

The first section of this paper addresses the heretical positions of the writer of a certain article, concerning Christology and Soteriology.

The Journal of Ancient Heresies

**A Critical Review of “The Doctrine of Salvation”
An Article by U.R. de Ceiver**

At certain times in our life, we have those strange moments, where we see a certain television show, or read a certain book, and it seems as though we are almost transported back in time. Such is the reading of this article, by Pastor de Ceiver.

As one begins there reading of his unbiblical work, it comes to your mind that you are taking a journey back through church history, pausing to gape in wonder at the heretical stances that certain unwitting theologians took, in their effort to discover the truth. What’s amazing about this article is that somehow these misconceptions found their way into a single writing, by a single man. It seems unthinkable that such a vast amount of refuting scripture could be overlooked: since it has been so overlooked, however, an attempt will be made in the following pages, to expose the misleading doctrine for what it is; a journal of ancient heresies.

Christ Was the First Created Being

We can thank Arius, the Bishop of Alexandria from the early fourth century, for this one. Arius taught that “God the Son was at one point created by God the Father, and that before that time the Son did not exist, nor did the Holy Spirit, but the Father only. Thus, though the Son is a heavenly being who existed before the rest of creation and is

far greater than all the rest of creation, he is still not equal to the father in all his attributes-he may even be said to be “like the Father” or “similar to the Father” in his nature, but he cannot be considered “of the same nature” with the Father” (Grudem 1994: 243).

Now compare this to the statement made by Pastor de Ceiver; in his article he states, “Thus ‘Christ’ was the firstborn and only begotten Son of God, a spiritual being who existed from the beginning of creation, and is the greatest of all creatures, second only to the Father”. Clearly de Ceiver is allied with Arian ideas!

Much of the misconception inherent within this idea is brought about by a misunderstanding of the word “begotten”. The Greek word translated “begotten” in John 3:16, is mistakenly interpreted in such a way that Christ is “born” or comes into being. This however should not be interpreted to mean “born” or “created” but rather that Jesus has the rights and privileges of a first born son.

One of the passages quoted within his work, is Colossians 1:15-16. In these verses, Christ is said to be “firstborn of all creation”, yet this is not speaking of literal birth, for in verse 19 of the same chapter it states “for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”. Christ was fully God! We can then, view this issue in a syllogism much like this; God was not created, Jesus was God, therefore, Jesus was not created.

Many other supporting passages abound. In John 10:30 he states “I and the Father are one”. In the first chapter of John it states “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word *was God* (emphasis added). Lastly, and most conclusively, in verse 10 of the Gospel of John, it states “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” If nothing was made, unless it was made through him, then he (Jesus) was obviously not made (created)!

Jesus Was Just “God in a Body”

Another heresy we see emerge in de Ceiver’s article, is that of Apollinarianism. In it, he says of Christ that “...while subject to all the physical limitations of a human body (e.g. tiredness, hunger), {he} *did not have a human spirit*, but had a powerful Christ

indwelling spirit.” This is identical to the ideas of Apollinarius, a bishop of the Laodicean church, who taught the very same thing (Grudem 1994:554).

This is an easily refuted idea; looking at Hebrews 2:17, we read that “...he had to be *made like his brothers in every respect*, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” Since he was “made like his brothers” in every respect, we can state unequivocally Christ must have had a human spirit and mind, to accomplish his work.

Ransom to Satan Theory

In regards to the atonement, de Ceiver writes “...Jesus gave his life as a *ransom to Satan*, to free the people the devil was holding captive”. Oh, what a high position this gives to the Devil!

Thankfully, this is not what scripture teaches; Christ was not paying a ransom to Satan, but to God the Father. It was God’s wrath that had to be appeased, Him who needed for justice to be done. Scripture states that “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”(John 3:36 ESV)

The Bible is very clear that it is God that demands payment for sin; “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins...” (1 John 2:1-2 ESV) In the Old Testament, when sacrifices were offered for sin, they were offered “to the Lord” as well. (Exodus 3:18, Leviticus 1:9)

It is unspeakable that God, the creator of all things, would need to pay a “ransom” to one of his creations. Furthermore, there is not a single scripture in all of the Bible, New Testament or Old, which ascribes such glory to Satan.

Jesus died as a payment, to the Father, for our sins. That is abundantly clear.

