

Christology: A Brisk Panoramic Assessment of Paul, Peter and Hebrews

By [Billy C. Sichone](#)

Central Africa Baptist University

Introduction

The study of Christ, His person, work and significance has been a subject of much debate and discussion for many generations across history. At times, Christ's person has been degraded to a mere created being of God ending up as an example of human excellence, while in other cases as a tragic end to a potentially prime story. It is however interesting that it took several centuries to finally settle the question as to Christ's actual person, nature and divinity. While the first century Christians worshipped Christ and considered Him God with immediate later generations carrying over this assumption, the third and fourth centuries were the hot spots of debate and eventual settling of the matter relating to Jesus' divinity and duo nature when He walked the surface of the earth.

However, the Christian church remained divided on the actual significance and person. While they agreed that Jesus was born, lived, died and rose again, they probably disagreed on the aspects thus far highlighted. It was therefore necessary for the different apostles to set the record straight and thank fully, we have some significant writings on the persona and work of Jesus Christ. For our purposes, we focus on the epistles, Hebrews and second Peter. Three different writers (i.e. Douglas Moo, Terrance Callan & Julian Kinkaid) have done an excellent job in deciphering the Christology latent in the respective books mentioned above. Despite not viewing things exactly the same, their work is helpfully insightful. We break down our investigation into several components but each head with its respective subheads. We finally wrap up the whole at the end of these summaries. Before delving into the details, it is fitting to define what is meant by "*Christology*".

By "*Christology*", we mean the study of Christ in His person, nature and work. When Christ came to the world, he came with a mission, to seek and save that which was lost, which He accomplished, climaxing it on the cross. Often, many of us focus on His incarnation and death but there is need to consider His resurrection and ascension into Heaven as well where He ever lives to intercede for the saints.

Paul's Christology

Paul has extensively written on the person and work of Jesus Christ. His writings in Galatians, I & II Thessalonians, I & II Corinthians and Romans (in order of authorship) throw some of the clearest light on the person and work of Jesus Christ. From the apostle's writing, it is crystal clear that the nature and work of this savior is exceedingly important to our salvation because if Christ did not come, we would be the most to be pitied because our salvation would be null and void (I Cor 15:17). We may observe a number of things about Paul's Christology:

1. Jesus is both God and man.
2. Jesus entered three offices that of Prophet, Priest and King.
3. Jesus was not only the Priest but the lamb and thus ransom for our sins.
4. Paul uses the names often used and established in his day such as '*Christ*', '*Lord*', '*Saviour*' or '*Redeemer*' repeatedly in his letters, most of the time using them carefully to communicate exactly what He intends his audience or readership to grasp.
5. Jesus actually was incarnated, lived among us and was crucified, died was buried and rose again. Paul, comparatively rarely directly refers to the ascension although alludes to it as a necessary fact to redemption/atonement.¹ That said, Philippians 2:5-11 comes close.
6. Paul's epistles are so pregnant with the word "*Christ*" or allusion to it, appearing nearly 450 times in the epistles mentioned. This is an average appearance of nearly once every three verses!
7. To properly and completely understand or grasp the entirety of Paul's Christology has proved elusive but at least four approaches have been devised namely:
 - a. Chronologically go through the epistles from first to last in order of writing and establish a trend. By this approach, a pattern is traced.
 - b. Focus on one book, especially Romans to establish Christology because for all intent and purposes, this was written with the express purpose to explain the gospel, its significance and result. Although the epistle does not make Christology the central theme, it none the less

¹ Note that Paul does in fact talk about the ascension in his theology though to a relatively lesser degree in comparison to other aspects of redemption/atonement. Dunn and others seem to hold this similar view.

highlights Christology. The second reason is that this was written in the mature years of the apostle and thus brings to the fore the full dosage of Paul's Christology. James Dunn advocates this view and approach.

- c. Study Paul's Christology by the Titles, names and frequency with which Paul uses these phrases to establish the importance of his subject matter. Focus is on titles such as '*Lord*', '*Christ*', '*Son of God*' etc and then establish a trend. It is interesting, as earlier mentioned, that Paul uses the word "*Christ*" or related words in the excess of 450 times if we consider all his epistles! That's really detailed amounting to nearly a mention of the word "*Christ*" every 3 verses! Further, Paul uses the phrase "*In Christ*" almost forty times!
- d. Finally, carefully tracing the narrative structures and underlying teaching of the New Testament teachings as given from the life and death of Christ. It is assumed that Paul knew about the earthly life of Christ and thus goes about to write. He is aware of the facts relating to Jesus and thus, evidently writes with that back ground in mind.

Admittedly, all these approaches have their own peculiar problems and short comings but used collectively and interchangeably, they help yield a rich result.

8. Christ is viewed as the apex of salvation without whom salvation is not possible. Paul makes this case in Colossians and Ephesians. Jesus is indeed the climax of history, the savior, the seed of Abraham, the last Adam, the end of the law and representative of those that would believe.
9. Christ's person is best understood if the "stages" of his redemptive enterprise is appreciated. Christ is said to be pre-existent (although Paul does not major much on this aspect), incarnated, died, rose/exalted (Phil 2:5-11). Paul never directly refers to Christ's ascension but his ascension, perhaps his emphasis on exaltation implies and assumes the ascension.

