

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine Christology. Dr. Spencer, last time we introduced the topic by explaining why God became man in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. You explained that because our debt is infinite, our Savior had to be God, and yet, because it is man who has sinned, it had to be a man who paid the price. Therefore, as the unique God-man, Jesus Christ is the only one capable of saving us from our sins. How would you like to continue with the subject of Christology today?

Dr. Spencer: I want to go back to the passage we were examining from Philippians 2 and look at the ending.

Marc Roby: Alright, well let me read the passage we were discussing last time. Philippians 2:5-11 reads, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”¹

Dr. Spencer: And we noted last time that this passage clearly teaches that Jesus was God from all eternity and then became incarnate at a particular point in time. It also teaches us that out of obedience to God, the man Jesus gave himself over to death on a cross, which we are told elsewhere was for the express purpose of saving his people.² And now I want to notice the end of the passage. Paul draws a conclusion based on this obedient work of Christ and says that “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” This passage again speaks of the deity of Jesus Christ and of the fact that he is a distinct person in the godhead, separate from the Father.

Marc Roby: And certainly the fact that every knee, in heaven and on earth will bow to him, which means will worship him, speaks of his deity. When Satan offered to give him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, Jesus responded, in Matthew 4:10, by saying, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

Dr. Spencer: That is a clear indication of his deity, absolutely. And the phrasing that “every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” is an obvious reference to Isaiah 45:23, where Jehovah says that “Before me

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² E.g., see Matthew 1:21, John 12:27, and Hebrews 9:26

every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.” And this reference is so important that I want to read a longer passage from Isaiah 45 to get the full context.

Marc Roby: Yes, please do.

Dr. Spencer: Before I read this passage, I should point out that every time you hear the word Lord in this passage, it is in all capital letters in our Bible, which means that the word is Jehovah. Now, with that in mind, in Isaiah 45:17-23 we read the following: “But Israel will be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation; you will never be put to shame or disgraced, to ages everlasting. For this is what the LORD says— he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited— he says: ‘I am the LORD, and there is no other. I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob's descendants, “Seek me in vain.” I, the LORD, speak the truth; I declare what is right. Gather together and come; assemble, you fugitives from the nations. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save. Declare what is to be, present it— let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me. Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.”

Marc Roby: That is an amazing passage for Paul to apply to Christ. It speaks of Jehovah, the one and only God who created all things and who has told his people what will happen in the future. And it also says that he is the only Savior of his people and that it is before *him*, and we could properly add, before him *alone*, that every knee will bow and every tongue will swear.

Dr. Spencer: That is exactly the point. It is an incredible passage that could not be clearer about who is speaking, it is the only true and living God, Jehovah. He is the Creator and he alone is the Savior. And then Paul clearly applies this passage to Jesus of Nazareth! And yet, the most incredible part about this is that Paul was not using it to prove that Jesus is God. He was, instead, assuming that his readers already knew that fact and was using it to make his point about the need for us to emulate Christ’s humility.

Marc Roby: That is very clear evidence that the church understood, from the beginning, that Jesus Christ is God. If they hadn’t already known that truth, Paul would certainly not have used it to argue for their humility.

Dr. Spencer: I want to read again a quote that I read back in Session 53. This quote is worth repeating because it makes the point so forcefully. It is from Jame Boice’s book *Foundations of the Christian Faith*. Boice quotes an English commentator, Bishop Handley Moule, who wrote, “We have here a chain of assertions about our Lord Jesus Christ, made within some thirty years of his death at Jerusalem; made in the open day of public Christian intercourse, and made (every reader must feel this) not in the least manner of controversy, of assertion against difficulties and denials, but in the tone of a settled, common, and most living certainty. These assertions give us on the one hand the fullest possible assurance that he is man, man in nature, in circumstances and

experience, and particularly in the sphere of relation to God the Father. But they also assure us, in precisely the same tone, and in a way which is equally vital to the arguments in hand, that he is as genuinely divine as he is genuinely human.”³

Marc Roby: That does make the point quite powerfully. And we should again remind our listeners that when we discussed the triune nature of God we spent a considerable amount of time presenting biblical proof for the deity of Christ. That material can be found in Sessions 51 through 54, which can be accessed in the archive on our website, whatdoesthewordsay.org.

Dr. Spencer: That’s true. And we have repeated a small amount of that evidence here because it is a critically important part of Christology. But I don’t want to repeat much of it, so interested listeners are encouraged to go listen to or read those earlier sessions. For now, I am just going to look at a couple of Scriptures that we didn’t use at that time.

Marc Roby: Alright, what Scriptures are those?

Dr. Spencer: They are from the book of Revelation, which presents a view of Jesus that is very different from the helpless babe in a manger that we hear about around Christmas time, and a very different view from the always smiling and gentle young man that many professing Christians envision.

In Revelation 1, Verses 13 through the first part of 17, John tells us what he saw in his vision: “among the lampstands was someone ‘like a son of man,’ dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.”

Marc Roby: We can sympathize with John’s fearful response, I’m pretty sure I would fall down as though dead too.

Dr. Spencer: John’s response was completely understandable and it teaches us something important. Remember that when Jesus was here on earth, John was the “disciple whom Jesus loved” as we are told several times in his gospel. And yet, in spite of this close relationship on earth, when John caught a glimpse of the risen and glorified Christ he fell down in fear.

