

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST? – THE STATES OF CHRIST

In Paper 007C we looked at the two natures of Jesus Christ. In this paper we will be looking at what is commonly referred to as the two "states" (conditions) of Jesus Christ - the state of Humiliation and the state of Exaltation. The two states are mentioned in such scriptures as Phil. 2: 5-11 and Heb. 2: 9 which reads, "*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*" This verse speaks of both the suffering and the glory of Christ or His humiliation and His exaltation. In the paper on the two natures of Christ we saw that He was both man and God. In this paper we will see Him as both Servant and King.

A) THE STATE OF HUMILIATION:

It is usual to distinguish two elements in the humiliation of Christ:

- The *kenosis*, or "laying aside" of the divine majesty which was Christ's as God, and the assumption of human nature in the form of a servant (Phil.2: 5-7).
- The *tapeinosis*, or "humiliation" consisting in that Christ, the Lawgiver, became subject to the demands and curse of the law and had to submit to it in obedience even unto death (Gal.4: 4-5: Phil.2" 8).

We usually distinguish five stages in the State of Humiliation: Jesus' birth, suffering, death, burial and descent into Hades. We will look at each of these in turn.

1) The incarnation and birth of Christ:

In the incarnation, God the Son (the *Logos*) became flesh by assuming human nature (Jhn.1: 4; I Jhn.4: 2). He became one of the human race by being born of Mary. This would not have been true if He had brought His humanity from heaven as the Anabaptists claim. The Bible teaches the virgin birth of Christ in Isa.7: 14; Matt.1: 20; Lk.1: 34 & 35. His birth was due to the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit, who also kept the human nature of Christ free from the pollution of sin from its very inception. The doctrine of the virgin birth was confessed in the church from the earliest times, but in modern theology it is denied by many. Speaking of this modern trend, Berkhof says:

Its present denial is not due to the lack of Scriptural evidence for it, nor to any want of ecclesiastical sanction, but to the current general aversion to the supernatural. The passages of Scripture on which the doctrine is based are simply ruled out of court on critical grounds which are far from convincing; and that in spite of the fact that the integrity of the narratives is proved to be beyond dispute; and it is gratuitously assumed that the silence of the other N.T. writers respecting the virgin birth proves that they are not acquainted with the supposed fact of the miraculous birth. All kinds of ingenious attempts are made to explain how the story of the virgin birth arose and gained currency. Some seek it in Hebrew, and others in Gentile, traditions (*Systematic Theology*, L. Berkof, 1971, The Banner of Truth Trust, London.).

One of the main arguments against the virgin birth is based on the translation of the word “virgin” in Isa.7: 14. Barclay says:

This translation introduces us to one of the strangest problems of Biblical translation. The word translated ‘virgin’ is in the original Hebrew *almah*, which means simply a young woman of marriageable age, whether or not she is a virgin. It is certainly not the characteristic word for virgin – *bethulah*, which Isaiah would surely have used if he had wished to underline the fact that the young woman of whom he writes was a virgin. Where then does the word “virgin” come from? It comes from the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, which was made in the third century B.C. In it the Greek translators for some reason which has never been explained translated the Hebrew word *almah* by the Greek word *parthenos*, which certainly does mean “virgin”. To add to this very odd problem, it must further be noted that there are three later revisions of the Septuagint, by Aquila, Theodotion and Symmachus, and all of them remove the word *parthenos* and substitute the word *neanis*, which does mean a young woman of marriageable age. The strange thing about the Matthew quotation of Isaiah 7: 14 is that it is a quotation based on the Greek version of the O.T., and not on the Hebrew version, in which the word does not necessarily mean a virgin at all (*The plain man looks at the Apostle’s Creed*, W. Barclay, 1967, Fontana, Glasgow).

