

Jesus: The Way, Truth and the Life

[Brian Schwertley](#)

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.” Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:1-6).

Introduction

Many people in America today view Jesus Christ as a friendly, wise, ecumenical teacher. They view Him as a great religious leader among religious leaders such as Buddha, Mohammed and Krishna. Such views, while popular, are not based on the Bible or the teaching of Jesus Himself. In fact, the sad truth is that the more the typical American truly learns about the extraordinary claims of Christ, the more he will be highly offended by His teaching. People are offended because the Nazarene was the most anti-ecumenical person who ever lived. They take great offense over Christ’s explosive and amazing claims about His own person and work. While in our pluralistic, relativistic age, we can understand why the exclusive claims of Christ are offensive, it is crucial that we focus our attention on the true Jesus, who is revealed to us in Scripture. A human fantasy, based on secular humanistic or sentimental wishful thinking, will not do anyone any good. If we substitute a false christ for the true savior of Scripture, we have created an idol and have cut ourselves off from any possibility of salvation.

With this thought in mind we come to one of the most exclusive (and offensive) sayings of Jesus in the Gospels: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” To those who are believers, this is one of the most glorious and comforting statements in the Scripture. But, to the unregenerate man, it comes off as the arrogant ravings of a madman. Whatever one may think, we must acknowledge that these three statements are true and we must carefully consider the meaning of these precious words to the best of our ability. Before we do so, however, we need to briefly consider the context, which is fascinating.

Jesus had been instructing the disciples about the fact that soon He would leave the earth and go to God the Father in heaven. This was a topic that He had instructed them in before (13:33-37), although somewhat vaguely. With this additional teaching, He expected them to understand. Here, He gives them comfort about His departure; He assured them that He would prepare a special place for them in heaven and that He would come back again to receive them. To this teaching our Lord adds another word of assurance: “And where I go you know, and the way you know” (v. 4). Jesus had just said “believe in God, believe also in Me” (v. 1). The “you know the way” is an implicit acknowledgment that the apostles knew that Jesus is the way. The

fact that Christ had just spoken about going to God the Father indicates that the disciples should have known He was speaking about heaven. The apostles had a rudimentary idea of where Jesus was going, but as yet were unwilling to accept the implications of what was said.

Thomas' question shows that the apostles were misunderstanding or misinterpreting our Lord's statements. He says "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way" (v. 5)? That Jesus was speaking about salvation and heaven as the destination of believers seems to have gone right over the apostles' heads. Thomas was thinking in carnal terms. He was thinking about an earthly destination, not the Father in heaven. Therefore, he essentially concludes, "How can we be expected to know the way (i.e. the directions or path to go to get to a geographical location) when we do not know your final destination?" It may be that the disciples' thinking was still clouded by the popular idea at that time of an earthly Messianic kingdom. The idea of Jesus ascending to heaven to rule from God's throne was foreign to their thinking. Thus, we could say that, on the one hand, the apostles really did know that Jesus was the only way to God in heaven. But, on the other hand, in this context they had misunderstood what Jesus had just taught. Our Lord knows exactly what is going on here and uses Thomas' ignorant remark as an occasion to bring forth a great truth regarding Himself. What Jesus is, because of His person and work, is precisely and exclusively what sinners need if they are to know the truth and possess eternal life.

Christ: The Threefold Solution

As we look at Jesus's categorical statement, "I am the way and the truth and the life," it is important to keep in mind that this statement is designed to focus our attention on Christ as the one who redeems sinners and reconciles them to God. To understand the full significance of His words, we need to contemplate what Adam possessed before he fell into sin. Before he sinned, Adam enjoyed three great privileges in relation to God. First, he had a good relationship with God. He was in *communion* with his Creator and walked and talked with Him in the garden. There was no enmity or disharmony in their relationship at all. Second, he *communicated* with God and knew God as the source of truth and meaning. Adam did not seek truth or meaning autonomously until he fell into sin. Third, he *possessed spiritual life*. Although he lived with the possibility of falling, he did not know or experience death until he ate the forbidden fruit. When Adam sinned, the communion that he had with God was broken and he was alienated from God. When he sinned, he no longer sought truth exclusively from God but listened to the devil's lies and sought to determine for himself what is good and what is evil. He looked for truth autonomously and thus lost the truth. Because of his sin, he also lost the spiritual life he possessed, for the moment he sinned he died spiritually. God's warning, "in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die," was strictly enforced.

