

The Apostles' Creed

Lesson 3

Jesus Christ

Forum



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Lesson Three: Jesus Christ

Forum

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Question 1:

How important is the doctrine of Christ's divinity?

From the earliest days of Christianity, followers of Christ have insisted that Jesus is fully divine — that he is God incarnate. The Apostles' Creed summarizes this belief by identifying Jesus as God's only Son. Today, many people are willing to accept that Jesus was a wise human teacher or even a prophet. But they struggle with the idea that Jesus is also God. Is this a matter on which Christians can reasonably disagree? How important is the doctrine of Christ's divinity?

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

The deity of Christ is absolutely essential for us. Without it, we don't have the revelation of God that we have in Christ. We have in Christ, God revealing himself to us in a way that we can understand as God takes on human flesh. We also, in Christ, have a God who's able to take on the sins of the world. He's human, fully and completely human, but he also is fully and completely divine and therefore able to show us who God is and redeem us.

Dr. Rebecca Luman

The doctrine of Christ's divinity is central to even our definition of who Christians are. Christians are "Christ ones," and without the central declarations of Christianity, which are, "Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again" — these are the central foundational things that we believe about who we are — and without that, we are people who follow a great teacher who had some individual and unique things to say, but to whom we can compare other teachers and maybe synthesize a philosophy of our own. But the divinity of Christ says, because he is Lord, because he is God, what he says about himself and about who we are and what the way of salvation is, is authoritative and final. And so he defines who we are in ourselves as Christians. And Christianity is definitely Jesus. Without Jesus it would not exist, and apart from his

divinity and lordship, it has no reason to exist except as a historical philosophy that's interesting.

Dr. Peter Walker

The doctrine of Christ's divinity, I would say, is essential to all Christian faith. I remember when I was younger, I walked past a church and it said, "We believe in the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ." And I thought that sounded really quite strong, and I wasn't too sure that matched up with my vision of the Jesus I loved and knew. And I suppose it's easier sometimes to have more of a sentimental view of Jesus and perhaps just the human Jesus. Let's not deny the humanity of Jesus, he was a real human being, and we can relate to him as human beings to another human being. But the New Testament is quite clear that he's more than just a human being. And so it could be the epistles of the New Testament, the earliest parts of the New Testament, they all describe Jesus as divine. And in the Gospels too, there is a clear teaching that he is authoritative and has the identity with God. And so quite clearly, at several places in the New Testament, to actually believe in Jesus Christ is to believe in him as Lord, and therefore as defined, essential, I would say, to Christian faith.

Dr. Knox Chamblin

There's many an affirmation of the deity of Christ in the New Testament. For example, John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." And then an inclusio with that in John 20:28, where Thomas says of Jesus, "My Lord and my God." And Paul, in Titus 2:13, talks about the glory of "our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." Going back to Romans 10:9, Paul says, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved." And then in verse 13 he says, "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." And there he's quoting from the prophecy of Joel, and "Lord" there is Yahweh, the God of Israel. So, you confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, and he's there given the sacred name of the God of Israel. I think another reason it's crucial is that it's vital for atonement. In his classic work, *Cur Deus Homo: Why Did God Become a Man*, Anselm says that the one who atones for sin must be both God and man, because only God can atone for sin, and only a human being ought to. So, Jesus is the God-man. And then, I think another reason is that only God can fully reveal God. So, going back to John 1, "the Word was with God, and the Word was God." And then in verse 14, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory." So, he was God and he became flesh, but he didn't cease to be God when he became flesh.

Question 2:

Is Jesus' sonship different from ours as children of God?

The Apostles' Creed states that Jesus is God's only Son. But the Bible clearly teaches that all believers are God's children — that we're his sons and daughters. We see this in places like John 1:12, Romans 8:14, Galatians 3:26, and 1 John 3:1-2.

How can both these ideas be true? Is Jesus really just one of many sons and daughters? Or is Jesus' sonship different from ours as children of God?

Dr. Peter Walker

The Bible is quite clear that Jesus is uniquely the Son of God in a way which is different from anyone else. So, in the Gospels we hear that phrase from God speaking, "You're my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Now that's spoken uniquely to Jesus, and it doesn't apply initially to anyone else. But the good news that the New Testament then unpacks is that as we believe in Christ, as we have faith in him, we're brought into exactly the same relationship with God as Father that, in a sense, Jesus enjoys. We come to enjoy something of that same relationship. The New Testament word for this is "adoption." So, we're not naturally children of God. In fact, we're naturally children of the evil one. But, we're brought in from there, to a place of adopted grace and it's not by nature, it is by grace.

Dr. Mark Strauss

Jesus' sonship is similar to ours in some ways, but it's also unique in other ways. It's unique in the sense that Jesus is the eternal Son of God. Eternally with the Father, always present. Both our sonship and Jesus' sonship are really metaphors and we have to recognize that. A metaphor is a picture of something, of a reality. And both refer to a special relationship. But of course, Jesus' relationship to the Father as the second person of the Trinity is unique and unprecedented. Our sonship is also an adopted sonship, whereas Jesus' sonship is what we could call "ontological" or essential to his nature. We are adopted as God's children on the basis of Jesus' sonship. Because Jesus has accomplished our salvation, we are adopted into a relationship with God as children of God. So, we could say that our sonship is dependent on Jesus' sonship to the Father.

Dr. David Bauer

Sonship sometimes carries with it the notion of likeness; a son is like his father. Sometimes it carries with it a notion of inheritance. Sometimes it carries with it the notion of obedience. Sometimes it carries with it the notion of discipline, as it does, for example, in Hebrews 12. And there are others as well, other aspects of sonship imagery that are used in various passages of the Bible. In most of these there is application both to Jesus as Son of God and to us as son of God, but with some difference. Take the notion of obedience. In the Synoptic Gospels — the first three gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke — Jesus' divine sonship is for the most part understood primarily, not exclusively, but primarily in terms of his perfect obedience to the will of the Father. And clearly when the New Testament talks about us being sons of God the notion is — often and in a number of passages — that we are sons of God as those who obey the will of our Father. It was assumed in ancient times that a son would obey his father and the like. But Jesus' obedience clearly goes beyond our own because the New Testament teaches that he was perfectly obedient to the will of his Father from beginning to end, and obviously none of us measure up in that way.

Also, of course, because Jesus was perfectly obedient to the will of his Father, his life is a perfect sacrifice to God. He is able to give his life over to God. He was able to, and did, surrender his life to God in a way that God requires of us, of all of us human beings, in a way that is required really for the God-human relationship. We don't do that. We haven't done that, and therefore, our sonship to God means that we participate in Christ's sacrifice of himself. So, by being, as Paul puts it, in Christ, or as Jesus puts it, following Christ, being with Christ, joining in Christ in a profound spiritual union with Christ we actually participate in Christ's obedience as Son, and almost by proxy, satisfy the demands of the God-human relationship of obedience through Jesus' perfect sonship to God.

