






A CHRISTIAN'S POCKET GUIDE TO
JESUS CHRIST






Those who get a glimpse of Christ's glory are astonished. People can descend 35,000 feet below the sea into the Marianas Trench, but our skill fails us when we probe the depths of Christ's person and work. But faith seeks understanding, and love wants to know its Beloved. Mark Jones has served us well by writing this short introduction to the doctrine of Christ. His book is biblical, clear, and rooted in historic Reformed theology. It is an excellent tool for personal study or for classes in church or school.

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Who is Jesus Christ? Our answer to that question will determine our eternity. What we believe *about* Jesus is essential to our belief *in* Jesus. In this book, Dr. Mark Jones helps to answer hard questions about the person and work of Jesus Christ in a simple and clear manner. This book is an excellent tool for evangelism and discipleship, and it is a much-needed resource for new believers, laypeople, and pastors alike.



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AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTOLOGY



MARK JONES

CHRISTIAN
FOCUS







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PREFACE



The topic of Christology concerns the person and work of Jesus Christ, the God-man (*theanthropos*). In theology, Christology has an importance that cannot be overstated. Christ's person and work are the central point of Christian theology. Yet we are far more comfortable discussing his work (what he did), than we are understanding his person (who he is). This is understandable given the incomprehensible mystery of the union of the infinite (God) and the finite (man) in one person. In writing this book, then, I am conscious that if more work is needed in helping us to be good 'Christologists' it falls especially in the area of knowing the person of Christ. After all, is it not paramount that we have correct views about the one we believe is 'distinguished among ten thousand' (S. of S. 5:10)?



The structure of this book is simple. First, I will provide an understanding of who Jesus is (that is his person). Second, I will look briefly at Christ's work as prophet, priest, and king in his twofold state of humiliation and exaltation. Readers must keep in mind that my main focus in this book is helping Christians to come to a better understanding of the person of Christ, so that even the section on his work will highlight the organic connection between what he did and who he is. Finally, we will look at the glory of Christ. The goal of redemption is the believer's vision of that glory. This vision constitutes true blessedness (or the "beatific vision"). The vision and glory of Christ in that vision have an organic connection to doctrines about his person and work, and represent the culmination of all Christology. For as the study of doctrines about Christ results (ideally) in an apprehension of him by faith, so faith results, inevitably, in our one day beholding the glory of God in the face of his beloved Son (2 Cor. 3:18).

I am very thankful to Philip Ross who first contacted me and encouraged me to write this book. He reminded me of my 'fearfully expensive' book on Thomas Goodwin's Christology. This book is not a summary of my work on Goodwin, but I acknowledge a great deal of intellectual debt to Goodwin and to John Owen, whose writings on Christ remain, for me, the model for Christian theologians: rigorous interaction with the text of Scripture; a comprehensive understanding of

the broader Christian tradition; and an incessant desire to make sure that the profound truths of Christ the mediator are applied to the hearts and minds of those he mediated for.

This is not technically an academic book, but a book for everyone, so I have sought to keep it simple, which is not always easy given the topic under consideration. There are a host of other areas of Christology that have not been discussed (for example, the names of Christ) that are worthy of a book-length project. The specific areas I have chosen are deliberate given what I believe to be a dearth in popular works on Christology.

The feedback provided by Ruben and Heidi Zartman has been invaluable; their labors in reading through this manuscript have contributed to the merit of this book. My doctoral student, Rev. Ryan McGraw, also provided numerous suggestions that I have been happy to take on. I would also like to thank my congregation at Faith Vancouver Presbyterian Church for their constant encouragement and their desire to hear Christ preached weekly from the pulpit. As always, I thank my wife, who has acted as a superwoman over the last year with the arrival of our twin boys, Thomas and Matthew.

I take this opportunity to dedicate this book to two older couples in my congregation who have been particularly helpful to (and patient with) their young minister: Don and Chris Robertson, and Paul and Bernace Walker.