This pitiful lost condition is something that all of us experience until we believe in Christ. Apart from Jesus, we are God's enemies and live under His judicial wrath. Apart from the Holy Spirit, who is bestowed on the basis of Christ's work, we are all dead in our trespasses and

spiritually blind to the truth. “For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:6-8). Without knowing the Savior, the life of man is based on nothing but lies and deceptions. And without Jesus, we all stand condemned under the sentence of death, both spiritual and physical. In His one statement to Thomas, our Lord presents Himself as the only and ultimate solution to all of man’s problems due to sin. Instead of enmity, alienation and wrath, Jesus is the way to God. He removes all impediments to fellowship and communion with God. Instead of satanic lies and the lies of autonomous human reason, Christ is truth itself. Instead of death, hell and the agony of spiritual death, Jesus is the life. Our Lord uses the ignorance of the disciples as an occasion to focus their attention on Himself and the gospel of salvation.

Jesus as the Way

The first thing Christ says is, “I am the way.” He does *not* say that he is *a* way to the Father, as if He were one alternative among many. He is “the way.” He is the only way. He also does *not* say that He points men to the way or is a guide to the way but He Himself in His person *is* “the way.” If men are to go to heaven to live with the Father, they must go to Jesus. They must embrace His person and work by faith. As the Savior said to the disciples on another occasion, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.... I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture” (Jn. 10:7, 9).

In Jesus’ day many Jews believed that the way to God was by keeping His law. In their view, the way was something we needed to do, such as good works and keeping the commandments from A to Z. This is essentially the position of all the world’s “great” religions. Hinduism teaches that heavenly bliss awaits those who follow proper meditative techniques. Buddhism teaches men to seek nirvana through the eightfold path. Islam and modern Judaism teach salvation through repentance and good works. You just say you are sorry and then live a righteous life. Roman Catholicism says you need faith plus good works that flow from faith. All these religions place salvation in men’s hands. In other words, redemption is something that we must achieve. In some of these systems, God may help but ultimately, they argue, it is man who makes his own way. Man must climb his way up to God.

When Jesus says “I am the way,” He is teaching that heaven can only be reached through what He will achieve by His life, atoning death and resurrection. Faith in Christ and His achievements is the key to heaven. This is an explicit rejection of the world’s religions that all follow the satanic philosophy of a self-imposed journey to God. Sinners cannot come up to God because they have a record of thousands upon thousands of sins; and they have corrupt hearts that do not and cannot truly seek God. To understand why Christ is the only way, we need to consider man’s predicament or total ruin due to sin.

The first thing about sin that we need to know in order to understand why Jesus is the only way to God is the fact that all sin involves real guilt and this guilt merits a severe penalty.

All sin results in actual guilt which means that God attaches a penalty or liability of punishment to every act of rebellion against His path. That sin merits real guilt and punishment is taught throughout Scripture (sin may be defined as a transgression of God's moral law either in thought, word or deed). God told Adam that the day he sinned he would surely die (Gen. 2:17). God warns us saying, "The soul [or person] who sins will die" (Ezek. 18:4, 20). Paul writing under divine inspiration says, "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Speaking of men who ignore God, who are unsaved, who walk according to an unbiblical philosophy, Solomon says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Rom. 14:12). Writing about non-Christians, John says that on the day of judgment they will be judged according to their works. He notes that all their sins are recorded in a book (Rev. 20:12-13). The penalty for their sins is the second death when they are cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14-15). Note that all sin is recorded by God, involves real judicial guilt and results in death in a comprehensive sense (i.e. spiritual death, physical death and eternal death or hell).

The fact that all sin results in real guilt before God raises a crucial question. How can this sin be paid for in a manner that truly satisfies God's justice? To simply say that one is sorry and then reform one's life is not enough to eliminate past sins, for a good deed in the future does not wash away or remove a wicked deed in one's past. Simply put, God's justice requires the punishment of death in a comprehensive sense (i.e. the penalty must be paid for in full) before God can declare a person to be judicially righteous. If we understand the implications of this answer, then we will see why only Jesus and no one else (or no other way) is the way to heaven. Because man has a lengthy record of guilt and remains a sinner, it should be obvious to us that he cannot by his "good deeds" or reformations or declarations of sorrow and regret manufacture a ladder into heaven.

In order to understand why Christ is the only way, we need to note who Jesus is and what He accomplished redemptively. The only Savior of men is the Son of God (Mt. 11:27; 14:26, 33; 16:16; 26:63-65); the second person of the Trinity (Gen. 1:26; Mt. 3:16-17; 28:19) is equal with God in every way (Col. 2:8-9; 1 Tim. 1:16-17; 2:3-4; 3:16; 6:14-16; Heb. 1:1-3, 8; etc.). In order to save man, the Son of God voluntarily left the throne room of heaven, assumed a human nature (i.e. He had a real human body and soul but without original sin; Heb. 7:26) and came to this fallen earth to be born of the virgin Mary in Bethlehem. God Himself took the initiative in man's redemption. Jesus came down to earth in order to save His people. He "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:7-8). Why is it important that we understand that Jesus the Messiah is truly human and truly God in one person? Christ had to be genuinely a human being in order to suffer and die and pay the penalty for other human beings. An angel or spirit could not die a vicarious death, only a person who was without spot or blemish (i.e. sinless) could do that. He had to be truly God if He was to offer up to the Father a sacrifice of infinite value. Keep in mind that Jesus did not die for one man or even a small group of people but for millions of

people from every nation on this earth. As both God and man, He was and remains the only Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24).

