

# The Apostles' Creed

LESSON  
THREE

## JESUS CHRIST



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# The Apostles' Creed

## Lesson Three

### Jesus Christ

#### INTRODUCTION

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For the past two millennia, billions of people have worshipped, followed and proclaimed the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth. No other figure in history has been as widely admired or had as much impact on society. Artists, musicians and authors have made him the subject of their art. Whole nations and cultures have been built around his teachings. In many parts of the world, even the calendar is counted from the time of his birth.

But as well-known as Jesus is, he is still the subject of intense scrutiny. Scholars of every kind research him. Skeptics try to discredit him. And his followers study him in every way imaginable.

And the fact is that learning about Jesus is important for everyone, because one day we will all have to answer the question “Who is Jesus Christ?” For Christians, the answer should be familiar, because we have been reciting it for centuries in the *Apostles' Creed*.

This is the third lesson in our series *The Apostles' Creed*, and we have entitled it “Jesus Christ.” In this lesson, we will turn our attention to the articles of faith that affirm belief in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. These articles read as follows:

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
And born of the Virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
Was crucified, died, and was buried;  
He descended into hell.  
The third day he rose again from the dead.  
He ascended into heaven  
And is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.  
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

While there are many ways to summarize what the creed says about Jesus, we will focus on three themes that have been common focal points throughout the history of theology. First, we will speak of the divinity of Jesus Christ, looking at things like the nature of his divinity, and his relationship to the other members of the Trinity. Second, we will look at his humanity, and discuss the relationship between his divine and human natures. And third, we will talk about his work, not only during his earthly ministry, but also after it. Let's start with the way the divinity of Jesus Christ is addressed in the *Apostles' Creed*.

## DIVINITY

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When we talk about the divinity of Christ, or even more properly, the deity of Christ — the fact that he is fully God — we are talking about the central claim of the New Testament concerning who Christ is. What we are told is that Jesus is fully God and fully man. The moment we back off of either of those, we no longer have Jesus. The only way we can explain Jesus in terms of his deity is exactly as the Bible declares him. We are told that he is the Son of the living God. This is the most fundamental fact preached by the early church. And what we have, for instance, from the Apostle Paul — what he writes in Colossians — our assurance is that actually he (Jesus) is the great power over all things. In him all things are created. He has all powers under his feet. That can be said only of God. You take that out, we have no gospel, we have no Jesus, and we have no Christianity.

— Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

The *Apostles' Creed* mentions the divinity of Jesus in these words:

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.**

Christians have always intended words like “Christ,” “Son of God,” and “Lord” to indicate Jesus’ divinity.

For our purposes, we will focus on just two of the terms the *Apostles' Creed* uses to point to Jesus’ divinity. On the one hand, we will look at the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. And on the other hand, we will investigate what it means for Jesus to be Lord. Let’s begin with the meaning of the term “Son of God” that Scripture applies to Jesus.

## SON OF GOD

The first thing we should note about the language “Son of God” is that Scripture often uses it to talk about beings that are not divine in any way. For example, the angels are referred to as sons of God in passages like Job 1:6 and 2:1. In some modern versions of the Bible, these verses are translated to say “angels” rather than sons of God. But in the passages from Job, the Hebrew actually says, “*benay haelohim*,” which literally means “sons of God.” And we find similar language in other passages.

The nation of Israel is also called God’s son in verses like Exodus 4:22, and Hosea 11:1. The human kings of Israel were also referred to as God’s sons in places like 2 Samuel 7:14, and Psalm 2:7. Adam, the first human being, is called the son of God in Luke 3:38.

And as all Christians know, in many passages in Scripture God's faithful believers are called his sons. We see this in places like Matthew 5:9, 45, Luke 20:36, and Romans 8:14, 19. As Paul wrote in Galatians 3:26:

**You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26).**

But if the title "son of God" does not in and of itself mean that Jesus is divine, why has the church made such a big deal about it?

When we look at how the New Testament talks about Jesus, it becomes clear that he is God's son in a unique way.

**In fact, one of the most emphatic things that we find in the New Testament is that Jesus is the unique Son of God. That he shares in the very essence of who God is. Or another way of putting that is that Jesus is very God of very God. And we are the children of God by relationship, by adoption, but not by essence. Jesus is the eternal Son of God. He has always been the Son of God.**

— Dr. Tom Schreiner

Jesus' unique sonship is especially clear in the Gospel of John. For instance, in 1:1-18, we are told that Jesus is the eternal word of God, meaning that he is both God himself, and the only begotten of the Father. We also see it in John 8:18-23, where Jesus said that as the Father's Son, he had come from above, that he had not originated in this world. And we find it in John 10:30 where Jesus insisted that he and the Father are one.

But perhaps the most obvious place where John made this clear was in John 5:18. Listen to what he wrote there:

**[Jesus] was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God (John 5:18).**

This passage makes it clear that when Jesus spoke of himself as God's Son, he meant that he was equal with God the Father. For this reason, Christians have rightly understood that when the Bible says that *Jesus* is the Son of God, it means that he is both unique and *divine*.

Jesus' divine sonship is also mentioned in many other New Testament passages. We find it in Romans 1:3-4, and 8:3 where Paul taught that Jesus was God's divine Son even before the incarnation. We see in Hebrews 1:1-3 where we are told that as the Son of God, Jesus created the universe and is the exact representation of the Father's being. In these and many other places, Jesus is identified as God's Son in a special way that indicates his eternal, divine nature.

This emphasis on Jesus as the divine and eternal Son of God is reflected in the doctrine of the Trinity, which states that:

**God has three persons, but only one essence.**

The New Testament teaches that Jesus is God the Son, one of the three persons of the Trinity. But what is his relationship to the Father and the Holy Spirit?

As we have discussed in prior lessons, the ontological perspective on the Trinity focuses on God's being and existence. As the Son of God, Christ is equal in power and glory to the Father and the Holy Spirit. All three of God's persons — including the Son — are infinite, eternal and unchangeable. And each has the same essential divine attributes, such as wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.

By contrast, the economic perspective on the Trinity describes how God's persons interact with each other. From this view, each one has different responsibilities, different levels of authority, and different assigned roles. For example, Christ has always been the Father's Son, subordinate to the Father's authority. Listen to what Jesus said in John 6:38, where he described his submission to the Father:

**I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me (John 6:38).**

And he made a similar claim in John 8:28-29, where we read these words:

**Jesus said ... "I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him" (John 8:28-29).**

Throughout the New Testament the Son is subordinate to the Father's authority. There is no conflict between them, because the Son and the Father always agree. But the higher rank belongs to the Father.

In a similar way, within the economy of the Trinity, the Son has authority over the Holy Spirit. For example, listen to Jesus' words in John 15:26:

**When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father ... he will testify about me (John 15:26).**

In other passages, such as Romans 8:9 and 1 Peter 1:11, the Holy Spirit is actually called the "Spirit of Christ," again indicating that the Spirit is sent by Christ.

These relationships are summarized in the identification of the Son as the second person of the Trinity. He is the second person of the ontological Trinity because he is generated by the first person, namely the Father, and he breathes out the third person, namely the Holy Spirit. And he is the second person of the economic Trinity because he holds the middle rank. He is subordinate to the Father, but he has authority over the Holy Spirit.

