

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

CHRISTOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ

UNIT 1: PROLEGOMENA — THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST IN ALL THEOLOGY

Lesson 1

Christ at the Center

Why Christology Is the Heart of All Doctrine

The Doctrine That Holds Every Other Doctrine Together

Key Texts: John 5:39; Colossians 1:15–20; Hebrews 1:1–4

These Are the Scriptures That Testify About Me

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SERIES VERSE

*“For we do not preach ourselves
but Christ Jesus as Lord,
and ourselves as your bond-servants
on account of Jesus.”*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:5, NASB 1995

INTRODUCTION

We begin. And it is fitting that when a systematic theology series turns from the doctrine of God to the doctrine of Christ, there is a sense not of departure but of arrival, or rather, of a pilgrimage that has been moving toward this center from its very first step. Everything that was said of God in Theology Proper was, in ways both explicit and hidden, a preparation for this: the study of the One in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily, the One through whom the invisible God has become visible, the One who is at once the supreme revelation of the divine glory and the only sufficient remedy for the human catastrophe that sin has made of image-bearing creatures.

Christology is not merely one doctrine among many in the theological encyclopedia. It is the doctrine that holds every other doctrine together. Remove Christ from Bibliology and you have a collection of ancient religious texts without their animating center; remove Him from Soteriology and you have a salvation doctrine with no Savior; remove Him from Ecclesiology and the church becomes a religious organization rather than a living body with a living Head. The great Reformers understood this instinctively. Luther's *theologia crucis*, the theology of the cross, was not merely a soteriological proposal; it was an epistemological declaration: we know God truly only in and through the crucified and risen Christ. Calvin opened his *Institutes* with the insistence that true knowledge of God and true knowledge of ourselves are inseparable, and both find their resolution in Jesus Christ.

This lesson, the first of thirty-two in this Christology series, does not attempt to cover everything. It attempts to establish the one thing that must be established before everything else can be understood: the centrality of Christ. Not merely His importance, not merely His prominence, but His centrality, the conviction that He is the organizing principle, the interpretive key, the beginning and the end of all genuine Christian theology. “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things” (Romans 11:36, NASB 1995), and in the doctrine of Christ, the full weight of that confession becomes concrete, historical, personal, and saving.

We approach this study, therefore, not merely as students approaching a subject, but as creatures approaching their Creator, sinners approaching their Redeemer, beloved approaching their Lord. The posture that befits Christology is not the detached curiosity of the historian or the cool precision of the philosopher, but the adoring wonder of the one who has been undone by grace and rebuilt by resurrection. We study Christ because we belong to Christ. And because we belong to Him, we can never know Him well enough.

I. CHRISTOLOGY DEFINED: PERSON AND WORK

The Two-Fold Question That Governs the Entire Study

A. The Question of Person: Who Is He?

Christology, derived from the Greek *Christos* (the Anointed One) and *logos* (word, reason, study), is the branch of systematic theology that investigates the Person and the Work of Jesus Christ. This two-fold structure, Person and Work, is not arbitrary. It reflects the shape of the New Testament's own witness to Christ. Before the New Testament asks what Christ has done, it insists on establishing who Christ is. The question precedes the answer; the Person precedes the benefits; the identity of the Savior precedes the nature of the salvation He provides.

Our Lord Himself made the question of His Person the decisive question of all human existence. In the region of Caesarea Philippi, surrounded by the religious pluralism of the ancient world, shrines to Baal, temples to Caesar, the grotto of Pan, He posed the question that silences all other questions with its weight: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (Matthew 16:13, NASB 1995). The disciples rehearse the popular answers: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the prophets. All honorable. All inadequate. And then comes the second question, more personal and more pressing: "But who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15, NASB 1995). This is the question that Christology exists to answer. Not merely to relay the opinions of others, but to confess, with Peter, the truth that only the Father can reveal: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16, NASB 1995).

