

THE
LORDSHIP
OF
CHRIST

SERVING OUR SAVIOR ALL OF THE TIME,

IN ALL OF LIFE, WITH ALL OF OUR HEART

VERN S. POYTHRESS

“Vern Poythress’s fine book argues a truly radical thesis: that Jesus’s lordship is as wide as creation and therefore as wide as our everyday activities. He shows how Jesus’s saving works and Word apply to absolutely every sphere of life—to art and science, business and entrepreneurship, scholarship and education, politics and economics. Any Christian who wishes to honor the Lord Christ in the totality of his or her life should buy this book and read it immediately.”

Bruce Riley Ashford, Provost and Associate Professor of Theology and Culture, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Vern Poythress is one of the few writers today who combines rigorous scholarship and biblical theology with deep, practical spirituality. This volume is a defense of the notion, so powerfully expressed in the Reformed tradition in general and by Abraham Kuyper in particular, that Christ is Lord over every area of life. Building on this heritage, Poythress brings important clarifications along with practical applications not always found in the pioneers. Readers should not be deceived by the enviable simplicity of the arguments; they pack a wallop.”

William Edgar, Professor of Apologetics, Westminster Theological Seminary

“My good friend Vern Poythress has written *Redeeming Science*, *Redeeming Sociology*, *Redeeming Mathematics*, and *Redeeming Philosophy*, as well as excellent books on linguistics and logic. *The Lordship of Christ* expounds the foundation beneath all these other studies—namely, the fact that Christ rules over every area of human life. This is the principle rediscovered by Abraham Kuyper, that every square inch in the universe belongs to Jesus. Poythress’s book contains a strong biblical defense of this principle. It also contains the best discussion yet of the one-kingdom/two-kingdoms controversy.”

John M. Frame, J. D. Trimble Chair of Systematic Theology and Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

“Thanks to Vern Poythress for providing an accessible, encouraging, practical study on the lordship of Christ. Any Christian who has questions about the authority of Christ and the joy of serving him will be greatly helped by this book. It revitalizes and reinvigorates a proper understanding of Christ the King. This book would be a useful tool for churches and Sunday school classes.”

K. Scott Oliphint, Professor of Apologetics and Systematic Theology, Westminster Theological Seminary; author, *Covenantal Apologetics*

“For anyone looking for a clear, accessible, and biblically sound introduction to the kingship of Christ as understood in the Kuyperian strain of the Reformed tradition, this is the book that fills the bill. What makes the Kuyperian understanding of the kingdom so attractive to many is that it calls Christians to be active in every sphere of society and culture (not least the academy), and this book does an excellent job of illustrating the cultural claims of Christ’s rule. At the same time, Poythress is careful to highlight some of the potential pitfalls of such an emphasis on Christian cultural engagement. One of the book’s strengths is its liberal use of pertinent Bible texts to illustrate its points, without falling into facile proof-texting. An added bonus is that the book includes an extensive appendix in which the author enters into dialogue with the proponents of so-called ‘two kingdoms’ theology, where in a non-polemical way he points out some of the conceptual confusions that have too often bedeviled the discussion around this topic.”

Albert M. Wolters, Professor Emeritus of Religion, Redeemer University College; author, *Creation Regained*

The Lordship of Christ

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The Lordship of Christ

*Serving Our Savior All of the Time,
in All of Life, with All of Our Heart*

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*The Lordship of Christ: Serving Our Savior All of the Time,
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Part 1

**THE CALL TO
SERVE CHRIST**

Being Radically Christian

The Bible has a radical, earthshaking message about Jesus Christ. It says that Jesus Christ is not merely a human being, not merely a famous religious teacher, but the Lord of the universe. Matthew 28:18 includes this claim: “*All authority* in heaven and on earth has been given to me [Jesus].” Similarly, Ephesians 1:22 says, “He [God] put *all things* under his [Christ’s] feet.”

That message has profound implications for everyone living on the face of the earth. It has implications especially for what we think—for the life of the mind. It has implications not only for individuals but also for society. This book concentrates especially on these two points—implications for the mind and for society.

