

# THE TRUE MAN

by Ray C. Stedman

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Hebrews is all about Christ. The introduction declares that Christ is God's final word to man. There is nothing more to be said, there is nothing that can be added after what Jesus Christ has said and done. And it is utterly foolish to ignore it, the writer says, because we cannot exist without Christ. It is basic dishonesty to pretend we can. We are not independent of God, as we sometimes foolishly imagine. We are not even independent of each other. We need one another and we need God, desperately, every moment of life. Therefore, if Christ be God, as this letter so dearly claims, he is the inevitable One, and it is foolish to ignore him.

Now we look at a section where Christ in his humanity is set before us as our mediator before God. When man is in trouble he craves a mediator.

A number of weeks ago I was involved in a rather minor automobile accident. In my view it was entirely the other driver's fault, but apparently he does not feel the same way, because this week I was served papers which informed me that I was being sued for damages. This is the first time I have ever been sued, and, I confess, I was a bit bothered by it. I still am unhappy over the circumstance, in that I do not like to have anyone angry at me, but I was comforted by the thought that this damage suit does not constitute any real threat since I have a mediator -- the insurance company! I can turn it all over to them, and they will handle the matter.

Thus, when we feel that God wants to say something to us, we look around for a mediator to stand in between. The ancient world looked to angels for this service. Angels were the demigods of the Roman and Greek pantheon. But the writer of Hebrews will argue that angels will never do as mediators. The reason is simple: No angel has ever been a man; no angel has ever stood where we stand. But Jesus, the Son, has! Just how fully he has become man, we shall see in this passage. All the value of his life arises out of what we may call *the identification of incarnation*.

There is an intriguing pattern developed in Hebrews 2:5-18 that I should like to indicate. Four times in this passage we are led along the course of our Lord's earthly ministry, viewing it from four different points of view. At the end of each trip we come up against the bloody cross. God has planted the cross in this passage four different times to indicate that whatever value there may be in the life of our Lord Jesus, it is made available to us by means of his death. He came to live in order that he might die. In the holy orgasm of anguish that is the cross, he poured forth his life in order that we may have it. The four insights of this passage accord very remarkably with the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Here are the gospels in miniature. They are not in the same order as the Gospels and it may add interest to this message for you to seek to identify which Gospel is indicated.

Now let us look at the first of four mighty reasons why Jesus Christ became a man:

**For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere,**

**"What is man that thou art mindful of him,  
or the son of man, that thou carest for him?**

**Thou didst make him for a little while lower than the angels,  
thou hast crowned him with glory and honor,  
putting everything in subjection under his feet."**

**Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one.  
{Heb 2:5-9 RSV}**

This section declares that Jesus Christ became a man in order to recapture our lost destiny. No angel could take

Christ's place for God had never given the right to govern the universe to angels, but to men. The writer substantiates that with a quotation from the well-known Eighth Psalm, where David cries, "What is man that thou art mindful of him...?" He is out beneath the stars on some soft oriental night, looking up into the majesty of the heavens and feeling his own significance. He asks, "Where is man's place in this universe?" and by the Spirit he answers his own question. "Thou didst make him for a little while lower than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honor, putting all things under his feet."

The writer insists that when David says "all things," he means all things, everything. For he adds, "Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control." Here is man's intended destiny, his authorized dominion. Man was made to be king over all God's universe. Surely this passage includes far more than the earth. It envisions the created universe of God as far as man has ever been able to discover it in all the illimitable reaches of space and whatever lies beyond that. All this is to be put under man's dominion. It is a vast and tremendous vision, is it not?

But man's authority was derived authority. Man himself was to be subject to the God who indwelt him. He was to be the means by which the invisible God became visible to his creatures. He was to be the manifestation of God's own life which dwelt in the royal residence of his human spirit. As long as man was subject to the dominion of God within him, he would be able to exercise dominion over all the universe around. Only when man accepted dominion could he exercise dominion.

The writer further points out that man was made lower than the angels for a limited time to learn what the exercise of that dominion meant. He was given a limited domain: this earth, this tiny planet whirling its way through the great galaxy to which we belong, amid all the billions of galaxies of space! And he was also given a limited physical body that within that limited area man should learn the principles by which his dominion could be exercised throughout the universe. This limitation is described as being "lower than the angels."