B. The Question of Work: What Has He Done?

The question of Christ's Work is inseparable from the question of His Person, but it is distinct from it. The classical threefold office, Prophet, Priest, and King, provides the primary organizing framework for understanding the comprehensive scope of what Christ has done, is doing, and will do on behalf of His people. As Prophet, He reveals the will and character of God with an authority that transcends every previous revelation: "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son" (Hebrews 1:1–2, NASB 1995). As Priest, He offers the once-for-all, all-sufficient sacrifice for sin and now intercedes perpetually before the Father on behalf of those He has redeemed (Hebrews 7:25). As King, He exercises sovereign authority over His church and over all creation, reigning now at the right hand of the Father and awaiting the consummation of all things at His glorious return (Matthew 28:18; Revelation 19:16).

These thirty-two lessons will work through both questions, Person and Work, systematically, exegetically, and historically, always in service of the pastoral goal that gives all theological labor its proper motivation: knowing Christ, loving Christ, proclaiming Christ, and being conformed to the image of Christ.

II. THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST IN THE THEOLOGICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

Every Doctrine Points Toward, Flows From, or Finds Its Coherence in Christ

A. The Christological Principle of Scripture

The most important hermeneutical claim in the entire New Testament is the claim that Jesus makes in John 5:39: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me” (NASB 1995). The context is a confrontation with the religious authorities who have rejected Jesus' healing of the lame man at Bethesda. They are devoted students of the Old Testament, and yet they have missed its central subject entirely. The Scriptures, Jesus insists, are not an end in themselves; they are testimony to Him. Their purpose is not merely to preserve a religious tradition or to provide a legal code; it is to bear witness to the One who is the fulfillment of every promise, the antitype of every type, the substance of every shadow.

This is the Christological principle of Scripture: the entire canon of Holy Scripture has Christ as its center, its goal, and its interpretive key. The promise of Genesis 3:15, the seed of the woman who will crush the serpent's head, is the first glimpse of the gospel that will take thirty-nine books and four hundred years of silence to reach its fulfillment in the manger of Bethlehem and the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. The Exodus narrative is not merely Israel's history; it is the typological pattern of the greater redemption that the true Passover Lamb will accomplish. The Davidic covenant is not merely a political arrangement; it is the promise of an eternal King whose kingdom will have no end. Every institution, every office, every sacrifice, every prophet, every king, every priest in the Old Testament is moving, as if magnetized by a force they cannot see but cannot resist, toward the One who will say, “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6, NASB 1995).

B. Christ as the Coherence of Systematic Theology

The great doctrines of the theological encyclopedia find their coherence in Christ. Consider: Theology Proper, the doctrine of God, reaches its highest expression not in abstract theism but in the declaration that the Word who was God in the beginning became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1, 14). The invisible, infinite, eternal God has made Himself known definitively in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). Hamartiology, the doctrine of sin, finds its full diagnostic force only in the cross; the severity of the human condition is measured by what it cost to address it. Soteriology, the doctrine of salvation, is not a theory of divine benevolence in the abstract; it is the story of the Son of God who came to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10).

Ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church, is incomprehensible apart from Christ, who is its Head (Ephesians 1:22–23), its Foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11), its Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), and the one whose Spirit animates its life and mission. Eschatology, the doctrine of last things, is not the projection of human hope onto the cosmos; it is the promise of the One who said “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25, NASB 1995) and who will return as the conquering King to make all things new (Revelation 21:5). Remove Christ from any of these doctrines and what remains

is a partial truth at best, a dangerous distortion at worst. Christology is not one doctrine among many; it is the doctrine that makes all other doctrines cohere.

“These are the Scriptures that testify about Me.” | “In these last days He has spoken to us in His Son.” | “In Him all things hold together.”

JOHN 5:39; HEBREWS 1:2; COLOSSIANS 1:17, NASB 1995

III. THE CHRISTOLOGICAL HYMNS: A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF CHRIST'S SUPREMACY

Colossians 1:15–20 and Hebrews 1:1–4 as the Theological Architecture of Christology

A. The Colossian Hymn: Supremacy in Creation and Redemption

Two great christological passages in the New Testament function as theological architecture for the entire discipline of Christology: the Colossian hymn of 1:15–20 and the prologue of Hebrews 1:1–4. Together they establish the twin pillars on which the entire edifice of Christian Christology rests: the supremacy of Christ in creation and the supremacy of Christ in redemption.

