

## **Christ: Systematic Summary of Christology, II**

Let us pray.

*Teach us, Father, about your Son. Exalt Him in our thinking, Lord, and in our lives, ministries, families, and churches. We pray through the mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

First of all, let us do our quiz. We continue the doctrine of the person of Christ and we are actually going to get to some of the systematic categories: pre-existence, Incarnation, and virgin birth—but first the quiz. As you know, we try to weave together the readings and the lectures. I need you to do the readings to get historical and theological information especially, so that on the basis of some Bible study in class we might reach conclusions. So I thank you for your perseverance.

True or false, according to Alister McGrath. He is a theologian who teaches primarily at Oxford University in Great Britain and is a prodigy in terms of his ability. In a short time he has developed an international reputation and it is deserved for both academic and popular books, such as this one. He is really remarkable. We should pray for him. In the British scene he is very conservative and is standing for Christ. It is wonderful to see.

1. There is sufficient historical evidence for Jesus Christ's existence as a first-century Jew who lived in Palestine. True, of course, found on page 18. That would be a radical criticism to deny that Jesus was an historical figure. I do not even know of anybody holding that. There probably are some outlandish types who do, but that is indeed outlandish.

2. The Christian faith is to be identified with an interpretation of certain events. It is irrelevant whether those events actually occurred in history or not. False, thankfully, found on page 23. Now our faith depends on more than the historicity of those events; we have to personally trust Christ to be saved. Somebody could believe that Jesus lived, died, and rose again and even that He is divine and able to save and not really personally rest in Him for salvation. So our faith depends on more than those historical events, but not on less. We cannot deny the history of those events and McGrath does not deny them either; he affirms them.

This question is not dealing with various statements in the Bible itself. It is not a biblical phenomenon. It is not something going on in the Bible. It is written to oppose modern reinterpretations of that which the Bible patently presents as history. Immanuel Kant changed thinking by his work in philosophy whereby he said that scientific reasoning will not enable us to get to God. We cannot think of God that way. Rather, we know God through morality, but not through reason. That has caused a great divide and, as a result of much historical development since Kant's time in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, some would say whether Jesus rose from the dead or not is unimportant. It is if the Christ is born in you today; it is if the Christ event has existential significance for your own self-actualization and stuff like that. That is nonsensical jargon. It is not enough to confess that the events happened, but to think that it is unimportant whether they happened or not is so far from the Bible's intention that we have to dismiss it as wishful thinking. That is what he is talking about. It is plain that he is not happy if somebody just ascends to Christian orthodoxy. It is not enough just to say that Jesus died and rose again, but one has to personally trust Christ as Lord and Savior. Having said that, emphasizing the importance of Christian experience does not minimize the necessity of the events that undergird that experience having happened. To quote 1 Corinthians 15:17-18: "If Christ has not been raised from the dead, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost." So the Bible itself holds in high regard those historical events. Everything in the Scriptures is not equally plain, but this question is not talking

about that. It is talking about a frontal attack on Christian orthodoxy in terms of denying its historicity and trying to hold that things can be religiously true whether they happened or not. The Bible knows of no such dichotomy. It is a modern dichotomy in philosophy whereby our feet are cut out from under us in our faith and we just cannot let that happen.

3. Christianity is primarily concerned about an intellectual system of doctrines and only secondarily about a person. False, found on page 34. It is the other way around as long as we do not de-emphasize the teachings because we know the person based upon the information and the teachings that we have from Him. Nevertheless, McGrath is right. Christianity is primarily about a person and our knowing and loving and serving that person. We have accurate information about Him and we do have a doctrine of Christ, which is our topic right now in the course, but the doctrine is not an end in itself. The Bible is not an end in itself. It is God's truth to lead us to know, love, and serve Him. So the person is more important than the doctrines, although I guess basically they are inseparable.

