



WHY DO WE BELIEVE *THAT* ?
Introduction to Reformed Theology

Class 9

FINISHING THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST
&
THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Education Year 2024-2025

Rev. Mark H. Vander Pol



1

Review – Doctrine of Christ

- Names
- Natures
 - Divine
 - Human
- States
 - Humiliation
 - Exaltation



2

Offices of Christ

- HC 31

Q. Why is he called “Christ,” meaning “anointed”?

A. Because he has been ordained by God the Father and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit to be

our chief prophet and teacher who fully reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our deliverance;

our only high priest who has delivered us by the one sacrifice of his body, and who continually intercedes for us before the Father;

and our eternal king who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and who guards us and keeps us in the deliverance he has won for us.



3

Offices of Christ and Us

- HC 32

Q. But why are you called a Christian?

A. Because by faith I am a member of Christ and so I share in his anointing. I am anointed to.

confess his name,

to present myself to him as *a living sacrifice* of thanks,

to *strive* with a free conscience against sin and the devil in this life,

and *afterward to reign* with Christ over all creation for eternity.



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Claims of Jehovah Witnesses to be Christians

- What they believe about Jesus
 - We follow the teachings and example of Jesus Christ and honor him as our Savior and as the Son of God (Matthew 20:28; Acts 5:31). Thus, we are Christians (Acts 11:26) However, we have learned from the Bible that Jesus is not Almighty God and that there is no Scriptural basis for the Trinity doctrine—John 14:28.
- *Response*
 - Matt 20:28 – agree that Christ came to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. His humiliation
 - Acts 5:31 – “God exalted [Christ] to his right hand as Leader and Savior...” Reference to the session of Christ. Distinction between the ontological (essential being of) Trinity and the economic (actions of, esp. for limited human understanding) Trinity.
 - Acts 11:26 – Are they though?
 - John 14:28 – “...the Father is greater than I” is another reference to the ontological Trinity.



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Calvin on John 14:28

- *For the Father is greater than I.* This passage has been tortured in various ways. The Arians, in order to prove that Christ is some sort of inferior God, argued that *he is less than the Father*. The orthodox Fathers, to remove all ground for such a calumny, said that this must have referred to his human nature; but as the Arians wickedly abused this testimony, so the reply given by the Fathers to their objection was neither correct nor appropriate; for Christ does not now speak either of his human nature, or of his eternal Divinity, but, accommodating himself to our weakness, places himself between God and us; and, indeed, as it has not been granted to us to reach the height of God, Christ descended to us, that he might raise us to it.¹

1. Calvin, Commentary on John 14:28, emphasis original.



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Claims of Jehovah Witnesses to be Christians

- We try to follow closely the teachings and behavior of Jesus Christ.—I Peter 2:21.
 - *Response:* Great, but other religions can say the same thing.
- We believe that Jesus is the key to salvation, that “there is not another name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must get saved.”—Acts 4:12.
 - *Response:* Agreed, but why is Jesus “the key?” HC 16-18
- When people become Jehovah’s Witnesses, they are baptized in the name of Jesus.—Matthew 28:18, 19.
 - *Response:* Okay, but why are we baptized into Jesus’ name along with the Father and the Spirit? That is the point!



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Claims of Jehovah Witnesses to be Christians

- We offer our prayers in Jesus’ name.—John 15:16.
 - *Response:* Again, okay, but why? Christ is our fully divine and fully human mediator; HC 18
- We believe that Jesus is the Head, or the one appointed to have authority, over every man.—I Corinthians 11:3.
 - *Response:* “...the head of Christ is God.” Again, the economic Trinity.
 - Calvin, God, then, occupies the *first* place: Christ holds the *second* place. How so? Inasmuch as he has in our flesh made himself subject to the Father, for, apart from this, being of one essence with the Father, he is his equal. Let us, therefore, bear it in mind, that this is spoken of Christ as mediator. He is, I say, inferior to the Father, inasmuch as he assumed our nature, that he might be the first-born among many brethren.

