

CHRISTOLOGY & SOTERIOLOGY

*The Biblical teaching concerning the
Redeemer and Redemption*



by

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Kreuzlingen, May 2022

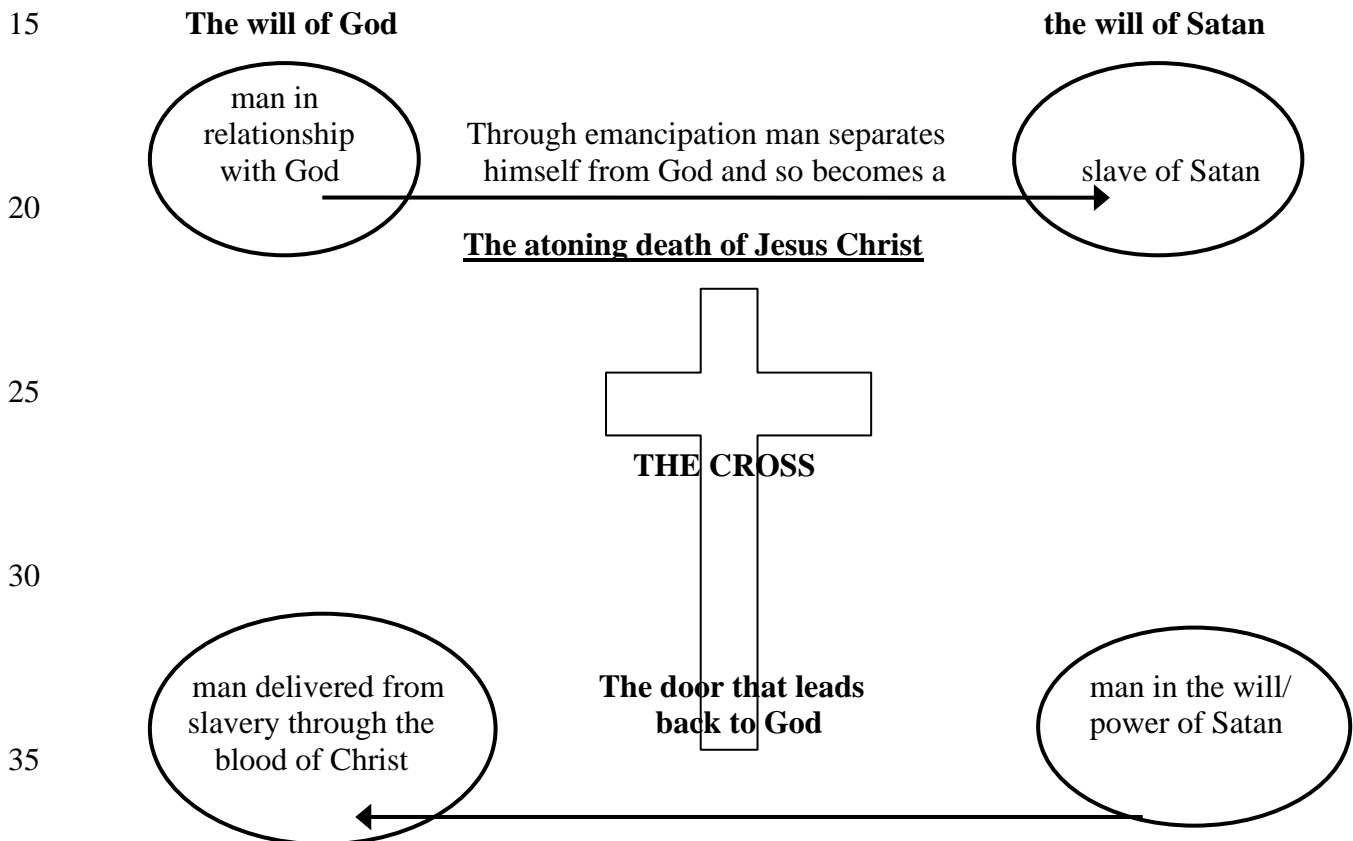
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I. Introduction

Christology is the biblical teaching concerning Christ, the Saviour and Soteriology the teaching regarding salvation (redemption) and its personal appropriation.¹

- 5 First of all we must ask ourselves why redemption is necessary. If there is a Redeemer, then there must also be someone who needs redemption. *Biblical Anthropology* teaches us that mankind, since the fall of Adam and Eve, is completely depraved (corrupt, sinful; cf. Rom 3:10.23; 5:12; Eph 2:1-3; Psalms 51:7). Sin leads to death (Rom 6:23). God, in his love, does not want man to be lost (cf. Ezekiel 18:23), but rather that he repents (2 Peter 3:9) and finds salvation (1 Timothy 2:3-4). The result of the fall of man is sin, death, and judgement, and therefore the need for redemption. The following sketch makes this clear:

The fall of man and the way of salvation can be portrayed in the following way:



- 40 From this we conclude: Since the fall, man is by nature separated from God, bound to Satan and spiritually dead: cf. Psalm 51:7; Isaiah 59:2; Ephesians 2:1.3.

In this brochure we will concentrate on the following three topics:

¹ Christology: the Greek title Χριστός means *Christ*, i.e. *the Anointed One*, and λόγος (*lógos*) means in this context *teaching*. Soteriology: the Greek title σωτήρ (*sōtēr*) means *Saviour* and the noun σωτηρία (*sōtēria*) *salvation*. Hence, in Christology we speak about the *Saviour* and in Soteriology about *salvation* and its appropriation.

1. The person of the Redeemer
2. The work and the threefold office of the Redeemer
3. Redemption and its appropriation

5

Here are three key New Testament texts to introduce our study of Christology and Soteriology:

10

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world.
(1Jo 4:14)

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved!
(Act 4:12)

15

They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household!"
(Act 16:31)

II. God's plan of salvation

A. God's plan of salvation is realised in Jesus Christ

Included in the word "salvation" is everything that God has done to save fallen mankind from sin. This salvation or deliverance embraces all that God has done to achieve for mankind the plan of salvation which he prepared before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4; 1Pe 1:20).

The eternal and omniscient God knew in advance that man would sin. That however does not mean that God wanted it to be this way and that he is therefore responsible for it. No of course not, man misused his moral freedom just as Satan did before him along with the angels who followed him in his rebellion against God (cf. Rev 12:2-3; Isa 14:9ff; Eze 28:11ff; 2Pe 2:4 and Jud 6). That does not change the fact that God is and will always remain sovereign over the whole universe which he created through his Son Jesus Christ (cf. Joh 1:3ff; Col 1:15; Heb 1:2-3). God also knew in advance that he would send his Son into this world to save mankind from sin (cf. 1Pe 1:20) and who would accept his offer of grace in Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 8:29-39; Psa 139:14-16). God's complete plan of salvation existed before the foundation of the world... if this were not so, then God would not really be God, or at least not the eternal, almighty and omniscient God of whom the Bible speaks.

This full and complete salvation which through Jesus Christ must:

- be pleasing and acceptable to God, so that the fellowship between him and mankind can be restored.
- be effective to blot out sin, because as a consequence of this man was separated from God.
- be effective in executing judgement over sin because the Word of God must be fulfilled (cf. Gen 2:16-17; Rom 6:23; Eze 18:4; Num 23:19).
- be effective in disarming Satan, the murderer and old liar (Joh 8:44), because he was and is the originator of sin (cf. Joh 8:44; Heb 2:14-16; 1Jo 3:8).

Modern humanism assumes that man's inner equilibrium is simply disturbed along with his relationship to his neighbours and surroundings. Therefore man seeks a way to save himself, e. g. through meditation or psychotherapy. That is the old attempt of man trying to save himself, just as he did at the beginning of human history:

Gen 3:7 *Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*

The Bible clearly rejects every attempt at self-redemption:

Jer 13:23 *Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.*

Psa 49:7ff *No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him – the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough – that he should live on forever and not see decay!*

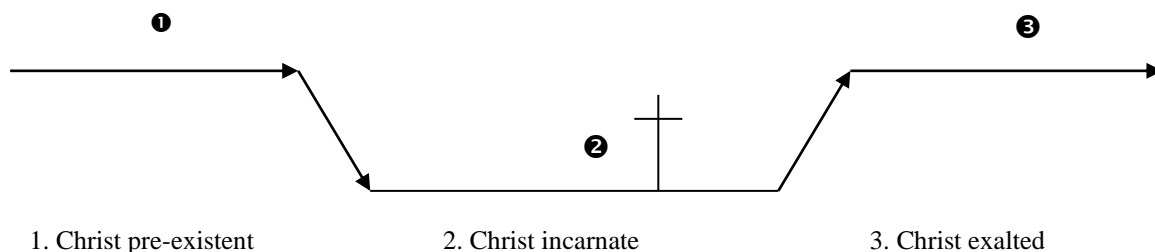
There is only one way of salvation and that is the way offered to us in Jesus Christ (cf. Joh 14:6; 1Jo 5:12-13; Act 4:12).

Rom 4:5 *However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.*

Man cannot save himself by any effort of his own even if all religions maintain this. It is solely the Biblical Christian faith that says that man is saved by grace alone. In the final analysis, Satan is the creator of all religions. He exploits the emptiness in the hearts of (sinful) men by offering each individual a religion that just suits him. Therefore everyone, rich or poor, educated, or uneducated, sophisticated or unsophisticated finds the religion that appeals to him. All religions are in fact a lie or an illusory deception of Satan.

Joh 8:44 *...for he is a liar and the father of lies.*

When considering redemption, we can and must only trust the revelation of God through his Word: Jesus Christ is the “Word” made flesh (Greek: λόγος [*lógos*]; cf. Joh 1:1.14.18). If we want to consider what salvation or redemption is, then we must first consider the Redeemer who is the author of redemption (cf. Joh 4:22.42). The study of the person of Jesus Christ can be divided into three chapters (parts):



What took place on the cross is in fact **the central event in world and salvation history**. We can thus understand why God gave Adam the promise of salvation before he punished him.

Gen 3:15 *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.*

God's promise here is called the “Proto-Gospel”. It can be compared with a bud which grows and finally becomes a wonderful flower or fruit. “The seed” or “the descendant” of the woman signifies a descendant who will overcome the devil (the serpent). In the New Testament, we see that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, fulfils this promise (cf. Gal 3:16.19; 4:4-6). This theme can be traced throughout the whole Old Testament (cf. 1Pe 1:18-20). The coming of the redeeming offspring is announced in the Old Testament by means of symbolic types and prophecies. Here are some well-known examples:

- **Gen 49:10:** *“The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he (שִׁילֹה [Šīlo^h] = owner) comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.”*
- 5 • **Exo 12:** the Passover lamb (cf. Joh 1:29; 1Co 5:7-8)
- **Leviticus:** The high priest (cf. Heb 4:14-16; 8:1ff)
- **Num 24:17-19:** *“I see him, but not now, I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth.”* (cf. Rev 22:16)
- 10 • **Deu 18:15ff:** *“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.”* (cf. Joh 4:25-26; Act 3:21ff)
- **2Sa 7:12-13,27:** *“When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish his throne forever.”* (cf. Isa 11:1.10; Jer 33:15; Mat 22:42-44; Luk 1:32-33; Act 2:29ff; Rom 1:3-4; Rev 5:5)
- 15 • **Psa 22; 69 etc:** Many psalms are called “Messianic psalms” because they incorporate prophecies concerning Christ (cf. e.g. Psa 22:2 with Mat 27:46; Psa 22:9 with Mat 27:43; Psa 22:19 with Mat 27:35 and Joh 19:24; Psa 69:10-11.24-25 with Joh 2:17; Rom 15:3; 11:9-10 and Act 1:20).
- 20 • **Isa 7:14:** *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel.”* (Mat 1:23)
- **Isa 53:** The servant, who bears the sin of the people: Mar 15:28; Luk 22:37; Joh 12:38; 1Pe 2:22-24.
- **Dan 7:13:** *“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.”* (cf. Mat 24:30; Rev 1:7)
- 25 • **Mic 5:1-2:** *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”* (cf. Mat 2:6)
- 30 • **Zec 9:9; 12:10:** *“Rejoice greatly, oh daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. . . . They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a first born son.”* (cf. Mat 21:5; Joh 19:37; Rev 1:7)
- 35

This is probably the way in which Jesus, following his resurrection, explained that all Scripture (at that time the Old Testament) testified to him. (cf. Luk 24:27.44-46).

40 *“But when the time had fully come”, the Son of God came into the world:*

Gal 4:4 *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law...*

45 The expression *“the time had fully come”* simply means *“end of time”*:

1Pe 1:20 *...He was chosen before the creation of the world but was revealed in these last times for your sake.*

Heb 1:2 *...in the last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe...*

5 The following question arises. Why did Christ appear at the time he did and not earlier, e.g. directly following the fall of man?

B. The unfolding of God's plan of Salvation

10 God created man in his own image, male and female he created them (Gen 1:26-27). Man bears the "image of God", implying a special relationship between him and his Creator. Man is made for fellowship with his God, his Creator. This is seen in Gen 2–3: Yahweh conversed with man. Because man is made in the image of God, he is a moral (ethical) being. There is a relationship of love between the Creator and his creation. Love is contingent upon freedom as well as responsibility. The boundaries of the freedom and responsibility are contained in the command which Yahweh gave to man in the Garden of Eden following his creation: *"And the Lord God commanded the man: 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'"* (Gen 2:16-17). Without freedom of choice, there is neither love nor true fellowship; life would be reduced to the existence of a robot or puppet! Unfortunately man let himself be deceived by the serpent (Satan); he wanted to "be like God", a status which God had not planned for him (cf. Gen 3:5-7). Satan managed to draw man into the very same sin that he himself had committed (cf. Isa 14:11-14; Eze 28:13-17; 2Pe 2:4; Jud 6). At the end of time, man's rebellion against God will culminate in the same sin: the Antichrist will proclaim himself to be God and demand the worship of all mankind (cf. 2Th 2:4 and Rev 13:14ff).² God is holy and there is no darkness in him (cf. Isa 6:3; Jam 1:17; 1Jo 1:5). His holiness also demands the holiness of his creation, man, created in his image (cf. Lev 19:1; 1Pe 1:16). Sin cannot exist in the presence of God. This is also the reason why sin brought with it separation from God (cf. Isa 6:5; 59:2). This became clear at the moment when Adam and Eve wanted to hide themselves from Yahweh in the Garden of Eden. After their punishment was pronounced, they were driven out of the garden of Paradise, away from the presence of Yahweh (cf. Gen 3:22-24³). As already mentioned, if God had wanted to, he could have slain Adam and Eve directly after the fall – he could for example have got rid of the whole universe and created a new one. But he did not do this. Why not? Because God loves man and created him in his own image; he had a plan of salvation ready for him. His Son was to come into the world, become man, and take upon himself the punishment of man i.e. his sin (cf. Isa 53; 1Co 1:30; 2Co 5:21; Heb 4:14-16; 9:24-26). In this way, the fellowship between God and man would be restored (Rom 5:1-2; Col 1:19-20; Heb 10:19-22). But God the Father did not choose to send his Son into the world directly following the fall of man. Rather he promised to send the Saviour who would vanquish Satan (Gen 3:15; 1Jo 3:8). Until the fulfilment of this promise, man should realise the tragedy of his sin and discover his inability to free himself from his lost state through his own strength or devices.

40 We do not know what instructions or what means of absolution God gave to Adam and Eve so that they could obtain forgiveness of their sins. We can only put forward suggestions. To

² More on this subject is found in the chapter on the fall of man in my brochure "Biblical Anthropology".

³ Compare with Rev 22:1-5: In the new creation the glorified believers will re-discover Paradise, which was in a way lost through the fall of the first people. On that day, the children of God will finally not only see the Son face to face but also the Father. (cf. Joh 1:18; Exo 33:20; 1Ti 1:17; 6:16; 1Jo 4:12.20).

use the word “speculation” here would have pejorative overtones. Maybe we could speak of “reading between the lines”. In Gen 3:21, it says that after Adam and Eve had sinned and God had pronounced judgement on them, he made them garments of skin and clothed them. More information cannot be found in the context. In the light of the whole of Scripture however, we could possibly deduce certain things. It is no use seeking more information on the subject in this passage. However, in the light of the whole body of Scripture certain deductions can be made. In order for someone to be clothed in animal skins, an animal must first die. It is true that nothing is impossible with God and he could have created an animal skin out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). But we may deduce from Gen 4 (which speaks of Adam and Eve’s son Abel sacrificing from the firstborn of his flock) that Yahweh had already given the first of mankind (directly following the ‘fall’) directions to seek forgiveness of sin through the sacrifice of an animal. Heb 9:22 tells us that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness, because the life is in the blood (Lev 17:11). However, it was man who sinned and consequently he was really the one who should have died. For the consequence (wages) of sin is death (Gen 2:16-17; Rom 6:23), and the soul who sins is the one who will die (Eze 18:20). The letter to the Hebrews teaches us that the blood of bulls and goats cannot really take away sin (Heb 10:4). The blood of animals has, since the fall of man, only had a symbolic or typological meaning. It pointed to (or was a picture of) the perfect blood of the incarnate Son of God. But the man who (since the time of Adam) sacrificed, testified (1) to his need of forgiveness and (2) to his dependence on someone who would pay the price of redemption (propitiation) for him (cf. Mar 10:45; Heb 2:9-11). Scripture shows that the sins committed by believers under the old covenant were provisionally covered by the sacrifices offered according to Mosaic law through the longsuffering of God and in anticipation of the final and eternal sacrifice of Jesus Christ through which sins would be blotted out once and for all (cf. Heb 9:15). The Christian faith is logical: The person who sins must die. Consequently, Adam and with him all his descendants who have inherited his sinful nature must die. Since all have sinned (Psa 51:7; Rom 3:10.21-23), no one can get out of this predicament in his own strength. Only God could (and can) provide a way out. And this could not be just any old solution. God had warned man that if he disobeyed, he would die. Since God cannot lie (Num 23:19), man had to be punished for his sin. Is there a way out of this dramatic situation? There is only one and that is that God, who is without sin, should himself pay man’s debt. This solution was only possible in that God became a man in order to die in the place of sinful man. The eternal and omniscient God had made provision for this from eternity. We could object to this by saying that if God were to become a man and die, he would cease to exist. Otherwise he would not have died! This is in fact a further proof for the plurality of the Godhead. It is also an important argument for the teaching of the trinity! God the Father sent his Son to die on behalf of mankind (Joh 3:16). The Son obeyed the Father and sacrificed himself through the eternal Spirit (Heb 9:15); on the third day, the Father raised him from the dead by the same Spirit (Rom 8:9-11; cf. 1Pe 3:18). This plan of salvation, especially the incarnation of Jesus Christ the Son of God, is a mystery (cf. 1Ti 3:16) into which angels desire to look. The Old Testament prophets sought to search out and understand the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing:

1Pe 1:10-12

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been announced to you by those who have preached the gospel to you

by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

Christ is the ultimate Word of God (cf. Heb 1:2). There is no sacrifice for redemption following his. Christ is the end of the law (Rom 10:4), and through his sacrifice the believer is made perfect once and for all:

Heb 10:10.14 *And by that will we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all**. . . . Because by one sacrifice he has **made perfect forever** those who are being sanctified.*

The example of old, pious Simeon (cf. Luk 2:25-35) shows clearly that there had always been people who feared God and who had believed the promise of the coming of the Redeemer. The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would not die before he had seen “*the Lord’s Christ*” (v. 26: τὸν χριστὸν κυρίου [*ton christon kuríou*]). Since the very beginning, there have always been people who believed in the coming of the Redeemer. Chapter 11 of the letter to the Hebrews gives us a list of men and women of God, who believed that God would fulfil his promises and who were waiting for the future (heavenly) city. Verse 13 of this chapter summarises this pertinently:

Heb 11:13 *All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.*

The message of salvation is unfolded through the whole of Scripture, beginning with the promise of the coming Redeemer (Gen 3:15 – the so called proto-gospel) until its fulfilment with the incarnation into this world of the Son of God. The whole Bible revolves on this pivotal event in world history. I will attempt to trace God’s plan of salvation by summing up the most important events and examples (types) chronologically which led to its completion in the coming of Christ and his saving work:

Directly following the fall (Gen 3), we read that Abel, the son of Adam and Eve, feared God and brought him a pleasing sacrifice (Gen 4). Abel is the first to be mentioned in the long list of the heroes of faith in Heb 11 (see v. 4). Abel’s sacrifice points to the coming final sacrifice of Christ. Sadly mankind moved further and further from God until God finally – in the time of Noah – pronounced judgement. Noah and his family were the only ones who feared God (Gen 6–9; cf. Mat 24:37ff; 2Pe 2:5). After the flood, Noah offered sacrifices showing his trust in God (Gen 8:20-21). Shortly after the time of Noah, mankind distanced itself from God again, only too quickly. This time, following their building of the tower of Babel and resisting his command to people the earth, God judged them by confusing their language (Gen 11).

Unfortunately mankind once again had not learned its lesson and had turned from God. This time was a turning point in salvation history: God called one man, Abram, to be the father of all who, like him, would put their trust in the one true God and not in heathen gods or idols. At this time, the worship of idols was practiced everywhere, even in Ur, where God had called Abraham (cf. Gen 11:27ff; 15:7; Jos 24:2-3).

God had promised Abram that he would make of him a great nation (Gen 12:1ff). Abram and his people should be a testimony to all nations. God promised him a country, Canaan, which would later be called Israel, after the new name of Jacob Abraham’s grandchild (cf. Gen

32:28). Wherever Abraham went, he gave expression to his faith in God by offering him sacrifices. His faith in God culminated in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac the son of promise (Gen 22). This sacrifice prefigured in many ways the eternal sacrifice of Jesus Christ: Abraham was ready to sacrifice Isaac, the son of promise on mount Moriah (מֹרְיָה [Mōrīyā^h]).
 5 Moriah was the place where Solomon later built the temple of Jerusalem (cf. 2Ch 3:1). In the same way, God the Father gave his only Son (Joh 3:16; 1Jo 4:9-10) as a sacrifice in Jerusalem (cf. Luk 13:33). This shows that even in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, there was a movement towards Jerusalem! But first of all Abraham's descendants had to go through a special (typological) experience which would point to final salvation through Jesus Christ:
 10 God announced to Abraham that his descendants would pass four hundred years as slaves in another country, that he would free them and give them the promised land which would stretch from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates (Gen 15:13-21). Israel's slavery in Egypt and deliverance are types of the redemption of believers from the slavery of sin and their eternal life in Jesus Christ. This typology is of course emphasised by the fact that Mary and Joseph
 15 had to flee to Egypt after the birth of Jesus because of the fear that Herod would kill their child (cf. Mat 2:13ff). The exodus of Israel from Egypt prefigures the return of Jesus to Israel with his parents:

Mat 2:15 *...where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what
 20 the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt have I called my Son" (cf. Hos 11:1)*

It was the Angel of the Lord who led Israel out of Egypt (cf. Exo 3:2ff). We will see in the next chapter (The Pre-existence of Jesus Christ) that the Angel of the Lord is identical with
 25 the Son of God before his incarnation. The apostle Paul confirms in 1Co 10:1-4 (*"and that rock was Christ"*) that Christ led Israel out of Egypt and guided them in the desert. After the exodus from Egypt, God led his people in the desert of Sinai and gave them his law (the Mosaic Law) through Moses. So Moses became the mediator of the Old Covenant and therefore a precursor of Christ, the mediator of the New Covenant (cf. Gal 3:19ff; Heb 7:22;
 30 8:1-11; 9:15; 12:24; 2Co 3:6; Mat 26:28). God had already announced through Moses that he would send a prophet like him (i.e. like Moses) and that all who would not listen to him would be judged (cf. Deu 18:15-18). The apostle Peter confirms that this prophecy was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ (cf. Act 3:22-26). It is mainly the apostle Paul who explains the purpose of the Mosaic Law: It shows man his sinfulness and inability to keep the
 35 demands of the law (cf. Rom 3:19-20; 7:7; Jam 2:10). It was put in place to lead us (pedagogue) to Christ:

Gal 3:19.24-25 *What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of
 40 transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator. . . . So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.*

45 God gave Moses instructions for building the tabernacle (see Exo 25–40). The tabernacle would serve as a sanctuary for God among his people:

Exo 25:8 *Then I will have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among
 50 them.*

In this tabernacle, Moses spoke with the Lord face to face:

Exo 33:7-11 *Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away calling it the “tent of meeting”. Anyone inquiring of the Lord would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. . . . The Lord would speak to Moses face to face as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young assistant Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.*

The Lord who spoke with Moses face to face was without doubt Christ, the Son of God. No one can see the Father except the Son (cf. Joh 1:18; 1Ti 6:16; probably also Exo 33:20). As I said before, in the new creation, the glorified believers will at last see the Father face to face (Rev 22:4). The tabernacle represented God dwelling among men. The sacrifices which were brought (see Leviticus) prefigured Christ, the perfect high priest, and his work of salvation. The main purpose of the letter to the Hebrews is to demonstrate the superiority of the person of Jesus over the angels (ch. 1 and 2), Moses (ch. 3), Joshua (ch. 4) and Aaron (ch. 5 and 7), also the superiority of the work and ministry of Christ over that of Moses and Aaron (ch. 8 to 10:18). The introduction of the feast of the Passover in Exo 12 justifies particularly a typological interpretation of many events and rituals in the Pentateuch. A lamb without blemish had to be slaughtered and its shed blood would protect all those from the angel of death who obeyed God’s instructions and put some on the sides and tops of the doorposts of their houses. This helps us to understand why Jesus in the New Testament is called “*the Lamb of God*” who takes away the sin of the world (cf. Joh 1:29; Rev 5:6.12) and “*our Passover lamb*” (1Co 5:7). As far as the tabernacle and the temple are concerned, Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, spoke of his body as a temple (cf. Joh 2:19-22). This is also the reason why Jesus said the kingdom of heaven was near (Mat 4:17) yes even (already) among them his contemporaries (cf. Luk 17:21; Mat 12:28). How are we to understand this? Very simply, the kingdom of God is where Jesus is. Because the Jews rejected their Messiah, their King, the kingdom of God was taken away from them and given to another people (Mat 21:43). “*Another people*” refers to all those out of the nations who have received Jesus as their Lord and Saviour and who thus inherit the kingdom (cf. 1Pe 2:9; Rev 2:26-28; 5:10; 20:4-6). However, this kingdom is obviously not yet manifest. The question of the disciples to the risen Lord in Act 1:6 must be understood in this way. At the ascension of Jesus, the kingdom of God (in the fullest sense) went so to say with him. It will only (in its entire fullness) be established on earth when Christ returns (cf. Luk 19:11-12; 1Co 15:23-28; 2Ti 4:1). According to the apostle Paul, a Christian who believes he reigns in this life already is living under an illusion (cf. 1Co 4:8-13).

Let us return though to the tabernacle and temple. After the death of Jesus, the curtain which separated the most holy place from the sanctuary was torn in two (Mat 27:51). This was a visible sign that henceforth every true believer would have access to the most holy place (cf. Heb 10:19ff) and that it would no longer be necessary for the high priest to bring blood into the most holy place once a year (on the day of atonement, Yom Kippur: cf. Lev 16:2.34; Heb 9:7). When Christ returns, he will rule over the whole world in Jerusalem (cf. Dan 2:35; Zec 14:8-9.16-17; Isa 24:23). He himself will be both King and High Priest. This is probably the reason why there is no mention of a high priest in connection with the temple during the kingdom spoken of in Eze 40–48. Only in eternity, when glorified believers live in the presence of the Father and the Son, will there be no more temple because then the Father and the Son will themselves be the temple (cf. Rev 21:22).