Next we need to consider what Jesus did redemptively that makes Him the only way to God's presence in heaven. This raises the question: how did Christ remove the guilt and penalty of sin for His people? The Redeemer came to earth to suffer and die a bloody death on the cross as a sacrifice for His people. Everyone who truly believes in Christ is united to Him in His death and resurrection (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 6). The sin and guilt of believers is imputed or placed upon Jesus as He suffered and died on the cross and consequently He paid the *full penalty* that we deserved. If you believe in Christ every sin that you have ever committed—past, present and future—has been paid for in full. Your sins have been expiated or removed forever. Theologians refer to Christ's death on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice (He did not die for Himself, for He was sinless. He died for the elect; for all those given to Him by the Father, Jn. 6:37). The language of Scripture that describes the significance of what the Savior did is clear and unmistakable. He "blotted out" sins (Ps. 51:1, 9); cleansed them or washed them away (Ps. 51:2; Ac. 10:15; 1 Jn. 1:7); "covered" them over so that they are forever out of God's sight (Ps. 32:1; 85:2; Rom. 4:7); removed them from God "as far as the east is from the west" (Ps. 103:12); cast them "into the depths of the sea" (Mic. 10:17) and placed them behind God's back forever (Isa. 38:17). Because of what Jesus did on Calvary, over 2000 years ago, our sins have been forgiven and forgotten by God (Col. 2:13; Heb. 10:17). The cross of Christ is hard for people to accept because people think they need to *do something* to appease God and *earn* God's favor. But the Bible is clear that only what Jesus accomplished is acceptable to Him. Therefore, we must count all of our supposed good works, achievements and strivings as worthless trash in God's sight and depend solely on Jesus for salvation (see Phil. 3:8-10).

Christ is the way, not simply because He removed the curse of sin for believers (see Gal. 3:13), but also because He obeyed the law in exhaustive detail; thus *earning* eternal life for His people. If a person wants eternal life, the penalty of sin must be removed and *a perfect obedience to the moral law must be rendered*. A Christian will be sanctified by Christ's Spirit and will lead a holy life; but, even the best of believers sins every single day. The righteousness that God requires for entrance into heaven is a *perfect, positive, perpetual* righteousness. Thus, Jesus came "to fulfill all righteousness" for us (Mt. 3:15). His whole life of obedience was vicarious, so He could provide the perfect righteousness we need. "Therefore, as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Rom. 5:18-19). The Savior was born *under the law* in order to redeem those under the law (Gal. 4:4-5). Consequently, He "became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). Jesus, by His death on the cross, removes our filthy garments (i.e. our sin and guilt) and in their place He clothes us with the white, spotless garments of His righteousness (see Zech. 3:3-4). He provides the white glistening wedding clothes that allow us to enter the wedding banquet of the Lamb (Mt. 22:12ff). When the Bible speaks of the totality of Christ's redemptive work (what theologians refer to as His active and passive obedience), it calls it "the righteousness of Christ" (cf. Rom. 10:4), "the

righteousness of God” (Rom. 1:17; 3:5, 21, 22; 10:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9); “the righteousness of one” (Rom. 5:18); and “the righteousness of faith” (Rom. 4:11, 13; 9:30; 10:6). It is the “righteousness” God imputes apart from works (Rom. 4:6). With this rich doctrine in mind, we can only conclude that Jesus is the only way to heaven because the Father can *only declare us righteous* on the basis of *Jesus’ righteousness*. As Paul says, “A man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ... For by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified” (Gal. 2:16). “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:21-24). Sinners must look to Jesus through faith. They must look to Christ’s sacrificial death and perfect obedience to the law.

Another reason that Jesus is the only way to heaven is that all believers partake of the victory and benefits of His resurrection. The efficacy of our Lord’s death cannot be separated from His resurrection. The resurrection not only proves that God accepted Christ’s sacrifice; it also plays a crucial role in a salvation itself. “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:10). The Savior’s resurrection tells us that He conquered death and merited life in its fullest sense (cf. Rev. 1:18; Jn. 11:25; 1 Cor. 15:21-22). It also proves that He has defeated and subdued the devil (cf. Heb. 2:14). It is important to recognize that the *victorious, living, exalted Redeemer* mediates for His people and applies His redemptive work to individuals throughout history. Our faith is to be directed to a victorious living Savior who conquered Satan, sin and death (we will consider the benefits and implications of the resurrection in more detail when we consider Jesus as the life). Note the importance of our Lord’s resurrection in Paul’s words: “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9).

