

The Hypostatic Union

“By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory,” 1 Timothy 3:16.

The context of the passage above teaches the church that God Himself at one time became a man. In English His name is Jesus. “Christ” is not a last name. As Al Mohler once said, there were no mailboxes in First Century Palestine that read: “Christ, Jesus.” The title “Christ” means the “Anointed One” and is a theological designation. God became a man, an anointed man we call “the Christ.” This is called the *incarnation*. Of all the miracles God ever performed I would say that this is the pinnacle. The creation of the cosmos in its unfathomable enormity, the revival of Lazarus, Jairus’ daughter, or the widow’s son from Nain, the turning of water to wine with a word, calming the seas with another, parting the Red Sea, or even the Resurrection of Christ itself; of all these things there is nothing more amazing than the fact that God became a man, born of a woman. He was a real man who was also God. How this could be a reality is a stunning thing to search out in the holy writings. How can the infinite triune God, without losing a shred of His nature set aside His glory and become a human being? What a compliment to humanity that He became one of us! Jesus Christ is God Himself and has always been. He is in no way a lesser being than God the Father or God the Holy Spirit. When Jesus walked among us on earth He was not altogether like us. He was born of the Holy Spirit through a virgin and, though a man, was not accounted the sin of Adam like the rest of us. He neither committed nor inherited sin. He was not of Adam’s line on His Father’s side, only His mother’s side. He was and is 100% God and 100% man. Nothing else can accord with all of Scripture’s teaching about Him. The church must remember both Jesus’ human and divine natures to see Him correctly in the Bible. This letter is about upholding both.

In every age, the church has had to counter the opposition of Satan’s isms. In our day it’s no different. Satan is today writing all sorts of new religions, mashing together old truths in new ways, and creating in the hearts of the unregenerate new gods by the dozen. All manner of worldly ideas are daily whispered by seducing spirits into the ears of many as truths from God. Some of these views end up taking shape as mere heterodoxy; others, unfortunately, are heretical. Many non-Christian views today still oppose the Deity of Jesus. They do this in varying ways. By denying the Son’s Deity (saying He’s less than God) they deny both the Father and the Son, 1 John 2:23. Other non-Christian views deny His humanity. This is usually tandem with the denial of His Deity, but not in all instances. The denial of Jesus’ humanity is as equally discrediting to any system of theology that does so as a denial of His Deity. You must have the right Jesus. The Biblical Jesus is the God-man.

It is interesting that in the first few centuries of the Christian church, many of the faith’s

first challenges came against Christ's humanity rather than His Deity. This can be equally damaging to the Christian religion. This period of time is sometimes referred to as the era of the "Early Church." It could be summed up roughly as the first two to three or perhaps even four hundred years of Christendom following the death of the Apostles or the end of the "Apostolic church." It was around the end of this time period that God decided it was time to address the issue of the divine and human natures of the Christ and resolve it in the church. Long before, as early as the time of the Apostles, ideas like Gnosticism began to challenge whether or not Jesus was actually a man at all. Gnosticism, a very early heresy, said that Jesus merely *appeared* to be human, and used various Bible verses, Philippians 2:7-8, etc., to buttress its view. Gnosticism taught that Jesus was something like an embodied spirit, but not really a man. Such teaching goes back to the first century and likely prompted John to write things like 1 John 4:1-6 in opposition. The fact that Jesus must be a literal human being is important. We see this in John's opposition to the false teachers/teachings of his day. John treated this as essential doctrine and something that separated true preachers from antichrists. We take the idea of the necessity of understanding Jesus' nature rightly to another proper setting as we address Christ's Deity. John, of course, taught this as well in many places, John 1:1, et al. Jesus became a man, born under the Law as a Jew, in order to make righteousness available for other men. He represented humanity perfectly as the first Adam had failed to do long before. Jesus never sinned. This brings honor to what mankind was created as. It also brings hope for what mankind will one day be again. He was never guilty of wrong. He honored the Law by His life as a man. He lived 33 plus years under the Law to honor the Father and His Law, Isaiah 42:21. This was to make His life a worthy sacrifice for sin. His life of obedience to the Law is often called His "active" obedience. This distinguishes His work from the "passive" obedience in which He suffered and died at the hands of wicked men in accordance with the ordained will of the Father, Acts 4:27-28. He pursued the Law of Moses from birth to death. He obeyed the letter of the Law outwardly and the heart of it inwardly. He was given to parents who obeyed it and was Himself circumcised on the eighth day of His life according to it, Luke 2:21-23. Christians are saved because of Jesus' life of obedience to the Law that they themselves could not keep. It is Jesus' life, death and Resurrection that saves sinners. He lived over 30 years as a man to accomplish all this. Jesus came and represented all of His elect as a man to purchase them out from under the Law, Colossians 2:14. He must be a human being to rightly represent human beings. Jesus, as a man, was, "tempted in all things as we are..." Hebrews 4:15. Hebrews teaches us that God wanted to make Him a Great High Priest that, though perfect, could still sympathize with those for whom He was to die, Hebrews 2:17. This is important and establishes the humanity of Jesus. Jesus was tempted as a man. He must therefore be a man. As God, however, He cannot be tempted, James 1:13. God *cannot* be tempted by sin. The Son was tempted. God's Son the God-man was both unable and able to be tempted. This leads many scholars to speak of the "impeccable" nature of Christ. An impeccable nature simply means that He *could* not sin because He was God by nature. This is a difficult truth to articulate, but not too tough to see I think. Though I agree with it, it in no way removes temptation from Jesus. It was not written to. Jesus was truly tempted with sin; it's just that He

