

## Christ's Redemption

## **The Gospel Coalition Booklets**

Edited by D. A. Carson & Timothy Keller

Gospel-Centered Ministry *by D. A. Carson and Timothy Keller*

The Restoration of All Things *by Sam Storms*

The Church: God's New People *by Tim Savage*

Creation *by Andrew M. Davis*

The Holy Spirit *by Kevin L. DeYoung*

What Is the Gospel? *by Bryan Chapell*

The Plan *by Colin S. Smith*

Can We Know the Truth? *by Richard D. Phillips*

Sin and the Fall *by Reddit Andrews III*

Justification *by Philip Graham Ryken*

Baptism and the Lord's Supper *by Thabiti Anyabwile & J. Ligon Duncan*

The Gospel and Scripture: How to Read the Bible *by Mike Bullmore*

The Kingdom of God *by Stephen Um*

---

# Christ's Redemption

---

*Sandy Willson*

---

 **CROSSWAY**  
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

*Christ's Redemption*

Copyright © 2011 by The Gospel Coalition

Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street  
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law.

Cover design: Matthew Wahl

First printing 2011

Printed in the United States of America

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture references are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 Biblica. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved. The “NIV” and “New International Version” trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica. Use of either trademark requires the permission of Biblica.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are from the ESV® Bible (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-2792-0

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-2793-7

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-2794-4

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-2795-1

---

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

VP        20   19   18   17   16   15   14   13   12   11  
14   13   12   11   10   9   8   7   6   5   4   3   2   1

# Contents

Christ, the Eternal Son	8
Christ, Our Humble Savior	8
Christ, Our Exalted Lord	11
Christ, Our Representative and Substitute	14
Christ, Our Only Hope	17
Christ, Our All in All	20

We believe that, moved by love and in obedience to his Father, the eternal Son became human: the Word became flesh, fully God and fully human being, one Person in two natures. The man Jesus, the promised Messiah of Israel, was conceived through the miraculous agency of the Holy Spirit, and was born of the virgin Mary. He perfectly obeyed his heavenly Father, lived a sinless life, performed miraculous signs, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead on the third day, and ascended into heaven. As the mediatorial King, he is seated at the right hand of God the Father, exercising in heaven and on earth all of God's sovereignty, and is our High Priest and righteous Advocate. We believe that by his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus Christ acted as our representative and substitute. He did this so that in him we might become the righteousness of God: on the cross he canceled sin, propitiated God, and by bearing the full penalty of our sins, reconciled to God all those who believe. By his resurrection Christ Jesus was vindicated by his Father, broke the power of death and defeated Satan who once had power over it, and brought everlasting life to all his people; by his ascension he has been forever exalted as Lord and has prepared a place for us to be with him. We believe that salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved. Because God chose the lowly things of this world, the despised things, the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, no human being can ever boast before him—Christ Jesus has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

—THE GOSPEL COALITION STATEMENT OF FAITH

---

**W**hen one of my sons graduated from college, it was the tradition at his alma mater to have a bacalaureate service on the night before commencement. Historically, of course, bacalaureate services were established for a minister of the gospel to deliver a sermon. Today, however, unless the institution hosting the bacalaureate service is evangelical, one does not expect a Christian sermon to be preached, and I certainly wasn't expecting such a sermon in this case. As a matter of fact, a Jewish rabbi had been invited to deliver the bacalaureate address, a rabbi I happened to know. He is bright, winsome, and interesting, so I was not surprised to find his address uplifting, practical, and thoughtful. In fact, it is the best I remember; I found that I agreed with everything he said with no exceptions.

As I walked away from that experience, I couldn't help but reflect on the state of much Christian preaching today. It is usually less interesting than the rabbi's preaching, and it often contains nothing with which the rabbi himself would disagree. Many of the sermons preached on TV and radio and in church pulpits are sadly devoid of anything distinctly Christian. They often consist of "common sense" things with which people of good will are generally in agreement. We often simply offer the same practical "how to" wisdom that others offer, except that we make reference to a Bible story or a Bible truth. My friend the rabbi also uses stories and principles from both the Old Testament and the New Testament, and he does it exceedingly well. So what should be distinctive about Christian preaching?

Christian preaching is fundamentally about Jesus Christ and what he has done to redeem his people. The gospel proclaims him. The gospel glorifies God the Father by glorifying Christ. If we misunderstand or misinterpret who Christ is and what Christ did, we endanger our eternal salvation. At the heart of The Gospel Coalition's Confessional Statement, therefore, is our declaration concerning Jesus Christ and his great work of redemption. This is at the heart of what we teach, preach, and counsel.

## Christ, the Eternal Son

“We believe that, moved by love and in obedience to his Father . . .”

From the beginning, our Confessional Statement addresses this question: “Why would Jesus Christ do what he did?” What we learn from the Bible is that there is only one explanation: Jesus Christ loves us, not because of who we are but because of who he is. There is no way to understand Jesus Christ apart from love. Love motivated everything he did. If we cannot receive love, we cannot receive Christ. If we cannot give love, we cannot serve Christ. The grand motive behind all of his words and deeds, behind his great sacrifice for us, is his undeserved, unmerited, unmitigated love for us.

