

## The Reality of Christ

By Ronald L. Dart

Years ago a friend told me that I was an apologist. I would have been flattered if I'd known what that meant. Later I encountered one of the greatest of Christian apologists, C. S. Lewis. Then I came across a quotation from C. S. Lewis that explained a vague disquiet that follows me around. "Apologists," he concluded, "can be saved only by falling back continually from the web of our own arguments into the reality—from Christian apologetics into Christ Himself."

Lewis was remarkable in this regard. He was an intelligent, highly educated, well-read man who also had the good sense to doubt himself, to examine himself, which one cannot do without self doubt. Lewis understood the spiritual dangers of vanity and what a thin web is woven by a good argument. He said, "No doctrine is dimmer to the eye of faith than that which a man has just successfully defended." Doctrine and apologetics are essential, otherwise you would never know where you are or what you should do next. But there is also a temptation to vanity. This was never clearer to me than when I read that quotation: "Apologists can be saved only by falling back continually from the web of our own arguments into the reality—from Christian apologetics into Christ Himself."

I think there are people who will be profoundly surprised to find me standing next to them on the sea of glass before the Lamb of God in the resurrection. In fact, I might be as surprised as they are. Imagine that you have made it, you've been raised from the dead, you're standing before him, the judge of all the earth, you can see him as he is, and standing alongside you are two figures you recognize immediately who come from different religious backgrounds—Billy Graham and Pope John Paul II. If you know much about Catholic and Baptist doctrine, you have to ask yourself, "How can that be possible?"

I think I finally understand. They will not owe their presence there to the fact that they had a correct set of

doctrines. They will not be there because they kept this or that law, or this rite or ritual. But, *you* won't be there for that reason either. What makes it possible for you or anyone else to stand before God is the grace of God.

And that grace, if it can't transcend our doctrinal differences and our little picky arguments, doesn't amount to much. And what makes that grace possible is Christ himself.

There is this incident in the ministry of Jesus Christ where one of the rulers of the Jews named Nicodemus came to him by night. After some conversation, Jesus told him, "No man has ascended up to heaven" (John 3:14-15).

Jesus basically said that just as Moses lifted up the serpent, the Son of man has to be lifted up so that we can look to him. Remember that Old Testament story. A plague had broken out. Serpents were biting people.

*continued on page 5 . . .*

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

#### **The Reality of Christ**

By Ronald L. Dart' ..... 1

**Let Born to Win Help .....** 1

**Is It Harder to Be a**

**Christian Now?**

From a Personal by Ronald Dart. 2

**May Bible Reading Plan..** 2

**Did Christ Abolish the Law?**

By Ronald L. Dart's notes ..... 3

### **Let Born to Win Help. . .**

Learning more and more about God and his Word are essential to spiritual strength. Let us help. Please don't hesitate to order the *FREE* CDs and information we offer even if you can't afford to make a contribution. We know a lot of people live on very little, and it makes us happy to give these messages away. But if you can help, don't forget that the reason we can make these CDs available *FREE* is because of the generosity of people like you. If you can help, a lot of people will be eternally grateful.

From a Personal Letter by Ronald Dart

Do you think it is easier or harder to live the Christian life today than it was a generation ago? It could depend on where you live. In our country, it seems relatively easy but in the Sudan or China, living as a Christian would be a horse of a different color.

In a way, though, it depends more on what we mean. If we are talking about being hard or easy in terms of having food, clothing, shelter, a safe meeting place, freedom from persecution, then there could hardly be an easier time and place than here and now. But if we are talking of how hard it is to remain faithful and live a righteous and exemplary Christian life, we may have to think again. It may be that a Sudanese Christian is tempted to forsake the faith because of persecution, while an American may be tempted in more subtle ways: sex, entertainment, wealth. Down through history, the Christian faith has thrived in the face of persecution. Persecution draws a bright line on the ground and dares us to cross it. Wealth erases the line and draws us into the gradual acceptance of conduct that, in harder times, no Christian would have allowed.

It takes a great deal of determination to live the Christian life in the modern world. Temptations are great; moral dilemmas are more confusing every day.

And just as it takes discipline and exercise to keep our bodies fit, the same appears to be true morally and spiritually. We would like to think that we would always have a zeal for Christ, a driving desire to be like him, a fervent prayer life. Something seems all wrong when we

pray by the clock. It just doesn't seem right that we have to drive ourselves to Bible study. But the truth is there are times in our life when we have to drive ourselves to exercise body, mind, *and* spirit. The failure to maintain some level of spiritual discipline means that when the hard times come, we will simply not be up to it.

