

Systematic Theology II: The Person of Christ I

This morning we are starting a new block for Sunday School. Welcome to Systematic Theology II! I am covering for Pastor Michael – he’s been busy lately! We are going to start with looking at the person of Christ. To open up I want to read a paragraph from the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith that will direct our content today. This is Chapter 8, paragraph 2:

“The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father’s glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, 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 Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her: and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures 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.” (Chapter 8, par. 2)

In a broad brushstroke sense I have a very simple outline. First, we will look at the humanity of Christ, and that will cover most of our time. Second, we will briefly discuss the deity of Christ.

I. ***The Humanity of Christ***

The biblical teaching about Jesus Christ is that He was truly and fully God and truly and fully man in one person, and will continue on as the God-Man forever. The theological term for this is the hypostatic union. The Eternal Son of God in the Incarnation, took on human flesh – took on a human nature. But this did not alter His divine nature. He added the human nature without disruption of His divinity. We read of this in **John 1:14**:

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

The Incarnation truly is a wonder of wonders! The mystery of how this is possible is beyond our comprehension. However, it is absolutely critical for our understanding of how Jesus could save us. An assessment of this from Ligonier concludes that:

“If Christ is not truly human, He cannot atone for our sin, for only a human being can atone for the sin of other human beings. If Christ is not truly God, the atonement He offers does not have sufficient value to be applied to all the elect. If Christ is not the God-man, there is no salvation.”

And so it is critical that we lay down this foundation for who Christ is.

a. Virgin Birth

The first aspect of Christ’s humanity we will consider is the virgin birth. Scripture teaches that Jesus was conceived by a work of the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb, without the aid of a human father.

Two passages which point to this are Matthew 1:18-21 and Luke 1:30-37. Let’s read just the first passage in Matthew.

Read Matthew 1:18-21

It is clearly stated in verse 18 (and also verse 25) that she had conceived before her and Joseph had “come together” in sexual union. She was a virgin. In both verse 18 and 20, we are told that the conception was “from the Holy Spirit”.

➤ **Why Does it Matter?**

I’d like to draw your attention to just two ways the doctrine of the virgin birth really matters:

- 1) *It shows that salvation must ultimately come from the Lord.* There was no way that Mary could conjure up what the Lord did through her. God had promised since all the way back in Genesis 3 in the “Proto Evangelium” that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent’s head. God always fulfills His promises! He brought it about in a way that no human being could boast about. The incarnation, the virgin birth, is truly a work of God’s omniscience and omnipotence. Salvation is completely a work of God, and that includes the supernatural way that the Son came into this world.
- 2) *It made the joining of full humanity and full deity in one person possible.* God chose this exact way to send His Son into the world. A natural birth from a human mother makes it easier to recognize Jesus’ humanity. And the fact that he did not have a human father, but the Holy Spirit supernaturally worked to conceive Him and place Him in Mary’s womb shows His deity. This is not just a man, He is God. But He is also very much still a man.

The doctrine of the virgin birth tends to be one that I take for granted. It’s kind of like, “yeah, that happened”, and then I move on to the life and ministry of Jesus. But stop and think about it. A woman conceived a baby apart from any sexual act. That doesn’t happen. And there was no super technology, no scientifically placed embryo. The Holy Spirit “overshadowed” Mary.

This doctrine is truly of the supernatural variety. It has been the case throughout church history for people to deny the validity of this doctrine because it just seems too impossible. But Scripture clearly teaches it. We should be those who trust in the utter omnipotence and wisdom of God. He has revealed His Word to be the truth. Our entire faith is built upon the supernatural. We believe in the Resurrection of Christ. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15 that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not raised and we are still in our sins and our faith is in vain. We believe in the miracles done by Jesus and the apostles which served to authenticate the message of the gospel, by which

believing we are saved. Those who deny the doctrine of the virgin birth simply confess that they do not believe in the supernatural God of the Bible.

b. Jesus Had a Human Body

As we've said, we can't help but think about the virgin birth without marveling at the wonder of the Incarnation. The Lord of All, Creator and Sustainer of the universe, took on a human nature and human body. And He didn't just come into the world as a fully grown human male – zapped down from heaven. He came through the very human process of childbirth. He called Mary's womb his home for 9 months. He was surrounded by amniotic fluid – nourished and growing within the womb. He was born with tiny hands, skin, teeth, etc. What a condescension! He grew up from an infant to a boy to a man.

