

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

WEEK 3: THE WORK OF CHRIST¹

INTRODUCTION & REVIEW

- Contrary to popular belief, the Bible depicts the death of Christ and all of his redemptive work as a whole, as the most significant, valuable and profound event of history.
- The work of Christ, quite literally, is our only hope.
- Here we arrive at a climax in Christian theology. We have considered Jesus Christ now is and forever will be one person with two natures. He is fully God – come to reveal God to us and to accomplish the Father’s plan.
- What did he come to do? “**Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners**” (1 Tim 1:15).
- This morning I want to study the work of Christ. If we misunderstand what Jesus came to do, we risk missing out on the salvation He accomplished and misleading others.
- We study this because Christ is worthy of worship and honor for what he has done.
- Nothing fires the affections of our hearts like remembering the price that He paid for us.

OVERVIEW OF THE WORK OF CHRIST

- Christ’s work is through the three offices he fulfills. He is our prophet, priest, and king.
- Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God and we know God through Christ. **Hebrews 1:1-2, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”**
- Jesus is also the ultimate high priest who mediates a new covenant between God and his people.
- We are reconciled to God through Christ. **Hebrews 7:26: “It was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.”**
- Jesus is the great King of the universe who rules with peace and justice.
 - He inaugurated His kingdom in His first coming, and He will consummate the kingdom at the end of time: **Revelation 19:11, 16: “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. On**

¹ <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/resources/core-seminars/series/systematic-theology/>

his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.”

- Therefore, we should praise Jesus because He is our prophet, priest, and king. He is sufficient and distinguished in His revelation, His sacrifice, and His rule.

Consider Jesus in His humiliation and exaltation.

- **Philippians 2:7-11**...Jesus “emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”
 - That’s His humiliation – his incarnation, perfect life, and sacrificial death.
- Then: “**Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed him the name that is above every name.**”
 - That’s His exaltation – His resurrection, ascension, session, and return.
- “The whole New Testament teaches the humiliated and exalted Christ as the core of the gospel.”²

THE STATE OF HIS HUMILIATION

1. The Incarnation of Christ.

- Why did the Son of God take on human flesh? For us and our salvation.
- We spoke of this extensively last week when we discussed the humanity of Christ...
 - It’s simply worthwhile to savor the beauty of this mystery. The Son of God was born as a baby to be our New Adam. The infinite one got tired and slept, the all-powerful one felt our weakness, the all-present one took on a human body. He shared fully in our humanity to serve as our representative and priestly mediator before God the Father (**Hebrews 2:14–17**).

2. He lived a Sinless Life.

- This is called *Christ’s Active Obedience*.
- The first Adam disobeyed but Jesus fully obeyed God because He came to fulfill the law (**Matt 5:17**).
- Christ’s active obedience should console us. He has felt the pull of temptation and the allure of sin.
- **Hebrews 4:15-16**, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”
- As wonderful as Christ’s incarnation and sinless life were, they didn’t complete his work.

² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 418.

3. The Death of Christ.

- In **Mark 8**, as soon as Peter confesses Jesus is the Christ, Jesus teaches “**the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again.**”
- Jesus became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. This is sometimes called his “passive obedience” – He lovingly obeyed the Father’s plan by submitting to the penalty of death for our sins.
- What did Christ’s death accomplish? His death was so monumental, the New Testament speaks of it using several related, overlapping themes and metaphors.
- ***Christ is our Penal Substitutionary Atoning Sacrifice***
 - This is the predominant way the Bible describes the death of Christ.
 - Atonement is a word that refers to the restoration of right relationship between man and God; it also carries the connotation of the sacrifice that is made or price that is paid for such right relationship to be possible.
- ***The Necessity of Atonement.***
 - We stand guilty before God as those who are represented by Adam. We have confirmed our guilty sentence by our own filthy deeds.
 - Eph 2:3 says we are by nature objects of wrath. This is because God is good. His law is right, his holiness is unimaginably pure, and His justice is totally right. Therefore, He won’t allow evil and wickedness to go unpunished.
 - God ordained the sacrifices and offerings of the OT to convey graphically the utter necessity of atonement. Animals were slaughtered daily as prescribed by Leviticus.
 - Why? **Hebrews 9:22** explains, “**without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.**”
 - This lesson would be engrained in the minds of every Israelite, because the floor of the temple would be covered with blood.
 - God, in his mercy, provided regular sacrifices that all pointed forward to the final sacrifice that would atone for sin decisively.
- ***The Nature of the Atonement.***
 - Christ’s atoning death was “penal.” That is, he suffered the penalty that our sins had incurred – the wages of death.
 - **Isaiah 53:5**, “**But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities.**”
 - **1 Pet 2:24**, “**He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.**”
- ***His death was also substitutionary.***

