

FOUNDATIONS: What Christians Should Believe

29 February 2012

SALVATION: How God Makes Rebels His Children

Part 6

Bible Reading: Philippians 2:5-11

Context: In our ongoing study through our church's confession of faith,¹ we are currently discussing the doctrine of salvation.² Thus far we have learned what it means to be saved, how salvation is wholly of grace, and how salvation is only and always mediated through Jesus Christ, our ultimate Prophet, Priest, and King. Tonight we will consider Jesus' incarnation, discussing the phrase from our doctrinal statement, "Who, by appointment of the Father, voluntarily took upon Himself our nature, yet without sin".

Salvation: *We believe that the salvation of sinners is divinely initiated and wholly of grace through the mediatorial offices of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who, by appointment of the Father, voluntarily took upon Himself our nature, yet without sin, and honored the divine law by His obedience, thus qualifying Himself to be our Savior; that by the shedding of His blood in His death He fully satisfied the just demands of a holy and righteous God regarding sin; that His sacrifice consisted not in setting us an example by his death as a martyr, but was a voluntary substitution of Himself in the sinner's place, the Just dying for the unjust, Christ bearing our sins in His own body on the tree; that having risen from the dead He is now enthroned in Heaven; He is in every way qualified to be a suitable, compassionate and all-sufficient Savior. We believe that faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition of salvation. Repentance is a change of mind and purpose toward God prompted by the Holy Spirit and is an integral part of saving faith.*

Discussion:

I. "Salvation...wholly of grace":

- A. In what way is salvation wholly of grace?
- B. Why must salvation be wholly of grace?

II. "...through the mediatorial offices of Jesus Christ":

- A. What does it mean that salvation comes through a mediator? Who is this mediator?
- B. What is the significance of Jesus being our ultimate Prophet, Priest, and King?

III. At first glance, some doctrines don't appear immediately relevant or life-changing (i.e., the virgin birth, the Trinity, the Incarnation, etc.). Is it still important to learn what the Bible teaches on these subjects? Why or why not?

IV. If someone asked you to demonstrate the deity of Jesus from the Bible, what passages of Scripture would you turn to?

Study:

I. Jesus' Humanity:

- A. While all Christians confess that Jesus is man in addition to God, often they think of Him as simply God in a human disguise with no true human limitations (similar perhaps to Superman). The Bible, however, teaches that Jesus is fully (100%) God *and* fully (100%) human

¹ For a complete copy of our church's confession of faith, visit our website (www.trinitybaptistmuncie.org) and look under the "We Believe" category. We will attempt to put all the previous notes from this series on the church website in the not too distant future.

² If you would like to go deeper in the study of the doctrine of salvation, we recommend the following resources: For an introductory study, see *What is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010); for a more intermediate consideration, consider *The Truth of the Cross* by RC Sproul (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust, 2007); for a challenging yet rewarding study, check out *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* by John Murray (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955).

simultaneously. Furthermore, during His earthly life (sometimes known as His "incarnation"), He experienced many of the limitations, weaknesses, and temptations that are intrinsic to humanity.

B. Some scriptural passages that teach Jesus' humanity:

1. References to Jesus as *man*:

- a. Luke 23:2 – They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king."³
- b. John 4:29 – Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?
- c. See also Romans 5:15; 1 Timothy 2:5, etc.

2. References where Jesus evidenced human characteristics and limitations:

- a. Jesus was born of a woman (albeit a virgin) through a human birth (Matthew 1:25; Luke 2:7), had a human genealogy, and human siblings (Matthew 1:1-16; Luke 3:23-38; John 7:5).
- b. Jesus had a human body (i.e., looked like a human being), mind, and human emotions. He was capable of feeling joy, sorrow, anger, etc. (Mark 3:5; Luke 10:21; 24:39).
- c. Jesus grew physically (Luke 2:40); grew mentally and cognitively (i.e., He learned new information; Luke 2:52; Hebrews 5:8); performed the physical labor of a carpenter (Mark 6:3); attended Jewish corporate worship services (Luke 4:16); prayed, fasted, and read Scripture (Matthew 4:2; John 17; Luke 4:16-21); became tired (John 4:6); slept (Matthew 8:23-25); grew thirsty (John 19:28); was hungry and ate food (Matthew 4:2, 11); felt physical pain (Luke 22:44; Mark 15:16-20); and died physically (John 19:30). There was even some information that Jesus did not know during His earthly life (i.e., the time of His return; Mark 13:32)
- d. Jesus experienced true human temptations to sin (indeed, every kind of temptation) though He never succumbed:
 - i. Hebrews 4:15 – For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.
 - ii. See also Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13; Hebrews 2:18.