Implications for Society

How does the lordship of Christ have implications for society? In the modern West, many cultural leaders wish to keep religion private. They say, “Keep it to yourself,” or “Keep it inside your family.” Cultural leaders want most of life to be “secular,” a realm where religion makes no difference. They say, in effect, “Keep your Jesus out of business, work, education, science, technology, government, politics, entertainment, media, and the arts.” But if

Jesus is in fact Lord of all, he is Lord of all these areas of life. He is already there in his divine authority and power and presence. You cannot “keep him out.” And trying to keep him out is already a violation of his claims to lordship.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NON-CHRISTIANS AND FOR CHRISTIANS

The message of the Bible has implications for all non-Christians, because Christ is Lord over each of their lives. Christ makes a claim on each human life. If he is Lord, he demands allegiance. He is not just someone you call in or consider if you think you need him. Nor is he someone who makes a claim only on Christians. His claim extends to everyone.

The lordship of Jesus Christ also has implications for everyone who is already a Christian believer. Many a person who claims to be a Christian drifts along without concerted attention to what it means to say that Jesus is Lord. A Christian may feel some kind of attachment to Jesus Christ but still not take seriously the radical changes that should take place with those who follow Christ.

WHO IS A CHRISTIAN?

Here we should observe that the word *Christian* in our day can be used quite loosely. There are people who consider themselves Christian because they live in the United States, and they suppose that the United States is a Christian nation (after all, it is not really Buddhist or Jewish or Muslim; only a small minority of US residents have these other religious commitments). Or they think they are Christian because their parents were Christian, or because they were once baptized, though they no longer believe much regarding the person of Christ. Then there are people who have some respect for Jesus Christ and who may read the Bible and go to church. But they still have not put their trust in Christ for salvation, and they do not have a personal relationship with God the Father and Christ his Son, established by the Holy Spirit.

In contrast to all these people, I have in mind born-again Chris-

tians, those who actually believe in Christ and follow him. But even the term *born-again* has its problems. People may think they are born again merely because they had an experience of religious excitement at some point, and they seemed for a while to feel differently about God and the world. Or they professed to make a commitment to Christ at some point, but their commitment was superficial and they did not really change.

That is not what the Bible means by being born again. Being born again is a radical change brought about by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is *born again* he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3)

Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and *the Spirit*, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is *born of the Spirit* is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’” (John 3:5–7)

For everyone who has been *born of God* overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:4–5)

We know that everyone who has been *born of God* does not keep on sinning, but he [Jesus] who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. (1 John 5:18)

Being born again involves being delivered from the power of evil and experiencing salvation.

RADICAL CHANGE

What happens when we acknowledge the lordship of Christ? Taking seriously the lordship of Christ involves radical change. Radical change can sound hard and unappealing. In some respects it is not only hard but impossible. At a fundamental level, we

cannot change ourselves by our own power. But the good news of Christ includes the promise of his presence and his transforming power. “What is impossible with man is possible with God” (Luke 18:27). God delivers us from the invisible chains in life from which we could never deliver ourselves: “He has *delivered* us from the *domain* of darkness and transferred us to the *kingdom* of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13–14).

The fundamental problem is the problem of sin and guilt. “You were dead in the *trespasses and sins* in which you once walked” (Eph. 2:1–2). Only as we begin to see the magnitude of the problem do we give up following our own ways and making up our own rules and following our own desires.

One fundamental change is in our status before God. We change from being guilty to being forgiven. God is holy, and our sins have made us guilty before him. He created us and we owe everything to him. But we have broken his law and dishonored his name. We deserve death: “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Through Christ God promises to forgive our sins: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to *forgive us our sins* and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Christ bore the penalty for our sins, and we are counted righteous because of the righteousness of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21). “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Pet. 2:24).

The changes that God brings about include changes in the whole person: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a *new creation*” (2 Cor. 5:17). The fundamental change is as radical an event as being born, as we saw from John 3:3 and 3:5 above.