Once the people of Israel were settled in the promised-land, the tabernacle was substituted by the temple. Moses had warned the people of Israel that if they were unfaithful, God would

cast them out of the land (cf. Lev 26; Deu 28–30). Sadly Israel was unfaithful to God and his laws soon after taking the promised-land (see the book of Joshua). This led time and time again to judgement (see Judges). Later, the infidelity and idolatry of King Salomon (1Ki 11) led to the division of the kingdom under his son Rehoboam (1Ki 12). All the kings of the Northern Kingdom (the ten tribes) were apostates and most of the people followed them in serving other gods (Baal and Asherah). Should God speak but not act? Yes he kept his word and his patience reached the limit. The Northern Kingdom was sent into captivity in the year 722 BC (cf. 2Ki 17). The following verse well summarises these events:

- 10 2Ki 17:7 *All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshipped other gods...*

15 Sadly most of the kings of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) along with most of the population followed the example of their brothers in the Northern Kingdom (Ephraim). They did not learn from the sad fate of Ephraim but sometimes acted even worse. As a consequence of this, God led them into the Babylonian captivity through King Nebuchadnezzar (2Ki 25). In 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple in Jerusalem (2Ki 25:9) and carried away all the articles of value to Babylon (2Ch 36:7.18-19). In this way, the warning given by Moses and other prophets after him (for example Jeremiah: cf. 2Ch 36:12.21) was fulfilled. When the exiled Jews humbled themselves, they were able to return to their own country and rebuild the temple (cf. 2Ch 36:22-23; Ezra 1–7; Zec 4:6-10; Hag 1–2), just as God through Moses (cf. Deu 30:1 ff) and other prophets after him (for example Jeremiah: Jer 25:11-12; 29:10-15) had said. But since the deportation of Judah to Babylon, the Jewish people have, until this day, been without a king (cf. Hos 3:4). And when their true King Jesus Christ came, they rejected him (cf. Joh 19:15-21). So it is that this period from the destruction of Jerusalem through Nebuchadnezzar to the return of Christ is called “*the time of the Gentiles*” (cf. Luk 21:24; Rom 11:25), because during the whole of this epoch (until this day), Israel has been without a king. The return of Christ will bring the “time of the gentiles” to an end, then on that day he, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords (Rev 19:16), will finally reign over all nations and over the whole earth (cf. Dan 2:35-36, Zec 14:9ff).

35 With the help of an analysis of the message and structure of the book of Isaiah, I want to show that the person and work of Jesus Christ are central to the message of the Bible. But in fact, this reality does not only reflect the book of Isaiah but is visible throughout the Old and New Testaments.⁴

40 The book of Isaiah is teleological; it is written according to an exact plan and aim from beginning to end:

45 **1st part ch. 1–39:** A descendant of David is still reigning in Jerusalem. But because the house of David and the people have turned away from Yahweh (just as their brothers did before them in the Northern Kingdom), judgement cannot be averted. The prophet Isaiah is charged with the announcement of the imminent exile: Isa 5:13; 6:11-13; 39:5-7. Zedekiah was the last king of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar caused his eyes to be put out (because of his rebellion), while Jehoiachin, after being deposed and taken into exile by Nebuchadnezzar, was

⁴ For more details see Roland Kleger, *Restauratio und Resurrectio in der Jesaja-Apokalypse*, Dissertation for his academic grade of *Doctor of Theology* at the Evangelical Theological Faculty Heverlee-Leuven (Belgium), 2001, now published (in Germany) with the title *Endzeitliche Wiederherstellung Israels und Auferstehung in der Jesaja-Apokalypse* (Hamburg: Diplomica, 2008). See also my website <www.Apokalypse-Bible.com>.

pardoned by him (2Ki 25; 2Ch 36). But he did not return to Jerusalem. As already mentioned, there was no further king of Israel, except of course Jesus of Nazareth. But he was rejected by his own people (cf. Joh 1:11; 18:36; Luk 19:14,27). It is he who in Isa 1–39 is constantly contrasted with the rebellious house of David.⁵ He is the Neo-David who will restore Israel and reign on Zion in Jerusalem. In chapters 1–39, we see two parallel lines: the house of David of that time disappears from the centre of things (Isa 39:7); his descendants are replaced by the coming Neo-David (Isa 9:5; 11:1.10; 22:22; cf. 2Sa 7:12-16; Jer 23:5; Eze 34:23-24; 37:24-27; Luk 1:27-33, etc.).⁶

2nd part: ch. 40–55: The prophet anticipates the exile of the children of Israel.⁷ Israel has no longer prophets or temple. The house of David is not mentioned anymore; only in chapter 55, which is a transition chapter, the New Covenant, i.e. the “*everlasting covenant . . . my faithful love promised to David*” is announced (Isa 55:3; cf. 37:35). But according to the perspective of the prophet, the events described in these chapters are still to come. Israel is called “*Jacob's servant*”, or simply “*servant*”. As in chapters 1–39, the coming King is contrasted with the King of Jerusalem (Juda), so in chapters 40–55 we are presented with the children of Israel as a servant in exile – because of their sin – in contrast to another servant, namely “the servant of the Lord”, that is the Messiah, who, as we know, is without sin (Isa 53:9; cf. 2Co 5:21).⁸ It is simply incorrect to identify *the servant* in all these passages as Israel.

In this second part, the theme is not only Cyrus as the chosen deliverer but also *the Servant of Yahweh* as Redeemer. Let us analyse closely the section Isa 42:1-17: On him rests the Spirit of Yahweh; he is called to bring justice to the nations and to be a light for them. This, without any doubt, alludes to Christ's first coming and not to the people of Israel as a whole (compare Isa 42:1-4 with Mat 12:18-21). The Servant of Yahweh here cannot possibly be Israel because he is called to bring Israel back to Yahweh (cf. Isa 49:5-6)!⁹ As well as this Israel can hardly

⁵ His first coming, his character and his work are often announced through little flashes: A virgin will give birth to him (Isa 7:14; cf. Mat 1:23; Gen 3:15). Thanks to him, Zebulon, and Naphtali (i.e. Galilee: Isa 8:23 to 9:1; cf. Mat 4:13-16) will see the light. The male child is divine, for he is to be called “*Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*” and he will reign on David's throne (Isa 9:5-6, cf. 2Sa 7:12-17; Luk 1:27-35), since he comes from the family of David (Isa 11:1.10; 22:22; cf. Rom 1:3; 15:12). In chapters 7–11, he is contrasted with the ungodly king Ahab who was ripe for judgement. In chapters 13–23, he is the coming sovereign Judge. In the Apocalypse of Isaiah (Isa 24–27), the prophet sees him reigning in Jerusalem (cf. Isa 24:23; 27:13).

⁶ In the first part of his book, Isaiah's purpose was obviously (ch. 1–39) to draw a contrast between the coming Neo-David and the godless king of Judah, who represented his people, in order to show that the final restoration was only possible through the coming of the Neo-David. That this was in fact Isaiah's purpose, is confirmed by two observations: 1. The announcement of the successor to the throne of David in chapters 13–23 (which speak of the judgement of the nations), is found significantly in chapter 22 where it is a question of the house of Judah (cf. Isa 22:22 and Rev 3:7) and: 2. The first part of the book (ch. 1–39) ends with 39:6-7 announcing exile for the people and the sons of the royal lineage.

⁷ But this does not mean that he himself will be in exile. The denunciation of idolatry (cf. Isa 57:3-12; 65:3-7.11; 66:3.17) speaks against a “*Sitz im Leben*” after the return from the Babylonian exile, because after this period (the Babylonian exile), the denunciation of idolatry of the Jewish people is no longer mentioned. On the other hand, if the prophet is speaking as being himself in the Babylonian exile or no longer in exile, we can not understand why in Isa 57:16 he is still speaking of an “accusation” of Yahweh against his people, because this problem will be considered settled only after the repentance of the people. But for the time being, the people are still called to repent (Isa 56:1ff; 58:1ff, 59:2ff).

⁸The harmony regarding the subject matter of the first and the second part of the book of Isaiah is striking. Chapter 42 serves as a bridge for the statements in chapters 49–55. The passage Isa 42:7 confirms Isa 35:5 and points to Isa 61:1. The *Servant* is identical with the person who is mentioned in Isa 35:4-5 and 61:1 (cf. Isa 42:7; 49:9), namely the Messiah, who will free his own from the guilt of sin. Also compare Isa 53:2 with 11:1-2.10: the Messiah is described as a *tender shoot* or a *root*.

⁹ See likewise Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *Towards an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), pp. 215-217.

be mediator of the new covenant (Isa 42:6; 49:8), this applies much more to the incarnate Son of God (cf. the New Testament: 1Ti 2:5; Heb 9:15; 12:24; see also Mat 26:28; Luk 22:20). He shall bring light to the nations (Isa 42:6). The Servant of Yahweh, the Messiah, who was is and remains without sin (Isa 53:9-12; cf. Joh 8:46; 2Co 5:21; Heb 4:15; 7:26; 1Pe 1:19; 2:22-25; 3:18), died for our sins, which demand our punishment (that is our death) (cf. Isa 53:11: “and he will bear their iniquities”).¹⁰ Compare this with Isa 26:21a (visitation and punishment of the inhabitants of the earth for their sins) and Isa 27:9 (Jacob’s guilt), also Isa 64:9 (that Yahweh should not remember forever the sins of his people). The Servant of Yahweh comes to wipe out this guilt and dies as a substitute. Transgression weighs so heavily upon the earth that it falls, unable to get up (Isa 24:20). The transgressors must die (Isa 1:2.28; 50:1; 66:24), but the Servant of Yahweh comes to wipe out their sins (cf. Isa 43:1.25; 44:22) in that he takes them on himself (Isa 53:5.8.12).¹¹

3rd part: ch. 56–66: All who repent¹² may participate in the feast on mount Zion. The prophet already sees Yahweh with his people and all those who have turned to him from the nations, on the mountain (of Zion). With whom is the Lord in this third part of the book contrasted? Why is it that in this part of the book the root letters מלך (*malak* = *king, to be king, rule*) are no longer used for Yahweh (but only for the kings of the nations!)? Why is David’s name not mentioned in it? Why don’t we find in this section the phrases *the shoot of Jesse, the root, Immanuel, the Servant of Jacob*?¹³ Here, where it is about the mediator, the expression “*Servant*” is no longer used (cf. Isa 59:15-17; 63:5-7). **He is simply called Yahweh. Why? Because the prophet does not have to contrast the Lord with another person here (whoever it may be) whom he will replace (the king of Judah or Israel in chapters 1–39) or represent as a substitute for (like the Servant of Yahweh for the servant of Jacob in chapters 40–55) as is the case in the first two parts of the book.** There is no mention of a king of Israel (or Judah). Also the Lord himself no longer has the title of “King” in this third part of the book. It is no longer necessary to say that the king has begun to reign because **the theocracy is (finally) an established fact.**

Yahweh is both King and High Priest. His house, his house of prayer, that is his temple, is there and there are priests who perform their ministry. As in Eze 40–48 (this passage also

¹⁰ It is of course clear that the Servant, who would be a light for the nations and who would, as the righteous one, die for the unrighteous, could not be identical with Israel because the people (of the Jews) must because of unrighteousness and guilt go into exile (cf. Isa 5:13; 6:7-12; 27:7-9, etc.). Only because the Servant of Yahweh is sinless, can he die a substitutionary death for the people (cf. Isa 53:9-12; see also Isa 59:16; 63:5). He himself has not merited death, which is certainly not the case for the people of Israel. Even the prophet himself, although called by God, is not without sin (cf. Isa 6:5-7)!

¹¹ It would be going too far to innumerate all the New Testament passages which refer to Isa 53 and were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. I will limit myself to mentioning Luk 22:37 and Mar 10:45. For a detailed Christological argument of Isa 53, I recommend Hans Walter Wolff, *Jesaja 53 im Urchristentum*, 4th edition (reprint of the 3rd edition revised of Evangelische Verlags-Anstalt, Berlin, 1952) Giessen: Brunnen-Verlag, 1984. Concerning Isa 53, see also Oswalt T. Allis, *The Unity of Isaiah: A Study in Prophecy* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1950), pp. 87ff.

¹² The people are living in misery, the temple in Jerusalem is described as being trampled down by the godless (Isa 63:18) and the town devastated (Isa 64:9-10). This shows incidentally that this part of the book cannot be the work of a so called post-exilic author, as many of the critical commentators and expositors insist (they speak of a *Trito-Isaiah*). It is true that the second temple (known as the post-exilic temple) was desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes (164 BC), but it was not burnt down by him. It was the Romans who burnt it down much later around 70 AD. This is also a reason why I place the starting point of this part of the book as being at the same time as Isa 5:13; 6:11-12; 40–48: The prophet predicts the Babylonian exile as Yahweh’s punishment for the godlessness and idolatry of the people (Isa 65:2-7.11).

¹³ “*Servant*” in the singular does not appear in this part of the book anymore, only the plural used for those faithful to Yahweh (see the seven times it is used in the passage Isa 65:8-15).

without doubt refers to the Messianic kingdom), no high priest is mentioned. Then in this temple the crucified and risen Christ will be Prophet, High Priest, and King. **Prophet**, because from him the word, righteousness and the law will go out (cf. Isa 2:3-4; Mic 4:2). **High Priest**, because he has paid the price for his own people through his sacrifice (cf. Isa 53), and when he returns (Isa 59:20-21; cf. Zec 14:3-5), he comes as the one whom men have pierced (Isa 53:5; cf. Zec 12:10; Rev 1:7). When men looked upon him, when he hung on the cross (Joh 19:37), he accepted the position of a *servant*. At his return however, when men will again see him whom they have pierced (Rev 1:7), he will hold the position of Lord of Lords and King of Kings (cf. Rev 19:16). In other words, he left glory (cf. Isa 9:5; Joh 17:5), came to this earth and was obedient unto death (Isa 53:5-12; Phi 2:6ff; 2Co 8:9). Then the Father exalted him above all things (cf. Isa 52:13; Phi 2:9). The Son is Messiah and Lord at the same time (cf. Act 2:34-36). He will return to finally take the place destined for him *among men* through all eternity (the actual meaning of the name *Immanuel* = *God with us*).

These two parallels can be drawn right through all three parts of the book of Isaiah: From glory and exaltation to humiliation and again back to exaltation! The lines of the people and of their Lord run parallel but there is a significant difference:

Israel and their King (and finally all mankind with them: cf. Gen 3:1-6; 11:1ff; Rom 5:12; Isa 24:5-6.20) have become apostate; they have turned away from Yahweh, the covenant God because they want to exalt themselves. For this reason, Yahweh has to humble and abase them by sending them into exile, so that there, if possible, they might come to their senses, repent, and humble themselves so that Yahweh could again receive and restore them.

The line of man in the book of Isaiah is as follows:

SELF EXALTATION (1–39)

EXALTATION BY YAHWEH (56–66)

HUMILIATION (40–55)

This re-acceptance and exaltation of man is only possible thanks to the works of the Lord, who, according to the message of the prophet Isaiah, as the royal child (Isa 7:14; 9:5; 11:2.10) came from eternity into the world (Isa 9:5; cf. Mic 5:1 and in the N.T.: Joh 1:1; 17:5.24; Heb 7:1-3) and lived as a servant. The people were in exile because of their sin and received blows on their backs (Isa 51:23). The Servant of Yahweh comes to take these blows on his own back (Isa 50:6) in order to deliver the people. In order to save the people bound by sin, the Servant of Yahweh humbles himself, takes the guilt of mankind on himself, and is willing to die for them although he is without guilt. Then he lives again, sees his descendants, and will reign (compare the words “*he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted*” in Isa 52:13-15 with “*For this is what the high and lofty One says – he who lives forever whose name is holy*” in Isa 57:15). The book is obviously structured in this way: In the first part of the book (chapters 1–39), the Messiah is seen as the coming king who will strike the tyrants with the rod of his mouth (Isa 11:4); in the second part (ch. 40–55), the prophet announces the humiliation and abasement of the Servant of Yahweh, how he offered his back to those who beat him (Isa 50:6) as a substitute for the sins of others (Isa 53:5).

In the book of Isaiah, the line of the Son of God, the Messiah, is as follows:

EXALTATION (1–39)

RE-EXALTATION (56–66)

SELF-HUMILIATION (40–55)

Paul's admonition in Phi 2 is also to be understood in this way. Just as Jesus was ready to relinquish all his privileges and glory (with his Father) in that he humbled himself and was then exalted by his Father, so are we also called to humble ourselves. The Holy Scripture says

5 that there is nothing that God hates as much as pride in man:

Jam 4:6 *But he gives us more grace. That is why the Scripture says: God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*

10 1Pe 5:5-6 *...All of you, cloth yourselves with humility towards one another, because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*

III. The pre-existence of Jesus Christ

We know Jesus Christ mainly through the New Testament. He was born for us at “Christmas”. Who in fact is this one who was born for us?

- 5 When we examine the testimony of the apostle John concerning the origin of Jesus, then we discover wonderful verses:

Joh 1:15 John the Baptist says concerning himself: *“He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.”*

10

But Jesus was born six months after John the Baptist! How could he have been “before John the Baptist”?

Jesus himself gave a much older date:

15

Joh 8:58 *“I tell you the truth”, Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am”.*

And he also said:

20

Joh 17:5.24 *And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. Father I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.*

25

Joh 1:1 ***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.***

A. His Person

- 30 The Holy Scripture teaches the pre-existence of Jesus, that is that he existed before he became man:

Pro 8:22-23 *The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work, before his deeds of old; **I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began.***¹⁴ (RSV footnote)

¹⁴ Jehovah's Witnesses claim that this passage suggests that Jesus Christ was created by God the Father. This can be countered as follows: The Hebrew verb “*qana*” (קנה) can have the following meanings: *establish, create, own, appropriate, acquire*. Here, most Bible translators choose the meanings “*acquire*”, or “*own*”. Anyway, the rules of hermeneutics show us that, if in such texts certain verses may point to Christ this does not necessarily apply to all the verses or statements in the text. Just one example of this: Psalms 22 and 69 are among the so-called “Messianic Psalms”. Thus, for example, Psa 22:2 is quoted in Mat 27:46 (Jesus’ cry on the cross before he died), Psa 22:9 in Mat 27:43 (mocking of Jesus on the cross by bystanders) and Psa 22:19 in Mat 27:35 (drawing

Mic 5:2 *But you Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times...*

Col 1:17 *He is **before all things**, and in him all things hold together.*

Heb 1:8 *But about the Son he says: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous sceptre is the sceptre of your kingdom.”*

On the subject of his nature (or his essence or substance; see more on this in the chapter over the two natures of Jesus Christ), Christ is identical with God:

Joh 1:1 ***In the beginning was the Word**, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

Joh 10:30 *I and the Father are one.*

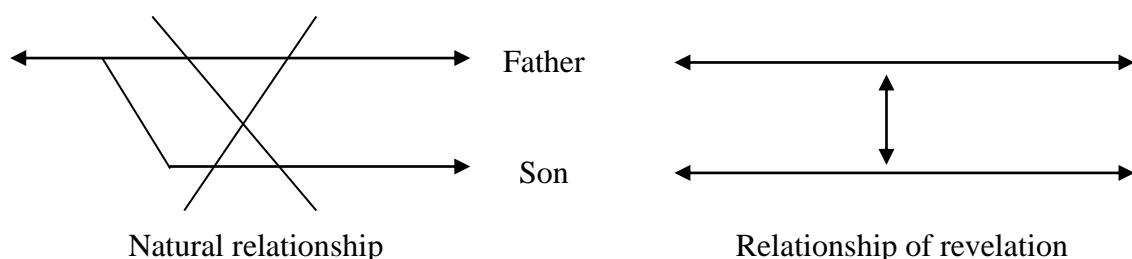
This is why he must unavoidably be eternal, that is without beginning. He always existed, from eternity. The question of his relationship to God the Father and to creation naturally poses itself.

1. His relationship to God (the Father)

Joh 1:14 *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of **the only Son from the Father**, full of grace and truth.*

Joh 3:16 ***For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son**, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

The relationship between God and Christ is described in Holy Scripture as that of Father and Son. This does not mean it is like a “natural human” relationship, it is rather a “relationship of revelation”:



lots for the clothes of Jesus beneath the Cross). Psalm 69:10-11.24-26 is quoted in Joh 2:17; Rom 15:3; 11:9-10 and Act 1:20, which does not mean that all the statements in Psalms 22 and 69 can be applied to Jesus. In Psa 69:6, for example, David speaks of his folly and guilt. This confession cannot be applied to Jesus because he was and is sinless: cf. Joh 8:46; 2Co 5:21; Heb 4:15. Thus, although certain statements in Pro 8:22ff may be applied to Jesus, it does not necessarily mean that all the details in the passage apply to him. As Scripture nowhere says that Jesus was created, it is (from the point of view of hermeneutics) inadmissible to use Pro 8:22ff to maintain this.

A suggestion: In reference to Psa 2:7, the following question has to be asked: What meaning does the word “*today*” have in this passage? Compare with Heb 1:5; Act 13:33; Rom 1:4. This word “*today*” seems to relate to the event of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

2. His relationship to creation

5 In relationship to creation, Christ is called the “firstborn”:

Col 1:15 *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.*

10 This word relates to **our present creation**. He is the firstborn because he already existed before all things. All eyes are fixed on him (like the first in a column)! Compare Col 1:16b-17.

15 Col 1:18 *And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.*

He is the first born, **because he was the first who rose from the dead**. He was the first who rose with a glorified body:

20 1Co 15:23 *But each in his own turn: **Christ the first fruits**; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.*

The same concerns our spiritual life here on earth, he is the firstborn:

25 Rom 8:29 *For those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son **that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.***

30 The beginning, and what proceeds from it, comes from him (Christ). All things are centred in him. He is the norm, the model, and the aim at the same time!

35 Col 1:16 *For by him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.*

Col 1:17 *He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

40 Col 1:18 *And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have supremacy.*

Col 1:19 *For God was pleased to have all [his] fullness dwell in him [Christ]...*

45 Are we fixing our eyes on him? Are we following in his footsteps? Are we really living according to his will? Compare Phi 2:5; 1Pe 2:21; 1Jo 2:6.

B. His work

There is perfect co-operation within the trinity. The will of God the Father is carried out by the Word (*the λόγος*, cf. Joh 1:1), that is through his Son. And the Son works through the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from both, that is from the Father and the Son (cf. the Latin expression “*filioque*” = “*and also from the Son*”, cf. my brochure on Pneumatology). In his pre-existence, Christ fulfilled the following two tasks:

1. That of the Creator

Joh 1:3 *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*

All things were created through the Word (*the λόγος*). Therefore Christ is the real Creator of the universe. We could say he was the one who carried out (executed) creation:

Col 1:16 *For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.*

He is therefore also “my Creator” (cf. Gen. 2:7: “Yahweh”!): it is he who created me. What a wonderful truth: our Redeemer is also our Creator. So he has a double right to our lives! (cf. Isa 43:1)

2. That of the Sustainer

Col 1:17 *He is before all things and in him all things hold together.*

Heb 1:3 *The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, **sustaining all things by his powerful word**. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.*

Creation is not a chance happening and the creation is not abandoned to itself. It has come from the hands of the Creator and still exists. In the same way time and world history as well as salvation history are in his hands (cf. Dan 2:21; Rev 5:6-9; 12:12). Parallel to this, Jesus Christ is not only my Creator but also the *Sustainer* and *Guarantor* for my spiritual life (cf. Phi 1:6; Heb 12:2).

C. The testimony concerning him in the Old Testament

A careful reading of the Old Testament leads to the clear conclusion that Jesus Christ was and is truly the Son of God. We must understand that the whole of the Old Testament testifies to Jesus Christ. The words of Jesus to the disciples on the Emmaus road confirm this:

Luk 24:26-27 *“Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*

5

The expression “*the Word became flesh*” (in reference to the incarnation of Jesus Christ) indicates that the “Word” already existed before his incarnation, before he became man.

Joh 1:1 ***In the beginning** was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

10

Joh 1:14 *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

15 At the same time, some of the names of God (Yahweh and combinations of Yahweh) also refer to Jesus Christ.

1. His appearances

The Old Testament reports appearances of Jesus Christ (called “*Christophanies*”) which confirm his pre-existence. Only a real being can appear to someone else!

20

Gen 3:8 *Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God [Yahweh] as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.*

25 Gen 18:1 *The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.*

Evangelicals are generally in agreement that the Lord here was the pre-existent Christ, because no man has seen the Father (except the man Jesus Christ: cf. Joh 1:18; 1Ti 1:16). Yahweh, the pre-existent Christ, appeared to Abraham in the company of two angels (cf. also Gen 18:22). Gen 19:24 in the Hebrew text speaks clearly of “two Yahwehs”: first the Yahweh who was standing directly beside Abraham and then the Yahweh in heaven. The first of these rained down burning sulphur on Sodom and Gomorrah. It is of course clear that the one who stood beside Abraham was the pre-existent Christ and the other in heaven God the Father.

35

Exo 3:4 *When the Lord [Yahweh] saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush and said “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said “Here I am.”*

40 In Exo 3:3, the same person who appeared to Moses in the burning bush is identified as the *Angel of the Lord*. In effect, apart from the passage in Haggai 1:13 (where the expression *Angel of the Lord* is applied to the prophet Haggai himself), it always means the Son of God before his incarnation. Here are some passages where the Angel of the Lord is mentioned:

45 Jud 13:3 *The Angel of the Lord appeared to her [Samson’s mother] and said, “You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son.”*

Zec 1:11

And they reported to the Angel of the Lord, who was standing among the myrtle trees, "We have gone throughout the earth, and found the whole world at rest and in peace."

2. Symbols

5 Jesus, who was to come when the time was fulfilled (cf. Gal 4:4), is described like a "shadow" in the Old Testament. Where there is a *shadow* however there must be a *body*! These *shadows* are known as *symbols* or *types*. The symbols refer to his **person** as well as his **work**. There are many examples of this; I want to mention a few of them, namely those which are confirmed through the New Testament:

10 a.) Concerning his person

I want to mention four biblical figures:

15 **Adam** (Rom 5:14): *Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as Adam did, **who was a pattern of the one to come.*** (cf. 1Co 15:45-47))

20 **Melchizedek** (Heb 7:3): *Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God **he [Melchizedek] remains a priest forever.***

25 **Moses** (Deu 18:15): *"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him" (cf. Act 3:22-23). Compare this with Joh 1:17...for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ).*

30 **David** (2Sa 7:12-13): *"He is the one who will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." Compare Luk 1:31-33: "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David."*

b.) Concerning his works

Here also I will limit myself to four well known examples:

35 **The Lamb** (Exo 12:3): *Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take **a lamb** for his family, one for each household. (Compare Joh 1:29: "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" and 1Pe 1:18-20: "but with the precious blood of Christ, **a lamb without blemish or defect.**")*

40 **Sacrifices** (Lev 1-7): Compare Heb 9:14: *"**How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God.**"* Heb 10:14:

*“Because by **one sacrifice** he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”*

Tabernacle (Exo 25:40):

“See that you make them according to the pattern shown on the mountain.” Compare Heb 8:5: “They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: ‘See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.’”

The Snake (Num 21:8):

The Lord said to Moses: “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” Compare Joh 3:14: “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert so the Son of Man must be lifted up.”

