

Who is Christ?

A Consideration of the Title Christ and its Different Emphases

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Translation

First, I have a problem (and I'm guilty of it too) with Bible teachers who pronounce Hebrew and Greek words in English as though that solves a problem. So, we might say, "Christ means Messiah." But now we need to know what "messiah" means. "Christ" represents the Greek *Christos* and "Messiah" represents the Hebrew *Meshiach* (hard ch). Neither tells the English reader what the word means, rather both are English pronunciations of these other languages.

Definitions

Let's start with *Meshiach*, which in Hebrew read from right to left looks like this משיח or with the added vowel pointing מְשִׁיחַ. Alexander Harkvay states this noun/adjective derives from the verb *mashach* מָשַׁח that meant "to anoint." He defines the adjective "besmeared (of a shield)... anointed, consecrated." [*A Students Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary to the Old Testament*:423]. Brown, Driver, and Briggs list this word under the same verb that they define "smear... anoint." [*A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*: ¶ 13144]. On the noun, they state, "1. king of Israel *anointed* by divine command." [¶ 13155]. They also point out that the noun referred to Israel's high priest, the Persian king Cyrus, and other fathers. Other lexical studies repeat these ideas. We can safely conclude that this Hebrew word meant to anoint.

Anointing meant that somebody poured or smeared oil on someone or something else. Jacob poured oil (anointed) a pillar of rocks (Gen. 31:13). Israel was to offer unleavened cakes smeared (anointed/buttered?) with oil (Ex. 29:2). Moses was to pour anointing oil on Aaron's head in preparation of his serving as high priest and Aaron's sons to serve as priests (Ex. 29:7; 30:30). Moses was to take that oil and anoint the tent, its furnishing, the altar, its utensils, and the laver that were outside the tent (Ex. 40:9-11).

For individuals, anointing could symbolize the coming of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, forty-four times this word refers to a king as an anointed one. Of these, I think four refer to Jesus. So Samuel anointed Saul with oil and stated that the LORD anointed him to be ruler and that the Holy Spirit would come upon him and he would be changed or turned into a different man, that is, the Holy Spirit would provide Saul with something to make him a king (1 Sam. 10:1, 6). After Saul refused to take personal responsibility for disobeying God, God sent Samuel to anoint David and the Spirit came upon David (1 Sam. 16:12). At the same time, the Spirit left Saul (16:14). Israel continued the ritual of anointing their kings even when God probably did not put His Spirit upon those wicked kings. Much later, God spoke of the Persian king Cyrus as His anointed (Isa. 45:1). We have no indication that Cyrus was an Old Testament believer, only that the Spirit would enable Him to conquer many people and send Judah home to their land and city (Isa. 44:28-45:3). This provides us with a background for understanding the idea of anointing. With individuals anointing with oil was a ritual that was to picture the real coming of the Holy Spirit upon them to enable them to carry out their God-given commission, as a priest or as a king.

Old Testament Revelation about Christ

With that brief background, we can look at the One whom God would send as the absolute Anointed one. When Jesus came to earth, Israel had expectations not only for this Anointed one but what He would accomplish (Jh. 1:41; 7:27, 31, 41-42; 11:27). Even the Samaritans expected the Anointed one (Jh. 4:25, 29). After He fed the five thousand, the people wished to make Him king (Jh. 6:15). They connected the idea of the coming prophet, most likely the one of whom Moses prophesied, and this anointed king (cp Dt. 18:15, 18-19). Though that may seem great, the next day, Jesus stated that it was not because they saw the sign, though John uses the same language in both verses, but because they ate and were full (Jh. 6:26). Jesus would later refer to this event as the violent taking the kingdom by force (Mt. 11:12). They thought they could make the kingdom what they wanted. They wanted a king who would fill their bellies, but they did not want a king who would rule by His standard. All this reflects their understanding or popular teaching about the Anointed One.

Jesus challenged His opponents to search the Scriptures because those Scriptures testify about Him (Jh. 5:39). Since they had expectations and Jesus claimed their Old Testament Scriptures spoke about Him, we should be able to find Old Testament statements about Him. Let's look briefly at a key set of these Scriptures that tie to the idea and title of the One Anointed by God with the Spirit to be Israel's king. About sixty years before God anointed Saul to be Israel's king and about 100 years before He anointed David, Hannah, Samuel's mother, referred to God giving strength to His king and lifting up the horn (place of strength) of His anointed (1 Sam. 2:10). This passage anticipates God having an anointed one. It may refer to Israel's future kings and/or God's ultimate king Jesus the Anointed One. David wrote about God's Anointed King who is also His Son. The world's rulers would oppose this one (Ps. 2:2-7). He later wrote that God's Anointed is king, sits on God's throne, has a kingdom, and is also God (Ps. 45:1, 6, 7). Since Judaism believes in ONE GOD, this Anointed one must be God with the other One who is God in this verse. This is one of many Old Testament statements that support a plurality of persons who are one God, what we know as the Trinity. Isaiah prophesied that God's Anointed one will be from David's family, anointed by the Spirit, will reign, will have a kingdom, will be welcomed by nations when He reigns and He will reign when His people (Israel) return to their land (Isa. 11:1-12). Isaiah's prophesy helps us by stating that God's Spirit is upon this One. The Gospels record that the Spirit came and remained upon Jesus at His baptism (Jh. 1:32-33). Zechariah prophesied that this one would be the Branch sitting upon the throne, ruling and being priest (Zech. 6:12-13). He would bring peace between the offices of priest and king. In the Old Testament, a priest was not king and a king was not a priest. King Saul fell into disfavor with God when he transgressed the office of priest. But God's anointed one will be both King and Priest. Israel also understood that this ruler was to come from Bethlehem based on Micah 5:1-5a. This summarizes the Old Testament's key revelation regarding God's Anointed One.

