

# Christology Still Matters

Equipping God's People for the 21<sup>st</sup> century to  
Appreciate the Ancient Doctrine of Christology  
for Their Lives and the Life of the Church

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## Introduction

It was his second missionary journey when the apostle strolled into that great center of Greek brilliance and philosophy. In many ways it was so different from his former place of residence in Palestine. Paul's countrymen were generally very minded toward a single God. Their scholars expended much of their cerebral energy in studying and expounding the Old Testament Scriptures and the Hebrew traditions. The God they purported to worship was the true and only God, the God that all people needed to know. They despised, most of them, not only the political and military yoke of the Romans, they also despised their system of religion based in polytheism and superstition. Now Paul, the learned Pharisee, was walking into the mouth of the lion, so to speak. The focus of this current effort was to be the citizens of Athens. The Athenian religious system was clearly rooted in the same sort of polytheistic principles as the Romans. Zeus, Poseidon, Hades, Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite, Ares, Dionysus, Hephaestus, Athena, Hermes, Demeter, Hestia and Hera were household names to many of them. As sacred texts they employed Hesiod's *Theogony* as well as his *Works and Days*. Homer's *Illiad* and *Odyssey* and the *Odes* by Pindar were also included and were generally looked upon as inspired often starting out with an invocation to the Muses for inspiration, in the sense of sending down the words from heaven, for the content that was to follow. An example would be these verses that begin the *Odyssey*:

ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλά  
πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσεν:

"Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns  
driven time and again off course, once he had plundered  
the hallowed heights of Troy."

The few that were not enamored by these "national" gods had the option of turning to the various mystery religions into which one could be initiated in order to learn their sacred secrets. These cults had what some considered the benefit of providing a chance for mystical awakening, a community form of worship and fellowship, and a systematic form of teaching. It was not just the religion of Athens that was well-known it was also the scholasticism. Athens was the most celebrated city of learning in antiquity. Plato, Aristotle and a plethora of other famous philosophers had taught there over the years. Poets from Athens had penned immortal works.

It was to this city of Athens immersed in this religious thought and comfortably drunk on academia that Paul came preaching and teaching in a way that he would also follow among the Greeks in Corinth and about a God that they knew little or nothing about. He related to the Corinthians: "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:2) And he tells them and us why: "...a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Corinthians 1:23) As he walked into the city he did so with the same Spirit-given faith as Peter who so many years earlier, standing together with John before a Jewish Sanhedrin that was not just a little hostile to their message, said this: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) Christ crucified mattered to the ancients and he matters to us, as well.

### I. Christ crucified for a World that keeps forgetting Him

So why speak of a believer and events that happened so long ago when the charge is to elaborate on why Christology still matters for people today? Because we are doing ministry in and the people of the United States of America are living in a country that is more and more becoming like the Athens that Paul walked into those many years ago. This country of ours is not woven out of the same fabric that it was when I was taught my Catechism lessons or even when some of us began our seminary training only a couple of decades ago. The country certainly had its religious shortcomings, even then, but now the beast against which we contend has craftily morphed. Yes, when it comes to the message of Jesus Christ, we still have the errors of the Romanist with their stubborn insistence on the value of works in justification and their other distortions of the doctrines of Christology. We are still plagued by the Calvinists and the Arminians with their errors based in rationalism. The name Lutheran still does not automatically guarantee that a pulpit will supply faithful Christological food. We were ready for that to a certain extent. But something different, something foreign to many of us is casting an ominous shadow over our people's lives and our ministries. Many of us have not had to deal with it before because centuries ago devout believing men, women and preachers cast them out of the woods and the lives and minds of the then emerging Christian world. Those pins were knocked down a long time ago by the bowling ball of an evolving Christian world in the west so that the civilized world has largely not had to deal with them. But something happened recently. While we had our backs turned to grab our bowling ball for an assault on the remaining pins, someone reset the ones that had previously been knocked down. Spiritualism and Paganism in all its various forms is on the comeback and gaining traction in our backyard at an alarming rate.

