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# THE MAN CHRIST JESUS

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ANY study of a single facet of the complex person of Christ requires a statement of limitations and assumptions. This paper on the humanity of our Lord assumes the fact of two complete natures in Christ. He was complete Deity, the One in whom dwelt "the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col 2:9), the eternal Word made flesh (John 1:14). A real self-emptying of the eternal Son in the incarnation also is assumed (Phil 2:5-8). In Jesus Christ incarnate there dwelt full deity and complete sinless humanity. When the eternal Son joined himself to a real human nature, he laid aside the independent exercise of his divine attributes, while retaining full possession of them. It is a basic maxim of this study that there is a distinction between the *possession* and the *exercise* of an attribute. While Christ never ceased to be God, thus retaining the full possession of His attributes, he did voluntarily lay aside the exercise of those attributes of power and omniscience so that he might become truly man. *Dependence* is a necessary characteristic of real humanity. The testimony of the NT, particularly the narrative of the four Gospels, presents a consistent picture of a true man, walking in dependence upon his heavenly Father.

The church was still in her infancy when the idea was advanced that Jesus Christ did not have a real body, hence, was not fully human. The proponents of this view insisted that the body of Jesus was only an appearance, an apparition. This was arrived at following the basic Gnostic presuppositions that spirit is good and matter is evil. It was evident, even to them, that Christ was a good man; therefore, they reasoned that his body could not be real matter since matter is evil. A distinguished bishop of Laodicea, Apollinaris, taught that while Christ possessed a true human body and soul, the human spirit in him was replaced by the eternal Son, or Logos. This view was intended to protect the full deity of Christ, but it left him with an incomplete humanity. The principal objection to the position is that "if there is no complete manhood in Christ, he is not a perfect

example for us, nor did he redeem the whole of human nature but only its spiritual elements."<sup>1</sup>

It was largely to answer this heresy in its various forms that the early writers and preachers declared forthrightly the real and complete humanity of Jesus. Earnest attempts to wrestle with the exceedingly complex problem of real humanity joined to full deity in one undivided Person were not always satisfactory in their outcome. Finally, at the Council of Chalcedon, in A.D. 451, a statement was drawn which was to become the accepted definition in the orthodox catholic church.

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 (ὁμοούσιος) 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 (θεοτόκος); one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change without 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 (ὑπόστασις), 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.<sup>2</sup>

#### GENUINE HUMAN CHARACTERISTICS

While this noble statement declares the *fact* of Christ's humanity and its relation to his deity, it neither explains the implications of that humanity nor grapples with the problems raised by it. This is not stated critically, only factually. Those good men of the fifth century were discovering important truth progressively and it would remain for others to deal with matters raised by their conclusions.

The statements of the Chalcedonian confession that Christ was "complete in manhood" and "of one substance with us as regards his

<sup>1</sup>F. L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University, 1958) 70.

<sup>2</sup>Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church* (2nd ed.; London: Oxford University, 1963) 73.

manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin" are derived from solid scriptural data. An examination of pertinent passages reveals the following concerning Christ's humanity.

### *A human birth*

While the conception of Christ was clearly miraculous, accomplished by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary (Luke 1:26-35), his birth was normal in every respect as far as the physical aspects are concerned. It took place only after the regular gestation period. The unusual external situation which emphasizes the poverty of his earthly circumstances (Luke 2:1-20) also brings into clearer focus the fact that the entrance of the Son of God into humanity was by way of regular physical birth. There is no reason to think that Mary did not suffer labor pains and the miseries of delivering a child that are common to all women. Luther's Christmas hymn declares that the "little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes," but that is of doubtful accuracy. Joseph tenderly ministered to his wife who had delivered a real baby. When the shepherds came in from the plains of Bethlehem they saw a real human baby. However deep the mysteries involved, it must be insisted on the basis of the biblical record that the Son of God came into our humanity via a genuine human birth.

### *Human growth and development*

The record is equally clear that Jesus developed and grew as other children do. "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him . . . And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:40, 52). This is surely one of the unsearchable things of biblical revelation. But revelation it is—that Jesus, the God-man, grew and developed and made progress in the physical, mental, social, and spiritual aspects of his being. No doubt his first teaching in truth and wisdom came from the lips of his mother. As all Jewish boys did, he attended the synagogue schools in Nazareth, mastering the principles of reading and writing under the guidance of real human teachers. His mind was keen and alert because it was unhampered by sin. Indeed, so amazing was that mental development that by the time he was twelve years of age his questions and answers astounded the scholars in the Temple at Jerusalem. Through the adolescent years, he was absorbing the lessons of nature, business, culture, and social intercourse that were to appear so strikingly in the teaching of future years. This whole subject, though much hidden from our view, is most intriguing and not without profit as we consider him of whom it is said that "in *all things* it behooved Him to

be made like unto his brethren" (Heb 2:17), and that he was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). But the point is that he did grow, he did increase in knowledge, he did develop in a genuinely human way.