➤ **Human Experience**

We read in Scripture of the human experience Jesus went through. He felt hunger (we see that in Matthew 4 that “he was hungry” after fasting forty days); he got thirsty (at the cross he cried out “I thirst!”); he got tired (he was asleep in the boat, most likely from exhaustion after teaching and traveling, during the storm in Matthew 8). He experienced weakness. A couple examples:

- Temptation in Matthew 4: after fasting and resisting the devil, Jesus was physically at the end of himself. It had been 40 days – that is a breaking point for the human body. He must have been physically shriveling. We are told in verse 11 of Matthew 4 that angels came and ministered to Him. Most likely to care for and nourish Him until He had enough strength to continue His ministry.
- Crucifixion: The ultimate expression of human weakness came at the cross. First, Simon of Cyrene was recruited to help Jesus carry the cross because Jesus was so physically weak from being beaten. Then, Jesus went through the human limitation of death at the cross. His body ceased to function and life left Him. This is the weakness of humanity.

➤ Resurrection Body

Even when Jesus rose from the dead, he still maintained a human body (although made perfect). This is important to understand. We read of the Ascension in Scripture in the gospel of Luke and in Acts. And Luke has recorded this event to stress the fact that Jesus still has a human body. Lets turn to Luke 24 and read a few verses starting in verse 36.

Read Luke 24:36-43

We notice that Jesus' resurrection body is able to do things that all human beings can't. He just appears in the midst of the disciples while they are talking, out of nowhere. And they are surprised, caught off guard. But then Jesus emphasizes human characteristics of Himself to the disciples. Verse 39:

"see my hands and feet" – the marks of the nails identify Jesus as having the same body as when He was crucified.

"Touch me and see" – He had a real body that could be touched and felt

"A spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have"

Jesus then purposefully asks for something to eat and eats some broiled fish before them to show that He indeed is not a spirit, but has a real human body that can chew, swallow, and digest.

It is in this body that we continue to read in Luke:

Read Luke 24:50-51

and

Read Acts 1:9

We learn that Christ's body was like ours before the resurrection, and after (in a perfected state). He ascended into heaven in this human body. This is a precursor of our resurrection one day, that will likewise be in a glorified real bodily form.

And so, Christ exists in heaven as the eternal God-Man. He still has a human body, and intercedes for us.

c. Jesus had a Human Mind

As a boy Jesus had to learn and grow just like everyone else. **Luke 2:52** says:

"And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man."

He learned how to count, and eat, read and write, and no doubt learned the carpenter's trade from Joseph. He also grew in knowledge of His Heavenly Father and in public speaking. This ordinary learning process was part of His human nature.

Also, He was limited in His human nature regarding omniscience. We read in **Mark 13:32** about the coming of the Son of Man; Jesus says:

"But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

d. Jesus had a Human Soul and Emotions

- He (as the Suffering Servant) is described in Isaiah 53:3 as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." In anticipation of the cross and accomplishing redemption by absorbing the wrath of God in our stead, Jesus expressed in **John 12:27**:

"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour?" But for this purpose I have come to this hour."

- In the Garden of Gethsemane, He tells his disciples that “my soul is very sorrowful, even to death.”
- He wept in sorrow at the death of Lazarus in **John 11:35**
- He could be filled with wonder and astonishment, and so he marveled at the Centurion’s faith in **Matthew 8:10**.
- He was filled with anger at the Pharisees on multiple occasions and also cleansed the temple, driving out moneychangers with a whip, and overturned tables in zeal for the honor of the Father in John 2.

e. **Sinlessness**

So far we have looked at many ways that Jesus was just like us in his humanity. But there is one major way in which he was different. This is the fact that He was without sin and never committed sin during his entire life on earth.

