

Further Notes on Christ's Two Natures

This paper is the second seeking to oppose the heresy that Christ did not have a genuine human nature, but instead brought an eternal, ideal form of humanity from heaven. Having earlier established basic theological principles to affirm that the Second Person of the Trinity assumed human flesh, I believe it would be helpful to add to this by noting the implication of a number of scriptures pertaining to this matter.

The Word became human flesh

Jn 1:14

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

1 Jn 4:2

Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

Gen 3:15

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.

Acts 2:29-30

The patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne.

2 Tim 2:8

Jesus Christ, of the seed of David.

Gal 3:16

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.

The eternal Son assumed, or took on, flesh and dwelt with men. The view that I am combating is that this flesh was not the same as that generated by Adam but was an ideal, absolute, eternal form of man-type flesh that existed in the Son in the Godhead.

Though the word 'flesh' has several meanings in scripture, it is clear that, as applied to Christ, it means that he was made man. Furthermore, many other scriptures declare that Christ's flesh was the seed of Adam, David and Abraham etc. It was not an eternal, mystical flesh, but a human flesh from a specific people type.

A body was prepared for him

Heb 10:5

Therefore, when he came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me.'

Clearly this could not be true if the Son already had a human type of nature (which necessitates some form of created flesh since man is a creation – a ridiculous concept for spirit). Christ's manhood was prepared for him in the womb of Mary. Being born of Mary, he was human, Adamic.

When the Word assumed human nature, he took it on, became a partaker with it; it was not something that he brought from heaven.

Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. (Phil 2:6-7)

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared ['made a partaker'] in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. (Heb 2:14)

Christ's divine nature was not converted to a human nature (which would have destroyed its divine properties) but the person of the Son assumed (took on) a human nature. This is the foundation of redemption and the 'mystery of godliness' (1 Tim 3:16).

Jesus is the 'Son of Man'.

Matt 9:6 etc.

The Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins.

Indeed, this was Christ's favourite term for himself during his humiliation. It appears scores of times in the Gospels. Clearly, this could not be true if Jesus was not a son of Adam's race, but was already a perfected, ideal, archetypal form of man in heaven.

Jesus was born of a certain race and tribe

Matt 1:1

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:

Matthew and Luke give us specific details of the nature of Christ's genealogy. If Christ was not really born a human being from the seed of Adam, then these texts would be lies.

Jesus was conceived in a womb

Matt 1:20-21

That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS.

Lk 1:31

You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS.

If the manhood of Jesus was an eternal archetype, then it could not have been conceived and grown as an embryo, but would have been transplanted. Jesus was the seed of God united to Mary's ovum, which grew into a human baby.

Jesus took the form of a servant

Phil 2:5-8

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross.

This text alone destroys the unorthodox concept under view. Note:

- Jesus is equal with God; i.e. the human nature of the Son ('Jesus') belongs to the Second person of the Godhead.
- The Son took the form of a servant. This could not be true if his form was a heavenly archetype. That eternal nature (if it existed) would be equal with God and could not be a servant of God.
- He was in the likeness of men – he looked like men. ['Likeness' involves the meaning of something that amounts to equality or identity.]
- He was in appearance a man – he was human. ['Appearance' or 'fashion' refers to what Jesus was on the outside (a man) compared to what he was on the inside (God).]
- He went to the death of the cross as a substitute for sinful men. Only a human sacrifice, a real man, could do this.

Jesus was exactly like us on Earth

Heb 2:11-14

For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified *are* all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: 'I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.' And again: 'I will put My trust in Him.' And again: 'Here am I and the children whom God has given Me.' Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.

- The human nature of Jesus and the human nature of the elect are 'all of one', i.e. the same substance.
- This enables the Lord to truly call himself brother to us. This would not be possible if he were an alien species from eternity.
- Jesus had human flesh and blood, 'the same' flesh and blood.
- Only by having an identical nature could Jesus destroy sin through dying in that human nature.