was of a better nature than to ever commit it. The Bible literally entitles Satan as “tempter” in Matthew 4:3. That’s exactly what he was to Jesus. Jesus came as a man in order to be able to sympathize with mankind. He came to be tempted. The fact that He is literally a man is very important to this aspect of His ministry as a Great High Priest. Jesus was a real man, a descendant of Adam on His mother’s side, Luke 3:23, 38. As we see even from Scripture, there have always been challenges to this. There was never a time when “everyone” got it. Challenges to truth like those we see today are not new. A man once said, “All news is just old news happening to new people.” Do you know and worship Jesus? Do you delight in God your Savior? I pray so.

Around the end of the early church Nestorianism showed up later and came and went with its dualist distortion on the single person of Christ. Apollinarianism denied the human nature of Jesus and faded out. There was Docetism, Gnosticism, Eutychianism, Arianism, Sabellianism/Monarchianism of multiple flavors, and more. The Watchtower Society of the Jehovah’s Witnesses teach an ancient and recycled heresy today saying that Jesus is merely an archangel, a lower creation of God. They deny that God became a man. Mormon’s have a semblance of mendacities from this time period and say that Jesus, as a created being, is nothing more than another creation of God as well, a brother of Satan. United Pentecostalism and the Apostolic Church today espouse modalistic heresies thus denying both the Father and the Son. Their view is often referred to as *Oneness* Pentecostalism, and is not true Pentecostalism at all. Most of these views denied the human side of Jesus; others denied that He is God. All of them are horribly incorrect. They all deny that He is God and man. All of these views center on the question of who Jesus is *in His very essence*, or in the constituent nature of His being. They were all asking: *In the nature of His very being ... who is Jesus?* The Church has answered in a creedal manner and answers daily from Scripture. The creed we’ll look at soon, by necessity, rightly defines both the humanity and the Deity of Jesus. “In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,” Colossians 2:9. This was said of a man raised in the city of Nazareth, Israel, and born in the city of Bethlehem, Israel.

Some people do not consider this question important, but it most certainly is. If we do not worship God “...**in truth**,” John 4:24, then we worship the devil unawares. Some of the views just mentioned here are long since extinguished. Others persist though often in modified format. We must remain on guard. The true church of Jesus Christ of *every day* saints has always taught, though it has not always had it extra-biblically articulated, that there was never a time when Jesus did not exist because He is eternal God, homoousios (of the same substance) with the Father, see [Nicene Creed](#). There was a time when He became a man, but this was not His inception. He had no inception. He Himself is the inceptor, John 1:3. Because of the depths of sound theology we rightly worship *as God* the one who, though a man, is prophesied not just as a “child born” (ילֵד - *yeled yalad*), but an “Everlasting Father” (עָבֶד - `ad 'ab), and “The mighty God” (גִּבְּור אֵל - *gibbowr 'el*). Isaiah 9:6; cf. Matthew 1:23. This is the depth of Trinitarian/Christian theology. The cults deny Him fully. The incarnation is truly awesome. God became a child born. God became a man. Without the Scriptures we would know nothing of this.

