The background is a composite image. On the left, the lower portion of the Colosseum is visible, showing its iconic tiered arches. On the right, a large, detailed marble bust of a man with curly hair is shown in profile. The upper half of the image features a textured, parchment-like background with a faint map of ancient Rome. The map includes labels for various regions: Dacia, Mistia, Thracia, Macedonia, and others. The title text is overlaid on this map section.

# ROME & THE BIRTH OF CHRISTIANITY



# Part 15: Introduction

The rapid spread of the gospel throughout the Roman Empire was fueled by the belief of the Apostles and disciples that Jesus Christ eternally existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit, was born of the Virgin Mary, lived a perfect life, was crucified under the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate, was buried in a borrowed tomb, was raised from the dead on the third day, and ascended into heaven forty days after His resurrection. As then, so now, there have been many detractors who have questioned who He was and challenged orthodoxy, claiming that He was nothing more than a delusional Jewish rabbi, a carpenter from Nazareth, a great moral teacher, a blasphemer, a Hebrew philosopher, a liar, or even a madman. Dr. Armand Nicholi



# Introduction

concluded in his book, *The Question of God: C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex, and the Meaning of Life*: “The claim of Jesus Christ to be God and to have the authority to forgive sins left only one of three possibilities: he was either deluded or deliberately attempting to deceive his followers for some ulterior purpose, or he was who he claimed to be.” No matter these various views, R.C. Sproul, in the opening sentence of *The Ligonier Statement on Christology*, asks the question that all people must ultimately answer: “Who is Jesus?” He continues: “Nearly every adult person has formed some opinion of Jesus. These opinions may be superficial, uninformed, or downright heretical. The truth about Jesus, not mere opinion, matters...and it matters eternally.”

# Introduction

Today, as we come to the end of this series on *Rome & the Birth of Christianity*, it is fitting that we seek to answer Sproul's question and to consider whether Jesus of Nazareth was, in fact, the incarnate Son of God. As Sproul asserts, "The church has labored for centuries to proclaim the Christ of history and Scripture, not the Christ of our imaginations."

Our search will begin with an observation that C.S. Lewis made about viewing art in his book, *Experiment in Criticism*. Following his insight, we will consider *The Ligonier Statement on Christology* and see if we can remove some of the confusion and misunderstanding about the second person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ.

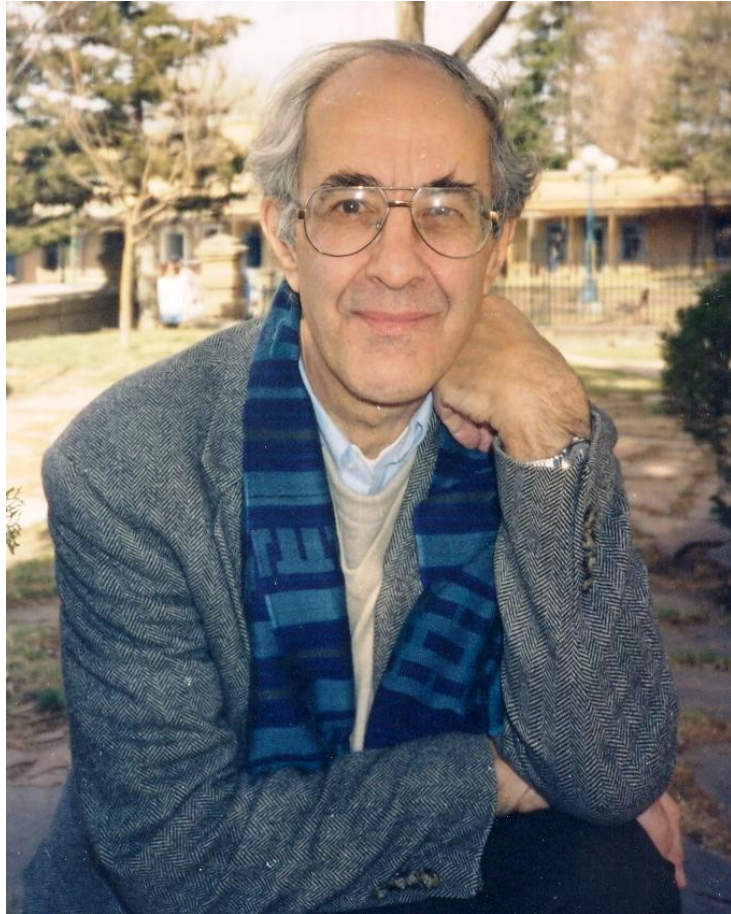
# Many *Use* Art and Few *Receive* It



C.S. Lewis  
1898-1963

“We must not let loose our own subjectivity upon the pictures and make them its vehicles. We must begin by laying aside as completely as we can all our own preconceptions, interests, and associations....We must use our eyes. We must look, and go on looking till we have certainly seen exactly what is there. We sit down before the picture in order to have something done to us, not that we may do things with it. The first demand any work of art makes upon us is surrender. Look. Listen. Receive. Get yourself out of the way.”

