

*The Whole Counsel of God*  
**Study 23**

**THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST**

***“...that in everything he might be preeminent.”***

*(Colossians 1.18)*

In our study of the whole counsel of God, we began with the doctrine of the trinity. While this doctrine was revealed late in time (i.e., in these last days spoken of in Heb 1.1), it presents to us God as he is eternally related within himself. Here all has its source. God in his triune being is the eternal beginning of all things. From the revelation of God's eternal and timeless being, we stepped into the beginning and studied the doctrine of creation and the whole cluster of themes associated with it that show how our world has been set up. We drew these themes from Genesis 1 to 3 which relate to us how God the creator and man through the first sin shaped our world. Now we must move from creation and the Garden to the revelation of God in the fallen world, and the centre of this revelation is Christ.

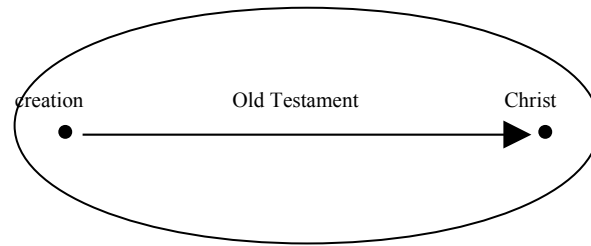
At this point, we should catch our bearings. We are not simply going through a list of doctrines and mining the Bible for what it has to say about the subjects. Rather, we are trying to study the doctrines as they are revealed within scripture. This means that we are carrying out the doctrinal study through a biblical study rather than simply using biblical material to back up our doctrines. Genesis 1 to 3 gave us a setting for studying the doctrinal themes in the context of creation. Now we are moving directly to the person and work of Christ, and this requires some explaining.

We could pursue our study of revelation in the fallen world by tacking the progress of revelation through the long stretch of time between the fall and the coming of Christ. Such a study would be fruitful as a biblical study, but this approach would not be suited for a study of doctrine. The OT is an open ended book. At each turn in its story, new difficulties are raised and the hope for their final resolution and for the final revelation of God is again and again put off to further revelation. No themes of revelation are completed in the OT, and the process of accumulating more insights into the problems of mankind and developing more prophetic visions of what God must yet do does not stop until the history ends with a sense of chronic failure. At this end, the prophetic vision points forward to the future when the LORD will enter history and the Messiah will bring about the fulfilment of all promises and the resolution of mankind's irresolvable problems.

If the OT always leaves one with a sense of incompleteness, the NT gives the opposite impression. Here all from beginning to end rings with the note of completeness and finality. In Christ the envisioned end of the OT breaks into history. Reading through the OT from Genesis 4 to Malachi is like a long hike up a mountain through dense forests. Each turn of the trail only reveals more forest and a further climb. The move from Malachi to Matthew is like stepping into the clearing above the tree line. We feel that we have arrived at the great destination of the hike and stand above all in the full light of the sun. From here we can look back and take in the whole terrain through which we hiked and look up to the peak.

In our study of doctrine, we will move directly from creation to the revelation of God in Christ. In creation, the whole journey was set up, and all doctrinal themes must be understood on the basis of creation. But, in Christ, all themes that are developed through the OT are fulfilled, and it is only in Christ that OT themes attain finality and full doctrinal status.

We can see revelation as a circle that has Christ as the center. All of God's purposes center in him. We can also look at revelation as an ellipse. An ellipse has two foci, and for revelation they are creation and Christ. The distance from the one to the other focal point is covered by the OT.



This view of revelation takes into account the fact that revelation has a beginning and an end and the two ends are connected through a historical development. The Bible presents two creations and two beginnings: the first creation and the new creation which are connected through OT history. The NT does not give us an open ended history of revelation like the OT. It explores and lays out for us the full dimensions of the once-and-for-all revelation in Christ. In our study of doctrine, we are taking this perspective that connects creation and Christ. In this present study, we will fix our focus on Christ and see how the doctrine of the person and work of Christ is tied to creation.