Hard times? Yes, hard times like temptation to have sex with someone we aren't married to. Hard times like temptation to steal from an employer. And maybe even hard times like being tempted to abandon our faith.

A church can provide some of the discipline, with a regular worship program, a visiting program, a regular group Bible study, and constant reminders to prayer. But in the end, each of us is going to have to have his own spiritual workout that includes prayer, Bible study, and meditation. These three spiritual disciplines will make a major difference in your life.

My programs on Paul's epistle to the Colossians brought all this to mind. The letter is full of exhortations on Christian conduct and encouragement to live the life. It is a great spiritual workout. The messages straighten out a couple of doctrinal questions. Just what was it that was "nailed to the cross"? And what was Paul talking about when he said we should let no man judge us for eating and drinking? To get your *FREE* copy of these messages just check the box on the enclosed card and return it, call us at 1-888-BIBLE-44, or email [adm@borntowin.net](mailto:adm@borntowin.net).

---

## May Bible Reading Plan

May 1: 2 Sam 5:1-10; 1 Chron 11-12	May 12: Psalms 65-67/69-70	May 23: 2 Sam 24; 1 Chron 21-22; Ps 30
May 2: Psalm 133	May 13: 2 Sam 11-12; 1 Chron 20	May 24: Psalms 108-110
May 3: Psalms 106-107	May 14: Psalms 32/51/86/122	May 25: 1 Chron 23-25
May 4: 2 Sam 5:11-6:23; 1 Chron 13-16	May 15: 2 Sam 13-15	May 26: Psalms 131/138-139/143-145
May 5: Psalms 1-2/15/22-24/47/68	May 16: Psalms 3-4/12-13/28/55	May 27: 1 Chron 26-29; Ps 127
May 6: Ps 89/96/100-101/105/132	May 17: 2 Sam 16-18	May 28: Psalms 111-118
May 7: 2 Sam 7; 1 Chron 17	May 18: Psalms 26/40/58/61-62/64	May 29: 1 King 1-2; Ps 37/71/94
May 8: Psalms 25/29/33/36/39	May 19: 2 Sam 19-21	May 30: Ps 119:1-88
May 9: 2 Sam 8-9; 1 Chron 18	May 20: Psalms 5/38/41-42	May 31: 1 King 3-4; 2 Chron 1; Ps 72
May 10: Psalms 50/53/60/75	May 21: 2 Sam 22-23; Ps 57	
May 11: 2 Sam 10; 1 Chron 19; Ps 20	May 22: Psalms 95/97-99	

By Ronald L. Dart

Jesus was sure he would be misunderstood. At the very outset of his ministry, he had to lay the groundwork for what would follow. The most aggressive teachers of the day were legalists. They had made the Law an end in itself, and were pursuing their own righteousness by means of the Law. Not content to have the Law of God, they added to it.

It was inevitable, then, that he would come into conflict with the Pharisees; and that they would accuse him of liberalizing the Law. So he made himself plain right from the start: “Do not think that I am come to destroy the Law or the prophets,” he said, “I am not come to abolish but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17, NASB).

There was no misunderstanding this statement. When he used the expression “the Law or the Prophets,” everyone knew he was talking about the two major divisions of the Holy Scriptures—our “Old Testament.” By the term “the Law” he plainly meant the Torah—the first five books of the Bible.

Both the Law and the Prophets looked forward to Christ, promised Christ, and prophesied his ministry. It would indeed be absurd for Jesus to abolish that which legitimized his work. It only made sense for him to *fulfill* it.

Jesus continued to explain: “Truly I say unto you, *until heaven and earth pass away*, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law until all is accomplished.”

He warns, “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” So even though Jesus modified some aspects of the Law, he promises he will not annul it. His modifications were in the nature of amplification, development, and exposition. He fulfilled—filled out—the Law. He did not abolish a single stroke of the pen.

He then proceeds to illustrate what he means, using two of the Ten Commandments, the laws of divorce, vows, and retaliation (Matthew 5:21-48). While these laws were amplified, they were plainly not annulled. Jesus saw a need, not for the abolition or replacement of the Law, but for a new administration of the Law. Faulting the Pharisees’ administration, he warned, “Unless your righteousness passes that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20).

Paul said, “The Law is good if a man use it lawfully,” acknowledging that there is right and wrong use of the Law. What is the difference?

