us not ascend from the Son of Man to the Son of God, but let us descend from the Son of God to the Son of Man. With this approach we can say with Paul, "And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Beheld by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory" (I Tim. 3:16 NASB).

The gospel of John is unique in that it carries us back to eternity. It presents the Son of God in His eternal Deity and leaves us with a view of Him who has offered Himself on the cross as the Son of Man (John 1:1, 49; 3:14-16). The Son of God came into the world for with those who had been purposed to be His by electing love, and He did not leave the world until He had redeemed them (John 10:11, 15; 17:1-24). The Father had given them to Him by covenant relationship (Heb. 13:20, 21). John looks deeper into the Person of Jesus Christ than the other gospel writers.

In the study of Christian evidences, we study not only the prophecies, birth, life, death, and resurrection of the Son of Man, but we seek to go deeper and touch the heart of Christianity—the

Person of Jesus Christ who is not only the Son of God, but also the Son of Man. The elect's hope of eternity is not based upon some small, etymological (as applied to historical languages and dialects), linguistic change of particular words. The revelation of God's glory shining in the face of Jesus Christ by the Spirit of regeneration gives the recipient of grace the ability to say, "Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25 NASB). Hence, having been regenerated by the Spirit, the call of the gospel does not come by the understanding of all the parts of English and Greek grammar. If it did, none would be converted. However, it does not remove the responsibility of the diligent study of Scripture. Furthermore, the students of Scripture are the ones who become the defenders of the truth once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

The two begettings of Jesus Christ takes in another important aspect of the Unique Person—the Lord Jesus Christ. The incarnation of Jesus Christ was a change of state but not a change of nature. He veiled His Deity in human flesh. Personal and official glories of the Son of God are both hidden, except where the faith of the elect discovered them. John said, "...we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14 NASB). The glory of the tabernacle was God tabernacling in its midst. That glory was evidenced by the Shekinah (Ex. 25-40). (Note the "glory" in chapter 40.) The glory of the assembly that Christ is building is the only begotten Son of God dwelling in her midst. Christ said, "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst" (Matt. 18:20 NASB). Only God's gift of faith sees that glory.

The faith of the disciples penetrated Christ's human nature and beheld the glory of the eternal Son who is full of grace and truth. The Lord Jesus walked through the land unrecognized as the Divine Son except where the light of the Spirit of regeneration enabled one to behold the Light of the world concealed by human nature. Christ's moral glory, however, could not be hidden. He could not conceal a perfect life which has been manifested by His words and works. God is absolute purity, uncontaminated even by the shadow of sin. "And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (I John 1:5 NASB). That text puts every person who believes in the peccability of Christ RIGHT WHERE HE BELONGS.

Christ's twofold begetting is the foundation of the elect being begotten again. Peter, having mentioned the chosen ones in I Peter 1:1, said in verses 3-5, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (NASB).

The twice begotten Son, once in eternity and once in time, obtained eternal redemption for the elect who must be begotten twice in time to spend eternity with God (Heb. 9:12; John 3:1-8). Unlike the begetting of the elect in time, Christ's twofold begetting is divided between eternity and time. His eternal begetting is without beginning. The Lord Jesus is the only accepted, once-begotten Person in time. God's elect, however, are twice born in time. They are born physically and then born spiritually from above. Furthermore, the elect have nothing to do with their physical or spiritual births.

Who Is The Unique Savior? - Part 2

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The eternally begotten Son of the eternal Father must be begotten in time to be the Mediator between God and man. Christ must mediate between the Holy Father and the elect who were given to Christ in the eternal covenant of grace. The mystery of the first begetting is a vital part of the mystery of the Son's second begetting, and both are the foundation of the mystery of the begetting again of the elect. Paul said, "Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:25-27 NASB).

The Father vindicated the Son's declaration that He and the Father are equal. "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:22-24 NASB). The anointing causes believers to abide in the Son (I John 2:20). Faith in the Son gives victory over the world (I John 5:4, 5). God's record testifies of the Son (I John 5:12). The Son came to give understanding (I John 5:20). The Son is the true God and eternal life (I John 5:20).

The title "only begotten Son" has been the source of controversy since the third century subsequent to Christ's death. Origen of Alexandria taught that Christ is from God and not God in Himself and that He was generated not in time but in eternity. In the fourth century, Arius taught that God has not always been Father. He believed there was a time when He was alone, but the eternal God made the Son a creature before all creatures, and He adopted Him for His Son. This teaching brought about great controversy in the fourth century. The church fathers concluded that the word "begotten" meant an inexplicable relationship and not an event.

