

Systematic Theology 3.2

The States of Christ

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Part Three: The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ — Section 2: The States of Christ

Editorial note

The text has been updated to UK English; gloss boxes have been added to explain technical terms; summaries have been included; and questions for further study have been added. We have also included a master outline with the part represented in this volume shown in bold.

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Berkhof's Systematic Theology: Master Outline

This six-part guide is designed for use at the beginning of each volume. The part represented in this volume is shown in bold.

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The States of Christ

I. The State of Humiliation

In His humiliation, the eternal Son willingly came under the law and bore its curse for His people. His incarnation, sufferings, death, burial, and descent into hades reveal the depth of His saving obedience.

A. Introductory: The Doctrine Of The States Of Christ In General.

GLOSS States of Christ: Christ's two redemptive positions: humiliation under the law and exaltation in glory after accomplishing salvation.

1. THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN A STATE AND A CONDITION. It should be borne in mind that, though the word "state" is sometimes used synonymously with "condition," the word as applied to Christ in this connection denotes a relationship rather than a condition. In general a state and a condition may be distinguished as follows: A state is one's position or status in life, and particularly the forensic relationship in which one stands to the law, while a condition is the mode of one's existence, especially as determined by the circumstances of life. One who is found guilty in a court of justice is in a state of guilt or condemnation, and this is usually followed by a condition of incarceration with all its resulting deprivation and shame. In theology the states of the Mediator are generally considered as including the resulting conditions. In fact, the different stages of the humiliation and of the exaltation, as usually stated, have a tendency to make the conditions stand out more prominently than the states. Yet the states are the more fundamental of the two and should be so considered.[Cf. Kuyper, Dict. Dogm., De Christo II, pp. 59 ff.] In the state of humiliation Christ was under the law, not only as a rule of life, but as the condition of the covenant of works, and even under the condemnation of the law; but in the state of exaltation He is free from the law, having met the condition of the covenant of works and having paid the penalty for sin.

2. THE DOCTRINE OF THE STATES OF CHRIST IN HISTORY. The doctrine of the states of Christ really dates from the seventeenth century, though traces of it are already found in the writings of the Reformers, and even in some of the early Church Fathers. It was first developed among the Lutherans when they sought to bring their doctrine of the communicatio idiomatum in harmony with the humiliation of Christ as it is pictured in the Gospels, but was soon adopted also by the Reformed. They differed, however, as to the real subject of the states. According to the Lutherans it is the human nature of Christ, but according to the Reformed, the person of the Mediator. There was considerable difference of opinion even among the Lutherans on the subject. Under the influence of Schleiermacher the idea of the states of the Mediator gradually disappeared from theology. By his pantheizing tendency the lines of demarcation between the Creator and the creature were practically obliterated. The emphasis was shifted from the transcendent to the immanent God; and the sovereign God whose law is the standard of right disappeared. In fact, the idea of objective right was banished from theology, and under such conditions it became impossible to maintain the idea of a judicial position, that is, of a state of the Mediator. Moreover, in the measure in which the humanity of Christ was stressed to the exclusion of His deity, and on the one hand His pre-existence, and on the other, His resurrection was denied, all speaking about the humiliation and exaltation of Christ lost its meaning. The result is that in many present day works on Dogmatics we look in vain for a chapter on the states of Christ.

3. THE NUMBER OF THE STATES OF THE MEDIATOR. There is a difference of opinion as to the number of the states of the Mediator. Some are of the opinion that, if we assume that the person of the Mediator is the subject of the states, strict logic requires that we speak of three states or modes of existence: the pre-existent state of eternal divine being, the earthly state of temporal human existence, and the

heavenly state of exaltation and glory.[Cf. McPherson, Chr. Dogm., p. 322; Valentine, Chr. Theol. II, p. 88.] But since we can speak of the humiliation and exaltation of the person of Christ only in connection with Him as the God-man, it is best to speak of only two states. Reformed theologians do find an anticipation of both the humiliation and the exaltation of Christ in His pre-existent state: of His humiliation in that He freely took upon Himself in the pactum salutis to merit and administer our salvation; and of His exaltation in the glory which He as our prospective Mediator enjoyed before the incarnation, cf. John 17:5. The two states are clearly indicated in II Cor. 8:9; Gal. 4:4,5; Phil. 2:6-11; Heb. 2:9.

B. The State Of Humiliation.

GLOSS Humiliation: the period in which Christ freely took the servant's place, obeyed under the law, and suffered for the sins of His people.

On the basis of Phil. 2:7,8, Reformed theology distinguishes two elements in the humiliation of Christ, namely, (1) the kenosis (emptying, exinanitio), consisting in this that He laid aside the divine majesty, the majesty of the sovereign Ruler of the universe, and assumed human nature in the form of a servant; and (2) the tapeinosis (humiliatio), consisting in that He became subject to the demands and to the curse of the law, and in His entire life became obedient in action and suffering to the very limit of a shameful death. On the basis of the passage in Philippians it may be said that the essential and central element in the state of humiliation is found in the fact that He who was the Lord of all the earth, the supreme Lawgiver, placed Himself under the law, in order to discharge its federal and penal obligations in behalf of His people. By doing this He became legally responsible for our sins and liable to the curse of the law. This state of the Saviour, briefly expressed in the words of Gal. 4:4, "born under the law," is reflected in the corresponding condition, which is described in the various stages of the humiliation. While Lutheran theology speaks of as many as eight stages in the humiliation of Christ, Reformed theology generally names only five, namely: (1) incarnation, (2) suffering, (3) death, (4) burial, and (5) descent into hades.

1. THE INCARNATION AND BIRTH OF CHRIST. Under this general heading several points deserve attention.

a. The subject of the incarnation. It was not the triune God but the second person of the Trinity that assumed human nature. For that reason it is better to say that the Word became flesh than that God became man. At the same time we should remember that each of the divine persons was active in the incarnation, Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35; John 1:14; Acts 2:30; Rom. 8:3; Gal. 4:4; Phil 2:7. This also means that the incarnation was not something that merely happened to the Logos, but was an active accomplishment on His part. In speaking of the incarnation in distinction from the birth of the Logos, His active participation in this historical fact is stressed, and His pre-existence is assumed. It is not possible to speak of the incarnation of one who had no previous existence. This pre-existence is clearly taught in Scripture: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," John 1:1. "I am come down from heaven," John 6:38. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor," II Cor. 8:9. "Who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men," Phil. 2:6,7. "But when the fulness of the time came God sent forth His Son," Gal. 4:4. The pre-existent Son of God assumes human nature and takes to Himself human flesh and blood, a miracle that passes our limited understanding. It clearly shows that the infinite can and does enter into finite relations, and that the supernatural can in some way enter the historical life of the world.

b. The necessity of the incarnation. Since the days of Scholasticism the question has been debated, whether the incarnation should be regarded as involved in the idea of redemption, or as already involved in the idea of creation. Popularly stated, the question was, whether the Son of God would have come in the flesh even if man had not sinned. Rupert of Deutz was the first to assert clearly and positively that He would have become incarnate irrespective of sin. His view was shared by Alexander of Hales and Duns Scotus, but Thomas Aquinas took the position that the reason for the incarnation lay in the entrance of sin into the world. The Reformers shared this view, and the Churches of the Reformation teach that the incarnation was necessitated by the fall of man. Some Lutheran and Reformed scholars, however, such as Osiander, Rothe, Dorner, Lange, Van Oosterzee, Martensen, Ebrard, and Westcott, were of the contrary opinion. The arguments adduced by them are such as the following: Such a stupendous fact as the incarnation cannot be contingent, and cannot find its cause in sin as an accidental and arbitrary act of man. It must have been included in the original plan of God. Religion before and after the fall cannot be essentially different. If a Mediator is necessary now, He must have been necessary also before the fall. Moreover, Christ's work is not limited to the atonement and His saving operations. He is Mediator, but also Head; He is not only the arche, but also the telos of creation, I Cor. 15:45-47; Eph. 1:10,21-23; 5:31,32; Col. 1:15-17.