Some have assumed that the written Law is the ultimate standard of righteousness—the ultimate guide for human conduct. As it happens, the Law is quite inadequate for that role.

Consider, for example, the Fourth Commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” The Law is relatively simple, but it generates hundreds of questions. The Pharisees tried to answer every possible question and succeeded only in making the Sabbath a burden.

What, then, *is* the Law? What purpose does it serve? What is the “lawful” use of the Law? The written Law is the revelation of the will of God as it applied to man in a certain time and place.

Time and circumstances can change the way the Law is administered without annulling the Law. Consider the occasion where Jesus’ disciples were criticized for plucking and eating heads of grain as they walked through a field. According to the Pharisees they were doing what was “not lawful on the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:2). There was nothing in the Law to specifically prohibit plucking and eating a few handfuls of grain. Obviously, to harvest a wagon load would be hard work and consequently forbidden on the Sabbath. For the Pharisees, the difference between a handful and a wagon load was one of degree with no clear dividing line between enough and too much. It called for a decision on someone’s part and the Pharisees’ administration labeled the disciples Sabbath breakers.

Jesus’ reply is significant: “Have you not read what David did, when he became hungry, he and his companions: how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, *which was not Lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but for the priests alone?*” (Matthew 12:3-4).

The Pharisees saw the Law as an inflexible absolute. Jesus saw a need to interpret the *intent* of the Law. The purpose of the law of the shewbread was to teach the way of holiness, not to let hungry men faint by the wayside just because the bread was hallowed. A real human need took precedence over the letter of the Law. Both the priest who gave David the bread (1 Samuel 21:6) and Jesus himself accepted the responsibility to make administrative decisions. In fact, Jesus presents himself as the ultimate administrator of God’s Law: “Or have you not read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath, and are innocent? But I say unto you that *something greater than the temple is here?*” (Matthew 12:5-6).

*continued on page 4 . . .*

*Did Christ Abolish the Law?*  
continued from page 3. . .

It was not that the Law was set aside. The priests “broke the Sabbath.” Yet, because of the overriding responsibility of their office, they were deemed *innocent*.

Conflict between two laws is not uncommon, but in this case, we find something unexpected. One would think that the Ten Commandments would take precedence over a mere ceremony. On the contrary, the Temple ceremony allowed one to break one of the Ten Commandments and be deemed innocent. This implies that the Temple is greater than the Sabbath.

Most important is that Jesus is greater than the Temple. All those laws, both moral and ceremonial, were subject to *his* interpretation—his administration. So he concludes: “For the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath” (v. 8).

This is not to say that Jesus could annul or set aside the Sabbath. He has already promised to do no such thing. But it does say that he is the ultimate authority for the interpretation and application of the Law.

In spite of Jesus’ clear support of the Law, he was not a legalist. He was at pains, for example, to redefine Sabbath observance. “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath,” he declared (Mark 2:28). Again and again He ran afoul of the Pharisees’ Sabbath traditions. He *had no intention of abolishing the Sabbath, but he did cut across the Pharisees’ administration of the Sabbath*.

Jesus deliberately chose to challenge the Pharisees where their traditions were most obviously wrong. Astonishingly, they believed it was wrong to *heal* on the Sabbath day.

It was Jesus’ custom to attend the synagogue each Sabbath and on this occasion there was a man present who had a withered hand. Those present watched Jesus closely to see whether he would heal the man on the Sabbath—that they might accuse him!

Jesus asked the man to stand up and turned to face the assembly. “Is it lawful,” he asked, “to do good on the Sabbath day, or to do evil? To save life or to kill?” But they wouldn’t answer. Jesus then told the man to stretch out his hand and it was restored whole as the other hand. The Pharisees’ response? They set out to kill him.

This happened more than once. On another occasion there was a man with dropsy. This time Jesus asked straight out: “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?” (Luke 14:3). They refused to answer. Jesus healed the man and then asked, “Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit and will not straightway pull him out on

the Sabbath day?” Obviously any of them would have rescued the animal even though it was work. After all, the animal was worth money! It was an emergency and they could work for that. But they refused to answer him.

Earlier, he had healed a woman bowed over with a spirit of infirmity. Naturally, he healed her on the Sabbath day. When the ruler of the synagogue criticized his healing on the Sabbath, Jesus had harsh words for him: “Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?” (Luke 13:15-16).

In no way did Jesus break the Sabbath. He actually *confirmed* the Sabbath by correcting men’s misconception about the day.