There is a new theory about Sonship taught today. Some say to apply "begotten" to Jesus Christ in His eternal Deity in the past is a traditional error. Those who embrace this view say "begotten" refers to Christ as born of the virgin in time. They believe the Reformers, in trying to escape Arianism, invented the phrase "eternal generation." While this view is incorrect, one must understand this revolutionary idea does not deny the eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ.

Some boldly proclaim the Bible says nothing about "begetting" as an eternal relationship between the Father and the Son. They dropped the statement "eternal generation" from their vocabulary of theology. The following are some of their arguments against the term "eternal generation":

- (1) They say that theologians in trying to escape the difficulty of Arianism invented the phrase "eternal generation."
- (2) They say that "begotten" refers to Christ's birth of the virgin in time.
- (3) That say that God was not known to any man as Father until the Man was here who is called the Son of God (Luke 1:35).
- (4) They say that the person spoken of in Hebrews 1:5 is represented as Son and He is called Son because Sonship is related to His Manhood.

- (5) They say that the assumption that prophetic statements of what Christ would be could be taken as setting forth facts subsisting as actualities at the time they were written would make the Scriptures nonsensical. They say that Hebrews 1:5 is simply a quotation of Psalm 2:7, and the Sonship of Christ does not go back into eternity.
- (6) They say that Scripture does not speak of “eternal Father” or “eternal Son” and Father and Son are names which could be known only through the incarnation.
- (7) They say that the One who is eternally God has come into the place and relationship of Son and this involved obedience to the Father.

“Eternal generation” is a human term, like “Trinity,” designed to explain the inexplicable. Explaining the inexplicable can be likened to knowing the unknowable. Paul said the following to the Ephesians in his desire to see them strengthened in knowledge: “...may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God” (Eph. 3:18, 19 NASB).

“Trinity” is a human term used to explain the mystery of the Godhead. Objectors to the use of “eternal generation” use the human term “Trinity.” Hence, they are not consistent. If one human term should be dropped, consistency would demand dropping all human terms. If this is done, interpretation is impossible. Human interpretation falls short of perfection, but all Christians are responsible to interpret. The task of the interpreter is to use materials provided and make them as understandable as possible. Christ existed as Son from eternity. What is this but eternal generation? God does not generate as man, because there is a difference in nature. In human generation, the father exists before the son. However, in the Godhead, the Father and Son coexist. As there is a distinction of the Persons of the Godhead in time, there must be a distinction of Persons by name in eternity. God’s knowledge is infinite (Ps. 147:5). There is no new thought with Him. God knows all things simultaneously. “Eternal generation” is an anomalous expression to declare the inexpressible. It is acceptable for the want of a better term. It is not objectionable for wanting a better term. It is not objectionable when one considers such Biblical truths as eternal election and eternal justification.

The Lord Jesus is eternally the only One of His kind. The Greek word for “only begotten” is *monogenes*. It comes from two words:

- (1) *monos*, an adjective meaning sole, single, alone, or only and
- (2) *genos*, a noun meaning kind, class, family, or offspring. Therefore, the compound word *monogenes* means the only one of its kind, unique. Everything in the Divine nature is eternal; therefore, the “only Begotten Son” is eternal. The incarnation, baptism, and resurrection were manifestations of Sonship. Paul said in his introduction to Romans, “Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 1:1-4 NASB).

There are many references in the New Testament which state the Father sent the Son: “...He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him” (John 5:23). “As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate, and died, he who eats this bread shall live forever” (John 6:57, 58 NASB). [Note on the phrase “he who eats Me”: This is not eating Christ’s body in the sacrament when the wine and bread are blessed as some believe.

- (1) The Lord's Supper had not even been instituted at that time.
- (2) Judas partook of the supper when the Lord instituted it, but he was not saved.
- (3) The dying thief on the cross did not partake of it, but he was saved. This phrase simply means 'appropriate what you hear'.] "But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law" (Gal. 4:4 NASB). There are three different verbs used for "sent" in these verses. They are *pempo* (John 5:23), *apostello* (John 6:57), and *exiapostello* (Gal. 4:4). These words are not used for the sake of variety.

