



Week 10 - The Person of Christ

How is Jesus fully God and fully man, yet one person?

We may summarize the biblical teaching about the person of Christ as follows: Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man in one person, and will be so forever.

The scriptural material supporting this definition is extensive.

We have in the past weeks discussed the deity of Christ. Now let's look at the humanity of Christ, and then we will show how Jesus' deity and humanity are united in the one person of Christ.

The Humanity of Christ

I. Virgin Birth.

Scripture clearly asserts that Jesus was conceived in the womb of his mother Mary by a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit and without a human father.

Matthew 1: 18 "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit" 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

Then we read that Joseph "did as the angel of the Lord commanded him;

Matthew 1: 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

The same fact is affirmed in Luke's gospel, where we read about the appearance of the angel Gabriel to Mary. After the angel had told her that she would bear a son.

Luke 1: 34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.

The doctrinal importance of the virgin birth is seen in at least three areas.

1. It shows that salvation ultimately must come from the Lord. Just as God had promised that the "seed" of the woman (Gen. 3: 15) would ultimately destroy the serpent, so God brought it about by his own power, not through mere human effort.

The virgin birth of Christ is an unmistakable reminder that salvation can never come through human effort, but must be the work of God himself.

2. The virgin birth made possible the uniting of full deity and full humanity in one person.

This was the means God used to send his Son into the world as a man.

John 3: 16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Galatians 4: 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,

If we think for a moment of other possible ways in which Christ might have come to the earth, none of them would so clearly unite humanity and deity in one person.

It probably would have been possible for God to create Jesus as a complete human being in heaven and send him to descend from heaven to earth without the benefit of any human parent.

But then it would have been very hard for us to see how Jesus could be fully human as we are, nor would he be a part of the human race that physically descended from Adam.

On the other hand, it probably would have been possible for God to have Jesus come into the world with two human parents, both a father and a mother, and with his full divine nature miraculously united to his human nature at some point early in his life.

But then it would have been hard for us to understand how Jesus was fully God, since his origin was like ours in every way.

3. The virgin birth also makes possible Christ's true humanity without inherited sin.

All human beings have inherited legal guilt and a corrupt moral nature from their first father, Adam (this is sometimes called "inherited sin" or "original sin").

[We will discuss this when we talk about sin more completely.]

But the fact that Jesus did not have a human father means that the line of descent from Adam is partially interrupted. Jesus did not descend from Adam in exactly the same way in which every other human being has descended from Adam.

This helps us to understand why the legal guilt and moral corruption that belongs to all other human beings did not belong to Christ.¹

II. Human Weaknesses and Limitations

Jesus Had a Human Body:

The fact that Jesus had a human body just like our human bodies is seen in many passages of Scripture.

- He was born just as all human babies are born (Luke 2: 7).
- He grew through childhood to adulthood just as other children grow. (Luke 2: 40).
- He increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man (Luke 2: 52).
- Jesus became tired just as we do (John 4: 6).
- He became thirsty (John 19: 28).
- He Hungered (Matt. 4: 2).
- He was at times physically weak (Matt. 4: 11), (Luke 23: 26).
- The culmination of Jesus' limitations in terms of his human body is seen when he died on the cross (Luke 23: 46).
- His human body ceased to have life in it and ceased to function, just as ours does when we die.

His Human Body Was Also Supernatural

Jesus also rose from the dead in a physical, human body, though one that was made perfect and was no longer subject to weakness, disease, or death.

He demonstrates repeatedly to his disciples that he does have a real physical body: he says,

Luke 24: 39 See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”

In this same human body (though a resurrection body that was made perfect), Jesus also ascended into heaven.

John 16: 28 I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.”

The way in which Jesus ascended up to heaven was calculated to demonstrate the continuity between his existence in a physical body here on earth and his continuing existence in that body in heaven.