A number of objections can be raised against some of the above statements based on the translation of the word *almah*. E.J. Young in the article “Immanuel” in the *New Bible Dictionary*, (1974, Inter-Varsity Press, London) says:

The mother of the child is an unmarried woman. Why did Isaiah designate her by this particular word *almah*? It is sometimes said that had he wished to teach a virgin birth there was a good word at his disposal, namely, *bethulah*. But an examination of the usage of the latter word in the O.T. reveals that it was very unsatisfactory, in that it would have been ambiguous. The word *bethulah* may designate a betrothed virgin, but when it does the explanatory phrase “and a man had not known her” is often added (cf. Gen.24: 16). The word may also designate a betrothed virgin (cf. Deut.22: 23). In this latter case the virgin is known as the wife (*issa*) of the man, and he as her husband (*is*). But the word *bethulah* may also indicate a married woman (Joel 1: 8). On the basis of this latter passage a tradition arose among the Jews in which the word could clearly refer to a married woman. Had Isaiah employed this word, therefore, it would not have been clear what type of woman he had in mind, whether virgin or married. Other Hebrew words which were at his disposal would not be satisfactory. Had he wished to designate the mother as a young woman he would most likely have employed the common term *naara* (girl). In using the word *almah*, however, Isaiah employs the one word which is never applied (either in the Bible or in the other Near Eastern sources) to anyone but an unmarried woman. This unmarried woman might have been immoral, in which case the birth could hardly have been a sign. We are left then with the conclusion that the mother was a good woman and yet unmarried; in other words, the birth was supernatural. It is the presence of this word *almah* which makes an application of the passage to some local birth difficult, if not impossible.”

Thus, it can be seen that Isaiah made his choice of the word *almah* with utmost care, and the original translators of the Septuagint likewise used the word *parthenos* to convey the same meaning since they obviously were aware of the true import of the word *almah* as used in this context. It was the later revisionists who were at fault in using the word *neanis*. Thus Matthew’s translation is not based on the Greek version of Isaiah at all but

on the true meaning of the word *almah* as it would have been understood from the Hebrew in the context of Isaiah 7: 14.

If Jesus was not born of a virgin He could never be the Saviour of the world because then He would have been tainted with the sinful nature of man. Likewise, if He had an earthly father He would have inherited the same sinful nature. To try and imply that Joseph was Jesus' biological father is absurd in the light of Matt. 1: 18-25. The Bible does not make a great deal about the virgin birth of Christ because it is self-evident that if He was not virgin-born then He simply could not have been the sinless Son of God. There are some critics who claim that the doctrine of a virgin birth is also taught in other religions of their gods and that therefore the concept was borrowed from these ancient religions by the Biblical writers. What these critics fail to understand is that most religions are a corruption of an original truth and that the idea of a Saviour who is born of a woman (without the agency of a man) is already indicated in Gen. 3: 15 long before any religions appeared on the scene. This central idea was therefore reiterated by the various religions that men invented as they spread around the world and served to remind them of that original promise of God concerning a coming Saviour.

2) The suffering of Christ:

Christ's whole life was a life of suffering, Isa.53: 3, "*a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*". This suffering resulted from various causes:

- The Lord of the universe had to become a servant – He who had the right to command was in duty bound to obey.
- He who was pure and holy had to live in a sinful world.
- His knowledge of how His life must end on the cross.
- The privations of life, the temptations of the devil, the hatred and rejection of the people and the persecutions to which He was subjected.

3) The death of Christ:

The sufferings of Christ finally culminated in His death. He did not die as the result of an accident or at the hand of an assassin, but under a judicial sentence, and was thus counted with transgressors, (Isa.53: 12). God providentially arranged that He be tried and sentenced by a Roman judge as the Romans represented the highest judicial power in the world, functioning by the grace of God and dispensing justice in God's name. Thus, when the Roman judge condemned the innocent, he also condemned human justice, but at the same time the sentence was also the sentence of God, though on entirely different grounds. By suffering the Roman punishment of crucifixion Jesus died an accursed death, bearing the curse for humanity, (Deut.21: 23; Gal.3: 13). Thus, Christ met the extreme demands of the law. We will look at the death of Christ more closely in our paper on the Atonement.

4) The burial of Christ:

This was also part of the humiliation, Ps.16: 10; Acts 2: 27 & 31; Acts 13: 34 & 35. It removed for us the terrors of the grave.

