

SALVATION AND THE INSEPARABILITY  
OF THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST

A Paper

Presented to

Gracelife

Grace Research Room

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by

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November, 2019

## Introduction

Keeping the gospel message free from works and to espouse it with clarity and simplicity is of the utmost importance. Even the Apostle Paul asked for prayer from the church in Colossae that he would make the gospel clear in the way he spoke (Col. 4:4). Recently however, some have overreached, and have gone so far as to say that belief in Christ as God, in addition to his death burial and resurrection are adding more to the message of the gospel than is required in order to receive eternal life. In their view, it's not that those things aren't important, they are, but they're not necessary for one to be convinced of as true in order to be saved.

According to this view, all that is required for salvation is to believe in the *name* Jesus and in that name for eternal life. Those who "add" things that we must believe, like Christ's death, resurrection, and being, are accused of being "doctrinal legalists."<sup>1</sup> One has even stated that we should "never confuse what our Savior had to be and to do to provide salvation with what we must do to obtain it."<sup>2</sup> This seemingly innocuous statement has profound effects on theology, particularly Christology and Soteriology, because it *necessarily* seeks to dissociate the person of Christ from His work.

The purpose of this paper is to briefly defend the idea that Christ's death and resurrection are inseparably linked with who Jesus Christ is, the Son of God. The person that is Christ and His work defines His uniqueness and provides the necessary components for the proper object of our faith; anything less, particularly in the mission field, will result in an improper object and an impotent savior. We believe in Christ because of what He did for us, and

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<sup>1</sup> Wilkin, Bob. *Essential Truths about Our Savior*. Grace in Focus, November-December (Grace Evangelical Society, 2008), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

He could only do for us what He did because He is fully God and fully man. Christ's person and work are two sides of the same coin;<sup>3</sup> they're inextricably linked.

I have divided this paper into three basic sections. I will begin by focusing on the person of Christ by defining the terms Jesus and Messiah; and focus on His deity. The next section will deal with His death and resurrection and the criticality with which that has upon salvation and all of theology, and the last section will deal with the relationship between the two.

### **The Person of Christ**

The purpose of this section is to illustrate the fact that to misunderstand, at the most basic level, Jesus' God-Man quality is to fail to recognize a specific individual. The importance of His person lies in the fact that Jesus cannot be confused with any other since He claimed to be God.<sup>4</sup> I'm not saying that one needs to understand the hypostatic union in order to be saved. Fortunately that is not spelled out as a requirement in scripture, only the fact that one must understand that He is at least the Son of God.<sup>5</sup> Dale Ellenburg notes the importance in Christ's person;

“The absolute fundamental to the Christian faith is Jesus Christ. The person Buddha is not essential to the teaching of Buddhism nor is the person Mohammed essential to the Islamic faith. Yet everything about Christianity rises or falls in the person of Jesus Christ.”<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Bing notes the importance of the person of Christ as well when he stated the following:

“We are saved by Someone, the Lord Jesus Christ. Not just any Jesus, but the One sent from God who is the Son of God. There are many things implied by the

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<sup>3</sup> Not to be confused with faith and works which are polar opposites in terms of initial justification. (Rom. 11:6)

<sup>4</sup> John 8:58

<sup>5</sup> The term Son of God encompasses deity.

<sup>6</sup> Dale Ellenburg, Holman Bible Publishers, e d. *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 899.

designation Lord Jesus Christ such as deity, humanity, and messianic mission. While someone may not comprehend a full-blown Christology, there must be some understanding of Jesus' uniqueness and divine authority."<sup>7</sup>

One might ask the question, "What about all the other attributes, like his virgin birth?" It is true the list of things Christ is, is endless. Jesus Christ is the God-Man; who is our Creator, our Savior, our redeemer, our sustainer, our intercessory, our deliverer, our hope, our substitute, our rescuer, who is firstborn of all creation, who is before all things and who is the invisible God.<sup>8</sup> These certainly set Christ apart, but nowhere in scripture, not a single verse or pericope,<sup>9</sup> are most of those attributes ever stipulated as requirements for salvation. They add a depth to his person and fulfill prophecy. It begs the question though "which one or ones are critical to salvation then?"

