

*Introduction to Christology***C. Fred Dickason, Th.D.**

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Welcome to our course in the doctrine of Christ. Theologians call this Christology. It means the study of the person and the work of Christ. And this is your teacher Dr. Fred Dickason, and the title of the course is pretty well self-explanatory. But suppose we go into the aims of the course. We want to try to accomplish something, and the first thing we'd like to accomplish is to become familiar with the biblical teaching concerning the person and work of Christ. We'd also like to become more convinced upon the basis of biblical evidence that Jesus is indeed the divine human Messiah predicted in the Old Testament. We also want to see the deity and humanity of Christ as united in one person; and to see these natures in their proper relationship in all of Christ's life and work. A fourth objective or aim for this course is to understand the biblical teaching concerning Christ's work in His present session and His coming again. We'd like to encourage you also to come to a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord in a new way and a commitment also to His message and ministry for a clear and compassionate presentation of the gospel.

Now the nature of this course is, of course, introductory. It's a short course. It's a summary course. It must necessarily be selective. And because it is selective and introductory, I'd like to recommend to you some other works on the subject of Christology. I'd like to highly recommend Dr. John F. Walvoord's book *Jesus Christ Our Lord*. Another book that might be very helpful is a general systematic theology book by Louis Berkhof. His section on Christology is excellent. Perhaps a simpler treatment, and yet very good, is the one by Henry C. Thiessen—*Lectures in Systematic Theology*—his section on Christology. Those are some textbooks that you might consider. You might like to buy the one by Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*. It's put out by Moody Press and I have used it in formal classes as a textbook. Now we want to refer also from time to time to certain notes that we have. This course also has an outline contained in what we might call a syllabus, or guide to the course. I'll be referring to this outline from time

to time and we'll structure our lectures around this outline. And you'll be able to follow it as a guide.

Now in our first lesson today, we'd like to begin with some introductory remarks about the doctrine of Christ. And so under our first major heading, the introduction, we'd like to say something about the importance of this doctrine. W. Griffith Thomas says, well, said as he wrote the title of one of his books—*Christianity is Christ*. That's very true. Christianity is Christ in a very simple way. The person and work of Christ is the basis of Christian doctrine. And the person and work of Christ is the focal point of Christian dedication and concern.

Let's look at this in a little more detail. Why is this doctrine important? First of all because Christ is the center of God's revelation and program. In the Old Testament Jesus Christ was the hope, the Messiah presented as to come. He was the hope of the Old Testament. And all of the Old Testament says He is coming, He is coming. And the books of the Old Testament have a messianic strain which can be traced in detail, which we can't do at this time. It's just sufficient at this point to say that He is the center of God's revelation and program as announced and revealed in the Old Testament. When we come to the New Testament, it's obvious that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. And He's the center of God's revelation and program. In John 1:18 we have this. "No man has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him" or literally, He has led Him out into plain view. He is the revealer of God in a very personal sense. He has led God out to public observation. In Ephesians 1:10, we read that Christ is the center and the cause of God's program. In Colossians 1:18 it says that God has given Him the place of preeminence above all things and all people. So He's the center of God's revelation and program.

A second reason why this doctrine is important is that Christ is the center of the believer's attention. He's the center of the believer's attention when we first come to know God as our own Father through Jesus Christ. You see Jesus Christ is called the Lamb of God. And John's gospel, recording the words of John the Baptist has this in John 1:29. "Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world." A look brings life. A trusting look brings eternal life by trusting Jesus Christ. He's the Lamb of God; the beginning of our attention when we come to know Him as our Savior. He's also the Lord of life whom we are to obey. In

2 Corinthians 5:14, we read that Christ died and rose again and that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. And He's the one whom we are to obey as the Lord of life. Christ is also the center of the believer's attention in that He is the Lord of glory. He's our hope. In Colossians 3, we recognize that we have died and risen with Christ. Paul puts it this way. He says, "If you be risen with Christ (and you) seek those things which are above where Christ sits on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things of the earth. For you died and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life shall appear, then shall you also appear with Him in glory." He's the Lord of glory and our hope is that we shall be with Him. He'll be the center of our attention right now and forever.

Besides being the center of God's revelation and program and besides being the center of the believer's attention, Christ has also been the center of Satan's attack. The religions of the world are strictly anti-Christ whatever they might be, eastern or western. They all introduce something other than the truth. Jesus said "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes unto the Father but by Me." His exclusive claims have been under attack like no other claims have. Other religions of the world can put up with other religions except for Christianity because of its exclusive claims. Actually, the 350 million gods of India are not too much of a problem for the Indians or whoever might believe in that type of religion. And Christ is no problem for some of them for they would just add Christ to the shelf of gods. But Christ won't be added that way. He's exclusive. His claims are exclusive. He shuts out all other gods. "I and the Father are one," He says. You see, all religions, then, must be anti-Christ since they do not agree with this.