However, it should be noted that Scripture invariably represents the incarnation as conditioned by human sin. The force of such passages as Luke 19:10; John 3:16; Gal. 4:4; I John 3:8; and Phil. 2:5-11 is not easily broken. The idea, sometimes expressed, that the incarnation in itself was fitting and necessary for God, is apt to lead to the pantheistic notion of an eternal self-revelation of God in the world. The difficulty connected with the plan of God, supposed to burden this view, does not exist, if we consider the matter sub specie aeternitatis. There is but one plan of God, and this plan includes sin and the incarnation from the very beginning. In the last analysis, of course, the incarnation, as well as the whole work of redemption was contingent, not on sin, but on the good pleasure of God. The fact that Christ also has cosmical significance need not be denied, but this too is linked up with His redemptive significance in Eph. 1:10,20-23; Col. 1:14-20.

c. The change effected in the incarnation. When we are told that the Word became flesh, this does not mean that the Logos ceased to be what He was before. As to His essential being the Logos was exactly the same before and after the incarnation. The verb *egeneto* in John 1:14 (the Word became flesh) certainly does not mean that the Logos changed into flesh, and thus altered His essential nature, but simply that He took on that particular character, that He acquired an additional form, without in any way changing His original nature. He remained the infinite and unchangeable Son of God. Again, the statement that the Word became flesh does not mean that He took on a human person, nor, on the other hand, merely that He took on a human body. The word *sarx* (flesh) here denotes human nature, consisting of body and soul. The word is used in a somewhat similar sense in Rom. 8:3; I Tim. 3:16; I John 4:2; II John 7 (comp. Phil. 2:7).

d. The incarnation constituted Christ one of the human race. In opposition to the teachings of the Anabaptists, our Confession affirms that Christ assumed His human nature from the substance of His mother. The prevailing opinion among the Anabaptists was that the Lord brought His human nature from heaven, and that Mary was merely the conduit or channel through which it passed. On this view His human nature was really a new creation, similar to ours, but not organically connected with it. The importance of opposing this view will be readily seen. If the human nature of Christ was not derived from the same stock as ours but merely resembled it, there exists no such relation between us and Him as is necessary to render His mediation available for our good.

e. The incarnation effected by a supernatural conception and a virgin birth. Our Confession affirms that the human nature of Christ was "conceived in the womb of the blessed virgin Mary by the power of the Holy

Ghost, without the means of man.” This emphasizes the fact that the birth of Christ was not at all an ordinary but a supernatural birth, in virtue of which He was called “the Son of God.” The most important element in connection with the birth of Jesus was the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit, for it was only through this that the virgin birth became possible. The Bible refers to this particular feature in Matt. 1:18-20; Luke 1:34,35; Heb. 10:5. The work of the Holy Spirit in connection with the conception of Jesus was twofold: (1) He was the efficient cause of what was conceived in the womb of Mary, and thus excluded the activity of man as an efficient factor. This was entirely in harmony with the fact that the person who was born was not a human person, but the person of the Son of God, who as such was not included in the covenant of works and was in Himself free from the guilt of sin. (2) He sanctified the human nature of Christ in its very inception, and thus kept it free from the pollution of sin. We cannot say exactly how the Holy Spirit accomplished this sanctifying work, because it is not yet sufficiently understood just how the pollution of sin ordinarily passes from parent to child. It should be noted, however, that the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit was not limited to the conception of Jesus, but was continued throughout His life, John 3:34; Heb. 9:14.

It was only through this supernatural conception of Christ that He could be born of a virgin. The doctrine of the virgin birth is based on the following passages of Scripture: Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:18,20; Luke 1:34,35, and is also favoured by Gal. 4:4. This doctrine was confessed in the Church from the earliest times. We meet with it already in the original forms of the Apostolic Confession, and further in all the great Confessions of the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches. Its present denial is not due to the lack of Scriptural evidence for it, nor to any want of ecclesiastical sanction, but to the current general aversion to the supernatural. The passages of Scripture on which the doctrine is based are simply ruled out of court on critical grounds which are far from convincing; and that in spite of the fact that the integrity of the narratives is proved to be beyond dispute; and it is gratuitously assumed that the silence of the other New Testament writers respecting the virgin birth proves that they were not acquainted with the supposed fact of the miraculous birth. All kinds of ingenious attempts are made to explain how the story of the virgin birth arose and gained currency. Some seek it in Hebrew, and others in Gentile, traditions. We cannot enter upon a discussion of the problem here, and therefore merely refer to such works as Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*; Orr, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*; Sweet, *The Birth and Infancy of Jesus Christ*; Cooke, *Did Paul Know the Virgin Birth?* Knowling, *The Virgin Birth*.

The question is sometimes asked, whether the virgin birth is a matter of doctrinal importance. Brunner declares that he is not interested in the subject at all. He rejects the doctrine of the miraculous birth of Christ and holds that it was purely natural, but is not sufficiently interested to defend his view at length. Moreover, he says: “The doctrine of the virgin birth would have been given up long ago were it not for the fact that it seemed as though dogmatic interests were concerned in its retention.”[*The Mediator*, p. 324.] Barth recognises the miracle of the virgin birth, and sees in it a token of the fact that God has creatively established a new beginning by condescending to become man.[*The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 556; *Credo*, pp. 63 ff.; *Revelation*, pp. 65 f.] He also finds in it doctrinal significance. According to him the “sin-inheritance” is passed on by the male parent, so that Christ could assume “creatureliness” by being born of Mary, and at the same time escape the “sin-inheritance” by the elimination of the human father.[*Credo*, pp. 70 f.] In answer to the question, whether the virgin birth has doctrinal significance, it may be said that it would be inconceivable that God should cause Christ to be born in such an extraordinary manner, if it did not serve some purpose. Its doctrinal purpose may be stated as follows: (1) Christ had to be constituted the Messiah and the Messianic Son of God. Consequently, it was necessary that He should be born of a woman, but also that He should not be the fruit of the will of man, but should be born of God. What is born of flesh is

flesh. In all probability this wonderful birth of Jesus was in the background of the mind of John when he wrote as he did in John 1:13. (2) If Christ had been generated by man, He would have been a human person, included in the covenant of works, and as such would have shared the common guilt of mankind. But now that His subject, His ego, His person, is not out of Adam, He is not in the covenant of works and is free from the guilt of sin. And being free from the guilt of sin, His human nature could also be kept free, both before and after His birth, from the pollution of sin.

f. The incarnation itself part of the humiliation of Christ. Was the incarnation itself a part of the humiliation of Christ or not? The Lutherans, with their distinction between the incarnatio and the exinanitio, deny that it was, and base their denial on the fact that His humiliation was limited to His earthly existence, while His humanity continues in heaven. He still has His human nature, and yet is no more in a state of humiliation. There was some difference of opinion on this point even among Reformed theologians. It would seem that this question should be answered with discrimination. It may be said that the incarnation, altogether in the abstract, the mere fact that God in Christ assumed a human nature, though an act of condescension, was not in itself a humiliation, though Kuyper thought it was. [De Christo II, pp. 68 ff.] But it certainly was a humiliation that the Logos assumed “flesh,” that is, human nature as it is since the fall, weakened and subject to suffering and death, though free from the taint of sin. This would seem to be implied in such passages as Rom. 8:3; II Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:6,7.