The notion of likeness is of course another aspect of sonship. When Christians become disciples, become sons of God in that sense there is, of course, a kind of transformation, a kind of likeness with God that happens to us, but that of course is true with Christ in his capacity as Son in ways that go far beyond what any disciple of Christ can claim. So that Jesus can say in John's gospel — and this of course, this aspect of sonship is emphasized especially in John's gospel — “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” This emphasizes this notion of likeness there. So, those kinds of things of course are all bound up. Sonship also involves inheritance, and Jesus, of course, is seen as Son of God, presented Son of God, as one who inherits from God. Actually, drawing upon the notion of Davidic kings from Psalm 2, Jesus is presented in the New Testament, in his capacity as Son of God, as one who is inheritor of all things. We also are presented in our capacity as sons of God, as those who inherit from God, but he inherits the cosmos, the whole universe from God, so that, in a sense, God gives the whole of reality, God the Father gives the whole of reality over to his Son as an inheritance. And of course, that goes far beyond what is the case with us. So, each one of these cases of sonship there are aspects of Jesus' sonship that pertain to us, but only so far. There are some aspects of sonship that don't have anything to do with us really, and that has to do especially with Jesus being Son of God as one whose origin is in God, who has been conceived by the Holy Spirit. That also is part of the New Testament's presentation of Jesus as Son, and obviously we are not “son of God” in that aspect at all.

Question 3:

How can Jesus be God and still subject to the Father's authority?

The Trinity — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — is a beautiful picture of the oneness of God. But it's also one of the most difficult Christian doctrines to understand. On the one hand, it says that all three persons of the Trinity are equally God. On the other hand, it also says that the Son came to do the Father's will. How can Jesus be God and still be subject to the Father's authority?

Rev. Valery Zadorozhny (translation)

The doctrine of the Trinity represents the explanation of God's revelation of himself that he gave in the Scriptures. And as we study what God says about himself, what the Bible says about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we see that there is a certain "ontology." That is, we see that — as theologians put it — the Son is eternally generated by the Father and the Father sends the Spirit. That is, there is a certain relationship between them. On the other hand, if we speak about the "economy," we see that the Son submits to the Father, and the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son, so we may say that there is a certain subordination. But it does not mean that one of them is lower or higher. The relations within the Trinity are such that they have one plan, one desire, and there is a communication with each other in which the Son is glad carrying out the Father's will. It brings him joy. The Father is happy with his Son, and the Holy Spirit glorifies them both. That is, in the Trinity there is communication, but where the Bible is speaking about the works of God we may say that God the Father created, the Son goes and fulfills a mission, the Holy Spirit applies redemption. But when we read the same texts we see that it's the whole Trinity that takes part.

Question 4:

Why should we think that the New Testament Greek word *kurios* refers to anything more than earthly human authority and honor, even when it is applied to Jesus?

One of the ways the Apostles' Creed affirms Jesus' divinity or deity is by calling him "Lord." But when Jesus was called "Lord" during his earthly ministry, this was usually just a polite form of address. The Greek word *kurios*, which we translate as "lord," was a common term used to address any person of authority. In and of itself, it didn't imply any sort of deity or divinity. So, why should we think that the New Testament Greek word *kurios* refers to anything more than earthly human authority and honor, even when it is applied to Jesus?

Dr. Stephen Wellum

One of the great titles of the New Testament that's applied to the Lord Jesus Christ is that he is Lord. The title "Lord" comes from the Greek *kurios*. Some who do not want to affirm the full deity of the Lord Jesus Christ and see this title as reflecting the fact that he is the Lord, try to say that, well, *kurios* can be used of kings and earthly rulers, and thus this doesn't at all prove that Christ is the Lord. Yet, when we have the affirmations repeatedly in the New Testament, where he takes on the very name of the Lord, *kurios*, from the Old Testament, which picks up the covenant name of God from the Old Testament Israel. Particularly you think of, say, Philippians 2, where he goes to the cross; he humbles himself, even to death on the cross. The Father is the one who then exalts him by resurrection, then gives him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and tongue confess, and that name that is given to him is Lord, *kurios*. That comes right out of Isaiah 45, where that name is

applied to Jehovah or Yahweh from the Old Testament, and that now comes over into its application to Christ where you have a clear affirmation that the New Testament is saying that the Lord Jesus Christ is nothing less than the one who takes on the very identity, role, aims of the Lord of the Old Testament. In fact, we can see this change of lordship — Lord, the name Lord from the Old Testament — applied to Christ many, many different places. The book of Hebrews does it repeatedly. Paul's letters do it. In fact, "God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" speaks of Christ as one who has the very identity of God of the Old Testament. So that it's not enough just to say, oh, this is just a human title. No, in the New Testament it is referring to the unique fact that the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is indeed the Lord.

Dr. Mark Strauss

When *kurios* is used of Jesus in the New Testament, it could simply be someone referring to him as sir or master, but in certain cases it's clear that the reference is actually to the Old Testament covenant name of God. For example, in Hebrews 1, the author quotes the Old Testament, Psalm 102, "... In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundation of the earth..." If you go back to Psalm 102 you see that this is a reference to Yahweh, to the Lord God. And so, Jesus is identified specifically with the Lord God. In that case there is no doubt that *kurios* refers to Jesus as the God of the Old Testament, the Lord God.

Dr. Thomas Schreiner

When we look at the New Testament, writers and speakers address Jesus as Lord. Now, sometimes in that culture the word "lord" did mean "sir." We can read examples of that in the New Testament where someone is addressed as "lord." Probably when the Samaritan woman is first speaking to Jesus and she addresses him as Lord, she didn't mean that "You are the Lord of the universe," but it was a title of respect. But what is important to see is that when we read the New Testament, often, the New Testament writers are quoting the Old Testament passages where Yahweh is described as Lord, as *kurios*, therefore as divine. And those passages are applied to Jesus Christ himself. One of the most striking is found in Philippians 2. The author of Philippians says there that Jesus has been exalted as Lord. That every knee will bow, every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. When we read the Old Testament, when we read Isaiah 45:20, there the author of Isaiah emphasizes that there is only one God, that there is none other. In that very passage Isaiah goes on to say that every knee will bow, and that every tongue will confess that Yahweh is Lord. Paul who was very familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures, nurtured in those Scriptures, educated as a Pharisee, Paul alludes to that very passage in Philippians 2 and applies that passage where Yahweh is identified as Lord; he applies that to Jesus Christ. It is very clear, therefore, that in that passage, Jesus Christ is seen as the *kurios* in terms of divinity, not simply in the terms of a title of respect. There are many other places in the New Testament where the Old Testament term Lord is applied so it's quite clear that the New Testament writers believe that Jesus Christ was the Lord, Son of God and fully divine.

Dr. Dennis Johnson

One of the significant backgrounds that we need to always take account of in the New Testament's usage is the fact that *kurios* was the preferred equivalent used by the Greek translators of the Old Testament — from Hebrew into Greek, the Septuagint — for, as the equivalent for the term “Yahweh,” the covenant name of God. And so typically, those reading their Greek Old Testament, their Greek Scriptures, when they came across the word *kurios* would recognize this covenant name. And clearly that's in the background in many of the places where that term is applied to Jesus. In the Church's confession, Jesus is *kurios*. And I think one place that is so obvious that that's what is intended is in that great hymn about Christ in Philippians 2, Paul's great exaltation of who Jesus is in his divine glory and in his condescension and his humiliation. He is in very nature God, Paul begins by saying. Equality with God is not something he needs to snatch at or grasp. He humbles himself, takes the nature of a servant, and then is highly exalted so that every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is *kurios*. Now that conclusion, Paul is echoing from Isaiah 45 where the Lord, *kurios*, announces that he alone is God, that every knee will bow to him and every tongue will confess allegiance to him. And Paul in unquestionably echoing that language, at the end of Isaiah 45 and saying Jesus is the one to whom every knee will bow. Jesus is the one to whom every tongue will confess. Jesus is *kurios*. Echoing a text in the Old Testament in which Israel's covenant God says, “I and I alone am God.” Paul could not make the point in a stronger way in the use of *kurios* than to say, Jesus is the covenant God of Israel, come into human flesh for the sake of our redemption.