In the early church, the confession that Jesus Christ was fully divine was a critical aspect of the Christian faith. Those who confessed the *Apostles' Creed* at their baptisms were not required to affirm all the finer points of theology with regard to the inner workings of the Trinity. But they were expected to proclaim the deity of Christ without hesitation. Even today, affirming that Jesus is truly and fully God is a hallmark of biblical Christianity.

Now that we have looked at the significance of the term “Son of God,” we are ready to see how the title “Lord” points to Jesus’ divinity.

## LORD

When the New Testament calls Jesus Lord, it is translating the Greek word *kurios*. *Kurios* was a rather common word meaning ruler or master, and it was even used as a polite form of address, like the English word “sir.” As such, *kurios* was frequently applied to mere human beings, as in Matthew 10:24, Luke 12:36-47, Ephesians 6:5-9, and many other places.

At the same time, the New Testament also used the word *kurios* as a name for God, as in Matthew 11:25, Luke 1:16, Acts 2:39, and many other passages. Given this range of meaning, why should we think that the use of the word *kurios* in the New Testament implies that Jesus is divine? Why shouldn’t we think that it simply refers to his earthly authority or honor?

**The key to Christian use of the word *kurios* is the Old Testament. The Old Testament Scriptures were written in Hebrew. Yet, a couple centuries before Christ was born, the Hebrew text was translated into Greek. This translation is called the Septuagint. When Jewish scholars translated the Old Testament into Greek, they used the Greek term *kurios* 6,700 times to translate the sacred name by which God revealed himself to his people: Yahweh. This backdrop is absolutely crucial for understanding the New Testament confession of Jesus’ *kurios*. Although the term *kurios* by itself does not necessarily imply Jesus is divine, the use of this term against its Old Testament backdrop clearly implies Jesus’ divinity in a number of texts.**

— Dr. Keith Johnson

**One of the most amazing passages in the New Testament is where it talks about “every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” [Philippians 2]. And actually, Paul, at that moment is quoting from Isaiah, where it was a hymn of praise that everyone would confess that Yahweh was the Lord. Now, he’s deliberately taking that Old Testament passage and saying that instead Jesus Christ is the Lord. And at that moment it’s quite clear the New Testament is saying Jesus Christ is not just a master, he is to be identified with the Lord God of Israel.**

— Dr. Peter Walker

Listen to what Paul wrote in Romans 10:9, 13:

**If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved... [F]or, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:9, 13).**

In verse 13 of this passage Paul quoted Joel 2:32 in order to prove that everyone who calls on the name of Jesus will be saved. But in this verse from Joel in the Hebrew Old Testament, the name of the Lord was Yahweh, the proper name of God. Put simply, when Paul said that Jesus is Lord, he meant that Jesus is Yahweh, the Lord and God of the Old Testament.

Other New Testament passages that equate Jesus with God in the Old Testament include Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3 and John 1, where Jesus is the Lord from Isaiah 40 whose path John the Baptist has prepared. We see the same dynamic in Hebrews 1:10, where the Lord Jesus is the God that Psalm 102:24-25 credit with creating the world. The list could go on and on.

Now, this is not to say that every time people in the New Testament called Jesus "Lord," they recognized his divinity. Sometimes they simply intended to show him human respect. But when the church formally confesses that Jesus is Lord, as we do in the *Apostles' Creed*, we are affirming the biblical teaching that Jesus Christ is God, and that as God he is a full member of the Trinity, with the same divine attributes as the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The divinity of Christ has all kinds of implications for the Christian life. For instance, it means that we should acknowledge and worship Jesus as God in our prayers and songs. It means that we should pray to him, just as we do to the Father and the Spirit. And it means that we can take great comfort in the security of our salvation, knowing that God himself has redeemed us from sin. These and many other practical concerns in the Christian life rest on the belief that Jesus is divine.

With this understanding of the divinity of Jesus in mind, we are ready to turn our attention to the way his humanity is reflected in the *Apostles' Creed*.

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## HUMANITY

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In the last couple centuries, many theologians have readily accepted that Jesus was human, but they have questioned his *divinity*. But in the early centuries of the church, it was at least as common for people to question the *humanity* of Jesus. Influential philosophies of that day made it relatively easy for people to accept that a god could *disguise* himself as a human being. But it was very hard for them to accept the idea that a god could actually *become* a human being. Human beings were physical and emotional beings. In their estimation, God would not compromise his own glory and dignity by taking on a lowly, creaturely, human nature. Sadly, many modern Christians also have trouble believing that God the Son could come to earth and take on full humanity, with all its weaknesses, limitations, and frailties.

To demonstrate that Jesus was a full human being, we will speak of three broad features of his humanity. First, we will talk about his human experiences. Second, we will discuss his human office. And third, we will say a few words about his human nature and its relationship to his divine nature. Let's begin by looking at his human experiences that are listed in the *Apostles' Creed*.

## EXPERIENCES

Several of Jesus' experiences prove that he was truly human because only human beings have such experiences. Listen to following assertions from the creed:

**[Jesus] was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
And born of the Virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
Was crucified, died, and was buried;  
He descended into hell.  
The third day he rose again from the dead.**

These experiences affirm at least four aspects of Jesus' humanity: his generation, his body, his soul, and his resurrection. We'll start by looking at his generation, which included his conception and birth.

## Generation

The *Apostles' Creed* speaks of Jesus' generation with these words:

**[He] was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
And born of the Virgin Mary.**

Admittedly, there were some very unusual details related to Jesus' conception and birth. First, he was conceived by the Holy Spirit rather than by a human father. He was also conceived in a way that did not violate his mother's virginity. We will speak of these details at greater length later in this lesson. For now, though, we want to focus on the basic ideas of conception and birth as essentially human experiences.

When the *Apostles' Creed* says that Jesus "was conceived", it has in mind that Jesus began in the same way that all human beings after Adam and Eve have begun: as a tiny baby in his mother's womb. Passages like Matthew 1:18, Luke 2:5-6; Galatians 4:4 and Hebrews 10:5 indicate that God formed Jesus in Mary's womb in the same way that he molds every human baby.

Luke 1:34-37 records this conversation between Mary and the angel Gabriel regarding Mary's pregnancy:

**"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.... For nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:34-37).**

Mary herself recognized that to conceive a child in this way would take a miracle. And a miracle is exactly what she got.

**What Jesus' miraculous conception does is to ensure that he's fully divine as well as fully human, but it does not make him less than fully human. It is true that the conception is a miracle, perhaps one of the greatest miracles that redemptive history has ever known. And yet, from the point of Jesus' conception forward, his gestation and development in the womb is like any other human being. His passing through the birth canal: normal human birthing process. His being dependent on his mother for his nourishment and his feeding, and everything from having runny noses to having to have his diapers changed is ordinary, normal human experience. He is more than just human, but not less than fully human.**

— Dr. Robert G. Lister

It is sometimes argued that Jesus could not have been truly human because he did not have a human father. But the very first humans didn't have fathers either, or mothers for that matter. As Genesis 2 tells us, Adam was molded from the dust of the earth, and Eve was created from Adam's rib. Neither of them had parents. Neither of them was born from a woman. But they were both fully and truly human. In the same way, Jesus was also fully human even though his conception was far beyond ordinary.

