

How Does Our Christology Impact Our Daily Lives?

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Introduction

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.

Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and became fully human.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate.

He suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

This is a statement of what we believe concerning Jesus Christ. It is a confession of our *Christology*. Christology most narrowly defined means the study of Christ. But in frequent usage the term also refers to the teaching or doctrine of Christ, that which is believed and confessed concerning him. Our Christology tells what we hold to be true regarding who Christ is (his person) and what he does (his work).

All twelve of the WELS district conventions this year are giving attention to one or more aspects of our Christology. Essays and studies are being prepared and presented to focus on those truths we draw from Scripture regarding the second person of the Triune God. Briefly stated, we hold that Jesus is true God, coeternal, coequal, and one in essence with the Father and Spirit, and that he became fully human at the incarnation without for a moment ceasing to be God. The divine and human natures are most intimately and permanently united in the person of Christ, the God-man. We also believe that in Christ the attributes or inherent characteristics of the each nature are communicated to or shared with the other nature. As the God-man and for our salvation, Christ did not always make full use of the divine powers and attributes he possessed, but he humbled himself to carry out the work of redemption. He voluntarily did this to serve us, obeying the law of God perfectly in our place and also dying as our substitute to ransom us sinners from guilt and death. As a result of this work, often referred to as his active and passive obedience on our behalf, the whole world of sinners has been declared forgiven. Upon the completion of this aspect of his work for us, Christ again took up the full use of his divine powers and prerogatives, and in this exaltation he continues to serve us. His descent into hell, bodily resurrection, ascension, current activities, and approaching return in glory for judgment are aspects of his exaltation. To describe Christ's work, the Bible often refers to him as the ultimate and eternal prophet, high priest and king who functions in these capacities. More than anything else, assurances are given that Christ, by his substitutionary obedience, has achieved reconciliation between this world of sinners and the righteous God. His redemptive work is perfect and complete and applies to all mankind. Jesus Christ is the only Savior and Lord of mankind.

Our assigned task at this convention is not to review any of these aspects of our Christology specifically, but to consider what impact our overall teachings about Christ have in our daily lives. We hold that the relationship between belief and behavior is basically a relationship between cause and effect. If a person believes what is correct, that person's behavior will tend to be correct. But if someone clings to what is false, what that person does will reflect and express what is untrue. In short, what we believe has great impact on how

we live from day to day. In the study that follows we will consider how our Christology influences the way we think (the mind), the way we feel (the emotions), and the way we make decisions (the will). But before we do this, an important point should be stated.

Our Christology Is Not Everyone's Christology

As stated above, a Christology is a statement telling who Jesus is and why he is important or significant. Not all professing Christians agree on these points. There are several kinds of Christologies that are competing for attention and acceptance. As in the ancient church, the biblical view of Christ's person and work continues to face opposition. Further, it is not uncommon to find two or more Christologies combined and declared compatible as though each contributes a valid part of the whole truth about Christ. To make you aware of at least some of the jargon used today, we report that some schools of thought provide us with mystical, existentialist, and dialectical approaches to Scripture and to Christ, while others give us functional, humanitarian, and evolutionary approaches to Jesus. Aside from the always elusive but never correct "historical Jesus" of the Jesus Seminars, we have serious and scholarly urgings to recognize a Jesus who endorses feminist, neo-orthodox, liberationist, and process theologies. Those who choose a theology of hope or a theology of religions also construct a Christ after their image and invite us follow him. Twenty-five years ago historian Paul L. Maier wrote this description of what he called "The Jesus Game."

Anyone can play the Jesus game, although it helps if you're a scholar. The rules are simple enough. First you read the New Testament Gospels and draw a general sketch of Jesus. Then distort that sketch as much as you please, add clashing colors, paint in a bizarre background, and if the surviving Christ resembles anything in the Gospels, you lose. But if you come up with a radically different—above all sensational—portrait of Jesus, you win. The prizes are maximum coverage in the nation's news media, frowns from the faithful, and plaudits from everyone else.