5) The descent into hell:

There are only four passages of Scripture that may have a direct bearing here, namely Eph.4: 9; I Pet.3: 18 & 19; I Pet.4: 4-6; Ps.16: 8-10 (compare Acts 2: 25-27, 30 & 31). Although the literal descent into hell is not explicitly taught in the Scriptures it is certainly implied and has been firmly held by the church for centuries. Indeed, many questions would go unanswered if it had not occurred. The following Scriptures are incidental to this doctrine: Matt.27: 52 & 53; Rev.1: 18; Matt.16: 18; Lk.16: 19-26. If Jesus did not descend to hell during the time His body was in the tomb then He was either roaming around on earth somewhere or He had ascended to heaven. Jesus' words to Mary in Jhn. 20: 17, "*Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father...'*" clearly shows that Jesus had not gone to heaven during this time. There is nothing in Scripture to indicate that Jesus was roaming around on the earth at this time. This means that the words of Eph.4: 9, "*Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?'*" (KJV) can only be understood as saying that Jesus descended into hell. We will look into this more closely in Paper 009D on the Atonement - "Christ's Descent Into Hell".

B) THE STATE OF EXALTATION:

In the state of exaltation, Christ passed from the indignity and humiliation of His sufferings and death, having paid the penalty of sin and having merited righteousness and eternal life for the sinner who trusts in Him. Moreover, He was crowned with honour and glory (Phil.2: 9-11). There are four stages in the exaltation of Christ:

1) The Resurrection:

The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of the Christian faith (I Cor.15: 17, "*And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins*"). For this reason, it is one of the most frequently attacked doctrines. The resurrection does not mean that Christ simply came to life again as others were restored to life before Him. If this were all that is implied by the resurrection then He could not be called "*The first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep*" (I Cor.15: 20), nor, "*The first-born from the dead*" (Col.1: 18; Rev.1: 5). The great difference between the resurrection of Jesus Christ and other people who were raised from the dead is that *all the others died again but Jesus rose to die no more!* What is implied is that while He did come to life again, that life was now in a glorified state, incorruptible, immortal, powerful and spiritual (I Cor.15: 42-44). The resurrection was physical in that the body was material and yet it superseded natural law (Lk.24: 31 & 36; Jhn.20: 13 & 19; Jhn.21: 7; Lk.24: 39). The resurrection was the work of the Triune God – the Father (Rom.6: 4; Gal.1: 1; I Pet.1: 3), the Son (Jhn.11: 25; Jhn.10: 18; Jhn.2: 19-21), and the Holy Spirit (Rom.8: 11).

Skeptics have tried to deny the fact of the resurrection by advocating various theories to try and explain it away. Some of these are as follows:

a) *The fraud theory:* This theory claims that the disciples stole the body of Jesus from the tomb by bribing the guards and then declared that He was risen. This view has largely been abandoned today because it cannot explain why the disciples would have endured

persecution and death later on for something that they knew was not true. It also has no answer for the multitude of witnesses who saw Christ after He was risen.

b) The swoon theory: This theory says that Jesus did not really die but fainted and later recovered. This view has so many medical improbabilities that no one really takes it seriously. It cannot explain how Jesus survived the spear in His side, how the Roman soldiers were mistaken as to His death (they knew their job well!), how He managed to roll the heavy stone away single-handedly and walk out of the tomb with two guards outside, and how all who saw Him thereafter saw Him not as a weak and wounded man but full of power and life. And what became of Him afterwards if he had simply recovered from unconsciousness?

c) The hallucination theory: This theory claims that the disciples only *thought* they saw Jesus after His death and burial. Again, this is an extremely weak theory which simply goes against common sense. The accounts given in the Bible of the appearances of Jesus after His resurrection certainly do not read as though they were visions. Furthermore, it cannot explain how hundreds of people could have seen Jesus after His resurrection if He was only a vision or hallucination.

d) The theft theory: This theory says that the disciples stole the body of Jesus after bribing the guards at the tomb and then claimed that he rose from the dead. No one, however, could produce the body of Jesus as evidence of this. This was, in fact, the story put out by the priests and elders in Matt. 28: 12-15.