And from all that we know from Scripture, Jesus' growth in Mary's womb was also a perfectly natural event, culminating in his birth. He did not appear magically, or descend from heaven at the moment he was born. On the contrary, Matthew 1 and Luke 2 indicate that Mary's pregnancy was at first undetected, but then became obvious. It even caused her fiancé Joseph to question her fidelity, until God told him the truth in a dream. And the final result was that Jesus was born as a real human baby.

**Jesus is fully and completely human. The miraculous conception of Christ in no way minimizes his true humanity. Jesus actually shows us humanity as it's intended to be in the miraculous conception because we see in Christ that we are able to be fully human without being sinful, which is how we'll be in heaven.**

— Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

Having considered Jesus' generation, we are ready to discuss how his body affirms his full humanity.

## Body

Here we have in mind the *Apostles' Creed's* claim that:

**[Jesus] suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
Was crucified, died, and was buried.**

In these words, the creed attributes certain experiences to Jesus that would only have been possible if he was truly a physical human being.

According to accounts of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion in Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, and John 18–19, Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate in a variety of ways. He was flogged, forced to wear a crown of thorns, spit on, mocked, repeatedly struck in the head with a staff, and forced to carry his own cross part of the way to the place of execution.

Jesus' sufferings, crucifixion, death and burial demonstrated that he was a real man with a physical human body — one that could be beaten, one that could bleed, one that could be abused by soldiers, one that could collapse under exhaustion, one that could be killed, and one that could be buried in a tomb when his soul had left it.

And having a real human body was critical because the justice of God required that a genuine human being suffer physical divine judgment to atone for the sins of humanity. We find this emphasis in places like Romans 7:4, Colossians 1:21-22, and Hebrews 10:10.

As just one example, listen to these words from Hebrews 2:14-17:

**Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might ... make atonement for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:14-17).**

As this passage makes clear, Jesus had to be flesh and blood, a physical human being, in order to make atonement for us.

With this understanding of Jesus' generation and body in mind, let's look at the fact that Jesus' soul completed his human nature.

## Soul

Scripture regularly says that human beings consist of a mortal body that houses an immortal soul. It speaks of our souls by many different terms, but the most common are "soul" and "spirit." Based on Hebrews 4:12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:23, some traditions have maintained that "soul" and "spirit" are different parts of our being. But there are approximately 200 verses in which one or the other of these terms is used to refer to all the inner, non-physical aspects of our being as a whole. So, it is best to conclude that the words "soul" and "spirit" both refer to the same underlying reality that man consists of only two main parts: body and soul.

In Luke 23:46, Jesus spoke of his own “soul” or “spirit” as he was dying. Listen to his words there:

**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit (Luke 23:46).**

When Jesus died on the cross, he indicated that while his body would be placed in the grave, his human spirit or soul would be in the hands of God the Father.

As the spiritual side of our being, our soul is the seat of our consciousness. When our bodies die, our souls are separated from our bodies and continue in a conscious state. And the *Apostles' Creed* explains that the same thing happened to Jesus when he died. Specifically, it says:

**He descended into hell.**

Here, the creed states that when Jesus died, his conscious, rational soul was separated from his body. And while his body remained in the tomb, his soul descended into hell. Later in this lesson we will investigate the meaning of this line in more depth. But for now, we simply want to point out that by mentioning Jesus' descent into hell, the *Apostles' Creed* affirms that Jesus had a real human soul.

Finally, in addition to affirming Jesus' humanity through references to his generation, his body, and his soul, the *Apostles' Creed* also speaks of Jesus' resurrection, in which his soul was reunited with his body.

## Resurrection

The resurrection proves that Jesus was a real human being because it reaffirms that his full, glorified human existence included the reunion of his real human body with his real human soul. The resurrection of his body occurred when his human soul was introduced into his perfected human body. Yes, his resurrected body was different in some ways because it had been glorified and was no longer mortal. But this did not make it any less physical or any less human. On the contrary, as we see throughout 1 Corinthians 15, Jesus' resurrected body is the firstfruits of the bodily resurrections of all believers. As such, it shows us what our own human bodies will be like in the future.

Listen to what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23:

**Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man... But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).**

Just as Adam was the first human being to be created, Jesus was the first human being to be resurrected with a glorified body. Others before him had been brought back to life, some of them raised by Jesus himself. And Enoch and Elijah had even been taken

bodily into heaven without dying. But none of these had received glorified, immortal bodies.

But even though Jesus' body is now glorified, it is still fully human — just as we will still be fully human after God has renewed our bodies at the great resurrection of the dead.

**He was an infant baby. He was absolutely dependent upon his mother in his infancy. He grew — Luke tells us that he grew in wisdom, and in stature, and in favor with God and man. We are told that he experienced the same hunger we experience, the same thirst we experience, and on Calvary's cross he experienced death as a human being experiences death. Now, it was far more. He was not only fully human, he was also fully God, but the reality is that Jesus is not only authentic humanity; he is perfected humanity.**

— Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

Now that we have looked at Jesus' humanity in terms of his experiences, let's turn our attention to his human office mentioned in the *Apostles' Creed*, namely the office of Christ.

## OFFICE

Jesus' office is mentioned in these words from the *Apostles' Creed*:

**I believe in Jesus Christ.**

In modern Christianity, many believers are unaware that the word “Christ” is actually the title of Jesus' office rather than part of his personal name. In this regard, the word “Christ” is very similar to words like “king” or “judge.”

We will speak of Jesus' human office in two parts. First, we will survey the Old Testament background to the office known as “Christ.” And second, we will explain how the fulfillment of this office in Jesus points to our Lord's humanity. Let's begin with the Old Testament background to the office known as “Christ.”

## Old Testament Background

The English word “Christ” is a translation of the Greek *christos*, which in turn is a translation of the Old Testament Hebrew word *mashiach* or “messiah,” meaning “anointed one.”

In the days of the Old Testament, the term “anointed one” was a broad term that could be applied to anyone whom God appointed to serve him in a special capacity. For instance, 1 Chronicles 16:22 identifies the prophets as anointed ones. Leviticus 4:3, 5, 16

speaks of anointed priests. And in 1 Samuel 26:9, 11, 16, David referred to Saul as the Lord's anointed because he was the king of Israel.

Listen to the way Leviticus 21:10-12 describes the anointing of the high priest:

**The high priest, the one among his brothers who has had the anointing oil poured on his head and who has been ordained to wear the priestly garments ... has been dedicated by the anointing oil of his God (Leviticus 21:10-12).**

As we see here, the anointing ceremony dedicated people to God's service.