Our Christology is noticeably different because our approach to Scripture is different. Our conviction that the Bible is God's verbally inspired and inerrant message of unchangeable truth leads us to limit ourselves to what is revealed there about the identity and characteristics of Christ, his purposes, and the nature of his work. It is this kind of Christology, *a biblical one*, that has a profound effect on the way we think, feel, and exercise our will.

Our Christology Influences the Way We Think

In basing our doctrine of Jesus Christ solely on Scripture, we assume more than its authority, truthfulness and trustworthiness. We also assume that the words given and the thoughts expressed there are understandable and are designed to tell us something definite. So when the disciple Thomas refers to Jesus Christ as "my Lord and my God" and Jesus accepts the statement (Jn 20:28), we maintain that Jesus is really God. Since the Bible also says "there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men" (1 Tm 2:5-6), we believe Jesus is fully human and worked for the good of all humanity. When Paul speaks of "the church of God, which he [God] bought with his own blood" (Ac 20:28), we conclude that Christ's human characteristics, like his blood, may be used with reference to his deity as well as his humanity. To us this is reality, truth, and factual information. No matter if we are unable to grasp how this was brought about or is maintained by God, we cling to what is revealed as it is revealed. We are told in unmistakable language that "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their [the world's] sins against them" (2 Co 5:19), so the universality of Christ's work is to us a historical and reliable reality. That is the way we think because that is how the Bible leads us to think. Frequently the Scriptures stress the necessity of reading, understanding, and pondering God's written revelation. We are repeatedly urged to be eager, diligent, and to make every effort to obtain a correct understanding of the word of truth and to cherish it

with utmost confidence. The idea is that we can and should know the truth of God through his revelation. Really. This is not to say that saving faith is to be equated with intellectual comprehension. The creation of saving trust in the heart is a work of the Holy Spirit distinguishable from mental knowledge. But alongside our God-given faith we receive intellect and the ability to receive God's thoughts communicated through words and language that mean what they say. Our Christology reinforces and expresses this way of thinking in us.

We believe Christ who said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn 8:31-32). By the grace and power of God we are able to learn, know, and hold to truth from Christ and about Christ. And how does this impact our lives? Consider these sample effects:

We enjoy stability of doctrine. The Christ of Scripture is not drawn from subjective opinion nor is he subject to fluctuations of human thought. He does not change. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:8). What we hold to be true now is perpetually true, not subject to revision.

We learn to subject our reason and logic to divine revelation. St. Paul stated as a part of the apostolic ministry the demolition of human arguments and "every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God," and to "take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ" (2 Co 10:4-5). In love, God brought this about among us. With the gift of reason and the ability to understand revealed knowledge, sinful humans often fall prey to the temptation to exalt reason above revelation and to manufacture so-called knowledge to usurp the place of divine truth. Our Christology fully admits that there are things about Christ's person and work that go beyond our ability to really understand, but it also teaches us to be content with what God has revealed. We ask questions about the mechanics of the virgin birth and wonder what it really means for the full Godhead or Deity dwells in Christ in bodily form. We ponder how it is possible for God to die at Christ's crucifixion and wrestle with Christ's real temptations to sin coupled with his equally real inability to sin. We often frame acceptable, though not absolutely authoritative, answers. Perhaps more than anything else, we learn humility and are trained to limit ourselves to God's level of self-revelation.

We learn to trust the biblical message of Christ. "We preach Christ crucified" for the same reason Paul did: the message is God's reasonable and reliable instrument to save souls, despite people's opinion that it is foolishness (1 Co 1:18ff.). We do not keep the sword of the Spirit in its sheath simply because scoffers say it is an unworthy weapon. We have learned otherwise about this message of wisdom centered in Jesus.