But the passage goes on to describe man's present state of futility. "As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him." There is the whole story of human history in a nutshell. How visibly true this is: We do not yet see everything in subjection to him. Man attempts to exercise his dominion, but he no longer can do so adequately. He has never forgotten the position God gave him, for, throughout the history of the race, there is a continual restatement of the dreams of man for dominion over the earth and the universe. This is why we cannot keep off the highest mountain. We have got to get up there, though we have not lost a thing up there, and know, when we get there, we will only see what the bear saw, the other side of the mountain. But we have got to be there. We have got to explore the depths of the sea. We have to get out into space. Why? Because it is there.

Man consistently manifests a remarkable racial memory, a vestigial recollection of what God told him to do. The trouble is that, when he tries to accomplish this now, he creates a highly explosive and dangerous situation, for his ability to exercise dominion is no longer there. Things get out of balance. This is why we are confronted with an increasingly serious situation in our day when our attempt to control insects by pesticides and other poisons creates an imbalance that threatens serious results. The history of man is one of continually precipitating a crisis by attempts to exercise dominion.

Go back into recorded history to the earliest writings of men, the most ancient of history, and the amazing thing is that men were wrestling with the same moral problems then that we are wrestling with today. We have made wonderful advance in the technological application of certain physical forces to life, but have made absolutely zero progress when it comes to moral relationships. Somewhere, man has lost his relationship with God. The Fall of man is the only adequate explanation of this. Since then the universe is stamped with futility. Everything man does is a dead end street, he is utterly unable to carry things through to a successful conclusion.

Even in the individual life this is true. How many have realized the dreams and ideals you began with? Who can say, "I have done all that I wanted to do; I have been all that I wanted to be." Paul in Romans puts it, "the creation was subjected to futility," {Rom 8:20 RSV}.

"But," the writer says, "we see Jesus!" This is man's one hope. With the eye of faith, we see Jesus already

crowned and reigning over the universe, the man, Jesus, fulfilling man's lost destiny. In the last book of the Bible there is a scene where John beholds the One seated upon the throne of the universe while ten thousand times ten thousands and thousands of angels are crying out in unending, undying worship before the throne. The call goes out to find one who is able to open the little book with seven seals which is the title deed to earth, the right to run the earth. A search is made through the length and breadth of human history for someone wise enough, strong enough, and compassionate enough to open the seals, but no one can be found. John says, "I wept much that no one was found worthy to open the scroll," {Rev 5:4a RSV}. But the angel says, "Do not weep for the Lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered and he can open the seals," {cf, Rev 5:5 RSV}. And when John turned to see the Lion, to his amazement he saw a Lamb, a Lamb with blood staining its neck, a Lamb that had been slain. As he watched the Lamb stepped up to the throne and took the little book and all heaven broke into acclaim for here at last was found One wise enough, strong enough and compassionate enough to solve the problems of man and to own the title deed of earth.

This is what the writer sees here. We see Jesus, who alone has broken through the barrier that keeps man from his heritage. What is that barrier?

Have you ever analyzed that? What is it that keeps you from being what you want to be? What is it that keeps man from realizing his dreams of dominion? It is put in one grim word, death!

Death, in this passage as in many other places of Scripture, does not simply mean a funeral; it includes more than the ending of life. Death, basically, means uselessness; it means waste, futility. Death, in that sense, pervades all of life. You can see the signs of it all along.

What is death? Boredom is death, and barrenness is death, as well as frustration and depression of spirit, anxiety, worry, fear, despair and defeat, along with all disease: All these are incipient death. The funeral is but the final straw. The closing of the casket is the ringing down of the curtain on a life of futility, of emptiness. The show is over! As Shakespeare put it,

"Life's but...  
a tale told by an idiot,  
Full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing."

The argument of Hebrews is that life apart from Jesus Christ is simply that. At the end of our life God may say, "It is a most remarkable performance, but the trouble is you missed the point. It signifies nothing."

But Jesus fulfilled the qualifications to realize man's heritage. He became lower than the angels, he took on flesh and blood, he entered into the human race to become part of it, he experienced death. Not only the death of the cross, but also that incipient death that marks the way of man through all his days. Thus, "He tasted death for every man," and in doing so he took our place. He thus made it possible for those who throw in their lot with him to find that he has removed the thing that gives death its sting.