There are some striking statements of Jesus that are recorded in John’s gospel which point to this reality.

- In **John 8:12** Jesus declares that he is “the light of the world.” This points to himself as the source of truth/revelation, but also the source of moral purity. Light as opposed to the darkness of sin.
- In **John 8:29** Jesus says *“He who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.”* Always. This implies that he lives in such a way that the Father is never displeased. Sin would bring God’s displeasure, and so the absence of sin accounts for the Father’s continual pleasure in Jesus.
- In **John 15:10** Jesus, instructing his disciples, says: *“If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.”* There is a

seriousness to the word “kept” here. To keep the commandments is to fully obey. There are those who have said that generally throughout scripture. And there is even a whole 176 verse psalm (Psalm 119) that prays to that end. But listen for example to how that psalm ends (**Psalm 119:176**):

“I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant, for I do not forget your commandments.”

As much as we try to “keep” the commandments, we still stray like sheep. Jesus is the only One who could confidently say He kept them.

In addition to the Gospel of John the Epistles often point even more explicitly to the sinless nature of Jesus. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:20-21,

Read 1 Corinthians 5:20-21

The writer to the Hebrews, in referencing Jesus’ temptation, says in **Hebrews 4:15**:

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

According to Hebrews 7:26-28:

Read Hebrews 7:26-28

Peter directly affirms Christ’s sinlessness in **1 Peter 2:22** by saying:

“He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.”

And John as well in **1 John 3:5** saying of Christ:

“You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.”

The doctrine of the sinlessness of Christ is found throughout the New Testament! And these scriptures are just a few examples.

We should also note that Christ faced temptation throughout his life (not only during the forty days of fasting). He faced this temptation in his humanity, submitting to the Father in perfect obedience, able to sympathize with our weaknesses because of what he went through. He not only died in our place, but obeyed in our place. Again and again and again. – securing both a perfect righteousness and thus a perfect sacrifice.

Before we leave this topic; some have argued that because Jesus never sinned, it takes away from his humanity. That he was not truly human – because sin is so much a part of human experience. However, they miss the massive impact of the Fall. Humanity was not created with sin as a part of them. Our life experience now is not how it is supposed to be. We live in an abnormal state. Adam and Eve were righteous and unstained before the first sin and they were truly human. And one day we will be made perfect and sin no more. And though we will have glorified bodies, we will still be human. So, this argument doesn't stick.

f. Why was Jesus' Full Humanity Necessary?

To maintain that Jesus was fully human is fundamental to the Christian faith. An early heresy called *docetism* maintained that Jesus was not truly human – his existence being either an illusion or of a celestial nature, rather than human. The beginnings of this heresy existed in the Apostle John's day and he reminded God's people to "test the spirits" - to be discerning. He writes this in 1 John 4:1-3 –

Read 1 John 4:1-3

We should really believe that this matters.

I want to quickly wrap up this section on Christ's humanity by looking at four reasons why Jesus' humanity matters. We have touched on some of these, so this will be a recap.

- 1) For Representative Obedience: As we said earlier, Jesus not only died but obeyed in our place. His perfect active obedience, as a man, was counted to us. Just as Adam was our representative head in sin, and his sin cursed us all – made us guilty; so Jesus is the representative head in righteousness for all His people, and his perfect sinless life is a gift for us all – showing that we have met the standard of perfection in Him. See Romans 5:18-19 –

Read Romans 5:18-19

Jesus had to be a real man in order to obey in our place. It was not just God obeying His own Law, but Christ, the man, submitted to the Father perfectly, as our representative.