2. THE SUFFERINGS OF THE SAVIOUR. Several points should be stressed in connection with the sufferings of Christ.

a. He suffered during His entire life. In view of the fact that Jesus began to speak of His coming sufferings towards the end of His life, we are often inclined to think that the final agonies constituted the whole of His sufferings. Yet His whole life was a life of suffering. It was the servant-life of the Lord of Hosts, the life of the Sinless One in daily association with sinners, the life of the Holy One in a sin-cursed world. The way of obedience was for Him at the same time a way of suffering. He suffered from the repeated assaults of Satan, from the hatred and unbelief of His own people, and from the persecution of His enemies. Since He trod the wine-press alone, His loneliness must have been oppressive, and His sense of responsibility, crushing. His suffering was consecrated suffering, increasing in severity as He approached the end. The suffering that began in the incarnation finally reached its climax in the passio magna at the end of His life. Then all the wrath of God against sin bore down upon Him.

b. He suffered in body and soul. There has been a time when the attention was fixed too exclusively on the bodily sufferings of the Saviour. It was not the blind physical pain as such that constituted the essence of His suffering, but that pain accompanied with anguish of soul and with a mediatorial consciousness of the sin of humanity with which He was burdened. Later on it became customary to minimize the importance of the bodily sufferings, since it was felt that sin, being of a spiritual nature, could only be atoned for by purely spiritual sufferings. These one-sided views must be avoided. Both body and soul were affected by sin, and in both the punishment had to be borne. Moreover, the Bible clearly teaches that Christ suffered in both. He agonized in the garden, where His soul was “exceeding sorrowful, even unto death,” and He was buffeted and scourged and crucified.

c. His sufferings resulted from various causes. In the last analysis all the sufferings of Christ resulted from the fact that He took the place of sinners vicariously. But we may distinguish several proximate causes, such as: (1) The fact that He who was the Lord of the universe had to occupy a menial position, even the position of a bond-servant or slave, and that He who had an inherent right to command was in duty bound to obey. (2) The fact that He who was pure and holy had to live in a sinful, polluted atmosphere, in daily

association with sinners, and was constantly reminded of the greatness of the guilt with which He was burdened by the sins of His contemporaries. (3) His perfect awareness and clear anticipation, from the very beginning of His life, of the extreme sufferings that would, as it were, overwhelm Him in the end. He knew exactly what was coming, and the outlook was far from cheerful. (4) Finally, also the privations of life, the temptations of the devil, the hatred and rejection of the people, and the maltreatment and persecutions to which He was subjected.

d. His sufferings were unique. We sometimes speak of the “ordinary” sufferings of Christ, when we think of those sufferings that resulted from the ordinary causes of misery in the world. But we should remember that these causes were far more numerous for the Saviour than they are for us. Moreover, even these common sufferings had an extraordinary character in His case, and were therefore unique. His capacity for suffering was commensurate with the ideal character of His humanity, with His ethical perfection, and with His sense of righteousness and holiness and veracity. No one could feel the poignancy of pain and grief and moral evil as Jesus could. But besides these more common sufferings there were also the sufferings caused by the fact that God caused our iniquities to come upon Him like a flood. The sufferings of the Saviour were not purely natural, but also the result of a positive deed of God, Isa. 53:6,10. To the more special sufferings of the Saviour may also be reckoned the temptations in the desert, and the agonies of Gethsemane and Golgotha.

e. His sufferings in temptations. The temptations of Christ formed an integral part of His sufferings. They are temptations that are encountered in the pathway of suffering, Matt. 4:1-11 (and parallels); Luke 22:28; John 12:27; Heb. 4:15; 5:7,8. His public ministry began with a period of temptation, and even after that time temptations were repeated at intervals right on into dark Gethsemane. It was only by entering into the very trials of men, into their temptations, that Jesus could become a truly sympathetic High Priest and attain to the heights of a proved and triumphant perfection, Heb. 4:15; 5:7-9. We may not detract from the reality of the temptations of Jesus as the last Adam, however difficult it may be to conceive of one who could not sin as being tempted. Various suggestions have been made to relieve the difficulty, as for instance, that in the human nature of Christ, as in that of the first Adam, there was the *nuda possibilitas peccandi*, the bare abstract possibility of sinning (Kuyper); that Jesus’ holiness was an ethical holiness, which had to come to high development through, and maintain itself in, temptation (Bavinck); and that the things with which Christ was tempted were in themselves perfectly lawful, and appealed to perfectly natural instincts and appetites (Vos). But in spite of all this the problem remains, How was it possible that one who in concreto, that is, as He was actually constituted, could not sin nor even have an inclination to sin, nevertheless be subject to real temptation?

3. THE DEATH OF THE SAVIOUR. The sufferings of the Saviour finally culminated in His death. In connection with this the following points should be emphasized:

a. The extent of His death. It is but natural that, when we speak of the death of Christ in this connection, we have in mind first of all physical death, that is, the separation of body and soul. At the same time we should remember that this does not exhaust the idea of death as it is represented in Scripture. The Bible takes a synthetic view of death, and regards physical death merely as one of its manifestations. Death is separation from God, but this separation can be viewed in two different ways. Man separates himself from God by sin, and death is the natural result, so that it can even be said that sin is death. But it was not in that way that Jesus became subject to death, since He had no personal sin. In this connection it should be borne in mind that death is not merely the natural consequence of sin, but above all the judicially imposed and inflicted punishment of sin. It is God’s withdrawing Himself with the blessings of life and happiness from man and visiting man in wrath. It is from this judicial point of view that the death of Christ must be considered. God

imposed the punishment of death upon the Mediator judicially, since the latter undertook voluntarily to pay the penalty for the sin of the human race. Since Christ assumed human nature with all its weaknesses, as it exists after the fall, and thus became like us in all things, sin only excepted, it follows that death worked in Him from the very beginning and manifested itself in many of the sufferings to which He was subject. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. The Heidelberg Catechism correctly says that “all the time He lived on earth, but especially at the end of His life, He bore, in body and soul, the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race.” [Q. 37.] These sufferings were followed by His death on the cross. But this was not all; He was subject not only to physical, but also to eternal death, though He bore this intensively and not extensively, when He agonized in the garden and when He cried out on the cross, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” In a short period of time He bore the infinite wrath against sin to the very end and came out victoriously. This was possible for Him only because of His exalted nature. At this point we should guard against misunderstanding, however. Eternal death in the case of Christ did not consist in an abrogation of the union of the Logos with the human nature, nor in the divine nature’s being forsaken of God, nor in the withdrawal of the Father’s divine love or good pleasure from the person of the Mediator. The Logos remained united with the human nature even when the body was in the grave; the divine nature could not possibly be forsaken of God; and the person of the Mediator was and ever continued to be the object of divine favour. It revealed itself in the human consciousness of the Mediator as a feeling of Godforsakenness. This implies that the human nature for a moment missed the conscious comfort which it might derive from its union with the divine Logos, and the sense of divine love, and was painfully conscious of the fulness of the divine wrath which was bearing down upon it. Yet there was no despair, for even in the darkest hour, while He exclaims that He is forsaken, He directs His prayer to God.

b. The judicial character of His death. It was quite essential that Christ should die neither a natural nor an accidental death; and that He should not die by the hand of an assassin, but under a judicial sentence. He had to be counted with the transgressors, had to be condemned as a criminal. Moreover, it was providentially arranged by God that He should be tried and sentenced by a Roman judge. The Romans had a genius for law and justice, and represented the highest judicial power in the world. It might be expected that a trial before a Roman judge would serve to bring out clearly the innocence of Jesus, which it did, so that it became perfectly clear that He was not condemned for any crime which He had committed. It was a testimony to the fact that, as the Lord says, “He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due.” And when the Roman judge nevertheless condemned the innocent, he, it is true, also condemned himself and human justice as he applied it, but at the same time imposed sentence on Jesus as the representative of the highest judicial power in the world, functioning by the grace of God and dispensing justice in God’s name. The sentence of Pilate was also the sentence of God, though on entirely different grounds. It was significant too that Christ was not beheaded or stoned to death. Crucifixion was not a Jewish but a Roman form of punishment. It was accounted so infamous and ignominious that it might not be applied to Roman citizens, but only to the scum of mankind, to the meanest criminals and slaves. By dying that death, Jesus met the extreme demands of the law. At the same time He died an accursed death, and thus gave evidence of the fact that He became a curse for us, Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13.