The changes include not only new beliefs but also new standards of judgment that we bring to the table when we are considering claims about truth. The changes include different behavior: we no longer try to make up our own moral standards but instead submit to the law of Christ our King. We receive power through

the Spirit of Christ to begin to walk in the ways of Christ: “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who *live according to the Spirit* set their minds on the things of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:5).

The changes include transformed attitudes and motives. We grow in loving Christ and in experiencing his love for us. Out of that love, we grow in loving others: “*We love* because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). We cast off hatred, jealousy, envy, selfish ambition (Gal. 5:19–21; Col. 3:5; James 3:14).

Change in the Mind

We also change in our thinking, in our minds: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be *transformed by the renewal of your mind*, that by testing you may *discern* what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2). This change in the mind takes place because the mercy of God has come to us, and we respond by devoting our whole selves to God: Thus, the apostle Paul writes, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by *the mercies of God*, to present your bodies as *a living sacrifice*, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:1). The change in our minds takes place as one aspect of a larger change, the transformation of the whole person. The Bible calls us to give complete submission to God in every aspect of life: we “present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1).

There are many good books providing Christians with resources for growing in their faith.¹ We need to start at the beginning, by hearing the good news of what Christ has achieved in his death and resurrection. We not only need to hear but also need to believe in Christ. God works in us through the Holy Spirit so that we trust in Christ and in the salvation that he has accomplished.

We continue in the same way we have begun, by trusting in Christ. The most fundamental way of growing is through the

¹I recommend J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), as one good starting point.

means that God himself has provided, sometimes called “the means of grace.” The means include reading and studying the Bible, listening to the Word of God preached, praying, participating in the sacraments (baptism and the Lord’s Supper), and having fellowship with believers in the body of Christ. When used by the Holy Spirit, these means bring about change in the whole person.

RESISTANCE FROM A SECULAR SOCIETY

In our environment, Christians do not always include in their idea of change the particular kind of change mentioned in Romans 12:2, the renewal of the mind. Change in behavior, yes. Change in attitudes by growing in love, yes. Change in beliefs, yes—at least when a person initially becomes a follower of Christ. But what about change in the mind? Christians do not always think about that area.

As we have observed, the surrounding culture in modern Western countries does *not* encourage us to think about such changes. Cultural leaders want most of life to be secular. According to this view, most of your thinking about business, work, education, and so on is supposed to be the same as everyone else’s. Christianity makes a difference only in private, or only when you are in a church building during a worship service. In this picture only small pieces of life are influenced by the presence of Christ.

Such a view is very different from the Bible’s principle that Christ is Lord of everything and that our minds are to be transformed and renewed by his presence. It is also notably different from past centuries in Europe, when Christian principles had wider influence on society, showing their effects in law, art, music, science, and many social organizations.

Being radically Christian means no longer naively accepting the cultural message of secularity. We belong to Christ. Christ is Lord not merely over individual souls but over the universe.

As the message about Jesus Christ goes out to the world, God is commanding everyone to repent and come to Christ: “The times

of ignorance God overlooked, but now he *commands all people* everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:30–31). Coming to Christ in faith involves acknowledging that he is the universal Master and Lord: “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is *Lord* and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” (Rom. 10:9–10).

The Call to Service

What are the implications? Over a century ago, Abraham Kuyper grasped the implications and made a ringing announcement: “No single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”² In this book we will be exploring the implications of the fact that Christ is indeed “Sovereign over *all*.”

As we explore these implications, we should keep clear what is the basis for our salvation. We are saved by the work of Christ on the cross, not by our own good works. When we strive to obey Christ, we do *not* do so because our works earn salvation for us. They could never be good enough for that. We serve Christ because we have *already* been saved, by grace alone. We respond in gratitude because we have come to love Christ. Christ has changed us, both by wiping away our guilt and by renewing our hearts.