# The Return of the Prodigal Son



On Saturday, July 26, 1986, Harvard professor Henri J.M. Nouwen visited the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg in the (then) Soviet Union. Having seen a poster of Rembrandt's *The Return of the Prodigal Son* three years earlier in France, he remembered that his "heart leapt when I saw it...the tender embrace of father and son expressed everything I desired at that moment." As he sat before the eight feet high by six feet wide painting, he "was stunned by its majestic

# The Return of the Prodigal Son

beauty. Its size, larger than life; its abundant reds, browns, and yellows; its shadowy recesses and bright foreground, but most of all the light-enveloped embrace of father and son surrounded by four mysterious bystanders, all of this gripped me with an intensity far beyond my anticipation....Its grandeur and splendor made everything recede into the background and held me completely captivated.”







# The Return of the Prodigal Son

“The painting was exposed in the most favorable way, on a wall that received plenty of natural light through a large nearby window at an eighty-degree angle. Sitting there, I realized that the light became fuller and more intense as the afternoon progressed. At four o’clock the sun covered the painting with a new brightness, and the background figures – which had remained quite vague in the early hours – seemed to step out of their dark corners. As the evening drew near, the sunlight grew more crisp and tingling. The embrace of the father and son became stronger and deeper, and the bystanders participated more directly in this mysterious event of reconciliation, forgiveness, and inner healing. Gradually I realized that there were as many paintings of





# The Return of the Prodigal Son

the *Prodigal Son* as there were changes in the light, and, for a long time, I was held spellbound by this gracious dance of nature and art.”

“Altogether, I spent more than four hours with the *Prodigal Son*.”

- Henri Nouwen

“*Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?*” (Mk. 8:18).

“*Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but see not, who have ears, but hear not*” (Jer. 5:21).

# *Alice Through the Looking Glass*



“‘When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.’

‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.’

‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be the master – that’s all.’”

- Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson)



# *The Ligonier Statement on Christology*

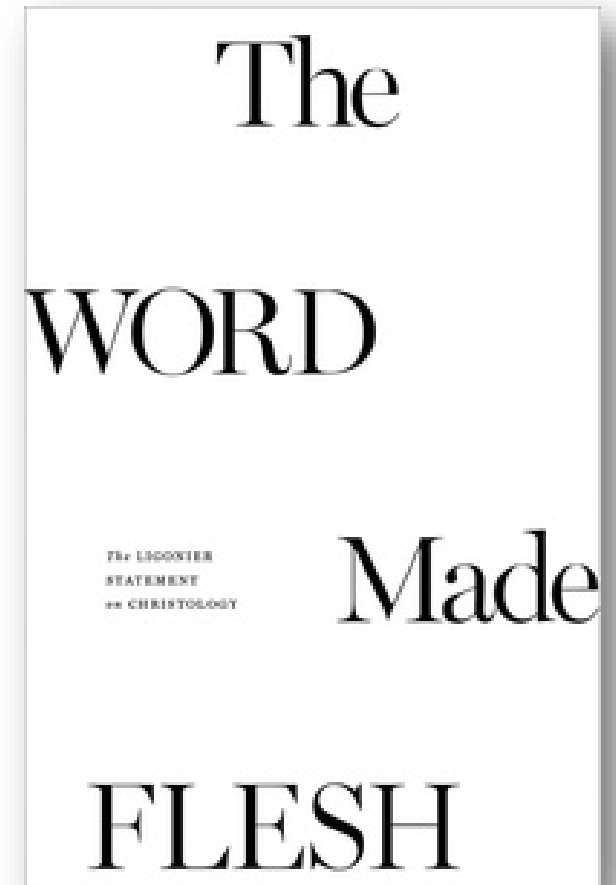
On February 29, 2016, R.C. Sproul announced the publication of *The Ligonier Statement on Christology*:

“I’m excited to announce the release of what I believe is one of the most critical resources that Ligonier Ministries has ever produced. Following significant planning and work with our Ligonier teaching fellows and other scholars and pastors, we’ve completed *The Word Made Flesh: The Ligonier Statement on Christology*. Building on the great confessions of faith, this statement is offered to the church out of a desire to help people regain clarity regarding the person and work of Christ. We wanted to provide a statement that can assist the church in applying the classic truths of orthodox biblical Christianity to the challenges of our day.”