Of course, in some respects this should not be a complete surprise. For the last century and a half the birth, growth and maturing of modernism has been slamming away at the underpinnings of Christianity. Modernism in all its different forms takes the focus off of God and puts it on man. Even when it is found in the form of Theistic Existentialism it has man at the center and God in the periphery. Modernism at its core is based in naturalism which is the thought that the universe (nature) and matter is all there is and ever will be. Pure naturalism has no room for a thought such as Christ or forgiveness because in pure naturalism there is no such thing as sin. The use of reason (critical thinking) and the senses are the tools of the trade in the right hand and the left hand of naturalism. Interestingly, though, even when critical analysis points to God, after all "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Psalm 19:1), even then, or perhaps one should say especially then, they must abandon their own stated principles and reject what is right before their eyes, namely that God exists. In a congregation that I served there was a member who himself was a scientist and had a brother who was a botanist. He often told me that his brother would say "we know that these things could not have happened by accident. There's no way." Yet, he still would not believe in God.

Of course, special revelation is a "no-no" to the pure modernist. Even the Theistic Existentialist, which is a loose brand of a modernist, starts with the modernist's assumption that for anything that is said to be supernatural or miraculous there has to be a natural explanation. The Humanist Manifesto II (1973) wasn't of much interest to me years ago since it seemed to be on the periphery of anything that someone would take seriously. You might want to do a web search on it and read it now in the context of this new millennium. It is chilling how successful Satan has been at promoting its precepts. Let me share a couple of snippets...

As in 1933, humanists still believe that traditional theism, especially faith in the prayer-hearing God, assumed to live and care for persons, to hear and understand their prayers, and to be able to do something about them, is an unproved and outmoded faith. Salvationism, based on mere affirmation, still appears as harmful, diverting people with false hopes of heaven hereafter. Reasonable minds look to other means for survival. ("Preface" – paragraph 3)

We believe, however, that traditional dogmatic or authoritarian religions that place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience do a disservice to the human species. Any account of nature should pass the tests of scientific evidence; in our judgment, the dogmas and myths of traditional religions do not do so... We find insufficient evidence for belief in the existence of a supernatural; it is either meaningless or irrelevant to the question of survival and fulfillment of the human race. As nontheists, we begin with humans not God, nature not deity. ("Religion" – paragraph 2)

.. we can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species. While there is much that we do not know, humans are responsible for what we are or will become. No deity will save us; we must save ourselves. ("Religion" – paragraph 4)

And does this sound familiar...

We deplore the division of humankind on nationalistic grounds. We have reached a turning point in human history where the best option is to transcend the limits of national sovereignty and to move toward the building of a world community in which all sectors of the human family can participate. Thus we look to the development of a system of world law and a world order based upon transnational federal government.<sup>1</sup>

The darling child to most modernists has been Darwinism. By the way it is promoted it is treated as scientific fact. The contention is that empirical science fully supports the theory. To them it is the modern proof that the Biblical record is a fallacy. Still it remains unproved theory and to more and more unproveable theory. It is contested that the belief in Darwinism is not based at all on empirical evidence but on a philosophical bent. Consider the following quote from "The Problem of Evidence" by Jonathan Wells; Forbes.com; February 5, 2009.

According to Georgia State University historian Neal C. Gillespie, "it is sometimes said that Darwin converted the scientific world to evolution by showing them the process by which it had occurred." But "it was more Darwin's insistence on totally natural explanations than on natural selection that won their adherence." The Darwinian revolution was thus philosophical rather than scientific. Darwin's followers now claim that they have "overwhelming evidence" for their theory, but despite 150 years of research no one has ever observed the origin of a new species by natural selection--much less the origin of new organs and body parts.