These symbols or shadows in the Old Testament, which (as shown above) only exist when there is also “a body”, prove that the whole of God’s plan of salvation existed before the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

3. Prophecies

I showed in the chapter on God’s plan of salvation that the Old Testament contains many prophecies concerning the coming of Jesus and that these run like a red line through the whole of the Old Testament. I will mention a few well known examples from the book of Genesis:

Gen 3:15

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel. (cf. Col 2:14-15 and Rom 16:20)

Gen 12:3

I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

Gen 49:10

The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the rulers staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.

IV. The incarnation of Jesus-Christ

The subject of Jesus Christ becoming man is central in biblical Systematic Theology! Our redemption stands or falls with the incarnation. If Jesus Christ were not really the incarnate Son of God, if he were not truly a perfect man, then there would also be no redemption for mankind! If Jesus Christ were not God and man at the same time, then there would be no salvation for us:

1Jo 4:2 *This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God...*

1Jo 4:3 *but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.*

These verses are like a sharp sword. The Holy Scripture says clearly that the pre-existent Christ became man:

Joh 1:14 *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Holy Scripture tells us in many places why Christ came in the flesh, that is, why he had to become man.

A. The necessity of the incarnation of Christ

1. To fulfil the promise

God had repeatedly and at different times promised to send his Son into the world:

After the fall:

Gen 3:15 *I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.*

At the time of the Syro-Ephraimitic war at the end of the 8th century BC:

Isa 9:6 *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Many of the promises apply not only to his first coming but also to his second coming i.e. his return:

- 5 2Co 1:20 *For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “yes” in him [Christ], and so through him the “Amen” is spoken, by us to the glory of God.*
- 10 Rom 15:8 *For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, **to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs...***

2. To reveal the Father

The Old Testament reveals God to us as Creator and sovereign Lord over the whole universe. Christ, **the Son** of God, came into the world to reveal **the Father** to us. This truth is revealed to us especially in John’s gospel:

- 15 Joh 1:18 *No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.*
- 20 Joh 14:9 *Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me Phillip, even after I have been with you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say show us the Father?”*

In Gal 4:6, we are told explicitly how wonderful this divine revelation is. Through and in Jesus we can pray today: “Abba, Father!”

25 3. To be a faithful High Priest

Christ came into the world to see and/or experience everything that a person here on earth must live through... except sin.

- 30 Heb 4:15 *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are – **yet without sin.***

35 **A high priest must be chosen from among men (Heb 5:1).** Only so can he be merciful and have compassion on his fellow people who live in ignorance and error, in misery and temptation:

- 40 Heb 2:17 *For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*

He knew hunger, experienced sympathy and/or antipathy; he watched in prayer through the night; worked through the day until he was exhausted; he was tempted, misunderstood, left in the lurch, persecuted... and finally he was even killed!

4. To do away with sin

The main reason for the incarnation of Jesus Christ is that he came to do away with the sin of man. He had to die because the wage of sin is death (Rom 6:23). But in order to die, he had to first become man that is to take on flesh and blood (Heb 2:14):

5

Heb 9:26 *Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now **he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.***

10

1Jo 3:5 *But you know that **he appeared that he might take away our sins.** And in him is no sin.*

Mar 10:45 *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, **but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.***

15

If Jesus had not died on the cross, then his life and sufferings would have had no particular meaning. Thanks to his death and resurrection we benefit from his blessings.

5. To destroy the works of the devil

The works of the devil are enumerated for example in Rom 13:12 and Gal 5:19. The work of Jesus accomplished the following:

20

1Jo 3:8 *The reason the Son of God appeared was **to destroy the devil's work.***

25

Heb 2:14 *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death **he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is the devil.***

Satan has had his power taken from him; he has been vanquished. We have the victory in Christ! At the moment, however, he can still tempt us, attack us and – unfortunately – occasionally cause us to fall. Sadly children of God honour the defeated enemy only too often, in that they give way to temptation! The final victory over Satan is revealed to us in Rev 20:10: after the millennium he will be thrown into the lake of fire, into hell.

30

6. To demonstrate to us holiness of life

Mat 11:29 *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

35

1Pe 2:21 *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*

40 We need an example, an illustration of the godly norm for our lives. Therefore our calling is:

Phi 2:5 *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus...*

1Jo 2:6

*Whoever claims to walk in him **must walk as Jesus did.***

The main incentive to live a holy life is not laws or regulations, but rather the exemplary and holy life of another! Therefore the following call always comes to us: *“Follow me!”* This is the basic principle of education: good examples are necessary!

The fact of Jesus humbling himself is described in Phi 2:5-8. That Jesus “made himself nothing” does not mean that he ceased to exist as God. Not one of his attributes was missing during his life on earth. He relinquished his right to make use of them. At no point did he cease to be God (also not during his humbling of himself → against **Kenosis** [kenotic Theology]; more over this in the chapter on the two natures of Jesus Christ).

The self-humiliation of Jesus must not be minimised (e.g.) by limiting it to the fact that he left the glory which he had enjoyed with his Father. No, his humiliation and abasement relates to the whole time that he lived on this earth, from his birth until his ascension. In the passages Joh 18:4-8.12, this reality is evident (Jesus forgoes resisting the arbitrary arrest).

Here a short summary of what the self-humiliation of Jesus entailed:

- Laying aside of the glory that he enjoyed with the Father during his pre-existence (Joh 17:5)
- The incarnation (Phi 2:7)
- The relinquishing of his power (his attributes) and the use of it during his earthly life (see for example Mat 26:53)

A challenge for us: The incarnation of Jesus Christ is not only important for our salvation but also for its implications regarding missionary work:

2Co 8:9

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

Rom 15:3

For even Christ did not please himself, as it is written: “The insults of those who insulted you have fallen on me.”

Joh 20:21

“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

B. The names of Jesus Christ

Just as in the Old Testament we find many names for God, so in the New Testament we equally find other names for the Son of God.

1. Jesus

In the chapter concerning the names of God in “Theology” (the teaching about God), we learn that every name of God in the Bible has a special meaning. The name corresponds with the person who bears it. The character (being or nature) of God is revealed through the names or

the attributes which he bears. But in connection with the humanity of the Son of God, the name “Jesus” (in Hebrew: יהושע [Y^ehōšou^a]) is without any doubt the most important!

Exo 3:13 *Moses said to God: “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, **what is his name?** Then what shall I say to them?”*

Exo 6:3 *“I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord [Yahweh] I did not make myself known to them.”*

As mentioned before, the name Yahweh in the Old Testament often refers to the pre-existent Son of God:

Pro 30:4 *Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in his cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? **What is his name or his son’s name?** Tell me if you know!*

Mat 1:21 *“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”*

Jesus is *the* name of the Son of God – the incarnate Son of God. It is the name that is above every name (cf. Phi 2:9-10). It is the only name under heaven given to men by which they can be saved:

Act 4:11-12 *This [i.e. Jesus] is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone. Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is **no other name** under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*

Acts chapter 4 always speaks of “the name” (see verses 7.10.12.17.18 and 30). Compare also Act 4:17; 5:28.40: the disciples were allowed to say what they liked without any problems but this name must not be mentioned!

Rom 10:13 *For everyone who calls on **the name of the Lord** will be saved.*

Therefore also the missionary call to his disciples:

Mat 28:19 *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the **Father** and of the **Son** and of the **Holy Spirit**... (“in the name of” in Greek a singular: εἰς τὸ ὄνομα)*

In the epistles and in Acts, baptism is even sometimes only in the name of Jesus. The Apostles understood. See for example:

Act 2:38 *Peter replied: Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

Rom 6:3 *Don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?*

2. Christ

Jesus is the name of the incarnate (self-humbling) Son of God. This name occurs frequently in the gospels. In the epistles, it is mostly used where the humiliation of the Lord is emphasised (for example in Heb 2:9: “*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*”)

The name “**Christ**” on the contrary is the **name of glory or title**:

10 Luk 2:11 *Today in the town of David a Saviour had been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.*

Christ (in Greek Χριστός [*Khristós*]) is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word מָשִׁיחַ “*Māšīaḥ*”, the Messiah, which means the “*Anointed One*”.

15 Christ is the fulfilment of all the anointings found in the Old Testament. The priests, prophets and kings were anointed at the beginning of their ministries. And so Christ is the name which designates the Lord’s ministry. His various offices are described in detail in the next chapter (V. The three fold office of Jesus Christ).

20 3. The Son of Man

Jesus called himself Son of Man:

Mar 2:28 *So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath*

25 Mat 24:30 *At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming with power and great glory.*

4. Other names

30 There are about 250 titles or names for the Son of God. These names apply only to him! Man is not worthy to bear these names! Here are some examples which we find for instance in the book of Revelation:

- The beginning of God’s creation 3:14
- The Alpha and Omega (i.e. beginning and end)¹⁵ 1:8
- 35 • The First and the Last 1:17; 2:8
- Son of God 2:18
- The Lord God 1:8
- The Almighty (the Omnipotent; in Greek: ὁ παντοκράτωρ) 1:8
- The Holy One 3:7
- 40 • The True One 3:7; 19:11
- The “Amen” 3:14

¹⁵ In the Greek alphabet *Alpha* is the first and *Omega* is the last letter.

C. The two natures of Jesus Christ

The incarnation of Jesus Christ is a great mystery:

1Ti 3:16 *Beyond all question, **the mystery of godliness is great: He [God] appeared in a body**, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in Glory.*

Jesus became man, but he remained God at the same time (on the contrary to what the adherents of “Kenotism”¹⁶ maintain). This remains a mystery:

- inexplicable to **human reason**,
- inaccessible to **scientific research**, but
- a precious knowledge for **our faith!**

It is not possible to prove that Jesus Christ was God and man at one and the same time. It is Scripture that testifies to it! This key question, which the Pharisees presented Jesus with, will always remain a pertinent, up to date one:

Mat 22:42 “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is he?”

The Apostle Peter’s reply to this question is found in Mat 16:15-18. Peter’s confession that **Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God** is pronounced by Jesus as the foundation on which his Church will be built. It should not surprise us therefore that the credo of the divinity of Christ is constantly under attack from critics of the Christian faith. According to 1Jo 4:1-3, this is the touchstone by which we can test the spirits: “...every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.”

1. Misunderstandings and heresies concerning the Person of Jesus Christ

When we stray from the biblical revelation we risk falling into the following errors:

- **An overemphasis of the godly nature of Jesus Christ** resulting in minimising or denying his human nature.
- **An overemphasis of the human nature of Jesus Christ** to the point where we minimise or deny his divine nature.

Even at the beginning of Church History, there were a number of Jewish-Christian sects who denied the divinity of Jesus-Christ, e.g. the **Ebionites** (= *the poor*). A certain denial of the divinity of Jesus Christ is found in the adoption theory (→ **Adoptianism**). It says that Jesus, at his baptism, was adopted by God and declared Son of God as a reward for his devotion. “This

¹⁶ The representatives of this (false) teaching maintain – based on such passages as Phi 2:5ff – that when Jesus became man, he ceased to be God, until the time when he ascended to heaven. The word “kenosis” is derived from the Greek verb κενόω (*kenōō*) found in Phi 2:7 which we, in relation to the incarnation of the Son of God, translate with “made himself nothing”.

is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” (Mat 3:17) Adoptianism was also supported by some Spanish bishops in the 8th century. Since the 18th century, liberal groups, representatives of Biblical criticism, have supported a view bordering on Adoptianism. They see Jesus only as a prophet or very religious man whose life and devotion should serve as an example for us. According to them, Jesus was only a man of noble sentiments but not of divine nature.

The controversy concerning the divinity of Christ without any doubt reached its climax in the views of **Arius**, a priest from Alexandria, Egypt († 336). We speak therefore of the **Arian controversy**:

Arius

Arius denied the full divinity of Jesus-Christ. He rejected especially the conception of the eternal pre-existence of Jesus Christ. He considered Jesus Christ as the first created being, in terms of his essence, only **similar** (*homoiousios*) to God, but not **equal** (*homoousios*).¹⁷ For him, Christ was “*the most noble of all God’s creation*”. Arius didn’t believe that God was always the Father; in his opinion God only became Father through the creation of Christ. In other words, Christ was not of one substance or essence (consubstantial) with the Father!

In 325, the emperor Constantine convened the council of Nicaea (his town of residence). It was called to answer the question “*What do you think of the Christ? Whose Son is he?*”

Athanasius

It was above all Athanasius († 373), a deacon from Alexandria (who later became bishop), who opposed Arius, in that he held firmly to Jesus Christ being of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father. He insisted that the Son was eternal like the Father.

At the above mentioned council of Nicaea, the doctrine of Arius was condemned and the *symbol of Nicaea* (Latin: “Nicaenum”) was adopted practically unanimously. The eternal divinity and pre-existence of the Son was proclaimed: begotten, not made; being of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father.

The peace didn’t last too long because the Arians didn’t accept this decision of the council. It didn’t take long before further disputes concerning the question “who do you say I am?” arose.

One reaction was that of Apollinaris from Laodicea in Syria († approximately 390). The so called **apollinarian controversy** goes back to him. At the beginning Apollinaris was a friend of Athanasius. But in order to emphasise the deity of Christ he rejected his full humanity. He maintained that Jesus had a human body and a human soul, but the divine *Logos* (cf. Joh 1:1ff) took the place of the human spirit, or understanding, which all other people possess. Apollinaris was condemned by various councils, but especially that of Constantinople in 381.

¹⁷ We speak of the fatal Iota: “*homoïousios*” (= *similar in essence*) and not “*homoousios*” (= *identical in essence*). Compare in regard to this J.-M. Nicole: *Précis d’Histoire de l’Eglise*, 5^{ème} édition (Nogent-sur-Marne, France: Edition de l’Institut Biblique de Nogent, 1990), pp. 46-49 or Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 4th edition (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), pp. 131ff or Adolf Martin Ritter *Kirchen- und Theologiegeschichte in Quellen*, Band I: Alte Kirche, 6th revised edition (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag 1994), pp. 235ff.

The symbol of Nicaea was reaffirmed and the so called **Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan** creed (“*Nicene*”) adopted. Here is part of the text:

5 We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth and
of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-
begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all ages, Light of Light,
true God of true God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the
Father, through whom all things were made; who for us men and for our
salvation came down from heaven and was made flesh (incarnate) by the Holy
Spirit of the virgin Mary, and became man; and was crucified for us under
10 Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose again on the third day
according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and is seated at the
right hand of the Father. And he will come again with glory to judge both the
living and the dead, whose kingdom will have end. And we believe in the
Holy Spirit, the Lord and the Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and
15 the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified,
who spoke through the prophets...

But soon there was a new dispute: **the Nestorian controversy**. Nestorius († 451) was bishop (patriarch) of Constantinople. He said that Jesus was true God and true man but he was of the opinion that the two natures of Jesus existed side by side (Juxtapositum) without forming a
20 real unity of the two but rather two different personalities. Nestorius was condemned by the council of Ephesus in the year 431. His followers were expelled from the kingdom and fled mainly to Persia, from where they undertook missionary journeys to India and even to China.

Then there was the **Eutychian Controversy**. Eutyches (Eutychus) was an abbot in
25 Constantinople who maintained, as a reaction against the Nestorians, that the two natures of Christ were mingled into one (not divided from each other as Nestorius affirmed). The human nature was absorbed into the divine nature. Eutyches rejected the idea that the human nature of Christ was “homousios” (of the same nature) as ours (i.e. with that of mankind).¹⁸
Through the initiative of Pope Leon 1st, in 451, Eutychianism was condemned at the council
30 of Chalcedon. The council condemned on the one hand Nestorianism and on the other hand Eutychianism and affirmed the two natures of Jesus Christ, fully God and fully Man at the same time, in two natures which cannot be mingled into one (against Eutyches), nor can they be separated (against Nestorius): without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.¹⁹

35 By the way, the Arian controversy is still a theme today. There have always been theologians who speak against the teaching of the divine trinity. They are called **Antitrinitarians** or **Unitarians**. I will limit myself to two examples: (1) **The Socinian movement** which bears the name of the Italian Lelio Sozzini (→ Socinus) and mainly goes back to his nephew Faustino Sozzini. In their opinion, the Bible (which is for them too the only valid revelation of God!)
40 cannot contain anything which contradicts human reason. Consequently they deny the teaching of the trinity and also salvation by faith. (2) The organisation **Jehovah’s Witnesses** (Watchtower Society, Brooklyn, New York, founded by Charles Taze Russel [1852-1916]) has its roots also in Arianism. As mentioned above, it rejects the eternal divinity of Jesus
45 Christ and considers Jesus as the first of God’s creation.

¹⁸ Compare with Williston Walker, op. cit., p. 170ff.

¹⁹ Compare with J.-M. Nicole, op. cit., p. 53.

With great regret it must be observed that many of today's theologians in the so called state churches no longer adhere to the testimony of these important councils.

- 5 In fact, the humanity of Jesus Christ is rarely contested. On the contrary, his divinity, especially his eternal divinity, certainly is. Representatives of so called "modern" liberal Theology reject the eternal divinity of Jesus Christ. 1Jo 4:3 says that this is the fruit of the spirit of the Antichrist. It is all the more important to know what the Holy Scripture itself says about the nature of Jesus Christ.

2. The divine nature of Jesus-Christ

- 10 The synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) reveal Jesus first of all as the Son of Man. John's gospel on the other hand presents Jesus primarily as the Son of God!

- 15 The gospels show us that the Jews always posed one particular question concerning Jesus: "Is he the Son of God or not?" (cf. Mat 12:38; Joh 2:18; 3:2). It seems though that the Jewish leaders only demanded an answer from Christ as to if he was the Son of God when he was led before the high priest Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (cf. Mat 26:63-64; Mar 14:61-62; Luk 22:70-71). The only accusation which the Jewish religious dignitaries could bring against Jesus was that he was guilty of saying he was the Christ, the Son of God (cf. Mar 14:63). It is conspicuous that when Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he challenged him to show that
- 20 he was really the Son of God (cf. Mat 4:1ff). Apparently, Jesus never found it necessary to prove his divinity. An indirect exception could be that he announced his resurrection (cf. Mat 12:40; Joh 2:19). In Rom 1:3-4, Paul says explicitly that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the proof of his divinity.

- 25 **Explanatory remark:** Here I want to point again to the importance of the death of God (that is the Son of God) on the cross, without which there is no redemption of man. Man cannot save himself or another (cf. Psa 49:4-10; Mat 16:26; Mar 2:7; Col 1:13-14). A perfect man could save himself, but no one is perfect. Since the fall of man, all have been born sinners. As far as Golgotha is concerned, the Bible makes no distinction between the humanity and
- 30 divinity of Jesus Christ (see for example Act 20:28). God cannot die because he is eternal and immortal; for this reason God had to become man to die in the place of sinful man!

a.) He is expressly called God

- Rom 9:5 *To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.*
- 35 Tit 2:13 *...while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of **our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ**.*
- 40 Heb 1:8 *But about the Son he says: "Your throne O God, will last forever and ever, and righteousness will be the sceptre of your kingdom..."*

His names also testify to his divinity:

- 45 Luk 2:11 *Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.*

Luk 22:70 *So they all said: "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them: "You say that I am."*

5 Joh 1:14 *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.*

Act 3:14 *You disowned the Holy and Righteous one and asked that a murderer be released to you. (cf. Rev 3:7)*

b.) Old Testament descriptions are attributed to him

10 Compare:

| | | |
|--------------|------|-------------|
| Mat 3:3 | with | Isa 40:3 |
| Joh 12:40-41 | with | Isa 6:10-11 |

c.) He possesses divine attributes

15 Joh 1:4 *In him was **life**, and that life was the light of men. (cf. Joh 14:6)*

Heb 13:8 *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. (Christ is unchanging)*

20 Joh 14:6 *Jesus said "I am the way and the **truth** and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

25 1Jo 3:16 *This is how we know what **love** is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. (cf. Joh 3:16; 1Jo 4:9)*

30 Heb 7:26 *Such a High priest meets our need – one who is **holy, blameless, pure**, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. (cf. Luk 1:35; 2Co 5:21)*

Joh 1:1 ***In the beginning was the Word**, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (Christ is eternal: cf. Joh 8:58; 17:5.24)*

35 Mat 28:20 *...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Christ is omnipresent)*

40 Mat 9:4 *Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?" (Christ is omniscient: cf. Joh 2:24-25; Col 2:3; Rev 5:6: the 7 eyes of the Lamb indicate his omniscience)*

Mat 28:18 *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." (Christ is omnipotent: cf. The Lamb in Rev 5:6: the 7 horns indicate his omnipotence)*

d.) The works of God are attributed to him

Joh 1:3 *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. (Christ is the Creator: cf. Col 1:16; Heb 1:2)*

5 Col 1:17 *He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Christ is the Sustainer of all creation: cf. Heb 1:3)*

Joh 5:22.27-29 *Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgement to the Son... (Christ is the Judge of the world: cf. Act 17:31; 2Ti 4:1)*

10 e.) He accepts worship

To worship or venerate a man is sin. Even the angels refuse to be worshipped by man (cf. Rev 19:10; 22:9). It is only Satan and the angels who fell with him who seek the worship of man. That Jesus Christ accepted worship is an indication of his divinity.

15 He was worshipped by the men of his time that is during the time of his humiliation:

Mat 14:33 *Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying "Truly you are the Son of God."*

20 He is worshipped by angels:

Heb 1:6 *And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says: "Let all God's angels worship him."*

25 He is worshipped by the people of today:

Joh 5:23 *"...that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who sent him."*

30 One day all will worship him:

Phi 2:10 *...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth... (cf. Rev 5:13)*

35 Only God is worthy of worship! Jesus said this clearly to Satan (cf. Mat 4:9-10; compare Rev 19:10; 22:9).

f.) He himself claimed to be God

Joh 5:18 *For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.*

40

Joh 10:30 *I and the Father are one.*

Joh 14:9 *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say show us the Father?*

45

Joh 17:11 *I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name – the name you gave me – so that they may be one as we are one.*

5 Jesus made a threefold claim of equality with God:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Equality of place: | Joh 17:5.11 |
| 2. Equality of nature: | Joh 5:18; 10:30 |
| 3. Equality of eternal existence: | Joh 8:58 |

10

After we have examined the testimony of the Word of God concerning the divine nature of Jesus Christ, we must analyse what it says about his humanity.

3. The human nature of Jesus Christ

15 Heb 2:17 *For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*

a.) He was born as a man

Gal 4:4 *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, **born of a woman**, born under the law...*

20

Rom 1:3 *...regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David...*

Luk 3:38 *...the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God...*

25

The Bible even testifies that he was born of a virgin (→ virgin birth):

Isa 7:14 *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel. (cf. Mat 1:23)*

30

Luk 1:30-38 *“You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.” . . . “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “Since I am a virgin?” (cf. Luk 3:23)*

35

Mat 1:18 *This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.*

b.) He had a childhood like all others

40 Luk 2:40 *And **the child grew and became strong**, he was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him.*

Luk 2:52 *And **Jesus grew** in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and men.*

Heb 5:8 *Although he was a son, he learnt obedience from what he suffered...*

5 As the Son of God he could say: “*I am!*” As the son of man though, he went through a normal process of growth.

c.) He possessed the nature of a perfectly normal human being

Man is composed of three parts: spirit, soul, and body (cf. 1Th 5:23):

| | | | |
|----|----------------|------------------|--|
| 10 | Spirit: | Mar 2:8 | <i>Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit...</i> |
| | | Mar 8:21 | <i>...and he sighed deeply in his spirit, and said...</i> |
| | | Luk 23:46 | <i>Father into your hands I commit my spirit...</i> |
| | | Joh 13:21 | <i>Jesus was troubled in spirit</i> |
| | Soul: | Mat 26:38 | <i>...my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow</i> |
| | | Joh 12:27 | <i>Now my soul is troubled.</i> |
| 15 | Body: | Heb 10:5 | <i>...a body you prepared for me</i> |
| | | Heb 10:10 | <i>...we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ</i> |
| | | Joh 2:21 | <i>...the temple he had spoken of was his body</i> |
| | | Heb 2:14 | <i>Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature</i> |
| 20 | | | |

Jesus Christ retained his human nature even after his resurrection (cf. Luk 24:39) → This too constitutes an argument against Kenotism (cf. see above).

d.) He had human needs and weaknesses

| | | |
|----|------------------|---|
| 25 | Joh 4:6 | <i>he was tired</i> |
| | Mat 4:2 | <i>he was hungry</i> |
| | Joh 19:28 | <i>he was thirsty</i> |
| | Mat 8:24 | <i>he slept</i> |
| 30 | Joh 11:35 | <i>he wept</i> |
| | Heb 4:15 | <i>he was tempted (but contrary to us he did not sin)</i> |

Prayer is a typical human need. It is an expression of dependence or neediness:

| | | |
|----|---------|---|
| 35 | Heb 5:7 | <i>During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death...</i> |
|----|---------|---|

There are more than 20 passages in the New Testament where Jesus prayed.

e.) He suffered and died

| | | |
|----|-----------|---|
| 40 | Luk 22:44 | <i>And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.</i> |
|----|-----------|---|

Heb 5:8 *Although he was a son, he learnt obedience from what he suffered...*

Joh 19:30 *When he had received the vinegar, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

The death of Jesus was an act of his own free will in giving up his life (cf. Joh 10:18).

5 f.) He described himself as a man and was also called a man by others

Joh 8:40 *...you are determined to kill me, **a man** that has told you the truth...*

10 Act 2:22 *...Jesus of Nazareth, **a man** attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs...*

Mar 10:45 *For even the **Son of Man** did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

15 1Co 15:21 *For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through **a man**.*

20 1Ti 2:5 *For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, **the man Jesus Christ**.*

Although he was fully man, he was and is without sin:

25 2Co 5:21 *God made **him who had no sin** to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Heb 4:15 *For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are – **yet without sin**.*

30 Joh 14:30 *I will not speak to you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. **He has no hold on me...***

The Bible confirms that Jesus Christ was and is without sin:

35 Joh 8:46 *Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?*

Joh 18:38 *"What is truth?" Pilate asked. With this he went out to the Jews again and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him." (cf. Joh 19:4.6)*

4. The unity of the person of Jesus Christ

40 Jesus is God as if he were only God. At the same time he was man as if he were only man. The essence of both of the two natures remained unchanged (unchangeable i.e. without transformation or confusion) when they were both unified (at the incarnation). The two natures are not mingled. Since his incarnation, Jesus possesses at one and the same time a divine and a human nature (God-Man; not "theandric"). The personality of Jesus Christ, on
45 the contrary, is indivisible. This is why we speak of Jesus Christ as "God-Man" because he is

both at the same time. Following are some Bible passages which attest to the unity of the person of Jesus Christ.

a.) The Bible always speaks of him in the singular

- 5 Joh 17:23 *...I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

10 When it is a question of Christ, it is always a question of one person alone. Since the incarnation of the Son of God, the two natures simultaneously were and always are in the person of "Jesus Christ". But the two natures are neither mingled nor separated, but rather united. That is, two natures in one and the same person. However it must not be forgotten that during the time of Jesus' humiliation here on earth he often relinquished the use of his privileges and qualities i.e. his attributes. Otherwise he would not have died for us (cf. Joh 4:34; Mat 26:39; 24:36; Phi 2:6ff).