We could, if we wish, jump right into a discussion of what Christ’s lordship means for politics, science, education, and other

²Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 488, italics original. The quote was originally part of Kuyper’s speech at the inauguration of the Free University of Amsterdam in 1880. Kuyper’s declaration about Christ’s lordship can be seen as exemplifying the biblical theme of exclusive loyalty to God (Ex. 20:3; 1 Kings 18:21). This quote and the larger context of the life of Abraham Kuyper influenced a recent book on the topic: Bruce Riley Ashford, *Every Square Inch: An Introduction to Cultural Engagement for Christians* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015); see Ashford’s comment on p. 6.

areas of modern life. We will get to all that in part 3 of this book. But it is important that we not be too hasty. The transformation of life includes transformation of how we think about the challenge of radical change itself. What are the proper foundations for Christian living? And what are the resources for serving Christ? These questions deserve our attention here in part 1 and then in part 2 respectively.

The Story of Redemption

If we are going to think through the life of the mind in the most radical way, we must do it in the context of the complete picture given in the Bible. The Bible indicates that we live within a world created by God, in a history governed by God, as human beings responsible to God. The view of the world presented in Scripture is deeply at odds with the typical thinking of “modern man,” the person who wants to break free of God and live in a secular world. It is appropriate, therefore, to review briefly the basic elements belonging to a biblical view of the world.

What Is Wrong

The Bible has a message about what is wrong with the world and what is the fundamental answer to this wrong. This message involves Christ at its center. Through Christ, and him alone, human beings can have their sins forgiven and be reconciled to God. Christ is the one Mediator between God and man, through whom the alienation between God and man is overcome.

For there is one God, and there is *one mediator* between God and men, *the man Christ Jesus*, who gave himself as a ransom for all. (1 Tim. 2:5–6)

And there is salvation *in no one else*, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

Jesus said to him, “I am *the way*, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

The Message in Context

This is the message of Christianity—that is, the message of Christianity properly understood. It is the message found in the Bible. And it is the message that was proclaimed by the followers of Christ in the first centuries after Christ’s resurrection from the dead. But in our day there is much confusion. Many people say many things in the name of Christianity and in the name of Christ. And many people have done good deeds in the name of Christ. But others have done evil while invoking his name. So it is important that we return to the Bible and discover the real truth about Christ and his claims.

The History of Redemption

The truths about Christ make sense only when we see them in the context of the full teaching of the Bible.¹ The Bible begins not with Christ the Redeemer but with the creation of the world: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1).

This teaching by itself is incredibly radical, because it affirms the presence of God and his unique character in relation to the world. We do not live in a meaningless world of mere matter and motion, as a materialist philosophy would have us believe. We live in God’s world, a world that he not only created but continues to rule over. In most of this book I talk about the lordship of Christ, but even that truth should be seen in the context of the full biblical teaching about God. God is one God in three persons—

¹D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 44–65, expands on my short summary and helpfully points to many implications for our understanding of the relation of Christians to “culture.” The book is in many respects complementary to mine.

the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Honoring Christ the Son of God goes together with honoring God in his fullness. We honor all three persons together. If we are serving and obeying Christ the Lord, we are simultaneously serving God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

As a central part of his work in creating the world, God created man in his image.

So God created man *in his own image*,
in the *image of God* he created him;
male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:27)

We are responsible to God as his creatures, especially made as persons who can enjoy a personal relation with him. We are responsible to receive his love and return love to him.

Adam, the first man, disobeyed God's command and fell into a state of rebellion against God (Gen. 3:6–7). The human race has been living in rebellion ever since. Through the generations, God showed mercy to the human race and made promises concerning the coming of Christ as Redeemer.

In the fullness of time, Christ came to earth and proclaimed a message of deliverance. Then, in accordance with God's plan, he died to bear the penalty of sins and was raised to new life on the third day to bring new life and forgiveness to those who trust in him: “[He] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom. 4:25).

We wait for the time when he will come again and bring a new heaven and a new earth, completely free from sin and death and the corruptions of this world (Rev. 21:1–4).

In sum, the Bible gives us several major points about God and the history of the world:

- *God.* God always existed. He is one God in three persons.
- *Creation.* The world came into existence when God created it.

