

## Christ-Shaped Philosophy: Wisdom and Spirit United

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***Abstract:** Christian philosophy is a distinctive kind of philosophy owing to the special role it assigns to God in Christ. Much of philosophy focuses on concepts, possibilities, necessities, propositions, and arguments. This may be helpful as far as it goes, but it omits what is the distinctive focus of Christian philosophy: the redemptive power of God in Christ, available in human experience. Such power, of course, is not mere talk or theory. Even Christian philosophers tend to shy away from the role of divine power in their efforts toward Christian philosophy. The power in question goes beyond philosophical wisdom to the causally powerful Spirit of God, who intervenes with divine corrective reciprocity. It yields a distinctive religious epistemology and a special role for Christian spirituality in Christian philosophy. It acknowledges a goal of union with God in Christ that shapes how Christian philosophy is to be done, and the result should reorient such philosophy in various ways. No longer can Christian philosophers do philosophy without being, themselves, under corrective and redemptive inquiry by God in Christ. This paper takes its inspiration from Paul's profound approach to philosophy in his letter to the Colossians. Oddly, this approach has been largely ignored even by Christian philosophers. We need to correct this neglect.*

**A** Christian philosophy must accommodate the subversive Christian message that the outcast Galilean “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor. 12:3; see Acts 2:36). In its talk of “Lord” (*kurios*), this message assigns distinctive authority to Jesus Christ, even the authority proper to God (see, for instance, Phil. 2:9-11). The claim that Jesus is Lord figures not only in who counts as a Christian (namely, the one for whom Jesus is Lord), but also in which philosophy counts as Christian (namely, the one for whom Jesus is Lord). A philosophy can be theistic or deistic without being Christian, because it can acknowledge that “God” is authoritative without affirming that Jesus is Lord. We will clarify “Christ-Shaped” philosophy as a model for other disciplines.

## 1. Paul as Philosopher for Christ

Following Jesus, the apostle Paul is the most profound advocate of a Christ-shaped philosophy. Christian philosophy, in his approach, depends on God's Spirit, and the Spirit in question is Christ-shaped, being the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The Spirit of Christ always points to the volitional struggle of Gethsemane (particularly, to the struggling *Jesus* in Gethsemane, where Calvary was sealed). In doing so, this Spirit promises to lead us, non-coercively, from death to resurrection life (as lasting, reverent companionship with God) in all areas of our lives, regardless of our academic disciplines. This story is Good News, but it rarely gets a serious hearing from philosophers. A key lesson will be that Christ-shaped philosophy should be joined with Christ-formed philosophers. It would be odd indeed to propose that a Christian philosophy has little to do with the conditions for *being* Christian.

Paul's Letter to the Colossians offers a striking portrait of Christ-shaped philosophy. To that end, it offers a firm warning: "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy... and not according to Christ" (Col. 2:8; translations from NRSV). Notice the contrast between philosophy and Christ. Philosophy outside the authority of Christ, according to Paul, is dangerous to human freedom and life. The alternative is philosophy under Christ, and this involves a distinctive kind of wisdom. If philosophy is the love and pursuit of wisdom, *Christian* philosophy is the love and pursuit of wisdom under the authority of Christ, which calls for an ongoing union with Christ, including one's belonging to God in Christ.

Paul illuminates wisdom under Christ. He prays that the Christians at Colossae be filled with "spiritual wisdom (*sophia pneumatikē*) and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:9-10). "Spiritual wisdom," in Paul's approach, is wisdom intentionally guided and empowered by the Spirit of Christ. It therefore yields "lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him." No merely theoretical or intellectual wisdom has the power to guide such lives intentionally, and thus Paul refers to *spiritual* wisdom, which amounts to *Spirit-empowered* and *Spirit-guided* wisdom. The redemption of humans calls for an intentional guide or agent who leads and empowers receptive humans inwardly, in accordance with God's character, even when rules and arguments fall short.