Question 5:**Does Jesus' miraculous conception make him less human?**

Jesus is fully God. Even the way he came into the world testifies to this fact. As the Apostles' Creed states, he was “conceived by the Holy Spirit.” No other human being in the history of the world was ever created in this extraordinary way. Sadly, Jesus' unusual conception has caused some scholars to conclude that Jesus was more God than he was man, that his divinity somehow overshadowed his humanity. But the Bible tells us that Jesus was fully God and fully man. But is this right? Does Jesus' miraculous conception make him less human?

Dr. Stephen Blakemore

The great mystery of the Christian faith is the great mystery of the incarnation, that the man Jesus of Nazareth could be God incarnate. Now the Scriptures teach us that his birth is one of miraculous conception, that the normal mechanisms of human procreation were not involved, that Joseph is not the earthly father of Jesus, but instead the Holy Spirit came upon the virgin Mary and she conceived by the Holy Spirit. Often people might wonder, well, does that mean that Jesus really is not like us in all ways? I think the answer to that question is no, because being born of the virgin Mary, whatever Jesus gets of his humanity, he gets it from Mary who was just as fully human as you and I are. So the mechanics of the normal method of human

procreation are not what is totally necessary to create a human being. But Jesus is indeed as fully human as you and I are. The miraculous conception is really a statement about his divinity and ultimately a statement that in Jesus Christ we have the most unique person, the only unique person, who has ever lived; the only person who is God and man, man and God, and therefore the only one who is a bridge for us between God and our humanity.

Question 6:

What did the Old Testament say about who the Messiah would be?

Many people in Jesus' day had trouble believing that he was the Messiah foretold by the Old Testament prophets. They envisioned a king who came in power and glory. They weren't prepared for the Messiah to be the son of a carpenter, or to be born to a young woman in a stable. But where did the first-century Jews get their expectations for the Messiah? Was it from Hebrew Scriptures? What did the Old Testament say about who the Messiah would be?

Dr. Mark Strauss

The Messiah had to be a descendant of David because of prophetic revelation basically; because it was predicted so, and that goes all the way back to Genesis where the tribe of Judah is prophesied to be the one through whom the kingship would come. That prophecy was of course, fulfilled in David, King David himself, who was the greatest king of Israel. Every king that followed David was compared to him either favorably or unfavorably. Then of course, we have the covenant made with David, himself. When David proposed to Nathan, the prophet, to build a house for the Lord, to build the temple, Nathan came back and said, "You're not going to build a house for the Lord, the Lord is going to build a house for you". And by house, he meant dynasty. It's in 2 Samuel 7 and that prophecy that God would build a house for him, would establish his kingdom forever, that his descendant would reign forever on David's throne, became the foundation for the messianic prophecies that followed. And so, when the prophets referred back after the collapse, especially, of the Davidic dynasty, the Davidic kingdom, when they referred back and looked forward to the hope that God would restore the glories of the Davidic dynasty; it was through the line of David that God would raise up a King. In Israel, the priesthood resided in the line of the Levites, through Aaron; and the kingship resided in throne of David, in the Davidic dynasty. And so, the King, the Messiah had to come through the line of David.

Dr. Stephen Wellum

Why did the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah have to be a descendant of David? The answer to that is rooted in God's plan in terms of what he has promised. Ultimately, he has to be human — the last Adam. The New Testament picks that up. But in the plan of God, that humanity comes through a specific family, a specific nation, a specific tribe. Particularly what I'm thinking of there is Abraham's family, the nation

of Israel, the tribe of Judah, and particularly David's line. That is where we have in terms of the Davidic covenant, 2 Samuel 7 makes promises to David as the representative of Israel, that it's through his offspring, through his lineage, that God's rule will come to this world. The Davidic King is presented as the one who will fulfill ultimately the Adamic role of ruling over the nations, carrying out the creation mandate that was given to each one of us. So, the Messiah, in order to fulfill God's plan, has to be a descendant of David, has to fulfill God's promises through the Davidic covenant to the nation of Israel, ultimately, in terms of God's promise, all the way back to Genesis 3:15.

Question 7:

According to the Old Testament, what was the Messiah expected to do?

Many first-century Jews accepted that Jesus was descended from David. But they still had a hard time believing that he was the Christ or Messiah because he didn't do many of the things they expected him to do. They thought he should free Israel from Roman rule and oppression, and that he should immediately establish an earthly kingdom. They had trouble believing that the Christ could be crucified as a criminal by the Romans, and that he could return to heaven without setting up an earthly political empire. But according to the Old Testament, what was the Messiah expected to do?

Dr. Thomas Schreiner

When we look at the Old Testament, the Old Testament especially emphasizes that the Messiah is, first of all, a son of David. Of course, David was that great king of Israel who trusted in the Lord so significantly, won powerful victories; in many, many ways obeyed the Lord. Of course, he had some significant failings as well, but David becomes the paradigm of what the Messiah will be. He will be a ruler who brings peace to the nation. And so, we see in the latter part of the Old Testament, after David has died, there is an expectation that a son of David will come, and that's especially aligned with the idea that there will be peace and righteousness and joy. Of course, this plays right into the New Testament doesn't it? When we read, even before the New Testament, there's a little book called the Psalms of Solomon. And there's this strong expectation of a son of David who would come. He would rescue the nation from their oppressors. He would roust out the Romans and defeat them. There would be peace with this ruler upon the throne. And of course, that's a central part of what we find in the Old Testament expectation. But mixed in with this is this expectation as well, in Isaiah 53 and some other passages that the Messiah would suffer.

Now interestingly enough, from all the evidence we have, the Jews, the Jewish people, did not understand that as well. We even see that in the New Testament when Jesus begins to explain to his disciples that he is the son of David and he's the

Messiah, they agree and they confess him as such, but their expectation is that he would bring in an age of peace and righteousness. He would destroy their enemies. But then Jesus shifts gears on them a little bit, helping them understand the fullness of what the Old Testament teaches about the Messiah, indeed, in terms of the suffering servant. And immediately the disciples are quite perplexed. That strand of the Old Testament teaching they hadn't integrated well into their thinking. Indeed, we don't know what they thought exactly about Isaiah 53 at all, but apparently, they didn't clearly understand that to refer to the Messiah. So, it was quite an education for the disciples to begin to understand that the Messiah would suffer, and he would die, and he would be crucified. Their notion was the Messiah was pleasing to God and anyone who was pleasing to God would not end up being crucified.

So, we have to take these two strands together and what we actually see in the Scriptures is that the victory predicted for the son of David would not come by him destroying his enemies, but by taking suffering upon himself, by absorbing the sins of humankind upon himself. So, it was quite a radical idea, which virtually no one understood. So, the pathway to victory is through suffering and defeat. And of course, God raised him from the dead to vindicate him and to show that he was indeed his Son, that he had fulfilled the messianic prophecies in terms of the son of David and the suffering servant, and that the victory had come through suffering and not through just destroying his enemies.

