

ARTICLE 3

We believe that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of the Father, conceived of the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary.

That Jesus was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead.

That He ascended to heaven and is today at the right hand of the Father as the Intercessor.

This article expresses in summary the story of salvation through Jesus Christ. Beginning with His preexistence, it traces the major events in the earthly life of Christ—the Incarnation, the Virgin Birth, the Cross, and the Resurrection—and concludes with the glorious climax of His exaltation into heaven where He serves as our intercessor. The story of Jesus' life, as recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, is God's plan of salvation. This plan of salvation involves God's saving activity for us, through which He provides forgiveness from wrongdoings and eternal life.

1. The Relationship of the Father to Christ: "That Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of the Father"

a. The New Testament indicates that God is the Father.

The word "Father" signifies a real relationship. God the Father is described as "the Father of glory" (Ephesians 1:17) and "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3). As the term "Father" applies to God, it is more than just a title. "Father" used in reference to God always signifies relationship, unlike our human use of the word. A human male may become a biological father simply by contributing genetic material necessary for beginning the life of another human being. This act does not guarantee, however, that he will be a relational father, active in the life of his son or daughter. Our heavenly Father is always involved in the lives of His children—always loving and cherishing each one of us.

Scripture references: Ephesians 1:3, 17

b. In the New Testament, the word "Father" when used to describe God is relational in meaning.

God the Father is more than a personal designation for God. His fatherhood involves both His relationship with Jesus Christ and His relationship with all who have received life through Him.

(1) God's relationship with Christ

As a person of the Holy Trinity, God the Father has a father relationship with Jesus Christ. The Father's relationship with Christ is unique because it is eternal (John 17:1-5). God has forever been the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the incomparable Son of God. God the Father has begotten (or given life to) Christ through all eternity (John 1:14,18).

We must remember when trying to comprehend God's relationship with Christ and the relationships within the Trinity that these relationships are so rich that they are beyond our human comprehension. In this life we will never be able to fully understand them.

(2) God's relationship with believers

God is also the Father of believers. Since believers are "born again" and adopted into God's family, they are children of "God our Father" (Romans 1:7).

Scripture references: John 1:14,18; 17:1-5; Romans 1:7

2. The Incarnation and Virgin Birth: "Conceived of the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary"

In Christianity, the term "Incarnation" refers to the union of God and man in the person of Jesus Christ. "Incarnation" literally means "in the flesh," indicating the coming of God in flesh form.

a. Through the Incarnation, Jesus Christ, the Son, came to earth in human form.

(1) Jesus Christ came into the world and took on "flesh."

As the Son of God, Christ had no beginning; for He is eternal, existing always. The clear teaching of Scripture is that the preexistent Christ took on flesh when He was conceived in the womb of Mary (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:8-20; John 1:14). He took on flesh and blood without ceasing to be God. The Incarnation is a miracle of profound significance. The word "incarnation" does not appear in Scripture, but the idea is suggested by the language of John 1:14: "The Word became flesh." Similarly, Paul said that God sent "His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3). The Son always existed in communion with the Father and Holy Spirit throughout all eternity. However, at a particular point in human history, the Son became a man. Jesus Christ, the Son, assumed our human flesh and form without giving up His deity. Thus He is Emmanuel ("God with us") in the person of Jesus Christ.

(2) Never can we fully explain the Incarnation or exaggerate its profoundness.

The words of Paul remind us that "great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). Truly the Incarnation was a miracle and an incomprehensible act of God!

Scripture references: Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:8-20; John 1:14; Romans 8:3; 1 Timothy 3:16

b. Christ's birth was a miracle.

(1) The Scriptures stress the action of the Holy Spirit in the birth of Christ.

Christ was supernaturally conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary (see Isaiah 7: 14).

Mary being "with child of the Holy Spirit"—Matthew reports that Mary was found "with child of the Holy Spirit" before she and Joseph had sexual relations (Matthew 1:18).

Mary's baby conceived "of the Holy Spirit"—We are also told in Matthew that an angel of the Lord told Joseph to take Mary as his wife, "for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:20). In this verse, the Greek preposition "ek," which is translated "of," indicates the source of something. The Holy Spirit was the originating agent, which indicates that Mary was the only human biological parent of Jesus Christ.

Mary's being "overshadowed" by the Holy Spirit—Luke, speaking of the miraculous conception, reports that the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary (Luke 1:34-38). His use of the term "overshadow" reminds us of the Old Testament account of the cloud's overshadowing

the tabernacle and of the New Testament account of the Transfiguration in which an overshadowing cloud was a sign of God's presence (Luke 9:34).

