

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

## WEEK 2: THE PERSON OF CHRIST<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION & REVIEW

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- Last week we began to consider the Person of Christ, and we focused on Christ’s deity, the truth that the Son of God is fully God, co-equal, co-eternal, with God the Father and God the Spirit, looking at passages like John 1, Col. 1, Phil. 2, Heb. 1.
- This morning we turn our attention to the humanity of Christ. This one who is fully God, 2000 years ago, took on flesh and dwelt among us.
  - John 1:14 “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”
- When we discuss the person of Christ, we always want to keep in mind that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully Man in one person. Scripture teaches that: **“Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man in one person and will be so forever.”<sup>2</sup>**

### THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE

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- We see the humanity of Christ clearly described in **1 John 4:2-3**.
- 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, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.”
  - “John not only gives the command to test and the reason for the test (“Every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God,” v. 3), he now provides the actual test itself. Again it is Christological: What do you think about Jesus the Christ?
    - John gives the way in which one can recognize “the Spirit of God.”
    - The test itself is comprehensive. Every spirit will either be approved or rejected based on the Christological test. Not only is the test comprehensive, but it is also confessional.
    - The legitimacy of a prophet should be determined by the content of his message, his confession about Jesus. The verb “acknowledges” indicates an unwavering confession

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/resources/core-seminars/series/systematic-theology/>

<sup>2</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 529.

and “denotes not mere verbal acknowledgment but an open and forthright declaration of the message as one’s own position.

- It is the outward expression of inner faith. The content of the expression is crucial, and it must acknowledge that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.”<sup>3</sup>
- This morning, we are going to look at Jesus’ humanity in three broad categories: 1) **His virgin birth**, 2) **His weaknesses and limitations**, and 3) **His sinless humanity**.

### **His Virgin Birth** (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:18-25, 24, 25; Lk 1:35, 3:23)

- When we speak of the humanity of Christ it is appropriate to begin with a consideration of the virgin birth of Christ. Scripture clearly asserts that Jesus was conceived in the womb of his mother Mary by a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit and without a human father.
  - **Isaiah 7:14** “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”
  - **Matthew 1:18** “Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.”
  - **Luke 1:35** “And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.”
- What is the doctrinal importance of the virgin birth?
  - This was the means God used to send his Son (John 3:16; Gal. 4:4) into the world as a man. Jesus experienced the full span of human life, including in his mother’s womb.
  - But the miraculous nature of the virgin birth testifies to the fact that he was not *only* a man, but the unique God-man.
  - It also seems to hold some significance for Jesus as the New Adam. It dramatizes the fact that unlike the rest of us, who inherit a sinful and guilty nature from our first father Adam, Jesus had no earthly father.
  - He is a new representative of the human race, of all those who would be united to him by faith. The virgin birth seems important here, because it shows us that Jesus did not descend from Adam in exactly the same way in which every other human being has descended from Adam.
  - This helps us to understand why the legal guilt and moral corruption that belongs to all other human beings did not belong to Christ.

<sup>3</sup> Akin, Daniel L. *1, 2, 3 John*. Vol. 38. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001.

- This idea seems to be indicated in the statement of the angel Gabriel to Mary in Luke 1:35 – because Jesus would be conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, therefore he would be called holy.

## **Jesus Endured Human Weaknesses and Limitations**

- Jesus had a human body. (Lk 2:7, 40, 52; 23:46; 24:42; Matt 4:2, 11; Jhn 4:6; 19:28; 21:9, 13)
- This fact of Jesus' human body being just like ours is brought out and emphasized in Scripture.
  - **He was born** just as all human babies are born (Luke 2:7).
  - **He grew** through childhood to adulthood just as other children grow: “And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him” (Luke 2:40).
  - **Jesus became tired** just as we do, for we read that “Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well” in Samaria (John 4:6).
  - **He became thirsty and hungry**, for when he was on the cross he said, “**I thirst**” (John 19:28). After he had fasted for forty days in the wilderness, we read that “he was **hungry**” (Matt. 4:2).
  - **He was at times physically weak**, for during his temptation in the wilderness he fasted for forty days (the point at which a human being's physical strength is almost entirely gone and beyond which irreparable physical harm will occur if the fast continues).
    - At that time “angels came and ministered to him” (Matt. 4:11), apparently to care for him and provide nourishment until he regained enough strength to come out of the wilderness.
    - When Jesus was on his way to be crucified, the soldiers forced Simon of Cyrene to carry his cross (Luke 23:26), most likely because Jesus was so weak following the beating he had received that he did not have strength enough to carry it himself.
- The culmination of Jesus' limitations in terms of his human body is seen when he died on the cross (Luke 23:46). His human body ceased to have life in it and ceased to function, just as ours does when we die.
- Jesus also rose from the dead in a physical, human body, though one that was made perfect and was no longer subject to weakness, disease, or death.
- He demonstrates repeatedly to his disciples that he does have a real physical body: he says, “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39).
  - He is showing them and teaching them that he has “flesh and bones” and is not merely a “spirit” without a body. Another evidence of this fact is that “they gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them” (Luke 24:42. v. 30; John 20:17, 20, 27; 21:9, 13).
- In this same human body (though a resurrection body that was made perfect), Jesus also ascended into

heaven. He said before he left, “I am leaving the world and going to the Father” (John 16:28; 17:11).