Jesus' human nature was not from heaven but was earthly

Heb 2:6-9

'What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You take care of him? You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honour, and set him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet.' For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing *that is* not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

- If Jesus' human nature was an eternal archetypal form then it would have been divine and thus higher than angels. But the human nature that the Son assumed was lower than the angels; i.e. human.
- This statement about being lower than angels is important enough to be stated twice in this passage. The writer is affirming (in the light of encroaching Gnosticism) that Jesus was made a real man.
- The human nature of Jesus enabled him to taste death for every one of the elect. He could not have done this if his nature was not Adamic.

In Christ, the fulness of God dwells in human form.

Col 2:9

For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

The bodily form of Jesus was not an eternal, archetypal man made into physical form, but was the human vehicle for the fulness of the Godhead.

Christ has the same nature as human beings.

Rm 9:29

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Christ was firstborn of a new race of people. This necessitated total identification with those people, who were human. Christ's brethren are people, and Christ is brother to us because he was also man like us. In his resurrection he takes that ordinary human nature

and remakes it as a spiritual form of humanity to last eternity. Thus those who are in Christ also change from being human like Adam, to being made human like the resurrected Christ at the end of time.

Christ's two natures

Rm 1:3-4

Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, *and* declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.

Here Christ is said to be a man, born in the line of David – i.e. an ordinary Adamic human being; but also shown to be God's Son by his spirit (not the Holy Spirit) and proved to be so when he was raised from the dead. Death could not hold him since his person is divine. His human nature was re-vivified.

Gal 4:4

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

Here we have the divinity of Christ – he was God's Son; but also his humanity, born of a woman and born under law (which only applied to created men).

Note that the revelation of Christ includes multiple statements where human and divine qualities are ascribed to him under both names:

1. Human characteristics ascribed to Christ under divine titles (Lk 1:32; 1 Cor 2:8; Acts 20:28).
2. Divine qualities ascribed to Christ under human names (Jn 3:13, 6:62; Rm 9:5; Eph 1:23; Acts 17:31).

The grave danger of holding an unorthodox view on Christ's two natures

This truth is denied by the spirit of antichrist

1 Jn 4:2

By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

2 Jn 7

For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

The foremost heresy is that which denies the scriptural presentation of Christ come in the flesh as man. It is this doctrine (along with a denial of Christ's divinity) that was assailed in the first centuries of the post-apostolic church and which led to the first creeds.

The doctrine of Christ began to be attacked in the apostolic church in the various teachings of Gnosticism. One variant of this was Docetism, which denied that the Son had really come in human flesh but was only the appearance of flesh. The basis for this denial was dualism, the idea that what is fleshly is evil and that only what is heavenly can be perfect – thus the perfect Saviour could not have really had human flesh.

John, the last apostle, takes this heresy head on in two letters and demonstrates the truth in his Gospel, written to prove that Jesus was the Son of God. What he says is fearful! Those who deny the orthodox doctrine of Christ, Son of God in two natures, are of the spirit of Antichrist. They are filled with deception and fallen foul of Satan's strategies.

This means that it is of the utmost importance to get this doctrine right. Those who genuinely do not understand it should bow their heads and submit to the truth of scripture and trust God to make it clearer in time. What is not an option is to construct some kind of theoretical or metaphysical doctrine that suits their understanding but does not conform to scripture. John explains in his letter that supposed believers who refuse to accept scriptural teaching on Christ are to be avoided:

Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. 2 Jn 1:9-11

The apostles Paul agrees with this:

If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a *means of gain*. From such withdraw yourself. 1 Tim 6:3-5

True believers should know this as a result of regeneration

Matt 11:27-28

All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and *the one* to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*. Come to Me, all *you* who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

1 Jn 5:20

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

It is fundamental to salvation to know Christ; indeed those who do not know Christ have no life (Jn 5:39-40, 6:35-40; 14:6-7). The basic and central feature of knowing Christ is to understand that he is both God and Man; indeed this is the basic tenet of faith. If Christ is not both God and Man then there is no salvation for men; thus to understand (even in the most basic way) that Jesus is the God-Man, is the bedrock of salvation. For this reason, Paul states the basis of the two natures at the very beginning of the book of Romans, which is an exposition of the Gospel (Rm 1:3-4). The start of Paul's Gospel was Christ's humanity and divinity.