One of the most important uses of the term "anointed one" in the Old Testament applied to the descendants of David that served as kings over Israel and Judah. We see this in places like Psalm 89:38, 51, Psalm 132:10, 17, and 2 Chronicles 6:42. During David's life, God made a covenant with David, promising to establish an unfailing kingdom on earth under the kingship of one of David's descendants. Psalm 89:3-4 summarizes the Lord's covenant with David in this way:

**I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, "I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations." (Psalm 89:3-4).**

Now, it's natural to wonder why the sons of David eventually lost control of the throne, if God had promised it to them. The answer is that the blessings God promised in this covenant were conditioned upon the obedience of each of David's descendants. This conditionality is mentioned explicitly in 2 Chronicles 6:16, Psalm 89:30-32, and Psalm 132:12. So, when David's descendants rebelled against the Lord, they lost their thrones.

For instance, in 922 B.C., during the days of David's grandson Rehoboam, ten tribes were stripped from David's dynasty and given to Jeroboam. We read about this event in 1 Kings 11-12. The tribes that followed Jeroboam came to be known as the kingdom of Israel, and the remnant that followed Rehoboam came to be known as the kingdom of Judah.

Later, in 587 B.C., even the kingdom of Judah was stripped from David's house, when his descendant Jeconiah was dethroned and his kingdom utterly fell to the Babylonians.

Around this time, many prophets foretold that God would send a great "messiah" or "anointed one" in the future. He would be a great king, descended from David, who would restore and reunite the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

**In the Old Testament, the figure who became known as the Messiah was the king — was the king from David's line. David was given a covenant by God, and in that covenant he was promised that one day God would raise up a king who would have a special, unique "son of God" relationship — relationship with God, as his Son, who would reign forever on the throne of David, who would establish justice and righteousness. So really, when we refer to the Old Testament Messiah,**

**we're referring to a king — the ultimate king, the king who would bring God's salvation and deliverance.**

— Dr. Mark Strauss

Many Old Testament prophets talked about the Messiah or Christ as a descendant of David who would return the exiles to the Promised Land and bring God's greatest blessings to the restored nation. For example, we find these types of prophecies in Jeremiah 23:5-8, 30:8-9, and 33:14-17. We see them in Ezekiel 34:20-31, and 37:21-28. And we read them in Zechariah 12–13. As just one example, listen to Jeremiah 23:5-6:

**"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety" (Jeremiah 23:5-6).**

Through prophecies like this, the Old Testament encouraged God's people to long for the Messiah — an anointed king in David's line who would rescue them from their suffering and bring them into God's glorious blessings.

With this understanding of the Old Testament background to the office of Messiah in mind, we are ready to explore how the fulfillment of this office in Jesus points to his humanity.

## **Fulfillment in Jesus**

The New Testament speaks of Jesus as the Christ in over 500 places. So, it almost goes without saying that from a Christian point of view, he is the great Messiah that the Old Testament anticipated. But to remove all doubt, there are two passages in John's gospel where Jesus is called "Messiah," and where John explains that "Messiah" means the same thing as "Christ." These passages are John 1:41, and John 4:25-26. Let's look at just one of these to prove the point.

Listen to these words from Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well in John 4:25-26:

**The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he" (John 4:25-26).**

Here Jesus explicitly admitted to being the Messiah prophesied by the Old Testament. And John explained that the normal word for "messiah" in Greek was *christos*, here translated "Christ." This tells us that whenever we see Jesus referred to as "Christ," we should understand him to be the Messiah prophesied by the Old Testament.

But how does Jesus' role as the Messiah, or Christ, prove that he is truly human? Why couldn't God simply come to earth in his divine glory and save his people? Or why couldn't he send an angel to lead his favored nation?

Well, according to the prophecies of the Old Testament, the Messiah had to be human because he had to be a son of David. As we have seen, God had made a covenant with David specifying that one of his descendants would rule Israel forever. And of course, all of David's descendants were human.

**God forms relationships with sinners through covenant. He does that voluntarily. He is not under any obligation to do so. The initiative is his. It's a sovereign choice of God to enter into covenant with us through the mediation of his own Son. Once God enters into a covenant, he is then, of course, obligated to fulfill the terms of that covenant, whether those terms be for blessing or for cursing. He is not at liberty to break that covenant.**

— Dr. Derek W. H. Thomas

**As surprising as it may sound, God truly obligated himself according to his decree. Whenever he makes a covenant, he is bound to keep its terms. He chooses to obligate himself in this way as a means to accomplish his eternal will for his covenant people. But even though the covenant binds him, it's still an expression of his free will.**

— Dr. Paul Chang, translation

In the case of the covenant with David, God obligated himself to send a human Messiah to save his people. And that Messiah was Jesus.

A second reason is that only a human son of David could be an atoning sacrifice for his people. As we have seen, Hebrews 2:14-17 indicates that the Messiah had to be human. And beyond this, Isaiah 53 adds the requirement that atonement be made by a human son of David.

A third reason the Messiah had to be human was that he had to be the second Adam. That is, he had to succeed where Adam had failed.

When God created humanity, he set up Adam as the head of the entire race, and he appointed humanity to transform the world into God's kingdom. But Adam sinned, plunging humanity into sin and rendering us incapable of performing our appointed task. Genesis 1-3 records this story, and Romans 5:12-19 explains its deep significance. The historical books of the Old Testament, in turn, record how fallen humanity continually tried and failed to build God's kingdom throughout the centuries.

Still, the Father's requirements had not changed — human beings were still responsible to build the kingdom of God. So, eventually the Father sent his own Son to fix the problem. The Son came to build the kingdom for us. But in order to build it on our behalf — in order to take our place — he had to be human himself. Through his righteous life, atoning death, empowered resurrection and heavenly enthronement, Jesus succeeded where Adam and the rest of us had failed. He became humanity's second Adam. And when we are united to Jesus by faith, his success becomes our success, and his power

becomes our empowerment. We are restored to the dignified, important role of building God's kingdom.

So far in our discussion of Jesus' humanity, we have spoken of his various human experiences, as well as of the human office of Messiah or Christ. At this point, we are ready to talk about Jesus' human nature and its relationship to his divine nature.

## NATURE

When we say that Jesus has a human nature, we mean that he possesses all the attributes and traits that are essential to being human — things like a physical human body and a rational human soul.

Throughout church history, many theological battles have been fought over the nature of Christ's humanity. Was he fully human in all respects? Did he have a real flesh and blood body, or did he just appear to be human? Did he have a real human soul, or did his divine person inhabit an empty body? Questions like these may seem rather technical and mysterious, and perhaps even unimportant. But at times arguments over Christ's human nature have threatened to divide the church. They have been the subject of many theological councils, and the stumbling block of numerous heretical sects. Even today false understandings of Christ's humanity can undermine the gospel. So, it's important for every Christian to understand at least the rudimentary aspects of Jesus' human nature.

Faithful Christian theology has consistently maintained that Jesus is fully human in every respect: he has a body and a soul; he was subject to sickness, injury and death; he had normal physical limitations; and so on.