(2) By the Holy Spirit, the Son of God was united with human nature.

The Holy Spirit formed the human life of the eternal Son in the womb of the Virgin. The powerful presence of God rested on Mary so that the child she bore was the Son of God.

Scripture references: Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:18, 34-38; Matthew 1:18, 20; Luke 9:34

3. The Cross and Atonement: "That Jesus was crucified"

a. God's purpose of sending His Son was to save His people from their sins.

(1) There are two major aspects of our salvation: deliverance and hope.

Deliverance—Salvation rescues or delivers us from the penalty of our wrongdoings and the judgment of God (Matthew 1:21; Luke 19:10; 1 Timothy 1:15; Romans 5:9).

Hope—Salvation brings us a personal knowledge of God and the hope of full salvation, that is, hope of the full honor that we will receive as the children of God (1 Timothy 2:4; Romans 8:23-24).

Already believers have experienced salvation to a degree, but they will receive "full salvation" at the Second Coming of Christ. On that occasion, God will raise the bodies of believers who have died; and all believers will be delivered from mental and physical suffering and will enjoy a life of eternal bliss in heaven in fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

(2) In its complete scope, salvation embraces the past, present, and future.

Past—Christians are people who have been saved from a life of destruction. The point in time when they put their trust in Christ marks the beginning of their experience of salvation (Luke 7:50; Ephesians 2:8; 1 Corinthians 1:21; Titus 3:5).

Present—Christians are people who have accepted God's gift of salvation. They are people who have submitted to God's process of salvation and are "being saved." That is, they are being made new beings as they experience more and more of Christ's love, the power of the Holy Spirit, and an increase in their knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 2:15; Philippians 2:12-13; Ephesians 3:14-19).

In believers' present state, God has yet to give them the full gift of salvation. God is in the process of executing His plan for salvation of the world. God's people eagerly expect God to complete His purpose.

Future—When God does complete His purpose and full salvation is realized, God through Christ will rule over all people, and the era of sin and evil will cease. God will also establish a new heaven and a new earth, and His people will reign with Him forever. These stupendous events that bring the completion of salvation will be accomplished through the Second Coming of Christ as Savior and Judge. Christians look forward to the day when God will triumph over evil and they will enjoy being with God forever (Romans 8:23-24; 2 Timothy 4:8).

(3) God is more powerful than Satan, and through His salvation plan He will triumph over evil.

A thoughtful person might raise the questions: "Isn't God more powerful than evil now?" "If God is good and all powerful, why doesn't He prevent the pain and suffering caused by sin

and evil?" The Bible does not explain why God permits evil. It does, however, explain that Adam and Eve's disobedience resulted in the entry of sin into humanity and that God is unrelentingly opposed to sin.

God is actively at work in overcoming evil, which is evident by His submission of Himself to the effects of sin in the death of Christ. Furthermore, He showed Himself to be more powerful than sin by raising Christ from the dead and likewise by His final victory over sin and Satan.

God will triumph over evil. The teaching of the Bible is clear that the end of this world system will be preceded by the final efforts of evil to overcome God. No matter how great the power of evil, it cannot triumph over the power of God. The present world system, corrupted by sin and evil, will end (Romans 8:19-23); and evil will certainly be defeated and destroyed (Revelation 19:11-21; 20:7-10).

Redeemed men and women will find perfect fellowship with God. The love and power of God will become the victorious reality (1 Corinthians 13:13; Revelation 19:6). Finally God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).

The whole process of salvation is summarized in Romans 8:29-30 and rests on the death of Christ.

Scripture references:

Purpose of sending Jesus Christ—Matthew 1:21; Luke 19:10

Aspects of receiving salvation—1 Timothy 1:15; 2:4; Romans 5:9; 8:23-24

Salvation: past, present, and future—Luke 7:50; Ephesians 2:8; 1 Corinthians 1:21; Titus 3:5; 2 Corinthians 2:15; Philippians 2:12-13; Ephesians 3:14-19; Romans 8:23-24; 13:11; 2 Timothy 4:8

God, more powerful than Satan—Romans 8:19-23; 1 Corinthians 5:28; Revelation 19:6, 11-21

Salvation process—Romans 8:29-30

b. Christ's death was unique.

There are two factors that make Jesus Christ's death different from that of other men.

(1) God acted in and through Christ and His Cross.

"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). As John 3:16 tells us, God took action through His Son to save the world. God "did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all" (Romans 8:32).

God stooped down to sinful, lost people through the whole life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Through the blood of the Cross, God made peace with us and forgave our sins (Colossians 1:20).