- He took the death we rightfully deserved, in our place.
- Think of the Exodus, where a lamb was slain, as it were, instead of the oldest son in the family.
- It's no wonder John the Baptist called Jesus the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29) and that Jesus died during Passover.
- **2 Corinthians 5:21** "For our sake he [God] made him [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."
- John Stott has memorably written, "The essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man."³
- ***What is the Result of the Atonement?***
 - It accomplished the propitiation of God's wrath, His anger against sin has been resolved and removed by Christ's sacrifice.
 - The prophetic books of the Old Testament depict God's good anger against all wickedness as him pouring out the cup of his holy wrath. For all who trust in Christ, he drank that cup on the cross. He experienced God's rightly terrible opposition against sin.
 - Paul refers to in **Galatians 3:13** when he says that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree."
 - Maybe the clearest passage on propitiation is **Romans 3:23-25**: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith."
 - It is important to remember, that while propitiation is necessary because God is holy, it is possible because God is supremely loving and gracious. **1 John 4:10**, "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."
- ***Christ's death also accomplished expiation (He took our punishment)***
 - His death fully covers the guilt of our sin; we are declared innocent.
 - **Colossians 2:14** says God forgave all our trespasses "by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross."
- ***Christ's death also brought about our purification,***
 - This is what theologians sometimes call **positional sanctification**, meaning we have been cleansed and set apart as acceptable to God.
 - **1 John 1:7** "the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."
- ***Christ's work on the cross changes everything for us.***

³ *Cross of Christ*, 160.

- We contribute nothing to our salvation. Jesus didn't purchase a possibility for salvation that we then need to activate. He didn't come to make atonement a potential reality, but an actual reality for those who would repent and believe.
- We can see that in the very nature of atonement itself. Substitution, biblically, means substituting for a definite group of people. ***That was the case with the Passover Lamb*** and with the OT sacrifices.
- How much more, then, does Christ's sacrifice actually achieve propitiation, expiation, and permanent purification for God's people. He is our substitute.
- ***This atonement is applied to us by the Holy Spirit when we are converted.***
 - When we turn from our sin and trust in Christ, all three persons of the Trinity act harmoniously in the work of redemption.
 - Christ's death was as a substitute for all those the Father elected, which are all those to whom the Spirit gives the gift of new life.

4. Christ is our Legal Substitute

- This is the glorious truth of justification. Scripture uses the language of the law court to convey our salvation. We are guilty before God's judgment seat. But Christ takes our sentence.
- As a result, we are we declared innocent, and Christ's perfect righteous record is credited or "imputed" to us. God the judge treats us according to Christ's upright and perfectly innocent standing.
- By providing Christ for our justification, God vindicates his justice while at the same time showing marvelous mercy to sinners.
- When Jesus died, He took the guilt for the sins of believers: past, present, and future. **Romans 3:24-26**, we are "justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

5. Christ is also our Redeemer.

- Here Scripture uses the imagery of the slave market. We are slaves to sin, unable to free ourselves from our voluntary bondage. Christ purchases our forever freedom. **Mark 10:45**, "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
- Some have thought Jesus paid this ransom to Satan, but this redemption is the payment God himself demands because of his justice.
- Our sin has locked us into God's judgment. Christ's blood is what releases us from this captivity.

- Our judgment fell on him. **1 Peter 1:18-19** says, “you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”
- Practically, this means that we belong to Christ. We’re no longer slaves to sin. We have a new master and his yoke is easy and his burden is light. **You were bought with a price, Paul says. Therefore glorify God in your body (1 Cor 6:20).**
- Satan can lie all he wants, but he has no power over us, and sin has no claim on us.
- **Colossians 1:13-14**, we have been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God’s beloved Son, in whom we have redemption.”
- But not only are we set free from sin and death; we now enjoy a new relationship with God:

4. Christ is our Reconciler

- The Bible does not only describe our salvation in terms of justice, redemption, and sacrifice, but also in terms of relationship.
- We were God’s enemies. Now, in Christ, we are his adopted sons.
- Again, Christ’s substitution is at the heart of our reconciliation. **Romans 5:1**, “Therefore since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- **Romans 5:10**, “While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.”
- **Galatians 4:4-7**, “when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”
- God hears our prayers. He cares for us tenderly as a father. As adopted children, the inheritance of the kingdom that belongs to Christ is now our inheritance too.