Just a few verses after Jesus had told them:

Luke 24: 39 See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”

We read:

Luke 24: 50 Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. 51 While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.

And in Acts:

Acts 1: 9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

All of these verses taken together show that, as far as Jesus' human body is concerned, it was like ours in every respect before his resurrection, and after his resurrection it was still a human body with “flesh and bones,” but made perfect, the kind of body that we will have when Christ returns and we are raised from the dead as well.

Jesus continues to exist in that human body in heaven, as the ascension is designed to teach.

Jesus Had A Human Mind:

Luke 2: 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature[a] and in favor with God and man.

The fact that Jesus “increased in wisdom” says that he went through a learning process just as all other children do.

He learned how to eat, how to talk, how to read and write, and how to be obedient to his parents.

Hebrews 5: 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

This ordinary learning process was part of the genuine humanity of Christ.

Yet if Jesus never sinned, how could he “learn obedience”?

Apparently as Jesus grew toward maturity he, like all other human children, was able to take on more and more responsibility.

The older he became the more demands his father and mother could place on him in terms of obedience, and the more difficult the tasks that his heavenly Father could assign to him to carry out in the strength of his human nature.

Jesus’ human moral ability, his ability to obey under more and more difficult circumstances, increased.

Yet in all this he never once sinned.

Hebrews 4: 15 ... but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

The fact that he faced temptation means that he had a genuine human nature that could be tempted. For Scripture clearly tells us that:

James 1: 13 ... for God cannot be tempted with evil ...

We also see that Jesus had a human mind like ours when he speaks of the day on which he will return to earth:

Mark 13: 32 “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Jesus Had a Human Soul and Human Emotions:

Just before his crucifixion, Jesus said:

John 12: 27 “Now is my soul troubled”...

John writes just a little later:

John 13: 21 After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified...

In both verses the word troubled represents the Greek term *tarassō*, a word that is often used of people when they are anxious or suddenly very surprised by danger.

Moreover, before Jesus’ crucifixion, as he realized the suffering he would face, he said, *Matt. 26: 38 “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.”*

Jesus had a full range of human emotions .

- He “marveled” at the faith of the centurion (Matt. 8: 10).
- He wept with sorrow at the death of Lazarus (John 11: 35).
- And he prayed with a heart full of emotion (Heb. 5: 7).

People Near Jesus Saw Him As Only a Man:

Matthew reports an amazing incident in the middle of Jesus’ ministry.

Matthew 4:23 And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. 24 So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them.

But when he came to his own village of Nazareth, the people who had known him for many years did not receive him:

Matt. 13: 53 And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, 54 and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, “Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? 55 Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? 56 And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” 57 And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household.” 58 And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.

This passage indicates that those people who knew Jesus best, the neighbors with whom he had lived and worked for thirty years, saw him as no more than an ordinary man

A good man, no doubt, fair and kind and truthful, but certainly not a prophet of God who could work miracles and certainly not God himself in the flesh.

For the first thirty years of his life Jesus lived a human life that was so ordinary that the people of Nazareth who knew him best were amazed that he could teach with authority and work miracles.

They knew him. He was one of them. He was “the carpenter’s son” (Matt. 13: 55)

So ordinary that they could ask:

Matthew 13: 56 ... Where then did this man get all these things?”

And John tells us:

John 7:5 For not even his brothers believed in him.

Was Jesus fully human? He was so fully human that even those who lived and worked with him for thirty years, even those brothers who grew up in his own household, did not realize that he was anything more than another very good human being.

They apparently had no idea that he was God come in the flesh.

III. Sinlessness.

Some have objected that if Jesus did not sin, then he was not truly human, for all humans sin.

But those making that objection simply fail to realize that human beings are now in an abnormal situation.

God did not create us sinful, but holy and righteous.

Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before they sinned were truly human, and we now, though human, do not match the pattern that God intends for us when our full, sinless humanity is restored.

Jesus Always obeyed the Father

John 8: 29 And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."