The Colossian hymn was likely an early Christian confession that Paul either cites or adapts to address the proto-gnostic “philosophy” threatening the church at Colossae. Its christological affirmations are breathtaking in their comprehensiveness: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:15–16, NASB 1995). The Son is not a creature, however exalted; He is the One through whom and for whom all creatures exist. The creation has its being from Him and finds its meaning in Him.

The hymn then pivots from creation to redemption with equally comprehensive christological claims: “He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross” (Colossians 1:18–20, NASB 1995). Creation and redemption are not two separate domains under Christ's authority; they are the two dimensions of a single sovereignty. He holds all things together (v. 17) and He reconciles all things through His blood (v. 20). The One who is the ground of the world's existence is also the ground of the world's redemption.

B. The Hebrews Prologue: The Son as the Final and Supreme Word

The prologue of Hebrews (1:1–4) provides the second great pillar of New Testament Christology, framing the Son's identity in terms of both divine revelation and divine redemption. “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days

has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:1–3, NASB 1995).

The structural movement of this passage mirrors the Colossian hymn: from the Son's role in creation (“through whom also He made the world”) to His role in redemption (“when He had made purification of sins”) to His present reign (“he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high”). But the Hebrews prologue adds a dimension that will prove crucial throughout this entire series: the Son as the definitive, final, and unsurpassable word of divine self-disclosure. God has always spoken. He spoke through the prophets, through dreams, through the law, through the sacrifice, through the temple, through the whole apparatus of old covenant mediation. But all of that speaking was preparatory, “many portions and in many ways”, pointing toward the one final speaking that needed no further supplement: “in these last days has spoken to us in His Son.”

The Son is not one revelation among many; He is the revelation to which all others were pointing and from which all others derive their ultimate significance. The Greek word *charaktēr* (“exact representation”) is the term used for the impression a seal makes in wax, the precise, unambiguous, unmistakable image of the thing that produced it. The Son is the *charaktēr* of the Father's nature: to see Him is to see, as fully as creaturely vision can sustain, the very character and being of God. This is not merely religious poetry; it is the most significant epistemological claim in the history of human thought.

IV. THE PASTORAL URGENCY: A CHURCH THAT GETS CHRISTOLOGY WRONG GETS EVERYTHING WRONG

Why the Precision of Christological Confession Is a Pastoral, Not Merely Academic, Concern

The history of Christian theology is, to a very significant degree, the history of the church defending the truth of Christ against a seemingly inexhaustible variety of errors. Ebionism denied His deity; Docetism denied His true humanity; Arianism made Him a creature, however exalted; Apollinarianism denied Him a complete human nature; Nestorianism divided Him into two persons; Eutychianism blended His two natures into a confused third thing. Each of these errors was not merely a theological mistake; it was a pastoral catastrophe. A Christ who is only human cannot save, because a merely human Savior is simply another drowning man reaching for a rope he cannot find. A Christ who is not truly human cannot sympathize with our weakness, cannot stand in our place under the law, cannot be our representative before God. A Christ who is both, but improperly related, offers neither the certainty of divine power nor the intimacy of human solidarity.

The great christological councils, Nicaea (325 AD), Constantinople (381 AD), Ephesus (431 AD), Chalcedon (451 AD), were not academic exercises in speculative theology conducted by disinterested scholars. They were battles for the gospel. The Nicene fathers understood that if Arius was right and the Son was a creature, “there was a time when He was not”, then Paul was wrong and faith is empty (1 Corinthians 15:17), because the power that raised Jesus from the dead is not the power of the eternal Creator but the power of a finite, creaturely deity. The Chalcedonian fathers understood that if the two natures of Christ were confused or divided, the incarnation, the hinge on which the entire economy of redemption turns, was either a fiction or an impossibility.

This is why the precision of christological confession is not an academic hobby for specialists in patristics. It is a pastoral imperative. The congregation that does not know who Christ is cannot rightly worship Him, cannot rightly trust Him, cannot rightly follow Him, and cannot rightly proclaim Him. Every sermon, every prayer, every act of pastoral care, every evangelistic conversation is shaped, for good or ill, by the christological convictions that undergird it. The pastor who is unclear about the Person of Christ will be unclear about everything that flows from Him: the nature of the atonement, the ground of justification, the power of sanctification, the hope of resurrection.

