

# Fundamentals of Christian Doctrine

## Jesus, the Center of our Faith– Lesson # 2

There are two major teachings about *Jesus* in the Bible:

1. *Jesus* was not conceived the natural way, but thru the action & power of the *Holy Spirit* in the womb of the *Virgin Mary*. Thus, *Jesus* is human because *He* was born of the *Virgin Mary*; and, *He* is *God* because *He* was conceived by the power of the *Holy Spirit*. *Jesus* had to become *God-Man* because that was the only way *God* could accomplish the work of salvation. *Jesus* is fully *God* & fully *man* in the way *God* intended man to be; without sin, & in full relationship with *God Himself* (John 1:14).



2. *Jesus* came to earth from the *Father* and lived among us to do the saving work of *God* for a world destroyed by sin. As *God's Son*, *He* had to become *man* so *He* could take our place, be perfectly obedient to *God* & obey every single law of *God* in thought, word, & deed (as *Adam & Eve* were created to do). Since *Adam & Eve* & all their future descendants were burdened with the consequences of original sin, *Jesus* would have to take on *Himself all* the sins of every human who would ever live on the face of the earth. *He died for all! He was tempted in all things as we are*, but *He* did not sin, not even once. *He* is the perfect sacrifice offered by *Himself* as our perfect high priest (Hebrews 4:15). The *New Testament* is vividly clear that *God* did indeed take on a body in *Christ* as the fulfillment of the plan of salvation already promised in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15).

*Jesus* did miracles, taught individuals & masses of people, mentored *His* disciples, and revealed the kingdom of *God*. *He* willingly submitted to the will of *God*, *His Father*; and, also to the cruel hands of *His* enemies and the hatred of *Satan* - -which climaxed in *His* suffering, death, burial & resurrection. On the cross, the *Father* punished *Him* for the sins of the entire world. When *Jesus* cried out on the cross, “*It is finished*,” *all* that was necessary for our reunion with *God* was accomplished by *His Son*, *Jesus Christ*. The *Father* validated the fulfillment of *Jesus’* work of redemption, by raising *His Son* from the dead on *Easter Sunday* morning.



Unbelievers raise the question: “How could the death of one man be enough to pay for the sin of every person who ever lived or will live?” The answer is because *Jesus* is *God*! - -Only *God* could bear the burden & punishment for sin. Only *God* could pay the price for sin owed to *Himself Who* demands justice for sin. Only *God* could defeat the devil & the power of sin; and, *He* did it

by the perfect obedience, suffering, death, & resurrection of *His Son* (1John 3:8b).

From *God's* perspective, the work of *Jesus* was necessary. *He* saved our souls & bodies. *He* rose in both body & soul. *We*, too, will be raised by *Him*, body & soul, to live with *Him* forever in *His* Kingdom. The resurrection is the ultimate proof that



*Jesus* is *Who He* claimed to be throughout *His* earthly ministry. (see *His* baptism: the voice of the *Father* from heaven says, “This is my beloved *Son* with *Whom I* am well-pleased.” (Matthew 3:17) *We* are baptized in the name of the *Father*, the *Son*, & the *Holy Spirit*. Baptism establishes *us* in a new relationship with *God*. *We* are now called “*Children of God*.” *We* offer our prayers in the name of *God*’s *Son*, our *Lord & Savior, Jesus Christ, Who* paid for all our sins. “*It is finished!*” *We* are justified by faith thru *Jesus Christ*!

## What is Justification?



*Justification is all about Jesus Who bears our sin; all* our sins, large & small, were placed on *Jesus*. All the benefits *Christ* earned are given to us in faith. This does not mean that *God* overlooks our sins or ignores them as if they did not exist. Justification means that *Jesus* acted as our substitute - both in *His* life & in *His* death. It means that in faith we are declared righteous - because *Jesus* is righteous! We are justified by grace thru faith in *Jesus Christ*; it is the center of the *Church*’s life & confession; it is the comfort for sinners. It is *Jesus* answering for *God*’s wrath over all our sins. Then with *His Spirit*, *God* continues to deliver forgiveness of sins thru *Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord’s Supper*.

*Forgiveness is our deepest need.* To stand before *God* is to stand under *His* judgment, responsible for our sins. But, because of our baptism, *God* sees *Jesus* standing in our place as our substitute. Justification is not by what *we do* or *who we are*. It is a gift from God. It is *Christ*’s doing! *He* gives us forgiveness thru the *Word* connected to our baptism, by the words of confession & absolution, and by the body & blood of *Jesus* offered to us in *His Holy Supper*. And greatest of all; this divine love is totally free. Justification is a perfect & complete gift from *God* to us.



*Jesus did everything necessary for our salvation!* We cannot earn it, or aid it, or take credit for *any* of it. Because *God* is saving us, *He* will get it right and our salvation will be sure. We are on our way home again to the new *Eden (heaven)*. Wearing the righteousness of *Jesus* like new clothes, we spend our days looking for ways to love *God* & serve others (Romans 6:5-11).

## The End of the World



*There are almost endless scenarios & speculations about how the world will end;* i.e., Hollywood’s computer-generated special effects to generate frightening images of a catastrophic end to the planet due to global warming. Many fear nuclear war will end life on earth. Others fear over-population will bring the end of civilization. All these opinions assume that humans will be responsible for bringing an end to the earth.