Dr. Peter Walker

One of the best texts in the Old Testament to discover the role of the Messiah is Psalm 2, which speaks about the way in which God has established this particular King, this Anointed One, this Messiah, on his holy hill, in Zion, in Jerusalem, and how he's going to be the one who's going to, well, he's going to be Lord over the whole world. The ends of the earth are going to be his possession. The obedience of the nations is going to be his. And that Psalm ends with the rulers of the earth being called to kiss the Son, or to bow down and to worship him. This sets up an incredible picture of what the role of the Messiah is. And over the centuries, as the Jewish people reflect on that, they're expecting someone to come who's going to be like David was, who was the king before, but who's going to be a ruler. Now, the New Testament claims that that is actually what Jesus is, and one of the key points to notice is that it's because he is Israel's Messiah, precisely because he's the Messiah of Israel, that he is therefore, in the same breath, the Lord over the whole world, because that's exactly what the Messiah was expected to be, not just the Messiah of Israel, but the Lord over the whole world. Now, in Jesus' day, there were other expectations as well, that the Messiah would come and restore the temple, and that the Messiah would redeem Israel. And they began to understand this in a more political sense, that surely if the kingdom was going to be restored to Israel, then we're going to be Lord over the whole world. But that wasn't the way it was going to be. Actually, it was the Messiah that was going to be the Lord over the whole world. And that's then what we see in Acts 1 and also in Matthew 28 as Jesus commissions his disciples. Effectively he says, "You're going to go into the whole world bringing the news that I am the King; I am the Messiah; I am the Lord of the world." And

that's the way through which the kingdom of God is going to be established around the whole world. If you understand what the Messiah was from Psalm 2, then you'll understand Jesus' ministry and the gospel in a whole new way.

Question 8:
How can God be both free in his sovereignty and bound by his covenants?

The Old Testament promise that God would send the Messiah or Christ to save his people is rooted in agreements that the Bible calls "covenants." In his covenants with his people, God voluntarily obligated himself to act in certain ways, such as redeeming and blessing his people and cursing their enemies. But how can God be both free in his sovereignty and bound in his covenants?

Dr. Samuel Ling

Covenant is the name of God's relationship with you. He has chosen that name. Now, God is free and sovereign. Now, sometimes we like to think about freewill as, well, I can choose to do anything I want to do. Now, nobody actually is free to do just about anything one wants to do. We never chose where and when we were born, our blood type, our genes, and so on. Lots of things we never chose. We have a limited kind of a freedom, a freedom of a creature. God's freedom is not like that. God, I suppose in a theoretical sense, could do anything he wanted to do. He is free. He is Lord. But as a matter of fact, as God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in eternity planned out how they were going to create and rule the world and redeem his people, God did not just randomly and arbitrarily, you might say in a [temper] tantrum, God didn't just choose to do anything he wanted to do. He decided to design a relationship with the world and with his people in particular. And at the end of the day, in the Bible we see that that relationship, that plan, is called the covenant. And so, God has chosen a plan. He doesn't have a backup plan. He doesn't have an emergency plan, plan number two. God has chosen this plan. He created a world, the Bible talks about a covenant he has made even with the day and the night, the creation and particularly God has made a covenant with his people. This means that God expresses his freedom and his sovereignty no more and no less than those conditions, those details that he has laid down in the covenant. So, we know that we don't have a kind of emotional, moody changing kind of God. God has promised us certain blessings, certain warnings as well, and he never departs from what he has promised. We can depend on God. Great is his faithfulness. He doesn't change. He is completely Lord over our lives. He is sovereign. He is free. Yet he loves us, and his love never changes.

Dr. Derek Thomas

God enters into covenant with man. You see it in Abraham, in Moses, in David. You see it in the great prophets, Jeremiah 31:34, Ezekiel, the promise of a new covenant. Jesus appears on the stage of history and he announces, this is the blood of the everlasting covenant. God forms relationships with sinners through covenant. He does

that voluntarily. He is not under any obligation to do so. The initiative is his. It's a sovereign choice of God to enter into covenant with us through the mediation of his own Son. And some of us think that in the Bible there are hints even of a covenant between God the Father and God the Son before the creation of the world, a pre-temporal covenant. Once God enters into a covenant, he is then, of course, obligated to fulfill the terms of that covenant, whether those terms be for blessing or for cursing. He is not at liberty to break that covenant. It's part of the truth that we maintain with regard to God, that God is faithful, that God doesn't change his mind. It's a great comfort to those of us who are Christians and in covenant with God that he will complete that which he begins unto the day of Jesus Christ.

Question 9:

How is Jesus' role as Christ similar to Adam's role as the first human being?

Through his role as Christ or Messiah, Jesus fulfills God's covenant promises to his people. One way that the Bible calls attention to this is by comparing Jesus to Adam, the first man. How is Jesus' role as Christ similar to Adam's role as the first human being?

Dr. Stephen Wellum

Adam as our head, our representative of the entire human race is, as all of God's creatures, to be obedient, to be faithful. We are the creatures. We are the ones who are to obey our creator, to serve him and to obey him and love him in every area of our life. In his disobedience, he brought with it sin and death and judgment. The only way for that to be reversed is we need God to do the remedy for us and to do so through another Adam, through another human. And so, we have the strong emphasis on "God will provide one like an Adam" through these various prophets, priests, and kings, ultimately culminating in our Lord Jesus Christ who — and you think of in the Gospels — he has come to do the will of God; he has come to obey. Galatians 4 says that he was born of a woman, born under the Law, to obey all of the Law. Well, why is that necessary? Because he has to undo what Adam did. By his obedience — and we think of this not just in terms of his life, but his life is important here too — by his obedience, sometimes we call this his "active obedience," he fulfills all the requirements of the Law for us. By his obedience, supremely in his death, Philippians 2, he obeys even unto death on the cross. He is then by virtue of that work, by virtue of that obedience as our King, as our Priest, he is exalted at God's right hand. It's not as if he wasn't King before and Lord before; he's always been that as God the Son. Yet, he is God the Son incarnate by his work, and he has to, through his humanity, be obedient, to be faithful, to do that on our behalf, so that he can win for us our salvation.

Dr. Derek Thomas

Jesus is our representative, he is our substitute, he is the last Adam, the second man, and therefore, as Adam was tempted in the Garden, so the last Adam, too, must be tempted by the serpent. If he is to represent us, he must be tempted in every way like we are tempted. Otherwise, he is not our substitute. Scripture is very clear that at no point in the course of his ministry did Jesus fall into sin. He was sinless. He was without sin in thought, in word, in deed.

Dr. Glen Scorgie

The Scriptures profile the Lord Jesus Christ as fully human and in every way just like us except that he was sinless. It's very important for us to appreciate the significance of that singular distinction. Adam had failed to provide a life of perfect obedience; Jesus Christ fulfilled that. And so, it was in his ability to lead a sinless life that he became the second Adam, the paradigmatic new opportunity for a fresh start for humanity. So, whether you look at it in terms of him becoming the second Adam or becoming the perfect and adequate sacrifice for sin, the sinlessness of Christ is critically important and a very important element of the good news about the Messiah.

Question 10:**How could Jesus be both fully human and fully divine?**

In order for God the Son to fulfill the role of Christ, he had to become a man. So, he became incarnate as Jesus. As a result, Jesus was both man and God — one person with two natures in hypostatic union. He had all the essential attributes of a human being, and all the essential attributes of deity. But these realities can seem hard to reconcile. Is it really possible for God to take on a complete human nature? How could Jesus be both fully human and fully divine?