Jesus Did Not Come in the Flesh

De Ceiver says that the most common misconception about Christ's resurrection is that he was "raised with a physical body". How can someone call themselves Christian, yet say such a thing? It obvious that Christ was raised with a physical body; and so will we be!

One indication that Jesus had a physical body was that the scars from his crucifixion remained. In Luke 24, when Thomas also doubted Christ's physical resurrection, Christ offered for him to place his hands in his side, and in the nail holes that were in his hands.

Before his death, Christ told the Pharisees who were doubting his claims, to "destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up". Clearly then this is not a different body, but the same body, raised "imperishable" (1 Corinthians 15:53-54).

Some try to make a big deal out of the fact that Jesus was not recognized by his disciples, and de Ceiver is no different. It can be easily seen, however, that upon receiving his glorified physical body, the 30 plus years of hard life would be erased from his face (wrinkles, etc.) and would make him nearly unrecognizable to the apostles. Christ then, just as we will be, was raised with a physical *perfected* body.

Works Based Salvation

In the authors section on "Righteous Living in Christ", he asserts that "At the end of our lives, God will evaluate our works after conversion." This clearly goes against biblical teachings; salvation is by grace, not by works.

It was the Apostle Paul who was the champion of the clarion call of grace. In his time, there was a Church that believed much the same thing; they receive a stinging rebuke! In Chapter 3 of his epistle to the Church of Galatia, we read "O *foolish* Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, *are you now being perfected by the flesh?*" (ESV Emphasis mine)

This type of thinking is what we are warned against over and over again in the New Testament! Yet some people seem determined to attack the Gospel of Grace. They

use certain verses to make it appear as if somehow we must work for our salvation, an idea the Bible condemns.

One such verse is from the book of James. In chapter 2, verse 14 we read “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? “. This they say is there proof; one must not only have faith, he must have works as well to achieve salvation. However, this verse, read properly and taken in context, is not saying that. Rather, it is describing the salvation process, whereby after receiving salvation, we will because of a new heart and renewed mind, inevitably produce works. In other words, the type of faith that saves *will* produce works.

Paul’s chilling warning should cause all purveyors of law to pause. In chapter 5 of Galatians, we read these words from Paul; “You are severed from Christ, *you who would be justified by the law*; you have fallen away from grace.” (ESV, Emphasis mine)

Summary

To be a follower of Christ, we must develop a spirit of discernment. So many articles, books, and writings are circulating around the world, many appearing on the surface to be Christian. Christ warned the Church about this; he said that many false apostles and false Christs would rise. Therefore we should be ever vigilant and watchful, lest we too should be led astray by such twisted doctrine.

Some say Christ was not God, and others put Satan at God’s level, as if the spiritual realm were some sort of dichotomy; a balance of good and evil. Perhaps the worst of all is that some claim the work of Jesus on the cross to be less than sufficient. The direction that the heresy takes is irrelevant, as they are all just a “different gospel”, and their followers pray to a God of their own making.

Thanks be to God that he has equipped his true followers. We are not alone; God has given us his Holy Spirit, which will guard our hearts and minds. People such as Pastor de Ceiver will rise and fall and we need to be quick to point out their error; but in the end God has it all under control.

The Humanity of Christ

It seems as if the Word of God is constantly under attack. Today, that thrust is primarily directed towards the deity of Christ, and the miraculous events that took place during his life. In the past however, an equally powerful attack was leveled against his humanity.

It is understandable, really, that people have such a difficult time envisioning a selfless creator that would assume weak human flesh, for the sake of his creation. No human, put in the same situation would go to such extensive lengths to save such an undeserving people. Christ has done just that; he was born, lived, and died fully human in all regards. This concept is absolutely vital to the proper understanding of Christ's redemptive work; the gospel falls apart if it is denied.

The Bible's Claim of Christ's Full Humanity

One of the earliest heresies of the church was that of Docetism. According to this view Christ *appeared* to take on human flesh, but in reality it was all illusory. Christ did not actually suffer and die on the cross, nor was he ever really thirsty or hungry (Grudem 2000:540).

The apostle John seems to be addressing such ideas in the beginning of 1 John, when he wrote, "That ...which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and have touched with our hands..." (1John1:1 ESV). Then again, in his second epistle, he states that "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist" (2 John 1:7 ESV).