We derive comfort from the reasonableness of what we believe. No, we don't believe in Christ because it appeals to our reason. We believe because the Spirit of God has brought us to embrace Jesus. But with faith we also enjoy the ability to see how our Christology is grounded in history rather than built on speculative philosophy. We share Paul's conviction that what we say and believe is "true and reasonable" and cheerfully note that what Christ did was done for the world to see rather than "in a corner" (Ac 26:25-26). We mentally note that the gospel is sensible and intellectually defensible, worthy of thoughtful appreciation by all. When Jesus appealed to his miracles as evidences of his identity (Jn 14:11) or exposed the fallacy of his opponents who said he was using satanic powers (Lk 11:17ff.), he demonstrated the fundamental reasonableness of his claims and work. A part of our rich theological heritage in Christ is this way of thinking about the truth.

We who are here assembled likely take these points for granted and accept it as a matter of course. The danger, however, is precisely in taking this way of thinking for granted and then assuming that it requires no special attention. One would think that among professing Christians, despite sweeping changes in other aspects of theology, the identity and work of Christ would remain fairly constant. In the 18th century, however, there began in the church a frontal assault on classic, biblical Christology, and the 20th century has taken this movement to extremes. The supernatural God-man portrayed in the Bible and confessed in the longstanding creeds was assigned an obscure position in the realm of superstition and ignorance. The Christ revealed in clear words of Scripture is now deemed ambiguous or an absurdity. The popular and often quoted theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that "Christ's deeds are not sinless, but ambiguous. One can and should see good and bad in them." Yet he is consistently held to be a 20th century thinker who maintained a significantly high view of Christ. At the heart of all this confusion, of course, is the fact that modern religious thinkers have adopted various approaches to the biblical text and the message there presented. Any study of these Christologies will

demonstrate at least two cardinal presuppositions of modern theologians: (1) The supernatural, historical Christ of the Bible text is impossible and patently false, and (2) our ability to know anything truly or objectively about Christ is likewise impossible. As you might guess, a person's subjective ideas about Christ then become the significant and important thing, at least for that person.

Church historians have sometimes labeled the 13th century the Age of Faith and the 18th century the Age of Reason. The 20th century, in the opinion of thoughtful observers, may well be called the Age of Irrationalism or Anti-intellectualism. In previous centuries, the vast majority of religious and secular philosophers have generally believed that definitive knowledge is possible to mankind. That idea has largely been abandoned. What might be called a radical skepticism regarding objective truth and reality has filtered down from prominent philosophers and theologians to penetrate our culture, from television to art to literature. There are evidences of an overwhelming cultural consensus, sometimes stated explicitly but more often simply implied, that mankind does not and cannot know anything truly or with certainty. Regarding our topic this means we cannot know that the Bible is the Word of God, that Christ is true God or that he died in our place or that he is alive today. So modern theology is largely content cataloging theological and Christological differences without scrutinizing causes for them and not worrying about the rightness or wrongness of them. To people who approach Christ and the Bible in this way, however, true Christianity becomes nonsensical, for it claims to be knowledge.

A related tragedy is that of wholesale ignorance about the content of the Bible. Over forty years ago Herman Gockel observed that modern man "is so far removed from the thought-world of the Bible that it is almost a miracle if he can still understand the kind of things the Bible speaks about." There is little or no evidence to indicate things have improved in this regard over the last several decades. The Bible words and message are largely meaningless to millions. Sadly, this is acceptable to most of them. Their ignorance is cynically declared to be bliss.

We are the ones who are considered abnormal. Our way of thinking is indicted as impossible, even absurd in a scientific age. If objective knowledge is not possible to mankind, for example, it is silly to argue points of doctrine. Subjective opinions, variable yet held to be equally valid, become the intellectual standard to be gained and maintained. Needless to say, Bible statements about Christ and his work are also considered subjective human testimonies that stem largely from inner longings of the soul and find expression in "hyperbole of the heart." Elements of myth, legend, and poetic inaccuracies are assumed to be present in all Christological accounts. Obviously our Christology and other Christologies are in conflict.