The verb used by the Spirit of inspiration in John 5:23 is *pempo*, which means to send, commission, or appoint. The Father who sends is greater than the Son who is sent. Christ said, "...I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I" (John 14:28 NASB). In what sense is the Father greater than the Son? Since both are God, how can one be greater than the other? The solution to this is the answer to all problems, and the Bible gives the answer. The title "Son" cannot be restricted to the incarnation of Jesus Christ. "Son" is a term that would not apply to the second Person in the Godhead if He were the Son only in an official or ethical sense. Christ's statement in John 10:30, "I and the Father are one," proves the Lord Jesus spoke of priority of position, not inferiority of nature. Paul also proved the priority of the Father's position in I Corinthians 11:3—"But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ."

Each Person of the Godhead has a distinguishing quality of His own; yet the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God. The Son is of the Father, but the Father is never of the Son or Spirit. The Spirit is of the Father and the Son. The Father operates through the Son, and the Father and the Son operate through the Holy Spirit. Some things are attributed to all three Persons; but, on the other hand, certain acts are predicated of one Person which are never predicated of the other two Persons. Neither Person is God without the others, but each with the others is God. The Father elects, the Son redeems, and the Holy Spirit regenerates.

The verb *apostello* is used in John 6:57—"As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he shall also live because of Me" (NASB). This is a compound verb made up of the preposition *apo*, meaning from, or out from, and the verb *stello*, meaning to dispatch, or send out or away.

The verb *exiapostello* in Galatians 4:4 is a double compound. It is the verb *apostello* with another prepositional prefix *exi*, and basically means "out of." The verb for "send" in Galatians 4:4 means to send away from oneself.

Being the Son of God eternally and being manifested the Son of God are two different things. The "only begotten" is never used in connection with Christ's human nature, but "to be born," "to cause to arise," and "firstborn" are associated with the incarnation. The birth of Jesus Christ is superior, and therefore has priority over all births, creatures, and events. Christ is said to be the "firstborn son" of Mary (Matt. 1:25 KJB), "her first-born Son" (Luke 2:7 NASB), "first-born among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29 NASB), "first-born of all creation" (Col. 1:15 NASB), "first-born from the dead" (Col. 1:18 NASB), and "first-born into the world" (Heb. 1:6 NASB). Therefore, the adjective "superior" and the noun "priority" fit each verse where *prototokos* (first-born) is used in connection with Jesus Christ.

The human nature of Christ was not eternally in the bosom of the Father. However, the "Only Begotten" was and is in the bosom of the Father. This blows the theory that Sonship is related only to Christ's Manhood. Since the Father gave His only begotten Son, He was the only begotten Son before

He was given (John 1:18; 3:16). Christ said that the person who has not believed in the “name” of the only begotten Son is already condemned (John 3:18). The word “name” speaks of Christ’s very being and nature—His Person and Work as revealed to men. Does the word “name” include Christ’s Sonship? We must not forget that God sees future, present, and past all at once. God is one mind. He has a fixed and settled purpose. All history is but one. There is no succession in God’s knowledge, but there is in the revelation of that knowledge to men.

Jesus Christ is not said to be begotten of the Father in any sense except as the Father bore testimony to Him as being His unique Son. Psalm 2:7 has been a verse of much controversy among Bible students. The Psalmist said, “He said to Me, Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee” (Psalm 2:7 NASB). Some feel the controversy is unprofitable. It has been said that the dispute reveals presumptuous curiosity rather than reverent faith. That remark seems to be a cop out for lack of study to learn as much as possible about the infinite God. The Psalmist boldly described God’s victory over His enemies. Functions of government are centered in the Son of God. Therefore, God said, “But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain” (Ps. 2:6 NASB). The kingdom that is predicted is not soteriological but eschatological. The appointed King expressed who He is and what He is able to do by virtue of the Divine decree. The final victory of the Messiah is mentioned in the Psalms before His suffering and death (Psalm 22). Five things must be observed in Psalm 2:7—

- (1) Jesus Christ is Son.
- (2) He is My Son, i.e., the Son of God.
- (3) He is the Son of God begotten. “Begotten” comes from the Hebrew word meaning to bring forth as a mother (Gen. 4:1) or to beget as a father (Gen. 4:18).
- (4) The Son is begotten “today.” “Today” refers to the time the decree was revealed. Since this was a Divine act, it was eternal.
- (5) The “begotten” was by saying. The Psalmist is the seer, and the Psalm is a picture of what he saw and heard.

The argument that “eternal Father” and “eternal Son” are not scriptural expressions is illogical. It is a fact that God’s knowledge is infinite (Ps. 147:5). Since God understands our thoughts afar off, to say the terms “Father” and “Son” were not understood by God until they were revealed in the incarnation would be against all logic. The Psalmist said, “Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up; Thou dost understand my thought from afar” (Ps. 139:2 NASB). This means before a thought becomes my own it is eternally comprehended by God. The incarnation would give a complete account of both Sonship and Fatherhood. “No man has seen God at anytime; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him” (John 1:18 NASB). “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Matt. 11:27 NASB). “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Luke 10:22 NASB).