(2) The death of Christ was an atoning action—an atoning, saving, reconciling action of God.

The word "atonement" means "making at one," indicating the process of bringing into harmony and fellowship those who are estranged. Human sin has separated God and humankind. In the New Testament, the word "atonement" describes the divine work of reconciliation as being accomplished through Christ's death. God restores fellowship between Himself and people who trust in His Son.

Jesus Christ's death was different from all other deaths because of its saving power. Through the Cross, God did what we could not do for ourselves—He made atonement for our sins and made possible for all who trust in Christ to receive reconciliation.

Scripture references: Matthew 1:21; Luke 19:10; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Romans 8:32

c. Christ's death on the Cross has profound meaning for us and for the world.

(1) The Cross was a sacrificial death that frees us from the consequences of sin.

Sacrifice—"Sacrifice" is the most important word used in the New Testament to express the meaning of Christ's death. Scripture points to Christ as the perfect priest who offered the perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 10:1-18).

Blood of Christ—The term "blood," which was a sacrificial term, was frequently used in apostolic preaching and teaching to speak of the death of Christ (Mark 14:24; John 6:53-56; Acts 20:28; Romans 3:25; Hebrews 9:14; 1 John 1:7). The apostle Paul wrote that God was pleased to reconcile all things to Himself by Christ, "having made peace through the blood of His cross" (Colossians 1:20). The blood of Christ indicates the violent death that He suffered. His violent death at Calvary accomplished reconciliation for every person and restores harmony between the repentant person and the Holy God.

(2) The Cross was a voluntary death.

Jesus said, "No one takes it [my life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:18). Jesus was not like a sacrificial animal, dragged to the temple for sacrifice. He could have avoided the Cross. He chose death rather than life. He chose the Cross. As His death drew near, it became even clearer that His suffering and death were voluntary. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter made a desperate attempt to save Him, but He told Peter to put away his sword for He could call an army of angels to His defense (Matthew 26:51-53, 54). Jesus was not a helpless victim of the circumstances that brought Him to Calvary. He was not an unwilling victim. Rather He voluntarily walked the path that led to the Cross.

(3) The Cross was a substitutionary death.

In His Crucifixion, Jesus was our substitute, bearing the penalty of our sins in His own body on the Cross. The word "substitute" means Jesus carried our sins so we will never have to suffer the eternal consequence for our transgressions. That Christ died for (Greek: *huper*) peoples' sins means He died "in the place of" those who should have died. Normally, the one who sins and the one who suffers for sinning is the same person. But Christ suffered in our place, taking the consequences of our wrongdoings. He "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). Taking our place on the Cross, He was, as John the Baptist declared, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). The words "takes away" literally mean that Jesus took upon Himself the sin of the world, thus to carry it away. Only Christ who took the pains and penalty for our wrongdoings, can deliver us from the burden and guilt of sin.

(4) The Cross was a ransom.

The terms "ransom" (*lutron*) and "redeem" (*lutroō*) come from the marketplace and express the idea of purchase or redemption. These words indicate the release of something upon payment of a price. The ransom Christ paid at the cost of His own life was not made to Satan. There was no reason for Christ to pay the ransom on our behalf to Satan. As sinners we had broken God's law. The debt against us was in God's Book. We had withheld obedience (which was rightfully God's) from Him and put ourselves "in the red." That debt called for our

death. "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20). Christ paid our debt at the cost of His own precious blood. He canceled the sentence (debt) of death against us and set us free by the "blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission [forgiveness] of sins" (Matthew 26:28).

(5) The Cross was a decisive victory.

By the power of the Cross the decisive defeat of Satan took place. As our Lord approached the time of His death, He spoke of "the ruler of this world" being cast out and judged (John 12:31; 16:11). Jesus knew that in His death a decisive struggle with the powers of darkness would occur, and these evil powers would suffer an overwhelming defeat. They did, according to Colossians 2:15. Christ did battle with the powers of evil and gained victory over them.

Though Satan was judged and defeated through the power of the Cross, he has not yet conceded defeat. Satan has been overthrown, but not yet thrown into the lake of fire. In fact, he continues to wield great power and to oppose the children of God. On the one hand, Satan can no longer lord over or control us who trust in Christ, for Jesus Christ is now enthroned as Lord (Philippians 2:9-11; Ephesians 1:20). On the other hand, we are warned to be on guard against the powers of darkness (Ephesians 6:11), for Satan "walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

The temptation may be to focus too much on just one side of the issue—either the victory of Christ or Satan's power to inflict misery.