We now turn our attention to an influence on daily living that is more powerful than our thoughts. Human emotions invariably impact behavior and lifestyle more than mere knowledge does. Our Christology feeds the heart as well as the head to make profound differences in daily life.

Our Christology Influences the Way We Feel

"When they saw the star, they were overjoyed...They saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him" (Mt 2:10-11). "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people" (Lk 1:68). "Then the man said, 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshiped him" (Jn 9:38). "He showed them his hands and his feet. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord" (Jn 20:20). This small sampling of passages have something in common: they describe how people responded to Christ with strong emotions, even though no explicit command to do so was given at the time. Christ's incarnation, ministry, and resurrection from the dead, with the implications they bring, breed strong feelings. We will also find no shortage of Bible passages that explicitly command, invite and urge us to respond to Christ and his work with love, gratitude, awe, humility, joy, courage, comfort, zeal, peace, and many other appropriate feelings. Our Christology impacts our emotions. "We love because he first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19).

When our emotions flow from the truth of Christ and his atoning work on our behalf, we feel the way God wants us to feel. Due primarily to time limitations, we cannot now mention or list in depth ways in which

our Christology influences the way we feel. But we can highlight a sampling of emotions that are to be found in our daily lives.

We grieve over our sin as we behold Christ taking its guilt and consequences upon himself. We learn also in this way to take our sinfulness most seriously. (Yes, this is certainly the “strange” or “foreign” work of Christ’s deeds, for they here function more as divine law in exposing and clarifying our sinfulness. It is not the primary focus of the gospel events, of course, yet a real one that impacts our emotions.)

We are overjoyed with the reliable news that our sins are truly removed, divine justice is truly satisfied, and life rather than death is truly our inheritance. Despite the ongoing accusations of the devil, the law, and our consciences, we find refuge in Christ who “has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:26). He is utterly faithful to his promises and cannot deny himself. We are forgiven.

We find comfort in his being the eternal, almighty Lord as well as our human brother. Daily we wrestle with our creaturely weaknesses and dependency on forces beyond our control. And daily we look to the all-sufficient Savior who directs our destinies and in all things works for our good. We are able to view the here and now from the perspective of the hereafter. “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33).

We find comfort because Jesus is our sympathetic brother. “We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who was tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (Heb 4:15). His experiences while he laid aside the full use of his powers are particularly comforting as we live out our lives with extremely limited powers. So we confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and grace to help in times of need.

We face the future cheerfully, fully able to react to dreadful and unpleasant signs of the end by lifting up our heads in anticipation rather than apprehension (Lk 21:28). Our optimism rests on Christ’s power and promises, and serves as the perfect antidote for whatever pessimism would otherwise result from viewing current events purely from our human perspective.

Again, lest we take these and related blessings for granted, let us pause to note that if true Christology does not influence our emotions, false views regarding him will. At the heart of false Christologies is something deeper than wrong-headedness. There is human emotion. Terrifically subjective and variable, feelings are nevertheless powerful. When divorced from or pitted against truth or objective reality, emotions can do great damage. False teachings about Christ amply demonstrate this tragedy.

It has been argued that many who succumb to false Christologies at least wish they could have some of the same emotional reactions that we do. Perhaps most people who have heard the Christmas story, for example, genuinely like the idea of believing it even as they conclude it is impossible. It is attractive and beautiful, though incredible. It revives nostalgic memories of childhood, stimulates thoughts of an ideal “peace on earth, good will toward men,” and it presents a most likeable concept of God somehow identifying himself with humankind. But in the end these emotions usually fail to make any lasting impact on lives, because they evaporate in the presence of skepticism. The false intellectualism mentioned above claims many victims in this way. Since its biblical basis is despised as uncertain, the whole concept of the incarnation is easily dismissed as lacking any foundation of reality.