We shall see more of this in a moment, but, for now, it is enough to see that in Jesus Christ man has but one ray of hope left to realize the destiny God had provided for him. Christ has come to begin a new race of men. That race includes himself and all those who are his, and to that race the promise is that they shall enter into all the fullness God ever intended man to have.

Listen to the way Paul puts it to the Colossians, in Phillip's glowing translation.

**They are those to whom God has planned to give a vision of the full wonder and splendor of his secret plan for the nations. And the secret is simply this: Christ *in you!* Yes, Christ *in you*, bringing with him the hope of all the glorious things to come. {Col 1:27 J. B. Phillips}**

That is the first reason Christ became man: To recapture man's lost inheritance. Which Gospel does that agree to? The Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of the Great King.

The second reason why Christ became man is to recover our lost unity,

**For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying,**

**"I will proclaim thy name to my brethren,  
in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee."**

**And again,**

**"I will put my trust in him."**

**And again,**

**"Here am I, and the children God has given me." {Heb 2:10-13 RSV}**

The earthly life of Jesus is referred to in one phrase, "perfect through suffering." Was he not perfect when he came? When Jesus was a babe in Bethlehem's manger, was he not perfect even then? When he was tempted in the desert and Satan tried to turn him from the cross, was he not already perfect? When he was feeding the five thousand, in compassionate ministry to the hungry multitudes, was he not perfect? Why then does it say he must be perfected by suffering?

There are, of course, two perfections involved. He was perfect in his person all along. The Scriptures make this abundantly clear. But he was not yet perfect in his work. Some of you young people may be perfect in health, perfect in body, perfect in strength, perfect in soundness of your humanity, but you are not yet perfect in this work you are called to do. Suppose Jesus Christ had come full-grown into the world a week before he died. Suppose he had never been born as a baby and grew up into adult life, but stepped into the earth full-grown as a man. Suppose he had uttered in one week's time the Sermon on the Mount, the Olivet Discourse, the Upper Room Discourse and all the teachings that we have from his lips recorded in Scripture. Imagine that he came on Monday and on Friday they took him out and crucified him, hanging him on the cross, and that he died, just as it is recorded in the Scriptures, bearing the sins of the world. Would he still have been a perfect Savior?

Certainly he would have been perfect as far as bearing our guilt is concerned -- that only required a sinless Savior. But he would not have been perfect as far as bearing our infirmities, our weaknesses, is concerned. He would have been able to fit us for heaven some day, but never able to make us ready for earth right now. In such a case, we could always say (as too often we do say, anyway), "How can God expect me to live a perfect life in my situation? After all, I'm only human (or Irish!) Christ has never been where I am. What does he know of my pressures, what does he know of what I'm up against?" But he was made perfect through his suffering. He does know, he does know!

There was handed me last week a characterization of Jesus taken from the cover of a book recently published. These words were written concerning him:

A man who was often afraid, at a loss to know what was expected of him; a man who searched desperately for his own fulfillment and who, through his own strength and faith in divine guidance, conquered all human failings to set mankind an example it has never forgotten.

What is your reaction to that? Did you feel, as I felt when I first read that, "This is but another example of liberal impertinence concerning Christ?" But, when I read it through again, I began to think about it and soon found that I had only to change two words and I could accept it fully. I would have to take out the word "desperately" -- "a man who searched desperately for his own fulfillment" -- for I do not believe the Lord Jesus was ever desperate. And I would have to change the word "strength" to "weakness" -- "who, through his own strength (weakness) and faith in divine guidance, conquered all human failings." But with those changes that is a perfectly accurate description of Jesus in his earthly life.

He was a man who was often afraid, he was a man who was uncertain at times, he was a man who searched for fulfillment in his life. If we deny him this, we deny him his identification with us as human beings. These were the temptations he faced, the pressures he withstood. Every fear is temptation, every sense of uncertainty is temptation, and he was tempted, "like as we are." Of course he never acted out of uncertainty, he never

spoke out of fear, because he knew a secret, the secret he came to teach us -- that man is intended to be indwelt by God and to be continually dependent upon that God within him to give him everything he needs for every situation.