4. THE BURIAL OF THE SAVIOUR. It might seem that the death of Christ was the last stage of His humiliation, especially in view of one of the last words spoken on the cross, “It is finished.” But that word in all probability refers to His active suffering, that is, the suffering in which He Himself took an active part. This was indeed finished when He died. It is clear that His burial also formed a part of His humiliation. Notice especially the following: (a) Man’s returning to the dust from which he is taken, is represented in Scripture as part of the punishment of sin, Gen. 3:19. (b) Several statements of Scripture imply that the

Saviour's abode in the grave was a humiliation, Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:27,31; 13:34,35. It was a descent into hades, in itself dismal and dreary, a place of corruption, though in it He was kept from corruption. (c) Burial is a going down, and therefore a humiliation. The burial of dead bodies was ordered by God to symbolize the humiliation of the sinner. (d) There is a certain agreement between the stages in the objective work of redemption and the order in the subjective application of the work of Christ. The Bible speaks of the sinner's being buried with Christ. Now this belongs to the putting off of the old man, and not to the putting on of the new, cf. Rom. 6:1-6. Consequently also the burial of Jesus forms a part of His humiliation. His burial, moreover, did not merely serve to prove that Jesus was really dead, but also to remove the terrors of the grave for the redeemed and to sanctify the grave for them.

5. THE SAVIOUR'S DESCENT INTO HADES.

a. This doctrine in the Apostolic Confession. After the Apostolic Confession has mentioned the sufferings, death, and burial, of the Lord, it continues with the words, "He descended into hell (hades)." This statement was not in the Creed as early nor as universally as the others. It was first used in the Aquileian form of the Creed (c. 390 A.D.), "descendit in inferna." Among the Greeks some translated "inferna" by "hades," and others by "lower parts." Some forms of the Creed in which these words were found did not mention the burial of Christ, while the Roman and Oriental forms generally mentioned the burial but not the descent into hades. Rufinus remarks that they contained the idea of the descent in the word "buried." Later on, however, the Roman form of the Creed added the statement in question after its mention of the burial. Calvin correctly argues that for those who added them after the word "buried," they must have denoted something additional.[Inst. Bk. II, XVI, 8.; cf. also Pearson, On the Creed.] It should be borne in mind that these words are not found in Scripture, and are not based on such direct statements of the Bible as the rest of the articles of the Creed.

b. Scriptural basis for the expression. There are especially four passages of Scripture that come into consideration here. (1) Eph. 4:9, "Now this, He ascended, what is it but that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth?" They who seek support in this passage take the expression "lower parts of the earth" as the equivalent of "hades." But this is a doubtful interpretation. The apostle argues that the ascent of Christ presupposes a descent. Now the opposite of the ascension is the incarnation, cf. John 3:13. Hence the majority of commentators take the expression as referring simply to the earth. The expression may be derived from Ps. 139:15 and refer more particularly to the incarnation. (2) I Peter 3:18,19, which speaks of Christ as "being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which He also went and preached unto the spirits in prison." This passage is supposed to refer to the descent into hades and to state the purpose of it. The Spirit referred to is then understood to be the soul of Christ, and the preaching mentioned must have taken place between His death and resurrection. But the one is just as impossible as the other. The Spirit mentioned is not the soul of Christ but the quickening Spirit, and it was by that same life-giving Spirit that Christ preached. The common Protestant interpretation of this passage is that in the Spirit Christ preached through Noah to the disobedient that lived before the flood, who were spirits in prison when Peter wrote, and could therefore be designated as such. Bavinck considers this untenable and interprets the passage as referring to the ascension, which he regards as a rich, triumphant, and powerful preaching to the spirits in prison.[Geref. Dogm. III, p. 547. For still another interpretation, cf. Brown, Comm. on Peter in loco.] (3) I Pet. 4:4-6, particularly verse 6, which reads as follows: "For unto this end was the gospel preached even to the dead, that they might be judged indeed according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." In this connection the apostle warns the readers that they should not live the rest of their life in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God, even if they should give offense to their former companions and be slandered by them, since they shall have to give an account of their doing to God, who is ready to

judge the living and the dead. The “dead” to whom the gospel was preached were evidently not yet dead when it was preached unto them, since the purpose of this preaching was in part “that they might be judged according to men in the flesh.” This could only take place during their life on earth. In all probability the writer refers to the same spirits in prison of which he spoke in the preceding chapter. (4) Ps. 16:8-10 (comp. Acts 2:25-27,30,31). It is especially the 10th verse that comes into consideration here, “For thou wilt not leave my soul in Sheol; neither wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption.” From this passage Pearson concludes that the soul of Christ was in hell (hades) before the resurrection, for we are told that it was not left there.[Expos. of the Creed, in loco.] But we should note the following: (a) The word *nephesh* (soul) is often used in Hebrew for the personal pronoun, and *sheol*, for the state of death. (b) If we so understand these words here, we have a clear synonymous parallelism. The idea expressed would be that Jesus was not left to the power of death. (c) This is in perfect harmony with the interpretation of Peter in Acts 2:30,31, and of Paul in Acts 13:34,35. In both instances the psalm is quoted to prove the resurrection of Jesus.

c. Different interpretations of the creedal expression. (1) The Catholic Church takes it to mean that, after His death, Christ went into the *Limbus Patrum*, where the Old Testament saints were awaiting the revelation and application of His redemption, preached the gospel to them, and brought them out to heaven. (2) The Lutherans regard the descent into hades as the first stage of the exaltation of Christ. Christ went into the underworld to reveal and consummate His victory over Satan and the powers of darkness, and to pronounce their sentence of condemnation. Some Lutherans place this triumphal march between the death of Christ and His resurrection; others, after the resurrection. (3) The Church of England holds that, while Christ’s body was in the grave, the soul went into hades, more particularly into paradise, the abode of the souls of the righteous, and gave them a fuller exposition of the truth. (4) Calvin interprets the phrase metaphorically, [Inst. Bk. II, XVI, 8 ff.] as referring to the penal sufferings of Christ on the cross, where He really suffered the pangs of hell. Similarly, the Heidelberg Catechism.[Q. 44.] According to the usual Reformed position the words refer not only to the sufferings on the cross, but also to the agonies of Gethsemane. (5) Scripture certainly does not teach a literal descent of Christ into hell. Moreover, there are serious objections to this view. He cannot have descended into hell according to the body, for this was in the grave. If He really did descend into hell, it can only have been as to His soul, and this would mean that only half of His human nature shared in this stage of His humiliation (or exaltation). Moreover, as long as Christ had not yet risen from the dead, the time had not come for a triumphal march such as the Lutherans assume. And, finally, at the time of His death Christ commended His spirit to His Father. This seems to indicate that He would be passive rather than active from the time of His death until He arose from the grave. On the whole it seems best to combine two thoughts: (a) that Christ suffered the pangs of hell before His death, in Gethsemane and on the cross; and (b) that He entered the deepest humiliation of the state of death.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY: How were state and condition related to each other in the case of Adam, when he fell? In the case of the Word becoming flesh? How are they related in the redemption of sinners? Do one’s state and condition always correspond? How should the state of humiliation be defined? What does Kuyper mean, when he distinguishes between the *status generis* and the *status modi*? What stages does he distinguish in the state of humiliation? Is there any biblical proof for the virgin birth, except in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke? What are the doctrinal bearings of this doctrine? Have the theories of the mythical origin of the idea of the virgin birth been found adequate? What do we understand by Christ’s subjection to the law? In what legal relation did He stand as Mediator during His humiliation? Was the human nature of Christ inherently subject to the law of death? Did eternal death in the case of Christ include all the elements that are included in the eternal death of sinners? How can the burial of the Saviour be conceived of as a proof that He really died?