15 b.) The Bible does not teach an abstract unity of the two natures

- Rom 1:3 *...regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David...*
 Rom 1:4 *...and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God...*
 20 Rom 8:3 *For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh...*
 1Jo 4:2 *...This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God... (cf. 1Ti 3:16)*
 25

c.) The Bible reveals the aptitudes and qualifications of Jesus thanks to his two natures

30 It could be said that the divine nature of the man Jesus qualified him to know and to do what is godly:

- Mat 17:2 ***There he was transfigured** before them. **His face** shone like the sun, and **his clothes** became as white as the light.*
 35 Mar 5:41 *He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha kumi!" (Which means: "Little girl, I say to you get up!")*

The human nature on the contrary enabled him to suffer death. If he "only" remained God (and not *God-Man*) he could not have died for us.

- 40 Mar 15:39 *And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry, and saw how he died, he said, "**Surely this man was the Son of God!**"*

d.) The qualities of one nature or the other are attributed to him under the name of the other

1Co 2:8 *None of the rulers of this age understood it [his wisdom], for if they had, they would **not have crucified the Lord of glory.***

Col 1:13-20 *“**His beloved Son**” in contrast to “**his blood, shed on the cross**”*

Joh 3:13 *No one has ever **gone into heaven**, except the one who came from heaven – **the Son of Man.***

Joh 6:62 *What if you see **the Son of Man** ascend to **where he was before?***

Rom 9:5 *To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to **the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen!***

Heb 1:3 ***The Son is the radiance of God’s glory** and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After **he had provided purification for sins**, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*

Since Jesus Christ returned to heaven, he still unites in his person the two natures. He will always remain God and man. We must recognise that our salvation is only possible through the unity of the divine and human nature in the person of Jesus Christ. We proclaim this reality by faith (1Jo 4:2-3), even if we cannot (yet) understand it completely.

Ps 49:8-9 *The ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough – that he should live on forever...*

Mat 16:26 *What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?*

Mar 2:7.10 *Who can forgive sins but God alone?*

A challenge: During his earthly life, two traits of Jesus’ character are manifested in particular:

1. Love

- The love for his Father:

Joh 14:31 *...but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.*

The secret of the life of Jesus is his love for his Father: “*I love my Father!*” Because of this, he consecrated himself and was obedient unto death!

- The love for mankind:

Eph 5:2 *And live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

5 Jesus does not only love us (believers), but he also loves sinners, i.e. those people who are hardened in their sins, his enemies! In his love:

- He gave his life (1Jo 3:16)
- He seeks what is lost until he finds it (cf. Luk 15:4-7)
- He has freed us from our sins through his blood (Rev 1:5)
- 10 • He serves his own until they attain perfection (Joh 13:1: *“He loved his own . . . until the end...”*)

2. Compassion

15 Jesus was full of compassion. Compassion for whom, and how did he show it? What were the consequences of it? In this regard I recommend the following Bible passages: Mat 14:14; 20:34; Mar 1:41; 6:34; 8:2; 9:22; 9:36; Luk 7:13; 10:33; 15:20.

V. The threefold ministry of Jesus-Christ

A. General observations about the different ministries

5 Jesus is Christ, the Messiah, this means the anointed one. See for example Joh 20:31. In fact, each anointing in the Old Testament prefigures Christ and his ministry. Kings, high priests, and prophets were anointed:

1Ki 19:16 Elisha as **prophet**

10 Lev 8:12 Aaron as **high priest**

1Sa 16:13 David as **King**

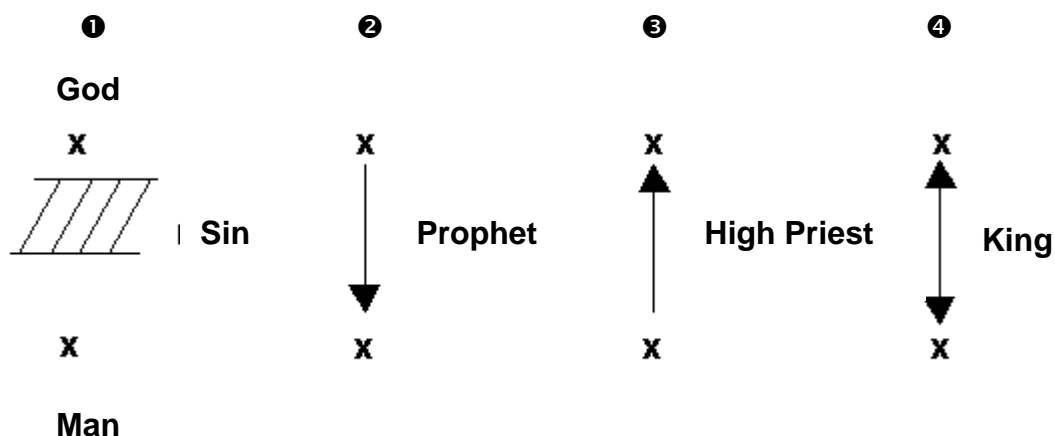
In the New Testament we read the following:

15 Act 10:38 *...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.*

20 This anointing of Jesus (at his baptism in the Jordan) was the fulfilment of the offices of the Old Testament, indicating typologically that under the New Covenant Jesus united in his person the prophetic, high priestly and kingly offices. Through him, the true meaning and purpose of these three offices (functions) was revealed.

- 25
1. As **Prophet**, he represents God before men. He reveals God to them.
 2. As **High Priest**, he represents men before God.
 3. As **King**, he restores the authoritative relationship between God and men.

30 The following diagram illustrates ❶ the relationship between God and man (the separation of man from God because of his sin) also the true meaning of the three offices (❷ prophet, ❸ high priest, ❹ king):



The prophetic ministry of Jesus (cf. Joh 15:22) prepared the way for his high priestly ministry (cf. 1Pe 2:24) which in turn was the absolute prerequisite for the establishment of his kingdom (Rev 19:16).

5 B. The prophetic office

1. Definition of the prophetic office

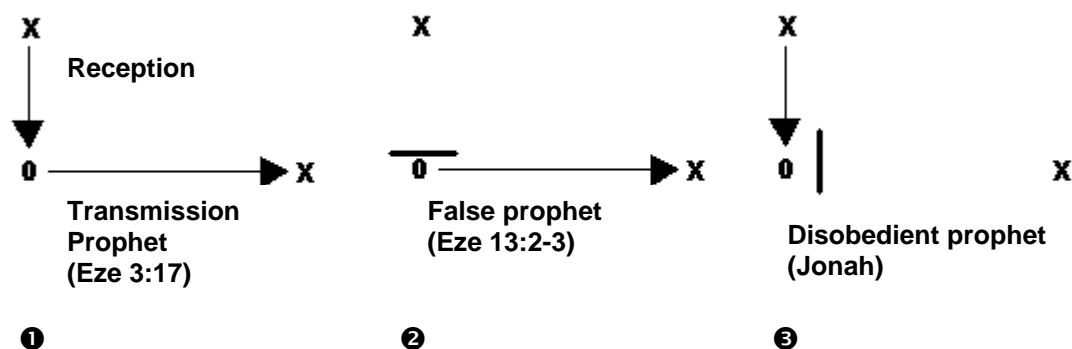
The etymology of the Hebrew word *nābīʿ* (נָבִיא = *prophet*) is uncertain. However its use is revealing. The best explanation (or definition) is to be found in:

- 10 Exo 7:1-2 *Then the Lord said to Moses: "See I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of the country."*
- 15 Here we could say that Moses took the position of God. He played the part of the Lord while Aaron was his spokesman or his prophet. A true prophet is in fact God's spokesman:
- Exo 4:16 *He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him.*
- 20 Deu 18:18 *I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.*
- 25 Jer 1:9 *Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me: "Now I have put my words into your mouth."*

The prophetic office includes basically the following two important functions:

- 30 1. The reception of the Word of God
 2. The transmission of the Word of God

The following diagram illustrates the prophetic office:



- 5 ❶ The true prophet (left) receives the message from God and passes it on to the people to whom God sends him. ❷ The false prophet (middle) passes a message on to people without having received it from God. He merely claims to be sent by God ❸ The disobedient prophet receives a message from God but refuses to pass it on to the people whom God sends him to (the most well-known example of this is without any doubt Jonah, who refused to pass God's message on to the people of Nineveh).

2. The fulfilment of the prophetic ministry in Christ

a.) In the Old Testament he was promised as a prophet

10 Deu 18:15 *The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him!*

Christ did not only become a prophet at his incarnation (New Testament), but he was already one under the Old Covenant, yes even from eternity:

15 1Pe 1:11 *...trying [the prophets] to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.*

20 Joh 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

b.) The New Testament reveals him as prophet

(1) Christ fulfilled the promise

25 Act 3:22 *For Moses said: The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you...*

These words of the apostle Peter are the fulfilment of the promise in Deu 18:15-17!

30 Heb 1:1-2 *In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, **but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son**, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.*

(2) Christ himself said he was a prophet

35 Mar 6:4 *Jesus said to them: "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house, is a prophet without honour."*

Luk 13:33 In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day – for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!

(3) Jesus Christ fulfils the requirements for the prophetic office

Joh 8:26 *I have much to say in judgement of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and **what I have heard from him I tell the world.***

5 Joh 12:49-50 *For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. **So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.***

10 Joh 17:8 *“For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them”*

Jesus fulfilled his prophetic ministry in that he revealed the Father to us:

15 Joh 16:25 *Though I have been speaking figuratively to you, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father.*

He fulfilled his prophetic ministry by:

- | | | |
|----|--|---|
| 20 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • his testimony (μαρτυρέω [marturéō] = to testify) • his preaching (κηρύσσω [kērússō] = to preach) • his teaching (διδάσκω [didáskō] = to teach) | cf. Joh 18:37 cf. Mat 4:23; 9:35 cf. Mat 4:23; 9:35 |
|----|--|---|

25 His prophetic ministry was supported by signs and miracles and confirmed (see for example Mat 8 and 9).

c.) The special features of his prophetic ministry

He revealed God both in himself and through himself:

30 Joh 1:18 *No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.*

Joh 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

35 All prophecy is fulfilled in him. You could say he is “*prophecy incarnate*” (cf. Joh 1:14). The other prophets merely pointed to Christ:

40 Luk 24:44 *He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”*

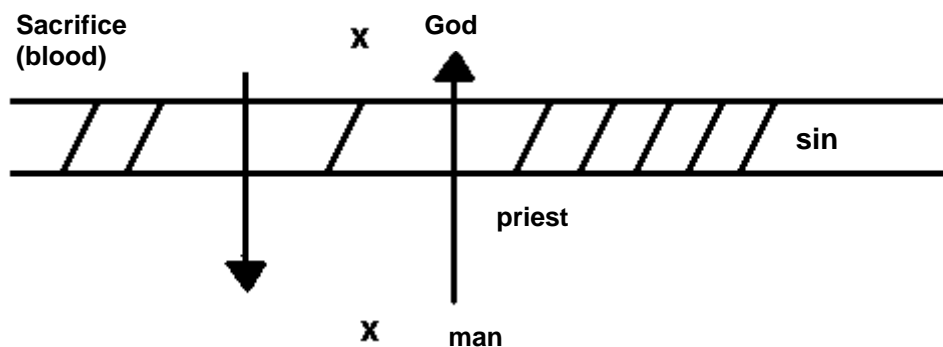
45 Jesus Christ has carried out his office to perfection. Even before the foundation of the World he was “glorious” (Joh 17:5), and in the new creation he will be the “light” (cf. Rev 21:23). Today he has become for us “wisdom” (1Co 1:30). In fellowship with Jesus Christ there is glory, light, and wisdom!

C. The high priestly office

1. Definition of the high priestly ministry and its fulfilment in Christ

a.) He brings us near to the Father

- 5 The etymology of the Hebrew word כֹּהֵן (*kohēn* = *priest*) is unsure.²⁰ The verb (with the same roots כָּהַן (*kāhan*) has in *Piel* the meaning “to exercise the ministry of a priest” (cf. for example Exo 31:10). In its narrowest meaning, the priest is the one who brings men near to God (again). The following diagram illustrates this:



- 10 Sin separates man from God. Christ came down into the world and shed his blood for us. As High Priest, he brings that blood before the Father and so makes atonement for the sin that separated man from God. In this way, he brings man back to God (cf. Col 1:19-20).

- 15 The book of Leviticus offers a good example of the profound meaning which the high priest's ministry represents. The high priest's ministry on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) illustrates this very vividly. The high priest brings blood into the Most Holy Place:

- 20 Lev 16:15 *He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull's blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it.*
- 25 Lev 16:17 *No one is to be in the Tent of Meeting from the time Aaron goes in to make atonement in the Most Holy Place until he comes out, having made atonement for himself, his household, and the whole community of Israel.*

In the New Testament – that is under the new covenant –, **it is Christ who, with his own blood, brings us once and for all back to God.** (cf. Heb 9:24-28):

²⁰ Compare Willem A. VanGemeren, General Editor, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Exegesis*, volume 2 (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Publishing, 1996), pp. 601-605.

Heb 9:12 *He did not enter by the means of the blood of goats and calves; but **he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood**, having obtained eternal redemption.*

5 Eph 2:13 *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been **brought near through the blood of Christ.***

b.) He is our mediator

The high priest serves as mediator between God and man. He comes into the presence of God and then returns to the people:

10

Num 6:23 *Tell Aaron and his sons: “This is how you are to bless the Israelites; say to them...” (blessing)*

15

Mal 2:7 *For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction – because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty. (teaching)*

20

Another duty of the priest was to ask God’s guidance for the people by consulting the “*Urim and Thummim*” (אֶת־הַתּוֹמִיִּם וְאֶת־הַאֲזָרוֹת = *with the Urim and the Thummim*: cf. Exo 28:30; Num 27:21).

The Lord Jesus Christ is, since his death and resurrection, our only mediator (→ the New Covenant):

25

1Ti 2:5 *For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ.*

30

Heb 7:25 *Therefore he is able to save completely those **who come to God through him**, because he always lives to intercede for them.*

The New Testament shows us especially that Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant (cf. Heb 9:15; 12:24), while Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant (cf. Joh 1:17; 2Co 3:4-18)

c.) He is our Advocate (Representative)

35

From God’s point of view, the high priest is the advocate or representative of man:

40

Heb 5:1 *Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.*

45

Exo 28:11-12.29 *Then mount the stones in gold filigree settings and fasten them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel. **Aaron is to bear the names on his shoulders as a memorial before the Lord. . . . When Aaron enters the Holy Place, he will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the breastpiece of decision as a continuing memorial before the Lord.***

The high priest represented the people (i.e. people with their names) before God. He carried the names of the 12 tribes of Israel engraved in the precious stones of his breastplate, as a memorial before the Lord.

5 But under the New Covenant, Jesus Christ is our advocate who pleads our cause before God:

1Jo 2:1 *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, **we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence – Jesus Christ, the righteous one.***

10

Heb 9:24 *For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with hands, a [mere] copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, **now to appear for us in God's presence.***

15

Heb 7:25 *Therefore he is able to save completely **those who have come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.***

20

The Old Testament offers us many precious lessons in order to make the ministry of Jesus as high priest clearer to us. Jesus must mean so much to us and even more so because the way to him is so simple!

2. Conditions for the high priestly office and how Jesus fulfils them

The following conditions must be fulfilled for someone to exercise the office of high priest:

a.) The high priest must be a man

25

Heb 5:1 *Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins...*

30

He must have a heart that sympathises with men in order to bring their concerns before God.

As a consequence of this, Christ had to be a man:

35

Heb 2:17 *For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*

b.) The high priest must be called by God

Heb 5:4 *No one takes this honour on himself, but he must be called by God, just as Aaron was.*

40

The office of priest is not given on merit; it is a calling or appointment. Only the one who is called can come before God.

Christ too had to be called by God:

Heb 5:5-6 *Christ did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. **But God said to him: “You are my son; today I have begotten you.”** And he says in another place: “**You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.***

5 c.) The high priest must be holy

Exo 28:36 *Make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it as on a seal: **Holy to the Lord!***

10 Lev 21:6 ***They must be holy to their God and** must not profane the name of their God. Because they present the offerings made to the Lord by fire, the food of their God, **they are to be holy.***

15 Lev 21:18 ***No man who has any defect may come near:** no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed...*

Heb 7:26 *Such a high priest meets our need – one who is **holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens...***

Consequently Christ must also be holy:

20 1Pe 1:19 *...but with the precious blood of Christ, **a lamb without blemish or defect...***

25 Heb 4:15 *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – **yet without sin.***

30 Heb 7:26-28 *Such a high priest meets our need – **one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. . . . The law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.***

d.) The high priest has to offer a sacrifice

35 Heb 5:3 *This is why he has to **offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.***

The high priest cannot come into God's presence without the blood of sacrifice.
Consequently Christ also had to offer a sacrifice:

40 Heb 7:27 *Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to **offer sacrifices** day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. **He sacrificed for their sins once and for all when he offered himself.***

45 Heb 10:10 *And by that will we have been made holy **through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.***

Heb 10:14 *...because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. (see also the warning in Heb 12:14)*

Eph 5:2 *...and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

- 5 Jesus didn't sacrifice just anything; no, he sacrificed himself as an offering for us (cf. Heb 9:12.26b). The value of the sacrifice is found in the blood. Because of this, Christ had to die:

Lev 17:11 *For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.*

10

Heb 9:22 *In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*

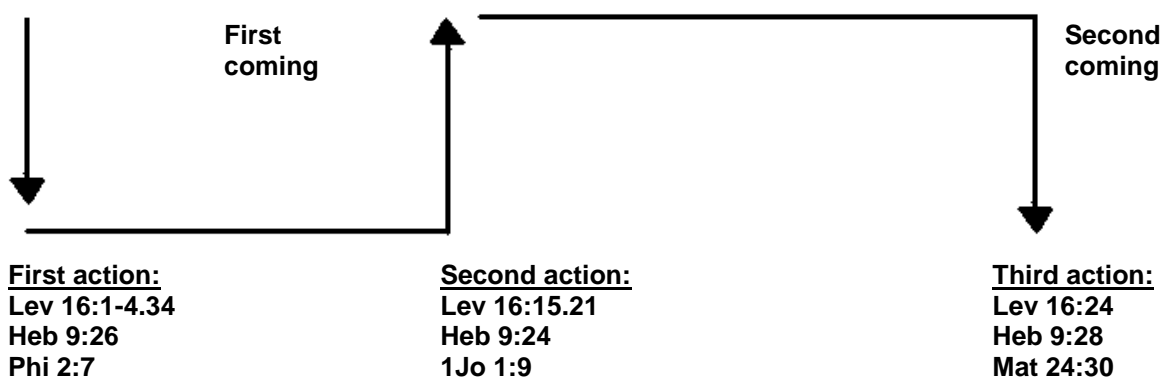
- 15 The heart of the high priestly office of Christ (as also the high priestly office in the Old Testament) lies in sacrifice and prayer. Christ has already accomplished the sacrifice, his intercession though continues until today (cf. Rom 8:34; Heb 4:14-16; 1Jo 2:1-2). I will first talk about the sacrifice of Jesus, that is his death, and then about his present ministry as advocate. Here first an illustration:

20

The great annual Day of Atonement, the so-called Yom Kippur (cf. Lev 16) illustrates in a wonderful way the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross. The high priest had to wash himself first, put on the sacred clothing (Lev 16:4), then he had to make the required sacrifice and take the blood of it behind the curtain into the Most Holy Place and sprinkle it on the atonement cover as a sign of reconciliation (Lev 16:15ff). After this, he came out of the Most Holy Place and stood before the people (Lev 16:24). The analogy of this is that Jesus Christ became man (he clothed himself with a human body) (Heb 9:25; Phi 2:7), offered himself as a sacrifice for mankind, returned to the heavenly sanctuary and presented his blood to the Father (Heb 9:24-25). From there he will return to mankind on the earth at the end of time, not because of sin this time (Heb 9:28), because he died for that once and for all on the cross (Heb 10:10.14):

25

30



3. The importance of the death of Jesus Christ

Just imagine how moving it must have been for the high priest when he offered the animal sacrifice on the altar and went with the blood into the Most Holy Place to bring about atonement for the people. And what a sacred moment it must have been when Jesus Christ shed his blood on Golgotha and then suddenly at the height of the day there was darkness! Christ died for me, for us all! Here are some key passages from the letter to the Hebrews which speak of the death of Jesus Christ: Heb 1:1-4; 2:14-17; 7:22-28; 8:1-7; 9:1-14.22-28; 10:1-14.19-25.

10 The death of Jesus was often foretold in the Old Testament:

a.) In the Old Testament it was foretold

A number of types (images) and prophecies in the Old Testament pointed prophetically to the death of Jesus Christ:

- 15 Gen 3:15 *And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and **you will strike his heel.***
- Gen 3:21 *The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.*
- 20 Exo 12 The Easter lamb
- Leviticus All the sacrifices
- 25 Isa 53:7 *He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.*

The theme of the death of Jesus is found throughout the Old Testament:

- 30 Luk 24:25-27 *He said to them: "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" **And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.***
- 35

b.) The central theme of the New Testament

About a fifth of the gospels concerns the last three days of Jesus' life on earth. The death of Jesus is mentioned at least 175 times in the New Testament. Here are some of the important passages: Mat 27:31ff; Joh 19:28ff; Act 2-3; Rom 3:21-25; 5:6-11; 6:1ff; Heb 2:14-18; 9:11-28; 10:10-14; 1Pe 1:18-21; 2:21-24; Rev 5:6-12.

40

c.) The main purpose of his incarnation

We have already mentioned above, in the chapter about the incarnation of Jesus Christ, why he had to come in the flesh. The main reason to mention here is that it was so that he could die for the sins of mankind:

5

Mar 10:45 *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.*

It should be noted that this is also considered the key verse in Mark's gospel.

10

Heb 2:14 *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is the devil...*

15 Jesus' triple announcement to his disciples of his sufferings (cf. Luk 9:22; 9:44-46; 18:31-34) attests to the immeasurable importance of his death.

d.) The fundamentals of the Gospel

The "good news" (which is the meaning of the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον [euangélion]) is: *Jesus died for me that I might have life:*

20

1Co 15:1-3 *Now, brothers, I want to remind you of **the gospel I preached to you**, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I have preached to you. Otherwise you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed onto you as of first importance: **that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...***

25

e.) The heart of the Christian faith

Other religions are based on the life and teaching of their founders. Christianity though is based on the death and resurrection of its founder.

f.) Indispensable for our salvation

30

Joh 3:14 *Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up....*

35

Joh 12:24 *I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat fall to the ground and dies it remains only a single seed. **But if it dies, it bears much fruit.***

Without the death of Jesus there is no redemption, no fruit, because forgiveness of sins is only possible when the "ransom" has been paid. Jesus paid it by his substitutionary death on the cross (cf. Mar 10:45; Rom 3:25-26; Col 2:14-15).

g.) The object of great interest in heaven

Luk 9:30-31 *Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendour, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem.*

5

Rev 5:8-12 The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders worship the Lamb who was slain, that is Jesus Christ.

4. The significance of the death of Jesus Christ

10 As I said previously, many religions are based on the life and teaching of their founders. In Christianity that is not the case. The heart of the Christian faith is the death of its founder, Jesus Christ. This is why Good Friday is the most important feast day for Protestants. Why do we attach so much importance to the death of Jesus Christ? To understand this, we must go back again to the beginning of the history of mankind.

15 We remind ourselves of the warning that God gave to the first man:

Gen 2:16-17 And the Lord God commanded the man: "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

20

Sadly, Adam and Eve did not obey and they ate the forbidden fruit. Both of them were inexcusably guilty because God had clearly warned them. True love is not cold obedience rather its authenticity must be proved. Without the possibility of choice there is no love. The fall plunged Adam and Eve into sin and they dragged all mankind down with them.

25

Some people imagine God handling this problem in the following way: *...Oh man has sinned... what shall we do now? We warned him that he would die if he didn't obey. But let us take pity on this poor creature... Let us close our eyes to it just this once!*

30 So-called modern man would maybe think and argue in this way. But God is not a man. When God says something, shouldn't he carry it out?

Num 23:19 *God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfil?*

35

"...when you eat of it, you will surely die" (Gen 2:17), "...what God has said, shall he not do?" The consequence cannot be avoided:

40 Rom 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death...*

Therefore God had to judge man. Man became mortal... and a slave of sin. Passages such as Psa 51:7 and Eph 2:1-3 confirm that man is by nature a sinner and a child of wrath. But the wonderful thing is that God, our Creator, loves us in spite of that. How can this paradoxical situation be resolved? The love of God wants to spare man but his righteousness and truthfulness demand judgement and the death of the fallen sinner. Islam and all other religions pretend that man is able to save himself. Islam teaches salvation through good works (the five

45

pillars of Islam); Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions recommend meditation, pilgrimages, or sacrifices of all sorts in order to gain favour with God or gods or spirits. But can animal sacrifices really blot out the sins of man? Holy Scripture says “no” (Heb 10:4ff) and this is logical, because it is man who has sinned, not the animals. Also a man cannot

5 redeem either himself or someone else from sin (Psa 49:7ff). If there is to be any way out of this impasse, then only God can provide it in that he himself takes responsibility for the guilt of man, his creation. But as already said, God cannot simply close his eyes to the shortcomings of man and say: “*Oh, I regret that I said to man ‘when you eat of it you will surely die,’ I will take this warning back... man shall in spite of it remain alive!*” No, what

10 God has said he will surely do, because he cannot lie. And so there is only one possible way out: God himself pays the price for man’s shortcomings. How – **by dying in his stead!** But in fact this is also not sufficient, because the warning of death in the case of disobedience was for man and not for God. God is God and not a man! The only solution was that God should become man in order to die in the place of sinful man. This was the only possibility for man

15 to be delivered from his slavery to Satan, who had successfully instigated man’s rebellion against his Creator. In the light of this, we can understand passages such as Joh 3:16 and 2Co 5:21. So the Son of God became man. He took on our human nature. He became flesh (Joh 1:14; 1Ti 3:16). Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit (not through a man, that is not through Joseph) and born of the virgin Mary (Luk 1:30-38). Therefore he is holy, without sin. So his

20 death was a ransom for mankind.²¹ He, who didn’t deserve death but suffered it of his own free will (Joh 10:17-18), has paid our debt. The value of his death, that is the price that he paid to purchase us, is credited to our account. His death is the ransom for the sin of all mankind. The death of Jesus also has a judicial (forensic) significance. On the contrary to what certain theologians or philosophers maintain, the death of Jesus was in no way simply

25 the death of a martyr who stayed true to his principals. If that was really what it was all about, why was Jesus afraid of death? ²² Such an assertion denies the real motive for the death of Jesus Christ, namely the reconciliation of sinful man with God! According to the arch-liberal German theologian **Rudolf Bultmann**, Jesus suffered death as a heroic idealist! Seen in this way, there would not be any difference between the death of Jesus Christ and that of Socrates!

30 Both would be considered to have died for their ideals. Others believe that the death of Jesus Christ had a “merely” “**moral effect**”: The suffering and death of Jesus would soften the hearts of men and cause them to change their lives! This interpretation of the death of Jesus denies its real character of reconciliation. The Bible teaches something quite different. This liberal view should be compared with such passages as Rom 5:6-7; Col 1:19-20; 2:14-15

35 which show undeniably that the death of Jesus is significant in terms of: **propitiation, substitution, reconciliation!**

a.) Reconciliation

Theologians with certain critical tendencies are of the opinion that such a living sacrifice is meaningless. Their view is that God is not a tyrant who demands blood sacrifices. According

40 to Bultmann, such concepts come from the mythological ideas at the time of Jesus and consequently the New Testament must be “demythologised”. In fact, this should not surprise us, after all the Pharisees rejected Jesus as Saviour. They believed they didn’t need a

²¹ For all men: cf. 1Jo 2:1-2, also for false prophets and heretics. But the latter cannot benefit from this ransom (from this grace) because they have rejected the One who bought them with a price, writes the apostle Peter (2Pe 2:1). Salvation through Jesus is only effective for those who believe and accept it (cf. Joh 3:36; 2Co 5:20; Mat 23:37; Luk 7:30); → against classical Universalism which claims that all men are (automatically) saved by Christ.