The Context of Jesus' Earthly Ministry

In the New Testament, the key noun Χριστός [*christos*] derives from the verb χρίω [*chriō*] meaning to anoint or smear. The related noun χρίσμα [*chrisma*] has a *-ma* ending which points to a result, therefore an anointing or a result of anointing. This word is used of believers but not

of Jesus. The verb ἀλείφω [*aleipho*] is translated anoint in nine passages in the NAS. This verb derives from the Greek word for oil, specifically olive oil, and meant to oil or pour oil upon. It is not used of God anointing anyone. The verb ἐχρίω [*enchrio*] is built on the verb *chrio* but is given as an instruction to the people in the Laodecian Church to smear salve upon their eyes (Rev. 3:18). Similarly, the verb ἐπιχρίω [*epichrio*] describes the Lord smear mud/clay on the blind man's eyes (Jh. 9:6, 11). This is the New Testament vocabulary for anointing.

When Jesus began His earthly ministry, God anointed Him with the Spirit when John baptized Him (Mt. 3:16). This is when He officially became the Anointed One, the Messiah (in Hebrew), the Christ (in Greek). After John was imprisoned, Jesus began to announce, "Change your minds, the kingdom from the heavens is near." (Mt. 4:17). He first told them to "change their minds" or "repent" because many in Israel had given up hope that this kingdom would come. They may have had ideas about who this Anointed one was to be, but didn't think He was coming. The reason to change to their minds was that the kingdom was near. Older English translations have "at hand" because the Greek word they used to say something was near or close meant to be at arm's length or at hand, whether literally or metaphorically. The kingdom was near because He, the Anointed King, was present. Jesus sent out His disciples to proclaim this same message (Mt. 10:7). His disciples accepted Him as King of Israel (Jh. 1:49; Lk. 19:36-38). At the end of His earthly ministry, when the Jews arrested Him and took Him before Pilate, they accused Him of making Himself king. Pilate had to consider this charge because Rome worried about contenders for the throne, not about crazy people claiming to be a god, that was the Jews' problem (Mt. 27:11; Jh. 18:37; 19:12). Jesus did not deny this charge but stated that He was born to be King and came into the world for that purpose (Jh. 18:37; Mt. 27:11). While Jesus hung on the cross, Israel's religious leaders taunted Him, "Let the Christ, the King of Israel come down" (Mk. 15:32). Even at the end, though they refused to acknowledge it to be true of Jesus, they knew that to be the Christ was to be Israel's King.

Change of Emphasis Following Jesus' Resurrection

When we move into the period following Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, we see that the apostles apply a different emphasis to the title Anointed (Christ). We first meet this change in Peter's message at Pentecost in Acts 2. Many if not all in the crowd had heard of Jesus' crucifixion fifty days earlier at Passover. By the Law, all Jews should have been in Jerusalem to observe Passover. Now they had returned for Pentecost. To this group, Peter spoke, focusing on Christ's resurrection. Upon hearing that God raised Him, they did not doubt this but wanted to know what they were to do (Acts 2:37). Peter first tells them they need to change their minds (repent), because Jesus was indeed raised. In connection with His resurrection, God (the Father) had made this Jesus both Lord and Christ. Whether Peter fully understood what he was saying, his words meant that Jesus is Lord of the Church. "Lord" does not mean "deity" for He the Father did not make Him deity. The Son had been God in all eternity. God also made Jesus Christ. He had already been anointed as Israel's king about three years earlier. Now, God made Him the Anointed one in a new sense. A few days or weeks later, Peter spoke about the coming kingdom. Peter expected that kingdom be established soon. Peter was not expecting God to start the Church and put His plan for Israel and the kingdom on hold (He didn't end it)(Acts 3:19-21).

For this reason, I don't think Peter fully understood the significance of what it meant for God to make Jesus Lord and Christ at that time. However, his words, spoken under the control of the Spirit, reveal a new reality which God will later explain through Paul. Christ or the Anointed One now emphasizes His (Jesus the man) exalted status as the resurrected one who sits at the Father's right hand.

By the time Peter goes to the house of Cornelius, his message has changed as he sees something else happening, and with that, a change in the idea of Jesus being the Anointed. Peter reminds them that God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38). He then rehearses what Paul calls the gospel that He was hung on a tree (the cross) but God raised Him the third day (10:39-40). He extends the promise of forgiveness of sins for those who believe in Him (10:43). Paul speaks the same message in the synagogue of Antioch (in central Turkey). He tells them that Jesus descended from the family of David, was executed by Pilate at the request of the Jews, was buried and raised by God (Acts 13:22-23, 27-30). Paul extended the promise of righteousness ("freed" in some translations) for all who believe in Him (13:39). Paul summarized his message in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. The emphasis in both Peter and Paul's messages is not on believing that Jesus is Israel's anointed king, but that He died for our sins, was buried and raised again.