Dr. Stephen Blakemore

When we speak about Jesus as the God-man, the term that the church coined to discuss that was “hypostatic union,” meaning that there is a coming together of natures, the divine nature and the human nature, that in Jesus Christ we have one person, God the Son, the second person of the Trinity. One person, who, not has two natures, but brings two natures together, and makes them united, doesn't make a third nature out of them. Instead he unites the divine and the human. Now, while that is a very difficult concept for us to wrap our minds around, it is utterly essential for our faith — understanding the absolute uniqueness of Jesus. He is the God-man. He's not just a great, exalted, enlightened teacher, such as the prophet Buddha or the prophet Mohammed. No, Jesus is the God-man. So, his identity is caught up in this notion of the hypostatic union. But beyond that, there is also something crucial for us in understanding our salvation in Christ. Christ does not come simply to pay a debt that we owe to God, so that God can write our debt off of the books. No, Christ comes to bring us back to the Father. Christ comes to unite the divine life that is lost in the fall

of Adam, back to our humanity. Only if Christ is the one who can bring God and man together can we really say that we have been saved. Not just forgiven of our sins, but saved, made again what God intended us to be all along, those who bear his image, those who live in the fullness of his presence, and those whose lives are united to him in love and faith and obedience. So, the doctrine of the hypostatic union, as hard as it is, is absolutely essential for us to keep in mind, and always thinking about because of the identity of Jesus on the one hand, and on the other hand his identity as the one and the only one who can bring us back to God. Not by what he did on the cross, but because of who he is in his very nature, the God-man.

Dr. Jeffrey Lowman

The question of what is the nature or the natures of Christ in the hypostatic union is one of the more difficult questions in theology, and the reason for this is we're seeking to understand a mystery. The nature has to do with Christ's humanity and his deity, and he had both a human nature and a divine nature. And what is interesting in the way the Scripture presents that is that these are not blends; he is fully human and he is fully divine, and they do not come together in a confused manner, but Christ at the same time was both human and divine.

Dr. Dennis Johnson

The term "hypostatic union" itself often sounds confusing, and then when you hear it explained that we're talking about divine nature of the second person of the Trinity, united with a full and complete human nature, sinless human nature, but full and complete — body, soul, mind the whole works — in one person, that concept in itself, as well as the term, is amazing, especially in the light of the fact that Scripture so often emphasizes in the Old Testament that we should not confuse God and man. Yes, man is made in God's image and God's likeness, but we shouldn't confuse the Creator and the creature. And here in the New Testament we find this very clear announcement that in Jesus Christ we need one who is obviously fully human, exhausted to the point of sleep in the midst of a storm on the Sea of Galilee and at the same time fully God, so that when roused from that sleep, as the Creator of the universe, he ushers the word "silence," and the whole storm stops in obedience to its Creator. So, there's a text right there that puts the hypostatic union right before us and demands that we, if we hear the Word of God, that we accept it.

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

The hypostatic union, this idea that in Christ we have a fully divine nature and a fully human nature coming together in one person, this is what enables God to show himself to us and to redeem us as only Christ is able to do. We have one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, and it's essential that he's both God and man to be this mediator.

Question 11:
How did the incarnation make the Son of God a more effective high priest?

One of the reasons that God the Son became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth was to save his people from their sins. Theologians often categorize this aspect of the incarnation under Jesus' role as priest. So, how did the incarnation make the Son of God a more effective high priest?

Dr. Mark Strauss

Jesus' incarnation made him a more effective high priest because he could sympathize; he could empathize; he could understand exactly what we are going through. Hebrews 4:15 says that, "We do not have a high priest who cannot empathize with us, but one who has been tested, one who has been tempted in every way as we have been tempted" and tested as human beings. Sometimes we, as conservative, as evangelical Christians, so emphasize the deity of Christ that we forget that it's really his humanity that saves us. Because Jesus became a true human being he could suffer and die for us, for our sins. So, Jesus' humanity is essential to our salvation, it's essential to this high priesthood because only as a human being could Jesus pay the penalty for our sins.

Dr. Robert Lister

Jesus had to become like his brethren in all things with the exception of sin only, so that he might become our faithful high priest. So that when we are tempted, we have one who was tempted like us in every respect apart from sin. And so, Jesus' high priesthood is one of a dual purpose. He is able to identify with our suffering, with our experience of temptation and we can look to him as the one who has gone before us and can show us the way of escape. And at the same time his priesthood in Hebrews 2 also shows the way that he dispenses with death and the power of sin by obeying on our behalf and conquering that foe. So, his priesthood is one that both effectively puts away sin, and shows us how to deal with the temptations that we face on a daily basis.

Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III

The Bible tells us that Jesus' incarnation made him a high priest who is able to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. And that means that he is a more effective high priest than he would have been or could have been had he not known the fullness of what it is to be human and experience that with and for us. He's not as C.H. Spurgeon would have said, "a dry land sailor." He's not someone who's an expert on sailing who's never been in a boat. He himself has been in our own flesh and blood and has experienced this whole same range of problems in a fallen world that we experience. But, it's even better than that, I think. It's better than that because the Lord Jesus not only experienced that common range of human problems in a fallen world, but he experienced them in an extreme degree. The Bible makes it clear that Jesus' humiliation is not something that was confined to the cross. Nor was it something that was confined to the opposition that he experienced in his earthly

ministry, but that it was something that he began to experience from the moment that he was born. His humiliation, for instance, begins in his birth in that he's born to a very common family without substantial political power or financial means. He's laid in the feeding trough of animals for his manger. I don't think there is a mother in the world who would want to put her newborn child in a feeding trough for animals. And his whole course of life, he tells us himself, is operated in the extremes of lack. He tells us that the foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head. So, the Lord Jesus is saying that, to those who are the most deprived of material comforts in this life, I am able to relate to you, because I was not born in a palace. I did not grow up in a family that afforded me fine clothes and the best of worldly enjoyments. I experienced the same kind of lack that about 80% of the world's population has over the duration of the time that there have been human beings on this planet. And so, the Lord Jesus is able, as a high priest, to sympathize with those who endure those kinds of lacks and wants.

But I think even more than that, the Lord Jesus' sympathy for us as high priest is found at a point, not of commonality with us in our human nature, but a point of difference. I think a lot of people think that Jesus can't relate to them because he was sinless and they're sinners. The idea is, unless you've been down in my sin, you really don't understand me. And I think the opposite is actually true. He not only lived in a world filled with sin and was perfect, but he had to live his entire life in consciousness that he himself was going to bear that sin which he had not committed. Now, none of us know what the future holds for us. Jesus did. Every conscious moment of his ministry he knew that he had come to die and to bear sins that he had not himself committed. The idea of contracting sin and bearing sin and bearing shame and scoffing rude is something that weighed on him. The Gospels record these events in the final week of Jesus' life. John tells us that his heart was deeply troubled and he cried out for God and begged God to be glorified in him because he was so overwhelmed at the prospect of what was going to happen at the end of Passover week. Well, Jesus as our high priest lived sinlessly in a world surrounded by sinners, which must have been a vexation to his soul. If you've ever been in a situation where you're one person trying to resist the predominant sin in a community around you while loving those sinners and not engaging in the same kind of activity that they engage in? This is how Jesus lived every conscious moment of his life. It must have been enormously, psychologically burdensome. And then to know that he was going to die the death that they deserved, bearing their sin in their place. This he did for us.

So, when you look at Jesus, you can't say "Jesus you just don't understand me." Because it's not only that Jesus made you, and he knows what's in you. It's not only that Jesus, because he is the God-man, in his divinity knows every thought of what we are. John can put it this way, "He himself knew what was in them," speaking of Jesus knowing the hearts of men. But it is that Jesus, in our flesh, has lived sinlessly in the midst of sinners knowing that he was going to bear the penalty due to sinners though in him there was no sin. And that built in the Lord Jesus Christ a sympathy whereby he is able to be down in the dust with us. And I think that that truth ought to be enormously encouraging to all Christians, that we don't have a high priest that

doesn't understand what it's like to be human. And even in those sins, which we have committed, that he has not, he knows things about the psychological burden of that sin that we ourselves do not know.