### *Human ancestry*

Furthermore, the fact of Jesus' human ancestry is made clear in Scripture. Matthew and Luke provide us with records of his human lineage, the one tracing it through Joseph back to Abraham through David to establish his legal rights to the throne of Israel, the other through Mary all the way to Adam to establish his true connection with the human race. In spite of attempts to prove otherwise, it seems clear that he had half-brothers and sisters and therefore knew the stresses as well as the joys of family life. His brothers are named in Mark 6:3. The historical record of the four Gospels give ample support to Paul's declaration that Jesus was "made of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom 1:3).

### *Human appearance*

There is no hint anywhere in Scripture that Jesus appeared to the physical sight as anything less than genuinely human. When he met the woman at the well, she was immediately aware that she was talking to a Jew (John 4:9). Indeed, the Gospel records are consistent in their presentation of a man who taught the Jews in the Temple and on the countryside, a man who performed miracles that amazed the multitudes, a man who was arrested and tried and crucified. It was a *man* who appeared to more than 500 people on various occasions after the resurrection. Mary thought he was the gardener. The disciples on the road to Emmaus did not recognize him at first, but they were fully aware that they were talking to a man. In fact, they thought he must be the only visitor in Jerusalem who had not heard of the strange circumstances surrounding the disappearance of the body of the crucified prophet from Nazareth (Luke 24:13-24). No suggestion can be found that the Jesus of the Bible was an apparition or a mere appearance.

### *Human experiences*

The emotions, feelings, desires, and needs that are ascribed to Jesus in the Gospel records point unerringly to His full and complete humanity. He became hungry (Mark 11:12) as all other men do when they go without food for a time. When he hung on the cross, the awful dehydration produced by that inhuman manner of execution wrung from his lips a cry of thirst (John 19:28). After a long walk in

the hot sun, he was weary (John 4:6). He felt the sorrow caused by death, for when he stood at the tomb of Lazarus, he wept (John 11:35). It is a part of genuine humanity to feel a special love for special people. This seems to account for our Lord's feelings for the little family at Bethany where he often found rest and refreshment (John 11:5).

As he moved ever closer to the awful cross experience, his real humanity is clearly seen. When he faced the struggles of Gethsemane, he craved human sympathy and support (Matt 26:36-40). While the agony of the garden experience is bathed with the profoundest mystery, it seems certain that he was recoiling from suffering. His "if it be possible let this cup pass from me" is not a suggestion of rebellion against his Father's will, but is a genuinely human, sinless revulsion to anticipated suffering. Any man avoids suffering if he can. Jesus knew what lay ahead for him on the cross, and in keeping with the humanity with which he was identified, longed for some deliverance from the unspeakable miseries. But there was to be no deliverance, and in full recognition of this, he uttered that noblest of all prayers, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt 26:39).

Students and theologians have for centuries pondered the cry of Jesus, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The implications of the question are deep and weighty, but surely the "Why? . . ." is one of the supreme evidences of the genuine humanity of Jesus. It is most natural for a man in the midst of excruciating pain to ask such a question. It does not reflect rebellion against the will of God, nor does it suggest a lack of knowledge. But it is the outcry of a mind and body and spirit that is being seared by the fires of suffering. While in the case of a sinful man, such a question can be the expression of rebellion or doubt, it is not always so. And in the case of the one in whom is no sin, the cry is the most piercing reminder that the one hanging on that central cross was in no degree deficient in the essential elements of humanity.

### *A human will*

The exercise of intelligent volition is one of the characteristics of humanity. If, therefore, it could be demonstrated that Jesus did not possess a genuine human will, there would be a good argument for the incompleteness of his humanity. But such a demonstration is quite impossible. H. D. McDonald has pointed this out:

It seems impossible to doubt, in the light of His own declarations, that Jesus had a will of His own (Matt. 26:39). It is clear that not only was His will moved by appropriate considerations as is ours (John 7:1-10), but also that it displayed the same activities and operated by the same forces as are common to all men. Throughout His life in the flesh there

were occasions when He had to steel Himself with purpose of will against temptations and to set His face as a flint to the fulfillment of His vocation. What have been called the virtues of the will are particularly exemplified by the steadfastness and persistence with which He continued (Matt. 16:22) and the consistent hostility of His enemies (Matt. 12:14; Mark 11:18).<sup>3</sup>

A reading of the Gospel narratives from the standpoint of human psychology secures the fact that Jesus possessed all those traits which are fundamental requirements of genuine, complete humanity.