Stop for a moment and reflect on Jesus Christ’s words. Do you believe that Jesus is the *only way* to heaven? If you think that He is one way among many; that all religions sincerely held lead to God; that all paths diligently followed end up in heaven; then you do not understand who Christ really is or the importance and uniqueness of what He accomplished. You, tragically, do not yet understand the wickedness of sin, the holiness of God and the dire nature of your predicament. Jesus is the only way to God because He is the only way to have sin and guilt removed and He is the only way to obtain the imputed righteousness that merits eternal life. Your life is full of sin. Your best works are tainted with sin. Your record is wicked and vile compared to God’s righteousness and holiness. Your only hope is to recognize this fact and confess your guilt and wickedness to God and then look to Christ and His righteousness. Listen to what Jesus says and bow the knee to Him as Lord and Savior: “All that the Father gives Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent

Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn. 6:37-40).

Jesus as the Truth

The second of Christ’s amazing self-descriptions is that He is “the truth.” This statement means much more than the reality that our Lord was a teacher of truth or a great prophet who told people truths about the Father. He is the divine Word. The source of all truth is in His person. The root of all knowledge and meaning is found only in Him. When Jesus says “I am the truth,” it refers to His essential being from which the truth of words necessarily flows. It also refers to His incarnate state, for He is come unto mankind to reveal the Father. Following our text the Lord says, “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.... He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:7, 9). Christ is the full and final revelation of God and thus to know anything correctly as to its true meaning and purpose, one must first study Jesus and have faith in Him. Paul makes this point when he says that in Him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). One’s view of theology, reasoning, factuality, philosophy and living must start with the Christ of Scripture. Since Christ is God manifest, all real wisdom originates in Him. Since Jesus is the source of redemption, all spiritual enlightenment and knowledge comes from Him. The Savior (His person and work) is the key to the storehouse of all God’s resources.

Consequently, we are *not* to seek knowledge, meaning or ethics *autonomously*. To do so is foolishness and rebellion. The devil told Eve that true knowledge or wisdom can only come by ignoring God and His word. The result of following Satan’s advice was sin, darkness, ignorance and foolishness. The wisdom of the world seems scholarly but is really dishonest, proud and wicked. Paul describes unbelievers as people who walk “in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph. 4:17-18). Solomon says, “The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble” (Prov. 4:19). Paul says that men create false religions and philosophies in order to avoid the truth about God revealed to them in the natural order (Rom.1:18ff). Thus, we see that genuine knowledge is connected to true spirituality and biblical ethics, all of which are found only in Christ. God made man upright with true knowledge, righteousness and holiness, but as a result of the fall “they have sought out many schemes” (Ecc. 7:29). As a result, “There is none who understands” (Rom. 3:11). “Professing to be wise, they became fools” (Rom. 1:22). “The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, ‘He catches the wise in their own craftiness,’ and again, ‘The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile’” (1 Cor. 3:19-20).

Jesus is infinite in knowledge and through His work of redemption renews our minds (Eph. 4:23) and restores us to “true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24). Through His person and work, He grants us repentance “unto the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 2:25). As a result “we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). As Truth itself, who restores men to the truth by His redemptive work, Christ sets us free from human traditions, worldly philosophies and the

worldviews of darkness. Churches apostatize when they turn away from Christ to embrace the world's way of thinking. Thus Paul warned us, "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him" (Col. 2:9-10).

The unregenerate man can only know truth in a superficial, disconnected, surface sense. He can know that a tree exists; that it derives its nourishment from the sun and the soil; that it is good for making houses and furniture; but he cannot tell us anything about where trees come from or why they exist. When he looks at a plant, or animal, or even man, he sees something that evolved from pond scum in a completely random meaningless universe. In his attempt to suppress the truth about God, the modern unbeliever asserts that everything evolved from chaos. He believes we live in an impersonal, chance universe where ethical absolutes, real meaning and even universal laws of logic have no place. He believes that man as the pinnacle of this random process cannot impose meaning and ethics upon his environment; but such thinking is arbitrary and inconsistent. Modern naturalistic, secular humanistic thought leaves men with only two choices in regard to existence. They can steal concepts of meaning and ethics from the Christian worldview and simply ignore *the great inconsistency*. Unbelievers almost always do this because they like to talk about love, justice, hope and meaning. Or they can be *consistent* and adopt a form of nihilism (nihilism is the bold acceptance of the idea that any real knowledge, meaning and ethics is impossible). Such a position leads to either anarchy or statism as men impose their arbitrary will on others by force. J. G. Vos notes that the great moral decline in the West and of the chaos and violence that flowed from this decline is directly attributable to a rejection of the Christian worldview:

It is entirely true that World War II was, in the deepest sense, a result of widespread acceptance of the doctrine of human evolution as the truth, accompanied by a gradual but very real rejection of the Bible, by highly educated people, as their standard of faith and life. The logic involved in this moral decline is really unavoidable when once the assumption of the truth of human evolution has been made. If we were not created by God, then we are not responsible to God for our beliefs and actions. If we are not responsible to God for our beliefs and actions, then we are responsible only to our fellow man and to ourselves. In that case there is no absolute, permanent moral standard; what is right and wrong changes with the times and the circumstances. From this position it is but a step to the ideology of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. The apparently innocent theory of evolution has wrought tremendous havoc in human life. We should always realize that evolution is not merely a logical theory; it is also a philosophy of life held by many.¹

Ultimately, you must either place your faith in Christ who is truth itself or you must embrace a lie. To know Jesus is to know the infinite personal God who created all things. To

¹ Johannes G. Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), 42-43.

trust in the Savior is to embrace truth and meaning in the fullest sense. People reject Christ because they are unwilling to face the truth about their own sin and inability. It is our hope and prayer that you will humble yourself, acknowledge your sin and look to Christ who alone reveals the Father. Believe in Jesus as the divine-human Mediator and trust in His words and works. That is your only hope: “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn. 8:32).

Christ as the Life

Our Lord’s third assertion is that He is “the life.” Jesus is the source and foundation not only of all physical life but all spiritual life as well. The person who does *not* believe in the Savior, who is *not* born again, is spiritually dead. He lives physically but exists under God’s wrath, is blind to the truth and spiritually lifeless. The sentence of eternal death and hell is upon him and he cannot escape death unless he believes in Christ. Whoever believes in Jesus possesses spiritual life right now—“he has passed from death unto life” (), and he will have life eternal when his physical body dies because immediately his soul will go to heaven. He will have glorified life after the resurrection when he goes into the eternal state with his resurrected glorified body (1 Cor. 15:42-56).

When we speak of Jesus as the life we speak of His person and His work. The Bible teaches that He is the “author,” “captain” or pioneer of salvation in the most comprehensive sense of the term. There is a vital union that exists between all genuine believers and Christ during His life, death and resurrection. When He conquered sin and death at the cross, His victory was ours. When He rose from the dead, we rose unto life with Him. The Savior is the trunk and we are the branches (Jn. 15:5). He is the fountain of living water (Jn. 4:10), “the resurrection and the life” (Jn. 11:25), the “bread of life” (Jn. 6:51), and “the beginning, the firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18). From Him and Him alone we derive spiritual life and nourishment. His resurrection is the reason that Christians have and live in newness of life.

Scripture emphasizes this crucial truth in a number of ways. “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (Jn. 11:25). Jesus does not simply say that He will give resurrection and the life but that He Himself is the resurrection and the life. He is the source of eternal life. The moment that you place your trust in Christ you will possess the life of the age to come. Paul writes, “For since by man [Adam] came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive (1 Cor. 15:21-22). Jesus said, “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. And I have the key of Hades and of Death” (Rev. 1:18).

When the Bible speaks of Christ as “the life” it directs us especially to the benefits of His resurrection. These benefits are manifold. The first fruit of our Lord’s resurrection toward the elect is regeneration. “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:4-6). “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of

your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Col. 2:13). In Christ we are “born again” (Jn. 3:3), “regenerated” (Tit. 3:5) or “made alive” (Eph. 2:5). Thus we are called a “new creation” (Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17), a “new man” (Eph. 4:24). Why are some people born again while others are not? The reason some are regenerated while others remain spiritually dead is that only the elect were united with Jesus in His death and resurrection. Hodge writes, “It is in virtue of their union with Christ that believers are partakers of his life and exaltation. They are to reign with him. The blessings, then, of which the apostle speaks, are represented as already conferred for two reasons,—first, because they are in a measure already enjoyed; and, secondly, because the continuance and consummation of these blessings are rendered certain by the nature of the union between Christ and his people. In him they are already raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of God.”²

The apostle John also teaches that believers are regenerated as a consequence of their union with Christ in His resurrection. The apostle speaks of a first resurrection that occurs long before the final resurrection at the end of human history. “Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be kings and priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:6). The first resurrection refers to the resurrection of Christ of which all believers partake. Consequently they cannot be harmed by the second death. In John’s gospel, Jesus also spoke of two resurrections. The first resurrection refers to regeneration and salvation (Jn. 5:24-25). It occurs when a person hears the word of God; Jesus speaks life to a dead soul; and the person believes in Christ. The second resurrection refers to the bodily, physical resurrection that occurs at the second coming (Jn. 5:28-29). Those who partake of a spiritual resurrection (the first resurrection) are raised to life. Those who do not partake of the first resurrection are raised to condemnation.

