

**DOCTRINE OF CHRIST, PART 3**  
**(SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2009)**

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**SCRIPTURE READING:** PSALM 40; COLOSSIANS 1:9-23

**INTRODUCTION**

J. I. Packer has written of our Lord Jesus Christ:

The divine Son became a Jew; the Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, unable to do more than lie and stare and wriggle and make noises, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed the more you think about the incarnation of God the Son the more staggering it gets. As we continue our study of the Doctrine of Christ it is important to emphasize that although Scripture has given us all that we need to know and understand this does not mean that we will come to understand all that we might like to know.

In Genesis 2 we read about Adam's creation on the sixth day. "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." Later in Genesis 2 we read that Eve was created from Adam's side. There is then no doubt that in amazing and special way our first parents were created. Can we explain in detail how our Triune God brought about this creation? No. But this lack of knowing how God did something doesn't mean that we have to doubt in the least what He did. I also can't fully explain how a Boeing 747 which when

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<sup>1</sup> John Blanchard, ed., *The Complete Gathered Gold: a Treasury of Quotations for Christians* (Accordance electronic ed. New York: Evangelical Press, 2006), n.p.

fully loaded weights over 900,000 pounds can take off and fly at nearly 600 mph.<sup>2</sup>

There are still questions about how the two natures of Jesus Christ, both human and divine, function together perfectly. Robert Reymond asks, “How can one person be both omniscient and yet finite in knowledge at the same time?”<sup>3</sup> Various solutions have been proposed though Reymond suggests that we probably will never discover the true solution. But the fact that we can’t answer all possible questions does not mean that we have to in anyway doubt what Scripture teaches nor that we should stop asking questions. It is important to give attention to our subject so that hopefully we can better understand the many passages of Scripture which speak of the two natures of Christ and also so that we will be able to recognize the many heresies and false teachings which are still very dangerous.

This morning we will focus on the third section of the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 8. You will find it printed in the center portion of your bulletins. Please follow as I read it.

3. The Lord Jesus, in his **human nature** thus **united** to the **divine**, was **sanctified**, and **anointed** with the **Holy Spirit**, above measure, having in him all the **treasures** of **wisdom** and **knowledge**; in whom it pleased the Father that all **fullness** should dwell; to the end that, being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth, he might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a **mediator**, and **surety**. Which **office** he took not unto himself, but was thereunto called by his **Father**, who put all **power** and

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<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boeing\\_747-400](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boeing_747-400)

<sup>3</sup> Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 619.

**judgment** into his hand, and gave him **commandment** to execute the same.

From this second section we will consider three main points:

1. The Holy Spirit and Human Nature of Jesus Christ
2. The Fullness of God Dwelling in Christ
3. The Calling and Power Given to Jesus Christ

## **1. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND HUMAN NATURE OF JESUS CHRIST**

Last week we emphasized the pre-existence of God the Son and His equality with the Father, being of the same substance as the Father. We then gave attention to the incarnation, where God the Son took on a human nature, including a human body, without any subtraction of His deity. Christ is one person. He is one self-conscious, self-asserting and acting subject. Christ from eternity has been one person. But Christ does have two natures. Nature means the power and qualities that make up a being. Christ has a **divine** nature. As such He has the total power of God in Him. Christ also has a human nature, which came from His incarnation. In his human nature he has the same limitations that we do in terms of knowledge, feeling, and understanding. His human body was just like our human body, because it is part of His human nature.<sup>4</sup>

Cyril of Alexandria nearly 1,600 years ago in a letter to the heretic Nestorius wrote:

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<sup>4</sup> A. A. Hodge, *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 141.

“[The eternal Word] subjected himself to birth for us, and came forth man from a woman, without casting off that which he was; but although he assumed flesh and blood, he remained what he was, God in essence and in truth. Neither do we say that his flesh was changed into the nature of divinity, nor that the ineffable nature of the Word of God was laid aside for the nature of flesh; for he is unchanged and absolutely unchangeable, being the same always, according to the Scriptures. For although visible and a child in swaddling clothes, and even in the bosom of his Virgin Mother, he filled all creation as God, and was a fellow-ruler with him who begat him, for the Godhead is without quantity and dimension, and cannot have limits.”<sup>5</sup>

Cyril makes a very important point. The divine nature of Jesus Christ did not turn His human nature into anything divine. And yet the human nature of Christ was fully prepared and tested for the great work Jesus Christ was called to do.

Jesus in His human nature did grow and learn. We read in **Luke 2:40**, And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. Remember also from Luke 2 the story of Jesus when he went to the temple as a boy of twelve years of age. Jesus after the Feast of the Passover stayed behind in Jerusalem, without Mary and Joseph realizing it. Jesus spent three days in the temple area, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. Luke states that all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. As I emphasized last week, Jesus wasn't just a great actor pretending to have a truly and fully human nature. And I think in this story, we see Jesus' true humanity. Jesus in His human nature did learn and study. The grace of God was upon Jesus. And yet as we noted last week, we also see alongside Jesus'

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<sup>5</sup> From “The Epistle of Cyril to Nestorius with the XII Anathematisms,” cited by Reymond, 619.

humanity His full awareness that He was God the Son. When Mary and Joseph asked Jesus about why He was not with them, Jesus said in response, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?”