The full account of Fatherhood and Sonship is necessary for the elect’s salvation. Therefore, Fatherhood had to be there in order to be brought out. Fatherhood cannot exist apart from Sonship. Hence, the Son is given (Is. 9:6, 7; 7:14). The Son is equal with the Father (John 5:17-47; 10:30; Heb. 1:3). The word “image” involves two things— representation and manifestation. The Son of God, therefore, is not simply the revealer of God, but He Himself is God revealed. In order to reveal the Father, the Son condescended to take the place of subjection to the Father. The place of subjection as the God-Man was to reveal the Father and redeem the elect, but there is more to come. The prophecy

of the eternally begotten Son became a reality when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among men (John 1:1, 14). Hence, the eternally begotten was begotten in time.

Who Is The Unique Savior? – Part 3

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“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel” (Is. 7:14 NASB). “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore, The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this” (Is. 9:6-7 NASB). The prophecy of Isaiah 9:6 and 7 came at a time when King Ahaz and the people of Judah had forsaken God. Ahaz had refused the sign of deliverance and was seeking alliance with Assyria to fight off his enemies. The people were turning to mediums and spiritists instead of God for guidance. Isaiah showed in the last verses of chapter eight that many prefer any source of assumed intelligence, even though it is diabolical. In this setting, the prophet said, “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. And they will pass through the land hard-pressed and famished, and it will turn out that when they are hungry, they will be enraged and curse their king and their God as they face upward. Then they will look to the earth, and behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and they will be driven away into darkness” (Is. 8:20-22 NASB).

The fact that man possesses a spirit causes him to seek support for that spirit in the day of mental strain and distress. Therefore, the unsaved person is an open target for “mediums and spiritists who whisper and mutter” (Is. 8:19). Satan does not allow the vacuum to go without filling it in his own way and for his own purpose. Familiar spirits will tell their clients just what they want to hear. They have no regard for the truth of God because it is their enemy. However, there is one thing for sure; the truth which they despise will judge them in the last day. Christ said, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day” (John 12:48 NASB). We cannot leave the immediate context without making a distinction between the world of evil (the world system) and the world of the elect. John said, “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (I John 5:19 NASB). He also spoke of the world of the Father’s elect. “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29 NASB). Paul said, “Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (II Cor. 5:18, 19 NASB).

In the midst of the darkness, Isaiah saw the sunrise behind the clouds. There was a brighter day, a day without clouds. It is interesting to observe that the clearest promises of the Messiah have been given in the darkest hours of human history. In the dark hour of Adam’s fallen state, God gave the promise of sin’s remedy in the “seed of the woman” (Gen. 3:15). In Israel’s dark hour of bondage in Egypt, Israel saw the promised Messiah in the paschal lamb (Ex. 12:3-10). When the foundation of society in Israel was crumbling with iniquity, God gave the promise of a sure foundation for believers. “Therefore thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed” (Is. 28:16 NASB). When false teachers were upsetting the faith of some, Paul said to Timothy, “Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, The Lord knows those who are His, and, Let every one who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness” (II Tim. 2:19 NASB).

As we see the dark clouds gathering in the days of great wickedness and apostasy, our Lord is saying to us through Luke, “But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:28 NASB). This redemption is not that of the soul, but it is the redemption of the body. Paul said to the Roman Christians, “And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23 NASB). He also said to them, “And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed” (Rom. 13:11 NASB). The salvation to which Paul referred is the salvation of the body.

Prophecy is to the Christian what light is in a dark room. Peter said, “And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts” (II Pet. 1:19 NASB). Both the dawning of the day and the rising of the morning star refer to the coming of Jesus Christ. The dawning of the day speaks of the anticipation in the hearts of believers caused by the signs of the approaching day of the Lord. Such anticipation produces a great transformation in the hearts of God’s people. “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (I John 3:2, 3 NASB).