THE CHALCEDONIAN CREED

The finest ecumenical statement on the person of Christ comes from the well-known fifth century document, the Chalcedonian Creed (451 AD). After many intense and complicated debates, the council of bishops present at Chalcedon agreed on the following statement:

*We, then, following the holy Fathers,
all with one consent,
teach men to confess one and the same Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ,
the same perfect in Godhead
and also perfect in manhood;
truly God and truly man,
of a reasonable soul and body;
consubstantial with us according to the manhood;
in all things like unto us, without sin;
begotten before all ages of the Father
according to the Godhead,
and in these latter days,
for us and for our salvation,
born of the virgin Mary,
the mother of God,
according to the manhood;
one and the same Christ,
Son,
Lord,*

*Only-begotten,
 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,
 not parted or divided into two persons,
 but one and the same Son,
 and only begotten,
 God the Word,
 the Lord Jesus Christ,
 as the prophets from the beginning
 have declared concerning him,
 and the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us,
 and the Creed of the holy Fathers
 has handed down to us.*

This ecumenical creed has been embraced by the Western church. The issue before us is how we relate the biblical evidence about Jesus of Nazareth with the Chalcedonian affirmation of one person who has two natures. This is not easy, but it is glorious; and when speaking about the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8) we should expect nothing less, despite our own frailties in knowledge of divine truths.

THE PERSON OF CHRIST

Questions are often a valuable way to understand truth. A number of questions could be asked in order to help us understand the person of Christ. For example, when Jesus was a young man helping his father Joseph in carpentry, would it have been appropriate for Jesus to ask what a certain tool was? Or, because he was also fully God, did Christ already know the answer, thus making any question superfluous? Again, we could ask, did Christ, who is the eternal Son of God, need to pray? Or did he merely pray as an example for believers? A trickier question—one that most answer wrongly, in my experience—is: does Christ have one will or two wills? Moreover, did he live by faith or by sight while he ministered on earth? And did he retain his human

nature after going to heaven? These questions and many more have been answered in different ways by thoughtful Christians. Our answers to these questions depend entirely upon the view we have of Christ's person.

Perhaps we should consider a more fundamental question before we answer the others, that is: Why did Christ come to earth? Christology involves understanding the person and work of Christ—his person ordinarily discussed in Scripture before his work (see John 1 and Heb. 1–2). These two aspects of Christology are so inter-related that it is practically impossible to discuss his person without also discussing his work. Nor is it possible to appreciate his work apart from understanding who he is; and knowing who he is enables us to understand why he alone is able to save sinners!

CUR DEUS HOMO?

(*'WHY DID GOD BECOME MAN?'*)

As a starting point for the investigation of Christology, I will consider the question posed by the brilliant eleventh-century theologian, Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109). He wrote a famous work titled *Cur Deus homo?*, which may be translated 'Why did God become man?' This question has been answered differently by many great theologians, even those from within the same theological tradition.

One can detect obvious strains of Anselm's thinking in Reformed theologians during the time of the Reformation and indeed in subsequent centuries. For

example, following Anselm's thought on the necessity of Christ's satisfaction, theologians such as John Calvin and John Owen held to the view that Christ came into the world to repair the damage done by sin.¹ However, the Puritan theologian Thomas Goodwin argued that Christ was ordained as mediator for 'higher ends' than the salvation of God's people. According to Goodwin, the principal reason that the Son of God became man was not that sinners might be saved by his meritorious work, though of course that was also a reason. Rather, in Goodwin's view, the benefits procured by Christ 'are all far inferior to the gift of his person unto us, and much more the glory of his person itself. His person is of infinite more worth than they all can be of.'² Therefore, God's 'chief end was not to bring Christ into the world for us, but us for Christ...and God contrived all things that do fall out, and even redemption itself, for the setting forth of Christ's glory, more than our salvation.'³ These are remarkable words. But Goodwin was not alone in his view. Another Puritan, Stephen Charnock, equally affirmed that there is 'something in Christ more excellent and comely than the office of a Saviour; the greatness of his person is more excellent, than the salvation procured by his death.'⁴ Perhaps the most glorious statement on Christ's person comes from Paul's letter to the Colossians where he speaks of Christ as the 'image of the invisible God' (Col. 1:15; see also Heb. 1:3). The words that follow from that proclamation of Christ's person indicate that all that Christ has done, and continues to do, depend on and reflect the glory of his person.

I cannot help but think that the emphases of Goodwin and Charnock are sorely missing in many modern treatments on the topic of Christology—and perhaps even in our own views of Christ—where the glory of his person takes an obvious back-seat to what he has done for us. The glory of Christ is not an appendix to the topic of Christology. As it is the culmination of all we can say about his person and work, so his glory provides the most basic reason for saying it, in that it is the basis for and the fullness of our eternal enjoyment of him in Heaven. So to answer Anselm's question, we are surely not incorrect to emphasize the need for salvation as one end for Christ's incarnation; but we are not speaking the whole truth if we make Christ's personal glory subservient to our salvation. As the prophet Isaiah wrote, God speaks of his children as those who are 'called by [his] name, whom [he] created for [his] glory, whom [he] formed and made' (Isa. 43:7).