Paul reports that he has been commissioned by God to make God's word fully known, and he identifies God's word with "the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages ... but has now been revealed" (Col. 1:26). Paul speaks of "the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is *Christ in you*

[plural], the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). This mystery prompts him to “teach everyone in all wisdom,” in order to “present everyone mature (*teleios*) in Christ,” being “rooted and built up in him” (Col. 1:28, 2:7). God’s main mystery, according to Paul, “is Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom” (Col. 2:2-3). This inward Christ is *alive* and *interactive* with God’s wisdom and power.

Paul’s offers a cosmic picture: God created all things *for (eis) Christ* (Col. 1:16), so that he, Christ, might be preeminent in everything (Col. 1:18). If Christ is to be preeminent in everything, then he should be preeminent in philosophy and in every other academic discipline, too. In Paul’s grand portrait, God wants “everyone [to be] mature (or, complete) in Christ.” Accordingly, God wants everyone, even every philosopher, to yield reverently to the authority of Christ, and this is not a merely external or juridical authority. Instead, the authority seeking maturity in Christ aims for a mysterious *inward union* (or, communion) between the exalted Christ and the people yielding and belonging to him as Lord. This inward union stems from God’s aim that all people become Christlike in moral and spiritual character, anchored in reverent companionship with God as Father. It demands that one be an intentional agent who freely appropriates the life-giving power of Christ as Lord. Let’s examine this vital power.

## 2. Union in Power of Divine Agapē

Paul identifies the Colossian Christians as having “clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge (*epignōsis*) according to the image (*eikōn*) of its creator” (Col. 3:10). They are “being renewed” in “the image” of God and hence of Christ, who himself is “the image (*eikōn*) of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15; cf. Phil. 2:6, 2 Cor. 4:4). The renewal of humans in the image of God in Christ is no purely external matter, in Paul’s philosophy. On the contrary, it is personally inward owing to an inward *agent-power* (rather than a mere event-power), as follows: “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives *in (en)* me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:19-20; cf. 1:16). This agent-inwardness of Christ fits with Paul’s statement to the Galatian Christians that “I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed *in (en)* you” (Gal. 4:19; cf. Rom. 8:10). It also fits with Paul’s pointed question to the Corinthian Christians: “Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in (*en*) you? – unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test!” (2 Cor. 13:5). His earlier question to them was: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in (*en*) you?” (1 Cor. 3:16; cf. 2 Cor. 6:16,

Phil. 2:13, Ezek. 36:26-27). We will clarify “the test” for the inward power of Christ.

Christ lives in Paul, but Paul does not suggest that he himself becomes extinguished or depersonalized by Christ. On the contrary, he affirms that he himself lives by faith in Christ. If Christ’s agent-inwardness extinguished or depersonalized Paul himself, Paul would not be able to live by faith in Christ or to have any faith at all. The Christ-human union, then, does not obliterate human selfhood. It does not entail an *absorption mysticism* of no personal distinctions, as do some strains of Buddhism. As a result, Paul does not, and would not, say, “I am Christ.” Instead, he honors Christ as God’s Son who created him, loved him, forgave him, and redeemed him with inward divine power. The key feature of Paul’s idea of “Christ in you” is the inward agent-power of Christ working, directly at the level of psychological and motivational attitudes, toward a cooperative person’s renewal in God’s image as God’s beloved child. We may call this appeal to the inward agent-power of Christ the *Gethsemane union* approach to “Christ in you.”

Paul’s approach to human union with Christ resists a reduction to shared ethical commitments, even when divine love-commands are centrally present. Ethical commitments and commands do not yield the inward agent-power of Christ that is central to human union with Christ. Paul explains to the Corinthian Christians: “[Christ] is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful in (*dunatei en*) you. For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God” (2 Cor. 13:3-4). No mere ethical or juridical account of union will capture the inward agent-power of Christ mentioned by Paul. One can have all of the right ethical or juridical commitments but lack the power of Christ to carry out those commitments.