At the end of his life, Jesus could say:

John 15: 10 ...just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

It is significant that when Jesus was put on trial before Pilate, in spite of the accusations of the Jews, Pilate could only conclude:

John 18: 38 ... he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him.

When Paul speaks of Jesus coming to live as a man he is careful not to say that he took on "sinful flesh," but rather says that:

Romans 8: 3 ... By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin ...

And he refers to Jesus as:

2 Cor. 5: 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Other references to Christ's sinlessness:

Heb. 7: 26, 1 Peter 1: 19, 1 Peter 2: 22, 1 Peter 3: 18, 1 John 2: 1, 1 John 3: 5

IV. Could Jesus Have Sinned?

The question is sometimes raised, “Was it possible for Christ to have sinned?”

Some people argue for the impeccability of Christ, in which the word impeccable means “not able to sin.”

Were the temptations real then?

Many theologians have pointed out that only he who successfully resists a temptation to the end most fully feels the force of that temptation.

Just as a champion weightlifter who successfully lifts and holds over head the heaviest weight in the contest feels the force of it more fully than one who attempts to lift it and drops it, so any Christian who has successfully faced a temptation to the end knows that that is far more difficult than giving in to it at once.

So it was with Jesus: every temptation he faced, he faced to the end, and triumphed over it.

The temptations were real, even though he did not give in to them. In fact, they were most real because he did not give in to them.

What then do we say about the fact that “God cannot be tempted with evil” (James 1: 13)?

It seems that this is one of a number of things that we must affirm to be true of Jesus’ divine nature but not of his human nature. His divine nature could not be tempted with evil, but his human nature could be tempted and was clearly tempted.

V. Why Was Jesus’ Full Humanity Necessary?

When John wrote his first epistle, a heretical teaching was circulating in the church to the effect that Jesus was not a man. This heresy became known as docetism.

So serious was this denial of truth about Christ, that John could say it was a doctrine of the antichrist:

1 John 4: 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

The apostle John understood that to deny Jesus’ true humanity was to deny something at the very heart of Christianity, so that no one who denied that Jesus had come in the flesh was sent from God.

As we look through the New Testament, we see several reasons why Jesus had to be fully man if he was going to be the Messiah and earn our salvation. We can list seven of those reasons here.

For Representative Obedience:

Jesus was our representative and obeyed for us where Adam had failed and disobeyed.

We see this in the parallels between Jesus' temptation (Luke 4: 1– 13) and the time of testing for Adam and Eve in the garden (Gen. 2:15– 3: 7).

It is also clearly reflected in Paul's discussion of the parallels between Adam and Christ, in Adam's disobedience and Christ's obedience:

Romans 5: 18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

This is why Paul can call Christ "the last Adam" (1 Cor. 15: 45) and can call Adam the "first man" and Christ the "second man" (1 Cor. 15: 47).

Jesus had to be a man in order to be our representative and obey in our place.

To Be a Substitute Sacrifice:

If Jesus had not been a man, he could not have died in our place and paid the penalty that was due to us.

Hebrews 2: 16 For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. 17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Jesus had to become a man, not an angel, because God was concerned with saving men, not with saving angels.

But to do this he "had to" be made like us in every way, so that he might become "the propitiation" for us, the sacrifice that is an acceptable substitute for us.

Unless Christ was fully man, he could not have died to pay the penalty for man's sins. He could not have been a substitute sacrifice for us.

To Be the One Mediator Between God and Men:

Because we were alienated from God by sin, we needed someone to come between God and ourselves and bring us back to him.

We needed a mediator who could represent us to God and who could represent God to us.

There is only one person who has ever fulfilled that requirement:

1 Timothy 2: 5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

To Fulfill God's Original Purpose for Man to Rule Over Creation:

God put mankind on the earth to subdue it and rule over it as God's representatives.

But man did not fulfill that purpose, for he instead fell into sin.