CHRISTOLOGY 'FROM ABOVE'

In discussing the incarnation of the Son of God we have no choice but to begin our Christology from 'above' rather than from 'below'. Starting from 'above' is reflective of the pattern one finds in the New Testament that focuses first on the divinity ('above') of Christ and then on his humanity ('below'). One only has to look at the prologue in John's Gospel where the first verse speaks unambiguously about Christ's divine nature and personhood. John then moves to verse 14 where

he affirms that the Word who is 'face-to-face' with God, and is God, has 'become flesh'. If Romans 3:21ff represents Paul's nuclear bomb against Pharisaic religion, then surely John could have said nothing more contrary to Jewish conceptions of Jesus than that the Word, who is Yahweh, became flesh.

The author of Hebrews also begins with a Christology from 'above'. Comparing Hebrews 1 and 2 shows that chapter 1 gives fuller treatment to the divinity of Christ whereas chapter 2 focuses principally on his humanity. A final example, from among many texts that could have been chosen, is Paul's 'Christ-hymn' in Philippians 2, a most significant statement for informing our view of Christ. One detects a high-low-high movement where the eternal divine Son becomes a servant by humbling himself through the incarnation and the obedience of the crucifixion. Yet the God-man is exalted by the Father because of his obedience to death on a cross and he is given the divine name, 'Lord'. More will be said later on this section in Philippians, but clearly the Christology in this hymn begins from 'above' and not from 'below'. This point is absolutely vital if we are going to appreciate the person of Christ.

Why is this important? There is a tendency in our minds to think of Christ as a 'superman'. That is, we fail to believe adequately that he is 'very God of very God' (*autotheos*—God of himself), equal in every way with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Viewing Christ as a sort of 'superman' also prevents us from appreciating his true humanity. Of course, like the doctrine of the

Trinity, the fact of the incarnation is a great mystery and its full truth lies beyond our finite comprehension. That many Christians have managed this mystery by thinking of Christ as a 'superman' explains why certain heresies (for example Arianism and the Jehovah's Witnesses) have flourished and still flourish at precisely these points of theology. A default mode of many theological errors begins when we try to manage God in our own thinking, rather than being content with the many mysteries of the Christian religion that go beyond our reason.



Arianism refers to the fourth century 'archetypal Christian heresy' that denied the divinity of Christ. Arius of Alexandria (c. 250–336) promulgated the view that the Logos was the Son and Servant of God, but not co-equal with God the Father. Arius viewed the Son as a power of God and thus a creature. Hence the famous Arian dictum that there was a time before the Son of God or there was a time when the Son of God was not. In the Post-Reformation period the Socinians held to basically an Arian view of the Son; and today a number of cults, including the Jehovah's Witnesses, also hold to an Arian view.

THE DIVINE SON

A number of fine treatments proving the divinity of Jesus can be found throughout the centuries. As noted, our Christology must begin from above because that is the general picture one finds in the New Testament. In addition to John 1 and Hebrews 1, what other evidences are there that Jesus has a divine nature that is equal with that of the Father and the Holy Spirit? The way

in which John in the book of Revelation uses the book of Isaiah provides indisputable proof that Jesus is the divine Son of God.

Consider the following passages:

YHWH (Isaiah)	Jesus (Revelation)
41:4 I, the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am he.	1:17 Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one.
44:6 I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.	2:8 And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.'
48:12 I am he; I am the first, and I am the last.	22:13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

There is no question that John, whose knowledge of the Old Testament is remarkable, believed without any doubt that the resurrected Lord of glory is not only human, but also the divine Lord. John ascribed the divine name to Jesus. Exodus 3:14 explains what the divine name (YHWH) means. As translated in the ESV it means 'I AM WHO I AM.' From the context we could also well translate YHWH as either 'I will be who I will be' or 'I will be who I have been', a rendering that speaks of God's eternity and immutability. This means that the language of Isaiah about the first and the last would be a restating of the divine name, and John's claim that Jesus is the Alpha and Omega (Rev. 22:13) means that Jesus is YHWH.