Events have shown that Jesus really did need to set the record straight right from the beginning. Plainly, he did *not* come to destroy the Law. Rather he came to redeem those who had broken the Law, and to magnify the Law (Isaiah 42:21). Jesus corrected misconceptions about the Law, developed a higher concept of the Law, and introduced his own administration of the Law. Jesus’ administration in no way lowered the standards of human conduct. On the contrary, he raised those standards (Matthew 5:20-22, 27-28). At the same time he introduced the element of mercy (John 8:3-11). Jesus today administers the Law in three important ways. First, we have his teachings as recorded in the Gospels. These are full of revelations of God’s intent in giving the Law.

Second, Christ administers the Law *personally*, as he lives in each of us. As we answer questions for ourselves, Christ in us leads, directs, and teaches. He promised that the Holy Spirit would lead us into all truth.

Third, Christ administers the Law collectively through the ministry. The ministry does not interfere in our private lives, but they are authorized to interpret the Law where it affects our actions as a group.

Jesus said that not the smallest letter or stroke of the pen would pass from the Law until heaven and earth passed. The Christian should not look for laws which have been done away. There aren’t any. But the Christian is justified in asking how Jesus Christ would *administer* the Law. And since Jesus Christ lives in each of us, each of us is fully responsible before God to obey the Law, not as some Pharisees might demand, but as *Jesus Christ would have us to do*.

*The Reality of Christ  
continued from page 1 . . .*

People were dying. Moses put a brazen serpent up on a pole, and if they looked up to that serpent, they lived; if not, they died. It had nothing to do with their character, personality, whether they were obedient or disobedient, they had to look to the serpent that had been lifted up.

Then Jesus said to Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Now, that's a tremendous promise, but there is a catch in it: you must *believe* in him. You must look to him, you must place trust in him. "For God did not send His Son . . . and this is the condemnation." This is something else that Jesus tacks on the end of this that sometimes people don't get. He said: "This is the condemnation that light has come into the world that men love darkness rather than light." Why? "Because their deeds were evil. . . wrought in God" (John 3: 17-21).

What makes all the difference? It's their deeds. It is what they actually do. If you say you believe in Christ and don't do anything, then you do not really believe. Many arguments about doctrine, law, or whatever religious argument, are mere spiders' webs. And you know how you handle a spider's web on the porch. You take a broom and brush it away. Remember, "Apologists only can be saved by falling back continually from the web of our own arguments into the reality—from Christian apologetics into Christ Himself." What exactly does that mean?

The reality is there was a young Jewish girl in a little town called Nazareth who was suddenly visited by an angel named Gabriel. He was real. The girl's name? Mary. She was real. "And the angel came . . . , and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee . . . she was troubled at his saying . . . And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God" (Luke 1:28-30). Now, Mary, young as she was, must have understood the significance of what he just said.

He is telling Mary, you're going to be the mother of the Messiah. He's going to sit on the throne of David, he's going to reign over the house of Jacob, of the increase of his kingdom there'll be no end. Mary put two and two together and asked, "Well, how can this be?"

It's hard to imagine how she might have felt at that time, a babe growing in her womb, a real child, to be born nine months later. Day by day, week by week, she went through the real symptoms of pregnancy. The cessation of her monthly period, her abdomen beginning to swell,

of the , the realization that there was a baby on the way, and, of course, the very real problem that her betrothed husband had, the baby wasn't his. But he was a just man so when the angel explained it to him all was well.

The story picks up again in Luke 2 where "Joseph went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth into Judea in the city of David, which is called Bethlehem." He went there to be taxed along with Mary, his espoused wife, who was, in Luke's expression "great with child."

They went to a stable because it was the only place they could find. Now, get the reality. There are many things that can be explained about this, but the reality is they went into a stable; the only place they could sleep and while there she went into labor and "brought forth her first-born son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a feeding trough." That's all they had.

The child born there was as real as you and me. He was as real as any baby anyone ever held. He was as real as any baby any mother ever put to her breast, and he had to drink mother's milk just like I did. The reality of Jesus' statement to Nicodemus comes home to me. The reality of giving up a son has to be considered.

I hadn't really thought much about it until I saw the movie, *The Bible*. George C. Scott played Abraham who was told by God to take his only son, Isaac, and go to a place that God would show him and offer Isaac there for a burnt offering. I had read the story in the Bible, I understood it fully, but George C. Scott's portrayal of Abraham's agony and his faith, brought it home to me. This was real. It was sort of a two-staged thing. First of all, the actor plays the part which made it real, and then secondly, the realization that what he is acting out is something that really happened to real people in real time.