## **A. SETTING THE FOCUS ON THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST**

The NT does not focus on the details of all the things God did, does and will do to meet every need and fulfil each promise. Rather, it shows that God's answer to all needs and his fulfilment of all promises is found in one person, Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul captured this in his description of the gospel in Rom 1.1-5. In vv 1 and 2 he says that God promised the gospel in the OT scriptures, and then in vv 3 and 4 he presents the Son of God as subject of the good news. All of God's promises amount to the promise of a person—Jesus Christ. As Paul says in 2Cor 1.20, "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him." The focus of revelation as a whole is not on this or that thing that God does for us but on the person and work of Christ.

The doctrine of the person and work of Christ is concerned with who Jesus is (his person) and what he came into the world to do for us (his work).

### **1. Jesus set the focus**

Jesus set the disciples' focus on his person and work in Matt 16.13-28. He had come to the end of his Galilean ministry which was focused on proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and performing miracles. He was now about to turn to Jerusalem to suffer, die and rise again. Before making his way to this end, he withdrew with his disciples northward into Gentile territory to focus them on who he was and what he was about to undergo.

#### **a. Who Jesus is (Matt 16.13-20)**

In the account of the Galilean ministry, which we have in Matt 4.12-16.12, there is a growing suspense as to who Jesus is. Demons knew who he was and were quick to announce it, but Jesus shut them down. The people saw that he was different and were filled with amazement. Jesus disclosed himself to his own disciples twice on the stormy sea, and there they caught a glimpse of his supernatural status. The question that hangs over the whole narrative of the Galilean ministry is this: who is this man? Jesus followed up this period of ministry by asking the question about who he was, and the answer to this question gave the point of his miraculous ministry. The first great theme of the Gospel is the disclosure of the person of Christ.

Jesus opened up the discussion by asking, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (Matt 16.13). It is important to notice that he referred to himself as the Son of Man. This was the title that Jesus commonly used for himself. In itself, it simply pointed to the fact that he was a human being (Ps 8.4). As a special title, it had the more exalted meaning given to it by Daniel 7 where the Son of Man is seen receiving from the Ancient of Days the kingdom over the whole world. But, the way Jesus used the title left it open for people to guess as to who he was. For the doctrine of the person of Christ, we must first draw on the common meaning of Jesus self-designation. It is, first of all, an affirmation of Jesus’ real humanity—he is a **human being**; but due to his unique person the title, Son of Man, expresses his exalted position as the one man in whom God’s purposes for mankind are realized—he is **the human being**.

Jesus first asked the disciples to report on who people said he was. Jesus’ response to Peter’s confession shows that in asking for this report he was drawing out that to which flesh and blood (i.e., mere human nature) was blind (v 17). The people saw in Jesus a prophet, and even one that came back from the dead, but they did not and could not see in him more than a man.

After drawing out popular opinion, Jesus turned to his disciples and asked, “But who do you say that I am?” (Matt 16.15). The word “you” is in the plural; he was asking the disciples as a group. Peter, the spokesman for the disciples, gave the answer: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v 17). Jesus verified this confession by pronouncing him blessed because flesh and blood did not reveal this to him but Jesus’ own Father who is in heaven (v 17). Peter saw that which human nature could never disclose to him.

The Jews saw Jesus within the framework of the OT. God was in heaven and man was on earth, and God would only use a man as an organ through which he spoke. The man remained a mere man, though he was honoured for being used by God. Peter saw Christ beyond the OT. As the Christ he was the Messiah who fulfilled the OT prophecies. In Psalm 2 the Messiah was designated by God to be the Son of God, but in confessing that Jesus was the Son of God Peter did not simply draw on Psalm 2. The disciples were moved in worship to say to Jesus, “You are certainly God’s Son,” when they experienced his power on the storm tossed sea (Matt 14.33). In this incident, Peter experienced Christ’s power enabling him to rise above the forces of nature and walk on the water. For Peter this was a special and experiential revelation of the divine Christ. In this revelation, Peter and the other disciples had their eyes opened to the person of Jesus beyond the capacity of flesh and blood.

