

APPRECIATING THE RICHNESS OF CHRIST'S INCARNATION

by Bill Watson

If you were to take a poll, Jesus Christ would most likely be voted the world's most controversial figure. He has been the most debated about, suspected, and questioned personality who ever walked this earth. The legacy He left since His visitation just short of 2000 years ago is nothing short of stunning!

When you consider the challenging, polarizing, and controversial effect He's had over the last two millennia, it's nothing short of amazing. As He said during His ministry, "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division [disunion, partition]: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three" (Luke 12:51-52).

The name of Jesus Christ has caused enormous provocation and division in families, nations, empires, and many cultures around the world throughout the centuries. Sadly, the Christian legacy has been written in the blood, sweat, and tears of *tens of thousands* who gave their lives for living and defending the faith that was once delivered to the saints.

Just consider the results of these many controversies that have impacted the Christian community alone. There is such a variety of movements and groups that have emerged from these disputes over the beliefs and teachings of Jesus Christ—the Docetics, the Adoptionists, the Ebionites, the Modalists, and the Arians. Then there was Nestorianism, and we can't ignore so many more Gnostic sects that characterized Christ in some very unbelievably non-traditional, strange, and quite bizarre ways. It's astonishing when one begins to understand the variations, aberrations, and disparities in teachings, instruction, and definitions by which Jesus Christ was ascribed and portrayed by so many of these divergent groups and movements. And surprisingly, to this day, many of these dissimilarities and distinctions, when compared with the *original* apostolic faith, remain embedded in the "Statement of Beliefs" of many present-day Christian denominations. That's right!—and that is disturbing!

So Who Was Jesus Christ?

A wide variety of opinions about just who Jesus Christ was and whether or not He was a divine or human being remains controversial among many Christian organizations and/or denominations. This debate has not gone away! From the time of the first century, this question has been hotly contested, with people literally being killed over their disagreements with what was considered the orthodox view. Some have gone as far as promoting the idea that Jesus Christ could not have sinned—it was all predestined for Him to succeed without any risk of failure—but can this be true? Some also claim He was an

angel, or some other kind of being, with a supernatural “edge” that gave Him a special advantage in resisting sin that afforded Him the ability to live a righteous life, untouched and uninfected by sin. Is this what the Bible teaches?



The answer to both of these questions is a resounding NO! God’s Word is clear: Jesus *could* have sinned, and He absolutely *could* have failed. When you understand this, only then can you begin to appreciate what Jesus Christ did for you and me, which was nothing less than spectacular and immensely heroic on His part! The Bible gives us background information, providing us with the knowledge of just what was sacrificed and at risk. It’s an incredibly inspiring event to be recognized for its full value, given the danger He faced.

A key part of understanding the background is recognizing that Jesus Christ was the *Creator* of all things. That’s right—that includes everything seen and unseen, physical and spiritual. As surprising as that may sound to some, this is what your Bible emphatically teaches: Jesus Christ is the actual Creator of all things!

Notice, in this context about Christ, Paul says to the church at Colossi: “In whom we have redemption through his [Jesus Christ’s] blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God [the Father], the firstborn [the first fruit from mortality] of every creature [this is Jesus Christ]: For by Him [Jesus] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or power: all things were created by him [Jesus] all things consist. And he [Jesus] is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead: that in all things He might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him [Jesus] should all fullness dwell and having made peace through the blood of His cross [stake] by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself: by Him [Jesus], I say whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven” (Colossians 1:13-20).

Paul makes another plain-spoken statement about Christ as Creator when writing to the church at Ephesus, explaining the mystery of what Jesus Christ has now made possible through salvation. Paul says this: “And to make all men [Gentiles too] see what is the fellowship of the mystery [about being part of the family of God], which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:9).

Notice what the writer of Hebrews says about who Jesus Christ is “God, who at sundry [various] times and in divers [diverse] manners spake in time past unto the fathers by

the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds” (Hebrews 1:1-2).

The apostle John also confirms in his Gospel, when talking about Christ’s preexistence prior to His incarnation, claiming very candidly: “In the beginning was the Word [Jesus is the Word, Revelation 19:13], and the Word [Jesus] was with God [the Father], and the Word [Jesus] was God. The same was in the beginning with God [the Father]. All things were made by him [Jesus Christ]; and without him [Jesus] was not any thing made that was made (John 1:1-3).