Now believers may not be able to articulate this theologically, but they believe it. Some believers may even find it difficult to rationalise this, but they realise that they must submit to the truth of scripture and leave their rational difficulties to God. Submission is the essence of conversion (repentance and faith); if there is a refusal to submit to this cardinal doctrine, then there can be no genuine faith. How can they believe, if the Jesus they claim to follow is not the same Jesus revealed in scripture? If Jesus does not have a human nature like all men (but without sin) then this Jesus is not the Saviour that we see in the Bible.

Thus we can see that this doctrine is supremely important to obey, whether we have rational difficulties with it or not. It may just be possible that a true believer has been deceived by the enemy and holds a wrong theory about Christ's human nature. However, when this is explained the correct action is to repent for this error and submit to God's word, even if there are still rational questions. True faith and repentance will result in a clearer vision of the truth in time. Refusal to submit to scripture indicates that there can be no real faith. Heresies about Christ's natures are stated in scripture to be evil; thus this is a matter of the deepest gravity.

Appendix One

Christological heresies which deny a human nature

Gnostic Docetism

Jesus did not have a human body but an eternal form giving the appearance of a body.

Eutychianism

Jesus had a 'one sole nature' [Monophysitism]; Jesus' body was divine; the human nature was swallowed up by the divine to create a third nature (called: *tertium quid*).

Apollinarianism

Christ is divine and has no human nature. [Monophysitism]

Monothelitism

Christ had no human will, just the one divine will.

Proofs of Jesus' human nature

1. He had a human birth. Gal 4:4; Matt 1:18-2:11.
2. He was the seed of Adam, David and Abraham. Matt 1:1; Rm 1:3; Lk 3:23-38.
3. He had human development. Lk 2:40, 52.
4. He had all the essential elements of human nature. Heb 2:14. [Body (Matt 26:12; Heb 10:10). Soul/spirit (Matt 26:38; Mk 2:8; Lk 23:46). Human will (Matt 26:39; Heb 10:7, 9; cf. divine will 2 Cor 5:21) Note that Christ had an infinite intelligence and will as God, but also a finite intelligence and will as man.]
5. He had human names. [Jesus (Matt 1:21) is the Greek form of Joshua. Son of Abraham (Matt 1:21). Son of David (Matt 9:27). Son of Man (over 80 times in NT; the Jews understood this as a reference to the Messiah - who was a man, see Dan 7:13; Jn 12:34, and the Son of God, Lk 22:69).]
6. He was representative of humanity. Heb 2:6-9.
7. He had human infirmities but without sin. [Fatigue (Jn 4:6); hunger (Matt 4:2); thirst (Jn 19:28); sleep (Matt 8:24); tempted (Heb 2:18).]
8. He was called a man. Jn 8:40 (by Jesus); Jn 1:30 (by John the Baptist); Acts 2:22 (by Peter); 1 Cor 15:21 (by Paul). These statements would be lies if Jesus were not a normal man.
9. He was recognised as a man. Jn 7:27, 9:29, 10:33.
10. He was known as a Jew. Jn 4:9.
11. He was accused of blasphemy for calling himself other than a man. Jn 10:33.
12. After the resurrection he was recognised as a man (but with new spiritual properties) Jn 20:15, 21:4.
13. He lives in heaven as a man. 1 Tim 2:5.
14. He will come again as a man to judge righteousness. Acts 17:31.

This latter list is partly indebted to Henry C Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, p219ff.

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Contact: understandingministries@yahoo.com