What all could see was that Jesus was a real human being, and Jesus began with this fact by referring to himself as the Son of Man. What Peter could only see by revelation from the Father was that this man was divine: the Son of Man was the Son of God. This truth outlines the subject matter for the doctrine of the person of Christ. He is both divine and human, and this reality is presented in the doctrines of the deity, incarnation and humanity of Christ.

#### **b. What Jesus did (Matt 16.21-28)**

The disclosure of who he was (Matt 16.13-20) became the basis for Jesus to disclose what he must do (Matt 16.21-28). Matthew makes the link between the two disclosures as follows: “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things...and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Matt 16.21). Notice that this was a beginning. Now Jesus began to set the disciples’ sights on the end.

Jesus turned the focus of his disciples from his person to his work. In this he followed the order of his course on earth. The Galilean ministry had fulfilled its purpose in that through it the person of Christ was revealed to the disciples. Now, the work of Christ had to be accomplished. This order of disclosure is also the order in which we must understand Christ. We can only see his work from the point of view of his person.

The way we are talking places the work of Christ at the end of his ministry on earth. This needs some clarification. Jesus’ whole ministry was filled with works, but these works were not his work for all. He healed specific people from their ailments, but this was not his work for all people. The events that Christ

underwent for all were his death and resurrection. Without these, all the miracles of Jesus would have proved to be merely good deeds of temporary worth and all would have ended in death under sin. Only in his death for our sins did he accomplish redemption and only in his resurrection did he triumph over death to become the source of life out of death for all.

The doctrine of the work of Christ leads directly into the themes of the doctrine of salvation. The two are like two sides of one coin. We will distinguish the two, and in taking up the work of Christ we will look at his death, resurrection and ascension from the point of view of his person, i.e., how he carried out his role as the divine-human person through his death, resurrection and ascension. What this does for us will be taken up in the doctrine of salvation.

## **2. The apostolic gospel and Christian confession**

The apostles kept the focus on the person and work of Christ in their proclamation and teaching. Paul points this out in the introduction to Romans. He does not introduce the gospel as the good news of our salvation. Rather, it is "...the gospel of God...concerning his Son..." (Rom 1.1-3). He presents the Son of God in terms of the two sides of his nature: "...who was the descendent of David according to the flesh and was declared the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord..." (vv 3-4). Paul presents Jesus as human and as the divine Son who is Lord.

The resurrection of Jesus was the headline of the good news. This event brought into focus both the person and work of Christ. The humanity of Jesus was a given fact in that he lived on earth and died on a cross. The resurrection, however, demonstrated that the man who died was indeed the Son of God and Lord. This great event also brought into view the work of Christ. It showed that his death was not like the common human death which is simply the end of life, but it was the basis for eternal life. Since sin is the cause of death, the resurrection shows that his death overcame the problem of sin.

The confession of faith answers to the gospel and is also focused on the person and work of Christ. The believer confesses Jesus as Lord and believes that God raised him from the dead (Rom 10.9). To grasp the full force of this confession we must unpack it. The title, Lord, is taken over from the Septuagint translation of the OT where the divine name, YHWH, is translated with the Greek word for Lord. Paul makes this connection clear in Rom 10.13 where the quotation, "...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord (YHWH) will be saved," answers to confessing Jesus as Lord. This confession was made in response to the good news that God raised Jesus from the dead. In Rom 10.8, the one word is placed in the mouth and the heart. In the mouth this word is the confession that Jesus is Lord, and in the heart it is the faith that God raised him from the dead. The connection is clear: the risen Jesus is known to be Lord because in him God's triumph over sin and death is carried out in this world so that he is the source of eternal life for us.

The fact of the Lord Jesus Christ's death and resurrection points to his true humanity, his divine position, and his work for us. The simple confession that Jesus (the man) is Lord (divine) is theologically profound and comprehensive.