Luke closes the chapter stating, **Luke 2:51** Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was **subject** to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. **52** And Jesus **increased** in **wisdom** and **stature**, and in favor with God and men.

The third section of this chapter of the Westminster Confession focuses on the human nature of Jesus Christ and importantly mentions the anointing of the Holy Spirit in preparation for His work. All four gospels tell the great story of Jesus’ baptism and the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus Christ in a special and powerful way. Now Jesus Christ never stopped being God the Son in eternal and perfect relationship with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus Christ at His baptism is understood in terms of the human nature of Jesus. We also realize the absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus Christ in His humanity in order for Him to fully carry out the work that He was given.

We read in **John 3:34**, For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.

A Jewish commentary on Leviticus states, “The Holy Spirit rested on the prophets by measure.”<sup>6</sup> And so John in this verse is making a contrast. The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus Christ without any limit, unlike any of the

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<sup>6</sup> Leviticus Rabbah 15:2. Cited by W. Hall Harris, ed., *The NET Bible Notes* (1st, Accordance electronic ed. Richardson: Biblical Studies Press, 2005), n.p.

prophets. This anointing by the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ was of course not needed for His salvation but it was needed for our salvation.<sup>7</sup> Immediately after the story of Jesus' baptism, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all state that the Holy Spirit then led or drove Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan for forty days.<sup>8</sup> It was through the working of the Holy Spirit that Jesus as the God-man was then able to fully accomplish our salvation. It was through the Holy Spirit's perfect working that Jesus was the true Messiah or Christ.

So although we distinguish between the divine and human nature of Christ and understand that He truly was human like we are, we also understand that Christ's human nature was given a position of great honor. And one very important application of this is again a testimony to the value of God's creation of us. Our physical bodies are important because God has created them and also because Jesus Christ had a truly human body. Jesus' body was raised and glorified and we look forward to the day when our bodies, affected by the curse, will also be raised to new life and glorified.

**Under this first point** I would also like to briefly discuss the language of the third section here which states, "to the end that, being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth, he might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a **mediator**, and **surety**." Here also the WCF places again emphasis upon the importance of Jesus' human nature. The language that the Confession uses comes from several NT passages.

**Heb. 7:26** For such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens;

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<sup>7</sup> G. I. Williamson, *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 76.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13.

Here we briefly pause to consider that Jesus Christ, although fully human, did everything perfectly. Every word He spoke was righteous. Every thought he had was pure. Every moment of His earthly life was used properly without waste. Every action was pleasing to God the Father. And it is very right that we place emphasis on this perfection of Jesus Christ. We are called also to be like Him in being willing to suffer and give our lives on behalf of others. We follow in the path of Christ, **and yet we must never think** that Jesus came to merely set us an example. His absolutely perfect life was necessary so that He could offer the perfect sacrifice required to pay for your sin and to remove God's wrath from coming upon you.

The other passage the Confession quotes is John 1:14.

**John 1:14** And 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.

There are many things that could be emphasized in looking at this verse. Here I emphasize just two points briefly. In the person of Jesus Christ, the God-man, we see that which causes us to be filled with awe and reverence. Although Jesus did humble himself in taking a the form of a servant, we still see in Him the glory of God. We also have in the person of Jesus Christ the greatest expression of God's covenant love for His people. We see in Christ's incarnation and birth what Moses wanted to see, the glory of God, and then what God so powerfully showed Him, His covenant love. In the two natures of Christ, divine and human, we then have the fullness of God's eternal plan of salvation.

Finally under this first point, let us briefly consider the word surety. We have already discussed that Jesus is our Mediator. He is the one who has come to us so that we might find true peace with God. We also read that Jesus is a surety.

**Heb. 7:22** by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant.

The word surety is not used often anymore. A more familiar word is guarantee. This relates both to Jesus Christ's divine and human natures. Jesus Christ being true God, our Great Priest was able to satisfy fully the wrath of God. Jesus as our Great Priest offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice. Jesus has given us in the Lord's Supper the symbols of bread and wine to be also that assurance and guarantee that in Him we have true salvation, the blessing of a better covenant than even what God's people of old were able to know and see.

## **2. THE FULLNESS OF GOD DWELLING IN CHRIST**

Much of this third section on Christ the Mediator consists of different passages of Scripture which have been grouped together. One verse the Confession quotes here is Colossians 1:19.