Not even modern genetics has solved the problem. No matter what we do to the genes of a fruit fly embryo, there are only three possible outcomes: a normal fruit fly, a defective fruit fly or a

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Kurtz and Edwin H. Wilson,  
[http://www.americanhumanist.org/Who\\_We\\_Are/About\\_Humanism/Humanist\\_Manifesto\\_II](http://www.americanhumanist.org/Who_We_Are/About_Humanism/Humanist_Manifesto_II) (1973)

dead fruit fly. Darwin's claim that microevolution leads to macroevolution has never been empirically corroborated. Indeed, there is growing evidence that the claim is false.<sup>2</sup>

We are told that now we have passed beyond the age of modernism and entered the age of postmodernism. Of course, if you think this means “whew, we made it through that one, now we can sit back and catch our breath,” you couldn’t be more mistaken. Modernism has just morphed into something even more insidious. Postmodernism believes that there is no basis for determining good and evil and that absolute truth is simply a group’s invention in order to control others. There is a general belief that truth and knowledge are “socially constructed” or invented as a means toward that end. There is no such thing to them as legitimate and necessary judgments. All of this is simply a power struggle between the haves and the have nots. All groups to them have the intention of gaining power over others in a way that to the postmodernist is unacceptable repression. So the postmodernist intends to level the playing field. It’s interesting and inconsistent to their principles how they do it. The postmodernist who considers that nothing can be looked upon as good or bad, that nothing should be judged, that no one should be repressed makes the judgment that groups with absolute belief systems are evil and then begins to work to repress them. Christianity is just one example of a target that is in their crosshairs. Neutralizing those targets is done in a clever almost sinister manner that is clearly meant to demonize. As just one example, in exposing what is behind their push toward implementing a teaching style called “objectivity” in the instruction about religion, David C. Thompson writes:

Postmodernists use words like academic, scholarly, fair, and objective – words that carry a positive connotation – to describe this teaching method; whereas pejorative sounding words such as parochial, sectarian, narrow, indoctrinate are used to describe the biblical approach to teaching religion. The bottom line is this approach does not allow the instructor to teach truth as truth.<sup>3</sup>

Thompson has a good discussion on when objectivity in teaching is useful and proper and when it is not. You’ll want to read it for yourself in his book *What in the World is Going On?* One cannot help but think of our Lord Jesus Christ and his handling of such things. The Bible speaks of Him christologically as the great Prophet. Already in the wilderness the Israelites were promised “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.” (Deuteronomy 18:15) What was the job of this heavenly Prophet? After the incarnation, the God-man on trial before Rome’s version of a postmodernist (“what is truth?”), Pontius Pilate, boldly witnessed: “for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” (John 18:37) Do a Libronix search on the word truth. Note how many times the great Prophet says “I tell you the truth.” This is not our version of “please believe me, I am not lying,” which the speaker may or may not actually be doing, this is the holy Prophet’s way of stating the absolute truth on the subject at hand in the face of so many mistaken, truly dangerous worldviews so that his listeners can quickly cut to the chase and know that which is going to turn out to be eternally reliable. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Wells, *The Problem with Evidence*, [http://www.forbes.com/2009/02/05/evolution-evidence-religion-opinions-darwin09\\_0205\\_jonathan\\_wells.html](http://www.forbes.com/2009/02/05/evolution-evidence-religion-opinions-darwin09_0205_jonathan_wells.html) (February 2009)

<sup>3</sup> David C. Thompson. *What in the Word is Going On?* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2010), p 51.

darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12) Of course, the disbelievers of his day challenged this claim as they will today. Listen: “The Pharisees challenged him, ‘Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid.’”(13) But the Lord does not consider himself backed into a corner at all by their challenge (and neither should we). He responded, “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me.” (14-18) Clearly Jesus is presenting facts and the facts are that there is more than his witness to validate his assertion. Realistically, a postmodernist will sneer even at this answer. To them it will prove nothing because you have to believe what Jesus is here saying – and they don’t. But we do and we know through the eyes of faith that just because they don’t believe it is so, doesn’t mean that it isn’t so. We know also that just because the finite human mind cannot rationalize such heavenly concepts and therefore declares them fallacies, does not mean that they are fallacies.

When Jesus testifies to the truth, he is not doing this to harm or to brainwash for his own benefit some hapless person who happens to believe him. He does this to help, to liberate, to enrich, to save those who are led by the Spirit to trust in him and what he is sent to proclaim. In the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 61:1ff Christ says: “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.”