II. The State of Exaltation

In His exaltation, Christ rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, reigns at the Father's right hand, and will return visibly as Judge. These stages show the Father's public vindication of the Son and the certainty of His final victory.

A. General Remarks On The State Of Exaltation.

GLOSS Exaltation: Christ's entrance into resurrection life and heavenly glory, following His completed work of obedience and atonement.

1. THE SUBJECT AND NATURE OF THE EXALTATION. As already indicated in the preceding, there is a difference of opinion between Lutheran and Reformed theology on the subject of the states of Christ. The former deny that the Logos, and assert that the human nature of Christ, is the subject of the states of humiliation and exaltation. Hence they exclude the incarnation from the humiliation of Christ, and maintain that the state of humiliation consists in this, "that Christ for a time renounced (truly and really, yet freely) the plenary exercise of the divine majesty, which His human nature had acquired in the personal union, and, as a lowly man, endured what was far beneath the divine majesty (that He might suffer and die for the love of the world)."[Baier, quoted by Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, p. 383.] They hold that the state of exaltation became manifest first of all to the lower world in the descent into hades, and further to this world in the resurrection and ascension, reaching its completion in the session at the right hand of God. The exaltation, then, consists in this that the human nature assumed the plenary exercise of the divine attributes that were communicated to it at the incarnation, but were used only occasionally or secretly. Reformed theology, on the other hand, regards the person of the Mediator, that is, the God-man, as the subject of the exaltation, but stresses the fact that it was, of course, the human nature in which the exaltation took place. The divine nature is not capable of humiliation or exaltation. In the exaltation the God-man, Jesus Christ, (a) passed from under the law in its federal and penal aspects, and consequently from under the burden of the law as the condition of the covenant of works, and from under the curse of the law; (b) exchanged the penal for the righteous relation to the law, and as Mediator entered into possession of the blessings of salvation which He merited for sinners; and (c) was crowned with a corresponding honour and glory. It had to appear also in His condition that the curse of sin was lifted. His exaltation was also His glorification.

2. THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST BOTH SCRIPTURAL AND REASONABLE. There is abundant Scriptural proof for the exaltation of Christ. The gospel story clearly shows us that the humiliation of Christ was followed by His exaltation. The classical passage to prove the latter is found in Phil. 2:9-11: "Wherefore also God highly exalted Him, and gave unto Him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." But in addition to this there are several others, such as Mark 16:19; Luke 24:26; John 7:39; Acts 2:33; 5:31; Rom. 8:17,34; Eph. 1:20; 4:10; I Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:3; 2:9; 10:12. There is a close connection between the two states. The state of exaltation must be regarded as the judicial result of the state of humiliation. In His capacity as Mediator Christ met the demands of the law in its federal and penal aspects, paying the penalty of sin and meriting everlasting life. Therefore His justification had to follow and He had to be put in possession of the reward. Since He was a public person and accomplished His work publicly, justice required that the exaltation should also be a public matter. The

exaltation of Christ has a threefold significance. Each one of the stages was a virtual declaration of God that Christ met the demands of the law, and was therefore entitled to His reward. The first two stages also had exemplary significance, since they symbolized what will take place in the life of believers. And, finally, all four stages were destined to be instrumental in the perfect glorification of believers.

3. THE STATE OF EXALTATION IN MODERN LIBERAL THEOLOGY. Modern liberal theology, of course, knows of no state of exaltation in the life of Christ. Not only has it discarded the legal idea of the states of Christ altogether, but it has also ruled out all the supernatural in the life of the Saviour. Rauschenbusch closes his *Theology for the Social Gospel* with a discussion of the death of Christ. Macintosh says that “the difficulties in the way of accepting the ordinary traditional notion of the ‘resurrection’ of Jesus, as a reanimation of the dead body, its miraculous transformation and final ascension to ‘heaven,’ are, to the scientific habit of thought, practically insuperable. . . . An undischarged burden of proof still rests upon those who maintain that it (the body of Christ) did not suffer disintegration, like the bodies of all others who have died.” [Theology as an Empirical Science, pp. 77, 78.] Beckwith admits that the Bible, and particularly Paul, speaks of the exaltation of Christ, but says: “If we translate the Apostle’s notion of exaltation into its modern equivalent, we shall find him saying that Christ is superior to all the forces of the universe and to all known orders of rational beings, even the highest, saving only the Father.” [Realities of Christian Theology, p. 138.] And George Burman Foster frankly declares: “According to orthodoxy, the Son of God laid aside his divine glory and then took it up again; he alienated from himself certain divine qualities, and then integrated them again. What is meant is at bottom good, namely, that the great and merciful God serves us, and is not too good for our daily human food. Perhaps the form of the orthodox doctrine was necessary when the doctrine was excogitated, but that terrible being, the modern man, cannot do anything with it.” [Christianity in Its Modern Expression, p. 144.]

B. The Stages Of The State Of Exaltation.

GLOSS Session at God’s right hand: Christ’s reigning authority and honour in heaven; He continues His kingly, priestly, and prophetic work for His people.

Reformed theology distinguishes four stages in the exaltation of Christ.

1. THE RESURRECTION.

a. The nature of the resurrection. The resurrection of Christ did not consist in the mere fact that He came to life again, and that body and soul were re-united. If this were all that it involved, He could not be called “the first-fruits of them that slept,” I Cor. 15:20, nor “the firstborn of the dead,” Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5, since others were restored to life before Him. It consisted rather in this that in Him human nature, both body and soul, was restored to its pristine strength and perfection and even raised to a higher level, while body and soul were re-united in a living organism. From the analogy of the change which, according to Scripture, takes place in the body of believers in the general resurrection, we may gather something as to the transformation that must have occurred in Christ. Paul tells us in I Cor. 15:42-44 that the future body of believers will be incorruptible, that is, incapable of decay; glorious, which means resplendent with heavenly brightness; powerful, that is, instinct with energy and perhaps with new faculties; and spiritual, which does not mean immaterial or ethereal, but adapted to the spirit, a perfect instrument of the spirit. From the Gospel story we learn that the body of Jesus had undergone a remarkable change, so that He was not easily recognised and could suddenly appear and disappear in a surprising manner, Luke 24:31,36; John 20:13,19; 21:7; but that it was nevertheless a material and very real body, Luke 24:39. This does not conflict with I Cor. 15:50, for “flesh