When I say Judaism is the other way around I mean that it certainly is not concerned about the person of Christ. Judaism is a mixed thing. There is liberal Judaism, which is largely ethnic and cultural, and even like some liberal Protestants and Catholics, substitutes culture for genuine spirituality. There are orthodox Jews who are looking for a Messiah and, although I have not read lately about it, when I studied a little bit on that, their picture of the Messiah is remarkably like Jesus. There is a whole span and we need to distinguish between the true Judaism of the remnant, or the faithful people of God in the Old Testament, and the true Judaism that Jesus found. It was a minority Judaism from the religion largely of the Pharisees and others. In rejecting Jesus, Judaism does not know the Lord. We do acknowledge that there is such a thing as a Hebrew Christian. And we also acknowledge that there are different styles of worship for them. There are some who are distinctively Jewish Christian, and others have not gone that way. But within Judaism per se today, they need to know the Lord. It would not be loving to say that Jews are fine, that they do not need to know Christ. That would not be loving at all; it would be unloving, although it is going to get us in trouble because it is not politically correct. We have to teach the truth in love no matter where that lands us.

4. Early Christians worshipped Christ as God. It is true, found on page 37. Their worship preceded their doctrinal formulation. It is a wonderful thing that their instincts went ahead of their full understanding anyway.

5. We are almost totally dependent upon the New Testament and particularly the first three gospels for our knowledge about Jesus. According to McGrath, true, found on page 41. Now you know that I appreciate him very much. He is to be criticized. He does not believe in inerrancy; in his broad British spectrum he is very much conservative. I rejoice in that. On the other hand, he is not our model for the doctrine for Scripture. I suspect he downplays the Gospel of John and is making some concessions to a liberal criticism of the New Testament. If that is the case, I still receive him and hold him highly for his work, but I lament that and I would use the Gospel of John for historical information about Jesus even as I would use the first three gospels. It contains different perspectives but it is still God's truth and the accounts in the Gospel of John are not invented. McGrath is careful. He does not attack it, but he does not use it as he should, so I fault him within my overall great appreciation of his work. I would be foolish not to use his books because of that. However, I would be less than careful and not a very good guide for you if I did not fault him where he needs to be faulted.

6. Early Christians faithfully transmitted the substance and meaning of Jesus' teaching and actions, although some slight inaccuracies may have arisen. True, according to McGrath, found on pages 44 and 45. His answer makes me nervous and opens the door to errancy, which is the opposite of inerrancy. I

know he holds to errancy because a former student of mine, John, is finishing his PhD under McGrath at Oxford and also greatly appreciates him, but they differ on this particular point. John told me that McGrath commented after the Evangelical Theological Society a couple of years ago, in which Tom Oden and Alister McGrath were the keynote speakers, that he was really impressed the ETS would have two people come and speak to it who could not sign its own doctrinal statement. The ETS has as its doctrinal statement only inerrancy and the Trinity. Now I know they believe in the Trinity, so he was talking about inerrancy. The irony of the situation is that Tom Oden, who for many years at Drew Theological School was on the extremely liberal side of things, has come progressively to the conservative to the point where he now has signed the doctrinal statement of the ETS and is a member. Anyway, McGrath handles the Bible pretty well. It is not that he is always criticizing it, but there are just little glimpses here and there of the fact that he does not hold to the inerrancy of the Bible and here is one of those little glimpses, little betrayals, if you will. We have no inaccuracies in the Bible. We need to be careful. We have accurate reports of what Jesus said and did, but not accurate by modern standards. The Bible is not a scientific book in that way. But he means more than that and I would fault him again.

7. Critics of traditional Christianity should not appeal to Bultmann in support of their views about Jesus being a moral example or a religious teacher. True, found on page 51.

8. The tradition concerning the empty tomb should be accepted as historical fact. True, found on pages 65 through 67. All of this is to be rejoiced with.

9. There are no examples of New Testament writers taking Old Testament words originally referring to God Himself and applying them to Jesus. False, found on pages 70 and 71. In Romans 10:13, for example, we have the Old Testament word, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” from Joel 2 specifically applied to calling Jesus as Lord in the preceding and in the following context. There is no doubt about it—that is a very high view of Christ. We will see some more of that a little later on. That is a good feature to observe.

