

# The Incarnation

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8)

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The mystery of the incarnation is something that we shall never fathom. We can behold it, worship the Son, revel in His grace, wonder with awe at His love, but never exhaust its mystery.

At the time that the Father appointed,<sup>2</sup> the Son of the living God was joined with humanity, conceived in the Virgin's womb by the Holy Spirit. The Second Person of the Holy Trinity had *added* to His undiminished divine Person a perfect human nature, taken from Mary. His humanity came from Mary, as the Last Adam had to be in the lineage of the first Adam, of the fallen human race, not a new race created outside of the existing one. As redeemer He had to be one with us, yet outside us without sin. He took from her what was human as mankind was originally created, but not as fallen. He was fully human, having a real body and a rational soul. He got hungry, needed to sleep, had human emotions of joy and anger, but He never sinned. *He was fully human as if not God.*

The woman Eve was taken from the *side of Adam* and given to him as his bride. The woman led the man into sin. Now the Last Adam is taken from the woman to deal with sin, and on the cross His side is pierced so that His bride can come from Him!

He was also *fully God as if not human*. He was the second Person of the Trinity, God of God, light of light, very God of very God, the same in essence as the Father in every way, existing from all eternity. When the Virgin conceived by the Holy Spirit, humanity was joined to His deity, not that His deity came into existence. Indeed, He was unchangeable<sup>3</sup> so that His deity did not change one iota at the holy conception. He *added* to His divine person perfect humanity, but nothing whatsoever was subtracted.<sup>4</sup> If He had ceased in any way to be God, there would have been no Trinity and no God, for God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Giving up His deity would be incarna-

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<sup>2</sup> Galatians 4:4

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 13:8

<sup>4</sup> The modern day heresy of kenosis states that Christ's incarnation was by *subtraction*, that He gave up something of either His deity or the use of His deity.

tion by decide. Or if Christ had ceased to be fully God, there would have been two “gods” left, the Father and the Spirit, which would mean the death of God. *A savior who is not fully God is a bridge broken at the far end, and a savior who is not fully man is a bridge broken at the near end. He would not reach fully either to God or man.*

Here we are confronted with one of the greatest mysteries of God’s holy and infallible Bible. The infinite One adds a finite nature without in any way lessening the infinite. As Mary carried the babe in her womb, sustaining His life, He was giving her life as He upheld all things by the word of His power.<sup>5</sup> As she held Him in her arms after His birth, He was holding her and the whole universe in His “arms.” She had originated, so to speak, His humanity. He had created all things whatsoever, making Himself the *originator* of creation.<sup>6</sup> He was not only the Word who spoke all things into existence, but He was the *sustainer* of what He had called into being from nothing. He was not only the originator and sustainer but also the *goal* of creation, the reason it was created, the end toward which all creation is moving, the one to be glorified.<sup>7</sup> Thus He is the origin, sustainer, and goal of creation as all moves to glorify Him.

The mystery of *the union of God and man* can only be understood by what has been revealed. We know that it was necessary for Him to be both God and man. He had to be a man to redeem man from his sin and death, to be identified with the human race that lost relationship with God. As God He could not die, but as man He could. He had to be God to satisfy infinite holiness, to take an infinite penalty, an infinite curse. What He did in His atonement was absolutely dependent on who He was, the two aspects being inseparable. Adam sinned and died. Jesus must be one with the seed of Adam so that He could die.<sup>8</sup> Adam owed God perfect obedience. Jesus obeyed God perfectly for us.<sup>9</sup> Adam came under the penalty of sin, which was divine judgment. Jesus took our punishment.<sup>10</sup> We read:

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For

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<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 1:3

<sup>6</sup> John 1:3; Colossians 1:16

<sup>7</sup> Colossians 1:16-17

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 2:9

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 2:10 (The grammar indicates that Jesus was bringing many sons to glory by His being made perfect.)