The unfulfilled prophecy of Scripture is a light that God has provided for His people (the sheep) in their hour of suffering and darkness. Prophecy not only proves the faithfulness of God in the past by prophecies that have been fulfilled, but the unfulfilled prophecies give direction and comfort to His people in the present. Hope is strengthened and sustained by what God has promised for the future. For example, David was living in dark times when God’s message came to him. “The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, And His word was on my tongue. The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spoke to me, He who rules over men righteously, Who rules in the fear of God, Is as the light of the morning when the sun rises, A morning without clouds, When the tender grass springs out of the earth, Through sunshine after rain. Truly is not my house so with God? For He has made an everlasting covenant with me, Ordered in all things, and secured; For all my salvation and all my desire, Will He not indeed make it grow?” (II Sam. 23:2-5 NASB). Although David’s house (his family) was not right with God, he knew that God’s covenant was unconditional and everlasting. “A morning without clouds” is a prophecy of the coming kingdom. The darkness before the dawn appropriately describes the period preceding the kingdom. The Psalmist said, “Weeping may last for the night, But a shout of joy comes in the morning” (Ps. 30:5 NASB). Paul said, “The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us [saints] therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Rom. 13:12 NASB).

The prophecy of Isaiah 9:6 and 7 is one of great interest to every Christian. Reference is made to the two advents of Jesus Christ. “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this” (NASB). A Child has been born, and a Son has been given, but the government of the kingdom is not upon Christ’s shoulders. The government that is referred to here is not soteriological but eschatological. Paul tells us when that will take place, that is, when the kingdom will be established by

Jesus Christ over the whole world. Paul said, “I SOLEMNLY charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom” (II Tim. 4:1 NASB). His kingdom will be established when He comes as King of kings and Lord of lords. The Lord Jesus did not rule in “peace” at His first advent, because His first advent was not for that purpose according to His own words. “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matt. 10:34 NASB). A worldwide, righteous government and universal peace are inseparable. This will not happen until Christ comes the second time.

Jeremiah prophesied a reigning King. He said, “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, When I shall raise up for David a righteous Branch; And He will reign as King and act wisely And do justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell securely; And this is His name by which He will be called, The Lord our righteousness. Therefore behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when they will no longer say, As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt, but, As the LORD lives, who brought up and led back the descendants of the household of Israel from the north land and from the countries where I had driven them. Then they will live on their own soil” (Jer. 23:5-8 NASB). This prophecy was not fulfilled at Christ’s first advent. The Jews rejected Him at His first advent, but He will be accepted by the remnant of Jews at His second coming. Like other Old Testament prophecies, the coming of the Son of God into the world is announced without distinguishing the first from the second advent.

Both the first and second advents of Jesus Christ are predicted in Isaiah 9:6 and 7 without any distinction between the two. This is not unusual from the perspective of Old Testament prophets. Both advents are absolutely necessary for completed redemption with respect to redemption’s application. The Old Testament prophets saw the salvation of men in its completion—soul and body. Redemption’s application to the soul takes place when one is regenerated, but its application to the body will not take place until Christ’s second advent. Paul said, “And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23 NASB).

The incarnation was an absolute necessity. Man can suffer, but he cannot satisfy God by his suffering. God absolutely considered can satisfy, but He cannot suffer. Jesus Christ is both a Child born and a Son given. As the Child born, we have the human nature in which the Son of God could suffer. As the Son given, we have the Divine nature of the Person who alone could satisfy God. Hence, the God-Man is able to suffer the penalty of sin for the chosen sinners and make satisfaction unto God at the same time. As the Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ—the God-Man—reconciles God to the elect and chosen sinners to God. Jesus Christ restores God’s favor manward in propitiation (reconciliation that reconciles—God and sinner brought together, because the sin debt has been paid in full by the God-Man), and He removes our enmity Godward in reconciliation. Reconciliation is objective before it is subjective. Paul said, “For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:10 NASB). Christ’s death on the cross removed the alienation objectively before it is removed subjectively by regeneration. God always comes first.

The subjects of the righteous government of the King of kings shall call Jesus Christ “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace” (Is. 9:6). Jesus Christ is no ninety-day wonder, but He is an eternal Wonder. Christ, our Savior and King, is beyond our comprehension. He is not only a miracle worker, but He is Himself a miracle. As God-Man in one Person, He is a miraculous Personage. As Counselor, He has the singular capacity for management. Every man, regardless of his position, needs counselors; but the God-Man is the wisdom of the Father.

(Read Proverbs 8.) In Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3 NASB). Before the creation of anything, there was a conclave between the Father, Son, and Spirit concerning their working out the eternal purpose of grace. Christ was Divinely named “Wonderful Counselor.”