10. Pannenberg approves of Troche’s using the principle of analogy for historical research and as an index to reality. False, found on page 75. He approves of it for historical research but not as an index to reality because, of course, it rules out miracles before the fact.

11. The first Christians regarded Jesus as both the source and object of their religious experience. True, found on page 82. This is a remarkable affirmation. They serve and worship and love. The Lord means the Lord Jesus.

12. Jesus was not prepared to accept the title Messiah in the course of His ministry. True, according to McGrath, found on page 85. I have some minor disagreements. It seems again he is dependent upon New Testament scholars, and that is not bad. You cannot be everything—an Old Testament scholar, a New Testament scholar, a church historian, and a systematic theologian—so we have to depend on each other. He is largely an historical theologian who uses the Bible well and reads what biblical scholars say. But at times he is somewhat dependent on liberal biblical scholarship and this is one of those times.

McGrath has brought out well that Jesus was reticent to accept certain titles. He did not arrive on the scene at the beginning of His public ministry and announce, “I am the Messiah.” He had to be prudent since it was the Father’s will for Him to have a three-and-a-half year public ministry and not get crucified in the first two months.

13. There was a time when Jesus was not the Son of God. False, found on page 92. That is an ancient heresy that is still propounded today, unfortunately.

14. Since Jesus acts as God in so many important contexts in the New Testament, we should conclude that He is God. True, found on page 96.

15. Jesus must be God and man if He is to redeem humanity. True, found on page 99. We are going to think about the connection between the person and the work of Christ and, if my past experience teaches me anything, you are probably better at making connections between the fact that Jesus is God to be able to save us than you are at the necessity of His becoming a real flesh-and-blood human being to be able to save us. Both are important and we will work toward integrating our understanding of Jesus' person and His saving work.

16. We should reject the Counsel of Chalcedon statements. False, found on pages 101 and following. Chalcedon was the epitome of the early church's deliberations and confessions concerning the person of Christ. To reject Chalcedonian Christology is to reject orthodox Christology.

17: Christ provides the most reliable knowledge of God. True, found on page 110. He is the great prophet in that sense.

18: *Immanuel* means God is on our side and present with us. True, found on page 116.

Let us go to a systematic summary of Christology. Last time we went over those historical errors, those heresies concerning the person of Christ. We now move to a systematic summary of Christology. I am going to intersperse this with Bible study, but we have arrived at our grid. I have got to work with these categories because this is not a Bible study class, rather this is theology class. We work with the Bible primarily, but we need these categories. Here is the overview of a systematic summary of Christology: first, the pre-existence of Christ; second, the Incarnation; third, the virginal conception of our Lord; fourth, the deity of Christ; fifth, the humanity of Christ; sixth, the unity of the person of Christ; and seventh, the two states.

Let us begin with pre-existence. By pre-existence we mean that the Son of God existed before the Incarnation. Now the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all existed for all eternity but we only use "pre-existence" in reference to the Son. It is not proper to use it of the Father or the Spirit. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are eternal, but we only say of the Son that He pre-existed because He is the only one of the Godhead who underwent a change in His existence. He is the only one to become a human being. So from the perspective of the Incarnation, we look back and talk about pre-existence. The perspective we are taking when we talk about pre-existence is not the Trinity before the creation of the world from all eternity. It is the life of Jesus and then admitting immediately that His birth in Bethlehem was not His beginning. It was the beginning of His humanity. He was not always a human. He became a human being at a point in time. He was always God with the Father and the Holy Spirit in heaven. His status changed because He who was always God now became a human being, of course remaining God. God cannot cease to be God and henceforth, He is the God-man. From the perspective of His earthly life looking backward, we can say of Him alone that He pre-existed or that the Bible affirms the pre-existence of Christ. In John 1 we saw last time that He, the eternal Word, was with the Father and the Holy Spirit in heaven. The Bible does not always fully systematize: "Before the worlds were made," "in the beginning was the Word," "The Word was with God," "He was God," "He was in the beginning with God." In John 8:58, Jesus identified Himself with the "I am." It is uncertain whether this is

referring to the “I am” of Exodus 3 or the “I am” statements of the latter chapters of Isaiah. It is immaterial because both of those places speak of a divine title: “I am.”

