



The Word Became Flesh

John 1:14

A STUDY OF THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRIST'S DEITY AND HERESIES THAT DISTORT HIS PERSON.

REFORMED SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY (VOLUME 2) - JOEL R. BEEKE AND PAUL M. SMALLEY

UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED, ALL SCRIPTURE TAKEN FROM THE NEW KING JAMES VERSION. COPYRIGHT © 1982 BY THOMAS NELSON, INC. USED BY PERMISSION. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

In the Beginning

- ▶ John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ To say that Jesus is truly God and truly man is a central tenant of the Christian faith. To deny the deity of Christ, or His humanity is to deny Who and what He is – the God Man. These denials separate one from saving faith. Without believing these things about Christ one CANNOT be saved.

Christ's Deity

- ▶ Christ's deity is indispensable for faith in Christ. Saving faith requires us to trust Christ just as we trust the Father (John 14:1; Isa. 45:22). Our faith in God is categorically different from our faith in men or any other creature, for we depend upon His infinite Lordship and love (Psa. 31:14-19). Denial of Christ's deity leads people away from wholehearted dependence upon Christ and into self-reliance.
- ▶ Christ's deity is indispensable for divine self-revelation. Christ is "the Word" who is "God" (John 1:1, 18; 14:9; Col. 1:15). Since Christ is God, He is indeed revelation of God, for Jesus Christ is the Son of the Father, and as such He is the revelation He brings."
- ▶ God is the communicator – Jesus is the communication.

Christ's Deity

- ▶ Christ's deity is indispensable for effectual salvation. If Christ is not God, then He cannot save His people from their sins. The Savior had to accomplish "everlasting righteousness" for His people (Dan. 9:24), even the "righteousness of God" (Rom. 3:21-22; Isa. 51:5-8). He had to sovereignly lay down His life and take it up again (John 10:17-18) in obedience to the Father. Only God can do these things.
- ▶ Christ's deity is indispensable for God's Kingdom among men. The only one who can bring God's kingdom into reality is God Himself.

Christ's Deity

- ▶ Christ's deity is indispensable for evangelical reverence – the childlike, joyful fear of God by faith in the gospel (mal. 3:16-17; 1 Peter 1:14-19). Only by the gospel of the God-man can we be awestruck at the Son's sovereign glory, aware of His terrifying wrath, and hidden safely in His grace, so that we “rejoice with trembling” (Psa. 2:10-12).

Christ's Deity

- ▶ Christ's deity is indispensable for Christian discipleship. Those who claim to be disciples of Jesus but reject His full divinity do not understand the claims Jesus laid on His followers. He said, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." (Matt. 10:37). He claims supreme affection from His followers, claiming the throne of their hearts. This is right and good only if Christ is the God who rightly demands the total love of our whole being (Deut. 6:4-5).

Christ's Deity

- ▶ Christ's deity is indispensable for Trinitarian spirituality. Christian prayer and public worship are profoundly shaped by the doctrine of the Trinity. Christians enjoy access to the Father in the Spirit through the Son (Eph. 2:18). His mediatorial work of salvation depends upon His deity. Saints receive divine grace and direct their worship to Christ (Rev. 1:4-5; 5:9) and removing the deity of Christ negates all that is distinctly Christian about our faith, worship, and living.

Christ's Deity

- ▶ Christ's deity is indispensable for evangelistic love. Those who deny Christ's deity can only be a witness of their religious party, for if Christ is not God then Christianity is no different than any other religion in the world. True Christian zeal for missions springs from the dual conviction that "whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13) and that this "Lord" is specifically "the Lord Jesus" (Rom. 10:9).
- ▶ Christ's deity is indispensable for biblical fidelity. This is not a secondary doctrine in the Holy Scriptures, but a great theme revealed in the Old Testament and pervasive in the New Testament. Those who fail to see the divine glory of Christ read the Bible with a veil over their hearts (2 Cor. 3:14-15; 4:4).

The Incarnation

- ▶ The Person of Jesus Christ is unique in who He is and what He means to us. Though being in the form of God, He took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men in order to carry out His mission from the Father (Phil. 2:5-11).
- ▶ “God’s eternal Son, who is, and continueth true and eternal God, took upon Him the very nature of man, of the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary, by the operation of the Holy Ghost; that He might also be the true seed of David, like unto His brethren in all things, sin excepted.” – Heidelberg Catechism

The Incarnation

- ▶ The word incarnation means “being or becoming flesh.”
- ▶ In the incarnation, One Divine Person, the “Word” – that is, Jesus Christ, the Son of God – became incarnate as a man. Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) quipped that all Three Divine Persons acted in the incarnation like three sisters making a garment that only one of them wore.
- ▶ The Word became flesh, that is human, mortal man.

The Incarnation

- ▶ God Dwelt Among Us – made His tabernacle, or pitched His tent in our midst.
- ▶ Christ is the true tabernacle where God's glory dwells with His people. His humble humanity concealed the unspeakable majesty of His deity, except for His brief transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-9). The glory of God overwhelms human nature and cannot be contained/concealed in any created temple (1 Kings 8:11, 27; Isa. 66:1-2), but in Christ all the infinite glory of God dwells in harmonious personal union with one finite man (Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:3).

The Incarnation

- ▶ Although the Word became flesh, He remains fully God, for in His flesh His divine glory was manifested to His disciples (John 1:14). The glory of Christ was His own divine glory as the Son, “glory as of the only begotten of the Father”, His eternal greatness and majesty with the Father (John 17:5). If He had not remained God when He became a man, then He would have had no glory to show them.
- ▶ This glory was beheld as being full of grace and truth – steadfast love and faithfulness.