<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 53:5; Romans 3: 25; Galatians 3:13

indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.<sup>11</sup>

He had to be *one Person* so that what one nature did would be united with the other nature in the one Person, thus joining the work of both natures. If He had only been a man indwelt by God, He would have been a great prophet, but not the One who could redeem; just one of the prophets of old. Under this circumstance, when He died, we would be left with a dead man and a distant God. But as God-man in one person, when He shed His blood, it was the blood of God: “to shepherd the Church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”<sup>12</sup>

If Christ were two persons, how could he shed His blood as man and offer infinite atonement as God and do both as one offering? It would be two offerings as two persons. He had to be one Person so that what one nature did would be united with the other nature in the one Person, thus joining the work of both natures.

If He had been two persons, we would not have a union of man and God doing a single work, but two persons doing a dual work. There would have been a human sacrifice to a God who could not accept such. Such a *moral* cooperation of a divine and human will would not give infinite value to the human or a human aspect to the divine. *There would be moral cooperation between two persons, but not an essential union of God and man.* God would still not be revealed personally but through a human only. But with a union of essence, a personal union<sup>13</sup> of man and God, what either nature did was attributed to the one Person. If He had been two persons, the natures could not have joined in one act but as two acts. But He was the God-man, not God and man; thus the two natures joined in Him as one work.

If the *natures had been mixed* in some way, He would have been less than God or more than man. If he had been less than God, He could not have offered sufficient atonement to the infinite God. If He had been more than man, He could not have represented us, not being “made like His brethren.” He would have been a hybrid, but not the God-man who lived and died for us, being totally acceptable to

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<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 2:14-17

<sup>12</sup> Acts 20:28

<sup>13</sup> “Hypostatic” is the word theologians use.

God as His peer, and representing us as our peer, joined in one Person and working as one.

Yet if the two natures had not been joined in essence, a metaphysical union, what He did in one nature would not have affected what He did in the other nature. He would have acted as a human and then as God but neither act would have been united with the other as the one act of the God-man. We would have had the acts of man and the acts of God in separation, not in union in one Person. As it was, His atoning work brought man and God together in *Himself*.

Though the natures were joined in the Son, they were *not mixed together but distinct*. There was a Creator/creature distinction in Christ Himself.<sup>14</sup> Consider the contrasts we have in this God-man of the two natures and one person with natures united but not merged:

He was God yet man.

He was infinite yet finite.

He was a babe who needed nurturing yet God who upheld all things by His sovereign word.

He had a human will that struggled with His mission in the garden yet a divine will that was unchangeable, impeccable, and absolutely determinative of all things. His human will was always obedient to His divine will.

He had a human consciousness and a divine consciousness yet only a divine *self*-consciousness and divine *self*-awareness, the I AM, the One who forgave sins.<sup>15</sup>

He had a human mind yet a divine mind. He could be known by humans face to face yet He and the Father knew one another uniquely, infinitely, and exhaustively: "No one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."<sup>16</sup> He could say humanly He did not know the time of His Second Coming,<sup>17</sup> but divinely He

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<sup>14</sup> Most of the Christological heresies of the ancient church were attempts to compromise the Creator/creature distinction in Christ.

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 9:1ff. There were not two self-consciousnesses in the Lord, for then He would have been two persons. Some struggle with how the one Person could both know and not know the time of His Second Coming, but the Church's teaching of two consciousnesses seems to answer this. In His human conscious, He did not know; in His divine consciousness, He did know.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 11:27

<sup>17</sup> Mark 13:32

knew all things.<sup>18</sup> He read the hearts of men as easily as one reads a book.<sup>19</sup>

As God He upholds all things; even His humanity is upheld by His own deity. His humanity is indwelt by His deity, by the Holy Spirit given to Him without measure.<sup>20</sup>

As man He was limited to one place at a time yet as God He filled heaven and earth.<sup>21</sup>

As man He was limited in His abilities to perform works of feat yet as God He was (is) the Lord God omnipotent, raising the dead, stilling storms, upholding all things, the beginning and the end.

In these contrasts, it is not that a single nature was both infinite and finite, for that would be a contradiction, but that the single Person of the Son can be considered from either the human nature or the divine nature, each being distinct from the other.