Almost 40 years later, John stated, "Everyone believing that Jesus is the Anointed One has been born from God" (1 Jh. 5:1). John does not mean that we believe Jesus to be Israel's king, though we don't deny that either. Contrary to what the antichrists said, we affirm that Jesus is Christ meaning He is equal with the Father and has come in flesh. The antichrists had been in these churches (1 Jh. 2:18-19). They denied Jesus is the Christ because they denied the Father and the Son (1 Jh. 2:22). This emphasizes not just that He is God but that He is equal with the Father, which was the significance of "son" in Jewish culture. They were also antichrists because they denied Jesus having come in flesh (4:2-3). "Having come" is a perfect tense that emphasizes that He came in flesh and is still in flesh at the time John wrote. We affirm that He remains flesh. When John refers to these men in 2 John 7, he does not use the perfect tense but the present tense, meaning this Jesus Anointed is still presently coming in flesh. That emphasizes His physical resurrection and physical return. Paul addresses the issue of a literal resurrection at length in 1 Corinthians 15:1-28. In this section, He uses the title "Christ" fourteen times but never once does he use "Jesus." He uses "Jesus" only two times in the whole chapter and then only with Christ (15:31, 57). This again supports the idea that the title Christ is not emphasizing Jesus as Israel's king but as God's anointed one in the realm of His resurrection and position. Jesus is the Christ because He is both God and man, and the resurrection is necessary for Him to still be a man.

As Evangelicals, we tend to emphasize man's sinfulness and Jesus' death for sins. At times, we do this to the exclusion of His resurrection. I've even been around people who affirm the resurrection but refuse to announce it to unbelievers or require it to be part of what one must believe to be saved. A missionary with a children's evangelistic organization told me they cannot announce the resurrection to children because children cannot understand the idea of resurrection. Contrary to this, the New Testament writers placed tremendous emphasis on Christ's resurrection. This is the post-resurrection emphasis of Jesus being the Anointed one; He's God in flesh and the resurrected one. Not every occurrence of "Christ" in the letters to the

churches emphasizes both sides of this idea, but it is at least part of His identity. When we pronounce the gospel to unbelievers, we do not require them to believe that Jesus is Israel's anointed king. Is that what you were told when you were saved? Is that what we've been proclaiming to unbelievers? Can we find evidence that believers in the Church proclaimed Jesus as Israel's king as the object of our faith? No. They proclaimed Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2).

Paul's special emphasis on Christ

Paul writes most of the New Testament letters, but of the 499 times that the title "Christ" [χριστος] occurs in the New Testament, 358 of those are in Paul's letters or 370 if he wrote Hebrews. The Gospels have Christ 53 times, Acts 24 times, Revelation 7 times, and the remaining letters 46 times. Of these, Paul uses Christ 46 times in the letter to the Ephesians. That's only one less occurrence than in 2 Corinthians, a letter twice the size of Ephesians. He uses it 37 times in his even shorter letter to the Philippians. This emphasis coincides with his growing focus on unity within the body of Christ, especially at the local church level.

Surveying through the New Testament epistles, every reference to "body" [σῶμα] that refers to the Son's physical body connects it with the name "Jesus." However, when "body" is used for the body of Christ, it is either Christ or no name, but never "Jesus." Why? Because the "body of Christ" connects all believers with the One who is risen in a special status as the Anointed One. The title *Christos* does not presently emphasize that He is anointed as Israel's king, though He will be King in the future. He is anointed to sit at the Father's right-hand and constitute the location where God applies to us many benefits of salvation. So, we have been placed into (baptized) Christ (Rom. 6:2-3). We have all blessings **in Christ** (Eph. 1:3). **In Him** we are holy and without blame (Eph. 1:4). **In Him**, we have redemption and forgiveness of trespasses and sins (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). We are made alive, raised-up, and seated in the heavenlies **in Christ Jesus** (Eph. 2:5-6). We are made God's kind of righteousness **in Him** (2 Cor. 5:21). We are dead ones to sin but living ones to God **in Christ** (Rom. 6:11). We are jointly-crucified **in Christ** (Gal. 2:20 (19)). We are sons **in Christ Jesus** (Gal. 3:26). We are all one **in Christ Jesus** (Gal. 3:38). We are **in Christ Jesus** who has become for us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). We are part of the one **body of Christ** (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:13). Through **the body of Christ**, we died to the law (Rom. 7:4). Rather than an insecure or precarious place, we have a firmness **in Christ** (2 Cor. 1:21). That's security. In all these and many other statements, Paul focuses us on who we are with Christ. Who we are in Christ rests wholly on who He is. God is counting us to share in Christ's character and work. For some that almost sounds blasphemous, but it isn't. It is how God has planned to apply certain aspects of salvation to us. It is grace, pure grace, for we deserve none of these things He says about us in Christ.

Paul uses the title Christ of Jesus when referring to our freedom from law. Paul died to the law in Christ (Gal. 2:19). Christ has freed us from the yoke of law (Gal. 5:1). Christ is the end of law for believers (Rom. 10:4). This is not true if Christ emphasizes His anointed status as Israel's king. In His kingdom, the law will go out from Zion (Isa. 2:3). As Israel's anointed king, the government rests on His shoulders (Isa. 9:6). He will sit on David's throne and uphold His

kingdom in judgment and righteousness (9:7). When He pronounced the message of that kingdom, He assured the Jews that He did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it (Mt. 5:17-19; 23:23). He raised the standard of law in His kingdom (Mt. 5:21-48). Note that every “You have heard it said” was not man’s changing or embellishment of the law, but quotations from the Old Testament law. He had come to be the one who would uphold the law both personally and then as Israel’s king (Isa. 11:1-5). The King will uphold the Law but as He relates to His body the Church, He ended the Law. By means of His anointed status at the Father’s right hand, He has introduced grace as a way of life.

Who is Jesus?