Yet another aspect to consider is Jesus' own words. Many times in the Gospels, he demonstrates aspects of his humanity. The bible demonstrates Him being thirsty (John

19:28), hungry (Mathew 4:2), and feeling physical and emotional pain (Mathew 27:46). These are things that are clearly human. To say that Christ was simply “imitating” humanity, would be to say that he was faking a large portion of his time on earth, and in essence, calling him a liar, and thereby denying his deity, because God cannot lie (Tit 1:2).

It is clear then that to deny the full humanity of Christ is to go against the teachings of the Bible. It is also clear that the apostle John regards this fact as extremely important. But what is it, fundamentally, that makes this biblical fact so key? Why is it necessary? We shall now take a look at the specific reasons for Christ’s humanity.

Necessity for Our Full Redemption

One of the most basic premises upon which the gospel of Jesus Christ is built is that he came to this earth, and became a man, to be a sacrificial offering, and save us from our sins. Through his perfectly lived life, and his death on the cross, taking our sins upon him, he has redeemed us so that we might stand justified before God, wholly righteous. But why was it that he had to be fully human in all respects?

Many early philosophers and theologians argued that he was not completely human. Some argued that Christ’s mind was divine, others that he did not possess a human spirit or soul. These views quickly present major problems in the doctrine of salvation, however.

It was Gregory of Nazianzus, a fourth century bishop of Constantinople, which wrote the words “For that which he has not assumed, He has not healed: but that which is united to his Godhead is also saved” (Placher 1983:81). In other words, it was necessary for Christ to become in every aspect human, if every aspect of humanity was to be redeemed. If Jesus did not have a human mind, then the human mind was not saved. If he did not have a human soul, then the human soul had not been purchased. Only the full humanity of Christ could save people fully.

Christ Became Human to Be Obedient Where We Were Not

It is a fact that since the fall of Adam, no person has ever been totally submitted and obedient to the Father. Moses, David, Abraham; all the great heroes of the faith failed in some manner. Christ came then, to be perfectly obedient and submitted, where we could not; to live a perfect, sinless life in our place.

In Romans 5:18-19, Paul illustrates this point perfectly. He states that although Adams sin brought condemnation upon all (that is, sin was imputed to us through Adam's disobedience) through Christ's obedience, many will be "made righteous" (righteousness was imputed to us through Christ's obedience).

To Set an Example for How We Should Live

Notice in Hebrews Chapter 4, verses 15 and 16, the relationship of Christ's sinless nature, and our relationship to God...

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Because Christ was tempted as we were, and yet he did not sin, he sets a moral example for us to follow. Also, note that it is *directly because* we have a 'High Priest' who has set the perfect example, yet is able to sympathize with the temptations we struggle with, that we are able to "draw near to the throne of grace"; i.e. Christ's obedience allows us to have a secure relationship with God. If Christ were not completely man, then real temptation for him would be impossible, for God "...cannot be tempted with evil" (James 1:13). Only by being man, is understanding of our trials with sin possible.

Summary

With these items in view, we can clearly see the necessity of Christ's full humanity, in order to accomplish his salvific work here on Earth. Were he not completely and totally man, the bedrock or the gospel of Jesus would fall apart. Jesus as sacrifice, as example, as fulfillment of obedience, all of the aspects are necessary for the Christian

life; to accomplish what Christ came to accomplish. The Shepard has saved his sheep, by becoming one of them, and placing himself willingly in the jaws of the wolf.

Justification

In the following pages, an attempt will be made to paint a biblical picture of justification. The necessity of justification, its impacts, and results, will all be examined from a biblical perspective. What exactly does the bible teach regarding our standing before God; how does he see us? We will start with a definition of justification, and work out from there.

The Meaning of Justification

Justification is a legal term used to describe the moment of our salvation. It is a declaration by God that our sins are forgiven, and we are seen as righteous and holy, irrespective of our actual deeds. Therefore, although we are not particularly “good people”, that is to say, perfect, we are justified in the same way that a judge could pardon a criminal’s crimes, even if he was guilty in fact.

This can be seen in the life of Abraham. Abraham did many sinful acts, including letting Pharaoh “take” his wife, out of fear (Genesis 12:15). If we look at James 2:23, though, we see that righteousness was “imputed” to him, even though he was not inherently righteous. So although he was not a “good person”, that is how God sees him.

Aspects of Justification

At this point someone might ask “Why do we need to be justified in the first place? Why do we need to be pardoned?” Let us look to the Bible.

