

Lecture 10-The Person of Christ

Prayer

Grant, Almighty God, that, as Thou not only invitest us continually by the voice of Thy Gospel to seek Thee, but also offerest to us Thy Son as our mediator, through whom an access to Thee is open, that we may find thee a propitious Father. O grant that, relying on Thy kind invitation, we may through life exercise ourselves in prayer. And as so many evils disturbs us on all sides, and so many wants distress and oppress us, may we be led more earnestly to call on Thee, and in the meanwhile be never wearied in this exercise of prayer until, having been heard by Thee throughout life, we may at length be gathered to Thine eternal kingdom, where we shall enjoy that salvation which Thou hast promised to us, and of which also Thou daily testifiest to us by Thy Gospel, and be forever united to Thine only begotten Son, of whom we are now members, that we may be partakers of all the blessings which He has obtained for us by His death. Amen.

The Person of Christ

I. Outline

- A. Person of Christ (2, 12-14)
- B. Work of Christ (2, 15-17)

II. Christ Had to Become Man in Order to Fulfill the Office of Mediator (2, 12)

- A. God's accommodation - Irenaeus: "the Father, himself infinite, becomes finite in the Son, for he has accommodated himself to our little measure..." (2, 6, 4)

B. Why did God become man?

1. No "simple" or "absolute" necessity (contra Osiander [2,12, 4-7])
2. But a "conditional" necessity
 - a. Christ's incarnation "stemmed from a heavenly decree" (2, 12, 1)
 - 1) Closest co-operation between Father and Son (2, 16, 2-4; 2, 12, 2)
 - 2) Ideas of a "covenant of redemption" and "covenant of works"
 - b. Conditional necessity: Calvin's meaning
 - 1) Because of the nature of our condition
 - a) Even un-fallen man needed a mediator: mediation as sustenance (2, 12, 1; *Westminster Confession of Faith*, VII, I)
 - b) How much more fallen man!: mediation as reconciliation (in Old Testament [1, 13, 10]; New Testament)
 - 2) Because of the requirements of our salvation
 - a) Our need - to be restored to "God's grace" (2, 12, 2)
 - b) God's provision - Christ "manifest in the flesh" (2, 12, 2; 2, 12, 3)
 - c) Christ's work (classical view [Christus Victor - 2, 12, 2]; judicial view [penal satisfaction - 2, 16, 10]; *Commentary* on Galatians 2:21)

III. Christ is God (1, 13)

IV. Christ is Man (2, 13)

A. Man

1. True man

- a. Against the Manichees ("heavenly flesh"), Marcionites ("mere appearance"), and Menno Simons (Christ took his body "out of nothing")
- b. Christ perfectly human - though without sin (2, 13, 1; *Commentary* on John 11:33)

2. Sinless man

- a. The virgin birth was the source of Christ's authentic humanity, not the cause of his sinlessness (2, 13, 3; 2, 13, 4)
 - b. Christ is sinless "because he was sanctified by the Spirit..."
- B. And God - united to, but not restricted to, the flesh
 - 1. *Institutes* 2, 13, 4 (*etiam extra carnem Christi*); 4, 17, 30; also *Commentary* on Luke 23:43; John 14:12; Acts 1:11; Hebrews 1:14)
 - 2. *Heidelberg Catechism* Q. 48
 - 3. Lutherans: extra-Calvinisticum
 - 4. E. David Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-Called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology*, 1966.
- V. Christ is One Person (2, 14)
 - A. "Not by confusion of substance" (2, 14, 1)
 - 1. Divinity and humanity "each retains its distinctive nature unimpaired" (2, 14, 1)
 - 2. "Communicating of characteristics" (2, 14, 2) a verbal, not actual communication
 - B. "But by unity of person" (2, 14, 1)
 - 1. The two natures "constitute one Christ" (2, 14, 1)
 - 2. Illustrations - 2, 14, 1; *Commentary* on 1 Timothy 3:16
- VI. "The Career of the Mediator" (2, 12, 1; 2, 14, 3; 2, 15, 5) (See Appendix E)
 - A. Sustenance (2, 12, 1) - Calvin's debate with Stancaró
 - B. Reconciliation (Old Testament; New Testament)
 - C. Session (2, 14, 3)
 - D. Judgment (2, 15, 5; 2, 14, 3)
- VI. Evaluation
 - A. "Learned ignorance"
 - 1. "God manifest in the flesh"
 - 2. 4, 17, 30
 - B. Stress on the distinction of the two natures
 - 1. Calvin refutes the Nestorian "double Christ" (2, 14, 4)
 - 2. Calvin's stress on the two natures guards Christ's humanity and divinity

For Further Study

Van Buren, Paul. *Christ in our Place; The Substitutionary character of Calvin's Doctrine of Reconciliation*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1957.

Along with an interesting introduction by Karl Barth, this book treats both the person and work of Christ. Part 1 is entitled: "The Incarnation: Christ's Union with Us," and Part 2, "The Atonement: Christ in Our Place."