

# Understanding The Nature Of Christ #1

**Introduction.** Does it really matter what we believe about Jesus (John 8:24, 58; cf. Exodus 3:14)? John says that we must believe Jesus came in the flesh. Otherwise we are in league with false prophets and the spirit of the antichrist (1 John 4:1-3).

These two lessons are going to explore how unified these two characteristics appear in the person of Jesus the Son of God.

## I. ***Jesus Has Always Provoked Controversy***

- A. In John, Jesus provoked a "schism" or a division among the people (John 7:43; 9:16; 10:19; cf. Mark 2:21).
- B. Historically, the first question in the early church that caused years of debate concerned the nature of Jesus.
  1. Ebionism (A.D. 107). They were a sect of Jews who denied the divinity of Christ, believing Him to be merely a man with an unmeasured fullness of the divine Spirit resting on Him.
  2. Docetism (A.D. 70-170). This doctrine stated that matter is evil, thus it denied the reality of Christ's body.
  3. Arianism (A.D. 325). Origen had taught a separate essence between the Father and Son, and the subordination of the Son as a secondary God beneath the Father. This furnished a starting point for the Arian heresy. He said the Father alone is God; Jesus is a creature. The proof offered were passages that seem to place Christ in the category of what is created, or ascribe growth, lack of knowledge, weariness, sorrow, etc., and other changing human affections to Him.
  4. Apollinarianism (A.D. 362-431). This doctrine denied the completeness of Christ's humanity. He believed it was impossible to join full divinity with full humanity in one person -- two wholes in one whole.
  5. Nestorianism (A.D. 428-431). He denied the real union between the divine and human natures of Christ. Instead of God-man, He was a mere God-bearing man. Jesus was only the instrument or the temple in which the divine Word dwelt.
  6. Eutychianism (A.D. 449). Eutyches denied the distinction and coexistence of the two natures and held to a mingling of both into one, thus making a third nature. This made Jesus' body a different substance than ours -- a divine body.
- C. It should not surprise us that this issue continues to resurface throughout history. The present controversy, which seeks to make Jesus' humanity far more important than His deity, developed because of an attempt to defeat the false doctrine of continual cleansing.

1. Back in the 1970s and 80s, there was a movement called "Neo-Calvinism" which affected churches of Christ. One of the statements made from this doctrine was that man had to sin because he had some kind of flaw or inherent weakness.
2. Some brethren rebutted this assertion by saying that this is essentially Calvinism (hereditary depravity). They argued that man could keep from sinning and thereby live perfectly. When pressed for an example of one who could live perfectly, Jesus was put forth as the only one who accomplished this.
  - a) The rebuttal to this was that Christ was more than just a man; He had an "edge" because of His deity, and therefore He was not a suitable example.
  - b) The response was that Jesus was just a man. He laid aside His deity when He came to earth. Now the claim is made that Jesus was fully God and fully man, but He did not exercise any of His own attributes of deity or divine prerogative. He was completely dependent upon the Holy Spirit for His miracle-working power.

## II. ***Jesus Was God In The Flesh And The Son Of Man***

- A. The eternal Word became flesh (John 1:1, 14).
  1. Jesus claimed equality with God (John 5:18; 10:30). When you saw Jesus, you saw the character of God (John 14:9). When they saw Jesus, they beheld the glory of the only Son of God!
  2. Both Jesus' humanity and deity are known by those who wanted to stone Jesus to death (John 10:33).
  3. The deity of Jesus was seen both during His days of flesh (1 John 1:1-4), and after His days of flesh (Revelation 19:13).
- B. Jesus also identified Himself as the "Son of man" (Matthew 16:13).
  1. This phrase often indicated one's connection with humanity (Psalm 8:4).
    - a) It was connected with humility and humiliation.
      - (1) No permanent abode (Matthew 8:20).
      - (2) Suffering (Matthew 17:12).
      - (3) Betrayed in death (Matthew 26:24).
    - b) It was connected with exaltation and glory.
      - (1) Unique relationship with heaven (John 3:13).
      - (2) Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8).
      - (3) Authority to forgive sins (Matthew 9:6).
  2. The term "Son of man" is connected with the prophecy of receiving an eternal kingdom and using that power to rule in bringing judgment (Daniel 7:13).

- a) The "Son of man" was going to the Ancient of days to receive a kingdom. He was not coming to earth to establish a kingdom (Premillennialism).
- b) The context of Daniel 7 is the rendering of judgment (Daniel 7:11-12, 18, 21-22). The "Son of man" therefore is connected with judgment in the New Testament.
  - (1) Temporal judgment on Jerusalem (Matthew 26:64).
  - (2) Temporal judgment regarding Rome (Revelation 14:14).
  - (3) Eternal judgment upon all man (John 5:27).
- 3. The term "Son of man" connects Jesus with the humility and humiliation as the "man of sorrows" as well as the exalted God of glory. While "Son of man" connects Jesus with humanity, it does not at the same time deny that the same person is also deity.

### III. ***Did Jesus Have Two Spirits?***

- A. The concept that Jesus had two spirits is used of those who are trying to explain how Jesus can be both man and God. How can man be man and not have a human spirit and how can God be God and not have a divine spirit?
- B. Some people obviously forget that Jesus was already a spiritual being before His coming to earth. Being God, Jesus is fundamentally "a spirit" (John 4:24).
  - 1. This describes His intrinsic form and this fact presents a problem for these brethren. If Jesus already possessed a spirit, but had to have a different kind of spirit in order to be human, then brethren are forced into a two-spirit position.
  - 2. They are forced to say that in order for Jesus to continue to be God He had to have a "divine spirit," and in order for Him to become man He had to acquire a "human spirit."
  - 3. However, the Bible states that Jesus had only one spirit (Psalm 16:10; Luke 1:35; Hebrews 5:7; 10:5; John 11:33; Matthew 27:50; Luke 23:46).
- C. Jesus was God who had preexistence (John 1:1; 2 Corinthians 8:9). Jesus, the Word, occupied a body of flesh (Hebrews 2:16-18; Colossians 2:9). He was always God (Revelation 1:8). Jesus is all that man's spirit is but He is more than a man; He is God.
- D. This doctrine has God being made in the spiritual image of man, rather than man being made in the spiritual image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). The fact that the plural is used for "God" means that Jesus was included in it. Thus, we received our spiritual attributes from Him; He did not receive His from us (cf. "grieved," Mark 3:5; Genesis 6:6).
- E. The Bible says Jesus told people about His personal experience of heaven. He told people what He had "seen and heard" in heaven (John

3:32). This means He did retain His personal divine knowledge. He was not as John, who had to be guided by the Spirit into the truths he taught. Jesus spoke from personal experience.

- F. Paul accused the Gentiles of changing "the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man ..." (Romans 1:23). Men cannot stand the thought of Jesus being fully divine. They want Jesus to be just like them in His knowledge, abilities, and powers. When people attempt to redefine the nature of our Lord they behave just as the pagans of old. This does not constitute belief in God; it is unbelief.

**Conclusion.** We do not have to understand a fact to believe it, but we do have to understand the theory! False doctrines will lead to further false doctrines concerning the person of Christ. Problems arise when we go beyond what is written (1 Corinthians 4:6). We have to abide in what is revealed: Jesus was God in the flesh, not just a man.

Jesus' humanity and deity are connected with making our salvation possible (Romans 1:3-4). The proper response to Jesus is obedient faith (Romans 1:5). Jesus has accomplished His part, so you need to be obedient in yours (Romans 6:3-4).