

Beloved in the Lord,

One day, long ago, as Jesus walked with His disciples, He asked them a question. That question is a question that each generation of Christians must properly answer. Christ asked the disciples, *Who do you say that I am?* That first generation of Christians was also confronted with that question. John writes this letter that we call the second letter of John confronting the lady, that is the Church, with the same problem, *Who do you say that Christ is.* For the answer that Peter gave, *You are the Christ* is the rock upon which Christ would build a Church so strong that the gates of Hades cannot prevail against it. To the disciples were given the keys of the kingdom now given to the Church. One of those keys was the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And there can be no preaching of Christ if the Church has no proper confession of Christ.

Perhaps it seems a bit redundant for the Belgic Confession to spend so many words on the two natures of Jesus Christ. Articles 10, 18, and now 19 all speak about Jesus as true God and true man. But as we have said, each generation must again answer that question. In the first generation of the Church, false prophets had come in denying Christ's full humanity or Christ's full divinity. In the case of the second letter, it was denied that Christ as God dwelled in a human body, it only appeared that He had a human body. That body was, they said, like a ghost body, for how could a holy God dwell in a sinful human body? The spiritual was good, and the material was evil, they said, and the two can not be united. Confronted with the question of who Christ, is they turned to their human philosophies, which John urges the Church to reject.

Has relativism, which so marks our age and badgers the Church, made it impossible for the Church to stand firm on the truth of the full humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ? A catalogue came in the mail this week, advertising no less than five different books about the person of Jesus. One of these books is an answer, they say, to another view of Jesus' substitutionary work that will make Christians and Jews better able to work together. The other books take a less than Biblical stance on the person of Christ. And when we realize that the publisher of this book once printed some of the best Reformed material in the English language, and still sells some of these books, it is disheartening to see how far those who call themselves Christians have gone to make Christianity more pleasing to everyone else. In the 19th century, German theologians declared that no one could confess a divine and human Jesus, virgin birth or a resurrection because we are thinking people, we have discovered science. By science, we find out the truth. If it cannot be scientifically explained, then it didn't happen, they said. They rewrote the doctrine of Christ, making Him a mere man, who, like Mohammed or Confucius,

was the revolutionary founder of a new religious movement. Christ's eternity, they said, is to be found in the fact that we still read and study His words today.

The impact has been man centred preaching that is little more than lectures about moral living. Preaching does little more than teach us what Jesus says about being a good husband, about taking care of the poor, about denying yourself and social justice. This preaching has little to say about Jesus Christ, who stands between God and man, who made peace between man and God through the shedding of His blood.

The Belgic Confession gives us the expression of what the Bible teaches about Jesus Christ that we might faithfully answer the question, ***Who do you say that I am?*** I bring you God's Word under the theme:

Christ as True God Became True Man That He Might Die For Us.

1. Fully Two 2. Fully One 3. Full Salvation

Fully Two: There came into the early Church those false teachers who were teaching the people that Jesus Christ could not be fully God and fully man. It, of course, defies human logic they taught. And what's more, they believed that every human had a basically good and immortal soul locked into a dying and evil body. The soul was the prisoner of the body. That false teaching led them to come up with all kinds of descriptions for Jesus Christ. They could not, on the one hand, denied that He had come to earth and at least appeared to be human. And so they concocted a new story. In fact, over the next four and half centuries, the Church battled about this issue. The Apostles, Nicene Creed and Athanasian Creeds were all written in this context. And each time, the Church confirmed that they would not let false teachers into the house. Each time the Church confirmed what the Bible taught.

So John wrote in the first chapter of His gospel, ***In the beginning was the Word and the word was God and the Word was with God. He was in the beginning with God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten Son of the Father full of grace and truth.*** The Bible teaches us that the Holy Spirit came upon the virgin Mary and she conceived. Later Jesus would ask the Pharisees, ***How then does David in the Spirit call Him Lord, saying The LORD said to my Lord sit at My right hand till I make your enemies a footstool? If David then calls Him Lord, how is He His Son?*** None was able to answer him until Peter in the Spirit answers that question on the first Pentecost Day sermon. Peter preached, ***Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has***

made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. He was the one promised to David, Son of Man, and the self-proclaimed Son of God.

Jesus had said that He was God and said that He was man. Jesus had said in Matthew 26, **For you have the poor always, but Me you do not have always** but at the end of that gospel in Chapter 28 Jesus said, **Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.** On the surface of that, it seems to be contradictory. But in Matthew 26, Jesus speaks of Himself in human terms, He as every man would die. In Matthew 28, He speaks concerning His divinity by which He laid down His life and took it up again that He would be with His Church forever.

Can we explain these things? No, we cannot, can we? But John doesn't ask the lady (the Church) to explain these things but to hold onto these things. The lady is not given a rational explanation for these things but is to preach these things as the truth! There was no relativism here. There was no call to water down this doctrine so that the Greek philosophers might feel just a little more comfortable. For that was to invite destruction, it was to change the nature of the Church and the gospel that she preached.

Our answer to the question, **Who do you say that I am?** has deep meaning for the Church and her witness to the world. But even more, it has meaning for her own salvation. For as the Confession tells us, Christ had to be VERY GOD and VERY MAN ("very" meaning truly) so that He might defeat death. He had to be man because a man had to pay the price of sin. He had to become man so that He might die. But He had to be God for only as God could He be righteous. He had to be God that He might defeat death and hell and withstand the eternal wrath of God upon the sin of fallen humanity. He had to be man that His blood might flow. He had to be God that He could take up life and gain and by His Spirit give us new life. He had to be God and man because God the Father demanded this, and He willingly did this for the sake of the sheep of God's fold!