The letters to the churches also demonstrate a very careful use of the name Jesus. The name occurs about 52 times without the title Christ. Every occurrence specifically emphasizes His humanity in some sense. Jesus bore the marks of punishment and crucifixion in His body and Paul bore similar marks in His body (Gal. 6:17). The Father is the one who raised Jesus our Lord out from among dead ones (Rom. 4:24; 2 Cor. 4:14). Salvation involves the recognition that Jesus is LORD, that is, Jesus the man is also God (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3). The New Testament writers often use Lord of Jesus’ deity to distinguish Him from the Father, though they also call Him GOD (cp 1 Thess. 4:13-14, “God will bring with Him” that’s Jesus). Truth is in Jesus, for He always sees all things as they genuinely are and lives up to what He knows (Eph. 4:21). The One who will descend to rescue us from the coming wrath is both God and known as the man Jesus (1 Thess. 1:10). After rescuing us from this place, we will accompany Jesus before God our Father (1 Thess. 3:13; cf Jh. 14:3). The Greek word *parousia* that is translated “coming” in many Bibles communicates the idea of “being present to or with” someone or something, hence the idea of “coming.” We believe that Jesus died and arose (1 Thess. 4:14). As the man Jesus, the Son was lower than the angels for a short time (Heb. 2:9). As the Son, He was always present in heaven, but in His human nature as Jesus, He passed through the heavens as our great high priest and arriving in heaven He entered in (Heb. 4:14; 6:20). Jesus, being a man, had blood which He shed and with which He cleanses us (Heb. 10:19; 13:12; 1 Jh. 1:7). Eternally He is Son. Jesus is the name of the Son in His human nature. The man Jesus was anointed and is also Christ or the Anointed One.

Are we “in Jesus?” Many times the Bible states we are in Christ, in Christ Jesus or in Him, but never does it state we are in Jesus. In our English Bibles we have “in Jesus” or “in Jesus Christ” four times as the object of faith (Rom. 3:26; Gal. 2:16; 3:22). None of these are properly “in Jesus” because no preposition “in” *εν* occurs, and in each, Jesus is **the object of faith**. In three of these passages, “Christ” is *χριστου* a genitive noun not *χριστω* a locative noun. When the genitive noun is used with faith, it does not indicate location “in” but the object of faith; we might say “faith concerning.” Perhaps a better translation would be, “concerning Jesus” or “about Jesus.” In John 12:11, we have “believing **into** Jesus” where the preposition *εις* indicates the direction of their faith, that is, they were directing faith at the person of Jesus. In Acts 4:2 the Jewish leadership was annoyed because Peter and John were proclaiming the resurrection from dead ones **by** the Jesus, where Jesus is the instrument who raises people from the dead. Ephesians 4:21 has the only legitimate “in Jesus” statement, but it does not refer to our position in Christ. It refers to truth existing in the person Jesus. He taught the Ephesians through the

apostles. He lived His life in truth, not only seeing all things as they truly are but living up to or answering to all He knew. He never over estimated or under estimated His ability. Paul wanted the Ephesians to begin being honest in the way they lived. Jesus was an example of an honest lifestyle. Paul's tough reminders to them demonstrate that while they knew truth, they were not living in a manner consistent with it, and that is not the way Jesus lived.

The apostle Paul speaks of our being in Christ. He wrote that we were baptized into Christ Jesus or simply "into Christ" (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). The Greek verb *baptizō* means to "put into" or "to immerse." By being baptized into Christ we were also put into Christ's death and His burial (Rom. 6:3-4). Because we are in Christ, it is as though we have "put on Christ" as we would put on clothing (Gal. 3:27). Being baptized or put into Christ involves our being put into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). It includes our joint-burial and joint-resurrection with Him (Col. 2:12). In none of these passages does Paul refer to water baptism. Water baptism should picture this union in Christ but it does not cause it. There is but one baptism for believers in Jesus Christ. Jewish believers do not have a baptism and Gentile believers have different baptism. We all were placed into Christ by the same act of baptism. We baptize believers with water in the name of Jesus, which is not specifically saying the name Jesus over the person, but representing their relationship to the person of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:39; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). Notice that in none of these do we baptize people only in the name of Jesus, but in Jesus Christ or our Lord Jesus. Water baptism testifies to the individual's relationship in the person of Jesus Christ, as well as to the Father and the Spirit (cp Mt. 28:19).

Our identity in Christ is based entirely on Him. There is not "Christ" apart from Jesus, for He is the One whom God has anointed. But our identity is connected with Him as Christ, for He is anointed now, not to be our king, but to be the One who is resurrected and so defines our character or standing in Him. We contribute nothing to this new identity. He literally died. We only died in Him. He was physically buried. We were buried only in Him. He bodily rose again. We rose only in Him. He ascended and sat down. We were raised up and seated only in Him. He fills all things [*παντα*] in all ways [*πασιν*] to make the body of Christ all that it is. In this context, the "all things" are the parts or members of the body. That's us. The "all ways" involves everything He does to give character to the entire body and produce proper ministry within the body. The body of Christ is not better because God chose to add a great orator or musician, a great mind or scholar, a great assistant or manager, a celebrity or millionaire. Anything we contribute within the body of Christ is completely due to God. John wrote, "The one doing the Truth comes to the light that it might be plainly seen that his works are worked by God" (Jh. 3:21). Jesus is this light, for He is the One who lives out eternal life in activity (Jh. 1:4). He was the one to whom Nicodemus came by night (Jh. 3:1-2). He Christ gave gifts to men (Eph. 4:8). As the Head of the body, He directs the proper use of the gifts for the benefit of the whole body.

Christians

Where does the title Christian originate? The Oxford English dictionary defines Christian as a person who has been baptized as a Christian or believes in Christianity. Joseph Thayer defined the Greek word *christianos* *χριστιανός* as "a Christian, a follower of Christ." [*Thayer's Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*: entry 5546]. The Greek word occurs only three times.