C. The Importance of Jesus' humanity:

1. Why Jesus' humanity is necessary:

- a. To provide us with an example of obedience:
 - i. 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.
 - ii. 1 John 2:6 – Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.
- b. To bridge the gap between man in his sin and God in His holiness:
 - i. 1 Timothy 2:5 – There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.
 - ii. Consider the following quote by the medieval theologian and pastor Anselm:

³Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

"Satisfaction cannot be made unless there be some One able to pay God for man's sin something greater than all that is beside God...Now nothing is greater than all that is beside God except God Himself. None therefore can make this satisfaction except God. And none ought to make it except man...If, then, it be necessary that the kingdom of heaven be completed by man's admission, and if man cannot be admitted unless the aforesaid satisfaction for sin be first made, and if God only *can*, and man only *ought* to make this satisfaction, then necessarily One must make it who is both God and man."

—Anselm (AD 1033-1109), *Why God Became Man*, (Book II, ch. 6).

- c. To live the life of obedience Adam failed to live. Thus he provides us with both forgiveness and justification (we will spend more time on this point in a future lesson):
 - i. Romans 5:18-19 – Therefore, as one trespassed to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 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.
 - ii. Hebrews 2:16-17 – For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. 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.
- d. Can you think of additional reasons (e.g., Hebrews 2:14, 15; 1 John 3:8)?
2. The Bible indicates that Jesus' humanity is essential to the Gospel:
 - a. 1 John 4:2-3 – By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 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.
 - b. 2 John 1:7-11 – Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.
3. Denying Jesus' humanity not only indicates that one is not a Christian, it makes one an "anti-Christ," someone actively opposing the truth of God.

II. The Unity of Jesus' Deity and Humanity:⁴

- A. We could summarize the biblical teaching about the unity of Jesus' two natures with the following phrase:⁵ *Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man in one person and will be so forever*⁶.
- B. While precisely how God and man came together in the one person of Jesus is ultimately mysterious, there are some things that we can say Jesus' Incarnation is definitely *not*:
 1. The Incarnation does not mean that Jesus is partially God and partially man (similar to Hercules or a mule).

⁴ The unity of Jesus' two natures is sometimes known as the "Hypostatic Union".

⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 529

⁶ Biblical support for the idea that Christ still possesses a human body today and will so forever includes: Matthew 26:29; John 20:25-27; Acts 1:11; 7:56; 9:5; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23; Philippians 2:10; 1 Timothy 2:5; Revelation 1:13-17; 19:9. This idea suggests that Christ will function as our mediator on into eternity.

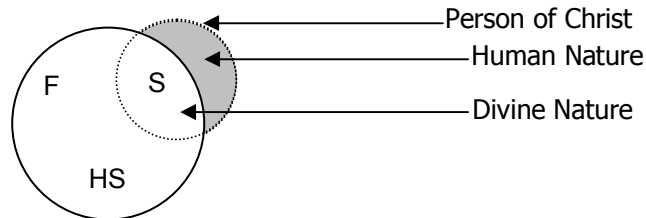
2. The Incarnation does not mean that Jesus is a "mini-god" or a created god or a lesser deity.
 3. The Incarnation does not mean that the human Jesus became God at some point in His life (i.e., at His baptism).
 4. The Incarnation does not mean that Jesus simply appeared human but possessed no true human limitations (i.e., similar to Superman in his Clark Kent costume).
 5. The Incarnation does not mean that Jesus was a split-personality with two independent, conflicting persons in one being (i.e., the human person wanted to sin while the divine person could only obey).
- C. The Bible passage that most thoroughly discusses the Incarnation is Philippians 2:5-11.
1. Observations:
 - a. Note that Paul uses Jesus' incarnation as a model of Christian humility (v. 3-5). Therefore, faulty views of the Incarnation could conceivably lead to faulty views of how we are to relate to one another.
 - b. The passage assumes Jesus' deity. Jesus was in the "form of God" and possessed "equality with God" (v. 6, ESV) prior to His birth. In ancient Greek, the "form" of something did not mean something simply appeared similar to something else, but "connotes that which is intrinsic and essential to the thing."⁷
 - c. Jesus, as eternal God, "made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" and was "found in human form (v. 7)."
 - i. The phrase "made himself nothing" is sometimes translated "emptied himself." Some have wrongly concluded that in Jesus' Incarnation He lost or abandoned some of His attributes of deity.
 - ii. Note that this "emptying/making nothing" was self-imposed (i.e., no one forced Jesus to become human). Jesus voluntarily, out of love, became human to die for us. (Would you be willing to become an ant to save ants?)
 - iii. The "emptying/making nothing" should not be understood as Jesus losing any deity but as Jesus adding to his deity a human body and human attributes. Note the parallelism between "emptying/making nothing" and "humbled himself," v. 7, 8.
 2. Implications:
 - a. During Jesus' earthly life, He continued to possess full deity and to exercise all His deity responsibilities (i.e., He continued to uphold the universe even as He grew in His mother's womb, etc.).
 - b. In becoming human, Jesus did not give up divine attributes or abilities but divine privileges and rights in becoming a servant. Likewise, in Christian humility we do not give up our intrinsic attributes or become less than human but rather put the interests of others before our own (cf. Matthew 18:1-4).
 - c. In the person of Jesus, there are two natures, one human and one divine. One nature could do some things in which the other nature did not participate (i.e., the human nature slept while the divine nature remained active) and *vice versa*.
 - d. On certain occasions, Jesus "pulled back the veil", figuratively speaking, and allowed the glory of His divine nature to shine forth unhindered (e.g., the Transfiguration). The