## **B. OPENING UP THE DOCTRINE**

The proclamation of the gospel focuses faith sharply and narrowly on who Christ is and what he has done for us. But, the mind is not to be left with a narrow understanding of Christ. If the proclamation must set the focus of faith narrowly on Christ, it does so to make him all to the believer, and for this our understanding of the person and work of Christ must be opened up to be all-encompassing. Christ must be seen in the widest field of vision, and we must see him fill the widest horizon. This horizon is set in creation.

The immediate context in which Christ was seen was Israel with its history of God's revelation. Christ was a servant of Israel to confirm the promises given to the fathers (Rom 15.8). But, he was not limited to this role. He came to realize God's purposes on the widest possible scale, and that is all of creation. The context

of creation is especially important for understanding the key issues in the doctrine of the person and work of Christ. That Jesus was a Jew, the son of Abraham and the son of David, is important for his historical identity. That he was the Messiah, the LORD's Anointed, is important for understanding his office. But, these facts concerning his historical identity and office do not open up the unique nature of his person and work, that he is both God and man, provided salvation from the universal condition of sin and was victorious over the universal enemy of death in his resurrection. For these themes we have to turn to creation, and in doing this we are following the NT where the doctrine of the person and work of Christ is opened up in connection with creational themes.

## **1. The deity of Christ: the Son of God**

The resurrection of Jesus fully demonstrates his deity. The mere fact that Jesus was raised from the dead does not prove the point. Pious Jews had the hope of resurrection at the time of Jesus without any illusion that through resurrection they would become divine. However, the Jews did know that it was God's distinctive work to raise the dead unto eternal life. This theological conviction points to the unique nature of Jesus and his resurrection. He was the first to rise from the dead, and through his resurrection he was the source of resurrection life for all others. The apostle Paul gave expression to this in Col 1.18: "He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead..." As the firstborn, all others who will be raised to eternal life participate in what belongs to him. They will receive resurrection life from him as the beginning of the new creation. This makes Jesus the source of eternal life along with God the Father, and this is the ultimate demonstration of his deity. Jesus pointed to this in Jn 5.17-29. The Jews perceived that Jesus was making himself equal to God (v 17), and Jesus pointed to his role in raising the dead as the full and final demonstration of this divine equality (vv 20f.).

We are dealing with the dividing line between God and man. It is God's role to be the source of life, and the creature can only be on the receiving end. Jesus stands on both sides. God raised him from the dead, but as the risen man he is the source of life and so stands on the divine side. If the resurrection of Jesus is viewed with the conviction that God is God because he is the source of life for mankind, one is compelled to see the resurrection of Jesus as the demonstration of his deity.

The apostles did not limit Christ's divine role to the life of the future—the hoped for resurrection life. What he was shown to be in resurrection and the new creation, he was in everything. In the Bible, the first defining feature of deity is the work of creating. God is God because he is the creator, and God does not share this glory with any creature. If we see that Jesus was demonstrated to be divine in the event that the Jews understood as God's act on the last day (i.e., raising the dead), it follows that we must see that he was divine and carried out his role in God's first act, that of creating the universe. We see the apostles work this logic out. From the vantage point of the risen Christ, they looked back and saw his role in creation.

In the NT, there are three passages which establish the full deity of Christ by setting forth his role in creation. In each of these scriptures, the author's interest was to establish believers in the truth of the full deity of Christ. But, they do not leave the matter with the mere fact of his deity. They worked out the symmetry of Christ's divine work in creation and his work as the incarnate Son within history to make us see his work for us as a divine work.

The three passages are:

John 1.1-18 which presents the Son in his personal relationships  
Colossians 1.15 -20 which outlines the Son's cosmic role  
Hebrews 1.1-3 which focuses on the Son's eternal finality

### **a. John 1.1-18: The Son of God within his relationships**

The prologue to the Gospel of John (Jn 1.1-18) presents the roles of the pre-incarnate and the incarnate Word in a chiasm. The progression of themes can be laid out as follows:

1. The pre-incarnate Word

- A1. **The Word** (vv 1-3)
- B1. **The life** (v 4)
- C1. **The light** (v 5)

2. The incarnate Word

- C2. **The light** coming into the world (vv 6-11)
- B2. His role as the **life** (vv12-13)
- A2. **The Word** became flesh and dwelt among us (v 14)

i. *The pre-incarnate Word*

John begins by taking the mind back to the beginning of Genesis 1.1. By saying that in that beginning the Word was already existing, he is affirming the eternal existence of the Word. In this eternal state, the Word was with God. He was not simply a being existing alongside of God but was God in relationship with (*pros*) God.