Later on in the same chapter, John mentions again, talking about Christ who was the true light, “That was the true Light [Christ], which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him [Jesus Christ], and the world knew him not [did not accept Him as the Savior]” (John 1:9-10). John then goes on to openly state, “And the Word [Jesus Christ] was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John the Baptist bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was He [Jesus] of whom I spake, He [Jesus] that cometh after me [the Baptist] is preferred before me: for he was before me” (John 1:14-15) Remember, John the Baptist was about six months older than Christ *physically*, yet he claims Jesus was preferred *before* him and actually was before him—showing that John the Baptist is *confirming* Christ was favored over him and He, Jesus, preexisted before John was born.

This clearly identifies just who Jesus Christ really is. Many are completely unaware that He is actually the very Creator of everything that we *see*—and *don’t* see in the spirit world. He is the actual Creator God! When we understand this and recognize this



unfortunately *marginalized* fact about Jesus Christ’s real identity, that is when we can really start to comprehend the magnitude and scope of just what was on the line and who it really was who put His very existence at risk. He loved *us that much* that He was willing to jeopardize His own previously safe, assured eternal life as a God being and relinquish it, giving up His immortality and surrendering it to mortal flesh in order to obey the Father’s loving desire for the redemption of all of us (John 3:16-21; 1 John 4:6-21). This is nothing short of courageous and noble heroism. You cannot help but respect and honor the *magnitude* of love and commitment He had to please the Father, and the *enormous* dedication to rescue us from the certainty of eternal death due to our sins!

Was There Really a Risk?

There have been many over the centuries advancing the claim that Jesus Christ was not really human in the truest sense of the word. There are many variations of what some taught, attempting to illustrate that He was a supernatural being manifested in the flesh, but not *really* flesh as we know it. Some would have you believe He was kind of an alien, even a type of hybrid angel. Some have gone so far as to claim He was an *illusion*, like a hologram. The point is, these teachings advance the idea that He was a different type of human being, not like us in every sense, since we are carnal and mortal, “subjected to the bondage of death” (Heb. 2:14-16). Many of these ideas came from the Gnostics, and disappointingly, far too many Christian denominations have retained these distorted, misappropriated, and delusional concepts. Over the centuries, these ideas have served only to undermine the value of this miraculous event that the Father and Jesus Christ accomplished by Jesus becoming mortal, incarnate in flesh and blood. at risk of dying! Many traditional Christians do not believe He died—that only His fleshly body died, and He remained detached like an immortal soul, alive, unaffected by death, consciously apart from His physical body.

For instance, some will use Colossians 2:9 as an explanation that Jesus Christ had two simultaneous natures within Him that afforded Him the advantage to avoid both *sin* and the experience of *actual* death. This belief is based on what some will characterize the Greek words, pronounced “Kat-oy-keh’-o” in combination with “play’-ro-mah.”

However, when reviewing both words, what’s simply being explained is that Jesus was indeed the God who is our Creator, formerly the Word of God, but now was contained, restrained, or confined—incarnate, in mortal flesh. Notice how Paul says it: “For in him [this physical, mortal person, Jesus resides, inhabitants, is housed] all the fullness [replete, imbued, verified, complete, perfect, filled up, full] of the Godhead bodily [physically, fleshly, incarnate]” (Colossians 2:9). Clearly, we are being told Jesus Christ was an embodied human being who was formerly the immortal Creator God, but now was fully human—carnal, mortal, and vulnerable to all that we as human beings think and feel, while being limited in our fleshly tabernacles (Heb. 4:15). Death loomed over Him every day of His mortal human life! He was well aware that He could die, because He was now a mortal being constrained and defined by the “embodiment” of His fleshly carnal body!

Paul is verifying that Christ was the actual Creator God who walked in the flesh, representing the Father who sent Him (but was not the Father) to reveal the mystery they were intent on revealing to the church. Paul speaks to this as part of his ministerial commission. Notice: “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel [the resurrection and Kingdom of God], which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; ...according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God; Even the mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:23-29) And the hope of glory is accomplished by Christ in us and through the miracle of the Holy Spirit begetting us, which allows for the potential of becoming a glorious, empowered spirit being, literally born of spirit by the resurrection, into the kingdom of God—this is man’s destiny! This truth, which has now been clearly revealed

to the church as the Gospel, has unfortunately been warped, distorted, and camouflaged to the point that very few recognize it for its true value and richness.

Was Christ Human or Divine?