### *A human relationship with God*

Jesus on one occasion declared that "men ought always to pray and not to faint." He thus made clear that prayer is a necessary activity of a man who stands in a right relation to God. It is not surprising, therefore, that the same Gospel records which present Jesus as a man in every other respect also emphasize His prayer life. He prayed before making important decisions (Luke 6:12); after passing through a crisis experience (John 6:15, cf. Matt 14:23); in the presence of his disciples (Luke 11:1); before performing miracles (John 11:41-42); in the presence of a mixed crowd (John 12:28-30); in the solitude of Gethsemane (Matt 26:36-44); and in the midst of his agony on the cross (Luke 23:34).

The question has been often asked, "If Jesus was indeed fully God, why did he pray to God?" If the scriptural record can be read candidly, we must insist that Jesus prayed because he *needed* to pray. His praying was not a charade or play-acting; it meant something. He prayed not just to give a model to be copied by his disciples; he prayed because he belonged to that species, man, of whom it is said that they "ought . . . to pray." He sought refuge under the shadow of the Almighty. He renewed his innermost being in the strength of God and found courage for the ordeals of living in his very real confidence in his Father. He prayed because he was a man—fully and genuinely man.

### A PERFECT HUMANITY

There is no question that the portrait of Jesus of Nazareth found in the Gospels is of a strangely solitary figure. There has never been another like him. He stands on the pages of history a unique and seemingly unaccountable person. On one occasion, his disciples asked,

<sup>3</sup>H. D. McDonald, *Jesus—Human and Divine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968) 16.

“What manner of man is this that even the winds and the sea obey him?” (Matt 8:27; Mark 4:41; Luke 8:25). He had just quieted the raging storm on the Sea of Galilee by the spoken word. His companions saw that there was something strange and unique about this one with whom they had cast their lot. For the present discussion we might well place the emphasis in their question on the word “man.” “What manner of *man* is this . . . ?”

The solitariness of Jesus lay not so much in the fact of his real humanity, or in his complete humanity, but in his *perfect* humanity. There was no flaw in him.

The Apostle Peter, who had occasion to know him well, describes him as “the Holy One of God” (John 6:60), and affirms that he “did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth” (1 Pet 2:2). The Apostle John declares that “In him is no sin” (1 John 3:5). The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says that he was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (7:26), that he was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (4:15), and that he “through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish unto God” (9:14). Paul’s testimony is that he “knew no sin” (2 Cor 5:21). The angel Gabriel, in announcing to Mary that she was to become the mother of Jesus, said, “That *holy* thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

There are other witnesses to Christ’s sinlessness. Judas Iscariot (Matt 27:4), Pontius Pilate (Matt 27:24), Pilate’s wife (Matt 27:19), one of the thieves who was crucified with him (Luke 23:41), and the Roman centurion who presided at the death of Jesus (Matt 27:54), all add their testimony to the fact that no sin or wrong marred the character of Jesus.

More important than any of these, however, is the testimony of Jesus himself that he was sinless and therefore perfect in his humanity. “I do always those things that please the Father” (John 8:29). To his enemies, he threw out the challenge, “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” (John 8:46). As he prayed on the night before his death, he said boldly to his Father, “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4). Nowhere in all the accounts of his life and ministry does Jesus ever betray the slightest consciousness of sin.

Often overlooked in this connection is the testimony of the Father to the sinlessness of his Son. As Jesus was leaving the obscurity of his life in Nazareth, he presented himself to John the Baptist at the Jordan to be baptized, thus identifying himself with the people he came to save. As he was coming up out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended upon him in a visible form like a dove, “And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I



am well pleased" (Matt 3:17). As the Father looked back over the first 30 years of Jesus' life, he was pleased. The temptations of the wicked little city of Nazareth, the stresses of growing up in the company of sinful brothers and sisters, and pressures of being the family breadwinner after his foster father died—none of these had left the slightest strain upon his character. The verdict of the holy God in heaven over all those 30 years was, "I am well pleased."

The perfection of Jesus' humanity included his body. We do not know precisely what Jesus looked like, but the evidence is that he was a strong, robust man. Sanders asserts that

Never in human history were physical frame and nervous system called upon to endure such unremitting strain as that imposed on our Lord during the three years of public ministry which climaxed in the cross. Only a physically perfect constitution could have supported such unceasing activity and expenditure of nervous force. When it was recorded on one occasion that "He perceived that virtue had gone out of Him", we are given an indication of the cost at which all of His ministry was carried out. The physical effort alone was prodigious. His recorded journeys during the three years—and there is no reason to believe that all His journeys are included—cover at least two thousand five hundred miles travelled on foot. He was usually thronged with people, and always preaching, teaching, and healing.<sup>4</sup>

He does not seem to have suffered from illness. This is to be expected, for illness is the precursor of death and death finds its ultimate cause in sin (Rom 5:12). There was a certain physical robustness about him which made it possible for him to face throngs of people constantly during the daylight hours and spend long nights in prayer.

