

The Nature of Christ

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The humiliation Christ voluntarily took upon himself is best expressed by Paul to the Philippians: "Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who being originally in the form of God, counted it not a thing to be grasped [that is, to be clung to] to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, becoming in the likeness of man; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross." Philippians 2:5-8, Revised Version, marginal reading

The above rendering makes this text much more plain than it is in the common version. The idea is that, although Christ was in the form of God, being "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person" (Hebrews 1:3), having all the attributes of God, being the ruler of the universe, and the one whom all heaven delighted to honor, he did not think that any of these things were to be desired so long as men were lost and without strength. He could not enjoy his glory while man was an outcast, without hope. So he emptied himself, divested himself of all his riches and his glory, and took upon himself the nature of man in order that he might redeem him. It was necessary that he should assume the nature of man, in order that he might suffer death, as the apostle says to the Hebrews that he "was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death." Hebrews 2:9

It is impossible for us to understand how this could be, and it is worse than useless for us to speculate about it. All we can do is to accept the facts as they are presented in the Bible. Other scriptures that we will quote bring closer to us the fact of the humanity of Christ, and what it means for us. We read in John 1:14 that "the Word was made flesh," and now we will read what Paul says as to the nature of that flesh: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Romans 8:3, 4

A little thought will be sufficient to show anybody that if Christ took upon himself the likeness of man, in order that he might suffer death, it must have been sinful man that he was made like, for it is only sin that causes death. Death could have no power over a sinless man, as Adam was in Eden; and it could not have had any power over Christ if the Lord had not laid on him the iniquity of us all. Moreover, the fact that Christ took upon himself the flesh, not of a sinless being, but of sinful man, that is, that the flesh which he assumed had all the weaknesses and sinful tendencies to which fallen human nature is subject, is shown by the few words upon which this article is based. He was "made of the seed of David according to the flesh." David had all the passions of human

nature. He says of himself, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." Psalm 51:5

A brief glance at the ancestry and posterity of David will show that the line from which Christ sprung, as to his human nature, was such as would tend to concentrate in him all the weaknesses of humanity. To go back to Jacob, we find that before he was converted he had a most unlovely disposition, selfish, crafty, deceitful. His sons partook of the same nature, and Pharez, one of the ancestors of Christ (Matthew 1:3; Genesis 38), was born of a harlot. Rahab, an unenlightened heathen, became an ancestor of Christ. The weakness and idolatry of Solomon are proverbial. Of Rehoboam, Ahijah, Jehoram, Ahaz, Manasseh, Amon, and other kings of Judah, the record is about the same. They sinned and made the people sin. Some of them had not one redeeming trait in their characters, being worse than the heathen around them. It was from such an ancestry that Christ came. Although his mother was a pure and godly woman, as could be expected, no one can doubt that the human nature of Christ must have been more subject to the infirmities of the flesh than it would have been if he had been born before the race had so greatly deteriorated physically and morally. This was not accidental, but was a necessary part of the great plan of human redemption, as the following will show: "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to aid them that are tempted." Hebrews 2:16-18

If he was made in all things like unto his brethren, then he must have suffered all the infirmities and passions of his brethren. Only so could he be able to help them. So he had to become man, not only that he might die, but that he might be able to sympathize with and succor those who suffer the fierce temptations which Satan brings through the weakness of the flesh. Two more texts that put this matter very forcibly will be sufficient evidence on this point. We quote first 2 Corinthians 5:21: "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

This is much stronger than the statement that he was made "in the likeness of sinful flesh." He was made to be sin. Here is a greater mystery than that the Son of God should die. The spotless Lamb of God, who knew no sin, was made to be sin. Sinless, yet not only counted as a sinner, but actually taking upon himself sinful nature. He was made to be sin in order that we might be made righteousness. So Paul to the Galatians says that "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Galatians 4:4, 5

That Christ should be born under the law was a necessary consequence of his being born of a woman, taking on him the nature of Abraham, being made of the seed of David, in the likeness of sinful flesh. Human nature is sinful, and the law of God condemns all sin. Not that men are born into the world directly condemned by the law,

for in infancy they have no knowledge of right and wrong, and are incapable of doing either, but they are born with sinful tendencies, owing to the sins of their ancestors. And when Christ came into the world, he came subject to all the conditions to which other children are subject.

From these texts we are enabled to read with a better understanding Hebrews 5:7, 8, where the apostle says of Christ: "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." Jesus spent whole night in prayer to the Father. Why should this be, if he had not been oppressed by the enemy, through the inherited weakness of the flesh? He "learned obedience by the things which he suffered." Not that he was ever disobedient, for he "knew no sin;" but by the things, which he suffered in the flesh, he learned what men have to contend against in their efforts to be obedient. And so, "in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted." "For we have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need." Hebrew 4:15, 16

One more point, and then we can learn the entire lesson that we should learn from the fact the "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." How was it that Christ could be thus "compassed with infirmity" (Hebrews 5:2), and still know no sin? Some may have thought, while reading this article thus far, that we are depreciating the character of Jesus, by bringing him down to the level of sinful man. On the contrary, we are simply exalting the "divine power" of our blessed Saviour, who himself voluntarily descended to the level of sinful man, in order that he might exalt man to his own spotless purity, which he retained under the most adverse circumstances. "God was in Christ," and hence he could not sin. His humanity only veiled his divine nature, which was more than able to successfully resist the sinful passions of the flesh. There was in his whole life a struggle. The flesh, moved upon by the enemy of all unrighteousness, would tend to sin, yet his divine nature never for a moment harbored an evil desire, nor did his divine power for a moment waver. Having suffered in the flesh all that men can possibly suffer, he returned to the throne of the Father, as spotless as when he left the courts of glory. When he laid in the tomb, under the power of death, "it was impossible that he should be holden of it," because it had been impossible for the divine nature which dwelt in him to sin.

"Well," some will say, "I don't see any comfort in this for me; it wasn't possible that the Son of God should sin, but I haven't any such power." Why not? You can have it if you want it. The same power, which enabled him to resist every temptation presented through the flesh, while he was "compassed with infirmity," can enable us to do the same. Christ could not sin, because he was the manifestation of God. Well, then, listen to the apostle Paul, and learn what it is our privilege to have: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in Heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be

strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." Ephesians 3:14-19

Who could ask for more? Christ, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, may dwell in our hearts, so that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. What a wonderful promises. He is "touched with the feelings of our infirmity." That is, having suffered all that sinful flesh is heir to, he knows all about it, and so closely does he identify himself with his children, that whatever presses upon them makes like impression upon him, and he knows how much divine power is necessary to resist it; and if we but sincerely desire to deny "ungodliness and worldly lusts," he is able and anxious to give to us strength "exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think." All the power which Christ had dwelling in him by nature, we may have dwelling in us by grace, for he freely bestows it upon us.

Then let the weary, feeble, sin-oppressed souls take courage. Let them "come boldly to the throne of grace," where they are sure to find grace to help in the time of need, because that need is felt by our Saviour, in the very time of need. He is "touched with the feeling of our infirmity." If it were simply that he suffered eighteen hundred years ago, we might fear that he has forgotten some of the infirmity; but no, that temptation that presses you touches him. His wounds are ever fresh, and he ever lives to make intercession for you.

What wonderful possibilities there are for the Christian! To what heights of holiness he may attain! No matter how much Satan may war against him, assaulting him where the flesh is weakest, he may abide under the shadow of the Almighty, and be filled with the fullness of God's strength. The One stronger than Satan may dwell in his heart continually; and so, looking at Satan's assaults as from a strong fortress, he may say, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us."