Dr. Dennis Johnson

It's a great question to ask how the incarnation made the Son of God a more effective high priest for us. We know that as the Son of God he has divine omniscience; he knows everything. And yet, again, the writer to the Hebrews emphasizes that this God who knows all things, who sustains all things, who is eternal, became in the Son a human being, so that we would have a brother who was a high priest. Hebrews begins to pick up that theme at the end of chapter 2 when it quotes from Psalm 22 — he is not ashamed to call us his brothers; he will confess the Father's name before his brothers. And immediately moves on into that reality that Jesus comes to share our human nature, become our brother, to be a merciful and faithful high priest. He picks that up and the end of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5 talking about the fact that our high priest is one who can be touched by the feeling of our weakness. And then connects in to Aaron, the Old Testament high priest, and Aaron's sons. Aaron was taken from among the brothers, that is, the Israelites, and therefore could represent them before God and his holiness. Now Aaron and his sons were all sinners and so Hebrews also points out that Aaron and his sons needed to offer an atoning sacrifice for their own sins first of all before they offered atoning sacrifices for the sins of Israel. Jesus, of course, doesn't need an atoning sacrifice for his own sins; he has none. But he can intercede for us from the perspective of one who as a human being has endured all the tests and the trials that are lodged against our faith and our faithfulness by the evil one. And, of course, Jesus endured them all with perfection.

So, his incarnation qualifies him in a particular way that perhaps we can't fully grasp because we are dealing with mystery here, to intercede for us, to pray for us. But, of course, the other crucial thing is we need not only a priest that knows us we also need a sacrifice that is sinless. And Hebrews also speaks of that, especially Hebrews 10. The preacher to the Hebrews quotes from Psalm 40 and references the fact that in Psalm 40 the speaker there, who is the psalmist — but the psalmist speaking for Christ as he enters the world — is coming to take up the body prepared for him to offer that body as the final sacrifice. Jesus became a human being in order to offer that sacrifice we needed. The blood of bulls and goats, Hebrews said, testified to our need for cleansing but could only clean externally and not get to the conscience. But the blood of Christ shed for us in his humanity, in his perfect humanity, atones for our sin and cleanses our conscience so that we can draw near to God in confidence.

Question 12: **How did Christ's death atone for sin?**

One of the most important things Jesus did as our high priest was to atone for our sins. Scripture tells us that without Jesus' atoning sacrifice we would still be dead in

our sins and without hope in the world. But exactly how did his death work to our benefit? How did Christ's death atone for sin?

Dr. Knox Chamblin

Jesus Christ atoned for sin in his saving death, and this truth is manifold and extraordinarily rich. There are two passages in Romans where several ingredients of the atonement are brought together. First in Romans 3:23-25, "...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, whom God set forth as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith." And then in Romans 5:9-10, "Since we have now been justified by Christ's blood, much more shall we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For, if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life." One of the themes of the atonement there is redemption. That means liberation from bondage by the payment of a price. We are freed from bondage to sin and death by the precious blood of Christ, that's the cost of our redemption. The second truth is in the word "propitiation" which is a complex truth. The blood of Jesus covers our sins, and so when the wrath of God that's revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, sees the blood of Christ covering our sin, it is averted; it is turned away. But Jesus Christ himself bears the weight of that wrath; he experiences the judgment of God. So in the language of Isaiah 53:5, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement that brought us peace was upon him and by his stripes, we are healed." And then justification, which stands at the very heart of Paul's gospel, the language of the law court, the righteous Judge declares the sinner not guilty. Paul says in Romans 4, God justifies the ungodly, and he does that because the righteous one has stood in our place. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." And then reconciliation, the language of the battlefield. We had rebelled against God, we were his enemies, and consequently we were under his wrath. Reconciliation establishes peace where there was conflict. And the extraordinary thing about this is that the offended party and the mightier party is the one who takes the initiative to be reconciled with his sinful and rebellious creatures.

Dr. Stephen Wellum

One of the crucial issues that we wrestle with in terms of the cross is trying to have what we call a "theology of the cross," and a theology of the cross seeks to answer the question, how does this work? What does this work achieve? What is it about? What is it accomplishing for us? How does the atonement work in that way? And that's a crucial question that needs to be addressed. The Scripture provides an answer to that in a whole set of ways, and at the heart of its answer — in terms of Christ's work on the cross is our redemption, and it's our reconciliation, and it's our justification, and it's the victory over the powers — at the heart of it is that Christ's work on the cross provides substitution for us as our representative. So that Christ comes as the God-man. He is the one who, in his man-ness represents us, is the last Adam in that way who comes to undo the work of the first man. He comes as a covenant head; he comes as the head of his people who then as our representative goes to the cross for us. He

does so as our substitute, by standing in our place. We deserve nothing less than God's wrath upon us — "The wages of sin is death." Christ then goes and takes our, what we say, our penalty. Often we speak of that in terms of penal substitution where he goes, takes our penalty to himself, lives our life, dies our death, is raised for our justification, and, as our substitute, he then, because he is the God-man, takes God's very requirements to himself. In fact, at the heart of the problem of forgiveness is how can we be reconciled, declared just, before a holy God? In Christ, he is not just a third party; he is not just another man. He is the God-man, the second person of the Godhead who takes God's own righteous requirements to himself, who stands in our place, who goes as our representative, who dies on our behalf, so that in him bearing our sin, in him satisfying his own righteous requirements, we who then believe in him are then forgiven because he stands for us; he stands as our covenant head. All that he has achieved in his death, his resurrection, that gloriously demonstrates that, then is applied to us. So that we die with him, we're raised with him, our debt has been removed, and we then can stand by faith, justified before the Father.

Dr. Samuel Ling

Now this salvation, Jesus Christ saving us from our sin, is expressed in the Bible with different terms. For example, the Bible tells us that God has designed Jesus to be a "propitiation" for our sins. This means that a righteous God, a holy God is angry at us and our sins. And what Jesus did on the cross, by dying, by shedding his blood for us, is that he laid aside, he set aside God the Father's anger, and thus God's problem, which he should have a problem of anger with us, is now solved. And so, the Bible talks about the propitiation that Jesus Christ is for us. The Bible also talks about the "atonement" or the "expiation." You and I have a sin problem. The sin problem we have is that we have a bad record; we've done bad things. We have a bad heart. We have a bad master, which is either ourselves or the Devil. What Jesus did was to set things right between us and God. He solved our sin problem, so now God receives us, he's at peace with us, and we are at peace with God. Which leads us to another word that the Bible uses, and that's the word "peace" or "reconciliation." God is now at peace with us, and secondarily we are at peace with God because of the Lord Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection. Finally, the Bible uses the word "ransom." We are like slaves in a market where Jesus came, or God came, and paid the price, which is the blood of Jesus, to set us free so that we no longer belong to the slave master, but we now belong to God. So, Jesus is our propitiation; he set aside the Father's anger. Jesus is our atonement; he solved our sin problem. Jesus is our reconciliation; he brought us peace with God, or rather he brought God to be at peace with us. And that Jesus is that ransom price paid for our sin.

Question 13:

What is the relationship between Jesus' atonement and the Old Testament sacrifices?

In the Old Testament, God applied salvation to his people through an elaborate system of sacrifices. But in the New Testament, Jesus' death replaced that system.