But there is a deeper reason, an emotional one, why most people reject a truly biblical Christology. It is their natural hatred of the meaning and purpose of the incarnation as defined in Scripture, which center in the message of human sin and Christ’s atonement for sin. The person and work of Christ simply cannot be adequately understood or appreciated without an accompanying understanding and acknowledgement of human sinfulness and its consequences. “When Christ came into the world, he said, ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me...I have come to do your will, O God.’ And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:5ff.). Here there are no stars leading wise men, nor Christmas trees, nor any easily misunderstood “peace on earth.” Without the Holy Spirit people cannot and do not see themselves as so sinful that they need such a Savior as described in the Bible. So to them there is nothing attractive about the cross of Christ.

People of this world understand and emotionally react to human weaknesses and the failure to be or act as one ought to. But to speak of failing to live up to one's full potential, shirking of responsibility, or trashing relationships through ethical lapses is not the same as understanding or endorsing the Bible concept of sin. False Christologies are invariably linked to false, inadequate appraisals of sin, its source, and its seriousness in the eyes of God. Wrong appraisals of the cross of Christ are sure to follow. Liberationist and feminist theologies, for example, see in Christ a model of resoluteness against social and political powers of oppression. Christ is no longer portrayed or proclaimed as Savior from sin but as political activist and social reformer. Similarly, many contemporary comforters present a Christ who supposedly leads us to deal with feelings of guilt by coming to terms with our inner selves through self-analysis, not by getting right with God through his work. That kind of Christ has a distinctly different kind of impact on human emotions than the kind we enjoy.

Another intense and pervasive emotional source of false ideas about Christ and salvation is the hatred of the idea of divine punishment. Human standards of justice usually find it cruel to threaten condemnation for those who remain ignorant of Christ or who lack faith in his saving work. To really understand false Christological systems that are gaining in popularity one must know the pluralistic and inclusivistic moods that are linked to the rejection of any claims of absolute truth. Even if Christianity is viewed as superior and unique among other religions (as inclusivism usually allows), the tendency to be optimistic about the salvation of those who do not know or trust Christ is still strong. This optimism does not enjoy a biblical foundation, but it expresses well the emotions of people who seek to appear loving, compassionate and tolerant of non-Christian belief systems. The concept of a guaranteed salvation for all is also quite acceptable to Americans in particular because of cherished democratic ideals like equal opportunity, equal rights, and equal standing before the law for everyone. Even though the idea that all religions are basically the same lacks intellectual integrity because of their mutually exclusive teachings regarding God and salvation, the idea is nevertheless embraced. Emotions override reason.

If emotions are stronger than intellectual reasoning, there is yet another, stronger force that determines the way people live. We refer to the human will. Our Christology also touches and transforms us in our exercise of the will and in this way impacts our daily life.

Our Christology Influences the Way We Choose to Live

The biblical and real Christ told his first disciples, "If you love me, you will obey what I command. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me...If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching" (Jn 14:15ff.). Those who by grace possess correct knowledge of Christ and embrace him in faith and grateful love understand this truth. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Co 5:17) "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph 2:10).

Any talk of the new life of a Christian must take into account the continuing existence and influence of the sinful nature that opposes all that Christ and the Christian seek to enjoy and express. The struggle between old and new is fierce and continuous. Two opposing wills are in conflict within every follower of Christ. In saying that our biblical Christology influences the way we choose to live we do not mean that the sinful nature has been rendered totally inactive. It is still casting its ballot against what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. We do mean, however, that the message of Christ and his saving work on our behalf brings ongoing renewal and a genuine desire to do God's revealed will despite the contrary will of the sinful nature. The petition of everyone who has been given life in Christ echoes that of David: "Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul...Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground" (Ps 143:8,10). The confession of Paul expresses reality for each of us: "In my inner being I delight in God's law" (Ro 7:22).