We study Christology, therefore, not to accumulate doctrinal credentials, but to be made competent ministers of the gospel. The aim is not to win theological arguments; it is to preach Christ accurately, love Him genuinely, and lead others into the same knowledge that is, as our Lord Himself defined it, eternal life: “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3, NASB 1995).

V. THE POSTURE OF THE STUDENT: REVERENCE, WONDER, AND ADORING FAITH

How to Approach the Mystery of Christ

There is a danger that every student of systematic theology faces, and it is perhaps most acute in the study of Christology: the danger of familiarity. The story of Jesus, the manger, the ministry, the cross, the empty tomb, is so woven into the fabric of Christian culture that it is possible to study it with a kind of affectionate detachment, as one studies the history of a tradition one has inherited rather than the living reality of the One who has redeemed one's soul. This danger must be named and resisted.

The apostle John, the “disciple whom Jesus loved,” who had leaned against the Lord's breast at the Last Supper (John 13:23) and had watched Him die on the cross (John 19:26), who had seen the empty tomb (John 20:8) and eaten breakfast with the risen Christ on the shores of Galilee (John 21:12), this same John, writing decades later on the island of Patmos, encountered the glorified Christ and “fell at His feet like a dead man” (Revelation 1:17, NASB 1995). Familiarity with Christ, in the fullest and most intimate sense, does not produce casual confidence; it produces prostrated awe.

Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up, and cried “Woe is me, for I am ruined!” (Isaiah 6:5, NASB 1995). Peter, after the miraculous catch of fish, fell at Jesus' knees and said “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” (Luke 5:8, NASB 1995). Thomas, when the risen Christ stood before him, answered with the greatest christological confession in the New Testament: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28, NASB 1995). These are the postures that the knowledge of Christ produces in those who have been genuinely arrested by who He is.

This series, then, will be conducted in the conviction that the proper posture before the study of Christ is one of intellectual rigor in the service of adoring faith. We will use the tools of exegesis, historical theology, and systematic analysis not to domesticate the mystery of Christ but to see it more clearly. We will be precise because imprecision does not honor the One whose glory is infinite. We will be thorough because He deserves our fullest attention. And we will be doxological because, in the end, every true encounter with the Person of Christ terminates not in a proposition but in a prayer, not in a definition but in the surrender of a creature before its Redeemer and its Lord.

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

MATTHEW 16:16, NASB 1995

VI. THE DOXOLOGICAL CONCLUSION: CHRISTOLOGY MUST TERMINATE IN WORSHIP

The great christological hymn of Philippians 2:6–11 does not end with a doctrinal proposition. It ends with a doxology: “so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10–11, NASB 1995). The entire drama of the incarnation, the humiliation, the exaltation, all of it moves toward this: the universal, unambiguous, final confession that Jesus Christ is Lord. That confession, made freely now in faith, will be made universally at the last day, whether in adoration by the redeemed or in recognition by the condemned. But the church makes it now, in the present age, as an act of worship.

This series will maintain, from its first lesson to its last, that Christology is not the study of a figure from the past but an encounter with a Person in the present, the living, reigning, interceding, returning Lord Jesus Christ, who is “the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8, NASB 1995). Every lesson that follows this one is offered in the conviction that the knowledge of Christ, pursued faithfully and humbly, will produce in the student not merely a more accurate doctrinal statement but a deeper love, a more grateful worship, and a more urgent desire to make Him known among the nations for whom He died.

Paul's series verse captures it best, and it is fitting that it should be the compass by which this entire Christology series navigates: “For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves

as your bond-servants on account of Jesus” (2 Corinthians 4:5, NASB 1995). Not ourselves. Not our theological system, however carefully constructed. Not our ecclesiastical tradition, however faithfully maintained. Christ Jesus as Lord. This is the beginning, the middle, and the end of all genuine Christian theology. It is the beginning and the end of this series.

