

The Last Word

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On Christology

I overheard a well-seasoned student of mine giving a bit of advice to a student who was in my class for the first time. 'Just remember, with her, it's always about Jesus. It's all about Jesus, who he was, what he did.' I smiled and thought what a fine theologian this elder student was becoming! Because it is 'all about Jesus'. Yes it is.

Christology ultimately matters to the extent that it is all about the historical Jesus. What's the difference between a scholarly apologetic that hides behind 'the Judeo-Christian faith' and one that comes right out and quotes 'what Jesus said'? Christology can be the reason for the church's first Council or a congregation's last schism. Christology can anchor our only hope for eternal life or set us adrift in a mental sea of Gnostic gymnastics. Christology can be reduced to just an idea that we argue or an idol we defend, or a seminar we research. But, Christology matters because Jesus was real. Christology matters because in Jesus, God took on our flesh through the virgin's womb; lived in our flesh through his life, baptism, temptation, and sinful community; suffered in our flesh through dying and death; proved the reality of our redemption's fullness in his resurrection; and recapitulated our humanity in his ascension. Beyond its own ontology, however, Christology matters because of who Jesus is, and what Jesus did for us tells us who we really are.

Christology is the defining substance of our soteriology. Our Christology, how we define Jesus, tells us how we really see ourselves. Anselm's *quantum ponderis peccatum*, how mighty was our sin, leads us to recognise our need for a mighty Saviour. The disciples refused to leave Jesus for a more comfortable call because they came to believe and know that Jesus alone was the source of eternal life, the Bread of Life, the Holy One of God (John 6:66ff). Arius lost his argument with the theologians at Nicaea more on the soil of very Jewish soteriology than Greek philosophy. Arius lost the battle for popular opinion in the reality of worship liturgy, the recognition of sin reflected in prayer, confession and repentance. Why worship someone who was not God, and if Jesus wasn't God, how can we be saved?

Our Christology is the bedrock of how we really see our sin. Attempts to qualify, demythologise, rationalise, deny, modify, erode, explain away, ignore, or avoid who Jesus is as God Incarnate, say more about the demotion of how we see our own sin than

the status of our Saviour. When we are convinced that our righteousness is a filthy rag, that our best efforts do not aid grace, that faith is pure gift and that we are utterly without hope apart from Jesus, then our Christology will reflect the truth of God found in Jesus Christ.

If we have seen Jesus, we have seen the Father. If we follow Jesus, we share his suffering on the way to sharing his glory. If we abide in Jesus, we know and obey his word. If we are known by Jesus, we are indwelt by his Spirit. If we pray in his Name, the Father responds affirmatively to the will of the Son reflected in our own prayer. Knowing God as our Father is all about knowing Jesus as God's Son. Our relationship with God as Father is mediated by how Jesus the Son related to God as Father. Our dependence on God the Holy Spirit is only possible because of the redemption gained for us in the work of Jesus Christ. It's all about Jesus because there is no salvation apart from his person, life, work, word, hope, promise, intercession, obedience or love.

If the cross becomes a place of a martyr and not the obedience of God the Son, we are left in our hopelessness with a unique example. And our understanding of sin necessarily shrinks to meet our own expectations. If Jesus as the Son was not God, not begotten but made, not one in being with the Father, then the resurrection necessarily devolves to works-righteousness. We then become more religious to compensate for our loss of imputed righteousness. If Jesus has not ascended to the right-hand of God the Father, with the fullness of our embodied and redeemed humanity, then there is nothing to do but stand around and look toward heaven. And we get tired and weary because the Christian life must be lived on our own energy witnessing to nothing more than our own history because the Spirit has not been sent to empower us to see Jesus and tell his story.

My student was right. 'Remember, with her, it's all about Jesus.' I can think of no finer accusation for a Christian theologian and a sinner to hear. It's all about Jesus or nothing else matters.