e) The ghost theory: This theory says that Jesus did not physically rise from the dead but appeared as a spirit to His followers. This is in stark contradiction to the words of Jesus Himself in Lk.24: 39, "... a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

f) The wrong tomb theory: This theory says that the women came to the wrong tomb (an empty one). Once again, this is nonsensical for the following reasons: Mk.15: 47 & Lk.23: 55 state that the women knew exactly where Jesus was buried; when the women told the disciples, Peter and John ran straight to the tomb where Jesus had been buried; and the high priests could have gone to the right tomb and produced the body of Jesus to prove that He was still dead.

g) Mythical theories: This line of reasoning claims that the resurrection story was derived from pagan myths which often bear a striking resemblance to the Biblical account. As mentioned before, the ancient myths were often largely corruptions of original primitive prophetic truth, and those who make this claim fail to prove their case in the light of historical evidence, logical argument and common sense. Some argue that the disciples created a "myth" of the resurrection which people later came to believe was literally true. This is a silly idea because myths take generations to develop and, in any case, why would the disciples give their lives for a myth?

The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is simply overwhelming and would stand up to scrutiny in any court of law. In fact, a British High Court judge, Sir Edward Clarke, said, "To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. As a lawyer I

accept the gospel evidence unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts that they were able to substantiate." (Quoted in *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? The Resurrection Debate*, Gary Habermas and Anthony Flew, 1987, Harper & Row, San Francisco). We will now consider the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.

a) *The witnesses*: Jesus appeared to different people at different times after His resurrection as follows:

- (i) The women followers of Jesus (Matt.28: 9; Mk.16: 1-3 & 9; Lk.23: 54-56; Lk.24: 1; Jhn.20: 11-18).
- (ii) Peter (Mk.16: 7; Lk.24: 34; I Cor.15: 5).
- (iii) The two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Mk.16: 12-13; Lk.24: 16-24 & 34).
- (iv) The disciples (Matt.28: 16-17; Lk.24: 33-53; Jhn.20: 19-28; Jhn.21: 1-24; Acts 1: 1-11).
- (v) Over 500 of the brethren (I Cor.15: 6).
- (vi) James (I Cor.15: 7).
- (vii) Paul (I Cor.15: 8).

b) *The infallible proofs (Acts 1: 3)*: The following evidences cannot be accounted for apart from the physical resurrection of Jesus.

- (i) The empty tomb - (Matt.27: 57-60; Mk.15: 42-45; Lk.23: 50-53; Jhn.19: 38-41). The grave was empty and all the enemies of Christ could not deny it. In all the preaching recorded in the book of Acts there is no mention of the empty tomb. Why? Because everyone knew that it was empty! The ensuing debate was not over whether it was empty but *why* it was empty!
- (ii) The missing body - (Matt.28: 6; Matt.28: 12-15). Neither friend nor foe could produce the body of Jesus.
- (iii) The discarded grave clothes - (Jhn.20: 5-7). If the body of Jesus was stolen why would the thieves leave the grave clothes behind? The fact that the napkin was apart from the other clothes indicates that the clothes were not strewn about but were in one place as though the body had simply evaporated through them. The grave clothes belonged to this world and this life and were therefore left behind - but Jesus was risen!
- (iv) The Roman seal - (Matt.27: 66). Anyone wishing to break the seal would need the permission of the Roman authorities as breaking the seal without permission was a serious offence. Naturally, the angel who rolled the stone away did not need any Roman approval!
- (v) The Temple Guard - (Matt.27: 62-66; Matt.28: 2-4 & 11-15). The guards collapsed unconscious when the angel appeared and rolled away the stone. When they told the chief priests what had happened they concocted the story that the guards fell asleep and the disciples came and stole the body. Falling asleep on duty was a capital offence and the priests had to guarantee the safety of the guards (v.14). But if the guards were asleep how would they know who stole the body? And surely they would have been awakened by the noise of the seal being broken and the stone being rolled away. And why did the guards need to be bribed with large sums of money if the resurrection was a hoax? Why did the priests not arrest the disciples and demand that they

produce the body of Jesus? The answer is simply that they all knew that Jesus had risen.