The Word's first relationship is with God (vv 1-2). In this eternal relationship, the Word was the means of creation, and this puts him into a relationship with all things that were made (v 3). He thus holds the full position of God: eternal in his being and creator of all.

John does not leave the matter with the full affirmation of the deity of the Son of God. He is interested in his ongoing function in relation to the world, and this is outlined in vv 4-5. Life was in him, and this life was the light of men (v 4). The Word thus is presented in relation to mankind. His role extends even further to that which is opposite to God, darkness. The light shines into darkness and darkness does not overcome it (v 5).

In John 1.1-5 we have the Word in the full scope of his relationships, being eternally with God, relating God to the world and penetrating into that which is opposite to God, darkness.

ii. *The incarnate Word*

John presents the role of the incarnate Son of God in vv 6-18. He is the light that was coming into the world and enlightens everyone (v 9). He is the means of God giving birth to his children, which answers to life being in him (vv 12-13). He is the Word that dwelt among us (v 14). In v 1, the Word was God with God, and John closes his introduction by drawing on this theme. He is the only God who is at the Father's side (lit., in the Father's bosom), and he has made God known (v 18).

The Son of God embraces God and the world in his relationships, and through his incarnation he carries out his divine role in the world.

**b. Colossians 1.15-20: The Son's role in relation to the whole cosmos**

In this passage, Paul brings together the Son's work in the creation of the universe and his work in reconciling all things to God. We can lay out the pattern as follows:

A. The Sons' work in creation (vv 15-17)

1. What he is (v 15)

- a. The image of the invisible God
  - b. The firstborn of all creation (this is explained by his role in bringing about creation in vv 16-17)
2. His role in creation (vv 16-17)
- All things were created through him and for him (v 16)
  - He is before all things and in him all things hold together (v 17)
- B. What he is through his resurrection and what he does by his death (vv 18-20)
1. What he is (vv 18-19)
- a. He is the head of the body, the beginning and the first born from the dead. This latter point answers to the statement in v 15 that he is the firstborn of all creation. Just as all creation came into being through him, so resurrection comes through him.
  - b. All the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in him (v 19). This answers to the statement in v 15a that he is the image of the invisible God. God is ever and only represented in the Son, and all the fullness of God dwells in him.
2. His role in reconciling the world to God through his death (v 20)

It was God's will to reconcile all things to himself by the blood of his cross. The reference to all things in heaven and on earth in v 20 answers to vv 16-17 where the Son is presented as the one through whom all things in heaven and earth were created and in whom all things hold together. The point in this is clear. Christ's role in reconciliation is parallel to and rooted in his role in creation.

The word *all* dominates this passage in Colossians. Paul is emphasising that Christ embraces all in his person and work.

The Son holds the entire relationship between God and creation. He represents the invisible God (v 15). By stressing that God is invisible, Paul is pressing the point that we have no direct access to God. God in his invisible being is only represented in his Son. What a person sees of God through creation (Rom 1.20) is the representation of God in the Son. To this Paul adds that in the Son, and here he has Christ as a man in mind, all the fullness of God (i.e., the Father himself) was pleased to dwell (v 19). In Christ we have all that God is, and this all is available to us through the incarnation (Col 2.9-10).

Not only does the Son represent and contain all of God, his role embraces all of creation, both the heavenly and invisible and the earthly and visible. Nothing exists outside of the sphere of his work and all things are only reconciled to God through him.

