

SRM14104

10/26/2014

“Union with Christ: Its Basis in Incarnation”
Or “How to Escape the Fear of Halloween”
Hebrews 2:14-18

Preaching faithfully the Word of God, when preachers by the grace of God are able to overcome their own flesh and do it in the power of the Holy Spirit, is a special miracle that often amazes me.

Those of you that have heard me preach for some time know that I often try to begin building the bridge from where you are when you walk into this church to where I believe the Lord wants me to take you in your walk with God by starting with an incident that has happened in the news, or a holiday we are celebrating in common. Sometimes it is quite a stretch, like, “This week we will celebrate Valentines Day... Speaking of disappointments in life...”

But sometimes, there is no such particular connection, because I am preaching through a passage of scripture or on a theme for a number of weeks.

A couple of weeks ago, I started on one of those with a series of messages on the theme of Union with Christ, or being One with Jesus Christ. First, we saw from Eph 1:3-6 that the Foundation of our being One with Christ is that God the Father chose us “in Him” before the foundation of the world.

Then, last week, we saw the beginning of that oneness from Col. 1:15-17 which begins with “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” It tells us that Christ is the Beginning of all things as Lord, Maker and Sustainer. It begins for you and me when we give up trying to be in absolute control of our own domain, and allow Christ to be the Lord.

In preparing this week’s message, I came to the next logical (and theological) step in this teaching of scripture, the Incarnation of the Son of God, His becoming a human being.

This is taught in many places in the Bible, and since it is my goal to always preach the Bible, I prayed for the primary text from which the Lord would have me speak.

I was led, I believe, to Hebrews 2:14-18 which states very clearly that the Son of God “had to be made like [us] in every respect”, i.e. human.

Here is where a little miracle happened for me. As I got into the text, I began to see that the text treats Christ’s incarnation as something that delivers people from their biggest fear, the fear of death.

This led me from my not very relevant title, “Union with Christ: Its Basis in Incarnation” to a more timely subtitle, “How to Escape the Fear of Halloween”.

After all, what is Halloween all about? Is it about dressing up in costumes, trick-or-treating or haunted houses? Isn't it really about dealing with human-kind's fear of the specter of death?

So, "This week, many people will be celebrating Halloween... Speaking of the fear of death..."

But seriously, the writer of Hebrews says that ...

1. The Son of God became human in order to rescue sinners from being slaves to the fear of death.

The theme of Heb. 1:1–2:18 is that Jesus Is Superior to Angelic Beings. A summary of who Jesus is (1:1–4) culminates in the announcement of his superiority to angels. This superiority is proven first in his unique quality as Son of God (1:5–14), and second in his humanity as Son of Man, which permits him to serve as the perfect founder of salvation.

In Heb. 2:5–18 Jesus is shown to be superior to angels since as we saw last Sunday, as Son of Man the world is subjected to him, though this has yet to be fully revealed (vv. 5–9).

Then the Bible tells us that Jesus' glorious sacrificial suffering and death required him to partake of humanity (vv. 10–18).

But the practical problem Hebrews 2:14-18 addresses is that all people are born slaves to the fear of death.

Hebrews 2:14-15 (NKJV) "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

Piper: "If there were no God, then death would be sad for most people, but it wouldn't be terrifying. It would be sad because life is the basis of all our pleasures—family, friends, work, leisure, food, sex, music—if we lose life, we lose everything that makes us happy—if there is not God. So death would be sad. But not terrifying. Falling asleep and going unconscious and never waking up into consciousness again is a sad farewell to contemplate. The ending of a long, beautiful summer is sad.

"But if there is God, if we are created in the image of God, as the Bible teaches, and if he is just and holy and worthy of our love and devotion and worship and obedience, and justly angry at our indifference and distrust and our preference for other things, and if we are going to give an account to this infinite, holy God and be sentenced to heaven or to hell, then death is terrifying if things are not right with God. And written on every heart, the Bible says

(Romans 2:15), is the law of God testifying to our conscience that we will all give an account to God.”

So for people who deny God, death is terrifying. They may not be terrified on a daily basis, but they are driven to shut their eyes and ears and minds to the personal reality of dying and having to answer to a holy, righteous God.

This is a form of slavery to the fear of death. It enslaves people to a world of denial or escape or numbness or philosophic rationalization or panic.

That is what vv. 14-15 is about. John Piper describes well the flow of these verses as ...

1. You are human;
2. therefore Christ became human;
3. so that he might die for you;
4. to nullify the deadly power of the devil;
5. so that you might be freed from slavery to fear and live in freedom the rest of eternity.

1. you are human; you are not angels or gods.