This is the gospel of love that the first of John's epistles of love, teaches us. Genuine love is to stand confirmed in the truth of these things. It is to stand before God with a child-like faith that does not question how. Christ, as God and man, allows us to know God in grace and truth and grace and truth will enable us to know ourselves honestly. And yet the Christ as God and man is still only one person.

Truly One We confess that the person of the Son is inseparable united and connected with the human nature so that there are not two sons of God, but two natures united in one single person. As John puts it, Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Never do we read that Christ

speaks of Himself as we or us as God does of Himself in Genesis 1 and 2, for instance. Christ is one person of two natures. That truth causes problems for a person who wants to spend time trying to figure it all out. The false prophets had said that Christ was only God and appeared to be a human. But in the centuries that followed, there came all kinds of explanations that were supposed to make this doctrine of Christ easier to accept.

Finally, in AD 451, the Church met at the council of Chalcedon, formulating the creed of Chalcedon. The Creed of Chalcedon says *the nature of Christ is unmingled, immutable, indivisible, inseparable, two natures being by no means obliterated by their union but rather the peculiarity being preserved being united in one person*. Thus we confess that Christ was fully human and fully God even at his death! He was never two persons in one but simply one person.

It is a mystery, but for us who confess it, it is a beautiful mystery! But for many, this mystery fills them with doubt. It cannot be denied. They say it is what the Bible teaches, but the Bible they say is asking us to accept the unacceptable. What are we to make of this?

John Calvin and Charles Hodge make a good point in this regard. They point out that God made man in such a way that we have part of the answer we seek. God created man but forming his body out of the dust. He then breathed life into the man. Ever since, we speak of a living man or woman as having a body or soul. The body we understand more easily because we can see it hear it and touch it. But what exactly is the soul? And we never speak about a person being two people, that is a body and a soul, but we speak of one person. The mind thinks, and the finger points. The finger cannot think, and the mind cannot point, but the two work together, don't they. Can we explain this? Biologists have looked long and hard for the answer to life, but life is a mystery. A soul without the body is dead, and the body without the soul is dead. Death is the separation of the soul from the body: two natures yet one person. And there is hardly a person who will deny this reality. Though unexplainable, it is acceptable to most people simply because they believe it to be true without rational proof.

Why then is it so difficult to believe that in Christ, God came to earth as a man? Is it not to deny that salvation is in Christ alone? Didn't the Jews long ago make that mistake? Seeing only the carpenter, they refused to see His divinity, and they rejected Him as the Christ. In this way, many have decided that Christ was a good and wise man, but He was not the Saviour, and He was certainly not the way to the Father.

But we confess this to be true. We hold on to this, and we, with the Apostle John, understand that we must hold onto this truth for confessing Jesus as the Christ is the foundation upon which Christ builds His Church. It is the keystone of the gospel we preach— our Christmas, Passion Friday and Easter joy! True God, true man. He is our morning star! The light came into the world in Christ. We hold onto this truth that we may receive the full reward.

Full Salvation The Confession ends with these wonderful words, *Wherefore we Confess that He is very God and very man; very God by His power to conquer death; and very man that He might die for us according to the infirmity of His flesh.*

Here is the crux of the matter. Our confession has everything to do with that full reward that John speaks about. For in the one man Jesus Christ God and man meet. Christ could stand on behalf of man before God and as God could reveal God to man. Christ can now go into the holy of holies as a man who has defeated sin and death and hell, and as God, He can impute His righteousness to us! He then is our mediator. He now makes it possible for us to enter into the presence of God with confidence and assurance.

Again we must see the importance of His being very God and very man. If Christ was, in fact, God and man and he died as a man. As a mere man, He would not have been able to defeat death, and if only God, then He could not have died. If He was a mixture of the divine and the human or a two-fold person, then He only in part could have died, and that would not have been enough for Him to save us from our sin. Thus Christ humiliated Himself, putting aside His Godly attributes, creation, eternity and infinity so that He could become a human, who could be only at one place at one time. And though He showed His divine power, He never let it overwhelm the people He came into contact with. For if Christ had not done this, no man could have stood before His glory, which was the glory of the Father. Thus Christ, as Paul teaches us in Philippians 2, emptied Himself of the divine glory and made Himself of no reputation so that the sin we had placed upon our heads might be taken by Him and removed from the sight of God.

Conclusion Until Christ comes again to put every enemy under His feet; the question will come again. *Who do you say that I am?* Each generation, in fact, every one confesses something about Christ. Either one believes that Christ is the Son of God, God with us, the Word who became flesh, true God and true man, is our only hope for salvation and the way back to God or one confesses that He is not. We cannot have Christ on our terms. We must believe what He, Jesus the Word, has revealed to us. Let us hold on that we might receive our full rewards. For the Apostle is firm in his writing. We ought not to let anyone who brings heresy

into the house, that is, we are not to allow such a person to gain a foothold in the Church, and we may not give him a base of operation. Quickly we must make our Confession of Jesus Christ that what Christ is building in us may not be ripped apart by the evil one.

Who do you say that he is? Stand firm in your belief that Christ had to be both God and man so that He might conquer death for us by dying. Praise God that the Word became flesh. Praise God that you confess this and believe it. For as Christ said to Peter, ***flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven.*** Amen.