The cults of Christendom paint a pseudo-Christ taking some truth from the Scripture and yet distorting Christ so as not to give a true picture or complete picture. And modern theologies deny the deity and the historicity or the full biblical dignity of the God-man. In fact the tapestry of church history is colored with devilish inter-weavings of false pictures of Christ. Christ is the center of Satan's attack. And Satan would not center his attack on Christ unless this doctrine of Christ were important.

What conclusion can we draw from these things? Well, it's important for us to see a true biblical picture. Down through the ages, there has been a core of biblical teaching that has been recognized as orthodox. And we must truly see this picture of

Christ, as it truly is in the Scripture, to appreciate who He really is. We want to appreciate a true picture of Christ. We want to relate ourselves to Him properly, and so to God properly, on the basis of a proper understanding of Christ. The more we appreciate of Him, the more we can appropriate of Him.

A third thing that's important for us is we want to defend the true picture of Christ. Often others, or even ourselves, might be led astray by false doctrine unless we know what the Scriptures truly say. And so we want to know the evidence so that we can answer those who would attack the true picture of Christ. And the last thing is we want to propagate a true picture of Christ when we witness, whether it's personal or whether it's public preaching or writing or whatever it might be. We want to present a true picture of Jesus Christ so others might appreciate Him properly, having come to trust Him and relate themselves to Him properly as the Lord of life. This has something for us, then, on the importance of the doctrine of Christ.

Now, at this point, I'd like to say something about the basis of our Christology. What's the basis of our study? How shall we approach this, you know, from times past, from the time of Arias who denied the deity and eternity of Christ, to times present when we have many currents of false teachings of Christ. There has always been a question as to how do we find the true Christ? And I'm going to adopt what Dr. Walvoord suggests in his book *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, the book I recommended earlier. And I'd like to say that the study of the person and the work of Christ is determined by how we approach this and on what basis. It's important that we start out with a concept that the Bible is the factual and propositional, that is, in statement form, presentation of the truth. The Bible is authoritative, and it is inerrant. That's my approach. I make no apology for it. I have evidence for it. I can't go into it right here. But depending upon how you take the Bible, that's how you take Christ. The Christ of the Bible is the Christ of history. And the Christ of history is the Christ of heaven, the God-sent Son of God, the God-sent Son of Man, the God-man who invaded history, who invaded our lives, and who is properly portrayed in the Scriptures. And as we take the Scriptures as authoritative and inerrant, then we can properly picture Christ. How shall we interpret the Scriptures? My contention is that we ought to interpret the Scriptures normally. That is, literally, historically, culturally. And this interpretation will lead us to a proper picture of Christ. And that will be my approach as we go through this series of studies on Christology.

With those things as a basis, it also follows that we should use a proper theological method. A proper theological method means coming to the Scriptures reverently and with research. We dig out the information from all sources in the Scripture concerning Christ. And we will classify and coordinate the evidence presented there and we will then relate this and present it properly as the overall picture of the teaching of the Bible concerning Jesus Christ. Unless we believe the Bible is truth throughout and unless we take the Bible literally or normally throughout, there is no hope of correlation. We must pick and choose. We must reject and refuse unless we assume that all the Bible is God's truth for us. And I'm going to assume this. I've been assuming it for years. Other good theologians have been assuming it for years. And we believe that this is the proper approach. It stood the test of time. It's also stood the test of God because God has blessed, as men have preached and presented the Christ of the Bible. People have come to know Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Their lives have been transformed. Their lives have been led on in dedication and usefulness in the past and in the present. So we make no apology for this approach.

There's another thing that we might consider at this particular point, and that is the interrelationship of this doctrine to other areas of doctrine. Let's just review very briefly. We have been in the introduction to Christology. We talked about the importance of the doctrine, the basis of the doctrine, and now our third point under here, the interrelationship of this doctrine to other areas of doctrine.