What makes this love all the more amazing is that before Jesus Christ came to earth, he existed as the second person of the Godhead, the eternal Son of God. John says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). John also calls him the “One and Only” son (John 1:14). He was “before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light” (Nicene Creed). From all eternity he was perfectly happy, coequal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. He was not in need of friends, for he had intimate, infinitely satisfying communion with his Father and thus enjoyed all the pleasures of eternal bliss.

The love that moved him to leave his blessed environment and come to this earth is a love he shares with his Father from all eternity—for us! Jesus said that he came to do his Father’s will, and his Father’s will is that his people should be saved. The Son of God shares completely in that loving intention—a love so pure, so powerful, and so gracious that men and angels can never comprehend it.

## Christ, Our Humble Savior

“. . . the eternal Son became human . . .”

One of the most remarkable characteristics of Jesus Christ is his humility. One cannot fathom the depth of humility that is required to leave heaven’s throne to be born on earth of a poor peasant woman. Thousands of hymns and poems have been written in an attempt to capture this amazing reality.

Thou Who wast rich beyond all splendor,  
All for love’s sake becamest poor;

Thrones for a manger didst surrender,  
Sapphire-paved courts for stable floor.  
Thou Who wast rich beyond all spendor,  
All for love's sake becamest poor.<sup>1</sup>

Paul joins the chorus when he says: “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Phil. 2:6–8).

This humility was necessary for human beings to be saved from our plight. Our circumstances were such that we could not be saved by human effort. What Jesus Christ did for us, we could never do for ourselves. The only way we could ever be rescued was for God to condescend to our miserable condition in our broken world. He had to come and get us. And that's exactly what he did.

The life of Jesus Christ can be divided into two historical sequences: his humiliation and his exaltation. When we speak of his humiliation, we usually include his incarnation, his perfect submission to the law of God, and his suffering, death, and burial. One can see this sequence in our Confessional Statement. Each of these aspects of his humiliation is essential to the redemption of God's people, and, therefore, it is right and good for us to believe these things, to contemplate them, to celebrate them, and to live in light of them.

### *His Incarnation*

“ . . . the Word became flesh, fully God and fully human being, one Person in two natures. The man Jesus, the promised Messiah of Israel, was conceived through the miraculous agency of the Holy Spirit, and was born of the virgin Mary.”

The conception and birth of Jesus Christ is not just unusual or miraculous but rather *sui generis* (of its own kind; unique). To be sure, in the Old Testament there are some highly unusual conceptions and births, the chief of which would be Abraham (ninety-nine years of age) and Sarah (ninety years of age) giving birth to Isaac. There are also the peculiar births of Samuel (1 Samuel 1), Samson (Judges 13), and John the Baptist (Luke 1), but all these, as well as

Sandy Willson

every other birth that has ever occurred, involved a human father and a human mother.

Only in the case of Jesus of Nazareth was a human being conceived and born of only one human parent and God. Through the years, and even today, some have said that the doctrine of the virgin birth is nice but not necessary, something we should not fight over, or about which we should not get too exercised. On the contrary, the great theologian Athanasius (AD 296–373) taught that the full humanity of Christ was necessary because God could save only what Christ became, so if Christ were not fully human, humans could not be fully saved. Anselm (AD 1033–1109) taught that Christ must be fully God in order for his sacrifice to be sufficient for all God’s people; otherwise one man could, at best, be substituted for only one other person.

We still believe this today, not primarily because Anselm and Athanasius taught it, but because Matthew’s and Luke’s God-breathed writings teach it (Matthew 1; Luke 1–2). How can we understand the depth of Christ’s humility in the incarnation? If Bill and Melinda Gates left their palatial home on the West Coast and took up residence in the middle of the Kibera slums in Nairobi, Kenya, they still would not touch the level of self-denial that Jesus endured to take on our flesh. What a loving Savior, indeed!

### *His Perfect Submission to the Father*

“He perfectly obeyed his heavenly Father, lived a sinless life, performed miraculous signs . . .”

Not too long ago, my church, Second Presbyterian in Memphis, Tennessee, gave my wife and me a sabbatical, and we spent four weeks traveling about. On each Sunday we visited a different church, and I was shocked to hear preachers on two consecutive Sundays, hundreds of miles apart, make apologies to their congregations for Christ’s impatience, testiness, and insensitivity. I could hardly believe what I was hearing. Who do these preachers think they are? Do they understand the implications of their heresy? Do they realize that if Christ were a sinner of any type or degree that he would have been a “blemished” sacrifice, unworthy to atone for our sins?

But, praise God, the Bible declares that he is a worthy sacrifice for us because, although tempted in every way as we are, he never sinned—in thought, word, or deed. Not only is his life a worthy sacrifice for