So, why does the New Testament also teach that Jesus' death on the cross was consistent with the prior sacrifices? What is the relationship between Jesus' atonement and the Old Testament sacrifices?

Dr. Frank Barker

The Old Testament sacrificial system demonstrated God's mercy, but one of the classic ways was on the Day of Atonement. You had your tabernacle or temple, and the innermost part of that was called the holiest of all, and in there you had the Ark of the Covenant with the Ten Commandments in it, and the top of that box was called the mercy seat. And on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would take the blood of the lamb and offer the lamb at the altar outside the temple or tabernacle, then come through the veil into that holiest of all part and sprinkle the blood on the top of the box. The idea was that God would be merciful when the blood of the lamb covered the law that was broken. Of course, that pointed to the fact of Jesus Christ was going to be the true Lamb whose blood would cover our having broken the Law. But, notice, God's mercy founded on that blood covering our having broken the Law.

Dr. Stephen Wellum

The relationship between Jesus' death and Old Testament sacrifices could be developed in a whole host of ways. At the heart, the Old Testament sacrifices must be placed within the old covenant that God gave to the nation of Israel. The sacrificial system was the means by which the people's sin was removed, God's wrath was turned back; there was relationship between God and his people. Those sacrifices, we say, are types, they're patterns. They point forward to something greater. Even in the Old Testament there are plenty of hints that just by the offering of an animal will never be enough to take away sin. It was never intended to be ultimately in terms of that which would remove sin. They were patterns of something greater, but they point forward to the sacrifice of Christ in that he is the one who, like that sacrifice, is our substitute. He is the one who takes our place. He is one who does so in a far greater way because he is human. He takes on our humanity. Those animal sacrifices didn't. Yet, he is also God the Son, God the Son incarnate, so that he now fulfills his own righteous requirements putting away our sin, standing as our representative, as our substitute, as our priest. And fulfills all of what those sacrifices pointed forward to, restores us to relationship with God, and brings us back to what God made us to be in the first place — his people, living for him, serving him, carrying out our role and duty as his image bearers in this world.

Question 14:

Why is the resurrection of Jesus an indispensable part of the gospel message?

Jesus' suffering and death atoned for our sins. And because of this, Christians often view the crucifixion as Jesus most important act — his crowning victory. But the

Bible also teaches that without Jesus' resurrection, his death would have been meaningless. Why is the resurrection of Jesus an indispensable part of the gospel message?

Dr. Peter Walker

The resurrection of Jesus is basic to the gospel because without the resurrection, with a dead Jesus, we have nothing. I mean, what help is there in a dead Jesus — crucified, failed? So, the resurrection in the New Testament is a sign that Jesus has been vindicated, and if we talk about the forgiveness of sins coming about through his death, well, if Jesus had died and not been raised again, we don't know that we're forgiven. The whole doctrine of salvation falls apart without the fact that Jesus is raised from the dead. But it's more than that, I mean, it means that Jesus Christ is alive today. And an essential part of the good news is that here is a living person that we can know and have our lives transformed by. We're not following just a dead hero; we're following a living person. But it's more than that, it's that there's actual new life beyond the grave for those who believe in Christ. So, death is not the end. The resurrection is a sign that there is a new kingdom established and that we have hope beyond the grave. And it is even more than that. It's that God has got a purpose for his whole world. This creation, which is subjected to frustration, finds through the resurrection that there's a hope of new creation. And so, the resurrection turns out to be absolutely key, not just for individuals, but for the whole world.

Dr. Dennis Johnson

Paul says in Romans 4 at the very end that Christ was raised for our justification. And in fact, he says in 1 Corinthians 15 as well that if Jesus is not raised our faith is futile, meaningless, and we are still in our sins. So, the resurrection is integral to our confidence that our sins have been forgiven. That what Jesus did on the cross was not for his own sins but for our sins. The resurrection is God's declaration that that wrath and judgment that Jesus received on the cross was not what he deserved, but what we deserve. It's God's demonstration that what Jesus deserves for lifelong, start to finish, inside and out, perfect obedience through the Father's will, is eternal life, the life of the age to come. And Jesus endured the cross for us. Paul says in Galatians 3, Christ endured the curse, becoming a curse for us as he was hanged on a tree. But now Jesus has entered into the new life that is rightfully his. And amazingly by grace, because we are united to Christ, that new life, the life of the age to come, is ours as well. His death to our sins guilt and penalty is our death. His resurrection to his rightly deserved reward by God's mercy is our reward. We haven't tasted it all yet, but we've tasted the firstfruits of it and the work of the Holy Spirit applying the resurrection already to our hearts and lives, drawing us out of death and into life as Paul says at the beginning of Ephesians 2. And that firstfruits of resurrection life through the work of the Spirit guarantees to us and assures us that the full harvest of resurrection, our own bodily resurrection to see and to be with Jesus and to be like him is certainly coming. The resurrection is crucial to the gospel because it speaks of Christ's victory over sin and over death, which is ours by God's grace.

Dr. Mark Strauss

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, together of course with his atoning death on the cross is indispensable to the Christian life. And I think two main reasons it's indispensable. For one thing, the resurrection was Jesus' vindication. Vindication in the sense that it proved, it confirmed that he was who he claimed to be. That he did accomplish what he claimed he would accomplish. So we know that Jesus' death on the cross paid the penalty for our sins because he rose victorious from the grave. So vindication is the first key reason. But the second is that he rose to a new life, a new glorified existence. When Jesus rose from the dead he entered into a different kind of existence, the kind of existence we were meant to have. Because Adam and Eve rejected God, they didn't enter into this glorified existence, but Jesus did at his resurrection, and by dying with Christ, by being risen with him, we know that we too will enter into our glorified bodies, and we will come into a unique and eternal relationship with God through that resurrection. So the key is both vindication, but also the newness of life into a glorified body, into a glorified existence that we will have with God forever.

Dr. Jonathan Pennington

The life and suffering and death of Jesus would ultimately be meaningless if it were not for the resurrection of Jesus. When Jesus rose from the dead it was God's vindicating that Jesus was right. You may remember that many of his enemies accused him of being satanic or foolish or a crazy revolutionary, but instead he spoke truth and wisdom and healed and lived in humility and lived with sinners and was accused being a sinner himself for living with them. Yet, God vindicated, by raising him from the dead, that he was the true Son of God. Another reason why Jesus' resurrection is so essential, and why his life and death and suffering are not sufficient in and of themselves, is because in the resurrection Jesus not only provides an example, but he also conquers death itself. In his rising, death is put to death. Death itself is killed. And so, if we only had his suffering and his death he would serve a great example, but it would not deal with our sin problem. We would still face our deaths, only with an example of someone who also faced death with nobility. But the resurrection of Jesus provides an assurance that not only Jesus was truly from God, but that death itself is now conquered.

Another reason the resurrection is so important is because it affirms the value of God's created order. It affirms that our bodies, as made by God, and all matter do matter. That it affirms that God cares about creation and that our hope is a resurrection body ourselves, in physical bodies, because all God has made is good, even though creation itself is marred, what God has made is good, and the creation itself, the Scriptures say, is longing for its redemption, the adoption of the sons of God. The resurrection not only inaugurates this but shows that God cares about our physical bodies and the physical world that he has made. Another reason that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so important — and this is one that I am afraid we often don't speak of, but it's in the Scriptures — and that is that the resurrection of Jesus inaugurates and initiates the new and final age of the world itself. Not only is the cross and the resurrection of Jesus the means by which we can receive forgiveness of

sins, atonement for our sins, but as important, and maybe even more importantly, the resurrection begins the new and final age of the world. The new creation, as the scriptures call it, begins at that tomb, that empty tomb. It is the new epicenter, the new focal point, the new hinge of history itself. It is not just another event, it becomes the focal point by which all of history is now understood, because all that Adam did and failed to do and that death reigned from the time of Adam's fall up to Christ, now life reigns because a new second Adam has come, and the resurrection is this turning point in history. This is why the rest of the New Testament authors regularly look back to the centrality of Jesus being raised from the dead, and speak of us now living in the end times. We are now all living in the end times, because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He has inaugurated this beginning of the end, and the hope for the Christian is that that beginning will now find its consummation at the second coming of Christ which is called, according to the Scriptures, a new creation itself.