The power in question corresponds to Paul’s talk of a “test” of whether “Jesus Christ is in you” (2 Cor. 13:5). The test is for an inward agent-power characterized by Paul as follows: “hope [in God] does not disappoint us, because God’s love (*agapē*) has been poured into (*en*) our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5; cf. 2 Cor. 4:6). Paul would say that *faith in God* does not disappoint us either, but passes the test for the same reason: we have been flooded in our deepest experience by the presence and power of God’s personal *agapē*, courtesy of the Spirit of Christ. Without this experience, one will have a hard time adequately understanding the Good News of God in Christ. An appeal to the testimony of God’s Spirit will fall short, cognitively and existentially, if it omits reference to the experienced flood of this Spirit’s *agapē*. It then will be too remote from God’s actual, self-revealed moral character in Christ. Christian philosophy should hallmark this unique

vital flood of God's *agapē* in Christ. It is puzzling indeed that instead it has neglected it.

Faith in God is neither mere assent to a proposition ("even the demons believe") nor a leap in the dark. Instead, it is the *responsive* commitment of oneself to the God who sends his Spirit with *agapē* and forgiveness for the sake of Gethsemane union with Christ. Faith in God includes one's ongoing resolve to receive God's moral character in Christ inwardly, and to belong to God, in the reverent attitude of Gethsemane. God calls first by showing us his *agapē* for us, and human faith responds with receptive self-commitment to this God who intervenes in our experience. When we remove the needed human resolve from faith in God, we end up with faith that lacks a vital human struggle to make Christ preeminent in our lives and moral characters. We then have dead faith, however much philosophy and theism we have.

Amazingly, divine love comes to God's *enemies*, including us (Rom. 5:6,10; Col. 1:21), and therefore we can test for God's love in us by testing for inward love and forgiveness of our enemies, including our intellectual enemies. To the extent that we resist inward enemy-love, we resist God himself, however shrewd our arguments and theories for theism. To that extent, we also resist God's aim that "the love from Christ urge us on," even toward forgiving and blessing our enemies (2 Cor. 5:14). Painfully, there is nothing abstract or amorphous about this test for the inward Christ and his salient power. Minimal honesty here reveals our desperate need for divine grace and renewal in the image of Christ as God's beloved child.

Paul identifies an inward agent testifying, or bearing witness, to God's redemptive love: "When we cry [or shout], 'Abba! Father!', it is that very Spirit [of God] bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God..." (Rom. 8:15-16; cf. Gal. 4:6, 2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5). God's testifying Spirit thus can be noisy at times, and hence cannot be reduced to Calvin's "*secret* testimony of the Spirit" (*Institutes* 1, vii. 4). Paul is well aware of false spirits that oppose the Spirit of God, and therefore he gives real substance to his approach, beyond vague talk of a divine spirit. He gives form or shape *de re* to his Spirit-talk by means of the *life*, including the inward life, of the crucified and risen Christ, not just by means of *de dicto* talk about his life. The actual *de re* life of Christ differs from *de dicto* talk about this life, because the former has a distinctive agent-power not possessed by the latter. (Christ is a personal agent with intentional power, including *agapē* and forgiveness; talk is not.) The agent-power in question stems from the inward life of Christ (who, Paul says, intentionally loved him and forgave him), and it shapes how God's Spirit witnesses to God's reality, love, forgiveness, and faithfulness.

