

Chapter XV: The States of Christ

We often use the words 'state' and 'condition' interchangeably. When we speak of the states of Christ, however, we use the word 'state' in a more specific sense, to denote the relation in which He stood and stands to the law. In the days of His humiliation He was a servant under the law; in His exaltation He is Lord, and as such above the law. Naturally these two states carried with them corresponding conditions of life, and these are discussed as the various stages of these states.

1. The State of Humiliation

The state of humiliation consists in this that Christ laid aside the divine majesty which was His as the sovereign Ruler of the universe, and assumed human nature in the form of a servant; that He, the supreme Lawgiver, became subject to the demands and curse of the law. Matt. 3:15; Gal. 3:13; 4:4; Phil. 2:6-8. This state is reflected in the corresponding condition, in which we usually distinguish several stages. a. The incarnation and birth of Christ. In the incarnation the Son of God became flesh by assuming human nature, John 1:14; 1 John 4:2. He really became one of the human race by being born of Mary. This would not have been true, if He had brought His humanity from heaven, as the Anabaptists claim. The Bible teaches the virgin birth in Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:34, 35. This wonderful birth was due to the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit, who also kept the human nature of Christ free from the pollution of sin from its very inception, Luke 1:35.

b. The sufferings of Christ. We sometimes speak as if the sufferings of Christ were limited to His final agonies, but this is not correct. 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 a sin-cursed world. Satan assaulted Him, His people rejected Him, and His enemies persecuted Him. The sufferings of the soul were even more intense than those of the body. He was tempted by the devil, was oppressed by the world of iniquity round about Him, and staggered by the burden of sin resting upon Him,— “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” Isa. 53:3.

c. The death, of Christ. When we speak of the death of Christ, we naturally have in mind His physical death. He did not die as the result of an accident, nor by the hand of an assassin, but under a judicial sentence, and was thus counted with the transgressors, Isa. 53:12. By suffering the Roman punishment of crucifixion He died an accursed death, bearing the curse for us, Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13. d. The burial of Christ. It might seem as if the death of Christ was the last stage of His sufferings. Did He not cry out on the cross, "It is finished"? But these words probably refer to His active suffering. His burial certainly was a part of His humiliation, of which He as Son of God was also conscious. Man's returning to the dust is a punishment for sin, Gen. 3:19. That the Savior's abode in the grave was a humiliation, is evident from Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:27, 31; 13:34, 35. It removed for us the terrors of the grave.

e. The descent into hades. The words of the Apostolic Confession, "He descended into hades," are variously interpreted. Roman Catholics say that He went down into the *Limbus Patrum*, where the Old Testament saints were confined, to release them; and the Lutherans that, between His death and resurrection, He went down to hell to preach and to celebrate his victory over the powers of darkness. In all probability it is a figurative expression to denote (1) that He suffered the pangs of hell in the garden and on the cross, and (2) that He entered the deepest humiliation of the state of death, Ps. 16:8-10; Eph. 4:9.

2. The State of Exaltation

In the state of exaltation Christ passed from under the law as a covenant obligation, having paid the penalty of sin and merited righteousness and eternal life for the sinner. Moreover, He was crowned with a corresponding honor and glory. Four stages must be distinguished here.

a. The resurrection. The resurrection of Christ did not consist in the mere re-union of body and soul, but especially in this that in Him human nature, both body and soul, was restored to its original beauty and strength, and even raised to a higher level. In distinction from all those who had been raised up before Him He arose with a spiritual body, 1 Cor. 15:44, 45. For that reason He can be called "the first fruits of them that slept," 1 Cor. 15:20, and "the firstborn of the dead," Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5. The resurrection

of Christ has a threefold significance: (1) It was a declaration of the Father that Christ met all the requirements of the law, Phil. 2:9. (2) It symbolized the justification, regeneration, and final resurrection of believers, Rom. 6:4, 5, 9; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:20-22. (3) It was the cause of our justification, regeneration, and resurrection, Rom. 4:25; 5:10; Eph. 1:20; Phil. 3:10; 1 Pet. 1:3.