5. Christ is our Victor

- By his death and resurrection, Jesus conquers Satan, sin, and death on our behalf.
- That’s why when he talks about his upcoming death in **John 12:31**, Jesus says “**now will the ruler of this world be cast out.**” **Colossians 2:15**, “**God disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him**” – that is, in Christ and in his victorious death.
- **1 Corinthians 15:56-57**: “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” In him we are more than conquerors.
- Everything that we have said today about his death would be meaningless and vain if it weren’t for this glorious truth – *Jesus rose from the dead.*

THE STATE OF HIS EXALTATION

- His resurrection, ascension, session, intercession and second coming.

The resurrection of Christ

- (Psalm 16:8-11; Isa. 53:10; Matt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19; 28:1-20; John 2:19-22; 10:17-18; 20:1-21:25; Acts 2:32; Romans 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:3-4, 12-22; Heb. 7:16, 24-25)
- The works of the exalted Christ begin with the resurrection. According to the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, the resurrection is the ground of our faith and hope, and since it is the ground of Christian faith and hope, it is central to the writings of the New Testament.
- The epistles depend entirely on the assumption that Jesus has indeed risen from the grave.
- The entire NT bears witness to the resurrection of Christ, and if the resurrection is so central to the New Testament, we should ask why it's so important for us.
- *Christ's resurrection ensures our regeneration (1 Peter 1:3; Eph. 2:5-6)*
- 1 Peter 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..." Peter is explicitly connecting Jesus' resurrection with our regeneration or new birth.
- When Jesus rose from the dead He had a new quality of life, a 'resurrection life' in a human body and human spirit that were perfectly suited for fellowship and obedience to God forever.
- *Christ's resurrection ensures our justification (Rom. 4:25)*
- Romans 4:25, Jesus "was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification".
- When Christ was raised from the dead it was God's declaration that he had accepted Christ's work of redemption. By raising Jesus from the dead, God the Father was in effect saying that he approved of Christ's work of suffering and dying for our sins, that his work was completed, and that Christ no longer had any need to remain dead.
- There was no penalty left to pay for sin. For those who have believes in Christ, since Christ was raised for our justification, and since we have been raised with him (Eph. 2:6), then by virtue of our union with Christ, God's approval of Jesus is also His approval of us.
- In this way Christ's resurrection also gives final proof that he had earned our justification.
- *Christ's resurrection ensures we will receive resurrection bodies (1 Cor. 6:14; 15:12-58; 2 Cor. 4:14)*
- The NT connects Jesus' resurrection with our final bodily resurrection. 1 Corinthians 6:14 "And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power" 2 Corinthians 4:14 "he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence."

- Then again, in 1 Cor. 15, which is the longest treatment of the connection between Christ's resurrection and our own, Paul says that Christ is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.
- The term 'firstfruits' is an agricultural metaphor indicating that we will be like Christ. Just as he, 'the firstfruits' would be raised, so too will we be raised.

The Ascension of Christ

- (Psalm 110:1; Matt. 22:41-46; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 4:7-8; 1 Timothy 3:16)
- *The ascension is the prerequisite for the subsequent saving works of Christ: the session, Pentecost, intercession, and the second coming.*
 - It is clear from **Psalm 110:1** and **Acts 2:33–36** that Christ had to ascend to sit down at the right hand of the Father, thereby beginning his heavenly session.
 - By His ascension, therefore, Christ was able to take His place as the King over all creation until the time when all things would be wholly subjected to Him.
- *The ascension was also necessary for Christ to send the Spirit at Pentecost.*
 - **John 16:7** "I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you."
- *Christ's intercession also required him to ascend.*
 - In **Hebrews 8**, Christ's intercession is his current priestly ministry for his people.
- *Finally, Christ could come again only if he went away in the first place.*
 - Peter declared this truth before the Sanhedrin in reference to "**Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things**" in **Acts 3:21**.
 - Although we cannot fully grasp the mystery of God's plan, it does require that Jesus ascend into heaven and once there, rule and empower his church so that the kingdom of God might spread. *Christ's ascension saves in that every benefit that the church receives from Jesus in heaven would be impossible unless he first ascended to take his position there.*

The Session of Christ

- (Psalm 110:1; Hebrews 1:3-4; 8:1-2; Acts 5:30-31; Romans 8:33-34; Colossians 3:1-4)
- The fact Christ sat at the right hand of God is referred to as Christ's *session* at God's right hand.
- The OT predicted the Messiah would sit at God's right hand in **Psalm 110:1**, "**The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'**"
- When Christ ascended back into heaven he received the fulfillment of that promise. **Hebrews 1:3** "**When he had made purification for sins he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.'**"
- This welcoming into the presence of God and sitting at God's right hand is a dramatic indication of the

completion of Christ's work of redemption.