It needs to be emphasized repeatedly that sin is not a necessary part of real humanity. Adam was a real man before he sinned. Sin is a Satanic intrusion and a blight upon humanity as God intended it to be. That blight was not found in Jesus Christ. The sinlessness of Jesus declares the absolute perfection of his humanity.

#### THE PROBLEMS RAISED

It is one of the basic presuppositions of this study and one of the great teachings of the NT that Jesus Christ is God. That being so, it follows that he was God during the days of his earthly life, for God cannot change in any of his attributes and remain God.

It is also true that Jesus Christ is man—true man and complete man. When the eternal Son of God became incarnate, he took upon

<sup>4</sup>J. Oswald Sanders, *The Incomparable Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1971) 47.

himself all the necessary characteristics of full humanity. But it was perfect humanity—not even his worst enemies could fault his character (John 8:46). Either a casual or careful reading of the four Gospels leave one with the decided conviction that Jesus of Nazareth was a *man*.

This raises some questions that are certainly theological in nature but very practical in their ramifications. Was the humanity of Jesus perfect because it was joined to deity? Or are the expressions of human feelings, limitations, attitudes, and emotions to be seen as functioning apart from the control of his divine nature? Must his successful resistance of temptation be accounted for by the union of the two natures in one person? If so, then is it fair to command believers to “walk as he walked” (1 John 2:6), when our human nature is not joined to deity?

There were many times when Jesus had to face temptation in addition to the wilderness experience. For thirty years in his Nazareth home he faced the daily decisions and tests of growing from boyhood to adolescence to mature responsibility. He was part of the life of a very real family. He apparently had the responsibilities of family breadwinner after the death of Joseph and faced the challenges in the carpenter’s trade of doing good work, pleasing his customers, handling himself in the rough-and-tumble world of business. Only in this way could he “in all things . . . be made like unto his brethren” (Heb 2:17). The perfection of his actions and reactions of those years is attested by the Father’s voice at the Jordan, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (Matt 3:17).

The four Gospels give us just a fraction of the deeds and words of Jesus during the three and one-half years of ministry. Yet there is abundant evidence that he constantly faced decisions and always made the right decision. Mary apparently wanted him to reveal his full identity at the wedding at Cana; Jesus chose to reject her veiled request (John 2:1-4). On another occasion his family, with apparently good intentions, tried to get him to “slow down” in his labors, fearing that he was working too hard (Mark 3:31-35). He chose to reject their appeal, using the occasion to teach the supremacy of spiritual relationships over family relationships. After he had fed five thousand people with a few loaves and fishes, the crowd sought to take him and proclaim him king (John 6:15). He chose not to entertain for a moment any thoughts of an earthly rule at that time and removed himself from the multitude.

His ministry was marked with the repeated necessity of making choices, and he always made the right choice. Of all men who ever lived, he alone could say, “I do always those things that please the Father” (John 8:29). These choices were very real and involved the

exercise of his will. Was it his human will alone functioning on these occasions or was his human will under the control of the divine nature? If the latter is true, then it is hard to see how Christians, who do not possess deity to control their human wills, can be called upon to look to Christ as their example. But if Jesus Christ did indeed divest himself of the *exercise* of the divine nature and lived among men in real dependence upon his Father and found his strength and wisdom in a pure humanity empowered by the Holy Spirit, then we can understand that his prayers were real prayers, his decisions were real decisions, his actions and reactions were genuinely human, and he is indeed our example in all things.

The portrait of Jesus Christ painted by the four evangelists is the portrait of a man. This brings him very close to us sinners. This man who is so much like us—apart from sin—is attractive. He has experienced our sorrows, our pains, our disappointments and frustrations. And he has overcome them and demonstrated to us how we, too, may overcome. Recently, the author asked a young seminary student how he had come to trust in Christ. He had been a student in a prestigious eastern university. Some Christian friends challenged him to read the Gospels. He said, "I started reading, and somewhere between the beginning of Luke and the end of John, I trusted Him." The compelling winsomeness of the man Christ Jesus has been used by the Holy Spirit to draw multitudes to him, and the efficacy of the death of that great God-Man has saved them eternally. His death was the consummation of a career that was truly human.

The night was long, and the shadows spread  
As far as the eye could see;  
I stretched my hands to a human Christ,  
And He walked through the dark with me!  
Out of the dimness at last we came,  
Our feet on the dawn-warmed sod;  
And I saw by the light of His wondrous eyes  
I walked with the Son of God.

H. W. BEECHER