Jesus Christ was named “Mighty God.” In the hypostatic union, the Divine nature is not humanized, and the human nature is not deified. The two natures are so united in the one Person that what is peculiar to one nature is often ascribed to the other nature. Christ said, “And no one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven, even the Son of Man” (John 3:13 NASB). Paul said to the Ephesian elders, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28 NASB). As the God-Man, Jesus Christ is the Mighty God who has power over all flesh (John 17:2), is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him (Heb. 7:25), holds all things together (Col. 1:17), and shall destroy the wicked one by the appearance of His coming (II Thess. 2:8).

Jesus Christ is called the Eternal Father. He is not called Father in respect to the Eternal Three, because He is the Son in that point of view. How complex is the Person of Jesus Christ! The prophet called Him “Child,” “Son,” “Counselor,” and now “Eternal Father.” A look at Jesus Christ by the regenerated person results in a conversion experience; but a lifetime of study concerning this One, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and in whom knowledge dwells, passes knowledge (Is. 45:22; Col. 2:3, 9).

Finally, the prophet Isaiah called Jesus Christ the “Prince of Peace.” The purpose of Christ’s first advent was not universal peace. He said, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matt. 10:34 NASB). Christ’s first advent was for the purpose of making peace for the elect by the blood of the cross. Christ gives individual peace to the elect when one who has been born of God believes the gospel (Rom. 5:1). There is strong criticism by many when men of God distinguish between the objectivity and subjectivity of salvation. The only peace experienced until Christ comes at His second advent is individual peace. It is given to the chosen one who has been born of God and has experienced the power of the gospel. However, when Christ comes, He will openly exercise His power and visibly bring all things into subjection to His righteous and peaceful reign on earth.

NOTE: Next Lord’s Day will be the final lesson in this series on “Who Is The Unique Savior.” That will complete this aspect of our study of Matthew 16. In light of Matthew 16:18 and 19, the following list of questions is presented:

1. Are *petros* and *petra* basically the same?
2. Why is the gender changed? (*petros*, masculine; *petra*, feminine)
3. Did Christ change genders to show that He was speaking of something different?
4. Upon Whom or what is the church built? Was it Peter? Was it Peter’s confession? Was it the apostles of whom Peter was the spokesman? Did Christ announce that all the Godly that would ever exist in the world would be associated with Peter? Is *petros* a smaller detachment of the massive *petra*? Did Peter explain the one Rock foundation of the church according to I Peter 2:4-8? Was the church built upon Peter as He was built upon Christ? Christ was the ultimate Rock (I Pet. 2:6). Apostles constituted the foundation of grace (Eph. 2:20). All believers are stones of grace (I Pet: 2:5). Is Peter the rock part of Simon Barjona upon which the church is built? Is the antecedent of this Peter?
5. Were the apostles called out by grace?
6. Does the word “church” refer to the visible or invisible aspect of the church?

7. Did Christ say He would build churches or church? It is singular in the text.
8. Did Christ speak of a local assembly or about a universal assembly?
9. Did Christ give the church a proper name?
10. Can the powers of destruction win victory over the local church?
11. Can the powers of destruction win victory over the invisible church (the *ekklesia* that Christ is now building)?
12. Do the gates of hell refer to the abode of the demons whose desire is to destroy the church?
13. Did Christ understand the gates of Hades to refer to physical death?

Who Is The Unique Savior? – Part 4

Preached by W.E.Best on September 14, 2003 at Kingwood Assembly, Texas, USA

The norm for Christology is given by the Holy Spirit through Paul in Philippians 2:5-11. “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (NASB).

Paul named the Person who was in the form of God and took upon Himself the form of a servant. His name is Jesus Christ. This passage by Paul proves not only Christ’s condescension but His preexistence. Hence, the same statements that prove His human nature also prove His Divine nature. The Divine Person did not become a mere man. He did not lay aside His Deity, but He did lay aside His privileges as the eternal Son of God. This condescension is called the hypostatic union—two natures united in one Person. The Divine nature never has a human attribute, and the human nature never has a Divine attribute. However, the God-Man may be spoken of as having both Divine and human attributes.

Christ’s preexistent nature is strikingly described in Philippians 2:6—“...He existed in the form of God...” The Greek verb *huparchon* is a present active participle of *huparcho*, which means to exist, to be, to belong, or to subsist. The present tense and active voice makes it read, “Who is existing in the form of God.” Furthermore, the word *morphe* (form) speaks of who Christ is essentially. The word in its original meaning carried the idea of reality that does not change regardless of how it might be manifested. Therefore, He who was in the “form” of God does not cease to be God, even though He chose to manifest Himself in the form of a servant. The mystery of God was manifested in the flesh. “And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Beheld by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory” (I Tim. 3:16 NASB).