K.H. Rengstorf says of the words early use in Acts 11:26, “This passage, like the two others in which the word occurs in the NT (Acts 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16), leads us to suppose that, being applied to Christians by outsiders, it contained an element of ridicule and that in this it did not differ from the description *Nasarēnos* or *Nazōraios*.” [*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology Vol. 2: 343*].

The title Christian first occurs in Acts 11:26. Luke tells us that Saul (Paul) and Barnabas met for a whole year with the disciples in Antioch. They taught a significant number of people at that time. This was Paul’s first major teaching ministry. He had engaged briefly in evangelism in Damascus and Jerusalem about seven years earlier. For his safety, the disciples sent Saul to his hometown Tarsus. Barnabas had to search for Saul (11:25). The description of the disciples first being Christians in Antioch, follows Saul and Barnabas’ teaching ministry. Though many like Rengstorf (cited above) claim unbelievers called the disciples “Christians,” the verb *crēmatisō* translated “call” means “to transact business, especially to manage public affairs.” [Thayer: entry 5537]. Further, the normal verb for “call” is *kaleō*, and occurs in the passive voice when it indicates that someone is called a name. This verb is an active voice indicating that disciples were not being called a name by others. Rather, the disciples were doing something. They were conducting their daily lives or public activity as Christians, as anointed ones.

So what does Luke (the writer of Acts) mean when he states that the disciples “conducted themselves as Christians? The Greek ending *ιστος* is diminutive “little.” Attached to the title Christ it means “little Christ.” Since Christ means anointed one, Christian meant “little anointed one.” All New Testament believers are anointed by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21). Jesus told His disciples that the Spirit would come upon them and the Spirit would be in them (Acts 1:8; Jh. 14:17). The Spirit came upon all who believed at Peter’s preaching (Acts 10:44-45; 11:15), and upon those who believed Paul’s message (Acts 19:6). The Spirit comes upon believers today when He comes to indwell us. John tells us we have an anointing [*chrisma* χρισμα] and it (He) remains at ease **in us** (1 Jh. 2:20, 27). As Jesus is THE ANOINTED ONE we are little anointed ones. God anointed certain Old Testament individuals for specific areas of service. He has anointed ALL New Testament believers for His special purpose today. Today, the Spirit anoints believers for a different purpose than God was accomplishing during the Old Testament period. Therefore, to be a Christian means to be one anointed by the Spirit.

After sitting under Paul and Barnabas’ teaching for a year, the disciples in Antioch were the first to conduct their daily activity as ones anointed by the Holy Spirit. Understanding this requires that we distinguish the filling of the Spirit in the early chapters of Acts from that which Paul explained as the present type of filling the Spirit performs. The type of filling in the early chapters of Acts is a filling of control. It is the same term used for John the baptizer being filled even before he was born. The Spirit filled John’s mother and Father so they both spoke exactly what God wanted them to say. The Spirit also filled Peter at Pentecost so that he spoke precisely what God wanted the crowds to know. However, the word used for how the Spirit fills us (cf. Eph. 5:18), means “to fill a lack or deficiency.” It does not mean to control. These two distinct fillings are indicative of two distinct ministries of the Spirit. Actively participating in the Spirit’s present ministry requires us to understand what God is doing in our lives by grace. This was not

the primary teaching of the first apostles. This teaching began with the ministry of Paul, followed then by the teaching of the other apostles and prophets (cp. Eph. 3:5).

The Christ

From this point, I will mostly use the English Christ rather than the translation Anointed One. I hope this will help us follow the following discussion in our English Bibles.

The Greeks used the definite article differently than we do in English. Greek also has no indefinite article. Greeks often omitted the definite article when a noun was definite of itself. So names often do not have definite articles. When the word spirit refers to the Holy Spirit, it often has no article. Sometimes names take the article to point to “that one and not another” or to point back to the one it has already mentioned. In English it may seem odd to say “the Jesus” but Jesus was a common name. The Greek was likely pronounced Yē-sou, and was a Greek version of the Hebrew Joshua, which was probably pronounced *Yeshoua*. Therefore, “the Jesus” would be like saying “the Jesus, that one you know, not some other one.” The Greek definite article sometimes functions like a pronoun, especially a possessive pronoun. So in Acts 26:1, we have, “Paul stretched out the hand” but “Paul stretched out **his** hand.” In many places, our English translations do not represent the Greek articles because it results in awkward English. However, to be a good student of the Word, we should try to see where God has chosen to use these articles and understand the significance in each case.

Context, context, context

Interpretation of Scripture involves more than just knowing some Hebrew or Greek grammar and word meanings. Words may have a variety of meanings based on context. I may run in a **race**, but so does a bearing, and people are born into different races. In the first, race describes a competition, in the second a channel that keeps bearings in place, and the last a group having a genetic similarity that distinguishes them as a people group. The same is true of grammar. A present tense in Greek does not always mean an action is going on right now. A present may be iterative, meaning it happens at times but regularly. The present tense most often represents an action as incomplete regardless of the time. It may be future it may be historic, but the present makes it vivid. How do we determine which it is? There is no formula that solves this problem, but context contributes the most. Even in English, we realize that context determines meaning. If I’m speaking with a machinist about a project on which he is working, “race” will most likely refer to a channel he is milling for a bearing. I don’t think of his project as White or Asian. That would be out of context. If my friend is regaling me with a story of crossing the finish line and says, “I’m coming down the homestretch and I’m gaining on the runner in front of me.” I don’t stop him and say, “Wait, you’re sitting in my living room, you’re not running a race!” I understand his present tense as a vivid retelling for impact. We do this all the time, but because we grow up speaking English, we don’t even think about the conventions of language; we just speak. However, when we speak, listen to, or read a language different than our native tongue, we must navigate their usage and not impose our figures of speech or our grammatical constructions upon theirs. We will fail to understand what they are saying, or make our communication incommunicable.