Many, if not most, God-believing people think and believe they have an immortal soul contained inside their flesh. Most religions have this as a common fundamental premise. Also, many Christians share this perspective and view the afterlife from this same premise. This is unfortunate because it obscures and confuses the message and process God has undertaken to convert mortal man to an immortal spirit. This original lie that Satan, the devil, promoted when he told Eve, “Ye shall not surely die” (Genesis 3:4) is a belief that has been around since the beginning. It has survived through the generations of mankind through multiple cultures down through history, twisting and perverting their beliefs and understanding of God, succumbing to worshipping the creation more than the Creator. The apostle Paul recognized this very clearly and addressed it in Romans 1:20-32)

Fundamentally, what underscores the confusion about who Jesus Christ was is the belief that man has a “soul,” a spirit essence, which can exist outside his body—a type of disembodied spirit.

If one adopts the belief that human beings have a separate spirit within them that can exist consciously apart from their flesh-and-blood bodies, then this opens up many possibilities for speculation about the afterlife and the rules that govern the spirit world. The varieties of religions throughout the world and the many denominations within the Christian religion are illustrations of the confusion resulting from this false teaching. You have everything from reincarnation, karma, heaven, hell, and purgatory, just to mention a few of these man-made ideas, which come directly from the original statement Satan introduced. Compound that with the misconceptions about God being three persons, or as others believe, three “modes,” and you have a swirling “cocktail” of spiritual confusion that just mixes up the meaning and nature of the Godhead.

If we are going to understand what Jesus Christ was while He “tabernacled” in the flesh, it’s important to know and embrace this biblical fact: human beings do not have immortality inherent within their flesh. Our Bible says, “...this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:53). This is an important premise, because the Bible states, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself [Jesus Christ] likewise took part of the same [reflexivity, coreferent, comparative—ref. “same example,” Hebrews 4:11]; that through death [literally *die*, death] he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil: ...For verily he took not on the nature of angels [He had no special advantage or super edge]; but took on him the seed of Abraham [human, mortal, vulnerable, breakable, finite, destructible]. Wherefore in all things [thoroughly, whatsoever, whole, all manner] it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren” (Hebrews 2:14-17). Being made “like unto His brethren” means just that—He was human in every sense as His brethren, buddies, or fellow human beings were! Frankly, He was an air-breathing creature whose life and consciousness depended upon His physical body to

support His life and performance for His ministry. Outside of that body, in this incarnate, mortal condition, Jesus Christ could not exist consciously and perform His mission.

What the writer is plainly saying is this: Jesus Christ was human in every sense of the word! He was vulnerable and destructible, subjected to the same foibles, limitations, anxieties, and weaknesses that we as humans experience, including death! In this incarnation, He experienced for 33 and one-half years, which clearly provided Him a very special insight into our challenges, our sufferings, and our struggles on the human level.

He also learned through His own human sufferings (Hebrews 2:9-10), and that caused Him to be "...a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that himself hath suffered being tempted [He, too, was tempted in all ways as we are], he is able to succor [relieve, help] them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:17-18). Notice again, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities [He connects with our vulnerable condition]; but was in all point tempted like as [same as, comparable as] we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). How much plainer, more pristine, can it be said? Christ was human, even to the point that He experienced the same struggles, anxieties, and disappointments that we go through when fighting temptations within our nature that war against the spiritual expectations we have from God.

Consider the Context of Hebrews 2:8-18

Notice how the writer of Hebrews provides understanding and clarity to the question of why Jesus had to do what He did in the way that it was done—and, in the course of this narrative, explains and answers the questions surrounding the nature of Jesus Christ.

Talking about mankind and all that is potentially his, the writer explains, "...But now we see not yet all things put under him [mankind]. But [instead] we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God [the Father] should taste death [He was intended, created mortal, so He could literally die] for every man (Hebrews 2:8-9)

We are plainly being told very forthrightly that because God *only* hath immortality (1 Timothy 6:16), Jesus had to be made lower than even the angels. Why? "For the suffering of death." Obviously, this means He was lower than the divine being level, too. It also explains why He had to be incarnated in flesh: so He could die, be killed! As an immortal, He could not!

The writer emphasizes this by mentioning it again: "Forasmuch then as the children [mankind, figuratively] are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same [flesh and blood] that through death [by this means; this literal, actual experience] he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14). The inverse of this is obvious: if He didn't die, He wouldn't be able to destroy him, the devil, who has the power of death.