²² This is then quite different from the heroic death of Socrates, whose death I also consider to be most remarkable.

Redeemer who paid the price for their sins. They rather thought that they were righteous before God because they kept the (Mosaic) law (cf. Luk 18:11-12). The Sadducees also rejected the idea of a Redeemer, as Jesus was, because they didn't believe in a life to come (cf. Mat 22:23; Act 23:8). They were waiting for a political Messiah who would free them from the hands of the Romans.

The question must in fact be posed as to whether the Roman Catholic Church is not also taking this direction (at least the official teaching of the Vatican), because it maintains that the church is the administrator (custodian) of salvation i.e. grace. The Catholic Church teaches that the church's treasures of grace stem from the merits of Christ, Mary and also the saints. The Roman Church is the only mediator of salvation, channelled through the sacraments. In other words, the Roman Catholic Church claims to be the only church that can impart salvation. We know though that no church has the right to authorise salvation. Imparting salvation is the prerogative of one person, Jesus Christ, the Son of God who died for us. Sadly there is also in protestant circles a tendency towards a certain sacramentalism. We know such expressions as "*I've been baptised too...!*" The Ecumenical Movement or the Ecumenical Council of Churches' (W.C.C.) understanding of salvation has meanwhile become most questionable. Whereas Luther asks, "*How do I obtain a merciful God?*" the W.C.C. asks "*How do I obtain a merciful neighbour?*" For the W.C.C. salvation only means overcoming unjust power structures and the re-distribution of power and riches. To put it simply, it could be said that the W.C.C. today is Marxist rather than Christian! In their opinion, the Christian message should no longer be proclaimed – certainly not an exclusive one – only a message of (inter) religious dialogue!

As far as I am concerned, I mean to hold to the teaching of the Bible on salvation and reconciliation.

Reconciliation is the act of bringing together two parties who are estranged. In the Bible these are the holy God and sinful man. Through reconciliation, the cause of the separation is removed.

Rom 5:11 *Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God **through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.***

Col 1:19-20 *For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

Since the fall of man, God and man are separated (Isa 59:2). But Christ has blotted out sin. Now it is up to man to return to God by accepting reconciliation with him through Jesus Christ:

2Co 5:19-20 *...that **God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf, **be reconciled to God.*****

In Animism it is man who has to reconcile himself with God. According to the Holy Scripture though, it is God who takes the initiative of reconciling man with himself through the blood of his Son Jesus Christ. Only where the New Testament speaks of reconciliation between God

and man, with God as the subject, is the verb “*to reconcile*” found in the active form. Man is the object (passive) of the reconciliation. Man can only do one thing, that is accept reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 5:10; 2Co 5:19-20).

b.) Substitution

5 Substitutionary suffering is suffering which is born by someone on the behalf of someone else. The purpose of this suffering is to obtain the liberation of the person on whose behalf the suffering was endured. The Old Testament vividly illustrates this theme of substitution:

10 Exo 12 **Either** the blood of a lamb without fault **or** the death of the first born of the household!

Lev 1–5 Animal sacrifice for the sins that a man has committed!

15 Lev 16 The yearly feast of the Atonement (*Yom Kippur*): the scapegoat!
Hands had to be laid on the animal to be sacrificed as a sign of substitution (identification).

Jesus Christ is our substitute:

20 Isa 53:4-6 *Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that bought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*

25 1Co 15:3 *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures...*

30 Rom 5:8 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Mar 10:45 *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

35 The significance of this substitution is immeasurable:

2Co 5:14 *For God’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.*

40 This is the reason why our lives are no longer really ours (cf. 1Co 6:19-20; 2Co 5:15). He who ransomed us from death has the right to our lives. Compare the principle of substitution with Philemon 18-19 (Paul is ready to pay Philemon for Onesimus’ debts).

c.) Redemption

45 The act of redemption lies in the fact that Christ purchased us by redeeming us from our sins (cf. Tit 2:14). At the time when slavery was widespread, everyone understood what it meant to purchase someone’s freedom. If someone owned a slave, and the slave wanted to be free, he or someone else would have to “redeem him” i.e. buy his freedom.

Christ has redeemed us that we might be his:

5 Mar 10:45 *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

Eph 1:7 *In him we have redemption (Greek: ἀπολύτρωσις [apolútrōsis] = deliverance out of) through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace...*

10 (1) Redemption from the curse of the law

Gal 3:13 *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."*

(2) Redemption from the demands of the law

15 Gal 4:5 *...to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.*

(3) Redemption from the power of sin

20 Tit 2:14 *...who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*

Rom 6:14 *For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.*

In conclusion we can say we are redeemed from:

- 25
- **the guilt of sin** (originating from the law; cf. Tit 2:14)
 - **the power of sin** (cf. Rom 6:14)
 - **but not yet from the presence of sin** (1Jo 1:8)

(4) Redemption from the power of Satan

30 Heb 2:14 *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is the devil...*

35 Col 1:13 *For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his beloved Son.*

Rom 16:20 *The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.*

(5) Complete redemption

Heb 10:14 *...because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy...*

Redemption encompasses all areas of life including those of the body. However we must not forget that our earthly body is not yet regenerated, only the spiritual part (the inner man). This reality is confirmed by the apostle Paul:

1Co 15:50 *I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.*

Faced with this fact, Paul cries out:

Rom 7:24 *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?*

What a relief that these words are followed by the following:

Rom 7:25 *Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.*

In chapter eight of Romans, Paul shows that the redemption of our bodies lies in the future, that is it will only come about when we receive a new body, a glorious body, on the day of the resurrection:

Rom 8:23 *Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (cf. Rom 5:1-5)*

So we are still waiting for our final redemption. Right now we only have the first instalment i.e. the guarantee of the Holy Spirit living in us:

Eph 1:14 *...who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.*

5. The consequences of the death of Jesus Christ

Did Jesus die only for the elect or for all mankind? Calvinists,²³ who insist on the doctrine of *unconditional predestination* and *irresistible grace*, are obliged to maintain that Jesus only died for the elect, not for all men. This teaching, which says that Jesus only died for the elect, is also called (in Latin): *expiatio definitiva*. The English expression *limited atonement* is more widely used. This (Calvinistic) teaching would mean that the number of those profiting from the saving work of Christ is limited to those who have been chosen by him before the foundation of the world (i.e. *those predestined*). In effect, if Jesus died for all mankind, then this Calvinistic teaching of predestination seems to be absurd. Why? Because it would be quite unreasonable for God to send his Son into the world to die for those that he had decided from eternity not to elect for salvation. It is true that defenders of the teaching of limited

²³ On the subject of Calvinism and other positions regarding this issue, see the excursus at the end of this brochure (VII. E.)

atonement can point to certain Bible passages which (at the first glance) can give the impression of Christ dying for a limited number of people. These passages speak of (among other things) Christ dying for “many”:

5 Mat 26:28 *“This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for **many** for the forgiveness of sins.”*

Mar 10:45 *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for **many**.”*

10

Heb 2:10 *In bringing **many sons** to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.*

15 The opposing view is generally called “**hypothetical Universalism**”. This teaches that Jesus died for all mankind, but that **his death is only effectual for those who accept the gift of grace in Jesus Christ**. Salvation in Jesus must be accepted, therefore the word “hypothetical” (hypothetical Universalism). Yes, Christ died for all (hypothetically), but this gift must be accepted, otherwise the death of Jesus remains ineffective for the one who rejects it.

20

Calvinists point to Bible passages like the following:

Joh 17:9 *“I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.”*

25

In the opinion of the Calvinists, this passage implies the same thing: Jesus prays exclusively for the elect that is for those predestined from before the foundation of the world. The defenders of the opposite position (Arminians and others) however interpret these words in this way: God knows in advance who will believe. Therefore Jesus prays for those who he knows in advance will believe. On the subject of the omniscience of the Lord see the following passages: Psa 139:14-16; Joh 1:45-51.

30

I am convinced that a number of Bible passages clearly indicate that Jesus explicitly died for all mankind and not just for a certain number of chosen ones:

35

Joh 1:29 *The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said: “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away **the sin of the world!**”*

Tit 2:11 *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared **to all men**.*

40

1Ti 2:3-4.6 *This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants **all men** (Greek: πάντας ἀνθρώπους [pántas anthrōpous]) to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. . . . who gave himself as **a ransom for all** (Greek: ὑπὲρ πάντων [hyper pántōn]) **men** – the testimony given in its own time.*

45

The following passages seem to me to be especially difficult for adherents of the Calvinistic teaching of *expiatio definitiva* (limited atonement):

1Ti 4:10 *For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, **who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe.***

- 5 When Paul adds here “*especially of those who believe*”, then this seems to indicate that Jesus did actually die for all mankind and not only for a specified number. However the work of salvation is of course only effective for those who really let themselves be saved (cf. 2Co 5:19-20).

10 1Jo 2:2 *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for **the sins of the whole world.***

15 2Pe 2:1 *But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, **even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them** – bringing swift destruction on themselves.*

20 If the ransom has also been paid for the false teachers, then this shows that Jesus has certainly died for all men without exception. Moreover to mention one example, if an evangelist does not really believe that Jesus died for all mankind, how can he say to his listeners: “*Christ died for you too, receive him and you will be saved!*”? Only evangelists who adhere to hypothetical Universalism can preach in this way with conviction, not though the Calvinist who teaches the doctrine of limited atonement.

25 It is on the basis of Christ’s death that God can forgive the guilty and give new life to the sinner. Christ died for all men. An illustration from the Old Testament will help us to understand this truth: Christ has become the throne of grace of the New Covenant. Compare the atonement cover above the testimony in the Old Testament (cf. Lev 16) with the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus in the New Testament (cf. Rom 3:25). Therefore, today
30 whoever comes to Jesus Christ will receive grace:

Heb 4:16 *Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

35 For this reason we speak of the dispensation of grace. Jesus wants all men to come to him. Whoever comes to him and receives his offer of grace is accepted:

40 Joh 12:32 *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*

Joh 6:37 *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.*

45 Isa 55:1-2 *Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and **you who have no money come buy and eat!** Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend your money for that which is not bread and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen to me and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.*

But whoever rejects the grace offered to us through the Lamb of God (Rev 5:6.12) sacrificed for our sins, will have to face him on the day of judgement as the Lion of Judah (cf. Rev 5:5), because that day will be the day of the *wrath of the Lamb* (cf. Rev 6:16).

6. Jesus Christ's office as the heavenly High Priest

- 5 Jesus Christ's office as High Priest is illustrated by two Old Testament personalities both of whom were high priests: **Aaron and Melchizedek!**

I will now make a comparison of these two high priests and their fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

a.) His person

- 10 As an earthly High Priest, Jesus Christ fulfilled the office of the Aaronic priesthood. This office culminated in the yearly feast of atonement (Yom Kippur). This feast had the following characteristics:

- once a year (Lev 16; cf. Heb 9:25)
- 15 • limited to the people of Israel (Lev 16:34; cf. Heb 7:11ff; 9:7)

As a heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ fulfilled the priestly office of Melchizedek as follows:

- It is eternal (Heb 7:17-25; 9:12)
- 20 • It is universal (Heb 8:1; 9:24-26)

- By the way, I am convinced that the appearance of Melchizedek is a Christophany, because it says in the epistle to the Hebrews that he is eternal without beginning of days or end of life (cf. Heb 7:3). He also held the offices of both king and priest (Heb 7:1), which was not permitted for an ordinary man (see the punishment of King Saul and Uzziah: 1Sa 13:8ff; 2Ch 26:16ff).²⁴
- 25

b.) Its duration

During his time on earth, Jesus laid the foundation for his high priestly ministry once and for all: He offered himself as a sacrifice on the cross:

- 30 Joh 19:30 *When he had received the drink, Jesus said; "It is finished!"²⁵ With that he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*
- 35 Heb 10:14 *Because by one sacrifice he has made perfect **forever** those who are being made holy.*

In heaven, Jesus Christ fulfils his high priestly ministry eternally. He is a high priest forever in the order of Melchizedek:

²⁴ For more on the subject of Melchizedek and his identity see my commentary on Hebrews.

²⁵ In Greek, the verb is in the perfect tense: τετέλεσται [*tetēlestai*] from τέλειω [*telēō*] = *conclude, finish, fulfil*. The perfect tense underlines the result of an action. Hence we can say that the sacrificial death of Christ has been accomplished once and for all and is eternally effective (that is for those who have accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for their salvation).

Heb 7:24-25 *...but because Jesus lives **forever**, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he **always lives** to intercede for them.*

c.) Its effect

5 As High Priest on earth, Jesus, because of his work of redemption on the cross, served the whole world:

1Jo 2:2 *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*

10

Heb 10:10 *And by that will **we have been made holy** through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all**.*

As heavenly High Priest he exclusively and unceasingly serves his elect:

15

Rom 8:34 *Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – **is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us**.*

20

Heb 9:24 *For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; **he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence**.*

25

1Jo 2:1 *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence – Jesus Christ the righteous one.*

30 As heavenly High Priest, Jesus represents us before the Father in virtue of what he achieved on earth for us. As eternal High Priest he mediates the salvation to those who come to him, which he obtained through his death on the cross (cf. Heb 7:24-25).

The Levitical priesthood has been superseded by Jesus Christ. This has resulted in a radical change in all aspects of the priesthood. The epistle to the Hebrews informs us about it:

35 Heb 7:11-28 The **new priesthood** (after the order of Melchizedek) is eternal!

Heb 8:6-7.13 The **new covenant** is eternal!

40 Heb 9:1-28 The **new sanctuary** is eternal (because it is a heavenly one)!

Heb 10:11-18 The **new sacrifice** is eternal (because the precious blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has replaced that of animals)!

45 **Suggestion:** More than 400 passages in the Bible speak of **the blood of Jesus Christ**. This is obviously an important subject. In our old hymnbooks there were a considerable number of hymns which spoke of the blood of Jesus. However, in modern hymnbooks we often find no reference to the blood of Jesus. We need to reflect on this.

- **The blood of the New Covenant:**

Mat 26:28 *This is my **blood of the covenant**, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*

5 Heb 13:20-21 *May the God of peace, who through **the blood of the eternal covenant** brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

10

- **The testimony of God on earth:**

1Jo 5:7-8 *For there are three that testify: the spirit, the water and **the blood**; and the three agree.*

15

- **The basis of redemption:**

Eph 1:7 *In him we have **redemption through his blood**, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace...*

20

Heb 9:12 *He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and of calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all **by his own blood**, having obtained eternal redemption.*

25 • **The means by which we obtain forgiveness of sins:**

Heb 9:22 *In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed by blood, and **without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.***

30 1Jo 1:7 *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and **the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.***

Heb 9:14 *How much more, then, will **the blood of Christ**, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, **cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death**, so that we may serve the living God!*

35

- **Justification:**

Rom 5:9 *Since we have now been **justified by his blood**, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!*

40

- **Bringing us near to God:**

Eph 2:13 *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been **brought near through the blood of Christ.***

45

Heb 10:19 *Therefore brothers, since we have confidence to **enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus.***

50 • **The foundation of peace:**

Col 1:20 *...and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by **making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.***

5 Eph 2:15-16 *...by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, **thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross,** by which he put to death their hostility.*

10 • **Purchased for God:**

Act 20:28 *Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. **Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.***

15 Rev 5:9 *And they sang a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and **with your blood you purchased men for God** from every tribe and people and nation.”*

20 • **The foundation of fellowship with God and with believers:**

Joh 6:56 *Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.*

25 1Co 10:16 *Is not **the cup** of thanksgiving for which we give thanks **a participation in the blood of Christ?** And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?*

• **Our sanctification:**

30 Heb 13:12 *And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. (cf. Heb 10:14)*

• **Victory over Satan:**

35 Rev 12:11 ***They overcame him through the blood of the Lamb** and through the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*

• **The eternal theme of the redeemed worshipping in heaven:**

40 Rev 5:9-10 ***And they sang a new song:** “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, **and with your blood you purchased men for God** from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom of priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth.”*

45

This all explains why the apostle Peter speaks of the precious blood of Christ:

50 1Pe 1:19 *...but with **the precious blood of Christ**, a lamb without blemish or defect.*

D. Christ's kingly office

The Old Testament announces the coming of a future king a number of times:

5 Gen 49:10 *The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.*

10 2Sa 7:12-13 *When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish **his kingdom**. He is the one who will build a house for my name, and **I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.***

15 In the New Testament, Jesus is presented to us as King, especially in the gospel of Matthew (the King and his kingdom). Reference to his eternal kingship is already found in the announcement of his birth:

Luk 1:33 *He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.*

20 Luk 2:11 *...today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ (Messiah) the Lord.*

25 Unfortunately, Jesus, the King, was not recognised by his people and was rejected. At one time even his forerunner John the Baptist had doubts on this subject. In spite of all this, Jesus entered Jerusalem as King according to prophecy (cf. Mat 21:4-5). When he was questioned by Pilate, he confirmed his kingly authority:

30 Joh 18:36-37 *Jesus said: "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." Then Pilate said to him: "**So you are a king**", **Jesus answered: "You say I am a king!"** In fact for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is on the side of truth listens to my voice."*

35 Sadly the people condemned him shouting out:

Joh 19:15 *But they shouted: "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "**We have no king but Caesar,**" the chief priests answered!*

40 In one of his parables Jesus had predicted this rejection by the people:

Luk 19:14 *We don't want this man to be our king!*

45 The kingly office of Christ became reality following his birth; the spiritual reality of the practice of his lordship followed his exaltation and enthronement.

1. Seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven

The main significance of the exaltation of Jesus is his enthronement in heaven:

- 5 Heb 8:1 *The point of what we are saying is this: **We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven...***

He occupies a position of waiting:

- 10 Psa 110:1 *The Lord says to my Lord: “**Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.**”*

- 15 Where a king is found, there are also his subjects. Because the laws of the kingdom of Christ are spiritual, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was the prerequisite for the beginning of his kingdom.

- 20 1Co 12:3 *Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “**Jesus be cursed**” and no one can say “**Jesus is Lord**” except by the Holy Spirit.*

Even during his time on earth, Jesus said:

- 25 Joh 18:36 ***My kingdom is not of this world.** If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.*

This kingdom is a kingdom of grace:

- 30 Heb 4:16 *Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

- 35 **Something to think about:** As a consequence of this, there are a number of practical questions for our lives:

- To what extent do we let Jesus Christ reign in our lives? The principle evoked by Paul in Gal 2:20 should also be our attitude: “*...and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*”
- How does the lordship of Christ manifest itself in our lives? Are we really living to his glory? Do our lives honour the Lord in sanctification and consecration? (cf. Rom 6:10-22; 12:1-2; 1Pe 3:15)

2. On the throne of David

- 45 At his first coming, Jesus was misunderstood and rejected by the descendants of David (cf. Joh 1:11). But at his second coming, he will be recognised and received by them:

Zec 12:10 *And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a first born son.*

5

When Christ died on the cross, this prophecy of the prophet Zechariah was fulfilled for the first time (cf. Joh 19:37). It will be fully and finally fulfilled at his return (Rev 1:7).

Hos 3:5 *Afterwards the Israelites will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the Lord and to his blessings in the last days.*

10

Eze 37:24 *My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees.*

15

At the return of Christ, the Holy Spirit will be poured out on those who will recognise and receive the Lord:

Zec 12:10 *And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. (cf. Rev 1:7)*

20

Joe 2:28 (3:1) *And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all people...*

Rom 11:26 *And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.*

25

The kingdom of Christ will be a kingdom of peace (Isa 9:6-7).

3. On the throne of God and the Lamb

When all things are finally submitted to him (during the reign of the Messiah on earth: cf. Rev 5:10; Zac 14:9), the Son will give the kingdom to the Father and himself be subject to him (cf. 1Co 15:23-28). That will finally be eternity, the new creation (cf. Rev 21:23; 22:1-3).²⁶

30

²⁶ More on this in my brochures on "Biblical Eschatology" and on "The Revelation of John".

VI. Christ's resurrection and ascension

A. Christ's resurrection

1. The importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an event of such crucial importance in salvation history that the New Testament speaks of it over 100 times! In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul says that there were over 500 witnesses to the resurrection:

1Co 15:5 *...and that **he appeared to Peter and then to the twelve.***

1Co 15:6 *After that **he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time**, most of whom are still living though some have fallen asleep.*

1Co 15:7 *Then he appeared to **James, then to all the apostles.***

1Co 15:8 *...and last of all he appeared to me [i.e. the apostle Paul] also, as to one abnormally born.*

Satan too knows how important the resurrection of Jesus is. That is why he has sought from the beginning to suggest it was not historically founded, by putting into the minds of the enemies of the faith that the resurrection was a deception of the disciples:

Mat 28:13 *...telling them: "You are to say, his disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep."*

a.) The scriptures must be fulfilled

Psa 16:10 *Because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. (cf. Act 2:27-32)*

Luk 24:44-46 *He said to them: "This is what I told you while I was still with you: **everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.**"*

Mat 20:19 *...and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked, flogged, and crucified. **On the third day he will be raised to life.***

This is why Paul introduces the great chapter on the resurrection with the following words:

1Co 15:4 *...that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures...*

b.) The central theme of the apostolic preaching

5 What purpose could there be in preaching the death of Christ if he wasn't risen but was among the dead?

10 Rom 8:34 *Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*

1Co 15:17 *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.*

15 The book of Acts is saturated with the triumph of the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

Act 2:24 ***But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible that death should keep its hold on him.***

20 Act 2:32 ***God raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.***

Act 3:15 *You killed the author of life, but **God raised him from the dead.** We are witnesses of this.*

25 Act 4:10 *...then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth **whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead** that this man stands before you healed.*

30 It could also be said that the message of the resurrection of Christ is *the other half of the Gospel*; the first being that of the substitutionary death of Christ:

35 1Co 15:3-4 *For what I received I passed onto you as of first importance: that **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...***

Rom 6:5 *If we have been **united with him like this in his death**, we will certainly also be **united with him in his resurrection...***

c.) Our faith stands or falls with the resurrection of Christ

40 “Faith comes from hearing the message...” and the message is heard through the word of Christ (Rom 10:17). Because the resurrection of Christ is the centre of the apostolic message, it should also be the centre of our faith and testimony:

45 Rom 10:9 *...for, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart **that God raised him from the dead**, you will be saved.*

1Co 15:14-20 speaks clearly of the importance of the resurrection in relationship to our faith. If Christ is not risen then:

- our preaching is in vain (v. 14a)
- your faith is in vain (v. 14b)
- we are false witnesses (v. 15)
- you are still in your sins (v. 17)
- those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost (v. 18)

10 The resurrection of Christ is absolutely indispensable for our faith.

2. The manner of the resurrection of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ was raised from the dead (passive). God raised his Son from the dead (active). The Holy Scriptures confirm this:

15 Act 2:24 *God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.*

But look at the following words of Jesus too:

20 Joh 10:18 *No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.*

25 Compare this with Joh 2:19: *“Jesus answered them: ‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.’”*

Rom 8:11 *And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who lives in you.*

30 We can conclude from this that the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was the work of the three persons of the Trinity!

a.) An authentic resurrection

35 Jesus Christ is truly risen, that means he was really dead. Some insist that Christ did not really die but was only unconscious and that he came to himself in the tomb. The Holy Scripture says explicitly though that Christ really died and rose again:

40 Mar 15:44-45 *Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph.*

45 Joh 19:33-35 *But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.*

Rev 1:18 *I am the Living One; I was dead and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.*

- 5 What an irony that it should be the enemies of Jesus who confirm that he actually died! God can in his sovereignty even use his enemies to testify to the authenticity of the resurrection of Christ (cf. Mat 27:62-66 and 28:11-15: the soldiers who guarded the sealed tomb and who were then bribed by the chief priests!).

b.) A bodily resurrection

10 The resurrection of Jesus was **a bodily resurrection**. Modernism would like to deny the bodily resurrection of Christ. But this is contrary to the testimony of Scripture:

- 15 • Psa 16:10: This passage indicates a bodily resurrection: *“Because you will not abandon me to the grave, **nor will you let your Holy One see decay!**”* Act 2:31, which is a quotation from Psa 16:10, also confirms this: *“He [David] foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that neither was he abandoned to the netherworld nor did his flesh see corruption.”*
 - Joh 20:5-8: The empty tomb also speaks of a bodily resurrection.
 - 20 • Luk 24:36-43 and Joh 20:25-28: Christ’s appearances in the midst of his disciples also show that the Risen One had a body:
1. Luk 24:39: *“Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.”*
 - 25 2. Mat 28:9; Joh 20:25-29: the scars (his feet, hands and side) of the Lord were visible after his resurrection.
 3. He ate and drank (cf. Luk 24:42-43; Joh 21:12-13; Act 10:40-41).

The testimony of Jesus himself after his resurrection should be mentioned as well: e.g. his meeting with the two disciples on the Emmaus road and his appearance to Thomas (Luk 24:13ff; Joh 20:24-29).

c.) A unique resurrection

35 The resurrection of Jesus Christ was a unique resurrection. Until then, a resurrection meant a continuation of life on this earth. It was a return to a mortal body, and so the person would die again later on. The resurrection of Christ was a resurrection in a glorious body and for eternity. He would never see death again!

Rom 6:9 *For we know that **since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again**; death no longer has mastery over him.*

40 Rev 1:18 *I am the Living One; I was dead and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.*

3. The consequences of the resurrection

a.) The consequences for Jesus Christ himself

The resurrection was the proof of his divinity:

- 5 Rom 1:4 *...who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Jesus did not become the Son of God because of the resurrection (as some liberal theologians maintain²⁷). The resurrection was in fact the proof of his divinity. It proved his authority to
10 teach as well as his claim to be the Son of God (cf. Mat 12:38-40 and Joh 2:13-22).

Mat 28:6 *He is not here he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.*

15 To deny the resurrection of Jesus is the same as denying his divinity!

b.) The consequence for believers

Joh 14:19 *Before long the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.*

(1) Before God we are endued with the righteousness of Christ

- 20 Rom 4:25 *He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.*

By raising his Son, God makes it clear that he has accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on Golgotha. By it he also shows that we, who believe on Christ, are justified. Christ is our
25 substitute not only in his death but also in his resurrection (cf. Eph 2:5-6). *The Christ who is for us is also the Christ who is in us.*

(2) We have a living hope

- 1Pe 1:3 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...*
30

²⁷ So for example the Neo-Hegelian Wolfhart Pannenberg who ascribes to the resurrection of Jesus Christ a retro-active effect. Compare Henri Blocher, *Christologie*, série FAC ETUDE (Vaux-sur-Seine, France: Faculté Libre de Théologie Evangélique, 1986), I, p. 140. Blocher summarises Pannenberg's theory in the following words: "He believes in solving (it) all by attributing to the resurrection a retro-active effect with regard to being, in an ontological way." (French original text: "Il croit tout résoudre en donnant à la résurrection une efficacité rétroactive quant à l'être, ontologiquement.") I am willing to consider the ideas of those who think that the disciples (a posteriori, so to say) attributed to Jesus later on the title 'Son of God', but to suggest a retro-active ontological divine Sonship seems completely irrational to me.