The agent-power of divine *agapē* in Christ enables the kind of witness mentioned in Romans 5:5; that is, God's love (*agapē*) poured out in (*en*) our hearts. This is God's self-giving love for his children, including for Jesus as God's preeminent son. Such experienced *agapē* prompts the filial cry immortalized by Jesus, "Abba! Father!" Accordingly, the witness of God's Spirit with our Spirit is based on agent-power, anchored in God's flooding a receptive human heart with his distinctive love of the kind shown in his preeminent agent, Christ. This life-changing power and the corresponding test for it go beyond mere truth, knowledge, understanding, or explanation. In addition, one can receive this power even if one has a very limited understanding or explanation of it. Paul exalts this power above mere faith, hope, knowledge, prophecy, and self-discipline (1 Cor. 13; cf. 1 Cor. 8:1). Prior to Paul, Jesus himself had indicated that the power of *agapē* underwrites being his disciple under "Abba, Father," and being known as such (see Matt. 5:43-48, Jn. 13:35).

Paul thinks of the power of *agapē* within Christians as the power of the inward Christ, the living intentional Christ within Christians. The power in question conforms to and sustains the pattern of the life of Christ. Paul writes: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection of the dead" (Phil. 3:10-11). Similarly, he remarks: "While we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. 4:10-11). We are to live out in our own lives, over time, the pattern of the self-giving life of Christ, who empowers us with divine *agapē* from within, as long as we are receptive and cooperative. If we have been united (*sumphutoi*) with Christ in his death, according to Paul, we are to live now in the newness of life with the risen Christ (Rom. 6:4,5,11,13; cf. Col. 3:1).

Paul characterizes divine *agapē* as cruciform, as moved by and conformed to the divine motive that led to the cross of Jesus. He urges the Philippian Christians to have "the same mind in you that was in Christ Jesus, ... who humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:5,8). This calls for cooperation with "the God who is at work in (*en*) you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). Christ's self-giving obedience, according to Paul, shows God's distinctive love for humans: "God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). This death manifests the faithful obedience represented in Gethsemane, where Jesus cried "Abba! Father!" and then obeyed God with everything he had (Mk. 14:36). He humbled himself, obediently and reverently, in yielding his will and his life to God's perfect will.

Although the death of Christ is “for us,” we should ask how this event becomes powerful *to us in the pattern of our lives*. Christ’s death is, of course, an event of ancient history, roughly dateable to a Friday in April of AD 33. Perhaps its power is only that of a historically remote event, inadequately powerful to make a contemporary life new and resilient with divine *agapē*. Clearly, then, the historical cross of Christ must not be left as *merely* historical, if it is to motivate Christians adequately today. The Good News therefore calls for the Gethsemane union of all Christians, even today, with the Christ who obediently suffered the Roman cross in ancient times. If we omit this union, the cross of Christ loses its divine redemptive power for today, however attentive and even emotional one’s response to it is. The message of the cross then would be reduced to so much talk and emotional response, and Christians would lose their divine motivation from Gethsemane union with Christ.

Gethsemane union is not limited to an instant of time, because the full volitional redemption of humans requires ongoing, diachronic union with Christ. This is compatible with the plausible requirement that there be a starting point for the redemptive process in humans. Even so, humans habitually resist God and his love commands, and therefore an *ongoing* powerful but noncoercive antidote is needed. An event from history, even one’s own personal history, will not supply the needed antidote, because no such event offers current *intentional guidance with power*. An inward agent, however, can serve the purpose of divine redemption for humans. In particular, the antidote comes from the inward Spirit of Christ who invites and encourages a receptive person to cry “Abba! Father!” as he himself did in Gethsemane. The direction of this prayerful cry was, and is, to yield one’s will to God’s perfect will, and this cry is a repeatable episode, as needed by humans habitually alienated from God. The ongoing importance of Gethsemane, then, is not just as a moral context where humans obey a divine command. Instead, Gethsemane becomes a repeated context where the risen Christ invites, encourages, and empowers one to yield into reconciliation and reverent companionship with God as one’s ongoing “Abba, Father.” Every occasion of human decision-making can become a Gethsemane context, courtesy of the inward Christ who values process (the *how*) as well as product (the *what*), but this is no claim to perfection in this life (see Phil. 3:12).