As Christians, we not only pay attention to context for interpreting grammatical issues and word meanings but also the point of the writer. When Jesus told people not to judge lest they should be judged, He was addressing people who acted as judges over others without considering their own conduct (Mt. 7:1-4). He tells them that if they address their own problem first, they can then help address their brother's minor problem (7:5). Those who wish to find contradictions in Scripture will then point out that Paul told the Corinthians to judge a brother (1 Cor. 5:12). A contradiction only exists if we do not pay attention to the context. The issue in 1 Corinthians 5 involves a brother who is behaving in a manner inconsistent with our salvation and the church is proud that they can tolerate his immoral conduct. It was something that needed to be done for the health of the church and the brother. That's a different context than people smugly point out others' faults while ignoring their own. I think most of us get this. Context is always important. In the 19th century and early 20th century, the return of our Lord received a renewed interest. Bible students examining many passages and vocabulary drew some wrong conclusions. Some came to understand the noun *parousia*, often translated "coming," to always refer to the same event. However, every context must be considered in interpreting any word. In Matthew 24:2, 27, 37, 39 we have four references to our Lord's coming. That coming is after the tribulation or adversity of those days. When Paul uses the term in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 the *parousia* refers to our Lord's coming before the Father with us. It is not His coming **here**, but His coming **in heaven** after coming for us. In reality, the word *parousia* means "presence" and may refer to one being present to others. The timing of that presence must be determined by context. I'm spending an inordinate amount of space pointing to the importance of context for proper interpretation because we will not understand some select uses of the title Christ if we are not paying attention to the context.

In certain passages, God chose to include you and me with Jesus Christ under the umbrella of the title Anointed One. Never is this title applied to us as individuals or as the body of Christ. It is only when God emphasizes our unity with Jesus Christ by virtue of being in Christ. The clearest text that does this is 1 Corinthians 12:12, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ." [ESV] The last phrase is "so it is with the Christ" or "in this way *is* the Christ." We would expect to find, "so is the body of Christ" but Paul does not write that. Paul sees that the body of Christ united so closely with Jesus Christ the Head that the whole shares the title which the Head alone deserves, but that's the grace of God. This union agrees with the many other realities we share in Christ: His death, His burial, His ascension, His seated status, and so on. We deserve none of these, but God applies them to us as He counts us to be in Christ. So, also He sees us all together as one new man and that one new man has one title-Christ. This has implications for our future relationship with Christ as His bride.

Let me be clear, most of the time when the Greek has "the Christ" it refers to Jesus Christ. However, as in 1 Corinthians 12:12, it does refer to Jesus Christ sharing a union with His body in a couple of dozen locations. This is determined by context. Consider Ephesians. Paul used *christos* 46 times. Of those 46 times, *Christos* has a definite article 23 times. That's half the occurrences. Of those 23, we easily recognize some places where *ho Christos* refers to Jesus Christ. In 1:20, God's power worked in *the Christ* raising Him from among dead ones and sitting Him in His right hand. In 2:5-6, what is true of the person of Jesus Christ in 1:20 God applies to

the body in Christ. In 2:13 we are brought near by the blood of *the Christ*. This cannot refer to Christ with His body, because the body of Christ as an entity does not have blood. Blood refers to Christ's physical nature. We are to love one another as *the Christ* loved us (5:2). Certainly this is not how Christ and His body-the Church loved us. So also *the Christ* loved the Church, and the Church submits to *the Christ*, and He is the head of the Church (5:23, 24, 25, 29). When believers live as God makes possible, *the Christ* shines upon him (5:14). He is not manifesting the Church but manifesting Christ. Of the remaining occurrences of *ho Christos* several are attached with other names and titles such as "the Lord of us Jesus Christ"(1:17). Paul states that he is the prisoner of *the Christ* Jesus (3:1). God made a purpose in "*the Christ* Jesus the Lord of us" (3:11). This is "the Christ" either alone or with another noun and all refer to the person of Jesus Christ.

While "the Christ" most often refers to Jesus Christ, about a dozen times God has included the whole body of Christ under the title. This is a matter of God's grace that He causes us to share in Christ's identity and He tells us as much in Ephesians 2:5 where He states that He has saved by His grace. He refers this grace to the matter of making us alive together with Christ, raising us together with Christ, and seating us together with Christ. As I have pointed out, each of these is an identity that Christ shares with us.

In Ephesians, Paul first refers to the Christ in 1:10. God had a truth planned that He did not reveal until He revealed it through Paul. Paul called it a mystery (1:9). This truth is for a dispensation or house rule related to the fullness of times, or we might say a dispensation which sums up all times. We popularly refer to this as the millennium. His plan for this time is to sum up or head up all things by the Christ (1:10). The word "sum up" [ESV, NASB] involves bringing things together under one heading which expresses it well. The first thousand years of Christ's kingdom involves the ministry of individuals on thrones, the ministry of angels interacting openly with humans, of humans, both Jews and Gentiles, living and working on the earth while remaining distinct groups under His rule. The Old Testament revealed all this. It revealed that the Christ would come and reign and He would shoulder the government and rule in righteousness (Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-9). Jesus Christ ruling over all things was no mystery. It was the plain testimony of many Scriptures. John the Baptizer, Jesus and His disciples all proclaimed that the kingdom was near. Therefore, the mystery adds another element.