*Christians have also offered opinions.* The “*Left Behind*” series is a recent addition to many other opinions based on *Biblical* clues. - -When the calendar changed from AD 999 to AD 1000, many *Christians* thought the end was near. Ancient calendars, prophets, seers, movement of planets or stars, writings & ravings of oracles, have all been used to pinpoint exactly *when* the end time will occur, or at least start.







But, **Christians** are interested for a different reason. *Scripture* not only tells us that **Christ** will return to **His** creation & bring an end to the world as we know it; but, that **He will come to judge us!**

**The writer of Hebrews (1:2) tells us that we are in the last days now.** The last days began when **God** sent **His Son** to be born as the **God-man, Jesus, Who** made it clear that absolutely no one (*not even angels*) knows the date of the very last day; only the **Father** knows (Matthew 24:36). The discussion among **Christians** has been complicated by an idea that **Christ's** return is an event separate from **His** judgment. Some believe that before the world ends, there will be a "golden age of peace & prosperity," lasting for 1000 years. This is called "*millennialism*" & is based on a literal interpretation of **Revelation 20**.



**Premillennialists say Jesus will return before this 1000-year period begins. Postmillen-**



nialists say **Jesus** will return **after** the 1000-year period. Lutherans & the large majority of **Christians** are **amillennialists** who believe there will be **no literal** 1000-year reign of **Christ** on earth prior to **His** return for judgment. St. Paul writes that in heaven **Christ** now rules over all things for the sake of **His Church**. With Paul, we might ask: "Why should **He** come back to establish an earthly kingdom when **He** steadfastly refused to do it on principle when **He** was here the first time?"

**Many of the Premillennial Christians also believe in what they call the "Rapture,"** which teaches that **Christ** will return secretly to remove the **Christians** from the earth before **He** sets up **His** 1000-year earthly kingdom. They point to 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 where Paul says that the believers will be "caught up in the clouds to meet **Jesus**." Yet the other events in that same passage (the **Lord's** descent from heaven, the cry of command, the trumpet sound) are events **Jesus** associates with **His** return for judgment, **not** a secret return. Proponents of the *rapture* think that **Jesus'** words: "one will be taken & the other left," (Luke 17:34) are when the earthly reign begins. But these verses only continue to develop the *same* topic **Jesus** has been talking about; namely, **His** return to judge the world.



**While the book of Revelation is about the final judgment,** it is also about *Heaven*, the *New Jerusalem*, a beautiful place where all who trust in **Christ** will live eternally with **God** & our fellow **redeemed** in *heaven*. Lutherans believe that on the *last day*, **Christ** will return to judge all people, giving *eternal life* to all **believers**, and *condemning to hell* all *unbelievers*. Because we do not know *when* **Christ** will return for *judgment*, we are encouraged to live each day in confidence, exercising our faith that works thru love.

**Until Christ returns, every person will experience death as the last event of his/her life;** everybody ultimately dies. **Christians** suffer this consequence of sin, just like everybody else. But, for us **believers**, death is deliverance from this sinful world, and entrance into *eternal life*. St. Paul told the Corinthians that "*Death is swallowed up in victory.*" (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). We can die in peace; death is not a total destruction or annihilation; it is the loss of physical life that occurs when the body & soul are separated. The moment a person dies, his/her soul enters heaven or hell, where it remains until **Christ's** formal day of judgment.



*St. Paul told the Thessalonians* (2 Thessalonians 1:9) that the unbelievers will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, *away from* the presence of **God**. While people are still alive in this world, they can see **God**'s creative & protective hand in nature and *do* receive **His** blessings thru **His** creation. They also have the possibility of hearing **His Gospel** of forgiveness & salvation; but, not so after they die & are judged. In contrast, the **believers** will live eternally in complete & perfect fellowship & harmony *in the presence of Almighty God*! Revelation 21:10-27 describes heaven as a beautiful city lavished with precious jewels & gold-paved streets. Beyond such picture language, the *Bible* describes heaven as the creation it was before Adam & Eve fell into sin.



*The Lutheran theologian*, Ed Koehler, summarizes what *Scripture* teaches concerning the death of **Christians**: “In the moment of death, the souls of the **believers** enter the joy of heaven.” (Luke 23:43; Acts 7:59; Revelation 14:13). Koehler also quotes Paul who desires to “be with **Christ** which is far better;” (Philippians 1:23). On the day of the final judgment, the **redeemed** souls in heaven will be reunited with their *glorified* bodies and will enjoy the bliss of everlasting life in *both* body & soul. In the meantime, our departed **friends** & **relatives** who died in faith in **Jesus** as their **Savior**, *even now* live with **Him** in heaven & are comforted as they wait for that final **judgment day**.



### Color Code:

-  (Purple) Royalty - **God**
-  (Red) Blood - **Jesus**
-  (Green) Living - **Holy Spirit**
-  (Blue) True - **Christians**

### RESOURCES

“Lutheranism 101” – Scot Kinnaman, Chief Editor; CPH, 2010.

“Summary of Christian Doctrine” – Ed & Alfred Koehler, CPH, 1952

“The Holy Bible” – English Standard Version, Crossway Bibles, 2001

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