Because the risen Christ lives eternally, we have a living hope, that is a solid foundation for our future (*and hope does not disappoint us*, Rom 5:5), because he himself is our hope (1Ti 1:1). The Holy Scripture speaks of the eternal despair of unbelievers (those who are lost):

- 5 Job 8:13 *Such is the destiny of all who forget God; so perishes the hope of the godless.*
- Job 11:20 *But the eyes of the wicked will fail, and escape will elude them; their hope will become a dying gasp.*
- 10 Pro 10:28 *The prospect of the righteous is joy, but the hopes of the wicked come to nothing.*
- 15 Eph 2:12 *...remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, **without hope and without God in the world.***

(3) We walk in newness of life

Our sanctification is a consequence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

- 20 Rom 6:4 *We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, **we too may live a new life.***
- 25 Eph 2:6 *And **God raised us up** with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.*

We can walk in newness of life thanks to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The source of strength for newness of life is described in

- 30 Eph 1:19-20 *...and his **incomparably great power for us** who believe. That power is like **the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ** when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.*

- 35 The greatness of this strength working in us is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ; therefore we have the testimony of the apostle Paul:

- 40 Phi 3:8-10 ***...to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...***

Instead of speaking of “a sanctified life” we could also speak of “a victorious life”. A victorious life is a result of the resurrection of Christ:

- 45 1Co 15:55-57 ***But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.***

These wonderful words of the apostle Paul are found at the end of the so-called great resurrection chapter and are the climax of the resurrection message.

(4) We have a living High Priest

Rom 8:34 *Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us!*

5 Heb 7:25 *Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.*

This high priestly ministry of Jesus, which was only rendered possible through his resurrection, is something we need every day. He intercedes for us before the Father through his blood which was shed for us (Heb 9:24). This is true even when we sin (cf. 1Jo 1:9; 2:1).

This is also the reason why he can promise us his daily presence:

Mat 28:20 *And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age!*

15 (5) We too will be raised

1Th 4:14 *We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.*

20 2Co 4:14 *...because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.*

Our own resurrection (or transformation at the rapture) is a result of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Christ is at the same time the guarantee for our resurrection (Rom 8:11) and also the model for our resurrection (cf. 1Co 15:49; Phi 3:21).

c.) The consequences for unbelievers

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is ultimately the reason for the resurrection of all mankind (believers and unbelievers):

30 1Co 15:22 *For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*

In addition to this, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the guarantee for the resurrection of all mankind (cf. Joh 5:28-29). Over and above this, the resurrection of Christ is an infallible indication of the coming judgement of the world (Act 17:31; 2Ti 4:1).²⁸

35 B. The ascension and exaltation of Jesus Christ

I make a distinction between *ascension* and *exaltation*. By the *ascension of Christ* I understand his return to heaven in his resurrection body, whereas I understand the *exaltation of Christ* as that act of the Father through which he lets his Son sit at his right hand.

²⁸ For more regarding the resurrection of believers and unbelievers see my brochures “Biblical Eschatology” and “The Revelation of John”.

Christ's ascension was an event which men here on earth could observe:

- 5 Luk 24:50-51 *When he had led them out to **the vicinity of Bethany**, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was **taken up into heaven**.*
- 10 Act 1:11-12 *Men of Galilee, they said, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, **will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven**. Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city.*
- 15 The exaltation of Jesus Christ was, on the contrary, something that happened in heaven and therefore could not be observed by men:
- Act 2:33 *Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.*
- 20 Phi 2:9 *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name...*

1. The purpose of the ascension and exaltation of Christ

In his farewell discourse (Joh 14 to 16), Jesus spoke of the reasons for his ascension:

a.) In order to prepare a place for his own

- 25 Joh 14:2-3 *In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if **I go and prepare a place for you**, I will come back and take you to be with me so that you also may be where I am.*
- 30 One day he will return and take us to himself. This prospect should fill us with a joy and expectation that others can see:
- 35 1Pe 1:7-8 *These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in **praise glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed**. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are **filled with inexpressible and glorious joy...***
- 40 Phi 3:20 *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ...*

b.) In order to send the Holy Spirit

Joh 16:7 *But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor [the Paraclete = the Holy Spirit] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.*

5

The letter to the Hebrews gives us further information concerning the ascension of Christ:

c.) In order to go before us

Heb 6:20 *...where Jesus has entered on our behalf as forerunner, becoming high Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*

10

Heb 10:19-20 *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is his body...*

15 As our precursor, the Lord has paved the way and prepared a place for us in heaven!

d.) In order to be our advocate before God the Father

Heb 5:1 *Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.*

20

Heb 9:24 *For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.*

25 Jesus took up the high priestly ministry in heaven:

Heb 4:14 *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.*

30

The salvation which Christ accomplished on earth is available to everyone who believes (Joh 1:12; 3:16; 1Jo 5:11-13).

2. The consequences of the ascension and exaltation of Jesus Christ

a.) The Father crowns his Son with glory and honour

Sinners crowned Jesus with a crown of thorns:

Heb 2:9 *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*

40

After about 33 years on this earth, Jesus Christ returned to his Father in heaven – nevertheless with the marks of the nails – as victor of Golgotha, to take his place at the right hand of the Father on his throne. On the earth there was no place for him.

5 Joh 1:11 *He came to his own, but his own did not receive him.*

Luk 2:7 *...and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*

10

Kings normally lodge in five or seven star hotels; but for the King of Kings, who humbled himself and came into this world, this was not the case:

15 Mat 8:20 *Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."*

Heb 13:12 *And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.*

20 His Father, however, gives him his rightful position:

Phi 2:9 *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name...*

25 Ps 110:1 *The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."*

The expression "sit at the right hand of God" is found more than ten times in Holy Scripture. In heaven Jesus awaits the manifestation of his final victory.

30 **b.) The outpouring of the Holy Spirit**

Act 2:33 *Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.*

35 Joh 16:7 *But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.*

40 Through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (which is one of the consequences of the ascension of Jesus Christ, as mentioned above), Jesus comes to dwell in the heart of believers (cf. all the passages speaking of "Christ in me" or "Christ in us": Gal 2:20; Eph 2:6-10; Col 1:2.27 and Joh 14:18.23; Mat 28:18).

And by the Holy Spirit, the Lord distributes spiritual gifts to his own in accordance with his will.²⁹

45

1Co 12:4ff A list of spiritual gifts which Jesus has given to the church. See especially verses 7 and 11: "Now to each one the manifestation of the

²⁹ For more regarding the gifts of the Spirit see the last chapter of my brochure "Pneumatology".

Spirit is given for the common good. . . . All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one just as he determines.”

5 Eph 4:8-13 A list of some of the spiritual gifts which Jesus has given to the church.
 “This is why it says: When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men. . . . It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, **so that the body of Christ may be built up...**”

10 Rom 12:4ff Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ, we who are many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.

c.) Christ has been appointed as the supreme head of the church

Eph 1:22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church...

20 Our “master” is in heaven. Therefore we are called upon to lift up our eyes and look to him (Heb 12:2) and to set our minds on the things that are above (i.e. in heaven: Col 3:1-4). The body can maybe survive without one of its members (e.g. a leg which had been amputated), but not without its head. Without the head, the body is dead. The true church is only to be found where the risen Lord is the head. The head serves the body.

25 Eph 5:29 After all, no one hates his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church...

30 Col 2:19 ...he has lost connection with the Head, **from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.**

The human body is commanded by the head. The same principle should be operative in the church of Christ and in our personal life of faith: Authority belongs to Christ the Head.

35 d.) Christ is exalted over all

Christ is the universal Sovereign:

40 Mat 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...”

The exaltation of the Son is the manifestation of God’s immeasurable greatness and power (cf. Eph 1:19).

45 Eph 1:21 ...far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

Phi 2:9 *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name...*

5 For those who belong to him, who have freely accepted his authority with all their hearts, the result of his exaltation is wonderful. But for the godless this reality is terrifying because the universal lordship of Christ concerns them too, and the day will come when they have to bow the knee to him:

10 Phi 2:10-11 *...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

15 Just as the death of Jesus becomes a practical experience in our own lives, so also can his resurrection and exaltation:

Phi 3:10-11 *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

20 Eph 2:6 *And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus...*

25 In concluding this chapter, we recommend the reading of Rom 8:31-39. This passage is a pertinent résumé of the practical outworking in our lives of the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ!

VII. The appropriation of salvation

The operation of the Holy Spirit is indispensable in the outworking of man's salvation. It is he who calls man to turn to Christ (Heb 3:7), convicts him of sin (Joh 16:8-9), brings about the new birth and regeneration (cf. Joh 3:3ff; 6:63; Tit 3:5), baptises him (Act 1:5), makes him a member of the body of Christ, i.e. the church (1Co 12:13), makes him a child of God (adoption), seals him (Rom 8:16; 2Co 1:22), and gives him the strength to live a sanctified life (Rom 8:3-14). We cannot go into all these subjects here, but they are considered in my brochure on "*Pneumatology*". I simply point out that all these things are due to the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men.

In the preceding chapters, we have considered the person and work of Jesus Christ that is the *Saviour* and *Salvation*. This chapter concerns the personal appropriation of salvation by individuals, in other words those who are saved.

It concerns **personal** salvation which begins with **conversion**. But before we talk about conversion, we must consider **calling** and **election**.

A. Calling and election

At the end of this brochure, I add an excursus on the various positions concerning *election*, *predestination*, *free will* and *assurance* or *security of salvation*. There I will present all the positions concerning Supralapsarianism (this is the dogma of double predestination), through to the other extreme, namely Pelagianism which among other things denies original sin. Along with most commentators, I suggest the following order of the so-called eternal ordinances of God: 1. creation of man; 2. permission for the fall of man; 3. salvation through Jesus Christ; 4. election of certain people; 5. outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the elect.

But we are faced with the following question: what do we mean by "election"? Thiessen introduces the discussion on this by the following question:

Is election the sovereign act of God whereby he chose some to salvation solely on the basis of sovereign grace apart from the merits or acts of the individual, or is it the sovereign act of God whereby he chose those whom he foreknew would respond to his gracious invitation? What is a working definition of election?³⁰

First of all what is the meaning of "election"? This word is derived from the Latin "electio" which in its turn comes from the Greek adjective ἐκλεκτός (*eklektós* = *elect*). Thiessen suggests the following definition of election in the context of theology:

³⁰ Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, revised by Vernon D. Doerksen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1979), p. 257.

In its redemptive aspect, election means that sovereign act of God whereby he graciously chose in Jesus Christ for salvation all those whom he foreknew.³¹

But here the next question arises: what relationship exists between God's "foreknowledge" on the one hand and God's "predestination" on the other? Commentators agree that election is based on the foreknowledge of God. **But opinions vary on the actual meaning of foreknowledge.** Thiessen sums up the two interpretations of "God's foreknowledge as follows:

Is it merely prescience or foresight, or does it relate more closely to actual choice? Does God, in his foreknowledge, perceive what each man will do in response to his call and then elect him to salvation in harmony with this knowledge? Or does foreknowledge mean that God, from eternity past, looked with favor upon some and then elected them to salvation?³²

First of all I want to summarise the two different positions. Then I will seek to analyse the interpretation called "God's foreknowledge" and at the same time explain why I prefer the second approach. I recommend moreover the reading of Thiessen's fairly detailed explanation of both positions with their pros and cons.³³

1. Election is based on God's unconditional and sovereign choice

This position considers election as a sovereign act of God through which he chooses certain people (sinners) to be the beneficiaries of his immeasurable grace. According to this interpretation the "foreknowledge" is not just "knowledge in advance" but has much more to do with "choice". According to this concept, God's "advance knowledge" is the same as his choosing. Foreknowledge is therefore identical with election. The exponents of this approach point to the fact that the biblical conception of "know" (especially the Hebrew verb *yāda'* [יָדָע]) often has the meaning of "knowing with predilection" or "knowing with appreciation". The adherents of this method of interpretation refer to such passages as Act 13:48; Rom 9:11ff; Eph 1:4-5.11.

2. Election is based on God's foreknowledge of a person's choice

According to this position, God, in his foreknowledge (i.e. his omniscience), knows in advance who will answer his call, his offer of salvation in Jesus Christ, positively, and therefore he has elected this person to be saved. In other words, God knew in advance (from eternity), who would believe on and receive Christ. This person he has chosen from eternity. Consequently those who hold this position interpret Eph 1:4 as follows: "*Those of whom God knew in advance that they would believe he also chose them in Christ before the foundation of the world...*" Thiessen says the following:

³¹ Henry C. Thiessen, op. cit., p. 258.

³² Ibid., p. 258.

³³ Ibid., pp. 258-265.

That is, election is that sovereign act of God in grace whereby he chose in Christ for salvation all those whom he foreknew would accept him. Though we are nowhere told what it is in the foreknowledge of God that determines his choice, the repeated teachings of Scripture that man is responsible for accepting or rejecting salvation suggest that it is man's response to the revelation which God made of himself that is the basis of his election. The elect are those whom God foresees will respond personally to the gospel.³⁴

We must now consider what "God's foreknowledge" actually means in this context.

3. Election and the foreknowledge of God

A key passage on this subject is without doubt:

Rom 8:29-30 *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

Concerning this, I refer the reader to my brochure on the epistle to the Romans. I quote my comments from this on the Bible passage concerning election being based on God's foreknowledge (see also 1Pe 1:2). Once again, it is a question of what foreknowledge of God is actually meant. How are we to understand the apostle Paul's assertion "*those God foreknew, he also predestined...*"? Bénétreau introduces this debate as follows:

The first assertion [Bénétreau refers to v. 28], which aims to clarify the meaning of *prothesis*, plan, purpose, has served as argument in opposing directions in the wide secular debate concerning the idea of predestination: what is the relationship between foreknowledge and predestination? Those who fear that man be crushed by the sovereignty of God, insist on predestination based on foreknowledge, and those who fear that God's freedom and authority may not receive their due respect, hold on to the priority of predestination, adding that this is the only way to make sure that salvation is by grace alone.³⁵

What is here actually meant by "foreknowledge"? Is it merely prescience in the sense of seeing beforehand or is there an element of real choice involved, in the sense of preference (predilection)? Did God in his foreknowledge know how each person would react towards his call and did he then elect him or her according to this knowledge? Or is it foreknowledge in the sense of God in past eternity looking with favour on certain people and choosing them to salvation?³⁶ Supporters of these two positions are putting forward linguistic and biblical-theological arguments to support their views. A number of commentators who interpret the verb *to foreknow* (προγινώσκω [*proginōskō*]) to mean *to prefer* or *to predestine*, quote (as mentioned above) the parallel use of the verb *yāda'* (יָדָע) in the Old Testament. It is true that this verb can also mean *to choose* besides its primary meaning of *to know* or *to get to know*. In this case the NBC prefers this interpretation:

³⁴ Henry C. Thiessen, op. cit., 258-259.

³⁵ Samuel Bénétreau, *L'ÉPÎTRE DE PAUL AUX ROMAINS*, 2nd edition (Vaux-sur-Seine, France: ÉDIFAC, Éditions de la Faculté Libre de Théologie Évangélique, 2002), 1: p. 243.

³⁶ With regard to this definition or explanation see Henry C. Thiessen, op. cit., p. 258ff.

Thus ‘to foreknow’ anyone is to enter into communion with a view to conferring special favour upon him. Here ‘to foreordain’ decides that this special favour will take the shape of sonship in Christ. Foreknowledge according to the biblical usage of the verb ‘know’ (cf. Pss. 1:6; 144:3; Ho. 13:5; Am 3:2; Mt. 7:23; Jn. 10:27; 1 Cor. 8:3; Gal. 4:9) implies favour or grace as the eternal beginning of all the other processes of salvation, an interpretation which accords with the whole Pauline theology.³⁷

Since the Hebrew verb *yāda* ‘in the Old Testament has a number of meanings, it seems to me questionable or even dubious to use this synonymous application also for the interpretation of the Greek verbs προγινώσκω (*proginōskō*) in the New Testament. In fact the commentator Godet maintains exactly the opposite:

Not only is this interpretation arbitrary, because there are no examples of it in the NT, and because in secular Greek the word γινώσκειν, *to know*, has the meaning of *decide* only when it is referring to an object, as when we say *to know something*, but never when it refers to a person. In that case the Greek would have to say γινώσκειν περί, *to decide concerning* (a person).³⁸

There is another reason which makes us doubt whether it is appropriate to say that in this passage the verb “foreknow” means *choose* or *elect*. Godet continues his argument as follows:

But what speaks even more clearly against this meaning is what follows: he also predestined them, since in this case the two verbs would have the same meaning and could not be linked with the particle of degree καί, *also*, especially in the light of verse 30, where the successive stages of divine action are strictly distinguished and ordered according to degree.³⁹

I also tend to think that **it is not right to give the first verb *foreknew* the same meaning as the second, *predestined*.**

Bénétreau interprets “*foreknowledge*” in the sense of predestination. However, he prefers to put the interpretation in the context of the letter to the Romans. He says the following:

It is necessary to refer to the context and attempt to determine the specific contribution of our passage. For us there is no doubt whatever that in chapters 9–11, not to mention other shorter passages, the apostle is attached to a strong doctrine of predestination, exalting God’s absolute sovereignty, the priority of his initiatives, and proclaiming his perfectly free salvation, apart from works.⁴⁰

This is indeed a weighty argument. Chapters 9–11 of Romans are not without reason spoken of as the stronghold of the Calvinists that is those who adhere to the teaching of deterministic predestination. Certainly a good number of commentators think that the particular statements do not require a priori a deterministic interpretation. Godet proposes the following explanation:

³⁷ D. Guthrie, J. A. Motyer, A. M. Stibbs, D. J. Wiseman, *The New Bible Commentary Revised*, (London: InterVarsity Press, 1970), p. 1033.

³⁸ Frédéric Godet, *Commentaire sur l’Épître aux Romains* (Paris: Sandoz & Fischbacher; Geneva: Desrois, Neuchâtel: J. Sandoz, 1880), II: p. 212. (We translated it from French into English)

³⁹ Ibid. (We translated it from French into English)

⁴⁰ Samuel Bénétreau, op. cit., 1: pp. 243-244. (We translated it from French into English)

The sense which we might find seems to me to be this: those to whom he was looking in love from all eternity, those whom he had ever seen and discerned *as his own*. In what way had God *known* them *beforehand*? Of course not as people who should *exist* one day. Because in that case foreknowledge would refer to all men, and the apostle would not say: “*those whom* he foreknew”. He did not foreknow them as future redeemed and glorified ones either; for this is the object of the decree of predestination of which the apostle is going to speak; and this object cannot be that of foreknowledge at the same time. There is only one answer: foreknown as those who will fulfil the prerequisite of salvation, *faith*, hence: *foreknown as his own through faith*. This is indeed the meaning to which many commentators were led, Saint Augustine himself in his early days, then the Lutheran exegetes . . . The action of *knowing*, as well as the action of seeing, assumes that there is an object perceived by the person who knows or sees. It is not the action of seeing or knowing that creates the object; it is the other way round, it is the object which determines the action of knowing or seeing. It is the same way with the divine fore-seeing and fore-knowing, because for God, who lives above time, fore-seeing is seeing and knowing what will be, knowing what for him is already there. Thus it is the faith of the believer, as a future reality, but existing in his eyes, which determines his foreknowledge. This faith does not exist because God sees it; on the contrary, he sees it because it will exist at a given point in time. In this way, we are arriving at the thoughts of the apostle: those of whom God knew beforehand that they will believe one day, whose faith he has beheld in eternity. It is those whom he designated, *predestined* (προώρισεν) as the object of a magnificent decree, namely that he will not abandon them until he has led them to the perfect likeness of his own Son.⁴¹

Consequently all those are predestined whom God knew from eternity would one day believe. It is a case of God’s foreknowledge of faith in Jesus Christ which is the only way of receiving the righteousness which counts before God. I am also of the opinion that this interpretation is in complete accord with the central theme of the epistle to the Romans (*justification by faith*). See also Archer who, speaking of Romans 9 (especially v. 17), says the following:

According to these verses God has chosen His redeemed from all eternity, “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4). This means He did not have to wait and see; for He who knows all things from beginning to end, knows what each man’s response will be to the call of Christ.⁴²

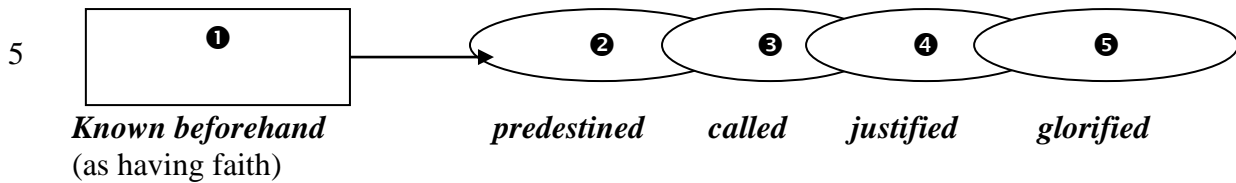
In other words, election is based on advance-knowledge of faith. I also tend towards this way of seeing things.

Foreknowledge therefore precedes *predestination*; the latter is the result of the former action. The content of the divine ordinance of predestination is the realisation of the likeness (image) of the Son in the lives of all believers (known in advance as those who believe). Christ is the Elect One par excellence (cf. Isa 42:1; Luk 9:35). Believers, his brothers are “chosen (elect) in him” (cf. Eph 1:4-6).

⁴¹ Frédéric Godet, *Commentaire sur l’Épître aux Romains*, II: pp. 213-214. (We translated it from French into English)

⁴² Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of BIBLE DIFFICULTIES* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), p. 394.

Seen from the divine perspective this *predestination* (as also election) could be illustrated as follows:



10 I tend to agree with this second interpretation of divine election (as does Thiessen). I refer back to the controversy of “hypothetical Universalism” (Jesus died for all mankind) versus “expiatio definitiva” (Jesus died only for the elect) which I discussed in Chapter 5 under the title “Consequences of the death of Jesus Christ”. I will limit myself now to a reminder of some words of Jesus which in my opinion tend to support my interpretation of predestination and election:

15 Mat 22:14 *For many are invited, but few are chosen.*

20 Along with many other commentators, I tend to interpret these words as follows: God wants all men to be saved (cf. 1Ti 2:3-4; 2Pe 3:9). He calls them through the Holy Spirit (Heb 3:7-8) to come to Jesus Christ, his Son, who died for all mankind (cf. 1Jo 2:1-2). But just as his sacrifice is only efficacious for those who receive him, so only those are elect who actually come to Christ: many are called (invited), but only those are elect who give a positive answer to the call of the Holy Spirit.

25 The following words of Jesus confirm this:

Joh 6:44 *No-one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.*

30 From these words of Jesus we might conclude that God does not want to elect/choose all men for salvation, but that he chooses only some of them according to his good-pleasure. But Jesus says in another place:

35 Joh 12:32 *But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will **draw all men** to myself.*

The Lord draws all men to himself... but only those who come to him and receive him (cf. Joh 1:12) will be saved!

B. Conversion

40 The Old Testament mentions conversion more than a thousand times. *Conversion, to be converted* is mainly expressed by the Hebrew verb “šūb” (שׁוּב) whose primary meaning is (re)turning:

45 Isa 31:6 *Return (שׁוּב [shūbū]) to him you have so greatly revolted against, O Israelites!*

In New Testament Greek conversion is rendered by the noun “μετάνοια” (*metánoia*) which means “*change of mind*” or *attitude, conversion or repentance* according to the context, or by the verb “μετανοέω” (*metanoeō*), which can mean: *to change one’s attitude, to be converted, to repent or to regret*.

5

Mat 3:2 *...repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near!*

Mat 3:8 *Produce fruit in keeping with repentance!*

10 In Greek the words “conversion” and “to be converted” can also be expressed by a root which corresponds to the Hebrew verb “šūb” (שׁוּב [*šūb*]): the noun ἐπιστροφή (*epistrophé*):

Act 15:3 *The church sent them on their way, and as they travelled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had **been converted**. This news made all the brothers very glad.*

15

This can also be expressed by the verb ἐπιστρέφω (*epistréphō*) which can have the following meaning, depending on the context: *to turn towards, to turn to, to turn back, to turn around, and to be converted*. The meaning of to “*be converted*” we find illustrated in:

20

1Th 1:9 *For they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how **you turned to** God from idols to serve the living and true God...*

25 Hence, by “conversion” or “to be converted” we mean the action of *turning from* (something or someone, e.g. from a false god) in order *to turn to* (the true) God.

Conversion is based on repentance and faith:

30 Heb 6:1-2 *Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance (μετάνοια [*metánoia*]) from acts that lead to death, and of faith (πίστις [*pístis*]) in God...*

35 Conversion is not something that man can earn, e.g. he cannot be converted, when he would choose to do so. Conversion is much more an offer of divine grace which man can accept or reject:

40 Joh 6:44 *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.*

Jer 31:18 *Restore me, and I will return (in Hebrew: הָשִׁיבֵנִי וְאָשׁוּבָה [*h^ašībēnī w^e’āšūbā^h*]) because you are the Lord my God.*

45 Heb 3:7-8 *So, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert...”*

50 The passage Heb 3:7-8 shows of course that we have the possibility (i.e. freedom) to reject God’s call to repentance. As mentioned above, Calvinism with its doctrine of irresistible grace (*gratia irresistibilis*) teaches exactly the opposite. We shall return to this later but will

mention here already passages such as Mat 23:37 (cf. Luk 13:34) and Luk 7:30 which seem to speak against this Calvinistic doctrine.

The question now arises as to the logical order of the experience of salvation. Thiessen replies as follows:

There is, of course, no chronological sequence; conversion, justification, regeneration, union with Christ, and adoption, all take place at the same instant. Sanctification alone is both an act and a process. But there is a logical sequence . . . This is done because the Scriptures appeal to man to turn to God . . . Conversion is that turning to God, and it represents the human response to the call of God. It consists of two elements: repentance and faith. The Scriptures never ask man to justify himself, to regenerate himself, or to adopt himself. God alone can do these things, but man by God's enablement can turn to God. The church at Jerusalem acknowledged, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18; cf. 2 Tim. 2:25). It seems clear that repentance and faith lead to justification, and justification leads to life, and not the reverse (Rom. 5:17f.).⁴³

I am following this chronological sequence suggested by Thiessen and, therefore, move on to conversion which consists of the two elements: repentance and faith.

1. Repentance

Repentance is often confused with penance, although Scripture clearly teaches that man cannot pay/atone for his sin and guilt. Any human attempt to pay off his debt through his own efforts (works) is an insult to God (i.e. his work on Golgotha). It is like saying that we do not need the grace and forgiveness of God, made available by the substitutionary work of redemption by Jesus Christ.

a.) Definition: what do we mean by "repentance"?

This word is derived from Latin: "re" and "paenitentia", which can be translated by "*regret*". In Wikipedia we find the following definition: Repentance is choosing to turn to God. In religious contexts it usually refers to confession to God, ceasing sin against God, and resolving to live according to religious law. It typically includes an admission of guilt, a promise or resolve not to repeat the offense; an attempt to make restitution for the wrong, or in some way to reverse the harmful effects of the wrong where possible.

b.) The importance of repentance

(1) Repentance is indispensable for salvation

This is shown in the following (and many other) passages:

⁴³ Henry C. Thiessen, op. cit., p. 268.