The mystery reveals that we will reign with Jesus Christ. Revelation 20 reveals that some martyrs from the preceding seven years of tribulation will reign on thrones. Jesus said that His disciples would sit on thrones. Jesus also revealed that individuals would be given varying spheres of authority under His rule. He did not reveal that anyone would sit with Him on His throne and rule in a close intimate relationship with Him. However, through Paul He revealed that we will closely reign [*sumbasileuō*] with Him (2 Tim. 2:12). To those who are victors because they have believed, He promised to sit with [*meta*] Him on His throne (Rev. 3:21). We do not at that time sit on separate thrones. At that time, we will have become His bride, made ready and ruling with Him on the New Jerusalem as His consort.

We will not reign as we are presently, but as we will be when we are changed (cp 1 Jh. 3:1-2). We will judge angels and the world (1 Cor. 6:2-3). We will rule (shepherd) nations with a rod of

iron. Our right to sit with Christ on His throne and to rule with a rod of iron is graciously granted to us for being victors (Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21). We are victors because by faith we have believed in Jesus Christ (1 Jh. 5:4-5). Despite some popular teaching, a victor is not a superior kind of believer. When the world does everything in its power to silence the gospel and to push Jesus out of the sight, just believing that Jesus is the Christ is a very big deal. In this way, both Jesus and John call us VICTORS. Those who claim that the “overcomer” or “victor” is a faithful believer miss the fact that 1 John 5:4-5 defines this very term for us. By holding out this promise for only certain believers who live up to a certain standard, such teachers place the believer under a law by offering a reward in exchange for a work. Rather, it is by God’s kindness and grace that we will reign not in a loose association with Him, but on His throne with Him (cp Eph. 2:7).

Therefore, the mystery in Ephesians 1:10 is that Christ shares His reign with His Church, which is His body and then also His bride. He shares His throne and authority with us.

For any who think this is a crazy token kind of reign, consider Paul’s statements that we will judge angels and the world in 1 Corinthians 6:2-3. I don’t think that Christ will look around at all of us, state what should be done about this situation or that one and then take a hand vote or, “All those in favor say, Aye,” followed by a unanimous, “Aye.” It could be this way, but let me suggest a possible scenario based on the armies of heaven and the death of Ahab. In 1 Kings 22, we read about Ahab’s lying prophets and God’s prophet Micaiah. Micaiah tells Ahab what he saw (22:19). The armies of heaven were standing on either side of the LORD sitting on His throne. He asked the hosts of heaven how they might entice Ahab to go into battle and be struck down (22:20). As various spirits (angels) spoke up, one (we presume a fallen spirit) said he would be a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab’s prophets (22:22). Those prophets would prophesy, “Go up, for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king.” (22:6). Jehovah responded, “You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.” (22:22). It may, therefore, be possible that the Lord will ask each of us at various times what we think should be done, and we will not defer to His judgment but give our suggestion. He will respond, “Make it so.” We cannot say for certain that this is how it will work, but the situation with Ahab illustrates well how God might employ each and every one of us in that rule. We must keep in mind that at that time we will not be shrouded with our current minds that are so often clouded by our sentimental souls and the distracting fallen flesh. We will be like Christ, and with His unimpeded character being present in us, we will render God-glorifying decisions.

Ephesians 3:17 and 19 are key references to the Christ. Paul mentions the Christ in 3:4 and 8 but since I have already addressed those verses, I’ll skip them. Beginning in 3:14, Paul expresses his request to the Father for a greater love among the Ephesians. He desires this reality of the Christ to settle down at home in their hearts. He wishes for them to become more firmly grounded in love. He wishes for them to be strong enough to apprehend with all the saints all the dimensions: breadth, length, height, and depth (3:18). At the end of chapter two, Paul explained that the Church is not only a body, not only the new man but also a building, a holy dwelling place of God (2:21-22). If we think that some believers are unnecessary or second class, or we refuse to engage with them, we miss out on many opportunities to love, fellowship, serve and grow. A structure made up of only those believers who we like is a partial structure. It may be two

dimensional. For this reason, Paul wanted them to grasp all the dimensions that make up the Christ and in that way, all the directions to love. Grasping these dimensions is knowing the love for the Christ that surpasses knowledge (3:19). It is not in our common, human, way of thinking to exercise a love equally for everyone in the body of Christ. Human nature loves selectively, choosing those with whom we meet by whatever criteria we determine.

Addressing the growth of the body of Christ in Ephesians four, the goal is the body to reach the fullness of the Christ (4:13). This is not the body reaching the stature of Jesus Christ, but the full-grown stature God has planned for the new man. When Christ began to create this new man in Himself, God already knew what this new man would be when it reaches full maturity.

Considering how the members are to serve one another for the purpose of this growth, our previous conduct as unbelievers is inappropriate (Eph. 4:17). It does not contribute to this growth. It operates in alienation from God rather than in total dependence. Rather than viewing other members of the body as those to be served in love, it views them with sexually inappropriate actions. It considers them with the intentions of greed and uncleanness (sexually immoral thinking) (4:19). Paul concludes, "But you have not learned **the Christ** like this." (4:20). It is true that Jesus Christ never viewed people in this way, but Paul's point is that this new man over which Christ is head does not operate like this. Our conduct is driven by the character of Christ the head, not our fallen cravings.