- *Fall*. Adam rebelled against God and engulfed the human race in sin.
- *Redemption*. Christ came from the Father and accomplished redemption by his crucifixion and resurrection from the dead.
- *Consummation*. Christ has promised to return, and God will create a new heaven and a new earth.

Further Points of Importance

We could describe this history given to us in the Bible in much greater detail. But we will content ourselves with a few further points.

THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST AS GOD AND MAN

First, the language about Christ's lordship involves the full person of Christ, who is God and man. Ever since his incarnation, Christ has been both God and man. He is God from all eternity: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). He became man through the virgin conception of Mary: "And the Word *became flesh* and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

When Romans 10:9 says that "Jesus is *Lord*," it implies that he is God. We can see this by noting that one of the neighboring verses, Romans 10:13, uses the same word *Lord* (*kurios* in Greek) in a quotation taken from Joel 2:32. Translated "LORD" in verse 32, the word represents the special name of the God of Israel, the four-letter Hebrew name that the Jews regarded as most sacred of all, the name that occurs also in Exodus 3:14–15:

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The *LORD*, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations."

To confess Jesus to be Lord is to confess him to be God, the same God who is the God of Israel and who created the world. Jesus is therefore worthy of absolute allegiance. In giving allegiance to Jesus we are at the same time giving allegiance to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, because the three persons are one God.

In addition, we ascribe the name *Lord* to Jesus because he has been exalted as a reward for his obedient suffering.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has *highly exalted him* and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is *Lord*, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:8–11)

Jesus always has been God. He is also fully man since the time of his incarnation. He suffered and died and then was exalted. These latter descriptions apply to his human nature. His exaltation gives him full authority over all things.

And Jesus came and said to them, “*All authority* in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Matt. 28:18)

. . . according to the working of his great might that he [God] worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and *seated him at his right hand* in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put *all things* under his feet and gave him as *head over all things* to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Eph. 1:19–23)

Christ our Redeemer has a special relation of love to those who belong to him and to his body, the church. But the verses in Ephesians 1:19–23 do not say that he is Lord *only* over the church.

He is “head over *all things*” (v. 22). He is given *to the church*, “which is his body” (v. 23).

Christ rules over all things because he is God. As God, he exercises his rule from creation onward to the consummation, and beyond. But it is also true that he rules over all things because he is exalted through his resurrection and ascension. This exaltation is the way in which God fulfills his design for mankind to have dominion.

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and *have dominion* over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Gen. 1:27–28)

Later parts of the Bible take up this same language of human dominion, as we can see in Psalms 8 and 110:

You have given him [man] *dominion* over the works of
your hands;
you have *put all things under his feet*,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field. (Ps. 8:6–7)

The LORD says to my Lord:
“Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies *your footstool*.” (Ps. 110:1)

This divine plan for human dominion is fulfilled in Christ, as is illustrated by the expression “put all things under his feet” in Ephesians 1:22. Another passage, Hebrews 2:6–9, confirms this idea by directly applying the words of Psalm 8 to Jesus. While Psalm 8 is focusing on dominion given to mankind, Hebrews 2:9

applies these truths to Jesus. It is Jesus who in his human nature has brought about the fulfillment of God's task of dominion given to mankind.²

Thus, Christ rules over all things as God and man. His divine nature and human nature belong together, because the two natures are united in one person. The *person* of Christ is ruling over all.

THE FIRST AND THE LAST ADAM

Second, Christ's work has a close connection with the work of Adam. Hebrews 2:6–9 implies that Christ has fulfilled the task of dominion originally given to Adam. Adam failed, through his sin. By contrast, Christ did not fail but achieved the victory. Adam was head and representative over all humanity, which descended from him. We inherit sin and death from him. Christ is head and representative over the *new* humanity, which consists in the church, the company of the redeemed. Through him, all who believe in him inherit his perfect righteousness and his Adamic achievement; we inherit eternal life and the new world to come, the new heaven and the new earth. The parallel between Adam and Christ is expounded at some length in Romans 5:12–21 and 1 Corinthians 15:20–26, 45–49. Christ is called “the last Adam” in 1 Corinthians 15:45 to indicate the parallel between him and the first Adam.