But when we talk about Jesus in this way, the picture quickly becomes complicated because Jesus differs from other human beings in some important ways. For one thing, Jesus is a perfect human being, whereas the rest of us are flawed. And this results in some significant differences between us. For example, every other human being has sinned. We see this theme in 1 Kings 8:46, Psalm 130:3, Psalm 143:2, Romans 5:12, Galatians 3:22, and many other passages. As just one example, consider these words from Romans 3:10-12:

**There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one (Romans 3:10-12).**

But Jesus is different. He was born without sin, and lived a perfectly sinless life. The Bible specifically speaks of his sinlessness in passages like Hebrews 4:14-15, and 9:14. So, how do we reconcile this idea with the assertion that Jesus had a true and complete human nature? Well, the simple answer is that the commission of sin, and even the ability to sin, are not *essential* to being human.

It's true that in the very beginning God created humanity with the ability to sin. Adam and Eve proved this in Genesis 3 when they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But we have to admit that even before they sinned, they were still human. So, it is possible to have a human being that *does not* sin.

And in fact, when we die and go to heaven, we will actually lose the *ability* to sin, as Hebrews 12:23 teaches. But we will still be entirely human. So, while sin characterizes us in this fallen world, it will not characterize us in the next. And therefore, sinfulness is not an essential attribute of humanity. This is why we say that Jesus' human nature includes all the attributes and traits that are *essential* to being human.

Another thing that makes Jesus different is the fact that he is the only person that possesses two natures: a human nature and a divine nature. Every other human being has only one nature: a human nature. But Jesus is both God and man, being both fully human and fully divine at the same time.

Now, the Bible does not explicitly say how Christ's two natures are united in his person. And the difficulties involved in explaining this union led to many controversies in the early church. But eventually the church settled on language that affirmed both Christ's one person and his two natures, without going beyond Scripture in its description of the details.

The technical term we use to describe the existence of both a human and a divine nature in the person of Christ is "hypostatic union." Although this may sound like a strange term to our modern ears, we can understand it when we think of how it was used in the early church. In the early church, "hypostasis" was one of the words that was commonly used to refer to what we call a person, especially a person of the Trinity.

For instance, in chapter 18 of his work *On the Holy Spirit*, the fourth-century church father Basil used the word hypostasis in this way:

**There is one God and Father, one Only-begotten, and one Holy Ghost.  
We proclaim each of the hypostases singly.**

Here, Basil meant the same thing that we would mean if we said "We proclaim each of the persons singly." The doctrine of the hypostatic union then, deals with the union of a divine nature and a human nature within the one hypostasis or person of God the Son. Stated precisely, it says that:

**Jesus is one person with two distinct natures (a divine nature and a human nature) with each nature retaining its own attributes.**

God the Son has always possessed full divinity with all its attributes. And when he was conceived and born as a human being, he added to his person all the essential attributes of a human being, such as a body and soul.

One place the New Testament talks about the hypostatic union is Philippians 2:5-7, where Paul wrote these words:

**Christ Jesus ... being in very nature God ... made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness  
(Philippians 2:5-7).**

Here Paul made it clear that Jesus existed as God and had a fully divine nature. Then, he became incarnate, adding a human nature to the divine nature he already possessed. Now,

Paul's statement that Jesus "made himself nothing," or more literally "emptied himself," has sometimes confused Christians.

Some have mistakenly thought that Jesus actually *put aside* his glory, or even his divine nature. But as we have seen in prior lessons, this is impossible. God's nature is immutable. God can't put aside any of his essential attributes, much less his entire nature.

Fortunately, Paul made the meaning of this phrase very clear by explaining it with two participial phrases: taking the very nature of a servant and being made in human likeness. These phrases tell us *how* Jesus "became nothing" or "emptied himself." Specifically, Jesus emptied himself not by *losing* his divine nature, but by taking on an *additional* nature — a human nature that did not *replace* but merely *veiled* his divine glory.

Perhaps the most famous statement explaining the hypostatic union was the creed of the ecumenical council that met in A.D. 451 in the city of Chalcedon, in northern Asia Minor. The Council of Chalcedon met to defend the traditional doctrines of the person and natures of Christ, and to deny several different heresies regarding these matters.

The statement the council produced is known by several names, including the *Chalcedonian Creed* or "Symbol," and the *Definition of Chalcedon*. Listen to this excerpt from it:

**Our Lord Jesus Christ [is] perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body ... in all things like unto us, without sin ... to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one person and one subsistence.**

Much of the language of the *Chalcedonian Creed* is very technical. But we might summarize it in two points. On the one hand, Jesus has only one person. He does not have two persons or two minds, as if a human person hosted a divine person in his body. And he is not one person that is somehow a combination or hybrid of two distinct persons or minds, as if a divine person merged with a human person. He is and always has been the same eternal person known as the Son of God.

At the same time, Jesus has two distinct natures: a human nature and a divine nature. Both these natures are entire and whole, just as the nature of the Father is entirely divine, and the nature of human beings is entirely human. Jesus possesses every attribute that is essential to divinity *and* every attribute that is essential to humanity.

Moreover, Jesus' two natures are distinct from each other. He does not have a hybrid nature that combines both divine and human attributes. Nor do his human attributes hinder his divine attributes, or his divine attributes enhance his human attributes. Each nature remains entirely unchanged.

**What I think is so intriguing is the way the epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes how crucial it is that the mediator between God and man, the great high priest, be fully God and fully man. He's eternally God, the Creator who sustains all things by the word of his power. He's**

**fully God. And then, Hebrews says, for our sake, because we need a high priest who is fully human, he takes to himself flesh and blood, just as we have. He is our brother. He can intercede for us from the standpoint of one who shares our human nature, who has endured every trial and temptation with absolute obedience, and who knows what it's like to undergo human testing. So we need a human high priest, a brother. We also need a divine high priest who lives forever to intercede for us. And we have that in the one person of Jesus Christ.**

— Dr. Dennis Johnson

Christ's humanity has many implications for the way we live as his followers. As Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:5, it means that we have an effective human mediator between us and God, so that through his death we can be forgiven and live as those fully reconciled to the Father. And as Paul taught in Romans 5:12-19, it means that as the second Adam, Jesus has constituted a new human race out of those who trust in him, restoring us to a position of honor and dignity within creation. Because of this, we now have the power to live in ways that please God, and to change the world to make it more like his heavenly kingdom. And on an individual basis, as we struggle with sin and suffering in our lives, we can approach the throne of grace with confidence, knowing that our fully human savior understands and sympathizes with our pains and weaknesses, making him eager to respond to us in ways that ease our suffering, build our character, and increase our eternal rewards. These are just a few of the countless ways that Christ's full humanity impacts our lives.

So far in our lesson, we have explored both the divinity of Jesus Christ, and his humanity. At this point, we are ready to focus on the work of Christ mentioned in the *Apostles' Creed*.

## WORK

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For the last few hundred years, it has been common for theologians to talk about the work of Jesus in terms of two ideas. First, there is his humiliation, in which he humbled himself by condescending to take on a frail human nature, and to suffer on earth in order to redeem fallen humanity. And second, there is his exaltation, in which God the Father unveiled Christ's hidden divine glory, and heaped additional honor and praise on him. These categories are not explicitly mentioned in the *Apostles' Creed*, but they are very helpful ways for us to think about the work of Jesus.

As we consider Jesus' work in this lesson, we will turn first to his humiliation, those things that hid or veiled his glory. And second, we will consider his exaltation, the work that revealed his glory and that will result in further glory in the future. Let's begin with Christ's humiliation during his earthly ministry.