Key Texts: *John 5:39; Matthew 16:15–17; Colossians 1:15–20; Hebrews 1:1–4; Philippians 2:9–11; 2 Corinthians 4:5*

THEOLOGICAL TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

| Term | Definition |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Christology | From the Greek <i>Christos</i> (the Anointed One) and <i>logos</i> (word, study). The branch of systematic theology that investigates the Person (who Christ is) and the Work (what Christ has done) of Jesus Christ. Distinguished as the doctrine that provides coherence to every other area of Christian theology, since all of Scripture testifies to Christ (John 5:39) and all of redemptive history finds its fulfillment in Him. |
| Person of Christ | The theological inquiry into the identity of Jesus Christ: His divine nature, His human nature, the relationship between the two, and His place within the eternal Trinity. The question of Person, 'Who do you say that I am?' (Matthew 16:15), precedes and grounds all inquiry into the Work of Christ, since the saving efficacy of what He has done depends entirely on who He is. |
| Work of Christ | The theological inquiry into what Jesus Christ has accomplished on behalf of His people, classically organized around the threefold office of Prophet (revealing God), Priest (reconciling sinners), and King (ruling over all). The Work of Christ is unintelligible apart from His Person; only a divine-human Mediator could accomplish what the gospel declares He has accomplished. |
| Munus Triplex | Latin: 'threefold office.' The classical Reformed framework, developed especially by John Calvin, for organizing the comprehensive work of Christ around three categories: Prophet, Priest, and King. Each office corresponds to a dimension of the human problem that sin has created, ignorance (needing a Prophet), guilt (needing a Priest), and bondage (needing a King). Christ fulfills all three offices perfectly, permanently, and simultaneously. |
| Christological Principle | The hermeneutical conviction that the entire canon of Holy Scripture, Old Testament and New, has Jesus Christ as its center, goal, and interpretive key. Grounded in our Lord's own declaration in John 5:39 that the Scriptures testify about Him, and in the apostolic reading of the Old Testament as a progressive revelation of the person and work of the coming Messiah. Not allegorism, but the recognition that all of Scripture's types, promises, and patterns find their fulfillment in Christ. |

| Term | Definition |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Hypostatic Union | The classical theological term for the mystery of Christ's Person: two complete, distinct natures, fully divine and fully human, united in the one Person (hypostasis) of the eternal Son of God. Defined at the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) with four negative boundaries: the natures exist without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation. The hypostatic union is the ontological ground of Christ's mediatorial work. |
| Theologia Crucis | Latin: 'theology of the cross.' Martin Luther's formulation of the epistemological principle that God is truly known not in power, glory, and wisdom as the world defines them, but in the weakness, shame, and foolishness of the cross. The theology of the cross stands in contrast to the theologia gloriae (theology of glory) and insists that the Crucified One is the true and final self-disclosure of the living God. |
| Eternal Son | The second Person of the eternal Trinity in His pre-incarnate, pre-temporal existence. The eternal Son is not a created being who became divine; He is the eternally begotten Son who, in the fullness of time, became incarnate. The distinction between the eternal Son and the incarnate Son is crucial: Bethlehem is not the beginning of the Son's existence but the beginning of His humanity. The Son 'was' before He 'became' (John 1:1, 14). |
| Theotokos | Greek: 'God-bearer' or 'Mother of God.' The title affirmed at the Council of Ephesus (431 AD) for the Virgin Mary, not to exalt Mary but to protect Christology: since the One born of Mary is the eternal Son of God, Mary may rightly be called the bearer of God. The denial of Theotokos by Nestorius implied the division of Christ into two persons, which Ephesus rightly condemned. The title is Christological, not Mariological, in its primary intention. |
| Chalcedonian Definition | The christological definition issued by the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD), the most precise and comprehensive formulation of the doctrine of Christ's Person in the history of the church. It confesses Jesus Christ as 'truly God and truly man,' His two natures existing 'without confusion, without change, without division, without separation,' united in 'one Person and one Subsistence.' This definition remains the ecumenical standard of orthodox Christology across Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant traditions. |

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

A.. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that Jesus Christ is not merely the most important figure in human history, or the most exemplary moral teacher, or the most profound religious genius, but the eternal Son of God who has taken on human nature without ceasing to be God, and that this conviction is not optional for Christian faith but constitutive of it. The New Testament does not offer Christ as one option among many religious alternatives; it presents Him as the only one through whom sinners are reconciled to God, the only name given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

We must also believe that the study of Christ is not a detour from practical ministry but its very foundation. Every pastoral task, preaching, counseling, discipling, evangelizing, comforting the grieving, confronting the sinning, draws its content, its power, and its direction from the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. The pastor who neglects Christology does not thereby become more practical; he becomes less faithful, because he has abandoned the source from which all genuine pastoral fruitfulness flows.