⁷ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 261.

norm, however, was, in the words of Charles Wesley, "veiled in flesh, the Godhead see; hail the Incarnate Deity."⁸

- e. In those rare instances where the natures of humanity and deity contradict one another, Jesus' deity trumps His humanity. For example, Jesus' deity overrules any tendency to sin or err intrinsic to humanity (e.g., "to err is human."). Thus, while Jesus was capable of being tempted to sin, He did not have the ability to sin. Furthermore, His deity prevented Him from making mistakes or giving wrong information

3. A possible illustration of the unity of Jesus' two natures:⁹



V. Conclusion:

- A. It is this Jesus – one person with two natures, one divine and one human – who laid down His life on the cross for our sins. The God-man shed His infinitely precious blood so that His enemies might be forgiven.
- B. What amazing love, that eternal God would descend to the very bottom of the staircase of humiliation out of love for sinners like you and me:

"[Jesus] not count equality with God a thing to be grasped...
 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant...
 being born in the likeness of men.
 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by
 becoming obedient to the point of death...
 even death on a cross."

- C. When the first Adam attempted to "become like God" (Genesis 3:5, 22), he condemned and corrupted the entire creation. When the second Adam, who is eternal God, became man, He redeemed those who believe and will one day remake creation into a New Heavens and a New Earth, undoing the mess the first Adam made. In the words of Isaac Watt's great hymn, "Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all."¹⁰
- D. It is this Jesus – fully God and fully man – who will one day return to earth, judge the living and the dead (Matthew 24-25), and reign on His throne forever (Revelation 19-20). In our glorified human bodies, we will worship God in human flesh on into eternity (Revelation 20-22).

⁸"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," public domain.

⁹Grudem, 558.

¹⁰"When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," public domain.

Application:

- I. Is there anything you now understand more fully about the person of Jesus Christ that you did not understand before this lesson?
- II. What does Jesus' incarnation tell us about the character of God? About God's love?
- III. What are some other practical applications of the Incarnation that we haven't mentioned yet?
- IV. After this study, are there specific ways in which you now think of Jesus being more like you than you did before? What are these?
- V. During His earthly ministry, Jesus entered into Galilean culture and adopted many of the cultural forms of ancient Galilean society (i.e., wore typical Jewish clothing, wore a beard, attended festivals, worked a typical job, etc.). How might Jesus' incarnation inform our philosophy of missions and evangelism (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23)? Our approach to culture?
- VI. The Bible teaches that Jesus was "tempted in every way as we are yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15)." If Jesus couldn't be broken, do these temptations mean anything? What is their significance?
- VII. What's the most difficult situation you're in right now? Can you think of any similar situations that Jesus may have faced? How can a clearer understanding of Jesus' humanity help you face temptations?
- VIII. In what ways do people deny Jesus' full humanity today?
- IX. What point from tonight's lesson most stood out to you and why?