Paul says that our Lord became a life-giving Spirit at the resurrection. “The first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45). At His resurrection Christ received a supernatural, spiritual (glorified) body. Thus, the resurrected Messiah (the second or last Adam) is the representative Man; “the firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18); the pioneer or lead climber for the elect in redemptive life; and, He Himself is the source for the new life: both the new life of regeneration and the new life at the bodily resurrection where all believers receive spiritual, glorified bodies. Matthew Poole writes,

The last Adam, by which he meaneth Christ, who in time was after the first Adam, and was born in the last days, and was [the] last common Head; as Adam was the first, with respect of grace and spiritual regeneration, he was made a quickening spirit: he was made so, not when he was conceived and born, for he had a body subject to the same natural infirmities that ours are; but upon his resurrection from the dead, when, though he had the same body, in respect of the substance of it, yet it differed in qualities, and was much more spiritual; with which body he

² Charles Hodge, *Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1964 [1856]), 75.

ascended up into spiritual life, so also to quicken our mortal bodies at his second coming, when he shall raise the dead out of their graves.³

As the rays of the sun give light, warmth and life to plants in the spring, the resurrected Son imparts spiritual light and life to His own people. “For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself” (Jn. 5:26). “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation” (Gal. 6:15).

The second fruit of Jesus’ resurrection is justification. “It [the righteousness of Christ] shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised up because of our justification” (Rom. 4:24-25). Although the New Testament virtually always relates justification directly to Christ’s death, blood, suffering or atonement (cf. Rom. 3:24; 5:9; 6:7; 8:33, 34; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 1:7; 2:13; Col. 2:14; Heb. 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10, 12, 14; etc.), Paul relates it here to the resurrection for good reason; because the justification of sinners that occurred on the cross was perfected, proved and made efficacious at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:17). Theologian and commentator John Murray gives five reasons why the apostle connects the resurrection of Christ with the resurrection of sinners. He writes,

(1) We are justified by faith, and this faith must be directed to Jesus (3:22, 26). But only as a living Lord can he be the object of faith. (2) It is in union with Christ that we are justified (cf. 8:1; II Cor. 5:21). Only as active through the resurrection can any virtue proceed from Christ to us and only with a living Christ can union have efficacy. (3) The righteousness of Christ by which we are justified (5:17, 18, 19) has its embodiment in Christ; it can never be thought of in abstraction from him as a reservoir of merit stored up. Only as the living one can Christ be the embodiment of righteousness and be made to us righteousness from God (I Cor. 1:30). (4) The death and resurrection of Christ are inseparable. Hence the death or blood of Christ as related to our justification (3:24, 25; 5:9; 8:33, 34) could have no efficacy to that end in isolation from the resurrection. (5) It is through the mediation of Christ that we come to stand in the grace of justification (5:2). But the mediation of Christ could not be operative if he were still under the power of death.⁴

Given the importance of the resurrection and its integral role in a believer’s justification, we should not be surprised to note Paul’s obsession with Christ and His resurrection. “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection” (Phil. 3:10).

The third fruit of Christ’s resurrection is sanctification. The most detailed and systematic discussion of sanctification in the New Testament is found in Romans 6:1-7:6. In this section of

³ Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1963 [1865]), 3:597. Note that the teaching of Paul in this passage corresponds to the teaching of Jesus in John’s gospel (discussed above; Jn. 5:24-25, 28-29), where our Lord sets regeneration-salvation in parallel with the last bodily resurrection unto life. Christ is the source and fountain of life. We live only because He lives. “For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you” (2 Cor. 13:4).

⁴ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968 [1959, 1965]), 1:156-157.

Scripture, Paul discusses at length the foundation for personal godliness in the Christian life. The apostle teaches that all the imperatives relating to a believer's progressive sanctification are grounded upon a definitive sanctification achieved by Christ Himself. By virtue of the believer's intimate union with our Lord in His death and resurrection, Christians have been delivered from the power of sin. Paul writes, "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.... Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God" (Rom. 6:4-5, 8-10). Jesus' death is the reason that Christians have died to the reigning, enslaving, defiling power of sin. His resurrection is the reason that believers have and live in newness of life. The "Prince of life" (Ac. 3:15) was and is the first and only fully sanctified man. He imparts this sanctification to others first in regeneration (or, as the Puritans often called it, initial sanctification) and then progressively through renewal by the Holy Spirit. The Confession of Faith says, "They who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection" (15:1).

