

The Messiah's Mother

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In the history of Christian theology, we often see that theological error sometimes sparks a response that goes to the extreme in the other direction. For example, the theological liberalism popular at the end of the nineteenth through the beginning of the twentieth century essentially ignored the transcendent lordship of God and focused entirely on His immanent presence. The Lord was made such a part of this world that He could not be distinguished from it. This error motivated the rise of neoorthodoxy in the twentieth century. Thinkers in this movement, such as Karl Barth, endeavored to renew belief in God's transcendence, but they went so far in that direction that they all but denied His immanent presence in the world. The Lord was seen as so transcendent that any concept of His revelation of Himself in the created order was repudiated.

Evangelicals are capable of a similar overreach when we respond to theological error. We see this clearly in the way we tend to regard Mary, the mother of Jesus. For centuries, the Roman Catholic Church has steadily exalted Mary to the point where she is seen as a dispenser of grace. There are even movements in Roman Catholicism to declare her the co-redemptrix, the co-savior of the world alongside her Son. Of course, anyone familiar with Roman Catholicism also knows that pleading for Mary to intercede on one's behalf is central to Roman Catholic piety. By contrast, evangelicals laudably and unambiguously affirm the biblical truth that there is only "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" ([1 Tim. 2:5](#)). In so doing, however, we often reduce Mary's role to the extent that she is almost an afterthought in the Lord's plan of salvation.

God's Word demands that we deny Mary a mediatorial role in salvation. Yet Scripture also tells us that she has been blessed far above all other women. Indeed, she is to be regarded as the "favored one," for she was given the immense privilege of carrying the incarnate Son of God in her womb ([Luke 1:26–33](#)). She is, as the Council of Chalcedon affirmed, the *theotokos*—"God-bearer" or "mother of God." This title was not given to Mary to confer quasi-divine status upon her; rather, it was given to defend the truth of the deity of Christ. That is, the title is for Jesus' sake. The developing infant whom Mary carried to term and birthed in Bethlehem was none other than the incarnate Son of God. He was (and remains) a perfect union of the divine nature and a human nature.

As followers of Christ, we must contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Yet in so doing, we must be careful about going to the opposite extreme, for we often commit other errors when we swing the pendulum all the way over to the other side. Our goal is to be faithful to Scripture, seeking to balance truths about God and creation where God balances them and trusting His Word to shape our interpretation of all of life.