B.. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

Let the question of Jesus, “But who do you say that I am?”, not remain an academic question. Let it become the governing question of your devotional life. Not merely: what is the correct christological answer? But: Who is Christ to me, in the living reality of my daily experience of faith? The goal of this series is not to produce Christological encyclopedists but Christological disciples, men and women whose knowledge of Christ has descended from the mind to the heart, and from the heart to the knees, and from the knees back into the world in the form of transformed lives and faithful witness.

Desire, above all, to know Christ, not merely to know about Him. The apostle Paul, writing from prison near the end of his life, expressed a desire that decades of the most extraordinary Christian experience any human being has ever had had not extinguished but only deepened: “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Philippians 3:10, NASB 1995). This is the desire that Christology exists to serve.

C.. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Begin this series by returning to the Gospels. Before working through the systematic categories of Christology, spend time simply reading Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, slowly, prayerfully, attentively. Let the primary sources form the foundation on which all the systematic analysis will build. Every doctrine in this series is meant to help you read the Gospels more clearly, not to replace them.
- Engage the history of Christological controversy with gratitude. The great councils and creeds are not the inventions of power-hungry bishops; they are the hard-won testimony of a church that bled to protect the truth of Christ. Read the Nicene Creed, the Chalcedonian Definition, and the Athanasian Creed. Let the precision of their language produce not pedantry but doxology.

- Preach and teach Christ deliberately. Every sermon, every lesson, every discipleship conversation is an opportunity to bring the discussion back to the center: the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. Practice the discipline of explicit Christocentrism, not as a rhetorical formula, but as the natural and necessary expression of a theological vision in which Christ is genuinely at the center of everything.
- Read deeply in the christological tradition. For this series, the following are indispensable companions: Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (the greatest short christological treatise in the history of the church); John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.12–17 (the incomparable Reformed treatment of Christ's Person and Work); John Owen, *The Glory of Christ* (devotional Christology at its finest); B.B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (rigorously exegetical and historically informed). These are not supplementary; they are essential.
- Let Christology reform your prayer life. Begin to address your prayers explicitly to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit, not as a liturgical formula, but as the theological reality of Christian prayer. Let the intercession of Christ (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34) become a living conviction that shapes how you approach the throne of grace. You do not pray alone; you pray in Christ.

STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OPENING QUESTION

1. Before beginning this study of Christology, how would you currently answer the question Jesus asked in Matthew 16:15: “But who do you say that I am?” Not the textbook answer, but your answer, the answer that reflects the living reality of your relationship with Christ at this point in your journey. Share honestly with the group.

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DO THE TEXTS SAY?)

2. Read John 5:39–40. In what context does Jesus make the claim that the Scriptures testify about Him? What is the irony of His accusers' situation? What does it reveal about the relationship between correct biblical information and genuine saving knowledge of Christ?

3. Read Colossians 1:15–20. Identify and list every christological affirmation Paul makes in this passage. How does Paul relate Christ's role in creation (vv. 15–17) to His role in redemption (vv. 18–20)? What is the significance of the phrase “so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything” (v. 18)?

4. Read Hebrews 1:1–4. How does the writer frame the relationship between the Old Testament prophetic revelation and the revelation given in the Son? What specific attributes and works does the writer ascribe to the Son in these four verses? What does the phrase “exact representation of His nature” (v. 3) imply about the Son's relationship to the Father?
5. Read Matthew 16:13–20. Note the two distinct questions Jesus asks (vv. 13, 15). What is the significance of the shift from the third person (“who do people say”) to the second person (“who do you say”)? What does Jesus' response to Peter's confession reveal about the origin and nature of true Christological knowledge?

INTERPRETATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT MEAN?)