## HUMILIATION

Jesus' work of humiliation is mentioned in the following lines from the *Apostles' Creed*:

**[He] was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
And born of the Virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
Was crucified, died, and was buried;  
He descended into hell.**

In each of these works, the Son of God caused his glory to be veiled and hidden from sight, and subjected himself to suffering and indignity. Because the Son's divine nature is immutable, it could not be humiliated. So, his humiliation was limited to his human nature. Nevertheless, because his human nature is perfectly united to his person, his divine *person* fully experienced the humiliation.

In this lesson, we will summarize Jesus' works of humiliation under two headings: his incarnation and his passion. Let's begin by looking at his incarnation, when he came to earth as a human being.

### Incarnation

The theological term "incarnation" refers to Jesus permanently taking on a human nature. Literally, the word "incarnation" refers to "taking on flesh," that is, a human body. But as we have seen, Christian theology has regularly maintained that Jesus also took on a human soul. So, when we speak of the incarnation in theology, we are generally referring to Jesus' entire human nature. Scripture speaks of the incarnation of Christ in many places, such as John 1:1, 14; Philippians 2:6-7; and Hebrews 2:14-17.

John 1:1, 14 is probably the source of the technical term "incarnation." Listen to what John wrote there:

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us (John 1:1, 14).**

Notice that John said the Son of God "became flesh" — the literal meaning of incarnation. His point was that Jesus took a real human nature, including a real human body.

In the *Apostles' Creed*, the works associated with Jesus' incarnation are his conception and birth. We previously spoke of these events in terms of Jesus' generation, and demonstrated that they prove his humanity. At this point, we want to consider these same events again, but from the perspective of Jesus' work as Messiah. Why was the incarnation necessary? What did Jesus accomplish by it?

Scripture teaches that Jesus' work of incarnation accomplished at least three things: First, it gave God the Son the legal right to be the Davidic king. Second, it gave him the mercy and sympathy he needed in order to be an effective high priest. And third, the incarnation was necessary in order for Jesus to become an atoning sacrifice for sin. Let's briefly consider each of these points, beginning with the fact that the Davidic king had to be a human being.

We have already mentioned that the messiah had to be human in order for God to keep the promises he made to David. So at this point, we want to consider how Jesus' work of incarnation gave him the right to David's throne. The problem before us is that the legal right to inherit David's throne could only be inherited by sons. So, Jesus could only claim David's throne if he had a human father who descended from David.

To solve this problem, Jesus became incarnate through the Virgin Mary, who was betrothed to Joseph. And as we see in Jesus genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3, Joseph was a direct legal descendant of David. So, when Joseph married Mary and adopted Jesus, Jesus obtained the legal genealogy of Joseph, and with it the right to be the messianic king.

Besides giving God the Son the legal right to be the Davidic king, the incarnation gave the him the mercy and sympathy he needed in order to be an effective high priest on behalf of his people.

**The Bible tells us that Jesus' incarnation made him a high priest who is able to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. And that means that he is a more effective high priest than he would have been or could have been had he not known the fullness of what it is to be human and experience that with and for us. There are a variety of ways that that's manifested. One is that Jesus in his own life and experience dealt with and encountered the same range of human problems in the fallen world that we do, that God in the flesh knows the same kind of heartaches and sorrows and disappointments and betrayals and wounds that anyone who lives in this fallen world experiences. This is not something theoretical to him, this is not something that he stood off in the deep bowels of space, in the dusty past of eternity and speculated about. It's something that he came into the world in our poor flesh, in our poor blood and experienced himself.**

— Dr. J Ligon Duncan III

The author of Hebrews discussed this aspect of the incarnation in Hebrews 2:17-18. Listen to what he wrote there:

**[Jesus] had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God ... Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Hebrews 2:17-18).**

In addition to giving Jesus the right to be the Davidic king and the experience to be an effective high priest, the incarnation enabled Jesus to become an atoning sacrifice for the sins of his people.

As we saw earlier in this lesson, Jesus had to be human in order to die in place of his people. But why was his humanity so essential to the atonement? The answer is that God had imposed human death as the penalty for human sin. Scripture teaches this in Genesis 2:17, Romans 5:12 and 6:23, James 1:15, and many other places. Beginning with Adam, sin spread to the entire human race, and it brought the legal penalty of human death. This is why only a real, flesh-and-blood human death could satisfy God's requirement.

Listen to the way Paul explained the connection between Jesus' humanity and our salvation in Romans 5:15-19:

**If the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! ... For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ... For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous (Romans 5:15-19).**

Over and over again, Paul emphasized that Jesus' human righteousness was the counterpart and cure to Adam's human sin. Paul made it abundantly clear that Jesus had to be human in order to fix what Adam had broken. He had to be human in order to take the penalty that God imposed on humanity, and in order to spread his righteousness to other human beings.

**Sometimes we as conservative, as evangelical Christians, so emphasize the deity of Christ that we forget that it's really his humanity that saves us. Because Jesus became a true human being, he could suffer and die for us, for our sins. So, Jesus' humanity is essential to our salvation.**

— Dr. Mark Strauss

With this understanding of Jesus' incarnation in mind, let's explore his passion, the second aspect of his work of humiliation mentioned in the *Apostles' Creed*.

## Passion

The theological term “passion” comes from the Greek verb *pascho*, meaning “suffer.” It refers to Jesus’ suffering and death, beginning the night of his arrest. Jesus’ passion is mentioned in these lines of the *Apostles’ Creed*.

**He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
Was crucified, died, and was buried;  
He descended into hell.**

Most Christians are familiar with the story of Jesus arrest, suffering and crucifixion. So rather than explore those details here, we’ll focus on the reason that Jesus subjected himself to these events.

With regard to Jesus’ suffering, Scripture explains that it was necessary to teach Jesus obedience, and to commend him to God the Father. As we read in Hebrews 5:8:

**[Jesus] learned obedience from what he suffered (Hebrews 5:8).**

And as Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:20-21:

**If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:20-21).**

Through his suffering, Christ fulfilled the Father’s will, and thereby commended himself to the Father. By perfectly obeying the Father, he earned an eternal reward — a reward that he now graciously shares with us.

But Christ’s treatment under Pilate did not end with suffering; it carried through to his death by crucifixion. This is perhaps the best known aspect of Christ’s work of humiliation, and for good reason: it was his death that atoned for our sin and accomplished our salvation.

**The death of the Lord Jesus for sin (that’s how it’s presented all the way through the New Testament) worked, if one can put it this way, because he became our penal substitute. “Substitute” means he took our place, and “penal” points to the fact that he took our place in enduring the judgment, the penalty, which all of us had merited by our own transgressions of God’s law — the penalty, that is, with which God had threatened us for breaking his law. God’s nature is such, I mean this is his holiness in reality, his nature is such that where there has been sin, there has to be retribution. And the wonderful, wise, loving way of salvation that God planned was to divert the penalty from our guilty shoulders, if I can put it that way, onto the innocent, flawless shoulders of his incarnate Son, who thus**

**fulfills the pattern of the flawless animal sacrifice that was demanded all through the Old Testament.**

— Dr. J. I. Packer

The apostle Paul often described the crucifixion as the very heart of the gospel. We see this in places like Romans 6:6, 1 Corinthians 1:17-18, Galatians 6:14, and Colossians 1:20. As just one example, listen to his words in Galatians 2:20-21:

**I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing! (Galatians 2:20-21).**

Christ's death was the central work that accomplished our salvation. And for this reason, it has been the central fact of gospel presentations throughout history.