- Some individuals may look only at the decisive victory of Christ and ignore the scriptural warnings to guard against Satan.
- While other individuals may see only Satan with his power to inflict misery and promote evil.

An overemphasis on the victory of Christ leads to triumphalism—unrealistic optimism with claims of perfect health and of absolute victory over all evil. An overemphasis regarding Satan's power on earth ignores the triumphal aspect of Christ's work on the Cross and the fact that He is Lord now. It leads to a defeatist attitude that overlooks the victory that Christ has already won over Satan. A balance between the two positions is the biblical model.

Satan is a defeated enemy, but he has not yet been destroyed. Our call is to resist him by the power of the Holy Spirit. We look forward to that day when Satan will finally be cast down forever and we will enter the joy of full salvation.

Scripture references:

Christ's sacrifice—Hebrews 9:14; 10:1-18; Mark 14:24; John 6:53-56; Acts 20:28; Romans 3:25; Hebrews 9:14; 1 John 1:7; Colossians 1:20
Christ's voluntary action—John 10:18; Matthew 26:51-53, 54; Galatians 1:4
Christ as our substitution—Isaiah 53:5-6; Galatians 1:4; John 1:29
Christ as our ransom—Ezekiel 18:20; Mark 10:45; Matthew 20:28; 26:28
Christ's victory—John 12:31; 16:11; Colossians 2:15; Philippians 2:9-11; Ephesians 1:20; 6:11; 1 Peter 5:8

4. The Resurrection: Christ "Buried" and "Raised from the Dead"

The story of what God has done for humanity does not end with the Cross. Through the Resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, God accepted the Cross as the full and adequate means of salvation for all people who trust in Christ (Acts 2:32-39). The act of God's raising Christ from the dead was a clear indication that Christ's suffering and death had been saving acts. Jesus Christ's Resurrection showed

that death, both physical and spiritual, are not final for believers, since God can raise the dead to a new life beyond the grave.

a. Jesus' death and His Resurrection are true historical events.

Christ appeared to His disciples after He had been delivered from the power of death. These appearances were personal and bodily appearances. The same Jesus who was crucified and buried was the One who appeared to His disciples. His appearances disclosed that He had a real, visible body that could be touched. Yet this resurrected body was marvelous and extraordinary. He was able to appear and disappear at will (Luke 24:31). The body that had been placed in the tomb had been miraculously raised, changed, and endowed with supernatural properties.

Scripture references: Luke 24:31, 39-40; John 20:27; 21:1-23; 1 Corinthians 15:4-9

b. Christ's Resurrection was a significant event in the world.

The doctrines of the Cross and the Resurrection of Jesus stand together. Christ died for the sins of the whole world; but if He had remained dead, how could He redeem others? The Resurrection demonstrated that the Cross was and is the power of God for our salvation. For that reason, Christ's victory over death has personal significance for believers in a number of ways.

(1) The Resurrection of Christ demonstrates that believers are members of a new people.

Christ's triumph over death not only established the fact of His personal immortality, but it was also the beginning of a new people who would finally be delivered from the power of death. Christ conquered death through His own death and Resurrection. As the "firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18), He became the actual beginning of a new order, a new humanity, and a new people (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). All believers belong to this order and are assured that their mortal bodies will be transformed so that they will have a glorious body like the risen Christ (Philippians 3:21).

(2) Believers are now raised with Christ to newness of life.

According to Ephesians 2:5-6, those whom God has saved by Christ are made "alive together with Christ" and God has "raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." The Resurrection of Christ is the source of the Christian's new life. No longer dead in trespasses and sins but raised to a newness of life, the Christian becomes a follower of Jesus Christ. Today the life that the believer now lives is through the same power that liberated Christ from death. That power raises them from the death of sin to a new life in Christ (Romans 6:4).

(3) The Resurrection of Christ is the pledge and guarantee of the future resurrection of believers.

Scripture speaks of Christ's Resurrection as "the firstfruits" (*aparchē*) (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23). The term "firstfruits" likens His Resurrection to that of the beginning of a harvest, signifying the full harvest that is to follow. The full resurrection harvest will not occur until Christ returns. Christ's Resurrection is typical of the resurrection of those who are joined to Him by faith. His Resurrection is the absolute assurance that the believer's resurrection is not only a resurrection from the death of sin, but also a resurrection from the death of the body. Only the One who said that He "was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore" can give us eternal life (Revelation 1:18).