- 2) To be a Substitute Sacrifice: Christ had to be a man in order to die in our place as our Substitute and pay the penalty that we deserved because of our sin. Let's look at Hebrews 2:14-17 –

Read Hebrews 2:14-17

Christ didn't become an angel, because he didn't come to save angels. He "had to" be made like us – to be a human – in order to make propitiation for our sins. The class might get into this a little more when we cover the Atonement in a few weeks.

- 3) To Be the Pattern for Our Redeemed Bodies: As we've looked at earlier, Christ rose as a man with a resurrected, yet still human, body. He is the first-fruits of our resurrection. We will be raised embodied in flesh, and yet glorified in the same way He is.
- 4) To Sympathize as a High Priest: Two verses from Hebrews make this crystal clear:

Read Hebrews 2:18 and Hebrews 4:15-16

As a man, Jesus experienced what we go through in this life – in a way he could not have only as God. He faced the temptations. And because He faced them as a man, and can sympathize with us in our struggles and fight against temptation, we are told that we can come to Him for grace, mercy, and help in our time of need.

Lastly, as we've marveled at already. Jesus is the eternal God-Man. Not only *was* he a man, but his divine nature and human nature have been eternally and permanently joined. He is both the eternal Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God as well as Jesus, the man, who is the Savior of His people!

II. The Deity of Christ

While it's important to maintain that Jesus was fully human, it's equally fundamental to establish that He was fully divine. We've already mentioned the Incarnation. This refers to the act of the eternal Son of God taking on human flesh.

a. Direct Scriptural Claims to Deity

1. The Word "God" used of Christ

There is one clear OT reference to Jesus as God in Isaiah's prophecy of Immanuel in **Isaiah 9:6** –

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

There are also *at least* seven NT passages which clearly reference Jesus as God. I will list them all and will read just a couple. These passages are:

John 1:1; 1:18; 20:28 / Romans 9:5 / Titus 2:13 / Hebrews 1:8 / 2 Peter 1:1

Two I'd like to just pick out and read are John 20:28 and Romans 9:5

In John we have Thomas' exclamation after seeing the risen Christ (**John 20:28**):

"Thomas answered him (Jesus), "My Lord and my God!"

Paul, talking about the Israelites, in **Romans 9:5**

"To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen."

2. "I AM"

In addition to the use of the word God used for Christ we have other strong claims to deity in the Bible.

One such example is found in John 8. In dialogue with the Jews Jesus mentions in verse 56 that Abraham rejoiced to see His day. "He saw it and was glad." Then lets pick up in verse 57:

Read John 8:57-59

Why does Jesus say what He says? And why do the people get so angry? It might seem like it would have made more sense for Jesus to say, "before Abraham was, I was." This would point to His eternity. That He existed before Abraham. However, He says "before Abraham was, I am." Most primarily Jesus uses "I am" to refer to how God revealed Himself to Moses in Exodus 3:13-14 –

Read Exodus 3:13-14

Jesus took upon himself the title of I Am, claiming equality with God. He makes an even deeper point about His eternity with this statement. Not only does he say he has existed a very long time, longer than Abraham. But by saying I am, He is saying as the Eternal Son of God there is no time which He is bound by. He always has been and always will be. He simply is. Self-existent. This is something unique to God. Jesus claims deity.

And the Jews understand this to be what He is saying. Which is why there is such a visceral and violent reaction.

3. “The Word”

While John 1:1 refers to Jesus using the word God, John also calls him the Word. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. And the Word was God.” It seems John would evoke two responses from his readers with this statement. The Jews would hear “in the beginning” and hear “Word” and “God” and think back to Genesis about the way that creation was spoken into existence by the word of God. **Psalm 33:8** says,

“By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.”

Gentile readers would hear “Word” or in greek “logos” and those who knew something of Greek philosophy would know that logos pointed to “the organizing or unifying principle of the universe, that held everything together” – their understanding of the divine principle. John draws both Jews and Gentiles in by saying that Jesus is both Creator and the One who holds the world together. He is God.