- The way in which Jesus ascended up to heaven was calculated to demonstrate the continuity between his existence in a physical body here on earth and his continuing existence in that body in heaven.
- Just a few verses after Jesus had told them, “A spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39), we read in Luke’s gospel that Jesus “led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven” (Luke 24:50–51).
- Similarly, we read in Acts, “As they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9).
- All these verses taken together show that, as far as Jesus’ human body is concerned, it was like ours in every respect before his resurrection, and after his resurrection it was still a human body with “flesh and bones,” but made perfect, the kind of body that we will have when Christ returns, and we are raised from the dead as well.
  - Jesus continues to exist in that human body in heaven, as the ascension is designed to teach.
- Jesus Had a Human Mind (Luke 2:52; Heb 5:8; Mark 13:32)
- The fact that Jesus “increased in wisdom” (Luke 2:52) says that he went through a learning process just as all other children do—he learned how to eat, how to talk, how to read and write, and how to be obedient to his parents (see Heb. 5:8). This ordinary learning process was part of the genuine humanity of Christ.
- We also see that Jesus had a human mind like ours when he speaks of the day on which he will return to earth: “But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13:32).
- Jesus Had a Human Soul and Human Emotions
- We see several indications that Jesus had a human soul (or spirit). Just before his crucifixion, Jesus said, “Now is my soul troubled” (John 12:27).
  - John writes just a little later, “When Jesus had thus spoken, he was troubled in spirit” (John 13:21). In both verses the word troubled represents the Greek term *ταράσσω*, a word that is often used of people when they are anxious or suddenly very surprised by danger.
- Moreover, before Jesus’ crucifixion, as he realized the suffering he would face, he said, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death” (Matt. 26:38).
  - So great was the sorrow he felt that it seemed as though, if it were to become any stronger, it would take his very life.
- Jesus had a full range of human emotions.

- He “marveled” at the faith of the centurion (Matt. 8:10).
- He wept with sorrow at the death of Lazarus (John 11:35).
- He prayed with a heart full of emotion, for “in the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear” (Heb. 5:7).
- Moreover, the author tells us, “Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (Heb. 5:8–9).
- Yet if Jesus never sinned, how could he “learn obedience”? Apparently as Jesus grew toward maturity he, like all other human children, was able to take on more and more responsibility.
  - The older he became the more demands his father and mother could place on him in terms of obedience, and the more difficult the tasks that his heavenly Father could assign to him to carry out in the strength of his human nature.
  - With each increasingly difficult task, even when it involved some suffering (as Heb. 5:8 specifies), Jesus’ human moral ability, his ability to obey under more and more difficult circumstances, increased. We might say that his “moral backbone” was strengthened by more and more difficult exercise. Yet in all this he never once sinned.
- The complete absence of sin in the life of Jesus is all the more remarkable because of the severe temptations he faced, not only in the wilderness, but throughout his life.
- The author of Hebrews affirms that Jesus “in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). **The fact that he faced temptation means that he had a genuine human nature that could be tempted, for Scripture clearly tells us that “God cannot be tempted with evil” (James 1:13).**

**Jesus was fully Human and Sinless** (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15-16; 1 Peter 1:19; Acts 2:27; 3:14; 4:30; 7:52; 13:35)

- **2 Corinthians 5:21** “For our sake he made him to be sin *who knew no sin*, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”
  - Christ experienced the consequences for human sin. The one who lived a sinless life died a sinner’s death, estranged from God and the object of wrath. He was treated as a sinner in his death.<sup>4</sup>
- **Hebrews 4:14–16** “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*. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

<sup>4</sup> David E. Garland, 2 Corinthians, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 301.

- Christ went through everything we have or will regarding temptations, but He did not sin. He did not give in when tempted but stayed the course.
- The Scriptures make crystal clear that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life.

## WHY SHOULD ALL OF THIS MATTER? WHY HIS FULL HUMANITY?

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- **Athanasius (AD 373):** “Such and so many are the Saviour’s achievements that follow from His Incarnation, that to try to number them is like gazing at the open sea and trying to count the waves. For, indeed everything about it is marvelous, and wherever a man turns his gaze he sees the Godhead of the Word and is smitten with awe.”<sup>5</sup>
- **Worship** Jesus Christ, the Second Adam (Rom. 5:18-19; 1 Cor. 15:45)
  - Jesus was our representative and obeyed for us where Adam had failed and disobeyed.
- **Worship** Jesus Christ, our Substitutionary Sacrifice (Heb. 2:14-17)
  - If Jesus had not been a man, he could not have died in our place and paid the penalty that was due to us.
- **Worship** Jesus Christ, the Mediator between God and Men (1 Tim. 2:5)
  - Because we were alienated from God by sin, we needed someone to come between God and ourselves and bring us back to him. We needed a mediator who could represent us to God and who could represent God to us. There is only one person who has ever fulfilled that requirement.
- **Worship** Jesus Christ, our Perfect Example (Phil 2:5-11; 1 Pet 2:21; Heb. 12:2)
  - Jesus had to become a man like us in order to live as our example and pattern in life. Disciples are Christ-followers. Our goal should be to be like Christ all our days, up to the point of death, and to die with unfailing obedience to God, with strong trust in him, and with love and forgiveness to others.
- **Worship** Jesus Christ, our Sympathetic High Priest (Heb. 2:18; 4:15-16)
  - If Jesus had not been a man, he would not have been able to know by experience what we go through in our temptations and struggles in this life. But because he has lived as a man, he is able to sympathize more fully with us in our experiences.
- **Worship** Jesus Christ, the First-Born from the dead (Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 15:49)
  - Jesus had to be raised as a man in order to be the “first-born from the dead” (Col. 1:18), the pattern for the bodies that we would later have. We now have a physical body like Adam’s, but we will have one like Christ’s: “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven” (1 Cor. 15:49).