The mode of manifestation is not identical with the essence itself. He who was with God was God (John 1:1). Paul used an expression which indicates the relation of the second Person to the first Person of the Godhead. There is an eternal subordination without inferiority of nature. There cannot be a Father without a Son. The eternal Being must have an image. Therefore, Jesus Christ is both the form of God and the express image of God (Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). We must not think of Jesus Christ apart from both His Divine and human natures. Since the incarnation, Jesus Christ is the God-Man forever.

In Philippians 2:7 and 8, the reality of Christ’s human nature is set forth by three expressions: (1) “Form of a bond-servant” proves the reality of the human nature. Christ took the human nature in order that He might serve and die in it. The Greek noun *morphe* (form) is used to describe the reality of Christ’s Divine and human natures (Phil. 2:6, 7). Christ existing in the “form of God” and taking the “form of a bond-servant” are two different things. The “form of God” refers to the Son’s eternality, and the “form of a bond-servant” refers to what He became as the God-Man.

(2) “Likeness [*homoioma*] of men” indicates that Christ is different from all other men. He who was eternally begotten was begotten in time by the Holy Spirit. Paul leaves room in his definition for all the range of difference between Christ and the elect of God.

(3) “Found in appearance [*schema*] as a man” completes the description of the incarnation. It has been suggested that “form” describes who Jesus Christ was and “likeness” describes what He looked like. Paul desired to give a contrast between who Jesus Christ was in Himself and what He appeared to be before men.

Jesus Christ did not change one form of being for another in the incarnation. He changed His appearance by assuming another nature which was the form of a servant. However, He did not cease being God, because He is immutable (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8; James 1:17). The Lord Jesus did assume the form of a servant, and He became what He was not before, the God-Man. The real difference between the “form of God” and the “form of a servant” is revealed in the tenses of the participles used in this portion of Scripture in Philippians. The participle *huparchon* is the present active of the verb *huparcho*, and it means “who is existing in the form of God.” In the three expressions to describe Christ’s human nature, there are three participles:

(1) *labon*, aorist active of *lambano*, which means “taking the form of a servant”;

(2) *genomenos*, aorist middle of *ginomai*, which means “being made in the likeness of men”; and

(3) *heuretheis*, aorist passive of *heurisko*, which means “recognized in fashion as a man.” Therefore, He who exists in the form of God did not cease being God when He assumed the form of a servant.

The union of the “form of God” with the “form of a servant” has made Jesus Christ the complex Person that He is and will ever be. John tells us that the Word who was with God was the same Word who became flesh (John 1:1, 14). The Word became that which first became by Him. Therefore, the Word did not cease to be what He eternally was by becoming flesh. He only entered into a new mode of being, but He does not become a new being. The Godhead did not become flesh, but the second Person of the Godhead became flesh. (See Luke 1:35; Rom. 1:3, 4; 9:5; I Tim. 2:5.) The names of the Persons of the Godhead remained unchanged in the incarnation. Therefore, it was fitting that the Father commissioned the Son to become flesh instead of the Son commissioning the Father. It has been suggested that the middle Person of the Divine Trinity has become the Mediator between God and man. Man now occupies the middle position between angels and beasts in the scale of created creatures.

The eternal Word becoming flesh must be distinguished from transubstantiation. In the incarnation, the phrase “and the Word became flesh” (John 1:14 NASB) does not mean that the Word that was God ceased to be God. That would be transubstantiation. Transubstantiation is the change of an entire substance in which one substance is entirely destroyed and an entirely new one takes its place, without any change of appearance. This is one of the chief doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. Their Catechism states, “The priests of the church continue to exercise this power to change bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ by repeating the words of Christ: ‘This is my body...this is my blood’, at the moment of consecration (the time when the sacred change takes place) in the mass....The change of the entire substance of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ is called transubstantiation.” (See the New Baltimore Catechism #2.) Roman Catholics make a god out of the Mass and then become cannibals, devouring what they believe is Jesus Christ.