Act 2:38 *Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

5 Act 3:19 *Repent⁴⁴ therefore, and be converted,⁴⁵ that your sins may be blotted out...*

Compare these passages with the following one in the Old Testament:

10 Pro 28:13 *He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.*

(2) God's call to repentance is addressed to all mankind

15 Act 17:30 *God has overlooked the times of ignorance, but now he demands that all people everywhere repent (μετανοεῖν [metanoēin]).*

2Pe 3:9 *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness, but he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (εἰς μετάνοιαν [eis metánoian] = toward repentance).*

20 (3) All the Old Testament prophets called to repentance

Notice however that the prophets did not all express this in the same way.

25 Jer 8:6 *I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right. No one repents of his wickedness, saying "What have I done?" Each pursues his own course like a horse charging into battle...*

When speaking of the great preachers of repentance in the Old Testament, we think mainly of Jeremiah, Amos and Jonah.

30 (4) Repentance was a central theme in the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ

John the Baptist declared:

Mat 3:2 *...Repent for the kingdom of God is near.*

35 Jesus said the same, see for example:

Mat 4:17 *Repent, for the kingdom of God is near.*

(5) Jesus commanded his disciples to preach repentance

⁴⁴ Imperative Aorist μετανοήσατε [metanoēsate].

⁴⁵ Imperative Aorist ἐπιστρέψατε [epistrépsate].

This commission (command) of Jesus was not only for his disciples of that time it is intended even more for his servants today!

Mar 6:12 *They went out and preached that people should repent.*

5

Luk 24:47 *...and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*

Jesus disciples obeyed him and preached repentance wherever they went:

10

Act 2:38 *Peter replied: "Repent and be baptised every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

15 Act 3:19 *Repent then,⁴⁶ and turn to God,⁴⁷ so that your sins may be wiped out...*

Act 20:21 *I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.*

(6) There is joy in heaven over one person who repents

20 The (holy) angels rejoice over one person who repents:

Luk 15:7 *I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.*

25

Luc 15:10 *In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*

c.) The manner of repentance

30 The person who sees himself in the light of God and who allows this light entrance into his life repents with his whole being:

(1) The understanding

The sinner recognises:

- his sin
- his guilt before God and man
- his lost state
- the necessity of new birth (i.e. renewal)

40 Compare this with the parable of the prodigal son who recognises his sin and returns to the father (Luk 15:17-19).

⁴⁶ Imperative Aorist μετανοήσατε [metanoēsate].

⁴⁷ Imperative Aorist ἐπιστρέψατε [epistrépsate].

Suggestion: we know different kinds of “knowledge of sin”:

1. **The psychoanalytic method:** This method is now used very often in the Western World. But it is all too often inadequate since it leads all too often to repression rather than confession of sin and restitution.
2. **The Pharisaic method:** You compare yourself with others and deplore their sin instead of your own. This method is also to be rejected because it leads to self-righteousness rather than the recognition of one’s own sinfulness.
3. **Conviction by the Holy Spirit** (cf. Joh 16:8): Man naturally wants to justify himself. This natural reflex can only be overcome by the Holy Spirit working in us (cf. Heb 3:7-8).

(2) Our feelings

A person who has been convicted by the Holy Spirit feels (experiences) remorse:

Mat 21:29 *“I will not,” he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.*

A wonderful illustration of this is found in the reaction of some of the listeners, who were convicted (smitten) by the words of the apostle Peter at Pentecost:

Act 2:38 *Peter replied: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...”*

Compare this reaction with that of the believers in the church at Corinth after they heard the words of reproach from the apostle Paul:

2Co 7:9 *...yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us.*

When our minds and our feelings are overwhelmed (filled) by awareness of sinfulness and remorse even our bodies may be affected. The experience of David (having been) convicted of his sin with Bathsheba is a good illustration of this:

Psa 32:3-4 *When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.*

Psa 38:18 *I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin.*

(3) Our will

Real repentance leads to an act of the will of the person who has been convicted by the Holy Spirit. Repentance, involving our will, may be described as the climax or breakthrough of repentance. Without such repentance there is no turning away from sin, from the old ways of life. Genuine repentance is the prerequisite for a complete turning to God. Such repentance shows itself through:

(a) Confession of sin

Here are three Biblical references to underline this important truth:

Psa 38:18 *I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin.*

Luk 15:21 *The son said to him: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."*

1Jo 1:9 *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

(b) Turning away from sin

Isa 55:7 *Let the wicked **forsake his way** and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*

Pro 28:13 *He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and **renounces** them finds mercy.*

(c) Turning to God

We have quoted Isa 55:7 where the wicked is called upon to forsake his sinful way and **turn to God:**

Isa 55:7b *Let him **turn to the Lord**, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*

Act 2:38 *...Repent **and**...*

Rev 2:5 *Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent **and do the things you did at first**. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.*

Repentance will be shown as genuine when a sinner is ready to make amends for his wrongdoing as far as this is possible (cf. Luk 19:8; Lev 5:21-26; Num 5:6-8).

Luk 3:8: *Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.*

d.) Means leading to repentance

From God's perspective repentance is a gift:

Act 5:31 *God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.*

Act 11:18 *When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying: "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."*

From man's perspective repentance is caused (externally) by:

(1) The Word of God

Mat 12:41 *The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; **for they repented at the preaching of Jonah**, and now one greater than Jonah is here.*

The example of the parable of Lazarus and the rich man shows that the crucial point is man's response given to the testimony of God's Word. The influence of miracles (or similar things) is not mentioned:

Luk 16:30-31 *'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' He said to him: "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."*

The impact of the preaching of the apostle Peter at Pentecost in Jerusalem is an excellent example:

Act 2:37 *When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles: "Brothers, what shall we do?"*

(2) The goodness of God

Rom 2:4 *Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that **God's kindness** leads you toward repentance?*

2Pe 3:9 *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. **He is patient** with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

(3) Chastisement by God

God chastises his children not simply to give free rein to his anger. Rather, he chastises them that they might return to him in repentance:

Heb 12:6.10-11 *...because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. . . . Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*

Rev 3:19 *Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.*

(4) Mutual exhortation between Christians and church discipline

The goal of mutual exhortation is the repentance of the Christian who has committed sin. It is not a matter of condemning someone. The exhortation should be constructive, not destructive:

Mat 7:5 *You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye!*

We should stick to the instructions of Jesus, which he gave to his disciples concerning discipline within the local church, having mentioned the universal church just before (i.e. in Mat 16:18):

Mat 18:15-17 *If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector...*

2Co 2:6-8 *The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.*

Church discipline can be compared to prophylactic treatment. It should not be confused with a court trial.

(5) Personally meeting God

When someone is led to repentance, he experiences a special encounter with the Lord. Here are some examples of people who repented:

Act 9 The repentance of the apostle Paul (Saul becoming Paul)

Job 42:5-6 Job who held on to God by faith repented saying: *"My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."*

Zec 12:10 At the end of time the nation of Israel will repent saying: *"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son."* (cf. Rev 1:7 and Rom 11:25-27)

e.) Different ways of repenting

In Scripture we find that people expressed repentance in different ways: by weeping, fasting, tearing their clothes, etc.:

1Ki 21:27 *When Ahab heard these words, **he tore his clothes**, put on sackcloth and **fasted**. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly.*

Jon 3:5 *The Ninevites believed God. They declared **a fast**, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, **put on sackcloth**.*

5 Mat 26:75 *Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and **wept bitterly**.*

Careful, it is the attitude of the heart which matters, not the outward manifestation:

10 Joe 2:12-13 *Even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.*

15

We must distinguish between the repentance of the unbeliever and that of the believer:

(1) The repentance of unbelievers

20 For them, repentance is the first and indispensable step towards obtaining salvation. Let us return to the example of the conversion of a great number of Jews at Pentecost:

Act 2:37-38 *When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles: “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ **for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**”*

25

(2) The repentance of believers

30 For the believer repentance is not just a one-time experience but rather a (permanent) attitude. If a believer commits sin, he can be restored to fellowship with the Lord through genuine repentance:

1Jo 1:9 ***If** we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

(3) Repentance of the (local) church

35 In 1Co 5:2ff, we see that Paul exhorts the church in Corinth to repent of the sin, which they tolerated in their midst. In several letters to the churches mentioned in Rev 2–3, we find a call of the Lord to repentance. Even today the Lord calls churches to repent, for repentance is the prerequisite/basis for revival.

(4) The repentance of Israel (as a nation)

The Bible speaks about the repentance of Israel as a nation at the end of time when Christ returns:

- 5 Zac 12:10 *And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.*
- 10 Rom 11:25-27 *I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.*
- 15

But today, in the dispensation of grace, there is no difference between the repentance of a Jew and a gentile:

- 20 Rom 3:9-10.23 *What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one . . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...*

(5) Repentance that is missing the goal

- 25 The Bible speaks also about a false repentance:

- Hos 6:1-2; 7:16 *Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us that we may live in his presence. . . . They do not turn to the Most High; **they are like a faulty bow.** Their leaders will fall by the sword because of their insolent words. For this they will be ridiculed in the land of Egypt.*
- 30

- 35 Instead of really repenting, we can merely feel sorry about a personal material loss or about the loss of face (injured pride) as was the case with King Saul:

- 1Sa 15:30 *Saul replied: "I have sinned. But please honour me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord your God."*
- 40

It is also possible to feel remorse because of the painful consequences of one's sin:

- Mat 27:3 *When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders.*
- 45

This sort of repentance will never lead us back to God. We cannot offer to God repentance as a merit (an item of good work).⁴⁸

Suggestion: Here are some examples of wrong kinds of repentance:

- 5
- Penance i.e. doing acts of penance, self-castigation, injuring oneself (self-mortification), asceticism
 - Self-condemnation, self-accusation
 - Having feelings of remorse
- 10
- Superficial confession (with one's lips only)⁴⁹

Conclusion: true repentance will always lead on to faith. It is always followed by a turning away from sin and a turning to God. Repentance is never a final destination; rather it marks a new beginning:

15

Act 2:38 *“Repent and...”* (The word ‘and’ indicates that repentance will show itself in practical ways)

In addition to faith true repentance will produce good works:

20

Jug 10:16 *Then they got rid of the foreign gods among them and served the Lord. And he could bear Israel's misery no longer.*

25

Rev 2:5 *Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.*

- True repentance has not just to do with our sins; it will affect/influence our character as well.
 - True repentance is first and foremost an attitude and that not just occasionally.
 - True repentance is always a victory of the Lord in a person's life and should always redound to his glory.
 - True repentance is obedience to God's command. It is important to realise that my confession of sin never makes worse than I am.
- 30

35 2. Faith

The Word of God says that it is impossible to please God without faith:

40

Heb 11:6 *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

⁴⁸ Works of repentance (penance) found in certain Catholic circles are ultimately unscriptural.

⁴⁹ You confess a certain sin knowing that you will commit it again. It has to be noted that such abuses are common in the confessional practice. Here just one example: during carnival many indulge in fornication and/or adultery; then you just go for confession and confess this to the priest in order to be able to go to mass. The person concerned knows beforehand that he or she will commit the same sin again and this so to say ‘in good faith’ that the priest will absolve him or her again.

a.) What is “faith”?

The following verse is an excellent definition of what faith is:

Heb 11:1 *Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*

The rest of the 11th chapter of the letter to the Hebrews (often entitled ‘the heroes of faith’) represents ultimately a list of men and women who lived lives of faith and trust. Their lives and experiences illustrate admirably what is meant by “faith”. Please, refer also to the examples mentioned in Mat 8:10 and 15:28 where Jesus commends the faith of the people concerned as an example. Abraham is known as “the father of faith” (cf. Jam 2:23), because he trusted God without having seen his inheritance:

Gen 15:6 *Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*

This verse is very important. It is quoted in the following passages of the New Testament:

Rom 4:3 *What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness (here with reference to justice and justification).”*

Gal 3:6-7 *Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham (here with reference to faith).*

Jam 2:23-26 *And the Scripture was fulfilled which says: “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone (here with reference to works).*

The word “believe” is expressed in Hebrew by the Hiphil of the verb אָמַן (‘āman). The same word can, depending on the context, also mean *trust, to be certain, to be reassured, etc.* The adjective אָמֵן (‘āmēn) means “true”. Used as adverb this word means “certain”, “so be it” i.e. “amen”. Our “amen” at the end of a prayer relates to this Hebrew root and simply means “so be it”. It is noteworthy that this Hebrew word root can mean *faith, confidence, faithfulness, firmness* as well as *truth*. In other words: *faith* and *truth* belong together!

In his Gospel, the apostle John calls Jesus Christ, the Son of God, “the Word” (in Greek λόγος [lógos]). In the book of Revelation, John gives him the same title (cf. Rev 19:13). At the same time, he calls him *the Amen, the Faithful and True* (Rev 3:14; 19:11). These names correspond to the Hebrew word root אָמַן (‘āmēn). The truth and true faith are both rooted in Christ, the True, the Word of God. And this “Word” (Logos), upon which the believers of the Old Testament relied, became flesh (cf. Joh 1:1.14).

According to the New Testament, the word “believe” means *trusting Christ and his finished work*. In the New Testament, especially in the Gospel of John, but also in Revelation, *believing* is:

- receiving Joh 1:12

- drinking Joh 4:14
- coming Joh 6:37
- eating Joh 6:54
- following Joh 8:12
- 5 • entering Joh 10:9
- opening Rev 3:20

Faith is not accepting blindly some vague offers. Rather, it is building on the surest foundation of the Word of God.

10

2Ti 1:12 *That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because **I know whom I have believed**, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.*

15 *True faith* in itself ‘does’ nothing, it takes hold of ‘what is done’ already (by God). Faith accomplishes nothing, it accepts things accomplished already. It accepts salvation accomplished by Christ. However, faith will not remain inactive (cf. Gal 5:6; Jam 2:22; see also 3.c. below).

b.) How is faith produced?

(1) Faith is a gift of God

20

Joh 6:29 *Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”*

25

Rom 12:3 *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, **in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.***

(2) Faith is a gift of Christ

30

“The author of faith” is one of the many titles of Christ:

Heb 12:2 *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

(3) Faith is a fruit of the Spirit of God

35

Gal 5:22 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness...*

Unbelief is sin; it resists the working of the Holy Spirit who convicts people of sin and unbelief (cf. Joh 16:8-9).

(4) Faith is man's positive response to the triune God

Faith is man's positive reaction to God's action. Hence faith cannot be separated from our will. It is true, that requires a certain knowledge, because we normally want and accept what we know. But if this knowledge is merely intellectual knowledge, then the heart is not affected. The Word of God tells us that even the demons possess this sort of faith:

Jam 2:19 *You believe that there is one God. You do well! Even the demons believe that and shudder.*

Mere belief in the sense of 'considering something to be true' is not sufficient. Such 'intellectual faith' must become living faith. Faith and repentance are similar in this regard: we have to believe with our whole being or personality, including mind, feelings and will. As mentioned above, the demons believe in the existence of God (Jam 2:19). They even believe that Jesus is the Son of God (cf. Mat 5:6ff) and yet they continue to oppose God.

Regarding faith there is a **divine aspect** and a **human aspect**:

| | | | | |
|---|-----------------|--|---|----------|
| ↓ | God's action: | through his Word (and the Holy Spirit) | | |
| ↑ | Man's reaction: | Yes | = | faith |
| | | No | = | unbelief |

Unbelief does not originate in the mind, but in the heart, i.e. in the will of man.

Psa 14:1 *The fool says in his heart: "There is no God!" They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good.*

God works through his Word which is living and active:

Heb 4:12 *For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

Faith and unbelief are the response of the human heart to the Word of God:

Rom 10:17 *Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.*

c.) What does faith do?

(1) Faith takes hold of promised spiritual possessions/goods

Rom 5:2 *...through whom we have gained **access by faith into this grace** in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.*
(→ Access to grace)

Gal 3:26 *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.* (→ Adoption: member of the family of God)

- 5 Phi 3:9 *...and be found in him, not having a **righteousness** of my own that comes from the law, but that **which is through faith in Christ** – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. (→ Righteousness through Christ)*
- 10 Act 26:18 *...to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may **receive forgiveness of sins** and a place among those who are sanctified **by faith in me**. (→ Forgiveness and heritage)*
- 15 Act 15:9 *He made no distinction between us and them, for he **purified** their hearts by faith. (→ Cleansing)*
- 20 Eph 3:17 *...so that **Christ may dwell in your hearts** through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love... (→ Christ in us)*
- 25 Gal 3:2 *I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? (→ Receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit)*
- 30 1Jo 5:4 *...for everyone born of God overcomes the world. **This is the victory** that has overcome the world, even our faith. (→ Victory over the world)*
- 35 Eph 6:16 *In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can **extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one**. (→ Victory over Satan; cf. Rom 16:20)*
- 40 Heb 11:33-34 ***...who through faith conquered kingdoms**, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. (→ Victory in dangers and various difficulties)*
- 45 Gal 5:6 *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is **faith expressing itself through love**. (→ Faith working by love)*
- 50 1Pe 1:5 *...who through faith are **shielded by God's power** until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. (→ Protection)*
- 55 Heb 6:12 *We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience **inherit what has been promised**. (→ Heirs of the promises)*

Whoever believes (again it is the Gospel of John which provides many details):

- 50 • is given the right to become a child of God: Joh 1:12
 • has eternal life: Joh 3:16

- is not condemned: Joh 3:18
- will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life: Joh 4:14
- has the light of life: Joh 8:12
- finds pasture: Joh 10:9

5 (2) Faith leads to assurance

Heb 11:1 *Now faith is **being sure** of what we hope for and **certain** of what we do not see.*

10 Rom 4:21 *...**being fully persuaded** that God had power to do what he had promised.*

Phi 1:6 *...**being confident** of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

(3) Faith leads to good works

15 “...*faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead...*” (cf. Jam 2:14-26). This is what the apostle Paul has to say concerning faith:

20 Gal 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ and **I no longer live**, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

2Ti 4:7 *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*

C. Justification

25 God is holy and just. Man was created in his image. Therefore God desires man to also be holy and righteous. Because of sin, man has lost his holiness and the righteousness he possessed at the beginning; he has become a sinner and deserves condemnation (cf. Rom 6:23). In order to escape judgement, man must again become righteous. But how? Man cannot
30 regain righteousness through his own efforts (cf. Job 25:4). Only God can render him righteous again.

1. Definition: What do we understand by “justification”?

35 Justification is that act by which God declares the repentant sinner to be righteous and acceptable to him. This is in virtue of Christ’s work of redemption on the cross. In dying on the cross in the sinner’s place, Christ has imputed to him his own righteousness.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Compare *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd edition (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), pp. 636ff.

1Co 1:30 *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our **righteousness**, holiness and redemption.*

5 2Co 5:21 *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the **righteousness of God**.*

2. Objective and subjective justification

By his vicarious death on the cross, Jesus offers **objective justification** to the whole world (cf. Rom 5:18). **Subjective justification**, on the other hand, relates to the repentant sinner's act of faith whereby he fully accepts Christ and his work of redemption and is so declared righteous before God.⁵¹

3. How is man justified?

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that man is justified by forgiveness of sin and inflowing grace (*gratia infusa*). The latter enables him to appropriate new virtues. The Church of Rome also teaches that man can obtain justification on the basis of inherent good qualities. According to this teaching, man can contribute to his justification through his own efforts or merits. The reformers Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and others reacted exactly against these false ideas by referring alone to the Word of God (the famous "*sola scriptura*").

a.) Not through the works of the law

20 Man cannot be saved through his own works:

Rom 3:20 *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.*

25 Why can't man be justified by works? There are two reasons: (1) With the exception of Jesus (Son of Man and Son of God), no man is able to perfectly keep the requirements of the law:

Rom 3:10.23 *There is no one righteous, not even one . . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...*

30 Someone may point to the example of the rich young man whose question about how he could receive eternal life was answered by Jesus with an exhortation to keep the law (of Moses; cf. Luk 18:18ff). But of course it is evident that Jesus gave him this answer in order to help him to understand that it is impossible for man to obtain salvation in his own strength. Why is it impossible? (2) Because he who seeks to justify himself by his good works must fulfil all the commandments of the law:

Gal 3:10 *All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: Cursed is everyone who does not continue **to do everything written in the Book of the Law**.*

40

⁵¹ Compare J. Théodore Mueller, *La Doctrine Chrétienne: Manuel de Théologie Doctrinale pour Pasteurs, Instituteurs et Fidèles* (Brussels: Editions des Missions Luthériennes, 1956), p. 421.

Just one transgression is sufficient to make someone guilty of breaking the whole law:

5 Jam 2:10 *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.*

It is also impossible because of the following: (3) After the fall, man was depraved, that is he became a sinner by nature (cf. Rom 3:10.23; Psa 51:7; Eph 2:1-3). Consequently it is impossible for him to live in conformity with the law and the will of God:

10 Rom 8:6-7 *The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.*

b.) But alone through the saving work of Christ

15 Man can only be justified through faith in Christ:

Gal 2:15-16 *We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we also have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.*

20

Moreover "justification by faith" is not just an "invention of the New Testament". This truth was known clearly in Old Testament times. The first explicit mention of it was when Abram (later God changed his name to *Abraham*) trusted God:

25

Gen 15:6 *Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*

Paul quotes this passage in Rom 4 (v. 3; cf. Gal 3:6) where he explains and illustrates justification by faith in the light of two Old Testament characters, namely Abraham and David. Of course these two men believed that the Redeemer would come, while we, today, believe (and know) that he has come. But, as I have already mentioned above, we are all justified by faith in the same Redeemer.

30

35 Rom 3:22-26 *This righteousness from God comes **through faith** in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are **justified freely by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.** God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as **to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.***

40

45 Paul says clearly that the blood of Christ is responsible for our justification as well as our salvation:

Rom 5:9 *Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!*

This immutable truth is also attested by:

Heb 9:22 *In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*

Torrey summarises this important fact as follows:

Works have nothing to do with justification, apart from the fact that they compromise the latter if we rely on them. The blood of Christ assures us of it, and through faith in Christ we make it our own. We are not justified by our own works but rather by His work. Justified solely on the basis of His blood, the sole condition being our faith.⁵²

But why in fact does God justify us by granting us grace through the blood of Jesus Christ? Thiessen explains that our justification has its source in the heart of God:

Justification thus originates in the heart of God. Realizing not only our lack of righteousness, but also our inability to attain it, he in his kindness determined to provide a righteousness for us. It was his grace that led him to provide it; he was under no obligation whatsoever to do it. In his grace he had regard to our guilt and in his mercy, to our misery.⁵³

4. The results of justification

Here is a list of some of the important results of justification:⁵⁴

- **Remission of penalty**

2Co 5:19 *...that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.*

See also Rom 4:7-9.

- **The imputation of Christ's righteousness**

The believer is now clothed in a righteousness that is not his own, but provided for him by Christ:

⁵² R. A. Torrey, *CE QUE LA BIBLE ENSEIGNE: Une étude complète des grandes doctrines bibliques*. Translated from American English into French under the auspices of Mission Évangélique Belge (Miami, FL.: Editions VIDA, 1979), p. 318. The American original book is not in our possession. We retranslated it from French into English. (French text: Les œuvres n'ont rien à faire avec la justification, excepté de la compromettre, si nous comptons sur elles. Le sang du Christ nous l'assure, la foi en Christ nous en rend possesseurs. Nous sommes justifiés, non par nos œuvres, mais par Son œuvre. Justifiés sur la seule et unique base de Son sang, à la seule et unique condition de notre foi.)

⁵³ Henry C. Thiessen, op. cit., 278.

⁵⁴ Compare with Henry C. Thiessen, op. cit., 279.

Rom 4:5 *However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.*

• **Heirship**

In becoming a co-heir with Christ, the Christian inherits eternal life:

Rom 8:16-17 *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

Tit 3:7 *...so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

• **Deliverance from condemnation and the coming judgement of God**

He who is justified is no longer under condemnation but has peace with God:

Rom 8:1 *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...*

Rom 5:1 *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...*

• **A righteous life style**

Justification has an effect on the practical life of the believer. It leads to a righteous life (at least it should do so):

Phi 1:11 *...filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.*

Christ is righteous; therefore those who are justified by him should also practice righteousness.

1Jo 3:7 *Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.*

• **Assurance of glorification**

Mat 13:43 *Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears let him hear. (cf. Dan 12:3)*

Rom 8:29-30 *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined he also called; those he called he also justified; those he justified he also **glorified**.*

D. New birth or regeneration

The most well-known text on this is without any doubt Joh 3:3-16. Concerning *revival* and *renewal* see also Joh 6:63; Tit 3:5.

1. The meaning of the new birth

- 5 The new birth or regeneration (from God's side) occurs at the moment of conversion (from man's side). As far as conversion is concerned, man is active, as far as the new birth is concerned, he is passive, that is God brings about the rebirth or regeneration in the heart of man through the Holy Spirit.

a.) A new, eternal and holy life

- 10 The old man (before the new birth) is sinful through and through (total depravation):

Eph 2:1-3 *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.*

15

It is true the renewed person remains a sinner but at the same time he is born again:

- 20 Joh 3:3 *In reply Jesus declared: "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."*

- Joh 3:6 *Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.*
- 25

Eph 4:24 *...and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

- 2Co 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*
- 30

b.) A divine nature

This may sound shocking but the Word of God says clearly that the nature of the old man (unregenerate) is of the devil:

- 35 Joh 8:44 *You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to conduct your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*

- 40 On the other hand, the new man is born of God:

Joh 1:13 *...children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, **but born of God.***

5 2Pe 1:4 *Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may **participate in the divine nature** and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

c.) A sanctified life makes it possible for him to live a holy life

The old man can never submit to the law of God; he is incapable of it:

10 Rom 8:7 *...the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, **nor can it do so.***

The new man lives a sanctified life; God enables him to do so:

15 Eze 36:26-27 *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*

20

Following regeneration man has two different natures:

The flesh

(the old nature)

sinful (Rom 7:18-20)
of the devil (Joh 8:44) → the EGO ⇔ CHRIST
unable (Rom 8:7) (I) Gal 2:20

death, everlasting
condemnation

Man spiritually regenerated by the Holy Spirit

(the new nature)

holy: 1Co 1:30
of God: 2Pe 1:4
able: Rom 8:6-7

eternal life

It is true that the Christian, the child of God, has great possibilities, but also a great responsibility:

25 Rom 6:16 *Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?*

30 Rom 6:19 *I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, **so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.***

2. The necessity of the new birth or regeneration

The Holy Scripture testifies to the necessity of being born again that is of regeneration:

Joh 3:3 *In reply Jesus declared: "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."*

Joh 3:7 *You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again'.*

Gal 6:15 *Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.*

a.) God's righteousness requires a new birth

"Without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). But a life of holiness is impossible without being re-clothed with the new nature. In order to lead a godly life (i.e. according to the will of God), we need to be equipped with a **godly nature**. This will of course not mean that a person who is in Christ is in some way "deified". To assert this would in fact be a false interpretation of 2Pe 1:4. It is rather that the spirit of the person is, through salvation in Christ, renewed by being born again of the Holy Spirit. The reborn or renewed person is enabled to resist the desires of the old sinful nature with the help of the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal 5:17) and to live in holiness of life according to the will of God (cf. 1Th 4:3).

God often speaks in Holy Scripture about things that must happen. Here are some examples: Luk 24:26; Heb 9:27; 2Co 5:10, etc. One of these "musts" is the new birth which is even commanded by God:

Joh 3:7 *You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'*

I was born into this world by means of a physical birth and became a citizen of this world. But I can only enter the kingdom of God through being born again, whereby I also become a citizen of Heaven and an inheritor of eternal life (Jn 3:3.5).

