

The Ascension of Christ Jesus

The book of Acts gives us the fullest account of Jesus' ascension into heaven (1:1-11). Christ's ascension was not a physical removal of His human nature to some remote spot in the universe (such as Reformed theology believes). Heaven is simply where God is. Jesus says, "*See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven*" (Matt. 18:10). Revelation 11:12 also says, "*Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them.*"

Jesus' ascension into heaven is not a change of location but a change of status. He withdrew His visible presence from His disciples (Acts 1:9). Yet He has assured us of His continuing presence. He tells us, "*For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them*" (Matt. 18:20) and "*I am with you always, to the end of the age*" (Matt. 28:20).

Jesus' ascension into heaven was a public certification for His disciples of His lordship over creation. When a king is crowned or a Prime Minister is inaugurated, he already possesses the power and authority of the office by virtue of descent or election. The coronation or inauguration simply certifies publicly that he is entering in upon the exercise of the office that is his. In a similar way, Christ, from conception, possessed, in His human nature, properties He had received from His divine nature. During His humiliation, Jesus had refrained from the full and constant exercise of these properties. When He became alive again and descended into hell to proclaim His victory, Jesus fully exercised the properties His human nature had received from the divine. Jesus' ascension into heaven publicly certified His exalted status for His disciples of all ages. He rules this world in the interest of His church.

Jesus' ascension into heaven, then, is important for three reasons:

1. It certifies Christ's lordship over all creation, which He governs as exalted Lord in the interest of His church (Eph 1:20-22).
2. It assures us that Jesus has gone to heaven to prepare a place for us (John 14:2-3). Because Jesus has come from heaven and has returned to heaven (John 3:13; 6:33,38), we are assured He will also take us there when He comes again.
3. It assures us that Jesus is pleading our case before God in heaven. He who is God and can do all things is also man who suffered and was tempted as we are. Thus He can empathise with us and effectively plead our case before God in heaven (1 Jn 2:1,2; Heb 4:15,16).

In his Letter to the Ephesians, Paul states how God seated Jesus at His right hand (1:20).

The expression we often hear of "the right hand of God" is anthropomorphic, that is, it ascribes to God a human characteristic. "*God is spirit*" (John 4:24). He does not have a right hand as we do. The "right hand of God" signifies a position of power not a physical location (Psalm 118:15-16; 139:10; Matt. 26:64). Paul described what is meant by Jesus sitting at the right hand of God as follows:

... "*how incomparably great His power is for us, who believe according to the working of His mighty power.*²⁰ *He worked with that same power in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms,*²¹ *far above all rule, authority, power, dominion and every other name that can be mentioned, not only in this age but also in the one to come.*²² *He also put everything under His feet and appointed Him as the Head of everything, for the benefit of the church,*²³ *which is His body, filled completely by Him who fills everything in every way*" (Eph. 1:19-23).

Christ, in His exalted state, governs and directs the affairs of this world also according to His human nature, which has received this property from His divine nature. Christ will not cease to carry out His governance on our behalf. All things will work for the good of God's children (Rom. 8:28). Jesus, who has given His life for us, directs the affairs of this world so that we shall be with Him in heaven. Thus we need not fear the devil and the world with their hostility for Christ and His church. Christ lives! He reigns! The same Jesus who has given His life for us will make all things work out for our eternal good.