Gethsemane union with Christ, although volitional, is grace-centered, because it revolves around God’s unearned offer and sustenance of companionship with receptive humans. One must “work out” this union for salvation (see Phil. 2:12), but such “working out” is volitional cooperation with God that differs from “works” as a means of earning or meriting salvation (cf. Rom. 4:4). Accordingly, Paul describes himself as struggling according to all of

the energy that God empowers in him (Col. 1:29). No Pelagian threat will arise here, as long as we distinguish the terms for *offering* a gift (for instance, completely unearned) from the conditions for *appropriating* the gift (for instance, cooperation of receptive humans with God). A requirement of active human cooperation with God, after the model of Jesus in Gethsemane, does not entail a requirement of human earning, despite widespread confusions in this area.

### 3. Toward Christian Philosophy

If Christian philosophy is genuinely *Christian*, it should accommodate Gethsemane union with Christ. Paul remarks that “knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” (1 Cor. 8:1), and he could have added that *philosophy* puffs up, too. Accordingly, he reports that he does not trade in “eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power” (1 Cor. 1:17). This suggests that a philosophy can empty the power from the cross of Christ. Paul has in mind the *redemptive* power of the cross, as he immediately mentions the cross as “the power of God” for “us who are being saved” (1 Cor. 1:18). How, then, can a philosophy empty the redemptive power of the cross of Christ? The answer: in *many* ways, given that there are many ways to mislead and obstruct people regarding God.

Paul has in mind, at least, the tendency of the world’s wisdom and philosophy to obscure or divert attention from the reality of “Christ [as] the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24). One such diversion occurs when a philosophy, even a philosophy called “Christian,” ignores the redemptive importance of Gethsemane union with the inward Christ. If attention is directed away from such union, as with most philosophy, one easily can neglect the importance of such union for human redemption. A test question arises for any proposed Christian philosophy: does the philosophy uphold the importance of one’s obediently dying with Christ under the guiding agent-power of God as “Abba, Father”? If not, the philosophy misses the mark as a Christian philosophy. Most philosophy fails this redemptive litmus test, because redemption, as being saved by God, is ignored by most philosophers, who thus fail to honor the unique redemptive Mediator from God, the inward Christ.

Aside from the diversionary dangers of philosophy, Paul acknowledges that “among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age” (1 Cor. 2:6). He would add that among the mature we Christians do offer a philosophy, though it is not of this age. He has in mind the era of the risen Christ whose Good News is that people of all nations are called by God into the lasting life of union with Christ. A philosophy of the era of Christ is distinctively Christian, because it gives preeminence to the risen Christ with



whom people are to share Gethsemane union. This preeminence includes giving pride of place to Christ and hence to redemption in Gethsemane union with him. The neglect of such preeminence entails neglect of a distinctively Christian philosophy.

Christian philosophy joins Gethsemane union with a religious epistemology oriented toward the Spirit of God and Christ. Christian philosophy must find knowledge of God, like human redemption, in divine grace rather than human earning. In particular, a Christian philosophy must acknowledge that the things of God are taught by God's Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, and not by "human wisdom." Paul states that "we have received the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God" (1 Cor. 2:12). In making Christ preeminent in all things, even in wisdom and philosophy, God does not allow the world to know God by its own wisdom. Paul remarks: "in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through [its] wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:21). Instead, according to Paul, "Christ Jesus ... became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30; cf. Col. 2:3). The latter treasures are offered by divine grace, but are appropriated by us only in the struggle of Gethsemane union with Christ.

Gethsemane union with Christ as Lord is no mere correct belief that something about Christ is true. Instead, it calls for volitional cooperation and companionship with Christ, who empowers and guides *how* we think, not just *what* we think. (The divine fruit of the Spirit of Christ – love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, and so on – should apply even to Christian thinking and thinkers.) Divine redemption values the inward process of human cooperation and companionship with Christ as much as any objective reality. Christian philosophy should follow suit, under the preeminence of Christ as Lord. It also should acknowledge that communing with and obeying God can awaken one to otherwise neglected realities and evidence of God, as God emerges more clearly as "Abba, Father" in one's experience.

