

Reformation  
& Revival



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**M**artin Luther said that the right way to come to a proper understanding of Jesus Christ was to begin with His humanity. Many people's first reaction to that statement would be to question its truth and to suggest that it is much more important to establish Christ's deity. But to think like that is to make a serious mistake. The Bible gives resounding emphasis to both, making it crystal clear that Jesus of Nazareth is both fully God and fully man, and that both His divine and human natures, united in one person, are absolutely essential to the gospel and therefore to man's salvation.

The real and total humanity of Jesus has not always been accepted by professing Christian scholars. Among the earliest of the heresies with which the early church had to contend was the teaching of the Docetists (Gk. *dokeo* = to appear, to seem), who taught that all matter was essentially evil, so that if Jesus was truly sinless His body could not have been real—in other words, He must have been some kind of ghost or phantom. But in speaking of Jesus the Bible never once uses *dokeo*, and the whole docetic idea is undiluted speculation. Reference will be made later to one of the most conclusive of the many anti-docetic statements to be found in Scripture.

In the fourth century, *apollinarianism* raised its heretical head. Apollinaris was among those who welcomed the great Athanasius back from exile in A.D.346 and eventually became bishop of the Nicene Church at Laodicea. He was generally orthodox in his theology but became derailed over the issue of Christ's humanity. He believed that the root of sin was in the human spirit, so that if Christ was divine (which he believed) He could not have possessed a human spirit. In effect, he taught that Jesus had a human anatomy but not a human psychology; He was literally soulless, the human psyche being replaced by the divine Logos. Apollinarianism was roundly condemned by a succession

of Church Councils from A.D. 311 onwards.

A century later the church had to repel monophysitism, a doctrine popularized by Eutyches, an influential monk from Constantinople. Monophysitism, from the Greek words *monos* (only) and *physis* (nature)—taught that the only way to safeguard the unity of Christ's person was to unify His nature. This was done by mingling Christ's deity and humanity in such a way that His humanity virtually disappeared. Yet in the monophysitic model Christ's deity was also affected, eventually leaving Christ with one new nature, neither fully divine nor fully human.

Monophysitism was outlawed by the Synod of Constantinople in A.D. 448, and although Eutyches managed to get himself reinstated at the infamous "Robber Synod" of Ephesus a year later, the Council of Chalcedon, held in A.D. 451, confirmed the judgment made in Constantinople.

Monophysitic rumblings continued to be heard from time to time, but by the seventeenth century, the Scottish divine Robert Bailie could write, "All serious theological thought has finished with the docetist, Eutychean, monophysite errors. . . . No more Docetism. Eutyches, we may say, is dead, and he is not likely to be as fortunate in finding an apostle to revive him!" In 1887 James Boyce, an early president of the Southern Baptist Convention, went even further: "It is no longer disputed that Christ had a human body, comprised of flesh and blood, as are the bodies of other men." Writing in 1939, Louis Berkhof was equally dismissive: "At present no one seriously questions the real humanity of Jesus Christ." One assumes that he was passing over the comment of Mary Baker Eddy, the founding mother of Christian Science, who said in her *Miscellaneous Writings* that "Christ is incorporeal," a view which is neither Christian nor scientific.

Why is it so important to establish the true humanity of

Jesus Christ? The Scripture gives the simplest answer: "Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God" (1 John 4:2). Our testimony to His humanity is one of His tests of our orthodoxy. To put it bluntly, we cannot deny the real, total, unmixed humanity of Jesus Christ and be true Christian believers. C. H. Spurgeon was therefore quite right to make the following point:

We can never forget that Jesus Christ is God. The church has given forth so many valiant confessions of His deity, and woe be to her should she even hesitate on that glorious truth. Yet sometimes she has need to insist earnestly on His humanity.

Spurgeon's words have an urgent ring today, for two reasons. First, because of the relentless output from theologians who try to drive a demythologising wedge between the Christ of history and the Christ of faith, and who in so doing are in danger of obscuring the Christ of Scripture. Second, because at the cutting edge of evangelism there is a constant danger that people will accept the Jesus of *Godspell* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* as genuine, whereas they are perversions rather than portrayals. To a greater or lesser degree, the same is true of all pop presentations of Jesus. It is impossible to reduce the real Jesus to plastic, antic, lyric or music. The best of man's artistic efforts in any field can only produce a vague shadow of the truth. Every art form known to man has the same inherent weakness—it cannot bear the full weight of the real Jesus.