There are some who believe that Christ who existed in the form of God emptied Himself and became something less than He was originally. Liberal theologians press the sense of “emptied” until nothing of the form of God remains. They insist that the Son of God emptied out of Himself the attributes of Deity. This would be transmutation, the change from one nature to another nature. This is

the opposite of the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, the change of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Transmutation is heresy regardless of which way it goes—from God to man or from bread and wine to the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

“The eternal Word became flesh” must be distinguished from consubstantiation. Some believe there was a mixture of the Divine and human natures in the incarnation. In the fifth century A.D., Eutyches taught there was a mixture of the two natures in the incarnation, thus making a third person which is different from both. Eutychianism is mentioned to show that the Lutheran Church has partially received the heresy of Eutyches. The Christology of Martin Luther was clear on some points but indefinite on others. His favorite illustration on the union of the two natures was derived from heated iron. Two substances are united. The one interpenetrates the other. The iron receives the attributes of the heat, making it glow. Where the iron is, there the heat is; but the iron remains iron and the heat remains heat. This ingenious illustration, however, does not explain how Divine attributes are transferred to the human nature and human attributes are transferred to the Divine nature. Divine attributes are not attributed to the human nature, and human attributes are not attributed to the Divine nature. They are ever distinct but performed by the God-Man. Therefore, the properties of the Divine essence never became the properties of the human. The Divine never becomes human, and the finite never becomes infinite.

Lutheran Christology is reflected in their doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. In their doctrine of consubstantiation, they believe the substance of the body and blood of Christ coexists in and with the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Luther affirmed, “Not only the accidents but the reality of bread and wine remained in the sacrament of the altar....The bread and wine are really bread and wine and the true flesh and blood of Christ are in them in the same fashion and the same degree as they (i.e. Roman Catholics) hold them to be beneath their accidents....Fire and iron are two substances, yet they are so mingled in red-hot iron that any part is at once iron and fire. What prevents the glorious body of Christ from being in every part of the substance of bread?”

We are not living in a time of orthodoxy but heterodoxy. There are more persons propagating unorthodox rather than orthodox views about the Person of Christ. However, the people of God have never been without conflict concerning the most important principle of the Christian faith, namely, the Person and work of Jesus Christ. It seems that in the last of the last days believers are bombarded not only with a revival of old heresies but also some new ones.

In the first century A.D., the Ebionites denied the reality of Christ’s Divine nature. They believed Jesus Christ was nothing more than a man. Docetism denied the reality of Christ’s human body in the second century A.D. In the second and third centuries A.D., Monarchianism denied the Trinity. They were divided into two schools of thought. Theodetus represented the Dynamic school of thought which denied the incarnation of the *Logos*. Sabellius represented the Modalistic school who accepted the Deity of Christ, but they denied His independent and preexistent personality. The life of Christ was only a theophany to this school. To this school, God was one; and the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit signified no more than different manifestations of the Divine essence. Both schools were condemned by the Synod of Antioch in A.D. 268. Arianism was a reaction from Sabellianism in the fourth century A.D. Arius denied the Deity of Christ.

The fourth and fifth centuries reveal the Christological conflict that has not subsided. To summarize the heresies of that period, it may be said Arianism denied the true Godhead of Christ; Apollinarianism denied the true humanity of Christ; Nestorianism denied the unity of the two natures

of Christ; and Eutychianism denied the distinction of the two natures of Christ. The heresies of our time are just as blatant, but it must be acknowledged that they are more subtly stated.

During the first five centuries of Christianity, Christology was a subject of great conflict; but out of that period of controversy came the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. The four Chalcedonian adverbs point out how essential it is to the Person of Christ that one must believe that He possesses both Divine and human natures “without mixture,” “without change,” “without division,” and “without separation.” This formula has dominated the orthodox exegetes to the present day. Hence, Chalcedon has been called the terminal point of Christology. For Christians, however, there is but one terminal point in the study of Christology, and it is given in the words of Christ Himself. He said, “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Matt. 11:27 NASB). Here we have Christ’s reaction to being rejected.

Like so many Biblical facts, Divine concealment is a subject religionists refuse to discuss. All truth originated in God, and He reveals some truth to some. “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of the law” (Deut 29:29 NASB). However, God conceals truth from some, and Christ praised God for concealing truth from some. Christ said, “I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight” (Matt. 11:25, 26 NASB). If there is no reprobation, there is no election; no election, no grace; no grace, no salvation; no salvation, no body of Christ; and no body of Christ, all are doomed to endless torment.

This study concerning Christ is being brought to a conclusion. Before we begin our teaching next Lord’s Day of Matthew 16:18 and 19, three things in the preceding verses in Matthew must be recalled:

- (1) Christ’s question in verse 15,
- (2) Peter’s answer in verse 16, and
- (3) the Father’s revelation to Peter in verse 17. “He said to them, But who do you say that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed are you Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 16:15-17 NASB).