There is no evolution:

- from mineral to plant
- from plant to animal
- from animal to man
- from man to God

Man must be born again by the Holy Spirit in order to live according to the will of God.

b.) The sinful nature of man makes the new birth a necessity

The Holy Scripture describes the condition of man by nature as following:

Eph 2:3 *All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. **Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.***

Eph 2:2 *...in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in **those who are disobedient**.*

5 Luk 16:8 *The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For **the people of this world** are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.*

10 Joh 8:44 ***You belong to your father, the devil,** and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*

15 **“Flesh”** gives birth to flesh (cf. Joh 3:6). It can be godless, religious or even pious flesh – but it is still the flesh! That means that the flesh itself (*per se*) cannot please God:

- Contrary to what humanism maintains (since Socrates who spoke of a spark of godliness in man), there is no “good core” in man (cf. Rom 7:18).
- There cannot be a “reformation” or “restoration” of man. The flesh remains flesh; it remains sinful. A complete transformation is necessary (Joh 3:3-7; 2Co 5:17). An example: It is no use cleaning the pipe of the well if the source is polluted!
- Good works are not sufficient (cf. Jer 2:22; 13:23; Rom 3:9-12.22; Jam 2:10).
- No institution (not even the church) can save. An institution cannot wipe out the sins or the sinfulness of man (cf. Joh 1:13). Therefore even the so-called sacraments cannot help (cf. for example 1Pe 3:21).

All religions avoid the fact of the sinful nature of man. It is the same with modern psychotherapy! It is based on a different image of man. The Word of God calls for renewal, the regeneration of man! That is the only way that man can be saved from total depravation.

30 **3. The means of regeneration**

35 Joh 3:4-9 *How can a man be born when he is old? Nicodemus asked. Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born! Jesus answered: “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. **Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.** You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” How can this be? Nicodemus asked...*

40 Jesus answered this intellectual in the following way:

45 Joh 3:14-16 *Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

a.) Through the will of God

Jam 1:18 *He chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.*

5 Joh 1:13 *...children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

Our regeneration is a creative act of God – man cannot obtain it by

- 10
- inheritance
 - his own efforts
 - the efforts of any other person (cf. Joh 1:13; Psa 49:7-8)

b.) Through the Word of God

15 Jam 1:18 *He chose to give us birth through **the word of truth** that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.*

1Pe 1:23 *For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, **through the living and enduring Word of God.***

20 Faith is created in us by the Word of God (or of Christ):

Rom 10:17 *Thus faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.*

c.) Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ

25 Nicodemus asked Jesus how it was possible for someone to be born again (cf. Joh 3:9). Jesus replied in verses 14-16 as follows:

30 Joh 3:14-16 *Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

Thanks to Christ's death and resurrection it is possible to receive a new, from God created life.

d.) Through the Holy Spirit

Joh 3:5 *Jesus answered: "I tell you the truth no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the **Spirit.**"*

40 Tit 3:5 *...he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us **through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit...***

e.) Through faith – the personal decision of man

- If God's will is the means of regeneration, then man must **submit** his will to him.
- If the Word of God is the means of regeneration, then man must listen to it.
- If the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the means of regeneration, then man must accept these and appropriate them.
- If the Holy Spirit is the means of regeneration, then man must obey him (cf. Act 5:32).

All of these can be summed up by the word "faith" or "to believe". Faith is the positive response of man to what God has done:

Gal 3:26 *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus...*

When man believes, God "responds" by making him a child of God.

4. The results of regeneration or new birth

The results of regeneration are at the same time the characteristics of a person who has been born again. They serve as tests, as to whether a person is truly born again:

- **A new life**, and therefore → *a renunciation of sin* (cf. Rom 6:2; 1Jo 5:18). In other words a "**sanctified life**". In relation to this, please see my brochure on "Pneumatology" (Biblical teaching concerning the person and work of the Holy Spirit), where I go into this subject in detail. I deal with the subject of sanctification in Pneumatology because it is a true fruit of the Holy Spirit.
- **Assurance** of new life and a living hope (cf. Rom 5:1-5; 1Pe 1:3-5).
- A desire to live in **fellowship** with God and other Christians.
- **Good works** (Mat 7:16-20; Jam 2:26)

E. Assurance of salvation

I distinguish between:

- **The fact of salvation** (the historical fact accomplished by Jesus Christ on the cross)
- **The preaching of salvation** (salvation is offered through preaching; cf. Rom 10:13-17)
- **The experience of salvation** (personal appropriation of salvation)
- **The assurance of salvation** (the outworking of the salvation that has been experienced)

1. The foundation of assurance of salvation

The **Word of God** is the true foundation for assurance of salvation. Assurance of salvation stands or falls according to faith in the inspiration of Holy Scripture, for it is this which tells man how he can receive salvation and so be born again.

Joh 20:31 *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

5 1Jo 5:13 *I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.*

10 The Word of God announces redemption which is indissolubly bound up with Jesus Christ and what he did. The preaching of salvation is based on the Word of God (Rom 10:17) which also brings about (by the action of the Holy Spirit) faith in the redemption which Jesus Christ has accomplished. I repeat: our assurance of salvation is based on the Word of God. It is not dependent on man. Assurance of salvation can be compared with a ship's anchor – this is found on the outside of the ship.

15 The assurance of salvation which is based on man himself (his intelligence, his feelings, his will, his works or some particular experience) is shaky and illusionary!

2. The generation of assurance of faith

a.) By faith

20 The Word of God can only be received by faith. Through faith, the realities of salvation are experienced and become a certainty. In the writings of the apostle John, we often find the following statement: “*Whoever believes has eternal life*” (cf. Joh 3:16.36; 1Jo 5:13).

b.) By the Holy Spirit

It is the Holy Spirit who offers us the salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ:

25 Joh 16:7-9.13-14 *But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor [the Holy Spirit] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.*

35 Rom 8:14 *...because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*

Rom 8:16 *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*

40 True assurance of salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men. All assurance of faith which rests on our own efforts or works is without value. This sort of “assurance” of salvation can lead to legalism or even fanaticism.

c.) The essence of assurance of faith

The salvation which we have experienced must correspond to that which Jesus Christ acquired for us through his work of redemption on the cross. We must distinguish between:

- 5 • The experience of salvation which is realised **now** and
- The experience of salvation which will be realised **in the future**.

Jesus acquired for us humans and also for the whole of creation a complete and full salvation (cf. Col 1:19-20; Heb 10:10.14). We could call what we now possess, “*possession of salvation based on faith*”:

Eph 2:8 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God...*

15 That which we will possess in the future we could call the “*the salvation hoped for*”:

Rom 8:24 *For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?*

20 True assurance of salvation includes the salvation which the Christian experiences now on earth as well as that which he will one day experience when he is united with the Lord:

1Jo 3:14 *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.*

25 Included in true assurance is all that Jesus has done for us. Again I say that an assurance of faith based on one’s own works or any sort of religious activities is an illusion.

d.) The effect of assurance of salvation

30 The fruit of assurance of salvation is a joyful and liberated life of faith. Someone who does not have assurance of eternal salvation will be prone to discouragement and depression. Take for example Luther who was so afraid of God until he discovered and understood the message of the epistle to the Romans.

(1) A new relationship to God (a new life)

35 Heb 10:19 *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus...*

He who has peace with God prays with joy and trust.

(2) A new relationship to others (a new ministry)

40 Assurance of salvation puts joy and strength to testify and serve into the heart of the believer. Our experience causes us to go to others that they too may experience it.

Act 4:20 *For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*

He who has assurance of salvation need not be afraid, at least as long as he stays in fellowship with the Lord:

- 5 Rom 8:38-39 *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

3. Eternal security (perseverance)

- 10 “*Can a Christian lose his salvation or not?*” This is one of the most controversial questions among evangelicals.⁵⁵ I am very happy with Thiessen’s explanation:

15 If properly understood, this is a very comforting doctrine, but it must not be abused or misinterpreted. The Scriptures teach that all who are by faith united to Christ, who have been justified by God’s grace and regenerated by his Spirit, will never totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but certainly persevere therein to the end. This does not mean that everyone who professes to be saved is eternally saved. Nor even does it mean that everyone who manifests certain gifts in Christian service is necessarily eternally saved. The doctrine of eternal security is applicable only to those who have had a vital experience of salvation. Concerning such, it affirms that they shall never totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace. This is not equivalent to saying that they shall never backslide, never fall into sin, and never fail to show forth the praises of him who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light. It merely means that they will never totally fall away from the state of grace into which they have been brought, nor fail to return from their backsliding in the end.⁵⁶

Blocher⁵⁷ speaks of two different groups of texts, whose meaning seems to be very nearly the same,⁵⁸ and cites a number of examples for each group:

- 30 1. **Texts with warnings** which could suggest that those who do not fulfil the necessary conditions can lose their salvation: Eze 33:18; Mat 18:23-25; Rom 11:20-22; 1Co 10:12; 2Ti 2:12; Heb 3:6.12.14; 6:4ff; 10:23ff; 12:3; Rev 2:4-5.16.25; 3:2-5.10-11.16-19.
- 35 2. **Texts which make security of salvation dependant on the grace of God:** 2Ti 1:12; Jud 24; 1Co 1:8; 10:13; Phi 1:6; 1Th 5:23; 2Th 3:3; 2Ti 2:13; 1Pe 1:15; Mat 24:22-24; Joh 6:39; 10:28; 17:2.6.9.12; Rom 8:34-39; 11:29.

Those who believe that a Christian can lose his salvation (often called *Arminians*⁵⁹) concentrate mainly on the first group of texts. Those on the contrary who hold the opinion

⁵⁵ See also my commentary on chapters 6 and 10 of the epistle to the Hebrews in my brochure on “The epistle to the Hebrews”.

⁵⁶ Henry C. Thiessen, op. cit., p. 294.

⁵⁷ Henri Blocher, *La doctrine du péché et de la rédemption*, new edition revised and augmented (Vaux-sur-Seine, France, 1997). I recommend the reading of the chapter over final perseverance (*la persévérance finale*, vol. II: pp. 335-349).

⁵⁸ Henri Blocher, op. cit.; see pp. 338ff.

that a born again Christian is and remains saved forever,⁶⁰ prefer to quote the passages from the second group of texts. At least at a first reading of the texts, you are left with the impression that the two groups contradict each other. To underline this, here is a passage from both groups:

5 2Ti 2:12 *...if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us...*

10 1Co 1:8-9 ***He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.***

Paul is convinced that God is able to keep his children to the end. This is found for example in Phi 1:6. If, in spite of this, someone should be lost, it would consequently mean that God was not able to keep him from falling. Arminians would say the following: It is true that no one can snatch a Christian out of the hand of the Lord (cf. Joh 10:28⁶¹), but a Christian can detach himself from the Lord and so become apostate. They stick to their point of quoting among others the passages of the first group mentioned above in order to conclude that these passages indicate that a Christian can lose his salvation.

Those who on the contrary insist on eternal security of the saints would answer this controversial question in the following way: It is true that if it would depend on man, then a great many (if not all) would be lost. There is a very real danger from man's (the Christian's) side. But the almighty God is able to protect his children from a fall which could lead to them losing their salvation. Those who hold this position do not contest the fact that a child of God can fall into sin again and that God in the last extremity can punish by physical death (cf. 1Co 5:5; 11:28-32). But this does not mean that he has lost his salvation. According to the words of the Apostle Paul, he risks losing his reward, but not salvation as such (cf. 1Co 3:11-15; 5:5). It is the same with 1Co 9:27: this verse certainly does not say that Paul was afraid of losing his salvation. It is rather his ministry and his reward which are at stake. Blocher⁶² mentions the example of a father who warns his child: "If you go too near the edge then you will fall down the cliff!" and he adds: "The vigilance of an earthly father can sometimes be

⁵⁹ Arminius (his real name was Jacob Hermans, and he came originally from the little village of Oudewaater in Holland) studied under the Theodore Beza (Calvin's successor) in Geneva and at first adhered to his doctrine of predestination. Arminius was a genius. He obtained a Doctor of Theology degree at the University of Basle when he was about 25 years old. He afterwards became professor of Theology at the University of Leyden and began to oppose the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination in that he insisted on man's free will (liberum arbitrium). Contrary to what is generally said, however, Arminius did not openly express an opinion on the subject, which interests us here (security of eternal salvation or the possibility of losing salvation). He simply attacked the Calvinistic teaching of predestination. The successors of Arminius on the contrary openly expressed the opinion that a Christian can lose his salvation. They are called the Arminians or Remonstrants. So when we speak of the Arminian position, which says that someone can lose his salvation, then we are thinking of the successors of Arminius, not Arminius himself.

⁶⁰ Calvinists (Predestinarians) en bloc along with a great number of theologians who contest the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination. Consequently, Calvinists treat the latter just as Armenians too. This is the position that Henry Thiessen, for example, holds (eternal security but not unconditional predestination). I also prefer this position: man is not entirely predetermined, he possesses the liberty of refusing the grace offered by God (e.g. Mat 23:37; Luk 7:30), but God will protect and preserve the salvation of those who have received Christ as Saviour and Lord and thus have been born again. This is probably the most commonly held view among evangelicals in the west. It lies between infralapsarian Calvinism and the Arminian or Wesleyan position (John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, also held the view that a Christian could lose his salvation).

⁶¹ A bastion of those who defend the teaching of the final perseverance of the saints.

⁶² Henri Blocher, op. cit., II: p. 340.

caught unawares, but that of the heavenly Father is infallibly sure!" I subscribe to this point of view. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, neither height nor depth (Rom 8:34-39). An Arminian would say at this point: "Except I myself"! I would reply: "Do I myself then exist outside of what is in heaven or earth?"

5

The question also arises as to whether the Arminian doctrine of the possibility of losing salvation does not imply that someone must ultimately maintain his salvation by good works?

10 The following question must also be borne in mind: If the backslidden Christian can lose his salvation, how bad must his sin be for that to happen? In the light of 1Co 3:11-15 and 5:5, we must ask the following questions:

- Which sins imply (only) a decrease of the heavenly reward?
- Which sins entail the total loss of the reward?
- 15 • And what sin can result in a total loss of salvation?

20

Where are the limits? These subtle questions are a reminder of the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, which introduced a system which distinguishes between different grades of sin (so-called venial sins and mortal sins...).

Blocher sums up⁶³ these two different interpretations as follows:

25

- Arminians say the believer will be saved "if the person remains in the faith".
- The others say, "God will grant that the believer perseveres (until the end)".

One of the reasons for these texts with warnings could be to encourage the believer to remain vigilant and to test the reality of his faith: Am I truly a child of God? Are my deeds an indication of authentic faith (cf. Jam 2:14ff)?

30 There are other serious questions which arise:

- Are we truly saved and preserved by the grace of God (until the end: cf. 1Co 1:8; Phi 1:6)?
- Is salvation by grace something that is granted to us forever or must we ourselves
- 35 maintain it through our own efforts?

40

Various passages indicate that God has the power to keep us to the end. Blocher⁶⁴ rightly poses the question as to how God can be truly almighty if his power comes to an end at the point where human liberty commences.

45

Certainly we do not believe that man is a pre-programmed machine. He possesses freedom of choice. Everyday life shows that even committed Christians can fall back into sin. I believe though that the Holy Scripture teaches that the sins of a Christian can put his reward in question, but not his salvation (cf. 1Co 3:14-15). On the contrary, where it is a question of men who go into perdition, it only applies to those who have never really been born again (cf. Heb 3:19; 4:6; 1Jo 2:19; Jud 5.19, etc.).

At this point, it is necessary to present a list of **two other groups of Bible passages:**⁶⁵

⁶³ Henri Blocher, op. cit., II: p. 342.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

1. Passages which indicate that a Christian can lose his salvation: especially Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-31; 2Pe 2:20-22.
2. Passages which suggest that the people concerned were not born again but were rather only “superficially” church members: 1Jo 2:19; Heb 3:19; 4:6; Jud 5.19. Several sayings of Jesus point to such people: Mat 7:23; 15:13 as does the parable of the sower and the various types of seed (already mentioned above) in Mat 13; Mar 4 and Luk 8.

In my opinion, the passages **Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-31 and 2Pe 2:20-22** speak of people who were not born again Christians. It is question of people who knew the truth but in spite of that drew back (cf. 1Jo 2:19). In effect, the *apostasy* of these people illustrates the well-known French proverb “*Chassez le naturel et il revient au galop!*” very well. Blocher comments pertinently on this: “The apostates prove by their falling away that they have remained dogs and sows in their hearts in spite of a superficial transformation.”⁶⁶ The expressions “*who have once been enlightened*”, “*who have tasted the heavenly gift*” and “*who have shared in the Holy Spirit*” in Heb 6:4-6 do not necessarily imply that it is a question of people who have been born again. Compare with Heb 2:9: Jesus tasted death but not decay. On the cross Jesus tasted the vinegar but did not drink it. Someone who has tasted the heavenly gift has not necessarily received the Holy Spirit. Incidentally before deciding on something you must first have tasted it, otherwise you cannot decide for or against it. Only after tasting can someone know all the consequences resulting from a commitment to Christ → «*to be enlightened*» does not necessarily imply renewal or regeneration. The parallel passage 2Pe 2:20 shows that it “merely” means “*to know*”. I repeat again: Simply to know surely does not mean that a person has been born again. Knowledge must first go down into the heart (concerning the heart see the words of Jesus in Luk 8:15 and in Mat 7:21-23). Concerning the expression “*shared in the Holy Spirit*” in **Heb 6:4**, it must be born in mind that in the Greek text the word “*Holy Spirit*” is mentioned without the article (καὶ μετόχους γεννηθέντας πνεύματος ἁγίου). It may be a question of a gift or better the working of the Holy Spirit on the person concerned in the sense of Joh 16:8-10. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin, he speaks to us, he moves us or meets with us... In spite of this man can resist or reject (cf. Heb 3:7-8). The expression → “*share in*” or “*participate in*” (King James Version) in Heb 6:4 is not the same as 2Pe 1:4 (“*so that ...you may participate in the divine nature*”). Those referred to in 2Pi 1:4 have not only been spoken to or illuminated, no, it says that they have changed their lives. In Heb 6:4-6, it is referring without any doubt to people about whom Jesus said they are like the seed that fell on rocky places or among thorns and thistles. At the beginning they were believed to be real Christians but when their faith was tested they fell away (cf. 1Jo 2:19). The **illustration of the land** in Heb 6:7-8 proves it: there are fields that drink in the rain and produce a good crop. Other land however only produces thorns and thistles. Once again doesn’t this remind us of Jesus parable of the sower in Mat 13; Mar 4 and Luk 8? I repeat, Jesus says that only those who receive the Word of God with a noble and good heart (and who bear fruit) are true Christians: see Luk 8:15. For me those who are mentioned in Heb 6:4-6, are comparable with those seeds that fall on rocky places or among thorns and thistles.⁶⁷ However the following verses 9-20 contrast clearly with the previous verses. You could think that the two passages contradict each other: Heb 6:4-5 gives the impression that you can lose your salvation, while Heb 6:9-20 speaks of assurance of salvation for believers. The same is

⁶⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, II: pp. 342-347.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, II: p. 342. (We translated it from French into English)

⁶⁷ As mentioned above, I recommend in this respect the chapter “perseverance of the saints” (“*la persévérance finale*”) by Henri Blocher in his book *La doctrine du péché et de la rédemption* (Vaux-sur-Seine, France 1997), vol. II: pp. 335-349).

5 true of **Heb 10:26-31**. Those who say that it is possible for a Christian to lose his salvation invoke verse 29: “*How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?*” At first
 10 glance at least the expression “*the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified*” suggests that it is possible to lose the salvation obtained at conversion. This expression does not necessarily implicitly say that the person in question had truly experienced the new birth. 1Co 7:14 speaks of an unbelieving husband or wife whom God blesses (lit. *sanctifies*; in Greek: ἡγιάσται [haegíastai]) through the believing partner. In this respect I must mention the
 15 important verse in 2Pe 2:1: Christ has paid the price of redemption for all (ἀγοράσαντα [agorásanta] Aorist Participle of the verb ἀγοράζω [agorátsō] = *buy, redeem, ransom*). According to this text, it is even for the false prophets and teachers. But of course for him who knowingly rejects Christ as Lord and Master, this redemption is not valid. He is under judgement. In a wide sense, all are sanctified or justified through the blood of Christ (cf. Rom 5:18; Col 1:20). But the blood of Christ is only efficacious for those who accept the Word of God with a noble and good heart, that is for those who are ready to be reconciled to God through Christ (cf. 2Co 5:20).

20 The subjects of the final realisation of our salvation and the return of Christ are dealt with in my brochure on *Eschatology* (the teaching concerning the last times).

F. Excursus: the different views concerning election, predestination, free will and the perseverance of the saints

25 The various positions concerning the questions of election, predestination, free will, the perseverance of the saints, the fall and hereditary sin:

1. Supralapsarianism

30 **Supralapsarianism:** (*supra* = *above, before*; *lapsus* = *fall*): This concerns the decrees (decisions) which God appointed before the foundation of the world: (1) God decreed (decided) to elect some men and to reject others; (2) Then God decreed to create both (those who would be elected as well as those who would be rejected [cast away]); (3) God decreed to allow the fall; (4) The decree to ensure the salvation of (only) the elect (through Christ). Well known supporters of this position (also called: *double predestination*) are Theodore de Beza (1519-1605; pupil and successor of Calvin in Geneva) and Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641; Professor of theology in Leiden, Netherlands). Scholars still contend whether Calvin was an
 35 Infra- or Supralapsarian, the reason being, that his statements are not altogether coherent. It seems that Calvin was a Supralapsarian in the beginning, but later came rather to a position of Infralapsarianism – his later writings seem to support that (cp above). The exponents of an unconditional election, i.e. predestination (positions 1, 2, 3) cite especially passages like Rom 9:11ff and Eph 1:4-11.

2. Infralapsarianism

Infralapsarianism: (*infra* = below, afterwards; some prefer the expression *Sublapsarianism*. *Sub* also means *below*): (1) God decreed to create; (2) God decreed to allow the fall; (3) God decreed to elect some (4) God decreed to ensure salvation for the elect (i.e. through Christ). This doctrine is also called: single predestination. Infra- as well as Supralapsarianism presupposes the following five dogmas (referred to as “5-point-Calvinism”): (1) The unconditional election, i.e. predestination; (2) Jesus died only for the elect (English: *limited atonement*; Latin term: *expiatio definita*); (3) Grace (i.e. the saving grace of God, for the elect only) is irresistible (Latin: *gratia irresistibilis*); (4) The elect cannot lose their salvation (i.e. *the perseverance of the saints*; Latin: *perseverantia sanctorum*); (5) The total corruption (i.e. the sinfulness of all men; English expression: *total inability* [or *depravity*]; Latin: *depravatio tota*). At the synod of Dordrecht in the Netherlands (1618-1619) the majority of Calvinists voted for infralapsarianism. Theologians of modern times like Loraine Boettner, Van Til and Henri Blocher may be counted among them (Neo-Calvinists).

3. Amyraldism

Amyraldism: Moïse Amyraut (Latin name: Amyraldus), French professor at the Huguenot Seminary of Saumur († 1664), held to (Augustinian-Calvinistic) predestination but not the doctrine of *expiatio definita*, i.e. he only supported 4 of the 5 points of Calvinism. Amyraut taught (1634) a *hypothetical Universalism*: By a hypothetical decree God appointed salvation for all man, if they believe; but through a further decree, only a certain number of men become the objects of his grace. For strict Calvinists this *hypothetical Universalism* is an untenable concession. In fact, one has to ask if it is not absurd to think, that God has decided that his Son should die for all mankind, but he decrees at the same time to elect only some people, i.e. to give them the necessary saving faith.

4. Election is based on the foreknowledge of God

Election (i.e. predestination) is based on the foreknowledge of God: (1) God decreed to create; (2) God decided to allow the (hypothetical) fall (as a result of a free decision of the will) of his creature; (3) God decreed to create salvation through his Son; (4) God decreed to make salvation effectual in those of whom he knew beforehand (Rom 8:29-30; 1Pe 1:1-2; cf. Psa 139:16) that they would accept the offer of grace in Jesus Christ. Election is not unconditional but dependant on faith, which God knows beforehand, as he knows everything in advance. *Foreknow* (Greek: προγινώσκω [*proginōskō*]) is not the same as *predetermine* (Greek: προορίζω [*prohorizō*]). It is to be noted that as in positions 1, 2 and 3 here also, salvation is seen as a pure *gift of grace* in Christ, i.e. without any merit on the side of man (no synergism; faith is not a work, but the gift of God through which man can receive salvation in Christ). The difference to the positions 1 and 2 especially are that grace is not irresistible but can be rejected (cf. for instance Mat 23:37 and Luk 7:30). It is further denied that Jesus should only have died for the elect (against the *expiatio definita*). Jesus has rather died for all men (1Jo 2:1-2; cf. 1Ti 2:4), even for heretics, whom the work of salvation does not help, since they deny the one who has redeemed them (2Pe 2:1). This position also holds (like 1, 2, 3) the so-called *perseverantia sanctorum* (perseverance of the saints), i.e., that the really

born again Christians will not lose their salvation (cf. Phi 1:6; Joh 10:28 etc.). If he gets entangled with sin, he will/may only lose his reward (1Co 3:14-15). This position is held by Thiessen (we also tend in this direction). It accepts only two points of the so-called “5-point-Calvinism”, namely the inability, i.e. sinfulness of all man (*depravatio tota*) and the perseverance of all the elect (*perseverantia sanctorum*).

5. Arminianism

Arminianism: The Dutchman Arminius (his real name was Jacob Hermans; pupil among others of Theodore de Beza in Geneva) was commissioned to prove whether Holy Scripture supports the supra- or infralapsarian position. Arminius concluded what is lined out in position 4. When he became as well as Gomarus, a professor in Leiden, he opposed the same in public. Arminius died 1609 and so could not participate in the synod of Doordrecht (1618-1619) where Arminianism was condemned by the Calvinists. The successors of Arminius tended more to the position that salvation could be lost (Arminius himself did not express a clear position on this question). Of “5-point-Calvinism” only the total sinfulness (*depravatio tota*) of all men is retained. It should be mentioned, that within this position there are again different “shades” (see for instance Wesleyans).

6. Semipelagianism

Semipelagianism: (half-Pelagianism): Soon after Pelagianism was condemned, a new controversy arose, that of *Semipelagianism* (429 to ca. 529 A. D.). Monks from Massilia (the abbot Johannes Cassianus and the monk Vicentius from Lerinum) opposed the Augustinian doctrine of predestination, but in a more moderate way than Pelagius previously (see position 7). They were initially called *Massilians* (= *habitants of Marseille*): Only since the 16th century (since the Reformation) one speaks of a semipelagian position. *Semipelagians* say that while the human will has been weakened by sin, the disposition towards the good has remained intact. Man is not dead, he is only sick! Therefore divine grace is necessary, but the free will (Latin: *liberum arbitrium*) of man and grace work together (man cooperates in justification → *synergism*). God has destined man to salvation in pre-knowledge of man’s perseverant faith. In this position salvation or damnation is dependent upon man himself.

7. Pelagianism

Pelagianism: As mentioned, they are named after the British monk Pelagius († 418), who is known for his dispute with Augustine (the *pelagian controversy*). Pelagius denied hereditary sin and advocated the full freedom of will. Through virtue man needs to prove himself worthy of grace. Christ is the perfect example for man, which he must imitate to attain salvation.

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Special thanks are due to Marion and Ueli Bruderer who accepted to translate this brochure from German into English as well as to Heinz Weber, my former teacher, on whose notes some chapters of this brochure are built up.

Kreuzlingen, May 2022

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