John makes another reference to Isaiah which proves the divinity of Christ. In Isaiah 6 the prophet sees a vision of 'the King, the LORD of hosts' (Isa. 6:5). No one disputes that Isaiah was given a vision of God. But John, quoting a large section of Isaiah 6, asserts in his gospel that Isaiah 'said these things because he saw [Jesus'] glory and spoke of him' (12:41). Moreover, because Jesus is the LORD (Yahweh), he can petition his Father to glorify him in his Father's presence 'with the glory that [he] had with [his Father] before the world existed' (John 17:5). Of course, in Isaiah we read that God gives his glory to no one else (Isa. 42:8), which means that Christ is either making an abominable request to which he has no rightful claim, or he is in fact entitled to the divine glory that belongs to him as the eternal Son of God.

Paul also makes use of the language in Isaiah in the Christ-hymn (Phil. 2:5-11) to prove Christ's divinity. Verse 6 ('who, though he was in the form of God') may appear to be the obvious place where Paul establishes that the humbled servant is also the eternal God, but verses 9-11 have an important background in Isaiah 45:22-3.

In Philippians 2:9-11 Paul affirms that God has granted to Jesus the glory that, according to Isaiah, belongs to God alone. In Isaiah 45:22-3 'every knee shall bow' to God. Paul is saying therefore that Jesus enjoys the same status as Yahweh. This makes perfect sense in light of the earlier part of the Christ-hymn (v. 6 'who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped'), and shows above all

that the 'name' (v. 10) in question is the Tetragrammaton (YHWH). Thus Jesus is not merely a lord, but the divine Lord. Note the connection:

Isaiah 45:22–23

Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.'

Philippians 2:9–11

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

THE INCARNATION:
GOD'S GREATEST WONDER

Among the many mysteries in the Christian religion, the incarnation is, with the trinity, the most wondrous. Some scholars have assumed that the Eastern Orthodox tradition has done more justice to the centrality of the incarnation than the Western tradition, where one finds an emphasis on the atonement (and sometimes the resurrection). This is more of a caricature than truth. Reformed theologians cherished the incarnation. They wrote often of the incarnation as the greatest wonder that God ever did. To borrow a phrase from Thomas Goodwin, heaven kissed earth when God became man. Do we realize how wonderful this truth is?

In this union between two natures there is the greatest distance involved. The Creator is identified with a creature. In the union of the two natures one sees eternity and temporality, eternal blessedness and temporal sorrow, almightiness and weakness, omniscience and ignorance, unchangeableness and changeableness, infinity and finitude. All of these disparate attributes come together in the person of Jesus Christ. In order to not make God into a man or man into God, we must be careful to insist that the eternal Son of God assumed a human *nature*, not a human *person*. Christ was a man; he had a real human nature, which included a reasonable soul. But he was never a person considered apart from the Son of God. The human nature of Christ subsists in the personhood of the Son of God. If Christ's human nature had a distinct personality, then there would have been two persons united together. But this is clearly unacceptable.

The technical term for the Logos's assumption of a human nature (as opposed to the assumption of another person) by the Logos is 'anhypostasis'. This speaks to



Nestorianism is the view that there are two separate persons in Christ—a human person and a divine person. Many ascribe this view to Nestorius of Constantinople (c. 381–452), but this would be grossly unfair to his teaching, which was basically orthodox. 'Nestorianism' is wrong because the Son assumed a true human nature (body and soul) but not a distinct human person, who already possessed an identity. Hypothetically, if the Son had assumed a distinct individual, then only that individual—and nobody else—could have been saved by the Son.

the human nature being ‘personalized’ (‘hypostatized’) by the Logos. Hence the statement that ‘the Word became flesh’ (John 1:14) is a statement of this personal union of two natures, not a statement that the divine nature somehow changed into a human one. The divine essence is incapable of alteration and communication. Theologians refer to this union as the hypostatic union—the union between the divine and human natures in the person of Christ. Because of the hypostatic union, we speak of Christ as a ‘complex person’; that is, unlike the person of the Father or of the Holy Spirit, the person of Christ since the incarnation always involves two natures (though again, manifestly not two persons).