Scripture references:

Resurrection indicating a new people—Colossians 1:18; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Philippians 3:21

Resurrection giving new life—Ephesians 2:5-6; Romans 6:4

Resurrection guaranteeing a future resurrection for believers—1 Corinthians 15:20, 23, 35-57; Philippians 3:21; Revelation 1:18

5. The Ascension: “That He ascended to heaven and is today at the right hand of God as the Intercessor”

The Ascension marked the end of Christ’s earthly life and ministry and introduced a new phase in His ministry.

a. After His Resurrection, Christ ascended to heaven.

Upon His departure from this earth, Jesus was lifted up to the exalted place with His Father, where He had been before the Incarnation. The Bible says Jesus “ascended far above all the heavens” (Ephesians 4:10). That is, He was exalted above all the spheres of heaven. The sphere to which He ascended cannot be reached by astronauts traveling into outer space. No spaceship or telescope is powerful enough to reach the sphere where Christ went.

Scripture references: Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9-11; Ephesians 4:10

b. Christ’s Ascension has great significance for us.

(1) The Ascension brought an end to the visible, physical presence of Christ on the earth.

The only occasion on which Christ appeared after His Ascension was when He reappeared to Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1-22). During Christ’s Ascension from the Mount of Olives, He passed from one state to another. No longer would He do miracles in His visible, physical body on earth, but miracles would continue to be done in His name and through His power by His human followers on earth. At Jesus’ Ascension all of the self-limitations of His humiliation were removed.

(2) Though He departed from the earth, Christ is still present in a real sense.

Jesus Christ is still present in spiritual form. He is not only present through the Holy Spirit, but Christ Himself is also with His people and will remain with them until the end of the world. His presence with His people is a special spiritual presence (Matthew 28:20; see also Acts 18:9-10).

(3) The Ascension led to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

One of the purposes of His going away was to send the promised Holy Spirit. In his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Peter spoke about the direct connection between Christ’s Ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Lifted by the powerful hand of God and having received the promised Holy Spirit, Christ poured out all that the people saw and heard (Acts 2). On the Day of Pentecost, the outpouring of the Spirit was proof that Christ had ascended and had begun His ministry in heaven.

(4) Christ never ceases to pray for our continuance in faith.

Through prayer Christ procures grace sufficient to keep our faith from failing. His love for us is beyond description. He died for our salvation, and He has not forgotten us, for now He lives forever to make intercession for us. His constant concern and prayers offer us comfort and strength in the middle of life's difficulties and temptations. Being unlimited, Christ is able to concentrate His prayer on each individual believer without disregarding the needs of other believers (Hebrews 7:25; 9:24).

Scripture references:

Physical presence of Christ—Acts 9:1-22

Spiritual presence of Christ—Matthew 28:20; see also Acts 18:9-10

Outpouring of the Holy Spirit—Acts 2:33; Ephesians 4:7-11

Christ's prayers for us—Hebrews 7:25; 9:24

Discussion

The Relationship of the Father to Christ

- 1) Give a difference between the use of the term "Father" applied to God and our human use of the term.
- 2) What is God's relationship with believers?

The Incarnation and Virgin Birth

- 3) When did Christ take on flesh? Was this the beginning of Christ? Explain.
- 4) What was the action of the Holy Spirit in the birth of Christ?

The Cross and Atonement

- 5) What are two major aspects of our salvation?
- 6) Explain the past, present, and future aspects of our salvation.
- 7) What factors make Christ's death different from that of other people?
- 8) What did Christ's death on the Cross do for us?
- 9) Discuss the significance of the Cross as a sacrificial death, as a voluntary death, as a substitutionary death, as a ransom, and as a decisive victory.

The Resurrection

- 10) What does the term "firstborn from the dead" mean?
- 11) Scripture speaks of Christ's Resurrection as "the firstfruits." What significance does this term have for believers?

The Ascension

12) What is your understanding of Christ as our Intercessor in heaven? How does this affect our prayer life?

13) What was the connection between Christ's Ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit?

Prayer

Glory be to the great God of Heaven! We magnify and praise You for sending Your only Son, Jesus Christ, to take upon Himself our humanity.

We worship and praise our Redeemer for His perfect life. His Cross and Resurrection bring us to our knees in gratitude. Our hearts are filled with thanksgiving for His supreme sacrifice and for forgiving our wrongdoings.

O Lamb of God, You who have ascended far above the heavens and sit at the right hand of God the Father, have mercy on us and give us power to touch the lives of others with Your love.

Amen.

Resources for Additional Study

Arrington, French L. *Christian Doctrine: A Pentecostal Perspective*, Vol. 2. Cleveland, Tenn.: Pathway, 1992; pp. 23-116.

The Relationship of the Father to Christ

(Please see resources listed under "Article 2" of this document.)

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