Christ embraces God and the whole universe. Paul presses this point in Colossians to focus the Christians' minds wholly on Christ. The Christian is not to relate to anything apart from Christ. He is not to think of God in any way apart from Christ, and he is not to seek anything in God that is not found in Christ. He is also not to relate to anything in the universe as existing and having its purpose and meaning apart from Christ. Faith finds everything in Christ, for in him are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2.3).

**c. Hebrews 1.1-3: The Son's eternal finality**

In Heb 1.1-4 the Son is presented in terms of the finality of his word (vv 1-2) and of his sacrifice for sins (v 3).

*i. The eternal finality of his word (Heb 1.1-2)*

God's word through his Son is set in contrast to his words through the prophets in three ways.

**First**, there is the contrast of time. God's word long ago is set in contrast to his word in these last days. To understand what is being said, we must catch the nuances. Long ago suggests that the former words have become outdated and have faded into the past. It is not the current word. The last days must be understood from an OT point of view. They are the final days in which God comes to earth to complete his work. The Son's word is the last and final word of God.

**Second**, there is the contrast between the many and varied and the one. The word long ago had many agents (the prophets) and was given at many times and in many ways. All this means that no single word was final and complete. In contrast to this earlier series of words, God's word through his Son is marked by singularity. No further word can be added. The apostles only continued to speak the word which was at first spoken by the Son (Heb 2.3-4). Their teaching only opens up that final word.

**Third**, there is the contrast in the nature of the agents. This is the difference between a prophet and a Son. This contrast is opened up in v 2. The Son is the heir of all things, and as heir he stands in the last position having the last word, being the final agent. The word *all* in the statement, "heir of all things," must be given its full weight. Nothing exists that does not have its goal in him, and all moves toward him. This position of being the end of all is rooted in the beginning. He is the heir of all things because he was the agent of the creation of the universe.

The themes raised in Heb 1.1-2 are developed in Heb 1.5-6.20. Here the author of the letter establishes the superiority and finality of the word of Jesus Christ, and this is rooted in the eternity of his divine person which is boldly stated in 1.10-12: he is the Lord who created all things, and though the universe will pass away he is the same and his years will have not end.

*ii. The eternal finality of his sacrifice (Heb 1.3)*

The second great theme of the letter to the Hebrews is the eternal priesthood of Christ and the eternal finality of his one sacrifice through which he opened up the way into the very presence of God in heaven. This great theme, which is developed in chapters 7 to 10, is pointed out in the opening of the letter in 1.3.

The finality of his sacrifice for sins is seen in that he is seated at the right hand of the majesty on high. This means that Jesus has his place in the closest relation to God the Father who holds the highest place, and he holds this place on the throne. This position of nearness to God as the executive of the divine will (the role of being at the right hand of God) and of enthronement (i.e., reign) has its counterpart in his divine role from the beginning. He ever was the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. So, the fact that Jesus as a man is in this position of intimacy with God in God's very presence is rooted in his deity. Jesus also has ever wielded the power over the universe for he upholds the universe by the word of his power. His present enthronement in heaven is congruent with his divine authority over the universe.

The message of Hebrews is that the temporal words of the prophets are fulfilled and superseded by the word of the Son and the many and temporary sacrifices for sins are replaced by the one and final sacrifice of the eternal Son who offered himself up by the eternal Spirit to secure for us an eternal salvation. This work of the Son is rooted in his divine person. The confidence of faith is expressed in Heb 13.8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

**Biblical perspective on the deity of Christ**

We began this section of our study by observing that the full deity of Christ was seen through his resurrection and that from this vantage point his divine role in creation was seen. But, the scriptures do not

simply look backwards. They also reason forwards from the Son's divine role in creation to his work on earth. The Son's work in history is seen in symmetry with his work in creation. This symmetry shows that in his redeeming work Jesus is acting in his full deity and works within the full scope of his divine relationships with God and the whole world.

We are not to simply see deity as a fact about the person of Christ. It is the great reality through all of his work, and this gives his work the scope and character of his great divine person. This makes Christ the one who "fills all in all" (Eph 1.23), and because he is all to God and to us our focus must be totally and exclusively on him.