This may be hard to grasp. I think this may be in part because what I am arguing is that the hypostatic union of two natures in one person does not require a single psychological center, as if the ‘mind’ of the Son of God assumed a human body only. We may be used to making the personal synonymous with the psychological. By ‘person’ I mean the identity of Christ, who is ‘to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, [and] inseparably’ (Chalcedonian Creed). Whatever is natural to the human nature, apart from sin, must be affirmed of Christ, just as whatever belongs to the divine nature must likewise be affirmed of him. This is the wonder of the incarnation. So by assuming a human nature he assumed a human body and soul with a distinct psychology that must not be equated with God’s own self-consciousness. More must be said, however, of the nature of Christ’s humanity.



Apollinarianism derives from its founder, Apollinaris of Laodicea (c. 315–392) who fiercely opposed the Arians of the fourth century. But in doing so, he made a fatal error, namely, that in the incarnation the Son did not assume a human mind. Instead, a divine ‘mind’ (soul) assumed a human body. This error is very common in today’s church. The Son united himself to a true human nature, which included a ‘reasonable soul and body’ (so Chalcedon). The modalist heresy treats the one being of God as absolute and the three persons as derivative so that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit do not reflect who God is in himself. The church’s confession of God as three eternally distinct persons in indivisible union is the biblical foundation for a proper understanding of the individual and the corporate in Scripture.

Following the basic thought of Anselm, the Son had to assume a human nature in order to save the bodies and souls of his people. But did Christ assume a human nature in its perfection? This has been a particularly knotty question for theologians from almost all traditions. The Scriptures point to the idea that the human nature of Christ was sinless, but that it suffered from the infirmities that were a part of the curse of man’s fall into sin. The words of John 1:14—‘the Word became flesh’—seem to suggest that Christ took a human nature that was clothed with infirmities as a consequence of the Fall. Note also Paul’s language in Romans 8:3, ‘By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.’ In discussing what is meant by ‘flesh’ or the ‘likeness of sinful flesh’ we must tread with some caution.

Christ clearly did not take on all of the infirmities that characterized man’s nature after the Fall. The distinction must be made between ‘painful infirmities’ and ‘sinful

infirmities'. Of the latter sort, Christ was entirely free. Regarding the former, however, it seems Christ only partook of one aspect of the 'painful infirmities'. That is to say, the 'painful infirmities' of human beings may be divided into those which manifest themselves in the form of disease (for example, leprosy) and those which are 'natural', such as pain, grief, and sorrow. As far as we know, Christ was not subject to disease, such as leprosy. Yet the Scriptures plainly affirm that he was 'a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief' (Isa. 53:3). In sum, regarding painful infirmities, while we never read that Christ experienced any form of disease or unwellness, it is affirmed that he experienced grief and pain. That is to say, Christ is similar to us in all things, since we are humans, but not according to all of the weaknesses of our nature. Below we will aim to show, given this model, how we may speak of Christ's truly human experiences. Before we do that a common misconception must be removed from how we think of the incarnation.

Some Christians in the pew, and even some theologians, have maintained that Christ's divine nature took the place of his soul. While they are prepared to affirm that Christ had a human body, they think that Christ's soul was somehow the person of the Son of God. But because Jesus was fully human, he had a soul which was the immediate principle of his moral acts, just as our soul is. If he did not have both a human body and a human soul, then the incarnation did not entirely take place, and some aspect of our humanity could not be redeemed. As the Early Church Father, Gregory

Nazianzen famously declared: 'For that which He has not assumed He has not healed.'⁵

In summary, Stephen Charnock depicted the wonder of this well: 'What a wonder is it, that two natures infinitely distant, should be more intimately united than anything in the world; and yet without any confusion! That the same person should have both a glory and a grief; an infinite joy in the Deity, and an inexpressible sorrow in the humanity! That a God upon a throne should be an infant in a cradle; the thundering Creator be a weeping babe and a suffering man, are such expressions of mighty power, as well as condescending love, that they astonish men upon earth, and angels in heaven.'⁶ The incarnation is indeed God's greatest work.



Could God himself have performed a greater work than the incarnation?

TWO NATURES AND ONE PERSON: SO WHAT?

All Christians are bound to affirm the truth of the incarnation, the fact that God became flesh. However, the most glorious truths are always the most disputed truths. Often fierce theological debates precede the writing of Creeds. This was certainly true of the ecumenical Creeds, such as the Nicene Creed (325 AD) and the Chalcedonian Creed (451 AD). The Chalcedonian Creed makes statements about the person of Jesus Christ that all Christians must affirm if they wish to call