**Col. 1:19** For it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell,

We could quote another similar verse from **Colossians 2:9**. "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Both of these verses were an encouragement to the Church in Colossae that they find their hope and



security in Jesus Christ alone rather than fearing other supernatural powers or looking to the wisdom of men and women.<sup>9</sup>

There are some interpretive challenges in both verses, especially Col. 1:19, that we don't have time to discuss. You might remember some of our discussion from Sunday School, but since I have forgotten much of what I earlier said, I don't blame you if you also have forgotten our study in these passages.

We could make many points on both of these verses but in light of our main context relating to the human and divine natures of Christ, we can emphasize one central point. In the person of Jesus Christ, in the perfect harmony of his human and divine natures, we are able to see all the attributes and activities of God.<sup>10</sup> We don't need to turn to pictures and images or the speculation of philosophy to know what God is really like. We instead have the inspired record of Scripture. We can mediate and study the life of Jesus found in the Gospels. We can read the other portions of both the Old and the New Testament.

And this also means that our Triune God has not evolved or changed over time from a God of Wrath and Anger in the OT to a God of Peace and Total Love in the NT. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.<sup>11</sup> This means that our Triune God doesn't not evolve or change, though we do understand that God has revealed Himself in different ways over time culminating in the revelation of Jesus Christ as Hebrews 1:1-2 tell us.

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<sup>9</sup> *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (ed. D. A Carson et al.; Accordance electronic ed. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 1266.

<sup>10</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians–Philemon* (WBC 44; Accordance/Thomas Nelson Electronic ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 53.

<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 13:8

So again the point to emphasize is this. The incarnation was in no way for God the Son a lessening of His deity. When God the Son took on human flesh He represented in His human and divine natures the fullness of the Godhead bodily. We don't need to turn to mysticism to experience God. We trust and follow our Lord and Savior because we are assured of all that we need in Him.

### **3. THE CALLING AND POWER GIVEN TO JESUS CHRIST**

The final part of section three reads: "Which **office** he took not unto himself, but was thereunto called by his **Father**, who put all **power** and **judgment** into his hand, and gave him **commandment** to execute the same."

Again the confession here is bringing together portions from different Scripture passages, the first being Hebrews 5:4-5.

**Heb. 5:4** And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron *was*. **5** So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, *but it was* He who said to Him: "*You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.*"

When we study the Doctrine of Christ we also must consider the doctrine of the Trinity. We believe that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are fully equal in power and glory. The Son is not less than the Father because He is the Son. But there is in our Triune God relationships and order. The Westminster Confession of Faith summarizes a great deal of theology in saying: "the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is

eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.”<sup>12</sup>

Robert Letham has writes, “The Son’s obedience is not inferiority, any more than the invisibility and anonymity of the Holy Spirit make him of less significance than the Son or the Father. To see it as a matter of superiority and inferiority is to view the Holy Trinity according to human analogies.”<sup>13</sup>

So there is no conflict in speaking of the calling that Jesus Christ was given by the Father and emphasizing the equality of the Father and Son.

**John 5:30** I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.

Earlier in John 5 we also read:

**22** For the **Father** judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, **23** that all should honor the Son just as they honor the **Father**. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the **Father** who sent Him.

We should also not be troubled by passages like **John 14:28** You have heard Me say to you, “I am going away and coming *back* to you.’ If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the **Father**,’ for My **Father** is greater than I.”

So appropriately Scripture and our confession speak of the calling that Jesus Christ has been given as our Prophet, Priest, and King. This calling by God the Father is to be seen not as a difficult doctrinal issue for us but one of

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<sup>12</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 2, Section 3, “Of God, and of the Holy Trinity.”

<sup>13</sup> Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 339.

comfort and encouragement. For Christ perfectly fulfilled the calling He was given. Because of His perfect work as our Messiah and Savior He has been given all power and judgment and the ability to execute such power and judgment.

And it is for this reason that we find comfort in the midst of what seems to us to be chaos and confusion. Is the world in its present state of strife and confusion because Jesus Christ is incapable of ruling over all things in Heaven and earth? **Of course not!** Rather we understand that the chaos and confusion of our world come from the judgment that Christ is bringing as He works out His perfect rule over all men and women.

And Jesus Christ does not only rule over all the world but He also rules in a perfect way over all those who have been given to Him. The power of Christ is to be emphasized as being both over His enemies and His people. You can find your perfect rest in Him, knowing that He is the God-man, with full power to rule and perfect understanding of all you are facing.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Robert Letham in his book on the Trinity has also written, “The Son’s relation to the Father is the model for our relation to the Father. What is His by nature is ours by grace.”<sup>14</sup>

We study the Doctrine of Christ so that then better understand our own relationship to our Heavenly Father.

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<sup>14</sup> Letham, 398.

**Luke 22:41** And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, **42** saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." **43** Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him.

Obedience – Prayer – Submission

### **Benediction – Ephesians 3:20**

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.