A serious problem stems from the frequent divorce of Christian philosophy from the Christian foundation of the inward Christ and Gethsemane union with him. The result is correct intellectual belief without the needed divine power, guidance, and companionship from the inward Christ. In that case, even if one talks voluminously of Christ, one's moral agency does not underwrite that talk by witnessing to the powerful *agapē*-character of Christ within oneself. People are left, then, with a conflicted witness at best, that is, with talk in the absence of the corresponding agent-power of *agapē*. Christians thus begin to look and act a lot like the world, regardless of their extensive talk to the contrary. Talk, however, is cheap indeed.

Christian philosophy cannot be *merely* academic or impersonal, because it cannot abstract from questions and facts about our deepest motives and our personal standing before God in Christ. Some philosophers object to bringing Gethsemane union into Christian philosophy on the ground that we should keep philosophy personally *impartial*, and not make it confessional in any way. The philosophy classroom, in this view, is no place for personal confession or redemption. This view is puzzling, however, because it suggests that we should do Christian philosophy without attending to the redemptive *reality* of being Christian in union with Christ. Impersonal talk, however, is too cheap and easy for Christian wisdom and philosophy. It leaves Christian philosophy as impotent as secular philosophy. Philosophy needs redeeming, and that by God in Christ.

A Christian philosophy may prompt an inquirer to ask *why* he or she lacks evidence reported by some Christians, such as the evidence of the inward flood of *agapē* from God's Spirit. This question will invite motivational issues about one's desires and intentions with regard to God, such as the question whether I am *willing* to yield reverently with Christ to God in Gethsemane. Have I hardened my heart to God in Christ? Do I welcome the offered inward flood of God's *agapē* in Christ? If not, why not? Am I truly willing to cooperate with the authority of divine *agapē* in Christ, even if my academic peers take sharp exception and offer ridicule? If we avoid the latter question of Christian authority, we will not accommodate the religious epistemology in Christian philosophy (see Moser, *The Elusive God* and *The Evidence for God*). A philosophy can be more or less Christian, but if it omits the preeminence of Christ and the redemptive power of union with Christ, it is Christian in name only. So, the fact that a Christian produces a philosophy, even about God, does not make the philosophy Christian.

Human reflection can stem from motives contrary to the divine *agapē* exemplified in Christ. In that case, we will lack robust Christian philosophy, even if we have an intellectual skeleton of the true article. Christian philosophy must be continuous with the content of the Good News of God in Christ. If, however, one pursues philosophy just to understand, acquire truth, or show off one's intellectual skills, rather than from and for the glory of God in Christ, one is not doing robust Christian philosophy, anchored in Christlike motives and prayer. We have, then, an indispensable moral and spiritual standard for Christian philosophy, courtesy of the Christ who is our wisdom, righteousness, and redemption from God. In him we find both *how* Christian philosophy is to be done (anchored in the Gethsemane prayer to "Abba, Father") and *what* (better, *whom*) it should regard as preeminent (God's Christ of Gethsemane union).

In Christian philosophy, God as the supreme, perfect authority ultimately testifies to himself, via the Spirit of the risen Christ, God's own image. Neither claims nor subjective experiences are self-attesting, but God as an intentional causal agent is self-attesting in being self-manifesting and self-witnessing regarding God's and Christ's reality and character. This has major implications for Christian epistemology, and may be called, following James S. Stewart, *the divine self-verification of Christ in conscience*: "this is a very wonderful thing which happens: you begin exploring the fact of Christ, perhaps merely intellectually and theologically – and before you know where you are, the fact is exploring *you*, spiritually and morally.... You set out to see what you can find in Christ, and sooner or later God in Christ finds you. That is the self-verification of Jesus." Christian philosophers can and should welcome this experienced reality, unashamedly and confidently. We need to reorient Christian philosophy accordingly.