and blood” is a description of human nature in its present material, mortal, and corruptible state. But the change that takes place in believers is not only bodily but also spiritual. Similarly, there was not only a physical but also a psychical change in Christ. We cannot say that any religious or ethical change took place in Him; but He was endowed with new qualities perfectly adjusted to His future heavenly environment. Through the resurrection He became the life-giving Spirit, I Cor. 15:45. The resurrection of Christ had a threefold significance: (1) It constituted a declaration of the Father that the last enemy had been vanquished, the penalty paid, and the condition on which life was promised, met. (2) It symbolized what was destined to happen to the members of Christ’s mystical body in their justification, spiritual birth, and future blessed resurrection, Rom. 6:4,5,9; 8:11; I Cor. 6:14; 15:20-22; II Cor. 4:10,11,14; Col. 2:12; I Thess. 4:14. (3) It is also connected instrumentally with their justification, regeneration, and final resurrection, Rom. 4:25; 5:10; Eph. 1:20; Phil. 3:10; I Pet. 1:3. *p* > <*p* > *b*. The Author of the resurrection. In distinction from others who were raised from the dead, Christ arose through His own power. He spoke of Himself as the resurrection and the life, John 11:25, declared that He had the power to lay down His life, and to take it up again, John 10:18, and even predicted that He would rebuild the temple of His body, John 2:19-21. But the resurrection was not a work of Christ alone; it is frequently ascribed to the power of God in general, Acts 2:24,32; 3:26; 5:30; I Cor. 6:14; Eph. 1:20, or, more particularly, to the Father, Rom. 6:4; Gal. 1:1; I Pet. 1:3. And if the resurrection of Christ can be called a work of God, then it follows that the Holy Spirit was also operative in it, for all the opera ad extra are works of the triune God. Moreover, Rom. 8:11 also implies this.

c. Objection to the doctrine of the resurrection. One great objection is urged against the doctrine of a physical resurrection, namely, that after death the body disintegrates, and the various particles of which it is composed enter into the composition of other bodies, vegetable, animal, and human. Hence it is impossible to restore these particles to all the bodies of which, in the course of time, they formed a part. Macintosh asks, “What became of the atoms of carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, hydrogen and other elements which composed the earthly body of Jesus?” [Theology as an Empirical Science, p. 77.] Now we admit that the resurrection defies explanation. It is a miracle. But at the same time we should bear in mind that the identity of a resurrection body with the body that descended into the grave does not require that it be composed of exactly the same particles. The composition of our bodies changes right along, and yet they retain their identity. Paul in I Cor. 15 maintains the essential identity of the body that descends into the grave with that which is raised up, but also declares emphatically that the form changes. That which man sows in the earth passes through a process of death, and is then quickened; but in form the grain which he puts into the ground is not the same as that which he reaps in due time. God gives to each seed a body of its own. So it is also in the resurrection of the dead. It may be that there is some nucleus, some germ, that constitutes the essence of the body and preserves its identity. The argument of the apostle in I Cor. 15:35-38 seems to imply something of the kind. [Cf. Kuyper, *E Voto* II, pp. 248 ff.; Milligan, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, pp. 117 ff.] It should be borne in mind that the real, the fundamental objection to the resurrection, is its supernatural character. It is not lack of evidence, but the fundamental tenet that miracles cannot happen, that stands in the way of its acceptance. Even liberal scholars admit that no fact is better attested than the resurrection of Christ — though others, of course, deny this. But this makes little difference to the modern scholar. Says Dr. Rashdall: “Were the testimony fifty times stronger than it is, any hypothesis would be more possible than that.” Yet at the present time many eminent scientists frankly declare that they are not in a position to say that miracles cannot happen.

d. Attempts to explain away the fact of the resurrection. In their denial the anti-supernaturalists always run up against the story of the resurrection in the Gospels. The story of the empty tomb and of the appearances of Jesus after the resurrection present a challenge to them, and they accept the challenge and

attempt to explain these without accepting the fact of the resurrection. The following attempts are some of the most important.

(1) The falsehood theory. This is to the effect that the disciples practiced deliberate deception by stealing the body from the grave and then declaring that the Lord had risen. The soldiers who watched the grave were instructed to circulate that story, and Celsus already urged it in explanation of the empty tomb. This theory, of course, impugns the veracity of the early witnesses, the apostles, the women, the five hundred brethren, and others. But it is extremely unlikely that the faint-hearted disciples would have had the courage to palm off such a falsehood upon a hostile world. It is impossible to believe that they would have persisted in suffering for such a bare falsehood. Moreover, only the facts of the resurrection can explain the indomitable courage and power which they reveal in witnessing to the resurrection of Christ. These considerations soon led to the abandonment of this view.

(2) The swoon theory. According to this theory, Jesus did not really die, but merely fainted, while it was thought that He had actually died. But this naturally raises several questions that are not easy to answer. How can it be explained that so many people were deceived, and that the spear thrust did not kill Jesus? How could Jesus in His exhausted condition roll away the stone from the grave and then walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus and back. How is it that the disciples did not treat Him as a sick person, but saw in Him the powerful Prince of Life? And what became of Jesus after that? With the resurrection the ascension is naturally ruled out also. Did He then return to some unknown place and live in secret the rest of His life? This theory is burdened with so many improbabilities that even Strauss ridiculed it.

(3) The vision theory. This was presented in two forms. (a) Some speak of purely subjective visions. In their excited state of mind the disciples dwelt so much on the Saviour and on the possibility of His return to them, that at last they actually thought they saw Him. The spark was applied by the nervous and excitable Mary Magdalene, and soon the flame was kindled and spread. This has been the favorable theory for a long time, but it too is freighted with difficulties. How could such visions arise, seeing that the disciples did not expect the resurrection? How could they appear while the disciples were about their ordinary business and not given to prayer or meditation? Could the rapture or ecstasy required for the creation of subjective visions have started as early as the third day? Would not the disciples in such visions have seen Jesus, either as surrounded with a halo of heavenly glory, or just as they had known Him and eager to renew fellowship with them? Do subjective visions ever present themselves to several persons simultaneously? How can we account for the visionary conversations? (b) In view of the extreme weakness of this theory some scholars presented a different version of it. They claim that the disciples saw real objective visions, miraculously sent by God, to persuade them to go on with the preaching of the gospel. This does really avoid some of the difficulties suggested, but encounters others. It admits the supernatural; and if this is necessary, why not grant the resurrection, which certainly explains all the facts? Moreover, this theory asks us to believe that these divinely sent visions were such as to mislead the apostles. Does God seek to work His ends by deception?

(4) Mythical theories. A new mythical school has come into existence, which discards, or at least dispenses with, theories of vision and apparition, and seeks to account for the resurrection legend by the help of conceptions imported into Judaism from Babylonia and other oriental countries. This school claims not only that the mythology of the ancient oriental religions contains analogies of the resurrection story, but that this story was actually derived from pagan myths. This theory has been worked out in several forms, but is equally baseless in all its forms. It is characterized by great arbitrariness in bolstering up a connection of

the gospel story with heathen myths, and has not succeeded in linking them together. Moreover, it reveals an extreme disregard of the facts as they are found in Scripture.

e. The doctrinal bearing of the resurrection. The question arises, Does it make any difference, whether we believe in the physical resurrection of Christ, or merely in an ideal resurrection? For modern liberal theology the resurrection of Jesus, except in the sense of a spiritual survival, has no real importance for Christian faith. Belief in the bodily resurrection is not essential, but can very well be dropped without affecting the Christian religion. Barth and Brunner are of a different opinion. They do believe in the historical fact of the resurrection, but maintain that as such it is merely a matter of history, with which the historian may deal to the best of his ability, and not as a matter of faith. The important element is that in the resurrection the divine breaks into the course of history, that in it the incognito of Jesus is removed and God reveals Himself. The historian cannot describe it, but the believer accepts it by faith.