In John 12:41 we learn that Isaiah saw Jesus when He saw the Lord high and lifted up, as recorded in Isaiah 6. John 12:37 is a very sad verse. Jesus has done six miracles. He calls them signs. The sixth was the climatic one: He raised Lazarus from the dead in chapter 11. Surely the prejudices of the Jewish leaders would be broken down and they would believe. Surely now they would be fair in their estimation of the Son of God. But they were not. In chapter 12 of John they put out a death warrant for Lazarus—they were not going to believe in Jesus no matter what. John 12:37-38 says, “Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in Him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: ‘Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?’” John 12:38 quotes from Isaiah 53.

Let us keep going. For this reason they could not believe because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: “He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them.” John 12:40 quotes from Isaiah 6. I am setting you up for one of my little tricky patterns. “Isaiah said this,” verse 41, “because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke concerning Him.” Isaiah saw Jesus’ glory. Isaiah spoke. Both of these are in verse 41. Where did Isaiah see Jesus’ glory? He just quoted from Isaiah 6. He is thus taking us by the hand and pointing us to the place where Isaiah saw Jesus’ glory. Where did Isaiah speak concerning Him? In my own interpretation, we have a chiasm here that John intends for us to figure it out and to conclude that Isaiah saw Jesus’ glory in chapter 6, when he saw the Lord high and lifted up, and he spoke about Him in Isaiah 53. So the reference to Isaiah 53 in John 12:38 would be A; the quotation from Isaiah 6 in John 12:40 would be B; Isaiah seeing Jesus’ glory would be B prime in reference to Isaiah 6. If my analysis is right, this is the pattern John uses sometimes. We saw a chiasm in chapter 1; there is also one in chapter 6, and here as well. If you are really interested in this there is a great two-volume commentary in the Anchor Bible series by Raymond Brown. He has a long introduction in the first volume to some of the features of John’s style, including chiasm. I have not seen this particular one in print; I found it myself. The main thing is I think it is really there. Regardless of the rest of the pattern, I want to know when Isaiah saw Jesus’ glory. I would submit to you it is in Isaiah 6. I am sure of that. I am not positive of the last member of the chiasm—that he intends for us to conclude Isaiah 53 is where Isaiah speaks of Jesus. I think so, though I cannot prove it. But I am sure of this: Isaiah said this because he literally saw His glory—NIV says Jesus’ glory—and they are right to interpret the “His” as Jesus and Isaiah spoke about Him. In Isaiah 6 we read, “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne”—he uses the word for Lord and Master, *adonai*—“high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him were seraphs”—apparently angels—“each with six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty—Yahweh, or Jehovah, that special name for God—“the whole earth is full of His glory.”” Here is my contention at this point: this combination of John 12:41 referring back to Isaiah 6 proves the pre-existence of the Son of God. Remember I said before how it is very common for us to make mistakes and to talk about when President Carter grew up, though he was not President Carter yet we use the later designation of the famous person earlier even if it is an anachronistic thing. John does it in chapter 12 (I am not criticizing the Scriptures here) when he says, “His glory.” He is referring to Jesus. Technically Jesus is the name given to the Son of God at His birth; it is His human name, but the biblical writers cannot help themselves and neither can you and I. They see continuity in the Son of God who became Jesus, who became a human being. My point is this: the Son of God did not begin to exist at Bethlehem. He pre-existed. And there are other proofs of this as well. John 1 says “All things were made by Him,” so here He certainly existed before Bethlehem if He

was the Father's agent in creation. Colossians 1 says, "He made all things in heaven and Earth," and Hebrews 1 teaches the same thing: by Him the worlds were made.