Even John wasn’t ready for this vision – with eyes like blazing fire, feet like bronze glowing in a furnace, a face like the sun shining in all its brilliance and with a sharp double-edged sword coming out of his mouth, which we are told in Revelation 19:15 is to “strike down the nations”.

Marc Roby: That is certainly a fearful sight. John certainly recognized him, and yet this Jesus was also very different from the one John knew during his earthly ministry.

³ Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, Revised in One Volume, InterVarsity Press, 1986, pp 269-270

Dr. Spencer: Joel Beeke mentions that exact point in his commentary on Revelation. He wrote, “That is what John means when he says the person he sees is ‘like unto the Son of man.’ He says, ‘I see Jesus, but oh, He is so exalted, so magnificent, so glorious, that I can scarcely believe my eyes.’”⁴

Marc Roby: And yet, Jesus’ response to John was extremely gracious. We read in the later part of Verse 17 through 18 that Jesus “placed his right hand on [John] and said: ‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.’”

Dr. Spencer: And notice here that it is clearly Jesus speaking; he says “I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!” This is the same Jesus who was crucified and raised from the dead. And he calls himself the “First and the Last”, which clearly refers back to Isaiah 44:6, where we read, “This is what the LORD says” and the Hebrew word translated Lord there is Jehovah, “This is what the LORD says — Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.”

In other words, Jesus is yet again clearly proclaiming to be Jehovah, the only true God. And he says that he holds “the keys of death and Hades.” And Joel Beeke notes about this verse that “A key both locks and unlocks a door. Jesus says: ‘I lock the door when My people go into the grave at my command, but I will also unlock that door so they may come out. My people will not abide under the power of death, but will come out of their graves to be with Me, to live with Me forever.’”⁵

Marc Roby: That’s a wonderful thought. And Jesus told us the same thing in John 14:1-3. He said, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

Dr. Spencer: That is the ultimate destiny of all true Christians. To be perfected and to come into the presence of our glorious risen Lord and be with him forever. And this is the Jesus Christ to whom all people will have to give an account. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:10, “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”

Marc Roby: That is a very sobering thought. We must all remember that our life will end and, in fact, this world will end. And then comes the judgment. There is an eternal reality for all people and Jesus Christ is the gate. He holds the keys.

Dr. Spencer: That is the most important point of Christology. We can never forget that there is a purpose to this universe. God didn’t create it just to watch the earth go around the sun and to see what people would do. He created it for his glory and we, as creatures made in his image, will

⁴ Joel Beeke, *Revelation*, Reformation Heritage Books, 2016, pg. 42

⁵ *Ibid*, pg. 51

glorify him either by being sent to hell for rejecting him, or by being brought to heaven to worship him. As Christ said in Matthew 25:46, unbelievers “will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Marc Roby: And so, we have established that the Savior must be both man and God, and Jesus Christ is truly God. But there have been people throughout history that have denied that he was truly man.

Dr. Spencer: There certainly have been people who denied Christ’s humanity right from the very beginning. The apostle John dealt with this in his first epistle. In 1 John 1:1-4 he wrote, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.”

Marc Roby: That is a marvelous passage. It alludes to Jesus’ deity by saying he “was from the beginning” and is “the Word of life”, but it also clearly proclaims his humanity by saying that John heard him, saw him with his physical eyes, and touched him. And later in that same letter John wrote, in 1 John 4:2-3, “This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.”

Dr. Spencer: The Bible is very careful to present both truths, that Jesus was fully God and that he was fully man. We must avoid overly spiritualizing Christianity. Our faith is based on real, tangible, true history. But we must also avoid doing away with the spiritual element.

James Boice makes the interesting point in his *Foundations of the Christian Faith* that we see both the humanity and divinity of Christ in a subtle way in the Old Testament as well.⁶

Marc Roby: Where do we see that?

Dr. Spencer: In the famous prophecy of Isaiah 9:6, which says, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Notice that this passage, which is uniformly applied to Jesus Christ by all Christians, says that a child is *born*, which speaks about Jesus’ humanity. But then it also says that the son is *given*, which implies his deity. He is the eternal Son who has been *given* to the world to save people from their sins. This same point is made by Rev. P.G. Mathew in his commentary on Isaiah.⁷

Marc Roby: That is an interesting point.

⁶ Boice, op. cit., pp 278-279

⁷ P.G. Mathew, *Isaiah, God Comforts His People*, Grace and Glory Ministries, 2018, pg. 80

Dr. Spencer: And Boice points out that the same subtle distinction is made in the New Testament as well. For example, in Romans 1:1-4 Paul wrote, “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Marc Roby: That passage clearly speaks of Jesus’ humanity. It says that “as to his human nature” he was a descendant of David. But the fact that it refers to his “human nature” also implies that there is another nature.

Dr. Spencer: It certainly does. And the passage goes on to say that Jesus was “declared with power to be the Son of God”, which is the same distinction as we saw in Isaiah, but in different words. He was descended from David, which requires being born, but he was *declared* to be the Son of God, which is like Isaiah’s saying a Son is given to us. A similar distinction appears in Galatians 4 as well, I’ll let the interested listeners look there for themselves.⁸

Marc Roby: And, of course, Jesus’ real humanity is important for us because we are told in Romans 8:29 that “those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. We are to be conformed to the image of Christ. So I want to spend some time discussing his humanity in more detail.

Marc Roby: And I look forward to doing that, but this would be a good place to end for today. So let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org and we’ll do our best to answer.

⁸ See Galatians 4:4; God *sent* his Son, who was *born* of a woman.