b. The ascension. The ascension was in a sense the necessary completion of the resurrection, but it also had independent significance. We have a double account of it, namely, in Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:6-11. Paul refers to it in Eph. 1:20; 4:8-10; 1 Tim. 3:16, and the Epistle to the Hebrews stresses its significance, 1:3; 4:14; 6:20; 9:24. It was a visible ascent of the Mediator, according to His human nature, from earth to heaven, a going from one place to another. It included a further glorification of the human nature of Christ. The Lutherans have a different view of it. They conceive of it as a change of condition, whereby the human nature of Jesus passed into the full enjoyment of certain divine attributes, and became permanently omnipresent. In the ascension Christ as our great high priest enters the inner sanctuary to present His sacrifice to the Father and begin His work as intercessor at the throne, Rom. 8:34; Heb. 4:14; 6:20; 9:24. He ascended to prepare a place for us, John 14:1-3. With Him we are already set in heavenly places, and in His ascension we have the assurance of a place in heaven, Eph. 2:6; John 17:24.

c. The session at God's right hand. After His ascension Christ is seated at the right hand of God, Eph. 1:20; Heb. 10:12; 1 Pet. 3:22. Naturally, the expression 'right hand of God' cannot be taken literally, but should be understood as a figurative indication of the place of power and glory. During His session at God's right hand Christ rules and protects His Church, governs the universe in its behalf, and intercedes for His people on the basis of His completed sacrifice.

d. The physical return. The exaltation of Christ reaches its climax, when He returns to judge the living and the dead. Evidently His return will be bodily and visible, Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:7. That He will come as Judge is evident from such passages as John 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42; Rom. 2:16; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1. The time of His second coming is not known to us. He will come for the purpose of judging the world and perfecting the salvation of

His people. This will mark the complete victory of His redemptive work. 1 Cor. 4:5; Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; 2 Thess. 2:1-12; Titus 2:13; Rev. 1:7.

To memorize. Passages bearing on:

a. The state of humiliation:

Gal. 3:13. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree."

Gal. 4:4, 5. "But when the fulness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that He might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

Phil. 2:6-8. "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; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross."

b. The incarnation:

John 1:14. "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth."

Rom. 8:3. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh."

c. The virgin birth:

Isa. 7:14. "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel."

Luke 2:86. "And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God."

d. The descent into *hades*:

Ps. 16:10. "For Thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol (Hades, Acts 2:27); neither wilt Thou suffer Thy holy one to see corruption."

Eph. 4:9. "Now this, He ascended, what is it but that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth?"

e. The resurrection:

Rom. 4:25. "Who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification."

1 Cor. 15:20. "But now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of them that are asleep."

f. The ascension:

Luke 24:51. "And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and was carried up into heaven."

Acts 1:11. "Who also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? This same Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have beheld Him going into heaven."

g. The session:

Eph. 1:20. "Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly places."

Heb. 10:12. "But He, when He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God."

h. The return:

Acts 1:11. Cf. above under f.

Rev. 1:7. "Behold, He cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they that pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over Him."

For Further Study:

a. What does the Old Testament tell us about the humiliation of Christ in the following passages: Ps. 22:6-20; 69:7-9; 20:21; Isa. 52:14, 15; 53:1-10; Zech. 11:12, 13?

b. What was the special value of Christ's temptations for us? Heb. 2:18; 4:15; 5:7-9.

c. How do the following passages prove that heaven is a place rather than a condition? Deut. 30:12; Josh. 2:11; Ps. 139:8; Eccl. 5:2; Isa. 66:1; Rom. 10:6, 7.

Questions for Review:

1. What is meant by the states of the Mediator?
2. How would you define the states of humiliation and exaltation?
3. What took place at the incarnation?
4. How did Christ receive His human nature?
5. What proof have we for the virgin birth?
6. How was the Holy Spirit connected with the birth, of Christ?
7. Were the sufferings of Christ limited to the end of His life?
8. Did it make any difference how Christ died?
9. What different views are there respecting the descent into hades?
10. What was the nature of Christ's resurrection? What change did He undergo?
11. What was the significance of the resurrection?
12. How would you prove that the ascension was a going from place to place?

13. What is its significance, and how do Lutherans conceive of it?
14. What is meant by the session at God's right hand? What does Christ do there?
15. How will Christ return, and what is the purpose of His coming?