1. Calvin, Commentary on 1 Cor 11:3 (emphasis original).



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Claims of Jehovah Witnesses to be Christians

- However, in a number of ways, we are different from other religious groups that are called Christian. For example, we believe that the Bible teaches that Jesus is the Son of God, not part of a Trinity. (Mark 12:29) We do not believe that the soul is immortal, that there is any basis in Scripture for saying that God tortures people in an everlasting hell, or that those who take the lead in religious activities should have titles that elevate them above others.— Ecclesiastes 9:5; Ezekiel 18:4; Matthew 23:8-10.
- *Response:*
 - Mark 12:29 – Quotation from Deut. 6:4-5, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” Yep! There is one, true God!
 - “*that the soul is immortal*” see Luke 23:43; John 11:25-26; 14:3; 2 Cor 5:1-2.
 - “*God tortures people in everlasting hell*” its not “torture” but just punishment: Matt 25:41, 46; Rom 1:18; Eph 5:6



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Result of JW's Claims

- They deny the clear teaching of the historic, catholic *Christian* church on the teaching of the Scriptures, therefore they cannot claim the name “Christian.”



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Claims of Mormons to be Christians

- We believe Jesus is the Son of God the Father and as such inherited powers of godhood and divinity from His Father, including immortality, the capacity to live forever. While He walked the dusty roads of Palestine as a man, He possessed the powers of a God and ministered as one having authority, including power over the elements and even power over life and death.¹
- *Response:*
 - *"...inherited powers of godhood and divinity from His father, including immortality..."* Horton, "Because of this distinction [the Father being 'unbegotten' identifies his person and not his nature], Reformed theologians could speak without contradiction of the Father as the principium and "the 'origin of all divinity.'" Each person enjoys the aseity proper to the essence, but for the Father alone it is also an attribute of his person. He is 'unbegotten,' while the Son is begotten and the Spirit proceeds. *Yet this in no way means for the Reformed that the Father is first in nature or cause. In fact, Reformed theologians agreed that the category of causality is inappropriate among the persons.*"²

1. <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/what-mormons-believe-about-jesus-christ>
 2. Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 292.



Claims of Mormons to be Christians

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- *Response:*
 - *"...He possessed the power of a God..."* No, Christ possessed the power of the one true God.

1. <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/what-mormons-believe-about-jesus-christ>



Claims of Mormons to be Christians

- We believe that He was born of a virgin, Mary, in Bethlehem of Judea in what has come to be known as the meridian of time, the central point in salvation history. From His mother, Mary, Jesus inherited mortality, the capacity to feel the frustrations and ills of this world, including the capacity to die. We believe that Jesus was fully human in that He was subject to sickness, to pain and to temptation.¹
 - *Response:* Nothing about Jesus having a true human body *and soul*. His ability to feel things doesn't make him human.
- God the Father is an embodied being.²
 - *Response:* God is a single, simple, spiritual being (BC 1)

1. <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/what-mormons-believe-about-jesus-christ>
 2. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/christians>



Claims of Mormons to be Christians

- Whatever the doctrinal differences that exist between the Latter-day Saints and members of other Christian religions, the roles Latter-day Saints ascribe to members of the Godhead largely correspond with the views of others in the Christian world.¹
- *Response*
 - “the roles Latter-day Saints ascribe to members of the Godhead...” Sounds like a form of Modalism, but yet they also are more “Tritheistic”² or henotheistic (one principle God [Elohim] among many).³

1. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/christians>
 2. Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 279.
 3. Ankerberg & Weldon, *Fast Facts on Mormonism*, 148.



Claims of Mormons to be Christians

- They reject the Christian understanding of the Trinity
- They reject the “creeds of post-New Testament Christianity”
- They use much of our categories and vocabulary, but not with the same full definitions.
 - They speak of a “substitutionary atonement” but it isn’t propitiatory.
 - They speak of “faith” but there is a clear works/obedience element to it.