What does this mean for our daily lives? Again, with no attempt to give an exhaustive list of ways our lifestyles are impacted by our Christology, we cite the following:

We resolve to follow Jesus in faith and to imitate him. “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps” (1 Pe 2:21). A year ago a book was published with the title *WWJD?: The Question Everyone Is Asking*. The popularity of the book and the greater popularity of bracelets, T-shirts, and other merchandise bearing the acronym WWJD bear witness to the number of people who have apparently joined the “What would Jesus do?” movement. As Thomas a Kempis did in 1427 with his *The Imitation of Christ* or Charles Sheldon did in 1896 with his *In His Steps*, so people today recognize Christ is the perfect role model and pattern for godly living. Our Christology leads us to appreciate the general sentiment expressed when people strive to deal with a situation, problem or dilemma by pondering how Jesus would respond and then resolving to imitate him. Our doctrine of Christ does more than that. Since it highlights the substitutionary nature of his obedience, it helps us maintain the primacy of “Christ for us” that empowers us to appreciate and rightly use “Christ in us.” It keeps us from separating what we would call a “sanctification emphasis” from the more important “justification emphasis” in Christ’s work. We resolve to use the Bible as more than a manual for behavior modification.

We are willing to bear the cross chosen for us. The words of Jesus to Simon Peter in John 21:19 are interesting and instructive. “Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, ‘Follow me!’” Jesus enables us to follow him despite inevitable cross-bearing. “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tm 3:12), yet this does not dim our resolve to follow or our willingness to suffer. In joyful response to Christ’s love and labors on our behalf, we do not crave what may be called a false triumphalism in our Christian lives, but rather follow the general pattern established by Christ. This is the pathway to glory that takes us through the cross to the crown.

We want to share the truth of Christ with everyone. “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Mt 24:14). This is a remarkable statement since the preaching described will take place during days more and more characterized by lovelessness and hostility, hatred and betrayal, persecution and apostasy in the religious community. Christ enables his people to desire and to carry out what pleases him (Phil 2:13) and what is really beneficial for our neighbor.

What a contrast there is between those who enjoy the true Christ and say, “Your will be done,” and those who embrace a false Christology as an expression of their own will. In departing from the Christ who reveals himself on the pages of Scripture they choose a nonexistent Christ, one of their own devising. Without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit they are unable to do anything else. By nature they despise the real Christ of history, find his cross offensive, and consider his gospel foolishness. In blindness and rebellion against truth, they manufacture a Christ that is compatible with their own self-chosen social or political agenda.

The unwillingness to assent to the biblical identity of Jesus Christ normally involves a redefining or downplaying of his saving work. Attacks on his person, that is, on the union of the divine and human natures in the person of Christ ultimately bring a negative impact on the significance of his redemptive work. The early church fathers recognized this in their resistance to all definitions or descriptions of Christ that failed to uphold his full humanity, full deity and the union between the two. As Luther so graphically phrased it, the devil attacks Christ “in three lines of battle. One will not let him be God, another will not let him be man, and the third will not let him do what he has done. Each of the three wants to reduce Christ to nothing.” Unbelieving scholars today still refer to a “divinity” and a “humanity” of Jesus, but do so in vague terms and with the purpose of highlighting mankind’s assumed ability to ascend to the divine. What Friedrich Schleiermacher wrote almost 200 years ago is pretty much assumed by modern religious thinkers: “As certainly as Christ was man, there must reside in human nature the possibility of taking up the divine into self, just as did happen in Christ.” When all is said and done, false teachers invariably tell us that we must duplicate or complete Christ’s work to be saved. Christ is thus a pattern or example, stimulator and pathfinder, but not really Savior in the biblical sense of the word.