John answers this for us throughout his Gospel which was specifically written so that we may know how to have eternal life. In it he emphasizes the deity of Christ more than any other book!<sup>10</sup>

Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may **believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God**; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:30-31)<sup>11</sup> [emphasis mine]

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<sup>7</sup> Dr. Charlie Bing, *GraceNotes no. 40 - The Content of the Gospel of Salvation*, (Burlison: Gracelife, 2009), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Colossians 1:13-23

<sup>9</sup> The accusation is often made that no single verse has Christ's deity, death and resurrection in one single verse. This is fallacious due to the simple fact that the Bible technically has no paragraphs, nor does it have verses, these weren't created until the mid-1500's by Robert Estienne (Stephanus). Context is key and one cannot simply proof-text.

<sup>10</sup> See also 1:14, 18; 5:17-21; 6:69; 7:38; 8:19, 58; 10:30; 20:28.

<sup>11</sup> The Lockman Foundation, *New American Standard Bible* (Anaheim, California: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1998).

John then emphasizes in one passage Jesus as Messiah, Jesus as the *Son of God* (His Deity); He sets apart clearly who he's referring to. John begins his book by defining who Jesus is for his readers. The emphasis is certainly undeniable.

In the beginning was the **Word** [Jesus], and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God** [Jesus]. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. (John 1:1-3) [emphasis mine]

Jakob Jocz makes an interesting observation regarding this pericope, he states;

“and the Word became flesh” (John 1:14). With this utterance we find ourselves in the heart of the fourth Gospel; all that follows is a description of how truly the Word became flesh. This means that for St. John the Gospel is not only what Jesus said or did, but also what He was—the incarnate Word of God. The words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth derive their importance from the fact that He is the Son of God.<sup>12</sup>

John then, makes it explicitly clear as to who he is referring to and for what purpose. So John's emphasis is on the object of our faith as well as what we must do to obtain Christ's offer of eternal life. This emphasis is logical because the purpose of John's Gospel is primarily evangelistic. Zane Hodges agrees stating that “A fundamental premise is that the purpose of the Gospel of John is evangelistic.”<sup>13</sup> If that is John's purpose, and I believe it is, then we should certainly take note of the importance of Christ's deity as he does. John is making sure we have the proper object of our faith.

While a full blown Christological study is not the point of this paper, one thing that is critical is the fact that He is God and He is Man. Walvoord notes the importance of His deity as well as His humanity.

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<sup>12</sup> Jakob Jocz, *The Messiahship of Jesus: What Jews and Jewish Christian's say*. Compiled by Arthur Kac (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 187-188.

<sup>13</sup> Zane Hodges, *Introducing John's Gospel: In the Upper Room with Jesus Christ*. (Dallas: Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, 2008). 29.

Though the doctrine of the deity of Christ is generally recognized as the indispensable fundamental of Christology, the doctrine of His true humanity is equally important. On the fact of His humanity depends the reality of His death on the cross, His claim to be Israel's Messiah, His fulfillment of the promise to David of a descendent to sit on his throne, and His offices of prophet and priest. Those who deny the true humanity of Christ such as modern Christian Science are just as effective at destroying the true Christian faith as those who deny the deity of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

While I'm not accusing anyone of denying Christ's deity or humanity, to leave that aspect out of an evangelistic message not only sells Christ short, but can lead people to an improper object. According to Walvoord Christ's deity and humanity are indispensable.

According to John's Gospel, in order to have eternal life we are to "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."<sup>15</sup> [emphasis mine] We are not believing in a name, we are believing in the person represented by the name Jesus, who *is* the Christ, the Son of God. John emphasizes this fact throughout his book.

For example, in John 4, in Jesus' discussion with the Samaritan woman, Jesus described himself as the one who gives "living water."<sup>16</sup> He then goes on to say that He offers eternal life (v14). The Samaritan woman recognized this by saying, "I know a Messiah is coming (He who is called the Christ)."<sup>17</sup> She didn't know a name, but she recognized that a Messiah was to come, a savior of the World (see John 4:42). Because of her testimony many believed (see John 4:39). Many Samaritans were convinced that Christ was the savior based on His words.<sup>18</sup> Jesus didn't say to the woman, "I'm Jesus and if you believe in my 'name' you will never thirst again." Christ's emphasis was on His person, as was John's account of the encounter.

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<sup>14</sup> John F. Walvoord <http://bible.org/seriespage/person-and-work-christ-%E2%80%94-part-ii-person-incarnate-christ>, last accessed May 2011.

<sup>15</sup> John 20:31

<sup>16</sup> John 4:10

<sup>17</sup> John 4:25

<sup>18</sup> John 4:42

Even Peter was asked by Jesus himself, “who do you say that I am?” Peter replied, “you are the Messiah” (Mark 8:29). Although they may have viewed Him at the time in the traditional sense of the term Messiah, which was associated with “a title of glorious personage both nationalistic and victorious in battle,”<sup>19</sup> Jesus certainly didn’t portray himself in that sense.

