

The God-Man

John 1:14-18

At the incarnation, the Word of God took on flesh and dwelt among us. He did not become less God, and He did not remain fully God while only appearing to be a man. Jesus is one hundred percent God *and* one hundred percent man. This union of the divine and human natures in the person of Jesus is not obscure theological trivia, but truth that determines the rise and fall of nations.

The Word Made Flesh

John wrote “the Word (*Logos*) became flesh and dwelt among us”, he offended the sensibilities of the entire known world. Heraclitus first used the word *logos* around 600 BC to describe the reason, plan, structure, and divine logic behind the universe. Plato and the Greeks ascribed the obvious order of the cosmos to this rational principle, but believed that matter here in our world has been hopelessly corrupted. Bodily existence is therefore not a good thing, and the only way to escape it is to die and be rid of your frail flesh forever. John uses *Logos* to tell truth about who came down, took on flesh, and lived among us. Not only was He not ruined by doing so, but we saw His undiminished glory, the same glory the only-begotten of the Father always had, full of grace and truth (v. 14). As Paul puts it, the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Jesus bodily (Col. 2:9). John the Baptizer knew this: this one is more important than him because He came before (v. 15). Not only do we see in Him the fullness of divinity, we receive of it, grace upon grace (v. 16). Moses ministered the law as God gave it to Him, but grace and truth come directly from Jesus the Savior (v. 17). Because God is immaterial, no one has seen Him at any time. And yet in the Word made flesh, fully God, the Father has made Him known (v. 18). If you want to know the Father, look at the Son. He reveals, portrays, manifests, explains, and exegetes Him.

The Council of Chalcedon

What happened in the incarnation is mind boggling, and the church matured over centuries in her ability speak about it (cf. Eph. 4:11-16). The shortest and most basic Christian confession is “Jesus is Lord” (cf. Phil. 2:11). Our earliest creed outside of Scripture is the Apostles’ Creed from the 2nd century. In the 4th century Arius, an elder from Alexandria, taught that Jesus was not co-eternal with the Father but rather begotten in time. Constantine called the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, where 300 bishops gathered to deal with the Arian heresy, and it’s reported that St. Nicholas of Myra slapped Arius for his insolence. More importantly, the Nicene Creed officially condemned Arianism and upheld the full divinity and humanity of Christ. But this in turn led to more questions about Christ: how do the divine and human coexist in Christ? How can the immutable, eternal God become changeable man? Is He more like two persons, sometimes acting as God and sometimes as man, as Nestorianism asserted? Or is Jesus a mixture of God and man where the natures combine to make a third? A larger council at Chalcedon with over 500 bishops was convened to deal with these questions. The balance in these discussions is to address the crucial questions at play, and in doing so not go beyond what the Scriptures teach (Deut. 29:29).

The Definition of Chalcedon

The Definition or Confession of Chalcedon is a wonderful gift of the Spirit working through the church. Like all creeds, it’s not infallible and inspired the way Scripture is, but all Christians have recognized its truth. It does not innovate, but “following the holy fathers, all with one accord, teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood.”

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Jesus is truly God and truly man, with a human soul and body, and also of the same substance with the Father. Neither His divinity or humanity is reduced in the incarnation. Therefore, He is “like us in all respects, apart from sin.” This is essential because if Christ is not fully man, He can’t represent us, sympathize with us, or be tempted like us (Heb. 4:15). But in order to bring us to God, Jesus can’t be a sinful man, which seems to be why He was born of the Holy Spirit. He has to be fully man to be like us, and fully God in order to save us. He is eternally “begotten of Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us man and our salvation, of Mary the virgin, the God-bearer.” The two natures of Christ are not mingled, but “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union.” The two natures coexist together in a hypostatic, one person, one God-man. Against Eutyches, this union doesn’t obliterate the differences of the natures and forge a third nature. And against Nestorius, Jesus is a singular person and not someone divided with multiple personalities.

The Impact of Chalcedon

In the ancient world and throughout human history, men have tried to ascend to divinity. The Emperor Augustus described himself as “the world’s savior who was to come.” In 17 BC, a star appeared in the sky and he inaugurated a 12-day Advent celebration in fulfillment of Virgil’s prophecy: “The turning point of the ages has come.” Some said that if there is no god, the state is god. R.J. Rushdoony points out that pagan rulers didn’t require Christians to burn incense to the gods but to the cult of the emperor. Christians confessed *Christos Kurios*, Jesus is Lord against *Caesar Kurios*, Caesar is Lord. Chalcedon defined in detail that no created being ever crosses the creator/creature distinction, as much as they try. The divine only resides in Jesus. God does ordain rulers, authorities, principalities and powers, but He limits them. He also establishes ecclesiastical and family governments. Each of these is inviolable and must be honored. And when someone in any God-ordained government gets out of their lane and strives for autonomy, they are ignoring Chalcedon at their peril. God laughs at it, but He will deal with it (Ps. 2:4-6). But the Lord has also put eternity in our hearts (Eccl. 3:11). Augustine said “our heart is restless until it rests in you.” We are made in God’s image and created to be fellowship with the triune God through agency of Jesus, the God-man. In Christ we “have been given exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:4).