We must turn to Scripture to find the genuine article. Essentially, the Bible says three things about the humanity of Jesus; everything it has to say on the subject comes within these parameters.

**Jesus Became a Man**

In John's sublime sentence, "The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us" (John 1:14), Jesus became something He had not previously been; "flesh" was something He became when He came. One of the most magnificent yet concise statements of this tremendous truth is at Philippians 2:6-8, where one of the most significant phrases tells us that "He emptied Himself" (Phil. 2:7 NASB). These are the words that gave rise in the nineteenth century to the so-called "kenosis theory" which (in a nutshell) taught that at His incarnation Jesus forfeited some or all of His deity or some of His divine attributes. There are echoes of monophysitism here. At another level, J. I. Packer wryly comments:

In England, the kenosis theory was first broached by Bishop Gore in 1880 to explain why our Lord was ignorant of what the nineteenth-century higher critics thought they knew about the errors of the Old Testament.

The fact is that there is no biblical support for the idea that the eternal deity of Jesus was in any way reduced or marginalised when He became human. The meaning of Philippians 2 is not that He laid aside His deity. What He laid aside was the uninterrupted enjoyment of the privileges that had been eternally His co-equally with the Father and the Spirit. The true meaning of His "emptying" can be seen by noticing the words that follow—"taking the very nature of a servant." He emptied Himself by adding something. Classic kenoticism sees the incarnation as "God minus"; Scripture teaches that the incarnation was "God plus." Jesus is eternally the Son of God; at the incarnation He became additionally the son of Mary.

The point is well made elsewhere in Scripture: "Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity" and was "made like His brothers in every

way" (Heb. 2:14,17). Here, "humanity" literally means "the same things" (i.e., "flesh and blood"). When He came to earth, Jesus added humanity, which He had never had before, to deity, which He had always had. There was a time when Jesus was not a man, but never a time when He was not God. As Athanasius wrote 1,500 years ago, "He became what He was not; He continued to be what He always was."

The method by which this was achieved was miraculous conception in the womb of the virgin Mary: "But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). The eternal Son of God became the earthly son of Mary. Whereas the first Adam had a beginning but no birth, the second Adam had a birth but no beginning. Yet Mary was His real mother. She supplied the unfertilized egg which established His genetic relationship to the human race. Conception took place when God the Son entered that egg and took upon Himself everything involved in the Word becoming "flesh."

The word "flesh," when used in connection with Christ's incarnation, means much more than blood, bone and tissue. It means everything involved in becoming truly, totally human. But would that not include sinfulness? Not at all. There is nothing sinful in human nature per se. Adam and Eve were human before the fall—but they were not sinners, either in nature or practice. It is important to notice how the Bible makes this point about the incarnation with such accuracy. When Paul speaks about God "sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man" (Rom. 8:3), his choice of words is meticulous. Jesus was sent not "as man" (which might imply something sinful); nor "as sinful man" (which He was certainly not); nor "in the likeness of man" (He was a real man, not an imaginary one); but "in the likeness of sinful man" (looking like any other male human being). If Adam and Jesus were to be laid side by side, the only way to tell them apart would be that Jesus was the one with a

navel.

At the incarnation the sinless Son of God became a member of sinful humanity, yet remained untainted by its sin. There is no doubt that Mary was a sinner (she confessed her trust in “God my Savior” (Luke 1:47). Then how did God ensure that the fetus in her womb, which now began to draw upon her biological resources, was not contaminated by the rottenness of her sinful nature? Frankly, we cannot tell (*pace* Barth’s idea that the transmission of sin is through the male). God has declined to give us the information. As even Paul admits, when speaking of God’s appearance as a man, “the mystery of godliness is great! He appeared in a body. . .” (1 Tim. 3:16). What we do know is that Jesus became a man, became “like His brothers in every way.” From the moment He entered His mother’s womb, everything about His humanity fell within normal, natural parameters. His embryo developed normally, gestation took about nine months, and when He was born He was just like any other baby— wrinkled, slippery, bloody and smelly.

Although eternally God, Jesus became a man. In His *kenosis*, Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, voluntarily gave up the independent use of His divine attributes in order to fulfill His purpose in coming into the world.

#### Jesus Was a Man

He was not part man and part God, nor a mixture of both. Nor was He “God in a human skin.” He had a human body, a human soul and a human mind, and we can trace the evidence of His humanity in four key areas of His earthly experience:

First, there is evidence from *His physical life*. When He was eight days old, He was circumcised in accordance with Old Testament law, just like any other Jewish boy. He had normal physical growth patterns— “He grew in wisdom and stature” (Luke 2:52). In the same chapter He is progressively

described as a “baby” (v.16), a “child” (v.40) and a “boy” (v.43). He had to be taught to stand, walk, write, feed and dress Himself. His hair grew, His voice broke, and He passed through puberty into manhood.