Point being, neither Peter nor the Samaritan believed in a name, but a person. This is no different today. However, through progress of revelation, just as the Samaritan woman found out and Peter knew firsthand, we know the Messiah goes by the name Jesus or Yeshua.<sup>20</sup>

The term Messiah is a transliteration of the Hebrew word meaning “anointed one” that was translated into Greek as Christos.<sup>21</sup> “Christ” and “Messiah” are therefore synonymous terms. Jesus or Yeshua was the name given by God, it means “Yahweh saves” or “salvation is from Yahweh” (Matt. 1:21). So the terms Christ, Messiah, and the name Jesus represent His person, not just a semantic name which can be confused with any other. Stegall notes that “The “name” stands for the attributes and actions of a person which make that individual unique and identifiable.”<sup>22</sup> Walvoord concurs stating that: “In the title Christ as attributed to the Lord Jesus is embodied the hope of Israel for a Messiah to deliver them from their sins.”<sup>23</sup>

As a side note in this discussion, if we’re to believe in the name Jesus *only* it begs questions like; which Jesus? And what about Old Testament believers like Abraham or Moses? Had they even heard the name of Jesus? I contend they had not, otherwise Moses would have written about his name specifically! Why would he leave out such pertinent information? They only knew that God was going to provide someone who would make atonement for their sins.

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<sup>19</sup> Holman Bible Dictionary, 1115.

<sup>20</sup> This begs a question, shouldn’t we believe in Jesus’ Hebrew name as given by God?

<sup>21</sup> Holman Bible Dictionary, 1111.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Stegall, *The Tragedy of the Crossless Gospel Pt. 5*. (Duluth Bible: Grace Family Journal, 2008), 15.

<sup>23</sup> John F. Walvoord. *The Death Christ Died*. (Chicago:Moody Press, 1969), 208.

Salvation has always been by grace through faith, faith in the messiah who was to come, and faith in the messiah who came.

The name of Christ points to His deity as well as His work. As we've seen in John chapter one, he asserts that Christ is God, "John's intricate Greek declares Jesus to be equal in nature with God the Father but distinct in person!"<sup>24</sup> John, along with much of the New Testament, emphasizes Jesus as Messiah and Jesus as the Son of God, which provides the necessary foundation for the proper person we're to place our faith in. But can this be separated from his work? Can we believe in Jesus only with the understanding that he is God and offers eternal life without understanding his work? First we must understand His work and then determine if we can separate it from the person, who is Christ.

### **The Death and Resurrection of Christ**

Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:11 said "So we preach and so you believed." This begs the question of what was preached and what was believed. This is answered earlier in verse 1-5, "I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received...by which also you are saved." Thus, Paul preached to the Corinthians the good news which they believed, and were saved from damnation in hell to eternal life. The gospel was "delivered as of first importance...that Christ died for our sins according to the scripture, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures"<sup>25</sup> He goes on to illustrate the fact that Christ is alive and was seen. There are several things to take note of in this passage.

First, here in this single passage, we have the person of Christ and His work defined for us and when we believe it, it brings salvation. It should be noted that Paul uses the word

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<sup>24</sup> Holman Bible Dictionary, 901.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Cor. 15:3-4



Christos not Ioesus to refer to the person who is Jesus the Christ. I contend that this seeks to emphasize the point made earlier, that the emphasis in the object of our faith is in a person. This is not to diminish the name of Christ, but to characterize his person so-as to provide the proper object of faith. Secondly, Paul clearly says that what he preached was that Christ died and rose again; it was of “utmost importance.” It was a message they believed and were saved by.

The death of Christ on the cross cannot be understated as it represents His sole purpose for coming into being in the incarnate form. It was His mission as defined by God. Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.”<sup>26</sup> The Father’s will was to reconcile man back to Himself using His Son Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup> This was done out of love as Romans 5:8 states so that he might bear the sins of mankind.<sup>28</sup> Man was lost and in need of a redeemer for “without the shedding of blood there is no remission for sins.”<sup>29</sup> So important is Christ’s death that without it no payment would have been made. John the Baptist recognized the importance when he stated “behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World”<sup>30</sup> If a person does not understand this simple fact, the only logical conclusion is that they must rely upon themselves in order to receive eternal life. Again, a deep doctrinal understanding of the cross is not required; in fact it’s so simple that a child can understand the concept of substitutionary atonement at a basic level.