In dealing with the assertions of postmodernism remember that God does not call upon us to buy into every supposed scholarly position that seems to sound rationale to our human minds or the minds of others. God does call upon us, even commands us as he did on the Mount of Transfiguration, to listen to him. The Father speaking from the cloud of glory said: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” (Matthew 17:5) The charges of the postmodernists have intimidated far too many on the side of Christ. Our Christian upbringing that teaches us not to slander and not to lord it over others has been something that Satan has twisted to use to his advantage in this battle. Christianity is by postmodernists charged with slander and lording it over others. Individuals are sensitive to those charges and some Christians even believe them. Accepting these charges as true and wanting to appear less judgmental and less parochial has led some Christians to compromise the truth and the everlasting Gospel. This is a travesty to truth and to love and a tragedy for the eternal welfare of mankind. The charges remind me of a child’s manipulation as they shout out to a parent who has disciplined them “You don’t love me!” The outburst is meant to challenge the parent through deception into believing that discipline is unloving and therefore should not be carried out any longer on this child. It is a charge that can make a parent think twice if they are not sharp enough to see through the deception. Well discipline is not unloving. It is in fact quite loving

and a responsible course of action for a parent. So it is with that which our Lord has charged us. Exposure of the lie is not evil, it is beneficial. Proclamation of the truth is not parochial, it is, in this case, life-giving information! More than ever who Christ is and what he has done needs to be broadcasted boldly without intimidation to our people and to the world so that these lies of the postmodernists do not take root in their hearts.

That now brings us to the bowling pins that were reset while we weren't looking. The witches and goblins are coming out into the open again in America. Spiritualism is clearly on the rise. There are a number of variations of Spiritualism and most of them have as their common thread the fact that they are primarily mother earth religions. Nature is sacred to them. Nature is often "god" to the Spiritualist. For that reason nature to them is to be worshipped and to be left in its natural state. It is rather interesting that in many of the variations of spiritualism evil is not something done against your fellowman or against a heavenly God, evil is instead that which is done against nature. Causing global warming so that the polar bear habitats are lost, relocating or dislocating wildlife so that cities and neighborhoods can be built for people, cutting down trees and other such things are seen as acts of evil. These religions include but are not limited to the Wiccans, the New Age movement, the occult, revived native American religions and others such as these.

Out and out Paganism is also on the rise. The difference between Paganism and Spiritualism is that paganism accepts a deity that is something other than mother earth. Hinduism recognizes the existence of a plethora of gods and goddesses. Native American religions also often have a pagan component to them in the "Great Spirit." The home grown Church of the Latter Day Saints promises the attainment of deification to faithful Mormon men and the list goes on. David Thompson in "What in the world is going on?" includes this quote from James W. Sire:

The New Age has reopened a door closed since Christianity drove out the demons from the woods, desacralized the natural world and generally took a dim view of excessive interest in the affairs of Satan's kingdom of fallen angels. Now they are back, knocking on university dorm room doors, sneaking around psychology laboratories and chilling the spines of Ouija players. Modern folk have fled from Grandfather's clockwork universe to Great-great-grandfather's chamber of gothic horrors.<sup>4</sup>

How successful have all of these attacks been on the doctrine of the deity of Christ and on the message of the cross? Consider these excerpts from a March 6, 2009 article published by Barna Research:

One-third of all adults (34%) believe that moral truth is absolute and unaffected by the circumstances

Just one-quarter of adults (27%) are convinced that Satan is a real force

Similarly, only one-quarter of adults (28%) believe that it is impossible for someone to earn their way into Heaven through good behavior.

The research data showed that one pattern emerged loud and clear: young adults rarely possess a

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p 69

biblical worldview. The current study found that less than one-half of one percent of adults in the Mosaic generation – i.e., those aged 18 to 23 – have a biblical worldview, compared to about one out of every nine older adults.