Deliberate rejection of Bible truth does not erase familiarity with—or the use of—Bible vocabulary. False teachers must define words like “Savior” and “salvation” in ways that twist the biblical emphasis. The rescue from the guilt and condemnation from sin, the reconciliation between the holy God and sinful mankind,

and the giving of spiritual and eternal life to replace death is no longer the focus. Salvation from various economic, ethical, social, political and psychological maladies is made the primary purpose and goal of Christ's words and deeds. It is not uncommon for modern theologians to use a "salvation vocabulary" without distinct meaning, just as our society in general does. You are perhaps aware of the recent strong and negative reactions to the blockbuster movie *Titanic*. Religious reviewers have often condemned the movie as satanic, evil, godless, and so forth. A case can be made for this appraisal, of course, as it can for probably 90% or more of all movies made and marketed by major filmmakers and studios. But the furor over *Titanic* focuses less on the almost obligatory fornication portrayed or the failure to use the 1912 sudden tragedy to urge spiritual preparedness than it does on one line in the movie's script. The heroine speaks the words as she declares that the hero "saved" her "in every way that a human being can be saved." With this mention of salvation without the mention of Christ, the film almost invites critics to look for the cloven hoof, sniff for brimstone, and assail the moviemakers for attacking Christianity. If taken seriously as a thoughtful and purposeful theological assertion, it is blatantly anti-Christian and reflects a totally inadequate view of Christ and salvation. It is more likely, however, that the sentence, in the context of the movie plot, probably referred to a "salvation" from a potentially bad marriage, from a social haughtiness and prejudicial class consciousness, and from a basically boring voyage on the part of the heroine. Viewed in the light of known religious ideas of contemporary Hollywood writers and producers, the words may more accurately be described as a silly overstatement or somewhat of a cultural cliché that uses words that have become largely vague and meaningless in society despite having a rich biblical meaning. One gains the same impression when reading what many major contemporary theologians and scholars have to say about Christ's saving work. They show themselves unwilling and therefore incapable of taking sin and salvation from sin seriously.

Conclusion

It might have been sufficient for this essay simply to highlight the impact of a true, biblical Christology in our daily lives. Serious thought was given to concentrating entirely on stating and describing only positive effects that our doctrine establishes and maintains among us. But an approach to the assigned topic that included brief looks at false Christologies was chosen. The decision to do this was made quite consciously, with the hope that this material will prove profitable in a number of ways.

First, may the contrasting look at true and false ideas regarding our Savior stimulate us to ask God for continued wholesome thinking. Love for divine truth is always to be accompanied by watchfulness over against falsehood. We are sometimes tempted to view false doctrines as relatively impotent formulations of theologians who dwell mostly in ivory towers. Yet there is ample evidence that the ivory tower is often "the control tower of a civilization" as John Robbins phrased it. Recognized scholars, despite (and perhaps often because of) the sheer nonsense of their conclusions, usually get good press and are usually assumed to be authoritative by the religious laity. We should not underestimate the influence of false teachers and their ideas on the way people think.

On the emotional level, may our love for the Lord Jesus Christ and our hatred for everything that denies or obscures him remain strong.

All error, heresy, idolatry, offense, misuse, and evil in the church originally came from despising or losing sight of this article of faith in Jesus Christ. And if one looks at it correctly and clearly, all heresies do contend against this dear article of Jesus Christ.

With these words Luther wisely observes that to fall prey to errors regarding Christ and faith in Christ is to lose all we need for life and salvation. The impact on our daily lives would be massive and deadly. So let us cherish the treasure of truth that God has so graciously preserved among us.

May our resolve to share the truth with our neighbor also grow and express itself vigorously. It is a major part of our Christian calling to reach out to those still enslaved to ignorance and error, and to seek their

release. We have what they need. We have what is fully able to change the way they think, feel and make decisions as surely as it can change their eternal destiny. Jesus is true God and true man. Jesus is the only Savior from sin, death and the devil. His life and death have won forgiveness of sins for the world. His resurrection assures us of this fact. This is the heart of true Christology. This is the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.