Like any other human being, He was dependent on food and drink. On one occasion we are told, “Early in the morning . . . He was hungry” (Matt. 21:18). After a long journey, “He was tired” and asked a Samaritan woman, “Will you give Me a drink?” (John 4:6,7). He experienced the shocking agony of crucifixion, and as soon as His spirit left His body what was left hanging on the cross was a human corpse. Later, when a soldier pierced His side, what poured out was “a sudden flow of blood and water” (John 19:34). Medical experts say this is exactly how a layman might describe a blood clot and serum flowing from a post-mortem rupture of the heart, such as would have been caused by the thrust of the soldier’s spear.

Second, there is evidence from *His emotional life*. Jesus had not only a human *soma* (body), but a human *psyche* (soul) and a human *pneuma* (spirit)—and He therefore experienced a whole gamut of human emotions.

He knew what it was to *love* people. When Lazarus was ill, news reached Him that “the one You love is sick” (John 11:3), and we are specifically told that “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus” (John 11:5). At times, His emotional relationship was expressed as *friendship*: He told His disciples, “I have called you friends” (John 15:15).

Jesus also knew *anger*, and in varying degrees. When disciples tried to stop parents bringing their children to Him, Jesus was “indignant” (Mark 10:14), a word which carries the sense of being irritated or annoyed. Earlier, Mark uses a stronger word. When the Pharisees were watching like hawks to see whether He would heal on the Sabbath, “He looked around at them in anger” (Mark 3:5); here “anger” comes from the same root as our word “rage.” An

even stronger word is used when John says that at the tomb of Lazarus, “Jesus . . . was deeply moved in spirit and troubled” (John 11:33). The phrase could be translated “enraged in His spirit,” and captures something of what He felt at coming into close contact not just with death but with the one who had the power of death. In Calvin’s vivid phrase, He approached the tomb “as a champion who was prepared for conflict.”

Jesus also knew great *sorrow*. When invited to visit Lazarus’ tomb, “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). When He looked over the city of Jerusalem “He wept over it” (Luke 19:41), the verb here indicating loud wailing.

Yet He also knew great *joy*. There is no record of Him laughing, or even smiling, but it would be ridiculous to suggest that He never did either. He came on a rescue mission, which He knew would be successful, whatever the cost. In B. B. Warfield’s phrase, “He came as a conqueror, with the gladness of imminent victory in His heart.”

This breaks out in Luke’s account of the disciples returning from a fruitful preaching mission and Jesus being “full of joy through the Holy Spirit” (Luke 10:21).

Other emotions could be added. When confronted with a deaf and dumb man, “He sighed deeply” and “He looked up to heaven . . . with a deep sigh” (Mark 7:34). We are repeatedly told that when seeing large crowds “He had compassion on them” (Matt. 9:36). In Gethsemane, “He began to be deeply distressed and troubled and told His disciples, ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death’” (Mark 14:33-34). These phrases include such emotions as shock, fear, confusion, distress, agitation, spiritual and mental pain, despondency and sheer horror. No wonder John Calvin said, “Those who imagine that the Son of God was exempt from human passions do not truly and seriously acknowledge Him to be a man.”

Third, there is evidence from *His spiritual life*. He was

*tempted*, not just in His head-to-head confrontation with Satan in the desert, but throughout His life— “tempted in every way, just as we are” (Heb. 4:15). No fewer than 25 times we are told that He *prayed*, and we can be sure He did so daily. There are instances of His praying in the morning, all night, and on special occasions. This indicates that He *needed* to pray, something that is true of man but not of God. Prayer is one of the things God cannot do but man can.

Jesus also attended public worship; Luke records Him visiting His local synagogue on the Sabbath day as was His custom (Luke 4:16). He studied His Bible (He was constantly quoting Scripture and, with one exception, always from memory); He fasted (clearly as a spiritual discipline); and He trusted God— “Take this cup from Me. Yet not what I will but what You will” (Mark 14:36).