The areas of doctrine that we usually consider in theology are the areas of theology—proper or the study of God Himself, soteriology or salvation, anthropology or the study of man, pneumatology the study of the Holy Spirit, ecclesiology—the study of the church, eschatology—the study of future things, Bibliology—the study of the Bible itself, and sometimes we include the area of angelology—the study of God's creation in the spirit world. The doctrine of Christ is certainly related to every one of these areas that we've mentioned as far as theology proper is concerned. Christ is one of the Godhead three. Under theology proper we consider the Trinity. And since Christ is God and He's presented on a par and level with the person and work of the Trinity, we recognize that to study Christ is to study one of the members of the Trinity. And some people include Christology under the study of the Trinity. As far as soteriology is concerned, soteriology is the work of Christ.

He saves. A good picture of His person and a good appreciation of His work helps us to understand how He is the only Savior. He indeed is the God-man who alone is our substitute, who took our penalty and bore our sins completely and fully on the cross. And God grants life to those who relate themselves to Him by faith, who receive Him and make Him their only Savior. He's related to anthropology in that when we study the person of Christ, we are studying one who is the God-man. He is human as well as divine. And this relates to the purpose of Christ. He became man that He might redeem man as a kinsman redeemer. When we read about angelology, we read that Christ is the creator of all angels (Colossians 1:16). He's the creator and He's the controller of all angels. He is honored by the elect, and He has victory over the evil angels. As far as pneumatology is concerned, Christ is the one who sent the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is Christ's personal representative. And He brings us into a personal relationship to Christ. And He promotes a personal relationship to Christ. So Christ is related to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in a very personal way.

As far as the doctrine of the church, or ecclesiology, is concerned, Christ is the head of the church to whom the church owes honor and obedience. We must follow His direction if we're to do His work. As far as eschatology is concerned, the culmination of God's program of the ages is found in Jesus Christ. He's the hope of the world. He's the hope of the nation Israel. He's the hope of the church. All things will wind up centered in Christ when Christ makes His throne and His dominion to be felt upon earth. We're looking forward to the second coming of Christ.

As far as Bibliology is concerned, that is the study of the Bible, Christ is the living Word. He is the one who is the center of all Scripture. And He's the one who gave us the written Word through the Holy Spirit. As the living Word, He is the incarnated Word of God. And as He is divine and human, so the Bible, the written Word or the inscripturated Word, is divine and human. It is a product of God and man. Jesus is Himself the God-man. You see all these things show us that the doctrine of Christ is related to other doctrines in the Scripture and bears out the fact in a very brief survey, that the Bible is indeed a source book of truth. And truth is interrelated. Truth, you might say, is a seamless garment that cannot be parted at any point less it all be ruined because it's all related.

This is a bit of introduction to our doctrine. Let me just remind you that we've been talking about the introduction to Christology, the

importance of the doctrine. He's the center of God's revelation and program. He's the center of the believer's attention. He's the center of Satan's attack. And therefore, we do well to center our attention upon Him and our study upon Him so that we might appreciate Him, defend Him, propagate Him, and relate ourselves properly to Him.

We've talked about the basis of Christology being the Word of God. The Word of God is authoritative and inerrant, the Word of God taken literally or normally in its interpretation, the Word of God understood through the theological method, that is all the facts being gathered and correlated and presented. We related the doctrine of Christ to other areas of doctrine to show that truth is indeed a seamless garment and that we are dealing with God's truth.

Now what we want to turn to next is the matter of Christ's eternal and preincarnate state. Perhaps it'd do well for us, at this point before we go to a detailed study on that, to take an overview of where we're going in our outline. Now the outline starts with the introduction and the things that we've covered in this particular lesson. But the next step is Christ the eternal and preincarnate Son of God. And I believe we'll be spending four lessons on this. And under this we want to hit His deity and eternity, the biblical evidences for such. We'll see if we can't mention His preincarnate appearances and say something about types and major prophecies. But our major emphasis will be on His deity and eternity, the biblical evidence for these. Now the reason we start here is because it's a logical starting place, Christ in the eternal state. You see He was God before He became man as well as God. And we can take the stages of Christ's historical presentation in the Scripture and use them as the major points of our outline. Let me just explain that.

We'll start with Christ the eternal and preincarnate Son of God. Then we'll move to Christ's earthly life and ministry. Under that we want to hit His incarnation, His early life, His ministry. And after His life and ministry, we'll want to talk about His sufferings and death. Then we'll want to cover His resurrection and following that, His ascension and present session, that is His ministries right now in heaven. And then we'll talk about Christ's future, the matter of His return for the church and His return to the earth and His reign and rule upon the earth. And so successively we'll treat these subjects, which sort of line up for us chronologically. Well, we have our work cut out for us. Our study looks very interesting,

and we'll be looking forward to our next lesson together.