The Son had no beginning except to say that there was a time in history when Jesus was born on earth, lived, died, resurrected and ascended. The fact that Jesus is the only begotten, John 3:16, is a phrase that speaks of His position over all things, not His cosmology. The truth of Jesus' eternality is also seen in places like Hebrews 13:8 or John 1:1 which reads: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The phrase "in the beginning" is a Biblical expression often used to show the eternal God's work *in the time space continuum* which He created. Jesus is the eternal Word. The fact that He is the "firstborn" over all creation, Colossians 1:15, addresses His preeminence. It is not at all a statement regarding His origin or creation. Jesus is the Creator of all things, John 1:3, and was Himself therefore obviously never created.

There are many things involved in theology that show the essential importance of maintaining that Jesus is both true God *and* true man. One of Jesus' favorite titles for Himself while He was here was "the Son of man." We see this title used in great honor in places like John 5:27. He was a man from men. Jesus was a descendant of Adam. We also see Him saying that He is God in places like John 8:58. Jesus must be God or else He was insane. The *trilemma* written by C.S. Lewis identified this well when he wrote that Jesus must be either a liar, a lunatic or Lord because of the things He said of Himself. Jesus must be God or the claims He made were either insane, outright lies, or worse. He must be God. Furthermore, the salvation of man *cannot* come through man. Mankind cannot save itself. We'll come back to this again. Salvation is of the Lord, Psalm 37:39; 98:2. Jesus must therefore not be *just a man* in some very real sense. He must be God. He must be a God-man.

Throughout history, one of the most universally recognized faith statements championed in the church came in A.D. 451 at the Council of Chalcedon. This creed came on the heels of many of the teachings mentioned here. What they produced is most often referred to as the *Hypostatic Union* and basically means "two natures in one." Before we read it I would remind you all of the words of George Santayana who said: "Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it." We need not re-learn these truths today. We learned this one. In this teaching, we affirm that the Christ cannot be any less than fully God, or also any less than fully human. No other man has ever been both except Jesus, and no other will ever be like Him. How God can be both is a most incredible and glorious mystery, but this is the revelation of the incarnation. Christ is the God-man, not just a godly man. The Council of Chalcedon wrote:

We, then, following the holy fathers, all with one consent, teach people to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably,

indivisibly, inseparably; (*ἐν δύο φύσεσιν ἀσυγχύτως, ἀτρέπτως, ὁδιαιρέτως, ἀχωρίστως - in duabus naturis inconfuse, immutabiliter, indivise, inseparabiliter*) the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person (*prosopon*) and one Subsistence (*hypostasis*), not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten God (*μονογενῆ Θεὸν*), the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

This creed is to be upheld today for what it articulates. Jesus is the God-man. He is the one and only man who can save man from God. Let's now talk a bit about just a few of the reasons why this is important. Before we do I would like to quickly say that many of these truths are laid up in Scripture only for the church. We have the honor of seeking them out. The Bible's writers do not write verbatim something like, "Now there are two parts of Jesus that must be upheld. There's a human side and a divine side..." These are truths that emerge from a good grasp of the whole of Scripture and that, though sometimes difficult to articulate, are clearly seen. In many places we read that Jesus is a man. In many other places we read that Jesus is God. We honor both when the Spirit of God ransoms us from death. We are *not* saved by right theology on these or any other points. We are saved by grace alone. By grace we are then taught of God. We then confess a common faith which consists, in part, of a truth that lifts up the God-man Jesus.

Jesus either fulfilled or will fulfill the roughly 300 prophecies concerning Him to their entirety in ways we never imagined. Some of these prophecies are relatively easy to see in their fulfillment while others require a more Biblically trained eye to appreciate. I'll let you decide which type the following one is. Jesus must be an Israelite, a direct descendant of Abraham through David's bloodline or He is *not* the promised Messiah, Matthew 1:6, Revelation 5:5, et al. Pretty simple, right? He is a descendant of David. Here comes the twist: He's also David's God. He is called David's God in Matthew 22:41-46. This creates an interesting paradigm. He must be both David's God *and* one of his great grandchildren or He is not the promise fulfiller. In vs. 45 Jesus poses this fact as a question to His antagonists and it literally shuts their mouths as they stubbornly refused to acknowledge that He is the God of David, the God of Israel. In many of the world's cultures (and perhaps especially the Judaism of Jesus' Day) it would be unconscionable to honor a descendant of yours as more venerable than you yet here David calls this descendant of his, "God." Jesus calls Himself greater than David here freely as well. This would be equally against the culture of the day. He says openly here that He is David's Lord. He says of Himself elsewhere that He is greater than even Solomon the king, Matthew 12:42. He said the same thing of Himself in another way in John 4:12-13 in regard to the water of the patriarch Jacob's well and the spiritual water He came to give. Jesus freely ascribed God-status to Himself over King David who was one of the greatest leaders in His nation's history. Both David and Jesus violated cultural tradition, but were, of course, correct to do so. David gives the Messiah the title "Lord"