Belief in the resurrection certainly has doctrinal bearings. We cannot deny the physical resurrection of Christ without impugning the veracity of the writers of Scripture, since they certainly represent it as a fact. This means that it affects our belief in the trustworthiness of Scripture. Moreover the resurrection of Christ is represented as having evidential value. It was the culminating proof that Christ was a teacher sent from God (the sign of Jonah), and that He was the very Son of God, Rom. 1:4. It was also the supreme attestation of the fact of immortality. What is still more important, the resurrection enters as a constitutive element into the very essence of the work of redemption, and therefore of the gospel. It is one of the great foundation stones of the Church of God. The atoning work of Christ, if it was to be effective at all, had to terminate, not in death, but in life. Furthermore, it was the Father's seal on the completed work of Christ, the public declaration of its acceptance. In it Christ passed from under the law. Finally, it was His entrance on a new life as the risen and exalted Head of the Church and the universal Lord. This enabled Him to apply the fruits of His redemptive work.

2. THE ASCENSION.

a. The ascension of Christ does not stand out as boldly on the pages of the Bible as the resurrection does. This is probably due to the fact that the latter rather than the former was the real turning point in the life of Jesus. In a certain sense the ascension may be called the necessary complement and completion of the resurrection. Christ's transition to the higher life of glory, begun in the resurrection, was perfected in the ascension. This does not mean that the ascension was devoid of independent significance. But though the Scripture proof for the ascension is not as abundant as that for the resurrection, it is quite sufficient. Luke gives a double account of it, Luke 24:50-53, and Acts 1:6-11. Mark refers to it in 16:19, but this passage is contested. Jesus spoke of it time and again before His death, John 6:62; 14:2,12; 16:5,10,17,28; 17:5; 20:17. Paul refers to it repeatedly, Eph. 1:20; 4:8-10; I Tim. 3:16; and the Epistle to the Hebrews calls attention to its significance, 1:3; 4:14; 9:24.

b. The nature of the ascension. The ascension may be described as the visible ascent of the person of the Mediator from earth to heaven, according to His human nature. It was a local transition, a going from place to place. This implies, of course, that heaven is a place as well as earth. But the ascension of Jesus was not merely a transition from one place to another; it also included a further change in the human nature of Christ. That nature now passed into the fulness of heavenly glory and was perfectly adapted to the life of heaven. Some Christian scholars of recent date consider heaven to be a condition rather than a place, and therefore do not conceive of the ascension locally.[Cf. Milligan, *The Ascension and Heavenly Priesthood of our Lord*, pp. 24 ff; Swete, *The Ascended Christ*, pp. 8 f.; Gore, *The Reconstruction of Belief*, pp. 272 f.] They will admit that there was a momentary lifting up of Christ in the sight of the Eleven, but regard this only as a

symbol of the lifting up of our humanity to a spiritual order far above our present life. The local conception, however, is favoured by the following considerations: (1) Heaven is represented in Scripture as the dwelling place of created beings (angels, saints, the human nature of Christ). These are all in some way related to space; only God is above all spatial relations. Of course, the laws that apply in heavenly space may differ from those that apply in earthly space. (2) Heaven and earth are repeatedly placed in juxtaposition in Scripture. From this it would seem to follow that, if the one is a place, the other must be a place also. It would be absurd to put a place and a condition in juxtaposition in that way. (3) The Bible teaches us to think of heaven as a place. Several passages direct our thought upward to heaven and downward to hell, Deut. 30:12; Jos. 2:11; Ps. 139:8; Rom. 10:6,7. This would have no meaning if the two were not to be regarded as local in some sense of the word. (4) The Saviour's entrance into heaven is pictured as an ascent. The disciples see Jesus ascending until a cloud intercepts Him and hides Him from their sight. The same local coloring is present to the mind of the writer of Hebrews in 4:14.

c. The Lutheran conception of the ascension. The Lutheran conception of the ascension differs from that of the Reformed. They regard it, not as a local transition, but as a change of condition, whereby the human nature of Christ passed into the full enjoyment and exercise of the divine perfections, communicated to it at the incarnation, and thus became permanently omnipresent. In connection with the idea that Christ began His session at the right hand of God at the ascension, they maintain that this right hand (which is merely a symbol of power) is everywhere. Lutherans, however, do not all think alike on the subject of the ubiquity of Christ's human nature. Some deny it altogether, and others believe that, while the ascension resulted in the ubiquity of Christ, it also included a local movement, whereby Christ withdrew His visible presence from the earth.

d. The doctrinal significance of the ascension. Barth says that the question may well be asked why the ascension should have a place among the main articles of the Christian faith, seeing that it is mentioned less frequently and emphatically than the resurrection, and where it is mentioned appears only as a natural transition from the resurrection to the session at God's right hand. It is exactly in this transition that he finds the real significance of the ascension. Hence he does not care to stress the ascension as a visible exaltation, a "vertical elevation in space" before the eyes of the disciples, since that is evidently not the way to the session at the right hand of God, which is no place. Just as the historical facts of the virgin birth and of the resurrection are regarded by him merely as signs of a revelation of Christ, so too the ascension as a sign and wonder is merely a "pointer to the revelation, that occurred in the resurrection, of Jesus Christ as the bearer of all power in heaven and earth." [Credo, p. 113.]

It may be said that the ascension had a threefold significance. (1) It clearly embodied the declaration that the sacrifice of Christ was a sacrifice to God, which as such had to be presented to Him in the inner sanctuary; that the Father regarded the Mediatorial work of Christ as sufficient and therefore admitted Him to the heavenly glory; and that the Kingdom of the Mediator was not a kingdom of the Jews, but a universal kingdom. (2) It was also exemplary in that it was prophetic of the ascension of all believers, who are already set with Christ in heavenly places, Eph. 2:6, and are destined to be with Him forever, John 17:24; and also in that it revealed the initial restoration of the original kingship of man, Heb. 2:7,9. (3) Finally, it was also instrumental in preparing a place for those who are in Christ. The Lord Himself points to the necessity of going to the Father, in order to prepare a place for His disciples, John 14:2,3.

3. THE SESSION AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD.

a. Scriptural proof for the session. When Christ stood before the high priest He predicted that He would sit at the right hand of power, Matt. 26:64. Peter makes mention of it in his sermons, Acts 2:33-36; 5:31. In

both of these passages the dative *tei dexiai* may have to be taken in its more usual instrumental sense, though in the first of the two the quotation in verse 34 favors the local interpretation. It is also referred to in Eph. 1:20-22; Heb. 10:12; I Pet. 3:22; Rev. 3:21; 22:1. Besides these passages there are several that speak of Christ's reigning as King, Rom. 14:9; I Cor. 15:24-28; Heb. 2:7,8.