Fourth, there is evidence from *His natural life*. Though He had none of our sinful inclinations, He had all of our sinless limitations. He could not stand on the day He was born, nor could He clean and jerk 2,000 pounds or jump 100 feet in the air. He did not have a halo, or x-ray eyes or bullet-proof skin. There were things He did not know. When one woman in a crowd brushed against Him, He asked, “Who touched My clothes?” (Mark 5:30). Later, He asked His disciples, “How many loaves do you have?” (Mark 6:38). Again, He asked the father of a demon-possessed boy, “How long has he been like this?” (Mark 9:21). Arriving at Bethany after Lazarus had died, He asked Mary and Martha, “Where have you laid him?” (John 11:34)—yet moments later raised him from the dead. The same person, at the same time, was infinite and finite, omniscient and ignorant, omnipotent and powerless. Impossible? To whom? There is an important principle here that can be put in one sentence. When Jesus chose to use His divine attributes it was *only* at His Father’s will, *always* to authenticate His mission and *never* for His own benefit.

Another obvious example of His ignorance was over the

question of His Second Coming: “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13:32). As a human being, Jesus had no advance information about the eschatological timetable and, as Calvin comments, “Surely that man would be singularly mad who would hesitate to submit to ignorance which even the Son of God Himself did not hesitate to endure.” There were some matters on which Jesus was ignorant; there were none on which He was in error.

#### **Jesus Remains a Man**

His humanity did not end with His death. When Mary of Magdala met the risen Christ near the garden tomb she mistook Him for the gardener; the two friends on the Emmaus Road thought their companion was a visitor to the area, and invited Him to stay overnight. When He appeared to other disciples on the seashore and asked them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” they simply answered, “No” (John 21:5-6), and would have left it at that and gone about their business had He not revealed His identity. Later, when He suddenly appeared to a group of disciples in Jerusalem they were “startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost,” but He confirmed His identity by telling them that a ghost did not have flesh and bones “as you see I have” (Luke 24:37, 39). He then joined them for supper, a meal which had not only proved fatal for the fish but has ever since been devastating for the Docetists! The body of Jesus was as real after His resurrection as it had been before His death, though it was raised to a level where it could now move in the spiritual world.

Several weeks later, after a final message to His followers, “He was taken up before their very eyes” (Acts 1:9), another Scripture adding that “He was taken up into heaven” (Mark 16:19). He clearly did this as a man, because when Stephen was martyred he cried out, “I see heaven opened and the

Son of man standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56). We have it on angelic authority that at the second coming it will be “this same Jesus” (Acts 1:11) who will return, and on apostolic authority that this will usher in the day when God will judge the world with justice “by the man He has appointed” (Acts 17:31). Paul also tells us in Philippians 2 that the day is coming when every rational being will acknowledge the deity of Jesus, the man. The last promise in the Bible—“I am coming soon”—is made by Jesus, the man; the last prayer in the Bible is addressed to the divine man—“Amen, Come, Lord Jesus”; and the last verse in the Bible speaks of “the grace of the Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20-21).

Jesus neither laid aside His deity when He came to earth, nor His humanity when He returned to heaven. As someone has rightly said, “The dust of the earth is at the right hand of the majesty on high.” Warfield agreed: “All that man as man is, that Christ is—to eternity.”

What are the practical implications for the Christian of the humanity of Christ? There is room to comment on just two, but they virtually embrace all the others. In the first place, it assures him of his salvation. Dietrich Bonhoeffer quite properly asked, “If Jesus Christ is not true God, how could He help us? If He is not true man, how could He help us?” But He is both, and therefore can. This is why theologians have spoken of “the essential humanity of Christ,” meaning that it is necessary for man’s salvation. As a guilty, lost and helpless sinner, my only hope is a substitute acceptable to God. Yet the substitute would have to be God Himself, because it is God I have wronged, and only God could provide a sacrifice of infinite value, sufficient to pay for the sins of all men. However, the substitute would also have to be a sinless human being; sinless, so that that death penalty He bore would not be for His own sin, and human, because only the human body and soul could suffer the physical and spiritual death penalty prescribed. In the man

Christ, I have exactly such a Savior! As Charitie Lees de Chenez puts it,

Because the sinless Savior died,  
My sinful soul is counted free;  
For God, the Just, is satisfied  
To look on Him, and pardon me.

Second, the humanity of Christ assures the Christian that His Savior's sustaining power is available to him: "Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted" (Heb. 2:18). As the same writer adds later, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses. . . let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb. 4:15-16). Warfield adds the perfect postscript: "The glory of the incarnation is that it presents to our adoring gaze not a humanized God or a deified man, but a true God-man—one who is all that God is and at the same time all that man is: one on whose almighty arm we can rest, and to whose human sympathy we can appeal."

*Hallelujah! What a Savior!*

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