Walvoord states that “So important is his death that without it, we would still be in our sins because no payment would have been made.” And that “Its proper understanding is the heart of gospel preaching as well as systematic theology, and without it other doctrines of

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<sup>26</sup> Luke 22:42, see also John 4:34.

<sup>27</sup> Romans 5:10

<sup>28</sup> Hebrews 9:28

<sup>29</sup> Hebrews 9:22

<sup>30</sup> John 1:29

Christology have no relevance either to human needs or to a vital hope. **Everything that is essential to salvation depends upon the suffering and death of Christ.**<sup>31</sup> [emphasis mine].

The death of Christ is critical to the Gospel message but so too is His resurrection. Dr. Bing rightly notes that we are “saved from something and to something.”<sup>32</sup> This is only achievable because Christ arose from the grave; proving not only His deity as the Son of God, but also that God was satisfied with the payment made. 1 John 2:2a says that “He Himself is the propitiation [satisfactory payment] for our sins;” So important to ALL of theology is the risen Christ that without it Paul says our faith is useless and we should be pitied most of all.

and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. (1 Cor. 15:17-19)

The point I stress here is that to deny the resurrection is to deny who Christ is; because if He is unable to conquer death, how can He promise eternal life? Christ would not have a leg to stand on and would be making a promise He Himself could not keep! That is what Paul is saying. It would be akin to me promising to pay off a million dollar debt. If it's not in my bank account, why would you trust me to do so?

Jesus Himself even notes the importance of this fact regarding salvation. After His resurrection He appeared to His disciples, sans Thomas. Thomas was being told by them that “yes, Christ is alive”, Thomas doubted and said “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails,...I will not believe.” Jesus appeared to him and Thomas believed, Jesus responded by saying “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and

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<sup>31</sup> John F. Walvoord, <http://bible.org/seriespage/person-and-work-christ-%E2%80%94-part-viii-christ-his-suffering-and-death>, last accessed May 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Bing

yet believed.” (John 20:29). Believe what? It can be construed as nothing other than Christ resurrected. What Christ did is equivalent to who He is. But why are those who believe blessed? Because this is proof positive that Christ is the Son of God and that by believing these facts they will receive eternal life. This is made clear in verse 31.

So the work of Christ is extremely important to believe, otherwise why would we place our faith in Him? What would he have to offer us without believing that He died in our place as a substitute and conquered death? We would have no legitimate reason to do so. In other words, if we don't believe in Christ's work, logically speaking we have no basis for our faith in Christ to provide salvation. We would be placing our faith in an improper object and thus not be saved.

### **The Inseparability of the Person and Work**

Now we've seen that “Jesus” means more than just a name, it encompasses His Person, Provision, and Promise.<sup>33</sup> Paul and John have emphasized Christ as the Son of God, as well as His death and resurrection which embodies the good news of salvation; and by believing this we have eternal life. All aspects are tied together in order to provide the proper object as well as the sufficiency of His person in order to fulfill the promises of eternal life.

Hixon expresses the inseparability when he states that “Paul inseparably links man's salvation with the person and work of Jesus Christ in Romans 5:8, “...”<sup>34</sup> “It is not belief in an undefined, ambiguous name. It is belief in the person behind the name.”<sup>35</sup> “To omit the death and

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<sup>33</sup> Dr. Bing. Person – Son of God, Provision – Satisfactory Payment, Promise – Eternal Life.

<sup>34</sup> Dr. J.B. Hixon, *Getting the Gospel Wrong, The Evangelical Crisis No One is Talking About*. (USA: Xulon Press, 2008), 85.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*

resurrection of Christ from the gospel is to have improperly ‘bifurcated the person and work of Christ.’”<sup>36</sup>

As we’ve seen, John emphasized Christ’s deity, His death and resurrection as well as what was required of us. In John 20:28, John uses the phrase “Son of God” to make a point; Bock notes that “For John, “Son of God” has for its full sense the one sent by God from heaven with a unique heavenly mission to deliver those brought into salvation.”<sup>37</sup> So important is the fact that Christ is the Son of God, John in his epistle of 1 John states that believing that Christ is the Son of God, is a requirement to salvation. “Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:5). The overcomer<sup>38</sup> is the one who believes, John’s point then is that the person of Christ is critical to our understanding that we have the proper object. Dr. Constable concurs stating that:

However, no one can overcome the world unless he or she believes that Jesus is the Son of God. **It is in this sense that John refers to overcomers here;** every Christian overcomes essentially because we believe in Jesus Christ.<sup>39</sup>

Not only that, but John emphasized the death and resurrection in two chapters.<sup>40</sup> Even John’s evangelistic gospel does not leave this quintessential fact out. John stressed the importance of who Christ is and what He has done, which also counteracts the idea of works for salvation, while at the same time defining for us the proper object of our faith. Taken as a whole, the book of John basically says “Here’s who He is, here’s what He’s done, and this is what you

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Darrel Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture, Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 549.