showing that he considers the Messiah greater than himself. Verse 46 clearly shows the gravity of the situation in the minds of the people after Jesus presented this truth. "...no one dared to ask him any more questions." When we see that Jesus is both a descendant of and the God of David then, for the Bible student, the need to harmonize Jesus' humanity and His Deity emerges.

Another powerful prophecy concerns Jesus' Deity and is found in the book of Micah. It reads: "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity," Micah 5:2. The NASB translates the Hebrew phrase (יּוֹם עֹלָם - *yowm `owlam*) as "days of eternity" showing clearly that Christ's days had no beginning. They are as eternal as He Himself is. Micah is prophetically expressing the exact same idea of eternality as the Psalmist in Psalm 90 when he writes, "Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God," Psalm 90:2. The same Hebrew word is used to express God's everlasting nature in both places and for all time. Jesus is also given the name "Emmanuel" by Saint Matthew. This title comes from Isaiah 7:14. Matthew tells us in Matthew 1:23 that this name means something significant. It means that Jesus is no less than "...God with us." Many references like this are found in Scripture. These truths compound together from all over the testaments to bring the Christian to a most non-disappointing climax in the very Person of Jesus Christ as the God of man and yet the Son of man.

Salvation can never come through man. This alone, when carried through the Scriptures, settles the argument as to why Jesus must be God. How can a person under condemnation ever remove condemnation? They cannot. Men cannot save themselves! We could not do it. Only God can save mankind from SIN. In 1 Corinthians 15:45 Jesus is called the "last Adam." He was found in the likeness of man and as a man made way for the favor of God now inside us, 2 Corinthians 5:19-21. It is His righteousness that He shares with His own. We need a perfect righteousness. No less than a perfect righteousness will do to pardon for sin! Jesus, as part of the holy Trinity of God, prepared Himself a body, and became like us in every way yet was without sin. He was born of miraculous means as the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary so that she was found to be with child. The title in the Chalcedonian Creed, "Mother of God" is, *in some particular sense*, therefore true. The title Theotokos is sometimes applied to Mary. It means "God bearer." She was the mother of Jesus in His humanity. As Deity, of course, Jesus had no mother. God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are forever an eternal Spirit. Jesus also, before He became a man, existed for eternity as the eternal Spirit. Mary was not His mother for all time, just of His humanity. Mary, like all sinners, needed Christ her Savior for her salvation, Luke 1:47. She too was under the curse of sin. God alone could save men. No man could do it because Scripture teaches us that all people born of Adam, "have sinned and come short of the glory of God," Romans 3:23. God therefore had to become man. No sinner could pay for the sins of humanity. That would be like a flat broke man with a one million dollar debt trying to pay off the million dollar debt of another. A person under an insurmountable debt has no credit with the creditor. Christ had no sin debt and has, if you will, unlimited credit with the Father. I'm not trying to build a church on this analogy; I'm simply trying to say that no man indebted to justice

can remove his own debt or that of another. Christ was free and could create a New Covenant in His own blood because 1) of who He is, and 2) of what He accomplished. He lived a sinless life according to all 613 laws handed down from Moses. He would eat no forbidden fruit no matter how well it was marketed by the Devil. This is awesome! He was of an impeccable nature in every respect and deserved heaven, apart from Him being God, according to His perfect life. He did not need forgiveness from His Father, His God.

The fact that God could become a man is awesome. I wonder how many of you have actually sat and thought on this most glorious truth?