# What Is the Ligonier Statement on Christology?

- Begun in the fall of 2013, it is a concise, 137-word statement in six stanzas or sections on the person and work of Christ.
- It includes 25 articles of affirmation and denial, with Scripture proofs.
- It includes a summary letter written and signed by R.C. Sproul.
- It includes an explanatory essay written by Dr. Stephen J. Nichols, President of Reformation Bible College and Chief Academic Officer for Ligonier Ministries.



# Why the Statement was Written: R.C. Sproul

“Confusion abounds regarding Christology - the doctrine of Christ - both in the West and around the world. As the church continues to grow, it is imperative that believers are taught the truths of Scripture as summarized in such documents as the Nicene Creed, the Definition of Chalcedon, and the Westminster Confession of Faith. Such confessions provide



# Why the Statement was Written: R.C. Sproul

guidelines to help the church develop a more biblical and consistent theology, and we believe *The Ligonier Statement on Christology* is a tool that can be used to renew the church's understanding of its historic Christological position. It can also be used as a rallying point around which believers from different churches can come together for evangelism and discipleship. Our goal is not to replace any historic confessions but to draw together their Christological insights in a helpful, summary form so that believers can know what the church has historically taught. That teaching has continuing relevance in our own era."



# Comments on Select Affirmations and Denials

- **Article 2:** *homoousios* (consubstantial, being of one essence, i.e., with the Father) and *homoiousios* (like God, of like essence).
- **Articles 3 & 4:** The Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds affirm the two natures of Jesus Christ in one person. “The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance, and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man’s nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the

# Comments on Select Affirmations and Denials

Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter VIII, Section II). The language of the *Ligonier Statement* is: “without mixture, confusion, division, or separation.”

*What do the Nicene Creed and the Definition of Chalcedon teach?*



# The Nicene Creed

“I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible: And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried, and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; And He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead;



# The Nicene Creed

Whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets. And I believe in one catholic and apostolic church; I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins, and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”



# Definition of Chalcedon

“Therefore, following the holy Fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood: like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized IN TWO NATURES, WITHOUT CONFUSION, WITHOUT CHANGE, WITHOUT



# Definition of Chalcedon

DIVISION, WITHOUT SEPARATION: the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the Fathers has handed down to us.”



# Comments on Select Affirmations and Denials

- **Article 5:** Jesus' human nature did not have divine attributes, nor did the divine nature communicate divine attributes to the human nature.
- **Article 6:** Docetism
- **Article 9:** Jesus' active and passive obedience
- **Article 11:** Salvation only through Jesus Christ
- **Article 12:** Various theories for the death of Christ
- **Article 14:** Justification by faith alone
- **Article 16:** Resurrection of the body and the soul

# Comments on Select Affirmations and Denials

- **Article 19-22:** Jesus is our Prophet, Priest, and King
- **Article 24:** Who will be saved?
- **Article 25:** The new heavens and earth. We will be made like Him and enjoy Him forever.



# C.S. Lewis

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

# Saint Augustine (AD 354-430)

“The Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit intimate a divine unity of one and the same substance in an indivisible equality; and therefore that they are not three Gods, but one God: although the Father is not the Son; and the Son is begotten by the Father, and so He who is the Son is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but only the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, Himself also co-equal with the Father and the Son, and pertaining to the unity of the Trinity.”



# The Affirmation of the Early Church

“By intimations in the teachings of Jesus, by the events of Pentecost, and then by the inspired teaching of the apostles, the early Christians were left with no consistent option but to affirm that ***three eternal centers of consciousness coexist in the Godhead.***”



Dr. Carl F.H. Henry  
1913-2003



# The Deity of Jesus Christ

- “The New Testament offers no retreat from affirming the deity of Jesus Christ” (Henry).
- “The supreme basis for affirming Christ’s deity lies in divine revelation, especially in the propositional content recorded in the inspired New Testament writings” (Henry).



# Further Information about the Statement

- It is available in 15 languages, including Arabic.
- It can be downloaded without cost from [www.christologystatement.com](http://www.christologystatement.com). In the right top corner of the webpage, click the round circle containing three lines. Click “Downloads” and choose your preferred language. If you only want to read the document online, click each section of the *Statement* for the full text.
- The *Statement* can be shared on Twitter, Facebook, or by email. Scroll to the bottom of the page to locate the social media icons.