Other groups that possess a below average likelihood of having a biblical worldview included people who describe themselves as liberal on social and political matters (also less than one-half of one percent); Catholics (2%); Democrats (4%) and residents of the Northeast (4%).<sup>5</sup>

It seems that the Athenian world that Paul faced in many ways has come to America and has set up shop in our backyards. Never before in America has it been as important to openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is God’s Son, that he came into the world for mankind because we have offended a holy God who justly has pronounced the guilty verdict on every man, woman and child here on earth. He came into this world born of a woman, born under law to redeem those under law that we might receive the full rights of sonship. Through his gift of redemption, Christ has reconciled the world to God not counting men’s sins against them. Since he wants the world of people to know this he has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. That is also why the great heavenly Prophet commissioned us to proclaim his message. That, of course, is exactly why we do proclaim it, but as we do it should not surprise us that it may seem that we are teaching them about a god completely unknown to them just as Paul was in Athens. That’s because more and more in America we are dealing with a population that is less and less familiar and exposed to historic Christianity. Of course, it should not surprise us either that God still works through our proclamation. Through the power of the Spirit in the proclamation of the Gospel benighted hearts which seemed impossible to crack still can and will be brought to the “light that shines in darkness.” (John 1:5)

## II. Christ crucified for our hearts that need him so badly

That brings us now to look at our own lives and the lives of our congregation members and our need for clear Christological preaching and teaching. The subject of Christology is far too broad to take an example from each of the Christological points in scripture. That would take a book, which you thankfully did not assign. Yet, let’s take a couple of examples that will indeed reflect how important it is to be faithful in “knowing nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

We spoke of the attempts of modernism and Postmodernistic thought to slam away at the underpinnings of Christianity. Well brothers, we are Christianity and so are our brothers and sister in our congregations. So expect that the truths that the Spirit through God’s divine revelation has etched in our heart will also be challenged. More and more often I have the question asked of me by Sunday School teachers: “Do we talk about hell with the children? More and more there is a sense that pointing out specific sin in sermons is being too judgmental and politically incorrect. Who hasn’t feared the charge of homophobic? Who hasn’t sensed, or been even outright told that we are a little narrow on our views of morality? Who hasn’t been

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<sup>5</sup>Barna Group, <http://www.barna.org/transformation-articles/252-barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years>. (March 2009)



tempted to hold back because of that? Why do you think fellowship principles are so unpopular today. Its because there is not supposed to be any good or evil or anything that is absolutely true.

Well, gentlemen, the message of the scripture is largely a message about a very unique plan of salvation. The plan had to be put in place, it tells us, because man is sinful by nature, is separated from God, and is condemned to eternal punishment in hell by God who has passed down this verdict quite justly. The Psalmist wrote: "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."(Psalm 51:5) Isaiah was told to write: "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear." (Isaiah 59:2) Ezekiel states: "The soul who sins is the one who will die." (Ezekiel 18:4) Jesus himself adds: "Be afraid of the One who destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:28) Are we not to make that clear to others even as we ourselves take it to heart? But if I allow myself to be shaped by the popular thought that there is no such thing as evil or good, or if I allow myself to entertain the notion that we in the Christian church have simply constructed these philosophies for the survival and dominance of the Christian "group," then I will back off of them in some sort of way and the sheep under our care, some of them will back off as well. To fail to teach sin will of course lead to a disinterest or even boredom with the message of the Gospel. Most importantly it will create a whole group of people who are going to be wholly surprised when the Holy One of God returns on that great and awesome day of the Lord.

We must keep proclaiming the necessity of salvation due to sin. We must continue to proclaim that no person is able to do anything meaningful himself at all to change his condemned status before God.

Most of us who have been in the ministry for awhile have noticed a shift in the difficulty of dealing with unrepentant sin in our congregations. Twenty years ago a lot of those we found it necessary to visit because they were caught in sin at least appeared to feel guilt over what they were doing. Today, more are surprised and annoyed that we even think that there is anything amiss in their behavior. I am convinced that a good share of this is the popularity of postmodern thought affecting our people, especially the youth. The solution won't be found in backing off. The solution is found in being ever more diligent in stating biblical truth about a holy God's expectations, the consequences of not living up to them and the necessity of salvation because we haven't lived up them. After we have done that we need to trust the Holy Spirit to convict hearts through those truths so that sinners are brought to ask "sirs, what must we do to be saved." Then, of course, the sweet news of the Gospel can enter these hearts.