After Jesus' crucifixion, his body was buried in a tomb, where it remained lifeless for three days. Being fully human, Jesus underwent the normal human experience of death. The *Apostles' Creed* records this fact in the words he descended into hell. At this time, Jesus' body remained in the tomb while his soul descended to the place of the dead.

Now, we should mention that modern theologians are not entirely agreed over the meaning of the phrase "he descended into hell." Many churches today interpret this line to mean only that Jesus was buried. But it seems clear that this is not the meaning the *Apostles' Creed* itself intended.

For one thing, the creed mentions *both* that Jesus was buried, *and* that he descended into hell. To all appearances, these phrases are separate and consecutive items in the historical record.

For another thing, while it is true that the phrase "hell" can simply mean "under the ground," its use in Scripture and in the writings of the early church almost always refers to the underworld that contains the souls of the dead. We might think of this as its default meaning in the early church — the meaning ancient Christians usually had in mind when they used the word "hell."

For these reasons, it's best to conclude that the *Apostles' Creed* intended to teach that Jesus' soul really descended into the underworld between the time of his death and resurrection. But what was the *nature* of this hell?

In the ancient world, the universe was often described in the language of a vertical structure. The earth, where human beings lived, was in the middle. Heaven, the realm of God and his angels, was spoken of as being in the sky. And beneath the earth was a shadowy underworld where all the souls of the dead resided. In the Hebrew Old Testament, it was most commonly called *sheol*; in the Greek New Testament and in Greek translations of the Old Testament, it was normally called *hades*.

In the Old Testament, the souls of both the good and the wicked were said to reside there as they awaited the final judgment. In the New Testament, however, *hades* usually refers to the abode of the wicked souls, as in Luke 10:15. Nevertheless, at least before Jesus' resurrection, the New Testament also confirms that the souls of the

righteous were in *hades*. Most notably, Acts 2:27-29 speaks of the righteous man king David as being in *hades*.

Now, this does not mean that everyone in *hades* or hell was treated equally. Jesus' parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, found in Luke 16:19-31, indicates that a great gulf divided the souls of the wicked from the souls of the righteous. And while the wicked suffered in torment, the righteous were comforted. In this parable, Abraham resided in the place of comfort. For this reason, theologians have often called this part of *hades* "Abraham's Side" or more literally "Abraham's Bosom."

The church father Tertullian, who wrote in the early third century, expressed the common belief in this division of *hades*. Listen to what he wrote in chapter 17 of his work *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*:

**That souls are even now susceptible of torment and of blessing in Hades ... is proved by the case of Lazarus.**

And the church father Ignatius, writing in A.D. 107, had this to say in his *Epistle to the Trallians*:

**By those under the earth, [I mean] the multitude that arose along with the Lord. For says the Scripture, "Many bodies of the saints that slept arose," their graves being opened. He descended, indeed, into Hades alone, but He arose accompanied by a multitude; and rent asunder that means of separation which had existed from the beginning of the world.**

So, when the creed says that Jesus descended into hell, the most likely meaning is that his human soul descended to the place of the departed spirits. Specifically, he descended to the region reserved for the souls of the righteous, and not to the region where the wicked are tormented. Jesus' stay in this part of hell was a necessary part of his work because it subjected his soul to the judicial punishment of true human death.

Jesus' passion shows us what it means to be truly human in a fallen world. If even our perfect Lord had to suffer as he opposed and remedied sin, then surely we who are imperfect will also suffer. In fact, as Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:12, suffering is guaranteed for everyone who seeks to live a godly life. But Scripture also teaches that when we suffer, Christ suffers. This means that he is sympathetic to our pain, and eager to comfort us. And as Paul taught in Colossians 1:24, eventually Christ's suffering through us will be complete. And when that happens, he will return in glory and we will receive our eternal inheritances. Our suffering is not without purpose; it is a means God is using to bring about the full restoration of all creation.

Now that we have looked at Jesus' work of humiliation, we should consider his work of exaltation, when his divine glory was revealed once again.

## EXALTATION

When we talk about Christ's exaltation, it's important to remember that it was more than an unveiling of his veiled glory. By his humiliation, the Son earned even greater glory than he originally possessed. He performed works that the Father blessed, and his sacrifice purchased a people for his own inheritance, as well as the right to sit on the throne of the kingdom of God. By these works, the Son's merit, worthiness and glory actually increased as a result of his humiliation.

The *Apostles' Creed* mentions Christ's exaltation in the following articles:

**The third day he rose again from the dead.**

**He ascended into heaven**

**And is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.**

**From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

Christ's divine nature was always immutably exalted. It had not been subjected to death, or removed from his throne in heaven. So, the exaltation of the Son of God was limited to his human nature. Still, like every other experiences of Christ in his human nature, his divine *person* fully experienced the exaltation.

Our discussion of Christ's exaltation will divide into four parts. First, we will speak of Christ's resurrection from the dead. Second, we will talk about his ascension into heaven. Third, we will explore the meaning of his enthronement at the Father's right hand. And fourth, we will mention the future judgment he will render. Let's begin with Christ's resurrection from the dead three days after his crucifixion.

## Resurrection

Many Christians don't realize this, but Christ's resurrection was just as important to our salvation as his death was. This is why 1 Peter 3:21 talks about being saved by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You see, our salvation is not merely something that Christ purchased on our behalf, and then gave to us as a gift, even though we often describe it that way. Rather, it is a gift that Jesus gives to us *by means of* our union with him — this is the idea of being “in Christ” that we hear so much about in the letters of the New Testament.

We are forgiven through his death because, through our union with him, we died with him on the cross. And we gain eternal life because we were also raised in new life through his resurrection. Scripture speaks about this in Romans 6:3-11, and 8:10-11, 2 Corinthians 5:14 and 13:4, Colossians 2:11–3:3, and many other places. As just one example, Paul wrote these words in Romans 6:4-5:

**We were ... buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him**

**like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection (Romans 6:4-5).**

In short, the work that Christ did by rising from the dead ensured that we too would have new spiritual life when we come to faith, and that in the future we will receive our own resurrected and glorified bodies, just like his. In this sense, his exaltation is also our exaltation, bringing us dignity, glory and honor.

