



Thoughts from the Bible and Books Devotions from The Heidelberg Catechism

University Reformed Church

4930 S. Hagadorn Rd., E. Lansing, MI 48823 - 517.351.6810

Lord's Day 12- March 23, 2008

31 **Q.** *Why is he called "Christ," meaning "anointed."*

A. Because he has been ordained by God the Father and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit to be our chief prophet and teacher who perfectly reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God for our deliverance; our only high priest who has set us free by the one sacrifice of his body, and who continually pleads our cause with the Father; and our eternal king who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and who guards us and keeps us in the freedom he has won for us.

32 **Q.** *But why are you called a Christian?*

A. Because by faith I am a member of Christ and so share in his anointing. I am anointed to confess his name, to present myself to him as a living sacrifice of thanks, to strive with a good conscience against sin and the devil in this life, and afterward to reign with Christ over all creation for all eternity.

If Jesus was a common Jewish name in the first century, Christ certainly was not. In fact, Christ isn't even a name (as if Jesus inherited it from his parents, Joseph and Mary Christ). Christ is a title, or more accurately, *the* title. Many of us are so used to putting "Jesus" next to "Christ" that we scarcely know what we are saying. But first century Jews would have known. "Christ" means anointed; it is simply the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word "Messiah." That's why there is so much discussion in the gospels about "the Christ", where he comes from and what he is like and whose son he will be. Peter's confession "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" was so momentous because Peter was stating what was far from obvious to everyone else; namely, that this wonder-working son of a carpenter, this teacher who ate with sinners, this man who said such strange and powerful things, was the long awaited Messiah—the bringer of a new kingdom, the Deliverer of God's people, and the Savior of the world.

The Catechism stresses the Trinitarian nature of Jesus' mission. He was ordained by God the Father and anointed with the Holy Spirit as the Christ. The three persons of the Trinity worked in tandem in salvation as much as they did in creation. That's why notions of the cross as cosmic child abuse are terribly unhelpful and unhelpfully terrible. The Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father. They are one (John 17:21-22). The death of the Son (the Spirit anointed Christ), who bore

the wrath of God in place of sinners, is a testimony to the glory of Trinitarian love, fellowship, and unity, not the undermining of all these things.

Heidelberg goes on to explain that the Father ordained and the Spirit anointed Christ to fulfill three different offices: prophet, priest, and king. If you've ever struggled to explain Christ on the beach or around the water cooler, try using these three words. They are easy to remember and with minimal explanation can be easily understood. Christ is a prophet who teaches us about God, a priest who sacrificed his own body for our sins, and a king who rules over us and keeps us in his care. We don't have to reinvent the wheel. There were some pretty good ideas floating around, even before blogging believe it or not. Prophet, priest, and king is not the only way to talk about Christ, but it has to be one of the best—better than contemporary ascriptions of Jesus as revolutionary, homeboy, and the "center" (never sure what to make of that one).

Christ is our chief prophet and teacher (Acts 3:22; Deut. 18:15). The word "chief" is important; it's what makes Christianity Christian. Muslims laud Jesus as a great prophet, but he is not the last and greatest prophet like Mohammed. Mormons worship Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God (understanding these words differently than Christians), but Joseph Smith is the prophet we all must reckon with. Even many Jews will recognize Christ as a teacher sent by God, but not greater

than Moses or Elijah and certainly not in fulfillment of their ministries of lesser glory. By contrast, for Christians, Christ is our *chief* prophet, the one and only who makes known the Father (John 1:18) and reveals the exact nature of God (Heb. 1:3). As a prophet, like Moses or Isaiah or Joel, Christ came to show us the way and declare the will of God. But as the Messiah, our chief prophet, he came not just to reveal the will of God but to fulfill it, and he laid down his life, not just in example of the way *of* God, but as the way *to* God.

Christ is also our only high priest (Heb. 7:17; Psalm 110:4). Again, the adjective is important. Christ is our *only* high priest. There's a reason Protestants have pastors or ministers instead of priests. It's because of a conviction—one most Protestants are unaware of—about the cessation of the official priesthood (in distinction from the priesthood of all believers). For centuries the Israelites had lots of priests and a string of high priests (think Aaron, Abiathar, Caiaphas). The main role of the priest was to offer sacrifices to God, and once a year (for the high priest) to enter the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur and make atonement for the people. But according to the book of Hebrews, all that has ended. The Catholic Church has simply gotten it wrong in asserting that Christ is sacrificed again and again by the priests in the Eucharistic celebration of the Mass (see Lord's Day 30). We need no more priests because we need no more sacrifices (Hebrews 7:27; 9:12; 25-26; 10:10-18). The only high priest (and only priest for that matter) we need is Jesus Christ because his sacrifice on the cross was the end of the sacrificial system—the “end” both as the fulfillment of all the sacrifices that went before and the termination of any we thought were yet to come. High priests served two related functions—making atonement and making intercession for the people—both of which are accomplished for us in Christ. Christ died for us (once for all, never to die again) and Christ prays for us (continually and repeatedly). This makes him the greatest priest, the last priest, and the only priest we need.

Finally, Christ is our eternal king (Matt. 21:5; Zech. 9:9). As a king, Christ does two things: he governs and he guards. The Catechism tells us Christ governs by Word and Spirit. Oh, how many theological stray cats have been sired by separating Word from Spirit. Word without Spirit is dead letter. Spirit without Word is hopeless relativism. The Spirit inspired the Word and illuminates the Word and gives us ears to hear the Word. The Word is how the Spirit speaks to us, changes us, and commands us. Christ governs us by Word, to give

us a propositional revelation of his will and an objective set of external truths, and by Spirit, to give us a subjective experience of his presence and the inner power to obey. So please don't pit Word against Spirit.

And while we're at it, let's not pit Christ against his Word or Spirit either. The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. His role is to lead us to Christ and make us look like Christ, all for the glory of Christ. While it is certainly wrong to ignore the Holy Spirit in our lives, it impossible to be too focused on Christ. Focusing on Christ is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit! He loves to make much of Christ to the glory of God the Father. Likewise, don't fall for the holy sounding rhetoric about wanting the Word (made flesh) and not the Word (inscripturated). Of course we don't worship the Bible, but we can't know the Christ we worship apart from our Bibles. Christ makes himself known and governs us by the words we read on the pages of Scripture.

As king, Christ not only governs, he also guards. Kingship isn't all authority and fiat and gloomy threats. Good kings also protect their people. In this case, Christ keeps us—not happy, healthy, and wealthy—but free. We were rebels and slaves to sin, but Christ redeemed us by his blood and won our freedom. Having paid such a price, he means to keep us free. He will not let us fall to the devil (not ultimately), and he will not let us offer ourselves again to the world's bondage (not finally). He loves us and the freedom he purchased on our behalf.

I've used up almost all my space and I still have Question 32. But we don't need to spend a lot of time there, because if you read Question 32 carefully, you'll notice a striking resemblance to Question 31. Why are you called a Christian? Answer: because I am a member of Christ, ordained by the same Father and anointed by the same Spirit. And as a little Christ, we are to fulfill (in a lesser way admittedly) the same offices as our Namesake. We confess his name like good prophets, present ourselves as living sacrifices like good priests, and fight our mutual enemies and reign in joint dominion like good kings. The work of Christ and the life of a Christian on earth and in eternity can be summed up in three words: prophet, priest, king. Not bad theology for a bunch of dead guys. Take this Lord's Day for a test spin and you'll find out it's a wheel that will still roll.

Written by: Kevin DeYoung