As God-man He had (has) absolute authority in heaven and on earth. When Satan came to tempt Him as the Last Adam,<sup>22</sup> he instantly obeyed the Lord when He commanded him to leave Him. Even the wind obeyed, and demons immediately came out of the ones He commanded them to exit. The healings He performed were instantaneous and perfect, a wonder to behold, as He recreated human tissue. With one spoken word, or sometimes just the thought, He performed miracles in His own name, not the name of another.

*The incarnation is love beyond measure.* God became humble, as it were, submitting Himself to the now rebellious creation that He had originally made holy.<sup>23</sup> One's humility is measured by the degree of his exaltation. It would not mean much for a common laborer to help an old lady across the street, but if the president of the USA did, it would mean more. How much more is it for the infinite God to assume humanity and submit to those who hated Him! The judgment that God required, He now came to take. The holiness that we lacked, He wove by His perfect obedience to His own holy law and

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<sup>18</sup> Matthew 11:27; John 21:17

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 9:4

<sup>20</sup> John 3:34

<sup>21</sup> John 1:48-50; 3:13 (This last text is supported throughout the manuscript history even though most modern versions leave out the words "even the Son of man who is in heaven.")

<sup>22</sup> Matthew 4:1ff. This is the only other time Satan appeared personally to tempt someone. In other words, he appeared twice in Scripture to tempt humans personally: the first Adam and the Last Adam. We are not suggesting that he had nothing to do with other temptations, but that Scripture only records two personal appearances to tempt.

<sup>23</sup> Philippians 2:8

commandments. The curse and punishment due us, He joyfully assumed in our place on the cross: "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."<sup>24</sup> Love manifested itself with infinite condescending. This was not a love in words only but primarily of doing.

Furthermore, *this love was particular*. It is easy to say: "I just love everyone." When we love everyone, there is no accountability for loving any one person. But take an oath to love one other person no matter what, such as in our wedding vows, to flesh out love for this other human for better or worse, giving up selfish orientation, to focus on the person's needs – that is another matter! But that is precisely what the Lord of Glory did for His people. The Father gave Him a bride,<sup>25</sup> whom He cherished to the point of death, even death on a cross.<sup>26</sup> There was nothing He would not do for His bride, even submitting to vile men, dying, and raising Himself from the dead.<sup>27</sup> He ascended to His home to prepare a place for His bride.<sup>28</sup>

*In heaven we shall behold our loved ones who have known and served the King of glory.* They will be beautiful and be whole, bodies restored,<sup>29</sup> no more suffering, sadness, or pain. We shall be "together with them," and "thus we shall *always* be with the Lord."<sup>30</sup> What joy we shall have as we are reunited with loved ones we have not seen for many years, especially knowing that no power can ever separate us again! A child lost in youth is beautiful. A godly grandmother who taught you the Bible at her feet greets you. A father who was faithful in bringing you up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord embraces you. A mother who prayed for you for years rejoices. A husband who was faithful to love his wife as Christ loved the Church is reunited with the one he cared for on earth.<sup>31</sup> Once in heaven, we can project ourselves a million millennia into the future, and at that projected time we will have been together only a finite period of time, with an infinite period still to come! The finite past

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<sup>24</sup> Hebrews 12:2

<sup>25</sup> John 17:6; Ephesians 5:22ff

<sup>26</sup> Philippians 2:8

<sup>27</sup> John 10:18

<sup>28</sup> John 14:2

<sup>29</sup> Paul indicates that we shall have some form of body in heaven (2 Cor. 5:1-8), but at the resurrection we shall have glorified bodies like the Lord's (Phil. 3:21).