## **2. The humanity of Christ: the Son of Man**

The three passages that open up to us the full scope of the deity of Christ explicitly speak of Christ as the Son of God (Jn 1.14, 18; Col 1.13ff.; Heb 1.2). They fill in Peter's confession: Jesus is the Son of the living God. But, there is the other side of Christ's person that Jesus put forward first—he is the Son of Man. Jesus bears many titles. Most of them are titles of office that were defined through the history of Israel. But Jesus' use of the term, the Son of Man, is different. It does not refer to an office but to his person. He is the human being, and this reaches back to creation.

### **a. Hebrews 2.5-18: Jesus' genuine and complete humanity**

The idea of Jesus being the Son of Man is explored in Hebrews 2. The author of Hebrews sets out to make the point that the world to come was subjected to man (Heb 2.5). He begins his discussion on this subject by quoting Psalm 8 which is a creational Psalm (Heb 2.6-8). The Psalmist reflects on the fact that God made man (whom he also calls the son of man) lower than angels and crowned him with glory and honour and put everything under his feet. The author of Hebrews observes that at present we do not see everything in subjection to man (v 8) and then hastens to point out that we do see Jesus who was made for a little while lower than angels (which establishes his authentic humanity) crowned with glory and honour (in his resurrection and enthronement in heaven presented in Heb 1.5-14; 2.9). The divine destiny for man is being fulfilled in the one man, Jesus, who is the Son of Man.

Hebrews 2 does not leave the theme of the humanity of Jesus with the fact that he fulfills the human role in God's purposes. He goes on to what lies behind this. Jesus partook of our nature, flesh and blood, to be one with us and die to deliver us (Heb 2.10-18). Taking humanity was not just a matter of taking our nature but becoming like us in every respect to the point of suffering when tempted (v 18, the reference being to the suffering of death in v 9). Christ's humanity was real. It had to be real for him to die for us and be one with us.

The themes of reigning, flesh and blood, being tempted, suffering and death reach back to Genesis 1 to 3.

### **b. Christ and Adam**

In theological discussion, the doctrine of the humanity of Christ focuses on the themes raised in Hebrews 2. This discussion is preoccupied with the profound subject of the union of divine and human natures. But, the interest here is only on one side of the theme – Christ's humanity. It is the side that connects directly with us in our human weakness and struggles, so our interest is understandable. But, there is another side opened up for us by the apostle Paul when he connected Christ with Adam.

The apostle Paul develops the theme of Christ's humanity by connecting Christ as a man directly with Adam. In 1Cor 15.21 he points out a consistency in God's ways: "For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead." Without the link of humanity between Adam and Christ, the Son of God who is the divine source of life could not be the answer to the problem of death brought in by a man. In the next verse (v 20), the apostle sets Adam and Christ side by side: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." He does not leave this connection between Adam and Christ as a

contrast. In 1Cor 15.45-49 he presents them both as prototypes of two humanities. Adam is the prototype of a natural humanity that was from the earth, man created of dust. Christ is the prototype of a spiritual humanity that was from heaven, and he became this through his resurrection.

Paul sees only two men: the first Adam and the last Adam (v 45) and the first man and the second man (v 47). The first Adam was the man God created from the dust. The last Adam was the man God raised from the dead to bring about resurrected humanity. The risen Christ is the last Adam because resurrection is the last act of God that brings in the eternal state for the person raised. There can be no further Adam (i.e., head of humanity) after the resurrection of Jesus. Paul also presents the two as first and second, which puts them in their order. The natural came first and then the spiritual (v 46), and the spiritual is raised in resurrection out of the natural.

Hebrews 2 focuses on the flesh and blood nature that we received from Adam and which Christ shared with us in order to die for us and be one with us. In this view, we see Jesus in continuity with our created nature. Paul takes up Christ's humanity in resurrection, and this is in contrast to the humanity God created in Adam. But, Paul still sees this humanity in connection with the humanity God created. God's ways are ever consistent. Whether it is the flesh and blood humanity or the glorified and resurrected humanity, the humanity of Christ is seen in direct connection with creation.