There are a million galaxies we clumsy workmen have spotted with our telescopes. God is no more present in any one of them than the other. It is not that God's foot is near Andromeda, and His head is near the Milky Way. God is fully present in all places, even hell. How is this? I don't know. God is omnipresent. How could He ever be contracted to the span of a womb? God as a man had an umbilical cord at one time! Selah. How could He take on flesh, and have that flesh sustain His splendorous nature? What an amazing thing it is that the One at whose command the protons spin was once unable to speak! Jesus grew in wisdom as a man. He subjected Himself to earthly parents though He was the God who created the Leviathan. Christ formed the planets yet once played hide-n-go-seek. What glory this is for the God of heaven! This is amazing. He will forever be praised for His incredible humility. One day on earth, the time of His ministry came. That time began and He announced who He was to those who rejected Him. "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him," John 1:10-11. God came and ate with us so that we might go and eat with Him.

God was among men as a man. In His nature there was a divine will and a human will. Try not to confuse the two. Let the Scriptures speak clearly. Scripture teaches that Jesus "...had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people," in Hebrews 2:13, but at the same time Jesus can say to a sinner, "...you are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world," John 8:23. A failure to properly reconcile the two natures of Jesus led to many of the false views mentioned here earlier. We must examine all that Scripture has to say on the subject and submit ourselves to it like children who trust the words of a loving parent.

Really, it's very simple: In the nature of Jesus there is the mystery that He is both fully God and fully man. This idea destroyed some of the earliest heresies that challenged the teaching of the Apostles. Some before Jesus taught that the flesh was purely evil and that only the non-physical "spirit" was good. Such ideology was shattered when Christ Himself, who is the highest good, paid the highest compliment to humanity when He took on flesh. Jesus' humanity was not swallowed up by His Deity. He declared openly that He was God in many ways, and received public worship on earth on more than one occasion. His Deity was not lost in His humanity; Jesus took on the nature of a slave for slaves for a purpose. For slaves, Jesus took on the form of a bondservant. "Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard

equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross,” Philippians 2:5-8. This emptying does not mean of His God nature. He fully submitted Himself unto His God and was led like a lamb to the slaughter, Isaiah 53:7. Jesus’ condescension from that glory He had before the world began, John 17:5, to what He was among us is the emptying. He did not care to “grasp at” His nature for that time. He emptied Himself of His position and honor to become a man who received neither from men. He felt it prudent and did it according to His own free will.

Go and read Isaiah chapter forty sometime and then consider the truth of the incarnation. *That God* became a gentle baby. Imagine the humility of God in this! Go and read God’s words to Job that begin when God starts talking to him in that book in chapter 38 and then in your mind put that God in a poor and dirty manger. The God who fashioned this tiny planet just a few thousand years ago in six days became a toddler and once learned to walk alongside one of its sea shores. I cannot grasp that but my heart explodes at times in honor for it! It’s as impossible to appreciate fully as heaven to a non-glory brain, but I love it with an ignorant love.

In the Christian there is now divinity as well. We are not like Jesus. We are not Deity and never will be. We do, however, have the Holy Spirit, who is God, within us. In that very real sense we have become the very temple of the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 6:19. We are a new creation; a fallen being with God Himself yet indwelling. We need not build booths for Jesus like Peter said because we’re now the booths, Matthew 17:4. We hold the glory once only seen in the temple.

This line of theology is called Christology. It is theology about the Christ. Remembering truths like this bring us into the awe and splendor of God’s Son like they’re supposed to. Sin promises satisfaction, but only leaves you wanting more. It *never* satisfies. It is ultimately the same for false doctrine. Christ, however, truly does satisfy as you behold Him rightly. You must see Him as the God-man or there is no salvation in His name. Go and read the twelve verses of Psalm 2. Read deeply what the Bible says of Jesus there. God the Father says this of God the Son. Consider that you have sinned against Him. Repent and turn from your wickedness. Trust in the Son if you have heard of His mercy. Have you heard what He did on Calvary for sinners? Do not neglect so great a salvation.

The disciples watched Him physically ascend into the glory He has forever held on a day much like this one some two millennia ago. He openly spoke of that momentarily set aside glory before them in John 17:5. This is the same glory that Moses was long before forbidden to see, Exodus 33:18-20. Through sin laden eyes the disciples saw a dim preview of glory on the mountain of transfiguration, Matthew 17:2. John later saw Him and fell before Him as a dead man, Revelation 1:17. The God-man is coming again just as He went up from among us, Acts 1:11, and we do not know when.

Thank you for your attention to this letter.