The ethical imperatives in the epistles arise out of and are rooted in the gracious indicatives [i.e. Jesus' past redemptive acts in history] of the gospel. "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God....Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col. 3:1-5, 5). "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). "Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God" (1 Jn. 3:9). "He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:15-17). When the apostle says that we no longer know Jesus after the flesh, he is pointing to the historical fact that our Lord has been resurrected and glorified and thus lives in a new, exalted, victorious state. The word "therefore" proceeds from this historical reality. When Paul says that for those in Christ old things have passed away, the verb tense (aorist) points to the moment in time when the Holy Spirit regenerated them. But then when the apostle says, "all things have become new" he changes the verb tense (this time perfect), indicating that old things became and continue to be new. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, Christians are regenerated and progressively sanctified. As there was a radical discontinuity between the state

of humiliation (“Christ according to the flesh”), there is a radical discontinuity from the state of being unregenerate (spiritually dead) and being born again (alive in Christ). The old mode of thinking and living (i.e. world and life view, passions, lusts, affections and actions) has been definitively slain with Christ and in regeneration is replaced with a whole new way of thinking and living. Since we have been raised with Jesus, we must continue to walk consistently with that new and continuous life. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

The fourth fruit of our Lord’s resurrection is glorification. After writing that we [i.e. the apostles] have seen, looked upon and even handled the Word of life (1 Jn. 1:1) John says, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 Jn. 3:2). Paul says that Christ Himself will transform our bodies into glorified bodies. “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (Phil. 3:20-21). The foundation of this transformation is the resurrection of Christ. “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming” (1 Cor. 15:20-23). The apostle is not merely discussing the resurrection in general but the resurrection unto life. That is a resurrection that results in immortal glorified bodies. Paul writes,

The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality (1 Cor. 15:47-53).

The salvation that our Lord achieved affects the whole man-body and soul. When Jesus rose in a glorious immortal, spiritual body, He established the redemptive foundation and thus guaranteed every believer’s regeneration as well as their future resurrection in a similar glorified body. All believers long for the day when they shall receive such a wonderful body. “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation, which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed,

but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” (2 Cor. 5:1-5). Although we [i.e. true believers] all share in Christ’s resurrected life in this life (regeneration, justification and sanctification), the full realization of this new life must await the second coming when our salvation is brought to completion. “The picture conveyed is that of the heavenly body being put on, like an outer vesture, over the earthly body, with which the apostle is as it were clad, so as not only to cover it but to absorb and transfigure it. In this way ideas both of continuity and of transformation, which are also prominent in the great resurrection chapter of 1 Cor. 15, are effectively communicated.”⁵

The fifth fruit of Christ’s resurrection is the restoration of the whole created order. As the fall of the first Adam resulted in a curse upon creation and a derailment of the God-glorifying nature of the dominion mandate, the redemptive work of Jesus is directed to the salvation of the elect, the re-institution and enabling of the original dominion mandate and the salvation of the whole created order. The Son of God, through His redemptive work, makes sure that God’s original purpose for mankind and the creation is not lost. To save a multitude and then leave them forever in a fallen corrupt world would be a contradiction of God’s original purpose for mankind. Therefore, the scope of Christ’s mission is cosmic. He not only makes His people a new creation by His resurrection power, He also makes a “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 3:13).

Jesus spoke of a coming restoration of the world in Matthew 19:28. “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” The word translated “regeneration” (NKJV, KJV, ASV, NASB, YLTB), “new world” (RSV) or “renewal of all things” (NIV) is *palingenesia*. It only occurs one other time in the New Testament, in Titus 3:5, in reference to a Christian’s new birth. It literally means re-generation, re-birth or re-creation. This passage can be interpreted in two different ways, both of which support the idea that in Jesus’ resurrection there is a restoration of the whole created order. The first interpretation takes the word “regeneration” in a definitive sense. That is, the regeneration of the world in principle is an accomplished fact in the Savior’s resurrection and ascension to the throne of glory. The judging of the twelve tribes by the apostles would then refer to the preaching of the gospel and the establishment of church discipline throughout Israel after the great commission (Mt. 28:19ff.). The second view (which is held by the great majority of commentators) is that it refers to the final day—the day of judgment. When Christ returns, the saints will receive their glorified bodies and there will be a glorious restitution of all things. It will be a cosmic regeneration, a new creation, a new Genesis.