Like every assembly of believers, the Corinthian church was an assembly of God, set apart in Christ, called ones, set-apart ones, and calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:2). This unity exists in Christ. In practice, the Corinthian church was riddled with divisions. One set of divisions revolved around loyalty to individuals who had served in their church (1:11-12). Paul asks, "Is the Christ divided?" (1:13). There is one body with one head-Christ. By dividing and pursuing individual leaders, the Corinthians were effectively dividing up this one new man into different men: a Paul body, an Apollos body, a Peter body, perhaps even a distinct Christ body. But the Christ is not divided regardless of our actions. It is always one because it is defined by Jesus Christ the head who graciously shares His identity with the whole group. For the new creation to be divided, Jesus Christ the head would also have to be divided, and that will never happen.

Paul ended 1 Corinthians with a reminder of a collection the saints were taking to help believers in Judea (1 Cor. 16:1-4). It appears from 2 Corinthians eight and nine that they had not yet taken up the collection and/or Paul had not yet stopped through Corinth to pick up the collection. So, in these two chapters, Paul reminds them about their commitment to help and the fact that they are materially capable of helping. The gift or "ministry" is a priestly service [*leitourgia*] to the people of Judea and Paul encourages their generosity as a source of thanksgiving among the Judean believers (9:11-12). When those believers receive the gift they will approve of the Corinthians' service. They will glorify God because the Corinthians submitted their agreement (confession) for the good news of the Christ (9:13). Many understand "the gospel of the Christ" to refer to the gospel we tell an unbeliever. However, the message of Christ's death for our sins and His resurrection requires nothing of us but faith that God will forgive our sins and declare us righteous because of what He did. It does not require us to submit or to make any financial gifts

to help others. All that would muddy the waters of the gospel message. The good news of the Christ is the same message Paul called a mystery in Ephesians 3:3-6. It tells us the good news that in Christ we are all equals. If we agree or confess that we are equal but do not show equal care for others as we are able, we become hypocrites.

Paul encourages the Philippians that their actions should match the good news of the Christ (Php. 1:27). Philippians contains many charges by Paul to serve together, to have the proper attitude toward each other, to let go of the past and press forward while looking out for one another. The two charges in 1:27 are to “stand in one spirit” and “compete together in one soul.” The first involves the facts they know about their unity in Christ. The second involves who they feel about each other within that unity. The word “strive” in the second phrase meant to participate **together** in athletic activity, to operate as a team. Many English translations use “mind” but it is the word “soul” and refers to their feelings. They may know as a fact that they are unified in Christ, but due perhaps to hurt feelings, they do not wish to be on the same team. That attitude is not worthy of the good news about the Christ that tells them they are all one. While this could be a reference to the gospel for the unsaved, it is unclear how a lack of unity would not be worthy of the gospel. It seems better to understand Paul to be referring to their unified status.

When Christ confronted Paul on the road to Damascus, He asked Paul why he was persecuting Him (Acts 9:4). Christ’s relationship to His body is a two-way street. Not only does God count us to be united in Christ but Christ also relates to us as parts of the body and shares in our sufferings. All believers suffer and Paul also suffered. He viewed his suffering as being on behalf of believers (Col. 1:24). He was filling up what was lacking in the adversity of the Christ. If *the Christ* refers in this instance to Jesus Christ, Paul’s language would imply that Christ suffered but not as much as was necessary and so Paul was making up what lacked. J.B. Lightfoot interprets Paul, “Despite all that He underwent, He the Master has left something still for me the servant to undergo.” [*Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*: 164] This is not at all what Paul means. Some believers suffer less than others and Paul saw himself as making up the difference. He was suffering on behalf of Christ’s body, the Church. This verse strongly demonstrates an occurrence of *the Christ* that does not make sense unless we understand Christ to refer to Jesus Christ in union with His body. Remember, this is not a different entity. It is only a way of viewing Jesus Christ graciously sharing His identity with His body the Church.

In Paul’s calling for a warm unity among the Colossians saints, he tells them to let the word about the Christ to dwell in them richly (Col. 3:16). I have previously addressed this in posts about the Spirit’s filling work. It is not the word about Jesus Christ exclusively they need but the word which tells them about the unity Christ has created in Himself as the Christ. It is letting the truth about the new creation, the new man settle down in them so they relate to one another as they should (3:10-11). In that new man Christ is all things and in all the parts. He gives character to the whole new man. In this same context, Paul has had to warn them against letting others impose law upon them (2:16, 18). When people do this, they act as an umpire against believers who live by grace rather than laws; they call believers, “OUT!” Rather than letting others do that, they should let the peace of the Christ umpire in their hearts (3:15). In the Christ we are all equal because Christ makes us equal in Himself. In Christ we are called in one body that cannot be divided by men’s application of law to believers. The Christ is not equivalent to the body of

Christ, it is Christ Himself sharing His status with His body and in this way forming a foundation for peace and unity.

L.S. Chafer noted this, “The members are a unity, being in one Body, and in its larger meaning this Body when joined to its Head is also one unity—the Christ.” [*Systematic Theology Vol. VI*: 142]. Robert Gromacki also comments, “The analogy is clear: ‘so also is Christ’ (12:12b). The equation of Christ with His mystical body, the church, can be seen here.” [*Called to Be Saints*: 154]. W.E. Vine sees in this Paul emphasizing the union of Christ as head with the body rather than as head over the body. [*The Collected Writings of W.E. Vine, Vol. II*: 88] “ ‘Christ’ in v. 12c is a synonym for the *ekklēsia*, the *body* of Christ, and v. 14 stresses the multitude of body parts.” [Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*: 258]

I trust this overview of the topic has been helpful in understanding the meaning of the title Christ, especially as it relates to Jesus. This title also has relation to believers in certain contexts.