TWO STAGES IN CHRIST'S DOMINION AND REDEMPTION

Third, the New Testament indicates that the redemption that Christ achieved in his crucifixion and resurrection comes into effect in two stages. The first stage begins with Christ's resurrection and ascension. As Ephesians 1:22 indicates, God has already, at the time of his resurrection, “put all things under his feet.” Christ rules over all. But he has not yet completely abolished sin and death. First Corinthians 15:26 indicates that “the last enemy to be

²Dan McCartney, “Ecce Homo: The Coming of the Kingdom as the Restoration of Human Vicegerency,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 56, no. 1 (1994): 1–21.

destroyed is death.” This event takes place at the second coming of Christ, when people are raised from the dead.

The New Testament indicates likewise that the believers’ inheritance comes in two stages. During this age we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is the “guarantee” or “down payment” of our inheritance (Eph. 1:14; the ESV margin has “down payment”). We come into full possession of it when Christ returns. Our inheritance is already guaranteed by Christ (1 Pet. 1:3–4). We do not depend on our good works in order to earn it.

The New Testament also speaks of our adoption as sons as coming in two stages. We are adopted sons now because we are united to Christ: “So you are no longer a slave, but *a son*, and if a son, then *an heir* through God” (Gal. 4:7). Another place speaks of adoption coming in the future, at the time of Christ’s coming: “And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we *wait eagerly for adoption as sons*, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23).

The two sides are not really in tension, because our present adoption is real and at the same time is a foretaste or down payment of the future adoption. These two stages belong together because both are the work of Christ, based on his Adamic achievement of obedience and the reward that he received in his resurrection. He ascended to heaven and now sits at the right hand of God, the place from which he rules over all things.

THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Fourth, the Holy Spirit comes as the fruit of Christ’s exaltation. When Christ was raised from the dead, he was exalted to the right hand of God: “This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore *exalted at the right hand of God*, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing” (Acts 2:32–33).

As a result of Christ’s exaltation, he poured out the Holy Spirit

on the church in the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, who dwells in those who believe in him (Rom. 8:9–11). Through the Holy Spirit the resurrection power of Christ is at work in us. Only through *his* power do we receive the power to change in a fundamental way—to turn from darkness to light and to walk as participants in the new creation in Christ: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a *new creation*” (2 Cor. 5:17).

As we live in Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are not *supplementing* the work of Christ, as if his work were incomplete. Rather, we are living out of the very energy of his resurrection life. We began this new life when we were first spiritually united to Christ at the time of our conversion. We died to the old life dominated by sin, and we were raised to new life: “If then you have been raised with Christ . . .” (Col. 3:1). But it is also true that the death and resurrection of Christ are being applied to our lives every day.

For we who live are *always* being given over to *death* for Jesus’ sake, so that the *life* of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So *death* is at work in us, but *life* in you. (2 Cor. 4:11–12)

. . . that I may know him and the power of his *resurrection*, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his *death*, that by any means possible I may attain the *resurrection* from the dead. (Phil. 3:10–11)

Christian living involves daily dying to selfishness and pride. And daily we are being renewed by his resurrection, living in the power of Christ and in the service of Christ.

We are living on the basis of his perfection and his achievement. But that also implies that we rule with him: “[God] raised us up with him and *seated us with him* in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6). This rule on the part of believers derives

from Christ's rule as the last Adam. Believers rule because they are united with Christ who rules. This rule is an exercise of *dominion*, a dominion in union with Christ. In some respects, it is comparable to what Adam failed to achieve when he rebelled against God. But it is better than Adam's dominion, because Christ as the last Adam surpasses even what Adam could have done. His rule is over the whole universe, not merely over the earth and the animals. He has eternal, resurrection life, not merely the ordinary, earthly life with which Adam began.

Thus, believers have a task of ruling. But they can do it only as they are empowered by Christ, and only on the basis of Christ's complete victory.

THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

Fifth, the lordship of Christ implies the authority of Scripture. During his earthly life, Jesus affirmed the divine authority of the Old Testament. The Old Testament is the very word of God. We can see this implication from several of his statements:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to *fulfill them*. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (Matt. 5:17–18)

Scripture cannot be broken. (John 10:35)

He [Jesus] answered, "Have you not read that *he who created them* from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?" (Matt. 19:4–5)

The last of these sayings, from Matthew 19:4–5, is quite significant because Jesus quotes from Genesis 2:24, which is just a part of the normal narrative of Genesis. Yet Jesus identifies the speaker

as “he who created them from the beginning,” that is, God himself. This identification shows that Genesis 2:24 is God’s word. By implication, the whole of Genesis is God’s word.

We are obliged to accept the authority of Christ because he is God and is Lord of all. God is completely truthful and completely wise. When we accept his authority, we accept his teaching. And one aspect of his teaching is the affirmation of the divine authority of the Old Testament. The same authority belongs to the New Testament as well, because Christ commissioned his apostles with his authority.³

If Christ is our Master and we are his servants, we must obey him. But obedience means little or nothing unless there are specific *ways* that we must obey. We must avoid just making things up out of our own minds and declaring to ourselves that we are obedient. If we do this, we are replacing the real Christ described in Scripture with our own idea of Christ. We are fooling ourselves and others by saying that *our* ideas of Christ are what he really wants.

By contrast to this route of making up our own kind of “obedience,” we have access to specific commandments of Christ and specific instructions from Christ in the Bible. The whole Bible is the word of God, and God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The whole Bible is the word of Christ. So it is all relevant to us.

The Bible includes specific commandments. But it gives these commandments within a larger context of instruction, including instruction about the history of redemption. The larger context helps to guide our understanding. Moreover, we need wisdom in order to discern the implications for our lives. This wisdom comes from Christ.

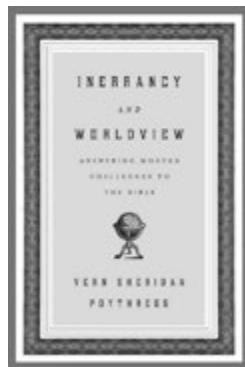
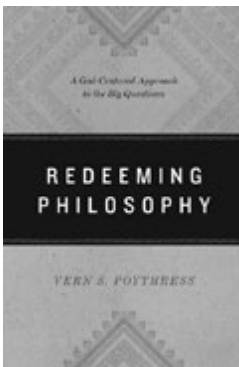
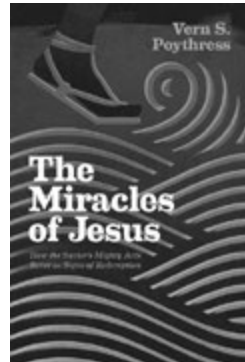
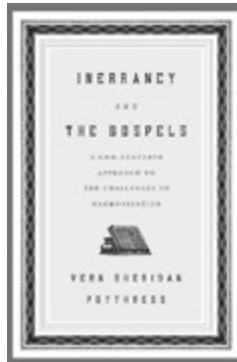
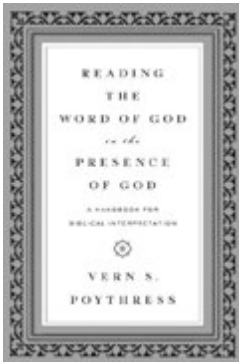
³For detailed discussion of the authority of Scripture, see John Murray, “The Attestation of Scripture,” in *The Infallible Word: A Symposium by Members of the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary*, ed. N. B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), 1–54. The other chapters in the same volume are also valuable. On the New Testament canon, see Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

And because of him [God] you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us *wisdom* from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption. (1 Cor. 1:30)

. . . Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of *wisdom* and knowledge. (Col. 2:2–3)

The Bible needs to be interpreted. Not everything is equally easy to understand or apply. But our obedience to Christ is robust only if we receive the Bible with the submission that it deserves: we receive it as the word of God, the very speech of God, because that is what it is. Throughout our discussions, we will use the Bible as our infallible guide.

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