Through the Spirit of Christ, God manifests his own character of *agapē* in (the experience of) receptive humans, pouring out his enemy-love in our hearts. This is something only God can do; mere humans and counterfeit gods, including imaginary gods, lack the needed power and character. Being *sui generis* here, God should be expected by us to be self-attesting and self-witnessing. No other agent has the self-sufficient *agapē* character of enemy-love needed for the task; so, no other agent is worthy of worship or divinely self-manifesting. God's self-attesting yields a corrective reciprocity in our receptive experience, particularly in our conscience, whereby we are challenged to move toward enemy-love and forgiveness, away from our destructive selfishness and pride. Ultimately, then, we Christians do not convince people regarding God; *God* does, and we contribute by being in union with God in Christ, thereby manifesting the power (beyond the mere talk) of God's own character.

Christian philosophy depends on Christian spirituality, because it requires discerning God in Christ for our ultimate authority, even in philosophy. This discerning is not casual or speculative at all, but requires volitional communion with God, which in turn depends on Christ's Gethsemane prayer: "Abba, Father, ... not what I want, but what You want" (Mk. 14:36). If we fail to make this prayer our own, daily, we fail to enter into robust Christian philosophy and even Christian life. What does it profit a philosopher if he gains the whole world but loses his or her own life?

The idea of God's offering, as a gracious and powerful gift, what the divine love commands require of humans is central to the Good News of God's redemption as "the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith [in God]" (Rom. 1:16). This idea fits with the emphasis of Jesus on God's gratuitous provision toward humans (Matt. 20:1-16; Lk. 15:11-32). The

provision acknowledges that the divine love commands require a kind of power among humans that only a perfectly loving God can provide. The love commands of Jesus call for *fellowship relationships* of unselfish love between oneself and God and between oneself and other humans. Such relationships go beyond mere actions to attitudes and to volitional fellowship, companionship, and communion between and among personal agents, with God at the center as the source of power for *agapē*. Going beyond right action, the love commands cut into who we are and how we exist in the presence of God in Christ. They correctively judge humans by calling them up short by a morally perfect divine standard, and then call humans to obedient redefinition, even “new creation,” by the divine gift of companionship with God in Christ. Willing humans move beyond discussion, then, to personal transformation via obedience, in a relationship of reverent companionship with the God.

How, then, is Jesus relevant to philosophy as a discipline? I mention just one important way. Philosophy in its normal mode, without being receptive to authoritative divine love commands, leaves humans in a discussion mode, short of an obedience mode under divine authority. Philosophical questions naturally prompt philosophical questions about philosophical questions, and this launches a regress of higher-order, or at least related, questions, with no end to philosophical discussion. Hence, the questions of philosophy are, notoriously, perennial. As divinely appointed Lord, in contrast, Jesus commands humans to move, for their own good, to an obedience mode of existence relative to divine love commands. He thereby points humans to his perfectly loving Father who ultimately underwrites the divine love commands for humans, for the sake of divine-human fellowship. Accordingly, we need to transcend a normal discussion mode, and thus philosophical discussion itself, to face with sincerity the personal inward Authority who commands what humans need: faithful obedience and belonging to the perfectly loving Giver of life. Such obedience and belonging of the heart provide the way humans are to *receive* the gift of divine love. Insofar as the discipline of philosophy becomes guided, in terms of its pursuits, by that gift on offer, it becomes kerygma-oriented in virtue of becoming an enabler of the Good News of God in Christ.

Many philosophers ignore or dislike Jesus, because he transcends a familiar, honorific discussion mode, and demands that they do the same. Philosophical discussion becomes advisable and permissible, under the divine love commands, if and only if it honors those commands by compliance with them. Jesus commands love from us toward God and others *beyond* discussion and the acquisition of truth, even philosophical truth. He thereby cleanses the temple of philosophy, and turns over our self-promoting tables of mere philosophical discussion. He pronounces judgment on this longstanding self-