- Sitting down at God's right hand is an indication of the authority he received over the entire universe. In **Ephesians 1:20-21**, when he says that God "raised him from the dead and seated at his right hand far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named."

The Intercession of Christ

- (Leviticus 16; Psalm 110:4; Isaiah 53:12; John 17; Romans 8:31-34; Hebrews 6:19-20; 7:25; 8:3; 9:11-14, 24; 1 John 2:1-2;)
- How does the heavenly intercession of Christ save us? First, it saves us because it is the completion of Christ's priestly work. Christ's intercession is emphatically not the completion of his sacrificial work.
- His sacrificial work was forever finished on the cross but not the end of his priestly work. **As a result of these prior saving events, He now makes intercession for the sinners He came to save.**
- If He had not risen from the dead, then He would have been unable to appear in the presence of God.
- The testimony of Scripture is that Christ has risen and that he has ascended to heaven and appeared in the presence of God in our behalf. Even now, the exalted Christ in heaven is making continual and effective intercession for his people, thus guaranteeing our final salvation.
- **It saves us because it is one means by which God enables his people to continue in faith and obedience.** It is God's plan that his elect persevere in faith and obedience (**Romans 8:29-30**).
- He always lives to make intercession for us (**Heb. 7:25**). Jesus Christ is a perfect Savior for his people.
 - **McCheyne**: "If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million of enemies. Yet the distance makes no difference; He is praying for me."⁴

The Second Coming of Christ

- (Psalm 110:1; Matthew 25:31-34; Mark 13:26-27; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 9:24-28; 1 Peter 1:13; 1 John 3:2-3)
- **Paul clears up the Thessalonians' confusion concerning Jesus's return.** They had the mistaken idea that their fellow believers who died might miss out on final salvation. But Paul says that they are not to grieve, as the unsaved do, when their loved ones die.
- **1 Thessalonians 4:17** "Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the LORD in the air, and so we will always be with the LORD."
- Salvation is here expressed as being with Jesus forever. It is triggered by the second coming at which time all the saints will go to be with the LORD.

⁴ Robert Murray McCheyne, *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray McCheyne*, Ed. Andrew A. Bonar (Edinburgh; London: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1894), 158.

- **Jesus's Return Brings Glory.** Paul asserts that Jesus's return will mean glory for Christians. Although we live on earth, **Philippians 3:20–21** “Our citizenship is in heaven...we await a Savior, the LORD Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”
- Our mortal bodies are lowly because they are subject to illness and death.
- **God has spiritually joined every believer to His beloved Son**, so that His saving benefits become ours. We spiritually died with him, were raised with him, and are presently seated in the heavenly places with him (Col. 2:20; 3:1, 3; Eph. 2:6). **Colossians 3:4** “When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed *with Him* in glory.”
- We are so joined to Christ spiritually that our full identity will be revealed only when Jesus returns.
- **Jesus's Return Brings Joy.** **Revelation 22:14** “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life.” After extolling the grace of God Paul says **Titus 2:11, 13-14** “...the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us”
- **Jesus's Return Brings Deliverance.** Another benefit that Jesus brings at his return is deliverance.
- **First**, He will deliver his people from any persecution they are enduring. **2 Thessalonians 1:6–8** “For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”
- **Second**, Christ will deliver his people from eternal punishment. **1 Thessalonians 1:9–10** “These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.” Because Jesus's death and resurrection save, when He comes from heaven He will bring final deliverance from the wrath to come.
- **Jesus's Return Brings the Kingdom and Our Inheritance**, **Matthew 25:34** “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”
- Here Jesus combines familial and royal imagery. God is our Father, and all who trust his Son for salvation become God's children and receive an inheritance.
- **Jesus's Return Brings Cosmic Restoration.** **Acts 3:19–21** “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.”