Scripture says that “All have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God” (Rom 3:23) and elsewhere it says that *all* “like sheep, have gone astray” (Isaiah 53:6). God’s

standard is absolute moral perfection, in mind word and action, and we have all failed to meet it, and therefore stand condemned.

Some will say “He can simply forgive our sins.” This line of thinking fails to take into account the absolute just nature of God. He *cannot* simply overlook our sins, there must be payment, and according to scripture, only one payment is sufficient; death (i.e. blood) (Romans 6:23).

Obviously then we cannot pay this price ourselves. Should we die in our sins, the Bible is clear that we would spend eternity in hell (Mathew 25:41). We then, need a substitute, someone to die in our place. Also, according to the laws laid down in the Torah governing sacrifice, that substitute must be “without spot or blemish” (Numbers 29:17, 26).

In this we see a two fold process; Christ both takes away our sin, and accepts the punishment for them, and imputes his righteousness to us. In other words, when God looks at us, he sees the righteousness of Christ, and we are therefore declared “not guilty”.

Ground of Justification

The substitute that we need can be found in Jesus Christ. He alone fulfills the requirements of our ransom. Scripture is very clear, that it is through his shed blood on the cross that we now have access to forgiveness and pardon for our sins.

First, notice that he fills the requirement of sinless perfection. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, *yet without sin*”(Hebrews 4:15 ESV). Since he is “without blemish”, he then qualifies as our sacrifice.

Secondly, he is God in the flesh (John 8:58), and his blood is thereby sufficient for all of humanity past and future. This would not be true of a person who was not God, even if they were sinless. Their blood would only be enough for themselves, not for others. Christ’s death was enough for all.

Lastly, we can see that this is exactly why Jesus came. The gospel of Matthew states that he “gave his life as a ransom for many” (20:28). Christ’s death is effective, sufficient, and available. All who receive the blood of Christ are justified in Gods eyes, and forgiven of their sins.

Instrument of Justification

The blood of Jesus Christ and his sacrificial death on the cross is the grounds for our justification. But what is the means? How do we receive it?

Again we must turn to the Word of God. According to it, our justification is secured by grace, through faith. As a matter of fact, it says precisely that in Ephesians 2:8-9...

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (ESV).

So we see then that it is specifically according to the grace of God, through our faith that we receive salvation, and hence justification. It has nothing whatsoever to do with anything that is inherent within us. Why? Because this would give us cause to “boast” and would rob God of the Glory that his mercy and kindness has brought to him.

Paul states this even stronger in his Epistle to the Romans, when he states that “through the works of the law, shall no flesh be justified” (3:20). Therefore, justification is totally dependent upon Gods grace, and our faith, all of which is given to us by God.

Results of Justification

According to Rodman Williams, the primary result of justification is that we become sons and daughters of God. In his book “Renewal Theology” he writes:

“All human beings are God’s creatures: they are made by him. But those justified are now his sons and daughters, his children. This is our new status in Christ” (1990:78).

Because of this new standing, and its accompanying new life in Christ, there are certain benefits that we as adopted sons and daughters receive. The first one of these is that we are free from sin, whereas before we were slaves to it. Sin is no longer our master, but God. This allows us to live a life that is pleasing to God, and more fulfilling to us.

Secondly, stemming from this newfound freedom is an overriding peace upon our lives. We have been made new, saved from a horrible fate, and this gives us a fresh, new outlook on life. We understand that since God is working in our lives for our good, there is nothing to fear. So when troubles come, and they will, we have peace knowing that God is working all of it out for our ultimate good.

Third, and last, we have an inheritance as children of God, awaiting us when we die. Christ said “In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? “(John 14:2 ESV).

We have awaiting us unspeakable joy, and an eternity with Jesus Christ! What a wonderful promise. Not only are we saved from our sins and the fires of Hell, but we are given untold riches in heaven. We have been given strength to live this life, as well as God’s guarantee of the life to come. Our loving creator sent his only son, to die in our place, so that we might in all things have joy and peace in him.

What an awesome God we serve!

Perseverance

Security is important to us. Financial security, personal security, national security; these are all important concepts to each and every one of us. These are things that we want, even crave, yet all of these are in reality impossibilities. It is not possible to be truly financially “secure”, nor personally protected, or even to be secure on a national military level. This makes the issue of the gospel, and an individual’s ultimate destination after death all the more poignant.