4. “Son of Man”

Jesus uses the title “the Son of Man” for himself *84 times* in the gospels. The background of this term comes from the OT book of Daniel. There is a vision recorded in Daniel 7:13-14,

Read Daniel 7:13-14

This “son of man” is a mighty ruler over all things forever. When Jesus is on trial before the high priests leading up to his crucifixion, he references this vision. Matthew 26:63-65,

Read Matthew 26:63-65

They knew what he was claiming and referencing by saying he was the “son of man coming on the clouds of heaven.” And just like when Jesus told the Jews, He was the “I Am”, there is again a violent reaction – the tearing of robes, shouts of blasphemy, and a sentence of death. Jesus made clear what He meant when He called himself the Son of Man – the Ruler over all.

5. “Son of God”

I won’t spend too much time on this point other than to say that this title is used for Jesus most especially in John but also other places in the NT to refer to Jesus as the Eternal Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, who is equal with God. Hebrews 1:1-3 really brings this home:

Read Hebrews 1:1-3

b. Attributes of Deity

While we’ve looked at passages where the Bible explicitly claims that Jesus is divine, there are also attributes of deity that we see in the life of Jesus that we will look at now. Let’s consider a few.

1. Omnipotence

The many miracles of Jesus point to the omnipotence in his divine nature. They were expressions of his power and glory. He changed water into wine, multiplied a boy’s lunch, stilled violent stormy winds and waves, and raised the dead. And we are meant to see in these things, not just a person working by the Holy Spirit to do amazing things, but to see the divine nature of Jesus himself.

Two examples of this are in John 2 and Matthew 8. After Jesus turns the water into wine we read in John 2:11,

“This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.”

And after Jesus calms the winds and waves we read in Matthew 8:27,

“And the men marveled, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even the winds and sea obey him?”

We are made to focus on the person of Jesus Himself, not the Holy Spirit. These miracles were the omnipotence and authority of the Son of God on display.

2. Omniscience

Throughout the gospel of John we see Jesus’ omniscience on display. One example is Jesus saying he saw Nathaniel under the fig tree while not there with him. Nathaniel’s response is telling, he cries out, *“Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”* He is taken aback by the all seeing eye and knowledge of Jesus.

In addition Jesus is shown to know the hearts of men, which even a person who knows tons of information can never boast of truly knowing.

John 2:24-25 // *“he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.”*

John 6:64 // *“for Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.”*

3. Sovereignty

Jesus had an authority that no OT prophet ever did. They would all say, “thus says the Lord” but Jesus began his statements with “I say unto you”. He did not speak simply on behalf of God, but with the authority of God Himself. He has the authority to forgive sins. We read in Mark 2:5-7,

Read Mark 2:5-7

This is the sovereign prerogative of God alone. In addition he has authority to reveal the Father to whomever he chooses, as we see in **Matthew 11:27**,

“All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

This is absolute sovereignty.

4. Worthy of Worship

The last characteristic I want to point out is that Jesus is shown to be worthy of worship, something that is reserved for God alone. When people bowed before angels, they were always told, “do not worship me, I am merely a creature, a servant. Worship God!” But Jesus does not resist praise. We read this glorious passage in Philippians 2:9-11 after hearing about Christ’s condescension:

Read Philippians 2:9-11

And hear the worship of heaven that we are shown in Revelation. Angelic beings and living creatures cry out:

Read Revelation 5:9-14

Christ is given unrestrained worship, showing His equality with the Father.

c. Why was Jesus’ Full Deity Necessary?

Three reasons:

- 1) As a song lyric says: “Only God can take the wrath of God and survive.” Only Jesus as fully God could bear the full weight of the penalty for the sin of all those who would ever believe in him. A mere human being would have been unable to endure and take it.

- 2) To show that salvation truly is of the Lord. God alone saves. It was accomplished by a fully divine person.
- 3) A mere human being could not be the one mediator between God and man. Jesus must be fully divine to reconcile us to God.

END

There's a lot more that could be said! But this is a taste of the person of Christ. This glorious eternal God-Man. I hope this makes us start to get lost in amazement. And there is more to come in part 2 next week.