2. therefore Christ became human; He did not come into being when Jesus was born. He had always existed. But now He created for Himself a human body with a human nature. He remained one person, but he became one person with two natures.

It took the church about 450 years to sort this all out, but this is what was concluded from scripture after it was all sorted out: Piper “since the children whom he loved and wanted to save were human, he took on the same human nature. So Jesus was actual God and actual man. It is a great mystery, but this is what God tells us about his Son.”

3. so that he might die for you; “He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death ...”

“Christ became human precisely so that he could die. This is what love does. It embraces suffering and death for the life of others.”

4. He did this to nullify the deadly power of the devil; “through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil”

“In dying, Christ defeated, in some profound way, the power of the devil and took away his ability to destroy by death. How did Christ do that? That's what we will see when we look at verse 17.”

5. “so that you might be freed from slavery to fear and live in freedom the rest of eternity.”

“The effect of defeating the devil in this way is that we are delivered from slavery to the fear of death.”

“and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

Now how exactly does the Son of God do this?
That is the subject of v. 17.

2. Our Union with Christ in His Incarnation is the basis of our salvation from the fear of death. V. 17

v. 16 simply ties these verses in with the larger context of Jesus being superior to angels. The Son of God did not become an angel because it was not His mission to redeem fallen angels, but human beings who had become sinners and rebels against God.

v. 17 tells us how the Son of God delivered people who trust in Him from the fear of death: “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”

This tells us that the Son of God was made exactly like human beings, except without sin, as was Adam, so He could become “a merciful and faithful High Priest”. In order to accomplish something, Christ had to become one of us.

“Christ rendered the devil powerless in death by his high priestly work of making a propitiation for our sins.” In the Old Testament, the High Priest’s main duty was to offer a sin offering.

Piper: “why did Jesus have to become a human—like us—in order to be a high priest for us? Because the offering he had to give was the offering of himself. He needed to be a human high priest, so that he could lay down his life not only as the priest who makes the offering, but also as the offering that he makes.”

““propitiation” simply means Christ takes away God’s anger at us for our sins. When Christ dies, he is perfectly innocent (Hebrews 4:15). His death is to bear the guilt and punishment of our sins, not his own. And when our punishment falls on him, it is taken away from us. That’s what propitiation means. God’s justice is satisfied.”

“Now how does that render powerless the one who had the power of death, the devil? It doesn’t mean Christians don’t die a physical death—sometimes very painful ones. Nor does it mean that Satan can’t kill us (see Revelation 2:10). What it means is that the only weapon the devil can use to destroy us in death is our sin.”

There is “one deadly power in Satan’s artillery, namely, unforgiven sin. The only reason anybody goes to hell is because of their own sin. And all Satan can do is fight like hell to keep you sinning and to keep you away from the one who forgives sin.”

Piper: “In sum, the connection between verses 14 and 17 shows that the way Christ renders power-

less the devil is by making propitiation for our sins. This shows that the only lethal weapon in the artillery of Satan is our own sin. If that is covered by the blood of Jesus, if that is forgiven, and if the anger of God against it is gone and in its place is omnipotent grace working for our good, then we can cry out to any human or demonic manslayer: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:54–55). "The body they may kill", but that is all. Instantly we are at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8)."

Trans: And v. 18 adds a final comfort to it all.

3. Because the Son of God shared fully in our humanity, He is able to deliver us from the fear of dying. V. 18

In Christ, the fear of death is taken away, and we are set free from the fear of death, but as R.C. Sproul says, "It's not death I'm afraid of, it's dying." It's the degeneration, the loss of our powers, the humiliation of senility, the pain, the breaking away of loved ones. What about all the trials and temptations to give up and despair in these things?

v. 18 "For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted."

When Jesus faced His own death, it was not easy.

Piper: "Christ took on weak, vulnerable human nature not only so that he could experience death, but also that he could experience dying, and then sympathize with the temptations that come with suffering and dying. It says he was tempted in that which he suffered—this isn't the temptation of lust or greed. This is the temptation to get angry and to be resentful and sullen and self-pitying and despairing and unbelieving in the goodness of God."

Not only does Jesus Christ offer freedom from the fear of death, but also freedom from the fear of dying. Whatever you or I may have to go through in dying, we do not have to do it alone!

Action: Ask yourself, "Do I continue to live in the fear of death?"

Have you trusted, and are you trusting in the Eternal God-Man, Jesus Christ, who laid down His life as a propitiation for your sins?

If you have done this, thank the Lord Jesus Christ for becoming fully human, so that He can help you when you are tempted to become bitter or angry when you face sufferings and disappointments.