This concept of restoration or re-creation is common in the New Testament. Peter spoke of the “restoration of all things” (Ac. 3:21) in his preaching and the creation of a “new heavens and a new earth” in his second epistle (3:13). The apostle John tells us of the re-creation as the climax of human history in the book of Revelation. “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth,

⁵ Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 168-169.

for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...the former things have passed” (21:1, 4). While describing a new paradise, the apocalypse clearly points back to the original pre-fall Eden. In the new world there is no more death, or tears, or suffering or pain (21:4). There is a pure river of water of life that flows from God and the Lamb’s throne (22:1). The “tree of life” is found in abundance (22:2) and there is “no more curse” (22:3) or “night” (22:5). All those who have not been cleansed by Jesus Christ who continue in sin and immorality are cast into the lake of fire (21:8) and excluded from the new creation (22:15). Best of all, there is continuous light (22:5), love and fellowship with God and Christ (22:3-5). The salvation that our Lord achieved gives the church and the creation even greater blessings than the original Eden.

Paul also discusses a comprehensive, cosmic reconciliation. “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross” (Col. 1:18-20). Jesus is not only the mediator of the original creation (Col. 1:15), but also the mediator and the firstborn of the second creation. “No domain is left in which the absolute supremacy of Christ and of his work is not fully effective.”⁶ “Whatever is needed to save a fallen world, and restore harmony to the universe, is treasured up in Him—is in Him.”⁷ “By his power and authority, he will correct every aspect of creation. Ultimately he will present this properly arranged universe to God who will be glorified in all.”⁸

In Romans, Paul even personifies the non-rational and inanimate creation to emphasize the future hope of believers in the coming glory: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (8:18-23). The power of Christ’s resurrection will overturn the frustration (*mataiotes*), emptiness or futility of the present world order. The creation, which is presently subject to decay (*phthora*), to corruption and the evils of disease, death, predation and pain, will be freed by our Lord’s liberation from the tomb.

The Only Way to God

⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, *St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961 [1937, 1946]), 64.

⁷ John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle to the Colossians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979 [1884]), 69.

⁸ Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 226.

After the threefold exclusive claim of Christ, our Lord essentially repeats His statement in a different way for emphasis: “No one comes to the Father except through Me” (v. 6). Jesus wants to make sure that we do not water down or misunderstand His words. *Not one person* will be saved and enter heaven to be with God unless they believe in Christ and are redeemed by Him. In other words, sin can only be removed by Jesus’ blood, by His sacrificial death. The only righteousness that God will accept for entrance into life is Christ’s perfect righteousness. The only person who ever lived to conquered sin, death and the grave is the Savior—the divine-human Mediator. There is nothing hard or difficult about our Lord’s statement. It is crystal clear. Heaven is only for those who believe in Jesus. Only Bible-believing, true Christians will behold the face of God in paradise. All others are excluded. Everyone else will go to hell for rejecting the Christ of Scripture. “Take away Jesus, and the way, the truth, and the life are gone: no way, no truth, no life are left. [See] Acts 4:12; John 6:36; Mark 16:16, ‘He that believeth not shall be damned.’ All hope of God and heaven outside of Jesus is vanity and worse. ‘Except through me’ is absolute and final.”⁹

Men are not only dependent upon Christ as the foundation or source of salvation, but also for their knowledge of redemptive truth. Moreover, the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the souls of the elect that imparts spiritual life, raises dead hearts to heavenly life, enlightens darkened minds to the truth and draws the sinner to Christ, flows from the efficacy of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Without Jesus and His work there is no salvation, no redemptive truth, no spiritual life and light and consequently no way to heaven to live in bliss with the Father. The claims of Christ are exclusive, absolute, and totally true. They stand as a warning in capital letters to all those who do not see the need or importance of embracing Jesus as Savior and Lord. There is nothing to do but look to Christ in all His fullness, power and love. Look to Him, suffering, bleeding and dying for your sins, with the eye of faith. Look to Him and trust in His victorious resurrection, ascension and heavenly mediation. What you can never do in one million years, He has done. Scripture presents Him fully to your eyes. Behold the blessed Redeemer: the only way to God, the only door to heaven, the only Mediator between God and men.

Now is the time to repent, to radically change your mind and reject the philosophy of this fallen world system. The universal message today is that all religions are good and lead to God. Such a view is not only self-contradictory and foolish, but is the exact opposite of Jesus’ solemn words. Heaven is not a place for all religions, or all mankind, but *only* for believers in Christ. What you believe is crucial. It can make the difference between living forever in heaven or in hell. Do not ever forget the Lord’s precious words: “There is no way to God the Father but by Me.”

Copyright 2012 © Brian Schwertley, Iola, WI

[HOME PAGE](#)

⁹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, [1943] 1961), 981.