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THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

- “The Forgotten member of the Trinity?”
 - Often times it seems that way!
 - However, BC II: “In regard to order, he is the third person of the Trinity—of one and the same essence, and majesty, and glory, with the Father and the Son. He is true and eternal God, as the Holy Scriptures teach us.”
- J.I. Packer’s spotlight analogy
- Horton on why we tend to depersonalize or marginalize the Spirit?
 - God is an incomprehensible mystery.
 - It is not easy to connect the Holy Spirit to our experience.
 - We can take his presence for granted or identify him with our own inner self.
 - We can infer he has a minor part in the biblical drama.¹

1. Horton, *Rediscovering*, 25ff.



The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

- All the works of God are the works of all the members of the Godhead.
 - Horton, “. . . every external operation of the Godhead is done by the Father in the Son and through the Spirit. This way of thinking. . . is hardly innovative: for example, as Calvin expressed it (echoing the Cappadocians), ‘To the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things; to the Son, wisdom, counsel, and the ordered disposition of all things; but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of that activity.’”¹

1. Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 569.



The Holy Spirit Changes Everything

- "...we should not be looking for the works that are done uniquely by the Holy Spirit but the unique role of the Holy Spirit in every work. The Holy Spirit, notes B. R Warfield, is 'the Executor of the Godhead not only in the creation and upholding of the worlds and in the inspiration of the prophets and apostles, but also in the regenerating and sanctifying of the soul.' Even better is Abraham Kuyper's expression: 'We begin with the general distinction: That in every work effected by the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in common, the power to bring forth proceeds from the Father; the power to arrange from the Son; the power to perfect from the Spirit.' When we explore the Spirit's work from Genesis to Revelation, creation to consummation, a common conclusion emerges: he is the person of the Godhead who brings everything to completion. The Spirit changes everything."¹

1. Horton, *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit*, 41.



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Person of the Spirit

- The "personality" (the personhood) of the Spirit is called into question by those who deny the Trinity and claim the Spirit is only a power or influence of God."¹
- The Spirit being designated as a person:
 - John 14:16-17, 26 – The Spirit will be sent as a Helper to dwell with us and he will teach and bring to remembrance.
 - Acts 5:3 – Lying to the Holy Spirit specifically
 - Acts 5:4 – "You have not lied to men but to God."
 - Acts 5:8 – "...to test the Spirit of the Lord."
 - Personal characteristics are ascribed to him:
 - Intelligence – John 14:26; Rom 8:16
 - Affections – Isaiah 63:10; Eph 4:30
 - Will – Acts 16:7; 1 Cor 12:11

1. Adapted from Berkhof, *Manual*, 80.



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Deity of the Spirit

- Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2.312:
 - "...there is no communion with the Father and the Son except in and through the Holy Spirit. The choice is clear: either the Holy Spirit is a creature—whether a power, gift, or reason—or he is truly God."
 - "He is the Spirit of Wisdom and truth, of power and glory; the Spirit by whom Christ sanctifies the church and in whom he communicates himself and all his benefits: the divine nature, the adoption as children, the mystical union. He who gives us God himself must himself be truly God."
 - "The Trinity only completes itself in the divine person of the Holy Spirit."

1. Adapted from Berkhof, *Manual*, 80.



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Procession of the Spirit

- "proceeds from the Father *and the Son*"
 - John 20:22 – "And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."
 - Romans 8:9 – "You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact *the Spirit of God* dwells in you. Anyone who does not have *the Spirit of Christ* does not belong to him."
 - Acts 16:7 – "And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them."