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<sup>5</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 8. 54. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 373/1993), 93.

- **Worship** Jesus Christ, the God-Man forever (Luke 24:39ff; Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:13-17)
  - Jesus did not temporarily become man, instead his divine nature was permanently united to his human nature, and he lives forever not just as the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, but also as Jesus, the man who was born of Mary, and as Christ, the Messiah and Savior of his people. Jesus will remain fully God and fully man, yet one person, forever.

## COMMON QUESTION REGARDING THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST

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### Could Jesus have sinned or was He unable to sin?<sup>6</sup>

- Over the years some have asked, was Christ able to sin in thought or deed?
- Two main answers to this question...impeccability (“not able to sin”) and peccability (able not to sin”), which implies that Jesus could have sinned but kept himself from doing so.
  - To be clear, peccability and impeccability are not synonyms for sinfulness and sinlessness. The former does not presuppose a sin nature. Both views admit that Jesus did not sin (1 John 3:5).
- The peccability position asserts that Christ could have sinned even though he did not. This is by far the minority view among theologians today. Arguments include the following:
  - **The full humanity of Christ:** If Christ in his incarnation assumed full humanity with all its attributes, he must have had the ability to sin, since by itself, unfallen human nature is capable of sinning, as the fall of Adam and Eve shows (Gen. 3:1–6).
  - **Christ’s ability to be tempted:** Christ was tempted in all points as others are (Heb. 4:15). He endured numerous temptations throughout his life (Matt. 4:1–11), and the ability to be tempted implies the ability to sin. This argument is the one peccability advocates appeal to most often.
  - **The free will of Christ:** That Christ had, as Adam did before the fall, a free will implies peccability.
- Peccability advocates see much at stake in this debate, preeminently the reality of Christ’s humanity, his temptation, and a truly sympathetic priesthood. They assert that all the above are compromised if Christ had no ability to sin.
- The Scripture, however, argues for the impeccability of Christ.
  - The impeccability position asserts that Christ was unable to sin. This is by far the majority view within the evangelicalism of past and present. Arguments for this viewpoint include the following:

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<sup>6</sup> John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 273–274.

- **The deity of Christ:** Since Christ is God and since God cannot sin (James 1:13), it follows that Christ could not sin either. Since “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23), God would have to die if he sinned—but God cannot die and, by implication, cannot sin.
- **The decrees of God:** Since God had decreed the plan of redemption to be accomplished by Jesus Christ, it follows that Christ could not have sinned, for had he sinned, the plan of redemption would have failed.
- **The divine attributes of Christ:** Some impeccability advocates argue from the immutability of Christ (see Heb. 13:8). The reasoning is that if Christ could have sinned while he was on earth, then he could sin now. Since he cannot sin now, and since he is immutable, it follows that he could not sin while on earth.
  - Other attributes appealed to include Christ’s omnipotence (the ability to sin implies weakness, but Christ had no weakness) and omniscience (John 5:25).
- **The Trinitarian relationship of Christ:** Being “full of the Holy Spirit” (Luke 4:1), Jesus could not fail the testing. The Holy Spirit could not fail in what he had been sent to do for Jesus.

### **Even though Jesus could not sin, the temptations he faced were genuine.**

- The reality of His temptations did not depend on his ability to respond.
- Indeed, since he never yielded to them, he endured their full force. Thus, temptation for Jesus was more real and more powerful than for any other human being.
- A comparison of Adam’s temptation and Jesus’s temptation reveals great differences and makes Jesus’s victory all the more remarkable:
  - Adam faced temptation in the best of settings, the garden of Eden; Jesus faced temptation in a stark environment, the wilderness of Judea.
  - Adam lived in the perfection of the pre-fall world; Jesus lived in a deeply corrupt and sinful fallen world.
  - Adam gave in to the first temptation he faced; Jesus faced repeated temptations throughout his earthly life and ministry (Heb. 4:15) but never yielded.
  - Adam entered his time of temptation adequately fed in a delightful garden filled with fruit and fresh water; Jesus was weakened by forty days of fasting before his temptation in the wilderness.
  - The consequences of Adam’s fall to temptation were lethal to the entire human race; the consequences of Jesus’s triumph over temptation allowed him to complete the program of redemption successfully.