The moment Jesus felt fear gripping his heart, immediately he leaned back upon the full-flowing life of the indwelling Father and that fear was met by faith. The moment he felt uncertain, did not know which way to turn, he rested back upon the indwelling wisdom of God and was immediately given a word that was the right word for the situation. Because he fully entered into our fears and pressures he is fully one with us. That is why it can be recorded here,

**For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all of one origin [or, are all one body, all one lump together]. {Heb 2:11a RSV}**

The writer quotes from the Old Testament to illustrate this, showing that the attitude and the relationship he had is the same we have.

**"I will proclaim thy name to my brethren,  
in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee."** [Rejoicing in all things, that is to be our attitude.]

**And again,**

**"I will put my trust in him."** [Trust is the secret of life.]

**And again,**

**"Here am I, and the children God has given me." [All one, together.] {Heb 2:12-13 RSV}**

Christ has become so utterly one with us, and we with him, that all causes of division are removed, all ground of enmity is taken away, all disagreement is answered. Thus this passage links up with the Gospel of John, the Gospel of the one body, where Jesus prays, "that they may be one, Father, even as we are one," {cf, John 17:22}. Thus to make a new, wholly undivided body is the second reason Jesus Christ became man.

The third reason is to release us from our present bondage.

**Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage. {Heb 2:14-15 RSV}**

Is the devil destroyed? Do you think he has quit working? If we mean by this *eliminated*, obviously the answer is "No."

Bishop Pike recently said about the devil, "If there be such, he is still doing very well, as anyone reading the daily papers can know." Thus he disposes of the victory of Jesus Christ.

But the word *destroy* here does not mean "eliminate." The word means "to render impotent; to nullify; to render inoperative, inconsequential." That is the idea. The devil has not been eliminated, but the devil has been rendered impotent. Not to everyone! Not to everyone! Only under certain conditions is this true, but those conditions are available to all men in Jesus Christ. That is what he is saying. When we enter into the conditions, we discover that what he says is thrillingly true: There is a freeing from lifelong bondage.

The devil does not have the power of death in the sense of determining who dies and when life shall end, only God has that power. But the phrase, "the power of death" means the grip of death, its fearsomeness, its terrible quality. Bondage therefore is that of the reign of sin, the flesh. This is what Paul means in Romans 8 when he says, "the mind of the flesh is death," {cf, Rom 8:6 RSV}. Death is the absence of life. Death is not something in itself, it is simply the absence of something.

Someone gets hit by a car, the crowd gathers around and wonders if there is any life left. A doctor may come

and examine the body. What does he look for? Evidences of death? No, he looks for evidences of life. If he can find no evidence of life as he searches the body of that person, he finally looks up, and says, "I'm sorry; he's dead." Death, in all its forms, is absence of life. That is what boredom is, that is what distress is, that is what fear is, that is what anxiety is. These are forms of death because they are the absence of the life of the Lord Jesus.

It is this death that Christ sets us free from. The fear of this death is the devil's whip, the writer says, by which he keeps us in slavery and bondage all our life. Non-Christians, of course, have no escape from this, but even Christians, because they do not understand the kind of freedom that Christ brings, frequently experience death: defeat, waste, limitation, despair.

Let me give two examples:

The first is taken from current life, the realm of fact. It is the present student unrest on the campus at Berkeley and other universities. What is behind this? Why are students so restless these days? The issue, as it is being publicized in the papers, is the matter of freedom of speech, and, in a sense, this is accurate. Students are desirous of experiencing life, they want to live life to the full. Who does not? They want to experience life in the totality intended for man, and they equate such living with freedom. To a degree, this, too, is right, but the concepts of freedom may be wrong. I am not attempting to judge the situation. There is obviously right and wrong on both sides. But in analyzing this, I see beneath the restlessness a constant hunger for life. But to so hunger after life exposes us also to the devil's lie, that freedom is self-expression. It is having what I want; it is doing what I like; it is going where I want to go, and acting as I please. It is the fear that we are going to miss out on life (the fear of death mentioned here), that is the devil's whip to drive us into activity on a principle that leads us into more and greater death. To gain such freedom only means greater boredom; to be denied it means hate or despair, all forms of death.

Example number two: This comes from the realm of fantasy, although it is often true. Here is a man who believes that money brings happiness, that if he can just get certain things in his life he will be content. Since he wants to be happy, he devotes all his time to the unending contest to amass a fortune. As a result, life begins to pass him by more and more. The real things of life he does not have time for. In his grubby search for money, and the things that money can buy, he may awaken to find that the years have flown by and he has not yet begun to live. Because he is afraid that he will lose out on life he keeps this up, and the result is, in the end he loses out entirely. That is the devil's whip. These words are highly accurate, precisely stating the situation as it is being lived out day after day.