22

Operations of the Spirit

- General vs. Special Operations
 - *General:* In the sphere of nature it is the Holy Spirit that gives birth to all life, organic, intellectual, and moral, that maintains it amid all changes, and that leads it to its development and destiny.
 - [Pertains] to the established order of nature and of the life of man, as it is rooted in creation, and guarantees its development and completion.
 - *Special:* And this is exactly what He also does in the sphere of grace or of redemption. He originates the new life in Christ Jesus, guides it in its development, makes it fruitful in good works, and leads it to its destiny.
 - ...bears directly only on the elect and introduces a new order of things that does not find its explanation in the work of creation, but only in the grace of God, revealed in Jesus Christ.
 - Without the general operations of the Holy Spirit, however, there would be no proper sphere for His special operations.¹

1. Adapted from Berkhof, *Manual*, 223-224.



Operations of the Spirit

- The special operation of the Spirit is the application of the work of Christ to the hearts and minds of sinners.¹
 - Redemption accomplished (by Christ) and applied (by the Spirit).
 - Usually thought of as the *Ordo Salutis*

1. Berkhof, *Manual*, 223.



Saving vs. Common Grace

- Abraham Kuyper: “we must distinguish two dimensions in this manifestation of grace: 1. a *saving* grace, which in the end abolishes sin and completely undoes its consequences; and 2. a *temporal restraining* grace, which holds back and blocks the effect of sin. The former, that is saving grace, is in the nature of the case *special* and restricted to God's elect. The second, *common* grace, is extended to the whole of our human life. The question then arises whether these two forms of grace, this special and this common grace, exist independently side-by-side or operate in connection with each other, and if so, how.
- That there is in fact a connection between the *saving* grace which is *special* and the *restraining* grace which is *common* cannot be doubted. This is immediately evident from the undeniable fact that, without common grace, the elect would not have been born, would not have seen the light of day. . . . On that basis alone all special grace assumes *common grace*.¹

1. Abraham Kuyper, "Common Grace" in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, 168-169, emphasis original.



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Saving vs. Common Grace

- Abraham Kuyper continues: “. . . we must pause here to call attention to the right relation between special and common grace. The error lies solely in that, in defining this connection, people focus on *their own salvation* instead of on the *glory of God*. This is the nuance by which you can always tell whether you are dealing with the genuine Reformed confession or with a faulty *imitation* of it.”¹
- “. . . the doctrine of common grace proceeds directly from the Sovereignty of the Lord which is ever the root conviction of all Reformed thinking. If God is sovereign, then his Lordship must remain over all life and cannot be closed up within church walls or Christian circles. The extra-Christian world has not been given over to satan or to fallen humanity or to chance. God's Sovereignty is great and all-ruling also in unbaptized realms, and therefore neither Christ's work in the world nor that of God's child can be pulled back out of life. If his God works in the world, then there he must put his hand to the plow so that there too the Name of the Lord is glorified.”

1. Kuyper, "Common Grace", 169, emphasis original.
2. Ibid., 166.



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Common Grace

- What we are talking about:
 - “Those general operations of the Holy Spirit whereby He, without renewing the heart exercises a moral influence on man that sin is restrained, order is maintained in social life, and civil righteousness is promoted;
 - Or, those general blessings which God imparts to all men indiscriminately in whatever measure it seems good to him.”
- What we are *not* talking about:
 - The Arminian position that common grace allows man to do a certain measure of spiritual good, turn to God in repentance, and accept Jesus Christ by faith.
 - Common grace does not remove or alter the total depravity of man or lead him to spiritual renewal.¹

1. Adapted from Berkhof, Manual, 224-225.



Common Grace

- There can be a “striving with the Spirit of God” that is temporary and does not lead to repentance:
 - Is 63:10; I Sam 16:10; Heb 6:4-6
- God restrains sin in unbelievers:
 - Gen 20:6; 31:7; Rom 13:1-4
- Unregenerate men doing things that are good and right:
 - 2 Kings 10:29-30; Luke 6:33
- God showering undeserved blessings upon all men indiscriminately:
 - Ps 145:9, 15-16; Matt 5:45



Next Week

- Response to the objections to Common Grace?
- Spiritual Gifts and Cessationism
- Fruit of the Spirit
- Anthropology