The Gospel tells us that salvation was accomplished for all of us by the Substitute, the one who did what we could not do, the one who lived a holy life and satisfied heavenly justice against sin by making himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant and being found in appearance as a man became obedient to death, even death on a cross. Even as he said when he cried out "It is finished," it really is finished. However, for people to benefit from this finished gift, something has to be done. God has also established a mode or way in which the sinner will come to benefit

from this gracious act of God. That mode, scripture tells us, is the preaching of the facts of salvation through which the acceptance of faith is produced. Scripture says “Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” (Romans 10:17) That mode of salvation needs to be followed. That’s why, as it turns out, Paul was so “right on task” when he resolved to know nothing among sinners except Jesus Christ and him crucified. We will want to do the same with a complete confidence in its power to produce faith even when it turns out to be a stumbling block to some and foolishness to others.

Perhaps a word should be said again about Christ crucified always being at the heart of our message. It always seems that some don’t buy into this and instead want to make Christian living the heart of their message. Remember, I said “heart of their message” and by that I mean the regular, predominant part of the message. It doesn’t help things when these same preachers seem to have churches that are brimming over with attendees. That makes the temptation to follow their lead a hard one to resist. To be sure, there is clearly a proper place for preaching sanctification, yet the heart of Gospel preaching has to be Christ crucified. First of all he is THE REASON sinners have salvation. Nothing can be more important. Secondly, when Christ crucified is not the heart of our message, man’s *opinio legis*, which is always lurking in our sinful nature and wanting to burst out of the prison that the gospel has put it in, is much more likely to rear its ugly head. It will try to turn Christian living into a way that man can reconcile himself to God instead of keeping it as the response of thanksgiving for the fact that Christ has redeemed me before God. When this happens man becomes his own savior from sin and what a useless savior that is! Man cannot save himself but rather, “out of free grace and mercy, without any reference to meritorious works of men, God determined upon the salvation of all mankind, appointing his Son as the Mediator of this salvation and establishing the means of grace, through the efficacy of which men are to be converted unto faith in Christ and thus become participants in his salvation to the glory of God.”<sup>6</sup>

Won’t my congregation become bored if I keep repeating that? One cannot predict how every person will react and certainly variety in the delivery of the Christological message is helpful, but in the end there is no other way and no better way. Trust God’s promise that his word will not return empty. Don’t they already know this? On a given Sunday morning we have dozens of people in attendance. The variety of the baggage from their lives that they are bringing to worship with them is certainly quite varied. One thing that they all have in common is this, though, they are all sinners. They have sinned that week and they have sinned that day already just as you and I have. All need the message of Christ crucified and some, because of a deep despair over a particular sin or two, need it desperately. Yes, they may know it, but they need to hear it again just as Jesus assured the paralytic “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.” (Matthew 9:2) Don’t fail to deliver that medicine because hearts are longing for it. Deliver it faithfully just as God has revealed it. You have seen the tear of joy, the narrowing eyes of the

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<sup>6</sup> John Schaller, Biblical Christology (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1981), p.28.

one whose heart is leaping for joy as they listen. Don't doubt, even if you are not given that visual feedback on a given Sunday, that there is some desperate sinner (and there are probably many of them) who knew full well the truth of redemption, but rejoiced in their heart to hear it again from the mouth of God's messenger that day. Don't assume anything. Just follow the charge of your Lord Jesus and preach it.

It is also important to remember that our brothers and sisters in the faith are constantly in contact with opposing views on almost all aspects of the doctrine of Christ. Our diverse ethnicity today means that we might have a Buddhist or a Hindu or a Muslim or a Wiccan as a neighbor or as a work associate, or in our college, high school, or elementary school classroom. Since 911, the prevailing thought among some that we can stop Muslim terrorist from attacking our country through wider acceptance of their precepts and culture has led some to laud a faith that denies Jesus Christ as the Son of God and rejects his work of salvation as historic and necessary for sinful mankind. Truth is being scrapped for convenience and for selfish reasons. That old abuse of the word "love" and "understanding" is held up as the defense for abandoning heaven's truths. Those who still dare point out the spiritual errors of Islam are doing so at the risk of being frowned upon and labeled. Don't think that doesn't affect the family in the third row on the left on Sunday morning.