- (vi) The rolled-away stone - (Matt.28: 2). The stone was not rolled away to let Jesus out but to show to the world that the tomb was empty.
- (vii) The silence of Jesus' enemies - (Acts 2 & 25). In all the attacks the Jews made against the preaching of the apostles, not once did they ever dispute the fact that the tomb of Christ was empty and His body nowhere to be found. As John Stott says, the silence of Jesus' enemies "is as eloquent a proof of the resurrection as the apostles' witness" (*Basic Christianity*, 1971, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill.).
- (viii) The appearances of Jesus - we have already listed these under *The witnesses* above. The fact that Jesus was seen, spoke and was spoken to, ate with His disciples and invited them to touch and feel Him cannot be accounted for unless He had physically risen from the dead.
- (ix) The transformed lives of the disciples - At Jesus' death the disciples were scared and timid, but after the resurrection they were bold and fearless even to death. Would a lie have transformed them? Obviously, it was the power of the risen Christ imparted to them that made them so different.
- (x) The existence of the church - Why did both the Jews and the Romans fail in their attempts to annihilate the church? It was because the church believed in a risen powerful Lord who had conquered death and hell; and because He conquered, they too would conquer.

2) The Ascension:

The ascension was the visible bodily ascent of Christ from earth to heaven as witnessed by His disciples. It is taught in the following passages: Lk.24: 50-53; Acts 1: 6-11; Mk.16: 19; Jhn.6: 62; Jhn.14: 2 & 12; Jhn.16: 5, 10, 17 & 28; Jhn.17: 5; Jhn.20: 17; Eph.1: 20; Eph.4: 8-10; I Tim.3: 16; Heb.1: 3; Heb.4: 14; Heb.9: 24. The significance of the ascension can be seen in the following:

- a) When Jesus came from heaven to earth in the incarnation and was born of the virgin Mary He took upon Himself a body of flesh and blood. After His resurrection from the dead He returned to heaven with this now glorified body. Thus, He came from heaven as God becoming man and returned to heaven as the God-Man. When He came from heaven He did not cease to be God, and when He returned to heaven He did not cease to become man (I Tim.2: 5-6). He is thus the guarantee that all we who are human and believe in Him will also go to heaven when we die (Jhn.14: 1-3).
- b) Secondly, the angels state in Acts 1: 11 that Jesus would come back "*in the same way*" and this indicates that His victory as Saviour over sin, death and hell will be consummated when He returns as Judge to finally consign sin, death and hell to a lost eternity forever (Rev. 20: 10-15).

3) The Post-Resurrection Ministry:

Jesus spent 40 days between His resurrection and ascension performing certain important tasks relating to the fulfillment of the sacrificial

prophecies and types in the Old Testament. This is described in the book of Hebrews and we will look at it in detail in our paper on the Atonement.

4) The Session:

The word "session" refers to the act of sitting in an official capacity such as in a court of law or in a council meeting. This is the position which Christ occupies at present at the "right hand of God" where He is seated (Matt.26: 64; Acts 2: 33-36; Acts 5: 31; Acts 7: 56; Eph.1: 20-22; Heb.10: 12; I Pet.3: 22; Rev.3: 21; Rev.22: 1; Rom.8: 34). The expression "right hand of God" is anthropomorphic and cannot be taken literally. It is derived from Ps.110: 1 "*Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet*". It is not only a position of honour (I Kings 2: 19), but also of power and glory. It thus refers to Christ's official function in heaven as Priest and King on behalf of His church as well as with regard to the affairs of the universe.

5) The Advent:

The Advent of Christ refers to His Second Coming. This is sometimes omitted from the stages of exaltation but this is not correct because the highest point is not reached until Christ returns as Judge. However, we will discuss the Second Coming fully in our papers on Eschatology.

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CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY
(PAPER 007E)

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST? – THE STATES OF CHRIST

Questions:

1. If Jesus was not born of a virgin could He have still been the Saviour of the world?
(Give a reason for your answer).
2. What would the implications be if Jesus did not rise from the dead?
3. What are some of the theories skeptics have proposed to try to deny the resurrection of Jesus?
4. What are some of the evidences that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead?
5. What is Jesus' role in heaven now?