Earlier we noticed that the title, Son of Man, has two levels of meaning. Hebrews 2 focuses on the lower sense of the title and draws out the fact that Jesus shared our common humanity. Through this focus on Christ's common humanity, Hebrews 2 raises our appreciation of Jesus as the one who bears the exalted title of the Son of Man, for by taking on our common humanity and being a human being he carried out God's will for us. He is the one man who fulfills God's will for all of mankind. Paul develops the meaning of the higher sense of the title. He begins with the resurrection of Jesus and opens up the vision of the exalted Man who reigns in resurrection life and victory over death and has become the head of a new humanity. The doctrine of the person of Christ takes in both levels of the title, the Son of Man. This doctrine is concerned with both the human nature of Christ and the role of Christ as the Man who reigns as the image of God. Jesus' weak and lowly human nature stands in contrast with the divine nature, and this presents a paradox to the human mind. But, his role as the image of God to realize the reign of God is in continuity with the divine role of the Son in the trinity.

### **c. The work of Christ**

The very passages that open up to us the meaning of Christ's deity and humanity set forth his work in the context of creation. The Son of God carried out the divine role of the creator, and the Son of Man took up the mankind's role set in creation.

The doctrine of the work of Christ is focused on the cross and resurrection. Here Jesus did not deal with issues specific to Israel as a nation but with sin and death which go back to the fall of mankind in the Garden. In his resurrection he realized the reign assigned to man in the area where man became the ultimate slave, i.e., death.

Every dimension of the person and work of Christ connects directly with creation, and this confirms our move to go directly from the doctrines that come out of Genesis 1 to 3 to the doctrine of the person and work of Christ.

## **C. CHRIST'S PREEMINENCE**

The study of the doctrine of the person and work of Christ runs a risk. By narrowly defining the subject, we isolate Christ and focus on specific aspects of who he is and what he has done. But, such isolation goes against all that we have seen so far. The biblical doctrine of the person and work of Christ does not isolate him to a narrow subject. The scriptures rather expand the view of Christ to embrace everything.

We need to correct our vision. In the NT Christ is not seen alone by himself, and this view is presented from the outset. Christ is introduced for his public ministry in the account of his baptism, and here he is introduced within the relationships of the trinity. The Spirit descended upon him and the Father declared him to be his Son. This introduction of Jesus makes an important point. Christ cannot be understood in isolation. He must be identified within the divine relationships of Father, Son and Spirit, and in this set of relationships, he is the center through which the Father is revealed and the Spirit is manifested. This means that the doctrine of the person of Christ is not to isolate him from the Father and Spirit but is to integrate the whole trinity and all the operations and workings of God.

The view given of Jesus at his baptism also presents the human side of his person. Before the Gospel introduces him within his divine relationships, it presents him as a real man identifying with those who were baptized with the baptism of repentance. We first see him as the Son of Man, the real human being doing God's will for people, and then we have him introduced as the Son of God. He is the center of the divine-human relationship as well as of the divine relationships.

When God became man in Jesus Christ, God took over the human side of the divine-human relationship to carry out the divine role through the human role. As the Son of God he is the divine heir of the universe for all was created through him. But, as the Son of Man he is the human heir of the world. As Son of God and of Man he carried through the divine role as Lord and the human role in obedience to God. In Christ we have all in one. This is the divine will, "...that in everything he might be preeminent" (Col 1.18). This is the need of believers: to realize his preeminence in everything.

Christ's preeminence squeezes out the flesh, that human nature that wants to put itself at the centre of the universe and have all things (including God) revolve around it. Christ himself provided for this by laying down his flesh on the cross, and we are joined to Christ through the cross. But, at the same time the preeminence of Christ means that in everything we can have a participation in the preeminent one in whom the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily and in whom we have been filled (Col 2.9-10). The purpose of our study of the person and work of Christ must be to open up this preeminence and fullness of Christ to our minds so that we can live in the good of it.