<sup>30</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:17

<sup>31</sup> Ephesians 5:22ff. But there will not be marriage in heaven (Matt. 22:30).

will always be but a dot; the infinite future a line that reaches to the horizon.<sup>32</sup>

As much as we shall rejoice over being made whole and reunited with loved ones, whom we shall easily recognize,<sup>33</sup> there is one exception to being whole in heaven: the hands, feet, and side of the Lord.<sup>34</sup> Fixing our attention on Him, we worship the nail prints in His hands and feet and the spear hole in His side. He has changed the crown of thorns for a diadem, and His robe is whiter than snow for His purity. All else fades as we behold the Lamb on His throne. Like a tidal wave, we will be overwhelmed with such grace as we bask in His presence. As never ending waves break on a shore, we shall forever have one wave of grace only to be followed by another. We shall be filled with praise, singing the song of the Lamb:

And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."<sup>35</sup>

All anxieties will immediately evaporate in the security of His loving presence. Only what was done for the Son of God will carry over from the past;<sup>36</sup> all else will be burned away.<sup>37</sup>

Then comes the Last Day judgment.<sup>38</sup> We shall approach the throne of the Almighty Lamb, whose omniscient gaze will penetrate our hearts, as "all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."<sup>39</sup> As we acknowledge one sin after another, we seem to hear the sound of a hammer against wood. We look up to behold every sin we committed nailed to the cross.<sup>40</sup> *Then we are openly acknowledged and acquitted* as children of the Lamb before God the Father, the holy angels, and all creation. Satan is forever banished to hell along with his angels and his seed who preferred him to Christ.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The same could be said of hell.

<sup>33</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:17 ("with them")

<sup>34</sup> John 20:25-28

<sup>35</sup> Revelation 5:9-10

<sup>36</sup> Revelation 14:13

<sup>37</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:20

<sup>38</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:10

<sup>39</sup> Hebrews 4:13

<sup>40</sup> Colossians 2:14

<sup>41</sup> Genesis 3:15; Matthew 25:46; 1 John 3:10

But heaven is not automatic nor for everyone. Only the God-man is worthy of our faith. He *alone* has accomplished our salvation, not the saints or ourselves. We cannot offer anything that will satisfy God and make ourselves acceptable to Him. Jesus has already done so. It would be the highest possible insult and sin to think that we do not need this Jesus, that we can earn our way to heaven, that what He has done is a good start but that we must complete what He left out.<sup>42</sup> In this case, Jesus would be necessary, but not sufficient, and His death on the cross considered a failure. We are not the God-man and cannot accomplish the salvation of anyone. He alone must be the object of our faith, not Him *and* us. If we think we can attain heaven by our own efforts, it would be faith in ourselves.

Having said that, there is one thing that we contribute to our salvation, without which we cannot be saved, and it is a human work – *our sins*! If we come to the Father by faith alone in Jesus alone, confessing our sins to Him, falling completely on His mercy, He will accept us. For then we understand that only He could accomplish what we cannot do. He came to call sinners, not those who think they are acceptable as they are.<sup>43</sup>

In the person of the Son, we have a *substantial union of Creator and creature*, a union of Spirit and creation, or of the spiritual and the physical, as it were. Our salvation was accomplished by both aspects. Likewise, we look to the visible, “physical” Church to accept us into His body, to be baptized (“physical”) and to be in spiritual union with Him. We must not think that we can have one without the other. To think that we can have His spiritual salvation without the physical, visible Church<sup>44</sup> would be to have a docetic Christ, one who was God but only appeared to be human. It would also be spurning His authority in His Church, thinking we can make ourselves His bride our way. On the other hand, to think that we are necessarily saved because we are in the visible Church would be to have a human Christ who was not God. Just as the two aspects of human (or “physical”) and divine (or “spiritual”) were united in Him, so we have a united salvation, in union with Him by being in His Church by baptism. The Church leads us to worship God, who is spirit, using physical means, the sacraments. In the Church, the two aspects come together: physical and spiritual, just as they do in

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<sup>42</sup> Romans 4:1-8

<sup>43</sup> Matthew 9:13; Luke 18:9-14

<sup>44</sup> A true Church is one that preaches the biblical gospel and administers the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion according to God’s Word.

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Christ: God and man in one person. Salvation is only for those who confess their sins to the Lamb, confessing faith in Him alone, submitting to Him in His Church by being baptized into His body, and persevering in His grace to the end. On the one hand, it is a free gift. On the other hand, the free gift comes in the context of His visible Church.

Let us worship the King who alone is our righteousness. **Amen.**