Here again, we are definitely told that by this method, that is, through death, He was able to destroy the devil's power over death. This is confirmed by the apostle John. Notice: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given go the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves [those who are dead] shall hear his [Jesus'] voice, and shall come forth" (John 5:25-29)

This goes to prove that Jesus Christ was dead. He tasted death for every man and woman so they could at some time have the opportunity to live eternally as an immortal if they should so choose—but it was through this experience and process of death that qualified Him with the authority over death. In other words, if Christ didn't really die, and there was no resurrection, we'd all be doomed without a means of escaping the clutches of death's conclusive grip (1 Corinthians 15:12-23)

Uniquely enough, we are encouraged to take time to remind ourselves of this fact annually when observing Passover—it's embedded, it's foundational to the holy days. It's what our salvation is based upon. In other words, if Christ didn't die, we don't have a Savior—and as was already pointed out, we'd all be doomed to the bondage of death's certainty! But notice what Paul says: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death [not His life] till he come" (1 Corinthians 1:26).

It is critical we acknowledge that the Creator God really did *literally* die for us, and while here in the flesh, experienced the same exact temptations and pulls *we* do, yet without sin. This is the great achievement the Father and our Lord accomplished for us at immense risk and with enormous jeopardy surrounding them!

Now let's get back to Hebrews. "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings [Christ suffered in the flesh]. For both he that sanctifieth [Jesus Christ] and they who are sanctified [mankind] are all of one [Jesus and mankind were the same in flesh]: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Hebrews 2:10-11).

That is an enormous realization, a convincing factor. A God Being condescending to the level of flesh and blood and experiencing similar suffering against sin. This is why He "will declare the name of His brethren" in the church—because He was like them and shared life in their dimension, on their level, including the bondage of death hovering over Him in His incarnated life. Notice, "And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on them the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham [He was a human being]. Wherefore in all things [in every sense a human; all means *all*] it behooved him to be made like [not partially, but in exact likeness] unto his brethren [He was just like them], that he might be [moved by *empathy* to be] a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation [propitiation, atonement] for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:15-17)

What we're being told is, this was a moving experience for our Creator, formerly the Word of God, but now is the born Son of God. "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor [help relieve, aid] them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18). In other words, He too was tempted, and unless He could have failed, missed the mark (sinned), and disqualified Himself and eternally died, He would not have been tempted in all things as we are. Actually, that would promote a doctrine of predestination, advancing a "once saved, always saved" teaching, which we know is an erroneous concept.

No, quite the contrary, He had free moral agency, the freedom to choose. He could have failed and died, with no reciprocating resurrection. That's why He is ultra-sensitive to our challenges and fears as mortal humans. He knows exactly what we are like and what we are in bondage to, death being the greatest bondage of all—and what I mean here is primarily the second death—a death with no associated resurrection attached—eternal death!

The Simplicity of Christ

The first generation of Christians, especially the original apostles, had no problems or confusion regarding Christ's humanity or divinity. They understood He was the Word incarnate—and vulnerable to human appetites, any common mortal contends with who walks the earth. They watched Him live a human life and go through the normal human experiences of carnal living, but without sin, blameless to the corruption surrounding Him. However, it wasn't without pain, sacrifice, and suffering, with the same struggles all of us go through as we engage our human nature with the Spirit of God, who bears witness with our spirit (Romans 8:16).

Clearly, Christ was a divine being, but is now limited in the glory and power He previously had, due to the restrictions and limitations of mortal flesh. Throughout Scripture, He claimed He could do nothing without the Father and the Father worked through Him (John 5:19-24; 10:36-38; 14:9-11). But He knew who He was, and in His closing prayer, prior to His arrest, He prayed for strength and a return to the glory He had before His human birth. Notice what He said, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before [prior to, in front of] the world was" (John 17:4-5)

Unquestionably, Jesus the Christ was indeed the Word, the Creator of the God family, who acted upon the Father's request, representing Him and dying on behalf of the plan of salvation, which was designed before the world was (2 Timothy 12:9) for the redemption of humanity. Christ was indeed humanly vulnerable and powerless when compared to the way He was prior to His human incarnation. He was now completely dependent upon the Father to uphold Him, perform miracles through Him, and ultimately rescue Him from the stranglehold of death by a resurrection back to Spirit life after three days and three nights, entombed in the blackness of this unconscious condition of death.

And yes, the good news is that the Father returned and, in fact, resurrected Jesus back to life, thereby making the way possible for many more sons and daughters to be “born again” as glorious, immortal spirit beings into the Family of God.

It is indeed a stupendous destiny that mankind has been created for, and now, thanks to the heroics and courage of both the Father and the Word, who now is His firstborn Son, Jesus the Christ, our elder brother, High Priest, and Savior—we have access to eternal life in the Kingdom of God as joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:15-17). Now that is something to really be grateful for and to deeply appreciate!