The world waited 30 years for this child to become a man and three years more for him to accomplish what he came to do. On that night before his death three years later, knowing full well what waited for him the next day, he got up from supper, laid aside his garment, girded himself with a towel and began to wash his disciples' feet. It was a familiar thing to have happen at any supper—but usually it was done by servants. For Peter on this night, it was a very real thing that Jesus was actually holding Peter's feet in his hand. Jesus took water and splashed it on Peter's feet, he rubbed his feet cleaning them, he put the water between his toes and opened them up to rinse out whatever might have been

*continued on page 6 . . .*

*The Reality of Christ*  
continued from page 5 . . .

there. Then he took the towel he was girded with and the real Jesus dried Peter's feet. For Peter this could not have been more real.

After Jesus had washed their feet and put his garment back on and sat down, He said, "Do you know what I've done? You call me Master and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then your Lord and Master have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet for I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you. What I want you to learn from this is, the servant is not greater than his lord, neither is He that is sent greater than He that sent Him. Now, if you know these things, happy are you if you do them."

Some Christian churches do this. They wash one another's feet because after all, Jesus said, "if you know these things, happy are you; blessed are you if you do them." After supper, he took bread, he broke it, and distributed it among them and told them to eat it. He said "This is my body do this in remembrance of me." To tell the truth, I think a lot of us partake of the symbols of Christ's body and blood as mere recipients of God's grace. But there is more.

We have entered into a new relationship. We have a family we didn't have before, a brother that we never had, and we have all the obligations of family. Why? Because we have partaken of this cup of the new covenant in his blood. A covenant isn't a one-way street. It isn't just something handed down. It is something we enter into voluntarily. The entry into the new covenant is not a passive event for us. We partake of Christ's body and blood, having examined ourselves, and we go away from the Passover to walk in a different way as brother's of Jesus Christ. The disciples knew what a covenant meant and that there were obligations that came with it. Somehow that truth gets away from us. Let's take a moment to fall back into reality, away from arguments and into Christ.

After all the events of this Last Supper, Jesus then sat and talked with his disciples for awhile. He said, "A new commandment I give to you . . . that the Father may be glorified in the Son." Now, remember I said that if you

enter into a covenant, you take on certain obligations. What follows here in John 14:14 are the obligations: "If you ask anything . . . keep my commandments." Did you catch this? Notice the two-directional aspect of it: if you ask anything, I'll do it, but here's what comes behind it, if I ask anything you've got to do it. The disciples would not understand how real this was for a few hours yet.

You know, if you had been able to embrace Jesus, to put your arms around him, to give him a hug, your arms would have been around a real man. Your hands would have been on the back that was given to the smiters; the whiskers that brushed your cheek would have been those that others would later that night pluck out.

And the real Jesus would cry out from the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Why? Why did that have to happen? He had to be tempted in all points like we are, and which of us have not felt at times like God has gone away completely. The blood that gushed out when the soldier pierced his side was real. The disciples had three days to deal with that.

Then an even greater reality descended on them. They came face to face with the risen Christ. They touched him. Thomas, who had not been there at the time, didn't even believe it. It was unreal to him. The next time Jesus appeared, he said, "Thomas, come here, put your finger in this wound in my hand. Stick your hand in my side. It's real." He was alive, he was real. And then they all stood there and watched him ascend into heaven. As unreal as that may have seemed to all of them, it was real enough. And know this; there was not a web of arguments about the Lord's Supper or the Passover, nor about three days and three nights. This was the real Son of God, suffering real pain, and real death, in our place. It is far past time for us to learn to stand in awe of the reality of Christ Himself. Not of our arguments about Christ.

Now don't get me wrong, I believe what I say, I believe what I teach, but I have come to see that what I teach is not real. It is a web of arguments that may be true enough but they are only a shadow of the body of Christ. I'll continue to argue for what is right, but I hope I will increasingly fall back from the web of my own arguments into Christ himself.

**Born to Win**  
**The Media Ministry Arm of**  
**Christian Educational Ministries**

PO Box 560 • Whitehouse, Texas 75791  
**phone:** 1-888-BIBLE-44 • **fax:** 903-839-9311  
**e-mail:** adm@borntowin.net • **website:** www.borntowin.net

*That the man of God may be proficient and equipped for every good work.*