The Incarnation

- ▶ We conclude that Christ is the God-man (Theanthropos). The incarnation was not an act of subtraction in which the Son cast off His deity, but one of addition in which He embraced our humanity.
- ▶ Augustine said, “God’s Son, assuming humanity without destroying His divinity, established and founded this faith, that there might be a way for man to man’s God through a God-man.”

Heresies Regarding Christ's Person

- ▶ 1. Christ is another god than the Father. Taught by the gnostic Valentinus, this promotes the idea that Christ is one divine spirit being among many emanated by the incomprehensible Father. This was taken further to teach that each Person of the Trinity has a distinct essence and nature. This error is called Tritheism and is taught today by Mormonism.
- ▶ This contradicts the teaching of the Bible that God is One God (Deut. 4:39; Isa. 45:22) and that the Father and the Son are one in essence and power (John 10:29-30).

Heresies Regarding Christ's Person

- ▶ 2. Christ is the same Person as the Father. Sabellius taught that in Jesus, the Father Himself had come and suffered for us. Christ is another mode in which God appears and works. This error, called Modalistic Monarchism. Servetus also taught this error and it is held today by many modern Pentecostals.
- ▶ The Scripture show the falsehood of this doctrine by revealing the personal distinction and relationship between the Father and the Son (Matt. 3:17; 14:23). The obedience of the Son to the Father in accomplishing salvation requires that they be distinct Persons.

Heresies Regarding Christ's Person

- ▶ 3. Christ is one person, merely a man. The Ebionites were Judaizers who believed in One Creator God, practiced Mosaic Law, and rejected the epistles of Paul. They viewed Jesus as a righteous man anointed by God, but not Himself God. They denied the Virgin Birth. Islam holds a similar view of Christ.
- ▶ This error is refuted by the weighty Biblical evidence that Christ is God. The Father could not have decreed that all men and angels will glorify Jesus as Lord, the name above all names, if He were a mere man (Phil. 2:9-11).

Heresies Regarding Christ's Person

- ▶ 4. Christ is one divine person, but not human. In the gnostic error of Docetism (to have an appearance), taught by people like Marcion, Christ was said to appear human but to actually be a spirit being that neither had a body nor experienced suffering.
- ▶ The Scriptures teach clearly that Christ is a true man (1 Tim. 2:5) and that He was born, ate and drank, was persecuted, was crucified, died, and was raised from the dead.

Heresies Regarding Christ's Person

- ▶ 5. Jesus and Christ are two persons: one human, one divine. Gnostic teachers said that Jesus was a man and that Christ was the spirit being that descended upon Him at His baptism and departed from Him before His crucifixion. We find this taught today in the followers of Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science.
- ▶ On the contrary, the Bible teaches that Jesus has been Christ the Lord from His birth (Luke 2:11) and that "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3).

Heresies Regarding Christ's Person

- ▶ 6. Christ is one person, a man adopted and glorified by God. Artemon, Theodotus of Byzantium, and Paul of Samosata taught that Jesus was not the incarnation of the heavenly Son of God, but a human being adopted by God at His baptism and exalted to divine lordship at His resurrection. This error is called Adoptionism and was continued in the 16th Century by the Socinians and is still taught today.
- ▶ The Bible teaches us about Christ's divine pre-existence (John 1:1; 8:58).

Heresies Regarding Christ's Person

- ▶ 7. Christ is one person, the supernatural Son created by the Father. Arius, perhaps as he learned from Lucian of Antioch, taught that Christ is not the eternal and almighty God, but a Son created by God before the creation of the world. The Jehovah's Witnesses teach this error.
- ▶ It is contradicted by the Bible's ascription of God's names, attributes, and actions to Christ (Heb. 1:10-12). We also note that God says He will not give His glory to another (Isa. 45:21-22; 48:11) and yet the Father and Son share the same glory (John 17:5).

Heresies Regarding Christ's Person

- ▶ 8. Jesus and the Son are two persons: one human, one divine. This is the error of Nestorianism, so-called because Nestorius objected to calling Mary the “God-bearer.” Cyril of Alexandria rebuked him for dividing Christ in two.
- ▶ Scripture presents Christ as one Person, God and man, who is addressed in the singular, personal “thou” (Mark 1:11).

Heresies Regarding Christ's Person

- ▶ 9. Christ is one person with one divine-human nature. Eutyches over-reacted to Nestorianism and taught that Christ's human nature was deified in union with His deity. This error is called Monophysitism for asserting that Jesus has only one nature. The human nature mingles with the divine nature.
- ▶ The many Scriptures that attest to Jesus having human attributes related to His body and soul (Luke 2:52) show Monophysitism to be false. Leo the Great wrote, "each of the natures retains its proper character without defect; and as the form of God does not take away from the form of a servant, so the form of a servant does not impair the form of God."

Our Confession

- ▶ The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith – Chapter 8.2:
- ▶ The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being true and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of the same substance and equal with Him; - Who made the world, and Who upholds and governs all things which He has made, - did, when the fullness of time had come, take upon Himself man's nature, with all its essential properties and common infirmities, with the exception of sin. - He was 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, so that He was born to a woman from the tribe of Judah, a descendant of Abraham and David, in accordance with the Scriptures. - Thus two whole, perfect and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; - So that the Lord Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man, yet He is one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.