How does Christ deliver us from this? The glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that the cross reverses our values. In its light, we are able to strip away the devil's lie, and to act upon a totally different principle of life. That principle is this:

Freedom is not having what I want; it is doing what God wants.

It is the man who gives up who gains; it is the man who flings away his life in abandonment to what God wants, who finally learns to live. It is the one who tries to keep his life who loses it. Is that not what Jesus said?

The man or woman who steps out upon this principle will discover that, for him, the devil is impotent. That man is set free to live the kind of life God intended him to live. He may not have some of the things others may have, for things do not produce happiness, but he has what God wants him to have: Life lived to the fullest degree possible.

That is the third reason Jesus Christ became man: to release us from the present bondage.

The last reason is to restore us in times of failure.

**For surely it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he**

**might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted. {Heb 2:16-18 RSV}**

There is the cross again, "expiation for the sins of the people." It comes at the end of a life in which the Lord Jesus learned to become a merciful and faithful high priest. The cross here is seen in its character as the basis for daily cleansing and forgiveness for the people of God. This has in view the ministry of First John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." He is able to do this because during his life he learned how to be merciful, that is, compassionate, and faithful. That gracious compassion is now made available to us in his death. Christ's present attitude is summed up for us in Chapter 5, Verse 2: "He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness." If we come defending our sins, defiant, excusing ourselves, we can find no help at all. But if we come, as David comes in the 51st Psalm, confessing, pouring it all out, admiring everything, saying it is wrong, and casting it all upon him, we find there is an immediate flowing out of strength and healing, restoring grace.

In the last issue of *His Magazine* is an editorial in which the editor, Paul Frohmer, tells of a personal incident in his own experience. Recently he found himself bitter and resentful over a situation that had occurred in his work. As he thought over the hurtful attitudes others had shown toward him, a verse from the 91st Psalm flashed across his mind:

**He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,  
who abides in the shadow of the Almighty,  
will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;  
my God, in whom I trust." {Psa 91:1-2 RSV}**

He said it suddenly occurred to him that the verse was saying that Christ was not merely able to become a refuge and a fortress; he is that. As he went on, he said he thought of the Lord as across the room from him, a refuge, a fortress. But here he was on this side and the problem was how to close the gap, how to get into the fortress, the place of refuge. As he thought further about his problem and what Christ could be to him, the thought came to him, "Why not itemize your problem? You are dwelling on it in such a hazy, vague fashion. You must get it down to specifics. Now itemize it." So he did that and found that he had six grievances rather than one, as he thought when he started. Then he went through these six and, one by one, as he thought on each one, he felt the Lord imparting to him a different point of view. He began to look at each from the point of view of those who had caused his problem, and each time he saw there was some basis for their accusation. He was then able to forgive and forget each grievance. Eventually, as he went down this list, one by one, he found every one of them was settled. When he reached the end he found that all the resentment had ebbed away, and in its place was a sense of peace and quietness of heart that made him able to go back to his work without strain, fret, or distress. He realized then that Christ in his high priestly ministry had closed the gap and had made him discover that "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty," {Psa 91:1 RSV}.

If you learn the reality of this, you will not need to go to a psychiatrist, or buy a book on peace of mind by Rabbi Vincent Sheen. If you know Jesus Christ you can come directly to him, at any time, any place, and find that his ministry is to bring you under the shadow of the Almighty.

The writer of this letter is deeply concerned that Christians enter into this. And my question to you in this 20th century hour is: "How much have you discovered this total ministry of Christ in your own life?"

He became a man not only to recapture our lost destiny, but also to heal the disagreements among us, and bring us into the unity of one life in him, to release us from daily, lifelong bondage to the fear of losing out on life, and to bring us that sweet, healing ministry which, in time of failure, restores us to fellowship without condemnation.

## **Prayer**

Lord, teach us to be more than perfunctory about our prayers. Grant us depth, honesty, and earnestness that we may believe this marvelous ministry made available to us by our Lord Jesus. That here in this 20th century hour there may arise such a tremendous demonstration of what human life was intended to be that everywhere around men and women will be talking about it and saying, "What do these people have?" We ask it in Christ's name, Amen.

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