The author of Hebrews realizes that God intended everything to be in subjection to man, but he admits:

Hebrews 2: 8 ... Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.

Then when Jesus came as a man, he was able to obey God and thereby have the right to rule over creation as a man, thus fulfilling God's original purpose in putting man on the earth.

Hebrews 2: 9 But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor ...

Matthew 28: 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Ephesians 1: 22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,

Indeed, we shall someday reign with him on his throne:

Revelation 3: 21 The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Jesus had to be a man in order to fulfill God's original purpose that man rule over his creation.

To Be Our Example and Pattern in Life:

1 John 2: 6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

1 John 3: 2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

2 Corinthians 3: 18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Romans 8: 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

1 Peter 2: 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

Hebrews 12: 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

Philippians 3: 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

Our goal should be to be like Christ all our days, up to the point of death, and to die with unflinching obedience to God, with strong trust in him, and with love and forgiveness to others.

Jesus had to become a man like us in order to live as our example and pattern in life.

To Be the Pattern for Our Redeemed Bodies:

Paul tells us that when Jesus rose from the dead he rose in a new body that was:

1 Corinthians 15: 42 So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. 43 It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

This new resurrection body that Jesus had when he rose from the dead is the pattern for what our bodies will be like when we are raised from the dead

1 Corinthians 15: 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

1 Corinthians 15: 49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Jesus had to be raised as a man in order to be the “first-born from the dead”

Colossians 1: 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

To Sympathize As High Priest:

Hebrews 2: 18 For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

If Jesus had not been a man, he would not have been able to know by experience what we go through in our temptations and struggles in this life.

But because he has lived as a man, he is able to sympathize more fully with us in our experiences.

VI. Jesus Will Be a Man Forever.

Jesus did not give up his human nature after his death and resurrection.

He appeared to his disciples as a man after the resurrection, even with the scars of the nail prints in his hands (John 20: 25– 27).

He had “flesh and bones” (Luke 24: 39) and ate food (Luke 24: 41– 42).

Later, when he was talking with his disciples, he was taken up into heaven , still in his resurrected human body, and two angels promised that he would return in the same way. (Acts 1: 11)

Still later, Stephen gazed into heaven and saw Jesus as “the Son of man standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7: 56).

Jesus also appeared to Saul on the Damascus Road and said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9: 5)

In John’s vision in Revelation , Jesus still appears as “one like a son of man” (Rev. 1: 13), though he is filled with great glory and power, and his appearance causes John to fall at his feet in awe (Rev. 1: 13– 17).

Moreover, Jesus will continue forever in his offices as prophet, priest, and king, all of them carried out by virtue of the fact that he is both God and man forever.

All of these texts indicate that Jesus did not temporarily become man, but that his divine nature was permanently united to his human nature, and he lives forever not just as the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, but also as Jesus, the man who was born of Mary, and as Christ, the Messiah and Savior of his people. Jesus will remain fully God and fully man, yet one person, forever.²

Things to Mull:

1. Why is it so important that Jesus was a man in human form?
2. Why would it be difficult for people to accept that Jesus was God if Joseph had been his biological father?
3. How can the truth that Jesus was “tempted in every way, yet without sin” help you in the midst of temptation?
4. What are the most difficult situations in your life right now? Can you think of any similar situations that Jesus might have faced?
5. Put yourself in the place of Jesus’ earthly family. How would you have responded to His traveling ministry? How would you have reacted when you found out He was God!?!?
6. Describe what the disciples must have felt as they came to a growing realization of who Jesus actually was?
7. Knowing that Jesus was “fully human” in all of his thoughts, actions, and deeds (and was without sin). How will that help you live your day to day life?

Bibliography

1. Grudem, Wayne (2009-05-18). Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine (pp. 529-530). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.
2. Grudem, Wayne (2009-05-18). Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine (pp. 532-543). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