Paul's Christology is deep and reach though focused on Jesus' redemptive work on the Cross. His exposition of Justification with respect to Christ's work is simply unequalled, no wonder some have accused Paul of having redefined the gospel. Muslims are among such pundits hence their deep detest of this great apostle to the gentiles.

The Christology of the second Letter of Peter

Second Peter does not talk much about the nature of Christ probably explaining why the vast majority of writers or commenter's focus more on the ethical and

eschatological aspects rather than its teaching on eschatology. II Peter however has a lot to offer in relation to Christology. Below are some highlights:

1. Peter Calls Jesus 'God' in a number of passages.
2. Jesus is called both Lord and God.
3. Jesus is a distinct person from God the Father.
4. There is one God. Ontologically, God is one.
5. Author makes no effort to explain the relationship between his divinity and humanity.
6. Hellenistic and Hebrew thought/views evident in this book because the term "god" was commonly used in two senses.
7. In some cultural contexts, the word "*Lord*" refers to seniority rather than divinity.
8. 2nd Peter does not identify Jesus as the '*word of God*' as does John.
9. The writer of 2nd Peter is monotheistic rather than polytheistic.

The Christology of Hebrews 8-10

Hebrews is thought to be the most concentrated book with respect to Christology because the author goes in far great detail to explain how and why Christ is the long expected savior. The writer also demonstrates that Christ has more than satisfied (i.e. expiated & propitiated) the just demands of God and more than that, ever lives to intercede for us. Below are summary points relating to Hebrews' points as advanced by Julian Kinkaid:

Hebrews is a book that achieves two things: First it demonstrates that the Old Testament sacrifices are obsolete/ impotent because of Christ's Sacrifice. Secondly, it shows that the sacrifices as we know them were inadequate to take away our sins forever, the best being one year at a go. Christ's sacrifice is a once and fall act able to cleanse all sin. In handling this great subject, Kinkaid tackles his treatise on Christology from chapters 8-10 in the following fashion:

Christ the pre-existent Son

Jesus is called the '*Son of God*' which denotes His divinity. He existed before He became man in the incarnation.

Christ the man

Having left the glories of Heaven, Jesus took on flesh and limited Himself in a human body, whilst still remaining God almighty throughout. He obeyed the entire law passively and actively. Though fully man, he was none the less without sin-two natures in one.

Christ the mediator

When Christ came to the earth, He became a mediator between God and Man. Only He qualified for such a mission and task. He brought about reconciliation by being the guarantor of the covenant.

Christ the High Priest

He entered the office of High Priest to sacrifice his offering (of his own body) before the Father. While the earthly High Priest entered the Holy of Holies once per year, Christ entered the Holy of Holies of Heaven to present his sacrifice in our stead. Thus, His Priest hood is superior to any other and in the order of *Melchizedeck*. It's a puzzle that one who did not belong to the Levitical priest hood offered such a sacrifice.

Christ the Intercessor

Having atoned for His people, Christ was raised and exalted to the highest place where he ever lives to intercede for the elect as individuals.

Christ the King

Not only is He intercessor, Jesus is the King of Kings, exalted at the right hand of God, denoting power. He is glorified forever.

Jesus is a great High Priest who has accomplished for us what we could not. Julian captures this though very well.

Lessons and applications

The fact that Christ saved us from the wrath to come is cause for great rejoicing and thankfulness. We, in point form suggest some take home lessons/applications.

1. Christ both propitiated and expiated in our stead.
2. Redeemed people ought to live joyful and thankful lives.
3. Christians must devote their lives to Christ.
4. Christ passively and actively rendered obedience to God.
5. Christ was not only an example for us but our actual saviour.
6. No human being can ever repay the debt we owe to Christ.
7. Christ died for the ungodly, this is matchless grace!
8. Christians need to daily persuade men to come to Christ if strangers to his grace.
9. Christians should walk as Jesus walked in holy humility and service to God.
10. Christ can be imitated unlike some men that walked the earth.
11. Christ ever lives to intercede before the throne of grace.
12. Jesus has a hypostatic nature difficult to exactly define but true.
13. The hymn writer is right when they say "*oh let my life be given, my years for thee be spent...*" Another rightly says "*More about Jesus would I know...*"

Conclusion

It is exceptionally evident that Christ remains the main subject of discussion even today. Although the debate about Christ's person and work are largely settled by many centuries of work, debate, research and writing, some pockets still emerge that trash the Evangelical position. This is evidenced by the increase in the Arians, Socinians and even some dissenting "Evangelicals" such as the Unitarians. It is therefore ever so important for the Church to be vigilant and preach or teach the truth as it is in Jesus. The Lord's death and resurrection has enabled every saint to enter the everlasting rest as taught in the 4th of Hebrews.

References

Brown J.C. (1867). *The Divine Glory of Christ*, The Banner of Truth Trust.

Callan Terrance, The Christology of the second letter of Peter, *Biblica* 82 (2001) 253-263.

Dunn J.D.G. (1996). *Christology in the making*, WM Eerdmans.

Kinkaid Julian, The Christology of Hebrews 8-10. *biblicalstudies.org.uk*. available at: https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_hebrews.html, accessed on 03/11/2021.

Moo J Douglas, The Christology of the early Pauline letters, *Yumpu* available at: <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/9123598/the-christology-of-the-early-pauline-letters-dj-moo-photography-> accessed on 03/11/2021.

Morey Robert.(2011). *Studies in The atonement*, Xulon Press.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).