<sup>38</sup> Be a nuke Christian. (Wilkin).

<sup>39</sup> Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on 1 John* (Dallas, Texas: Sonic Light, 2004), 57.

<sup>40</sup> John 19-20

have to do.” According to John then, the person and work of Christ are necessary to believe for salvation.

Likewise, Paul preached the same message and focused on these aspects as well; in fact, he stressed several times the importance of Christ’s death and resurrection. In 1 Corinthians 1 he said;

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, **so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.** For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. **...but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness** (1 Cor. 1:17-18,23) [emphasis mine]

Two things are worth noting regarding this passage; one is that Paul de-emphasized his method of preaching and words, and emphasized the message of the Cross, which is the gospel. But he also drew a critical relationship between Christ and the cross; the person and work must be linked. This is emphasized in verse 23 when he said that he preaches Christ crucified. Paul tied both the person and work of Christ together. When Paul preached Christ crucified, it was a stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks. It is a stumbling block because it is offensive to them; Jocz notes that that

The paradox which is implied in the Gospel message is an offence to the Jew and the Greek. ... The offence of the Cross is that it is the man Jesus who died for the sins of the world and that this man is the Son of God.<sup>41</sup>

Paul then, if he was preaching a Jesus only message would not offend; however, because he was preaching Christ crucified, which entails his deity and humanity, he certainly did offend. To the Greeks it’s foolishness because who has ever been raised from the dead? Thus,

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<sup>41</sup> Jocz, 193.

Paul's requirements for salvation are no different than John's. Paul does not separate the person from the work of Christ.

### **Conclusions and Applications**

If one relegates Christ's work as unnecessary for belief, for salvation; the logical conclusion is that His work is inconsequential, it could even be denied.<sup>42</sup> While those who espouse the former view do not necessarily believe the latter, it's a slippery slope. Walvoord states the importance stating that "the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ was a proof of His deity and Lordship, so also was His resurrection an indispensable evidence of the efficacious value of His death on the cross. ... [it] demonstrates that He is indeed all He claims to be."<sup>43</sup>

Application 1: Don't divide the person from the work of Christ because that's how cults get started; by obfuscating the person and/or the work of Christ. To dissociate the Person of Christ from His work diminishes both aspects. Without believing Christ's death for salvation (Romans 3:24), it is essentially no different in practice than those who affirm that Christ died but did not literally rise from the dead, and those who claim that He never died but was revived. If Christ's work is not necessary to define the proper object, then it begs the question as to whether or not these are just grey areas in Theology.

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<sup>42</sup> This is just one of many problems and questions raised. One theological implication worth noting, especially in regards to dispensationalism, is that if one separates the person and work of Christ in the Gospel message progress of revelation becomes nullified. Through the dispensations the person of Christ has been more and more clearly defined. From seed of woman, to seed of Abraham and Isaac etc.. Progress of revelation indicates some objective content that has been revealed. The means for salvation has always been by faith in God's promises; the object has always been God's provision through the Messiah. While the object of saving faith has not changed, nor the means, the content of saving faith has grown. Dr. Anderson notes that "The Content of our Faith from age to age – Varies." (Anderson, 70) To say that Christ's deity and his person and work are not required is to render progress of revelation purposeless.

<sup>43</sup> Walvoord, <http://bible.org/seriespage/person-and-work-christ-%E2%80%94-part-xvi-christ-his-resurrection> last accessed May, 2011.

Application 2: Be clear and include in the gospel message what Paul and John included. We should always strive to keep the gospel message clear and simple, free of works, while at the same time providing the lost the proper object of faith. For anyone to believe anything less is to run the risk of having people place their faith in an improper object, one that cannot fulfill promises made.

The proper object is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the one who died and rose again and by believing in Him, because of His provision and promise, we have eternal life. So never be confused about who our Savior is, what He did, and what we must do to obtain His offer of eternal life. “but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor. 15:57)

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