But what about Eternal security? Is it *possible* that saints will “persevere” to the end, or is perseverance *assured*? Is our security based upon something we do, or is it God alone who sustains our faith, and keeps us until the Day of judgement?

Surely we will not reach an answer to these questions here. Instead, an attempt will be made to clarify the two main positions. We will begin with a clarification of the doctrine of perseverance itself.

Rodman Williams (1990:120) defines perseverance as “persistence in a state, a course of action, or undertaking, often in spite of difficulties, contrary influences, or opposition”. There are two primary positions taken under this doctrine; the Calvinist position, often referred to as “Eternal Security”, and the Arminian position “Conditional Security”. Let us start with a look at the Calvinist position.

The Calvinist View

In the acronym that makes up the essentials of Calvinism, there is within the five points of TULIP no more contested point than that of Perseverance of the Saints, also known as “Eternal security”.

To put it succinctly, the doctrine of Unconditional Election states that once a person has received salvation, God will sustain them until the Day of Judgement, and it is therefore impossible to fall away from the faith; i.e. one cannot lose their salvation. It is important to make a distinction at this point; what it does *not* teach is that a person is guaranteed salvation the minute they say some type of formulaic prayer, or profess belief.

It also does not mean that once salvation is obtained, a person may do or say whatever they wish without consequences. As Charles Horne states (1984:81):

“It is utterly wrong to state that a believer is secure quite irrespective of his subsequent life of sin and unfaithfulness. The truth is that the faith of Jesus Christ is *always* respective of the life of holiness and fidelity”.

So, then, when we see verses that speak of a certain attitude or lifestyle of believers, such as holiness, righteousness etc., we must understand these as the inevitable result of salvation, rather than something we must do to keep our salvation. One such verse can be seen in 1 John 2:24-25:

“Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us--eternal life.”

This verse then, if interpreted in light of the doctrine of Perseverance, would simply mean that if one were truly saved (“what you heard...abides in you”) then you *will* abide in God. Thereby, we are heirs to the promise of eternal life.

Other sections of scripture, such as John 10:27-29, definitely indicate that it is God’s responsibility, as well as his promise, to guard our salvation until the final day for he states that “no one can snatch you from my hand”.

This view is not without challenge; interpretation of several difficult passages, such as Hebrews 6 :4-8 sheds at least some doubt on this position. In these passages, it states:

“For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt”.

This seems conclusive on the surface. Indeed, although many argue that the people spoken of in this passage are not truly saved, others point out that the word used for “fall away”, demands that they were once a part of the true faith. It seems though to possess enough vagueness where this could be the case, and that these people never truly

received salvation. When taken in context with other verses, and weighed carefully, this does seem to be the better interpretation.

The Arminian View

Conditional security, conversely, states that a believer can lose his salvation. Although taken to different extremes, most believe this is only the result of a conscious choice, and not because of an “excess of sin”. There does indeed seem, at least on the surface, to be some scriptural merit to this. John chapter 15, for example, states that “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away”.

Rodman Williams (1990:132) states that “...because of the fact that the salvation of God operates through faith-a faith that is living-the forsaking of that faith can lead to apostasy. By failing to abide in Christ, continue in him and his word, to persevere in the midst of worldly trial or temptation, to make faith firm and strengthen it-thereby allowing unbelief to enter- believers may fall away from God. Thereby they may tragically forfeit their salvation”.

One of the supporting verses that he uses is 1 Timothy 4:1 ;“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons...”

This verse does seem to teach that one can fall away from the faith. However, there is nothing inherent within the verse itself that demands that these people were truly saved at one point. It is interesting to note, as a matter of fact, that these individuals depart from “*the faith*” and not “*their faith*”. This then, could well be “Sunday Christians” who appear to be of the Body of Christ, but are not.

In addition, when coupled with other verses, such as 1 John 2:19, it seems clear that those who fall away were not truly Christian. In this verse, it states that “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.” So, then, those who departed from the faith, were never truly Christian to begin with; this is plainly stated in the text.

Summary

It seems important, regardless of your view, to keep two points in mind. The first is that regardless of which begets which, righteousness and persisting in your faith is a call of God. Whether it is he who preserves us, or we who must choose, the decisions from moment to moment sit squarely upon our heads; God demands holiness. As Christians we should be growing, and being nurtured by the Word of God. Our focus should be on Christ.

Last, God is faithful. He never gives up on his people, regardless of whether or not they can choose to give up on him. His grace is boundless, even if our faith may not be.

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