Question 15:

What work is Jesus doing in heaven right now?

After mentioning Jesus' death and resurrection, the Apostles' Creed tells us, "He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty." This sometimes gives Christians the impression that Jesus isn't doing anything right now, other than waiting for his return. But nothing could be further from the truth. So, what work is Jesus doing in heaven right now?

Rev. Jim Maples

The Scripture tells us that Christ is seated at the right hand of God. This is an anthropomorphic expression that shows that Christ received the reins of government, of the church, and of the universe. At his ascension, he is made to share in the corresponding glory that goes with this. But this reference to being seated, however, does not imply that Jesus ascended to a place of rest. He continues in his work as our king and prophet and priest, and in his mediatorial work as priest, he continues to intercede for his people. As priest, he is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. He is constantly interceding on behalf of his people. When he cried out from the cross, "It is finished," he did not mean that his mediatorial priestly work was finished; he meant that his act of suffering was finished at that time. He continually offers up his sacrifice, his completed sacrifice, to the Father as the sufficient basis for the bestowal of God's pardoning grace. He is constantly applying the work he did on the cross and making it effective for the justification and the sanctification of sinners. He always lives to intercede for those that are his, pleading for their acceptance before God on the basis of his completed work.

Dr. Carl Trueman

Jesus Christ is our priest. He performs that function in his life, his death, his resurrection and now in his ascension to the right hand of the Father. He performs the function of a priest by interceding on behalf of his people and making a sacrificial

offering for them. On earth, of course, he was interceding for his people in the high priestly prayer in John where he talks to the Father about the people that the Father has given him. He offers himself as a sacrifice upon the cross at Calvary. And now, ascended to the right hand of the Father, he offers himself continually in intercession to the Father on our behalf, fulfilling the great Old Testament role of the priest.

Dr. Bill Ury

The fact that he is at the right hand of the Father on a throne, spiritually speaking, is a great affirmation to us that there is victory at the end of all human history for us. He is the King who has won every battle. We don't sense it now, but in reality, he has. That's the cosmic concept. The transformation of all the universe, his total lordship, that is all pictured for us as his reigning lordship on a throne. But the great thing about remembering who Jesus is, is that the one that reigns is a glorified man, the Son of God who became the Son of Man so that his incarnation never ceases. He didn't become some spirit alone. He has taken humanity into heaven, and the one who is at the right hand of God the Father is a Jewish carpenter who is the Son of God. So that, as Hebrews says — I think it's six times — he ever lives to intercede for us. There is this marvelous mix of his lordship, his sovereignty, his dominion, his absolute victory over all that has occurred but also this incredible intimacy, this taking us into himself, that his intercessory life, this powerful prayer and concern for our lives continues.

Question 16:

How important is the doctrine of the last judgment?

After mentioning that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, the last thing the Apostles' Creed says about Jesus is that he will return to judge the living and the dead. Today, Christians are often uncomfortable with the idea of judgment. We generally prefer to focus on forgiveness and mercy rather than on judgment, especially when we proclaim the gospel. How important is the doctrine of the last judgment?

Dr. Mark Strauss

Jesus talked about judgment quite a lot. We sometimes think of the Old Testament as a stern and angry God and the New Testament as a good and loving God and Jesus always talking about goodness and love for one another. That's certainly true that he talked about goodness and love for one another. But he also, more than anyone else in the New Testament, certainly, talked about God's judgment, that ultimately God would right every wrong, that he would separate the sheep from the goats and would send the goats — that is the wicked — into eternal judgment. So, we know that a good God, a loving God, is also a just God who must punish sin.

Dr. Thomas Schreiner

This last judgment isn't only for Hitler or Stalin or other people that we view to be particularly evil. We all deserve that final judgment, and the Christian Scriptures

teach us that that judgment will come, either when Christ comes again, or also when we immediately die, I think there is a sort of judgment as well. That judgment will be based on whether we have confessed Jesus to be Savior and Lord, whether we have put our trust in him to forgive us of our sins. Another thing I'd like to say is that judgment has a function in the life of believers. Again and again we see in the Scriptures that the judgment to come is used as an argument as why Christians ought to persevere to the end. We see this is in Revelation. Revelation is very strong on the last judgment. And the author says that this is a motivation for believers to endure and to persevere, knowing that the judgment is coming, knowing that those that have not followed Christ will face an eternity of punishment and even torment.

Dr. David Garner

You know, the question of final judgment, hell, the wrath of God, those are not topics that we eagerly discuss often in the church. And part of the reason for that is it's just difficult for us to get our minds around that degree of fury and wrath associated with the God that we envision in our minds. And I think that's precisely the problem. I think the problem that people have with final judgment and condemnation of the wicked is actually a problem that they have an invalid view of who God is. The fact of the matter is that, according to Scripture, it is within God's full right as the one who is completely other than we are, who has made us for the purpose of giving him glory, that is with his full right and full righteousness to condemn all who violate the covenant that he made. And to say anything less than that is to not do justice to the God who has revealed himself in Scripture as absolutely holy, perfect, pure, spotless. He is a God that demands perfect justice, perfect allegiance, perfect commitment. And when those made in his image have shaken their fists in his face, he would be unjust not to carry out a full wrath upon those who have violated his law, his covenant, and his character.

The gospel is actually centered right there. None of us deserve anything less than that fury. We need to recognize that. It is the grace of God that is extended to some of us that he draws us to himself. How does he do that? How does he become just and the justifier of the wicked in history as we see Paul describe in Romans 3:21 and following? How does that happen? It happens because instead of God unleashing his fury on us, he has actually done so on his very own Son in our place. If you want to see a picture of the wrath of God, the place in which it comes to boldest view is none less than the cross itself when Jesus himself cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Why had he been forsaken? Because of your sin and my sin. And he held his wrath against his Son in our place that we might be received into his blessed company. So, as we think about the question why does God judge his enemies, the better question is why does God receive me into his presence? I am worthy of his wrath, but instead, he has granted me mercy, he has granted me forgiveness because he has held his wrath against his Son. I think about this when a very familiar text oft quoted comes from 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Isn't it stunning that he would use the term "just" there; that our forgiveness is actually grounded in God's justice instead of his mercy? I think the reason that that is

true is because for him to now hold his wrath against us would be — to use what in common parlance in the legal field, would be double jeopardy — that he has held our sin against Jesus, and he's held it against us, too? No. He's held our sin against Jesus Christ.

The Apostles' Creed is a powerful declaration of our faith in Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, who is both fully God and fully man. He came to earth to atone for our sins and to offer us an abundant life. Through Christ's atoning sacrifice, God's faithful children have no fear of judgment. And even now, Jesus sits at the right hand of God and lives to intercede for us. So, how should we respond to the grace we've received in him? By living every day in thankful obedience, by relying on his strength and intercession, and by giving glory to God for and through our Savior Jesus Christ.

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