b. The significance of the session. Naturally, the expression "right hand of God" is anthropomorphic and cannot be taken literally. The expression, as used in this connection, is derived from Ps. 110:1, "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." To be seated at the right hand of the king might be merely a mark of honour, I Kings 2:19, but might also denote participation in government, and consequently in honour and glory. In the case of Christ it was undoubtedly an indication of the fact that the Mediator received the reigns of government over the Church and over the universe, and is made to share in the corresponding glory. This does not mean that Christ was not King of Zion up to this time, but that He is now publicly inaugurated as Godman, and as such receives the government of the Church and of heaven and earth, and enters solemnly upon the actual administration of the power committed to Him. This is entirely in agreement with what Calvin says, namely, that the statement that Christ was seated at the right hand of God is equivalent to saying "that He was installed in the government of heaven and earth, and formally admitted to possession of the administration committed to Him, and not only admitted for once, but to continue until He descend to judgment." [Inst., Bk. II. XVI. 15.] It is perfectly evident that it would be a mistake to infer from the fact that the Bible speaks of Christ's "sitting" at the right hand of God, that the life to which the risen Lord ascended is a life of rest. It is and continues to be a life of constant activity. The statements of Scripture vary. Christ is not only represented as sitting at the right hand of God, but also simply as being at His right hand, Rom. 8:34; I Pet. 3:22, or as standing there, Acts 7:56, and even as walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. And it would be equally wrong to conclude from the emphasis on the royal dignity and government of Christ, naturally suggested by the idea of His sitting at the right hand of God, that the work in which He is engaged during His heavenly session is exclusively governmental, and therefore neither prophetic nor priestly.

c. The work of Christ during His session. It deserves emphasis that Christ, while He is seated at the right hand of God, is not merely a passive recipient of divine dominion and power, majesty and glory, but is actively engaged in the continuation of His mediatorial work.

(1) Since the Bible most frequently connects the session with the kingly rule of Christ, it is natural to think first of all of His work as King. He rules and protects His Church by His Spirit, and also governs it through His appointed officers. He has all the forces of heaven under His command: the angels are His messengers, always ready to convey His blessings to the saints, and to guard them against surrounding dangers. He exercises authority over the forces of nature, and over all the powers that are hostile to the Kingdom of God; and will so continue to reign until He has subjected the last enemy.

(2) However, His work is not limited to His kingly rule. He is priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. When He cried out on the cross, "It is finished," He did not mean to say that His priestly work was at an end, but only that His active suffering had reached its termination. The Bible also connects priestly work with Christ's session at the right hand of God, Zech. 6:13; Heb. 4:14; 7:24,25; 8:1-6; 9:11-15,24-26; 10:19-22; I John 2:2. Christ is continually presenting His completed sacrifice to the Father as the sufficient basis for the bestowal of the pardoning grace of God. He is constantly applying His sacrificial work, and making it effective in the justification and sanctification of sinners. Moreover, He is ever making intercession for those that are His, pleading for their acceptance on the basis of His completed sacrifice, and for their safe-keeping in the world, and making their prayers and services acceptable to God. The Lutherans stress the fact that the

intercession of Christ is *vocalis et realis*, while the Reformed emphasize the fact that it consists primarily in the presence of Christ in man's nature with the Father, and that the prayers are to be considered as the presentation of legitimate claims rather than as supplications.

(3) Christ also continues His prophetic work through the Holy Spirit. Before He parted with His disciples He promised them the Holy Spirit, to aid their memories, teach them new truths, guide them in all the truth, and enrich them out of the fulness of Christ, John 14:26; 16:7-15. The promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost; and from that day on Christ, through the Spirit, was active as our great Prophet in various ways: in the inspiration of Scripture; in and through the preaching of the apostles and of the ministers of the Word; in the guidance of the Church, making it the foundation and pillar of the truth; and in making the truth effective in the hearts and lives of believers.

4. THE PHYSICAL RETURN OF CHRIST.

a. The return as a stage in the exaltation. The return of Christ is sometimes omitted from the stages of His exaltation, as if the session at the right hand of God were the culminating point. But this is not correct. The highest point is not reached until He who suffered at the hands of man, returns in the capacity of Judge. He himself pointed to this as a special mediatorial prerogative, John 5:22,27, and so did the apostles, Acts 10:42; 17:31. Besides the passages that speak of Christ's appointment as Judge, there are several that refer to His judicial activity, Matt. 19:28; 25:31-34; Luke 3:17; Rom. 2:16; 14:9; II Cor. 5:10; II Tim. 4:1; Jas. 5:9.

b. Scriptural terms for the return. Several terms are used to designate the future coming of Jesus Christ. The term "parousia" is the most common of these. It means in the first place simply "presence," but also serves to designate a coming preceding a presence. The latter is the common meaning of the term, when it is used in connection with the return of Jesus Christ, Matt. 24:3, 27,37,39; I Cor. 15:23; I Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; II Thess. 2:1; Jas. 5; 7,8; II Pet. 3:4. A second term is "apocalypsis," which stresses the fact that the return will be a revealing of Jesus Christ. It points to the uncovering of something that was previously hidden from view, in this case, of the concealed glory and majesty of Jesus Christ, II Thess. 1:7; I Pet. 1:7,13; 4:13. A third term is "epiphaneia," the glorious appearing of the Lord. The implication is that what is uncovered is something glorious, II Thess. 2:8; I Tim. 6:14; II Tim. 4:1-8; Tit. 2:13.

c. The manner of Christ's return. Some place the return of Christ in the past, claiming that the promise of His coming again was realized when He returned in the Holy Spirit. They refer to the promise in John 14-16, and interpret the word "parousia" as meaning simply "presence." [Warren. *The Parousia*; J. M. Campbell, *The Second Coming of Christ*.] Now it may be said that, in a sense, Christ did return in the Holy Spirit, and as such is now present in the Church. But this was a spiritual return, while the Bible teaches us to look for a physical and visible return of Christ, Acts. 1:11. Even after Pentecost we are taught to look forward to the coming of Christ, I Cor. 1:7; 4:5; 11:26; Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:4; I Thess. 4:15-17; II Thess. 1:7-10; Tit. 2:13; Rev. 1:7.

d. The purpose of His return. The second coming of Jesus Christ will be for the purpose of judging the world and perfecting the salvation of His people. Men and angels, the living and the dead, will appear before Him to be judged according to the record which was kept of them, Matt. 24:30,31; 25:31,32. It will be a coming with terrible judgments upon the wicked, but also with blessings of eternal glory for the saints, Matt. 25:33-46. While He will sentence the wicked to everlasting punishment, He will publicly justify His own and lead them into the perfect joy of His eternal Kingdom. This will signalize the completed victory of Jesus Christ.

e. Objection to the doctrine of the return. The great objection to the doctrine of the return of Jesus Christ is of a piece with the objection to the doctrine of the physical resurrection of Christ. If there can be no

physical resurrection and ascension, there can be no physical return from heaven. Both are equally impossible, and the Biblical teachings respecting them are merely crude representations of an unscientific age. Jesus evidently shared the carnal views of His day, and these colored His prophetic delineations of the future. The only return of which we can speak and for which we can hope is a return in power, in the establishment of an ethical kingdom on earth.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY: What historical proofs have we for the resurrection of Christ? Does I Cor. 15:8 prove that the appearances were subjective visions? What myths are supposed to have entered into the shaping of the story of the resurrection? What light do the following passages shed on the post-resurrection condition of Jesus? I Cor. 6:17; II Cor. 3:17, 18; I Tim. 3:16; Rom. 1:3, 4; Heb. 9:14; I Pet. 3:18. What is the difference between a soma psychicon, a soma pneumatikon, and a soma tes sarkos? Are “spirit” and “spiritual” antithetical to “body” and “bodily” in the New Testament? Does science really make it impossible to think of heaven as a place? Is it true that in Scripture the words “heaven” and “heavenly” indicate a state rather than a place? Does modern theology think of heaven only as a condition to be entered upon after death? Does its position really find support in such a passage as Eph. 2:6? Does the Old Testament contain any references to the ascension and the session at the right hand of God? What serious objections are there to the Lutheran doctrine of the ubiquity of the human nature of Christ? Does the Bible teach us to regard the return of Christ as imminent?