**In dying Jesus is placed beyond the power of sin. You cannot tempt a dead man. He's placed beyond their demonic powers. But sin turns Jesus over to death, his mightiest ally. So he allows Jesus to meet death, and in meeting death, Jesus conquers death. And the implications of that for his people are stupendous. So, in Revelation 1:18, Jesus the risen glorious Christ declares, I am the living one, I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and hell. He used them to free himself, but he still retains them because one day he will use those keys to liberate his people from bondage to death.**

— Dr. Knox Chamblin

**Not only is the cross and the resurrection of Jesus the means by which we can receive forgiveness of sins, atonement for our sins, but as important and maybe even more importantly, the resurrection begins the new and final age of the world. The new creation (as the scriptures call it) begins at that tomb, that empty tomb. It is the new epicenter/ the new focal point, the new hinge of history itself. We are now all living in the end times, because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He has inaugurated this beginning of the end, and the hope for the Christian is that that beginning will now find its consummation at the second coming of Christ, which is called, according to the Scriptures, a new creation itself.**

— Dr. Jonathan Pennington

In addition to the work of resurrection, Jesus' exaltation also included his ascension from earth into heaven.

## **Ascension**

The ascension was the event where Jesus was taken bodily into heaven. Forty days after his resurrection, Jesus rose on the clouds into heaven. Luke described the ascension in both Luke 24:50-51, and Acts 1:6-11.

Jesus' work of ascension accomplished many things that he could not do while he was still on earth. For example, in John 14:2-3, Jesus told the apostles that he was ascending to prepare places for them in heaven. And in John 16:7, he said that he could not send the Holy Spirit to empower the church for ministry unless he first ascended to heaven.

Beyond this, Jesus actually had to ascend to heaven in order to complete the work of atonement that he began on the cross. The author of Hebrews argued this point in chapters 8–9 of his book. In summary, he said that the earthly temple was a copy of the temple in heaven. And he compared Christ's atonement to the work that earthly high priests performed on the annual Day of Atonement, when they would take the blood of the sacrifice into the Most Holy Place and sprinkle it on the altar, thereby obtaining forgiveness for the people's sins. In the same way, Jesus entered the Most Holy Place of the true temple in heaven, and sprinkled his own blood on the altar. And this completed the ceremony of the sacrifice that Jesus had begun on the cross.

Listen to the way Hebrews 9:11-12 describes Christ's atoning work in heaven:

**When Christ came as high priest ... he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation... [H]e entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:11-12).**

Moreover, as our high priest in heaven, Christ continues to intercede for us, continually pleading the benefits of his atonement on our behalf when we sin. Theologians commonly refer to Christ's ongoing work in the heavenly temple as his session. And it is this session that makes our salvation secure. Hebrews 7:24-25 describes his session in this way:

**Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them (Hebrews 7:24-25).**

As we see here, Jesus' ascension into heaven was a critical aspect of his redemptive work. Without it, we could not be saved.

Having spoken of Christ's resurrection and ascension, we are ready to address his enthronement in heaven at the right hand of God.

## **Enthronement**

The New Testament mentions Jesus' enthronement at the right hand of God the Father in many, many places. The basic idea is that Jesus is our great human king, and that he has a throne in heaven that sits to the right of the Father's great throne. In this scenario, the Father is the great high king or suzerain, and the Son is the lesser king or vassal that serves him. This follows the model of kingdoms in the ancient world, whereby

lesser kings would rule over various portions of a great empire, and pay tribute and render service to the emperor.

**Normally when we think about the kingship of Christ, we think of that as something very exalted, high up there, and because Jesus is now at the right hand of God the Father, and he is the King. But we must remember that Jesus was exalted in his kingship in his human nature. That's to say, in his divine nature, Jesus was always the King. He was always ruling as the sovereign over all things, but Jesus was given authority in heaven and earth in his human nature. And Jesus is the Son of David, and therefore the one who represents the nation of Israel, and the people of God. And the Son of David, like David himself, was a vassal king; he was a servant of the greater king, God the Father in heaven.**

— Dr. Richard Pratt, Jr.

In passages that mention Jesus in his role as king, he is also spoken of as a priest who intercedes for his people. This follows the model of the ancient world in which kings commonly served as priests. For example, Melchizedek was both priest and king in Genesis 14.

When Scripture speaks of Jesus' position at the Father's right hand, it sometimes emphasizes his role as our messianic king, as in Acts 2:30-36, Ephesians 1:18-23, Hebrews 1:3-9 and 1 Peter 3:21-22.

At other times, though, the Bible highlights Jesus' role as our high priest who intercedes for us. We find this emphasis in passages like Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 8:1.

In both cases, though, the meaning is the same: Jesus has authority and power over all creation, which he rules over on behalf of the Father. And in that position, he brings salvation to his people, and ensures that the Father looks on them favorably.

After Jesus' resurrection from the dead, ascension into heaven, and enthronement at the Father's right hand, the *Apostles' Creed* mentions the judgment Christ will render on the last day.

## Judgment

When the creed says that Jesus will return in judgment, it states that he will come from there, that is, from his throne at the right hand of God. The idea is that Jesus is the human king over all creation, and that he will render royal judgment against those who have violated his laws and not respected his kingship and kingdom. We see this in Scriptures such as Luke 22:30, Acts 17:31, and 2 Thessalonians 1:5 and 4:1.

The final judgment will include both the living and the dead, that is, everyone who has ever lived, including all those who are alive when Jesus returns. Every word, thought and action of every person will be judged on the basis of God's character. And the horrible truth is that every human being will be found guilty of sin and condemned to death.

The good news is that those who are united to Christ by faith will already have undergone judgment through Christ's death, and will already have been vindicated by Christ's resurrection. So, at the judgment, they will receive an eternal blessing and inheritance.

But the bad news is that those who are not found in Christ will have to bear the full brunt of God's wrath in their own persons. They will be cast into hell for all eternity.

**In our day today the doctrine of the last judgment is not very popular. I suppose, though, things haven't changed very much, for I don't think judgment was ever attractive to human beings. I would argue that it is absolutely vital to proclaim the judgment — that we ought to proclaim that there is eternal hell for those who do not put their trust in Christ.**

— Dr. Tom Schreiner

**One of the reasons that we talk about hell is because it's the truth. And we dare not escape the truth. And there's a lot of half truth and sometimes even ninety percent truth, but if you're going to evangelize well, and you're going to evangelize with the truth, you've got to talk about ultimate judgment. So we talk about hell and need to. One of the things we recognize about hell is it reminds us who is the judge. We are not; he is. It reminds us about personal responsibility. It reminds us about urgency. It reminds us about eternity. Lots of things that hell can come to us with that, simply, it's going to be very difficult to approach evangelism minus hell. So we talk about it. But remember, we talk about it most of all because it's the truth and we do not want to escape the truth.**

— Dr. Matt Friedeman

## CONCLUSION

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In this lesson, we have explored the articles of faith in the *Apostles' Creed* that speak of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have considered his full divinity, including his divine nature and his relationship to the other members of the Trinity. We have also explored his full humanity, including the relationship between his divine and human natures. And we have summarized his work, from the beginning of his humiliation to his ultimate exaltation.

For those of us who call ourselves Christians, and for all those who want to understand Christianity, it is critical to have a solid grasp of the person and the work of Christ. Jesus is the centerpiece of our religion — the person that sets us apart from all

other systems of belief. He is the ruler of the universe, and the fulcrum on which all of history turns. He is our God, our high priest, and our king. And salvation is nothing less than knowing him, loving him, and finding life in union with him.

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