6. The lesson argues that Christology is not one doctrine among many but the doctrine that holds every other doctrine together. Do you agree? Test this claim by choosing one other area of systematic theology (Soteriology, Ecclesiology, Eschatology, etc.) and explaining concretely what is lost or distorted when Christ is removed from its center.
7. The lesson distinguishes between the question of Christ's Person (who He is) and the question of His Work (what He has done), but insists that these two questions are inseparable. Why can the Work of Christ not be properly understood apart from the Person of Christ? What would be lost in our understanding of the atonement, for example, if we did not first establish who it is who dies on the cross?
8. The lesson argues that the christological controversies of the early church were not academic disputes but pastoral battles for the gospel. Select one of the early Christological heresies (Arianism, Docetism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, Eutychianism) and explain concretely how it distorts not merely an abstract doctrine but the gospel itself. What is the practical pastoral consequence of that distortion?
9. Hebrews 1:1–2 describes the Old Testament as God speaking “in many portions and in many ways” and the New Testament as God speaking in His Son. What does this imply about the relationship between the Testaments? How does the Christological principle of Scripture (that all Scripture testifies to Christ) shape the way we should preach and teach the Old Testament?
10. The lesson describes the proper posture before the study of Christ as “intellectual rigor in the service of adoring faith.” What is the relationship between these two qualities? Can they be in tension? How do John's falling “like a dead man” before the glorified Christ (Revelation 1:17) and Paul's meticulous christological argument in Colossians 1 model different but complementary dimensions of the same posture?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT DEMAND OF US?)

- 11.** The lesson states that “a church that gets Christology wrong gets everything wrong.” Reflect honestly on your own church context. In what specific areas, preaching, worship, evangelism, discipleship, might a sharpened Christological focus produce the most significant change? What would it look like for your ministry to become more deliberately Christocentric without becoming Christomonist (to the exclusion of the Father and the Spirit)?
- 12.** The apostle Paul prays “that I may know Him” (Philippians 3:10) as a goal still being pursued, even after decades of the most extraordinary Christian experience. What does this tell us about the nature of the knowledge of Christ available in the present age? How should the “already/not yet” structure of our knowledge of Christ shape both our satisfaction in what we already know and our hunger for more?
- 13.** The lesson recommends deliberate Christocentrism in preaching and teaching. Without becoming formulaic or reductive, how do you currently move from any given biblical text to Christ in your preaching? What resources, hermeneutical, homiletical, theological, would help you do this more faithfully? What is the difference between a Christocentric reading of Scripture and an allegorical reading?
- 14.** This is the first lesson of thirty-two on the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. What specific expectation, hope, or prayer do you bring to this series? What do you most want to understand more clearly about Christ by the time you reach Lesson 32? What is the one christological question that, if answered, would most transform your preaching, your worship, or your daily walk with God? Commit that question to prayer, and return to it at the conclusion of the series.

PRAYER FOCUS

Open this first lesson of the Christology series with a reading of John 1:1–18, the great Johannine prologue that established the theological coordinates for the entire Christological tradition. Read it slowly, as if for the first time. Let the weight of verse 14 press upon the group: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (NASB 1995). The eternal Word. Flesh. Glory. Grace. Truth. These are not ideas; they are the testimony of an eyewitness who had seen, and handled, and heard the One of whom he writes (1 John 1:1–3).

Spend time in adoration of the Lord Jesus Christ for the miracle of the incarnation, that He who was in the form of God did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant (Philippians 2:6–7). Adore the Father for the gift He has given in His Son, “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” (John 3:16, NASB 1995). Adore the Spirit for making Christ

known to us, illumining the Scriptures, applying the benefits of Christ's work to our lives, and interceding for us with groanings too deep for words (Romans 8:26).

Pray together for the duration of this series, that the study of Christ would be, for each participant, not merely an intellectual exercise but a transforming encounter; that every doctrine learned would produce a deeper love; that every theological truth grasped would descend from the mind to the heart and from the heart to the will; and that by the time Lesson 32 is reached, each student would be able to say, with greater depth and greater conviction than they can say it now: "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21, NASB 1995).

Close with the Nicene Creed, spoken together as a confession rather than a recitation, not as an end in itself but as the church's faithful summary of what Scripture declares about the One who is "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6, NASB 1995):

"We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through Him all things were made. For us and for our salvation He came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit He became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate; He suffered death and was buried. On the third day He rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end."

THE NICENE CREED (381 AD)

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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