Our universities are also contributing to the misinformation. The pursuit of wisdom is not the fault. The fact that the pursuit of wisdom in universities by necessity has to come through the conduit of educators who in some cases do not have a biblical worldview and who seem intent upon neutralizing the biblical worldview in our young adults is often the culprit. Our children are being fed a diet that wars with biblical Christology. I know, I have children in college. Scripture is neutralized and higher criticism is glorified. If we do not teach and preach what the Spirit has told us about Christ how will our youth continue to know the difference or how will the bold assertions of those lectures be countered in their hearts by the equally bold but true assertions of Scripture? We haven't even been able to touch the media, the internet and all that these things bring with their misinformation and temptation. They also are proof of the need to keep plugging away at teaching who Christ is.

So far the examples I have given are operating from the mostly defensive stance that is needed for the preservation of the truth. Let's not forget the other side of things. The Psalmist wrote: How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (Psalm 119:105) That is what the teaching of Christ is to the sinner. Our hearts still leap at Christmas at the news of the incarnation and that God has come to save his people. We still rejoice to see the omniscient boy Jesus discussing the scriptures with the temple teachers knowing that in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. Though, there is that tinge of sorrow that our sin caused it, even more there is the joy as we see the guilt of our sins disappearing on the cross and the undeniable proof that it is so as the angel announces to the women on Easter morning, "Why do you seek the living among the dead. He is not here He is risen." (Luke 24:5) Our eyes are

turned joyfully to the future when he tells us that he is going to prepare a place for us and that he will return to take us to be with him. Then we see him ascend and in the state of exaltation return to the throne room of heaven. We are comforted that Christ the King is ruling over all things for the good of the church and that through him, though attacked, demeaned and assailed it will remain unto the end. We find peace in our hearts and solace to know that the great High Priest who sacrificed for sin once for all is also interceding for us in heaven. We appreciate that he can relate to our difficulty in temptation. His sinlessness did not render doubtful the reality of his temptations. He suffered anguish of soul in them just like we do and he suffered the severe internal struggles that temptation brings just like we do and so is able to “help those who are being tempted.” (Hebrews 2:18) One day we will stand before him and his judgment seat. We are not afraid of that at all. His salvation, which by faith we now have and through which we are declared righteous in his sight, means that we are going to hear the invitation “Come you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance.” (Matthew 25:34) If he chooses to bring us to that day through death, we fear it not for our Christ has made it so that it can be said “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord” (Revelation 14:13) If he chooses to bring us to that day still standing upon earth so that we see the sun darkened and the moon no longer giving its light, the stars falling from the sky and the heavenly bodies shaken (Matthew 24:29) even that we do not fear because he has given us the trust to know that he will keep us safe. When we see these cataclysmic events we will lift up our heads with joy and know that our salvation is drawing near. Finally, we marvel how the Spirit has given us hearts that long to live and reign with him forever in a place that he calls the “new heaven and the new earth,” cleansed from sin, supernally joyous and enjoying the fact that now the dwelling of God is with man.

Why would we not want to preach Christ and him crucified? Why would we not consider all of this as important now as it ever was?

*My heart is longing to praise my Savior  
And glorify his name in song and prayer;  
For he has shown me his wondrous favor  
And offered me all heav'n with him to share.*

*O blessed Jesus, what you have given  
Though dying on the cross in bitter pain,  
Has filled my heart with the peace of heaven;  
My winter's gone, and spring is mine again.*

*Soon we are home and shall stand before him;  
What matter then that we have suffered here?  
Then he shall crown us while we adore him;  
So death and all our pains will disappear.*

*O Christian friends, let our song ascending  
Give honor, praise to him who set us free!  
Our tribulations may seem unending,  
But soon with him we shall forever be. (CW364)*

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