

A study of Jesus Christ

We dealt with the first two of the five questions regarding Christ's ascension, namely, 'Where did He ascend to'; and 'In what manner did He ascend'.

Before we study the third question, "For what purpose did He ascend?", we need to ask ourselves

Is Christ not with us to the end of the world as He promised in Matt 28:20:

Mat 28:18 - 20 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Let's first look at the short answer:

Christ is very man and very God; with respect to His human nature, He is not on earth anymore; but with respect to His Godhead, majesty, grace, and Spirit, He is at no time absent from us.

Acts 1:9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

Acts 3:20, 21 and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, ²¹whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.

Mat 28:20 I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

John 14:17 - 19 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. ¹⁸I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also.

In more detail, there are two aspects to this question, which are the absence of Christ and the presence of Christ.

Christ is absent from us in his human nature.

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John 14:28 you heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.

John 16:28 I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.

Matt 26:11 the poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.

His human nature, that nature that was born of the Virgin Mary, that was apprehended by the Jews, nailed to the cross, taken down from the cross, wrapped in linen cloth, buried in the tomb, that was seen after his resurrection, walked with and talked to hundreds of witnesses, and ascended into heaven, that human nature is not with us anymore.

This absence holds much comfort for the believer in that we now know that a body of flesh and blood is in heaven, that place to which Christ ascended to prepare for us a place where we will live forever, in our bodies, after our resurrection and ascension.

John 17:24 Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

With regard to his presence, one may well ask, what about Matt 28:20, which says, "... surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"?

There exists a personal union between the two natures of Christ, his divine and human. This union is the mysterious and wonderful indissoluble joining together of these two natures in one person in such a manner that they constitute the essence of the person of Christ. One nature would be destroyed if separated from the other and yet each retains its own particular properties, which distinguish it from the other.

Matt. 28:20 should therefore be understood to be fulfilled according to His majesty, providence and unspeakable grace – His divinity.

Christ is, therefore, present with us,

1. By his Spirit and Godhead

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2. By our faith, and the assurance and confidence with which we believe in Him.
3. By mutual love; because we love Him, and He loves us in such a way as to not forget us.
4. By union with His human nature; it is the same Spirit which is in us and Him that unites us to Him.
5. In the promise of perfection, which is the certain hope of coming to Him.

But if His human nature is not present wherever his divinity is, are these two natures in Christ then separated from one another?

Certainly not. Since divinity is not limited and is present everywhere, it is evident that Christ's divinity is surely beyond the bounds of the humanity He has taken on, but at the same time his divinity is in and remains personally united to his humanity.

In Jer 23:23 God says that He is a God who is near and not far off.

Jer 23:23, 24 "Am I a God who is near," declares the LORD, "And not a God far off? ²⁴Can a man hide himself in hiding places So I do not see him?" declares the LORD. "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" declares the LORD.

God is everywhere:

Act 7:48, 49 However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says: ⁴⁹'HEAVEN IS MY THRONE, AND EARTH IS THE FOOTSTOOL OF MY FEET; WHAT KIND OF HOUSE WILL YOU BUILD FOR ME?' says the Lord, 'OR WHAT PLACE IS THERE FOR MY REPOSE?'

Isa 66:1 Thus says the LORD, "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest?"

His divinity is united with his humanity.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

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John 3:13 No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.

Col 2:9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,

If the two natures of Christ were totally equal, then Christ's presence in divinity and absence in humanity may have caused a separation of His two natures. Christ's human nature is finite and cannot be in more than one place while His divine nature is infinite, with all the properties of omnipotence, omniscience, and majesty intact. His two natures are not equal but His divine nature is in His human nature, giving it, among other, the glory that we once will have.

That which is infinite may be entirely within the finite, and at the same time be complete without it.

We know where the human nature of Christ is, He is at the right hand of God the Father. We also know where the divine nature of Christ, He is everywhere.

III. For what purpose did He ascend?

Christ ascended into heaven for His own glory, and for that of His Father. It was proper and necessary, that He should have a heavenly kingdom. Hence it was not appropriate the He should remain on earth.

Eph 4:10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.

Phil 2:9-11 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 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.

It also belonged to, and was proper that Christ, who is the Head, should be glorified with an excellence, and superiority of gifts above all the members, which could not have been the case had He remained on earth.

And still further, Christ ascended for our benefit and that in the following respects:

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1. That He might make intercession for us in heaven.

Rom 8: 34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

He intercedes for us,

- a. by the value of His sacrifice, already offered on our behalf, which is so great that the Father receive us into favor;
- b. by His own will, by which He continually desires, that the Father would receive us into favor at the sight and recollection of that sacrifice which He accomplished in His own body;
- c. by the consent of the Father, approving the will, and desire of the Son, accepting the value of His sacrifice, as a sufficient satisfaction for our sins, and together with the Son receiving us into favor.

It is by making intercession for us in this manner that Christ applies unto us the benefits and merit of His death. The entire glorification of the Mediator, consisting in His resurrection, ascension, and sitting at the right hand of the Father, was necessary in order that this application might be made unto us.

The intercession that Christ made on earth had respect to that which was yet future; for it was made upon the condition that the Mediator, after He had accomplished His sacrifice on earth, should forever appear in the sanctuary on high.

2. That we might also ascend and have assurance thereof. Christ says in the gospel of John, "I go to prepare a place for you" and "In my Father's house are many mansions" that is, places to abide forever, for He speaks of our continuance there. Christ ascended, therefore we shall also ascend. This conclusion is proper and forcible because Christ is the Head, and we are the members; He is also the first-begotten among many brethren.
3. That He might send the Holy Spirit and by Him gather, comfort, and defend his church to the end of the world.

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John 16:7 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

Titus 3:5, 6 He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, Whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Although the Holy Spirit was given before Christ's ascension, it was not given in such abundance as on the day of Pentecost. Whatever influences of the Spirit were given to the church from the beginning of the world, were given on account of Christ, who was to be manifested in the flesh, and would then reign in His human nature, and shed on us abundantly the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit, on the decree of God, was not given in such large measures before the ascension of Christ, because God had determined to effect both by man glorified. The mission of the Holy Spirit was the main part of the glory of Christ.

John 7:38, 39 'Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

This is the reason why the mission of the Holy Spirit was deferred until after the ascension of Christ into heaven.

IV. In what does the ascension of Christ differ from ours?

The ascension of Christ agrees with ours in the following:

1. Both He and we, ascend to the same place.
2. Both He and we, ascend to glory. *Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. (John 17:24)*

The ascension of Christ differs from ours in the following:

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1. Christ ascended by His own power and virtue. **No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven--the Son of Man. (John 3:13)** The Scripture clearly means 'by his own virtue'. Our ascension, on the other hand, will be effected by and for the sake of, Christ. **I am going there to prepare a place for you.(John 14:2) I want those you have given me to be with me where I am (John 17:24)**
2. Christ ascended that He might be Head; we shall ascend that we may be members. He ascended to glory that is proper for the Head, we shall ascend to glory that is proper for members. He ascended that He might sit at the right hand of the Father; we shall ascend that we may sit upon His throne and that of His Father, not in the same dignity, but only by a participation therein. **To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Rev 3:21)**

We shall, therefore, be partakers of His glory, a just proportion being preserved between the members and the Head.

1. The ascension of Christ is the cause of ours, but not the contrary.
2. The whole Christ ascended, but not the whole of Christ, because He ascended only as to His human nature, and not as it respects His divine nature, which is everywhere and cannot go from one place to another. We shall ascend whole, and the whole of us, because we have only a finite nature and one nature only.