Did the Son of God exist before creation? Yes. Was there equality between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in all eternity? Yes. Why did the Son of God become a human being and not the Father or the Holy Spirit? It is fitting for Him who is the image of the invisible God—human beings were made in His image in the first place—to become a human being. I like to stay away from speculation so it was fitting for the Son to become a human being. He did not have to become a human being; nothing was lacking in Him. Sometimes we too glibly say, "He became a human being so we could have fellowship with Him." That is true, then He could have fellowship with us; but our fellowship is so impoverished compared to the fellowship He shared with the Father and the Holy Spirit. It was not because He needed us. I do not know how to answer the speculation as to whether the Holy Spirit or the Father could have become human. The Bible does not indicate anything like that. You may wonder if He was always the Son of God. Are we to limit that title to His becoming a human being or to His earthly existence? No, it goes before then. In John 17:24 Jesus said, "Father [...] you loved me before the creation of the world." I do not believe He is speaking incorrectly or imprecisely there. The relationship with Father, Son, and Spirit is an eternal relation. I cannot answer all those things that we are beginning to think about.

But we affirm the eternity of the three persons and, from the standpoint of His Incarnation, we affirm the pre-existence of the second person. Second, we affirm His Incarnation. I think we take this for granted, which is true of many of the great fundamental truths, the verities of the Christian faith. When we talk about the Incarnation we are saying nothing less than this: the eternal, almighty God became a human being in Jesus of Nazareth. We are saying that God became a human. I encourage my students around Christmas time to go ask, with the mother's permission of course, to hold the newest-born baby you can find. It is a tremendous experience to hold a little one in your arms and it is wonderful to see how adults, both men and women, act around babies and the things we do to babies. We like to rub their soft skin. We love when they grab our fingers and display that little reflex action where they have a tight grip on things. It is fitting to make noises to a baby that we would not make anywhere else. But of all the things we do, think of how abnormal it would be to worship that baby. So hold a baby around Christmas time and just think about it. Think about the shepherds coming and worshipping a baby. It is so foreign to our instincts, and later the Wise Men did the same. But here is the amazing thing: those shepherds and those magi were directed by God and they were correct in worshipping the baby. You say, "It is unfathomable—the God-baby." The Bible teaches nothing less than that. John 1 says, "The true light was coming into the world"—the one who would illumine men and women who are in darkness and give them the light of God as no mere prophet ever did, because here was a prophet who could turn the lights on inside of His ears, to switch the metaphor in John 5. The Son gives life to whomever He wants to give it. But that is only half the story. There is also real human responsibility, but there is divine sovereignty and since the Son is God in humanity, He is sovereign. He gives life to whomever He wants to give it. This is an amazing thing to be said of a human being. The point is that He is not only a human being. That which provides continuity in the life of the Son of God is His divine nature because His human nature began to exist in Mary's womb. It did not exist before. He was always God's Son so now God the Son took on not just a body, but He became a human being. The point of continuity is thus His divine nature. He was not incomplete; He was a true person before He became a human. He took on true humanity, you say, "Now He is one plus one; He makes two." No, it is one plus one in the sense that He who is God became a real human being; nothing is lacking in His humanity. He is not a human with the mind missing and the *logos* filling that slot; that does not work. This is one of the mysteries of the Christian faith, of how He could be God in humanity and yet be one person with two natures, but we are saying nothing less than that almighty God became a human being. John 1:14 says it so well: "The

Word,” a divine title, “who was with God and who was God became flesh”—became a flesh-and-blood human being.

I am saying He was the Word at the same time He was the Son, at the same time He was the light in the second person of the Trinity. These are different designations of Him. Yes, they are different ways and we do group them. We struggle to talk intelligently about these things and we ought to be careful in trying to figure out what the Trinity was doing before the creation of the world, lest we deserve Augustine’s smart comment for the person who was not asking questions from good motivation but in mockery and asked what God was doing before creation. Augustine said, “Preparing a hell for people who ask these kinds of questions.” So we do not want to probe into mysteries where we cannot probe, but since the Bible talks about certain things happening before creation and God existing, then we want to humbly, without speculating, make some basic affirmations. God the Holy Trinity has always existed. There is no beginning to Him. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit existed from all eternity and since God is three in one there is fellowship, there is communion, there is sharing, and there is love. In John 17 Jesus says, “‘Father, You loved me before the creation of the world.’”