

## C. The Humanity of Christ: the Glory of His Humble Appearing

**“Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52)**

**Doctrine:** Jesus was, is, and remains truly and fully human. He was like us, yet without sin.

*“He was no phantom being. However more than man He was, He was not less. He was quite literally and truly a man” (H. D. McDonald).*

*“We cannot deny the real, total, unmixed humanity of Jesus Christ and be true Christian believers” (John Blanchard, see also 1 John 4:2).*

**Epitomizing Text: Luke 2:1-52.**

### 1. The EVIDENCES of His Humanity.

- a. ***He had a human birth and a human ancestry.*** The conception of Christ was clearly miraculous (Lk 1:26-35), but physically his birth was normal in every respect, taking place after the expected period of pregnancy. The shepherds came in and saw lying in the manger, a real, newborn baby. The lineages recorded in Matthew and Luke established his legal right to the throne back to Abraham through David, and his true connection with the human race back to Adam. He had half-brothers and sisters and knew the stresses and joys of family life (brothers named in Mk 6:3). (See also Paul's declaration in Rom 1:3)
- b. ***He experienced normal human growth and development.*** The record is clear that Jesus grew and developed as other children did (Lk. 2:40, 52), making progress in the physical, mental, social and spiritual aspects of His being. The mark of His mental development, unhindered by sin, is seen in his questions and answers, given at 12 years of age, to the scholars in the Temple.
- c. ***He is called by names which imply a human nature.*** (1 Tim. 2:5; John 8:40; 1 Cor. 15:21, 47; Matt. 1:1; Mark 6:3; Luke 2:12, 43; Acts 2:22).

Consider, in particular, His favorite and most frequent self-designation: the **“Son of Man.”** It appears at least seventy times in the first three gospel accounts. While the self-reference speaks of His humanity, it also tells us He is more than man. Having its roots in the Old Testament (Dan. 7:13), by the time of Jesus' appearance it was synonymous with the Messiah, the “Christ” (Jn. 12:34; Matt. 16:13, 16, 21). He is the unique Man, the special Man, the anointed Man, from the Father. This self-reference is used repeatedly in the context of suffering and glory, e.g., **“the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected . . . and be killed . . . when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels”** (Luke 9:22, 26). The reference intimates both humiliation and exaltation, meekness and majesty, a Cross and a throne. The term “Son of Man” both *“revealed and concealed the glory of the Messiah who suffers, and the humility of a King who reigns”* (H. D. McDonald).

- d. ***Certain expressions imply a true and complete human nature.*** (John 1:14; Heb. 2:9-18; Heb. 4:14-16; Rom. 1:3; 9:5; Acts 2:30).
- e. ***He identified with men in their need and their temptations.*** This identification with

- men as “a man” is particularly evidenced in His baptism (Matt. 3:13-17) and His subsequent “trial” in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11; see also Heb. 4:15). In the first He fulfills all righteousness. In the second He resists all evil. He thus glorifies God as the true man. In His baptism He identifies—takes His place—with our fallen, sinful humanity. He does not distance Himself from us, but openly aligns Himself as one of us. In His trial in the wilderness He is tempted to exercise His divine prerogatives on His own behalf and He refuses, answering that “**Man shall not live by bread alone**” (Lk. 4:4).
- f. ***He displayed certain human limitations.*** (John 4:6; Matt. 8:24; Luke 22:43; Heb. 5:8; Matt. 26:39; Mark 11:33) We must understand that to be human is to be limited. Though He had *none* of our sinful inclinations, He had *all* of our sinless limitations. Humanness is finite in power, in knowledge and wisdom. We should not be surprised at His lack of knowledge, as a man, of certain things (Mark 13:32).
  - g. ***He had the appearance of a human being.*** There is no hint in the Gospels that Jesus ever appeared to the physical sight as anything less than human. The emphasis is on the *man* whom people saw, who did miracles, who was arrested and crucified, and even the *man* who appeared after the resurrection. (Matt. 16:13-14; John 1:10; 4:9; Phil. 2:8).
  - h. ***He proved He was human by suffering and death.*** (John 19:30, 34).
2. **The NATURE of His Humanity.** The consistent doctrine of the church has been that “*Christ took a true human body and He took a reasonable human soul*” (Jn. 12:27; 13:21; Matt. 26:38).
    - a. ***He Possessed a True Body.*** He was “*bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh.*” This is clearly stated, for example, in Hebrews 10:5. Paul states it explicitly in Colossians 2:9 and John does so in his gospel (John 1:14) and his epistle (1 John 4:2). Luther stated it well: “*He did not flutter about like a spirit, but He dwelt among men. He had eyes, ears, mouth, nose, chest, stomach, hands, and feet, just as you and I do. He took the breast. His mother nursed Him as any other child is nursed.*” He was subject to the limitations of His body. He was hungry and thirsty (Mark 11:12; John 19:28). He got tired (John 4:6). He slept (Matt. 8:24). He sweat and bled (Luke 22:44). He could be beaten and bruised, slapped and spit on. He could be nailed to a cross. In all essential respects Christ’s human body was identical with our own. It had the same anatomy, the same physiology, the same biochemistry, the same central nervous system and the same basic genetic code (Macleod, 162). He was resurrected bodily (Luke 24:39-43; John 20:24-28). In fact, He still possesses a body, a human body, a “body of glory” (Phil. 3:21) that shall be considered in the section dealing with His exalted glory as resurrected and ascended. “*The dust of the earth is on the throne of the Majesty on High*” (John Duncan).
    - b. ***He Possessed a Human Mind.*** We are told in Luke 2:52 that “**Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature . . .**” We are told in Hebrews 5:8-9 that “**He learned obedience through what He suffered.**” Humanness is not omniscient. In other words, like other humans, He had to grow in knowledge and obedience. His human growth in knowledge, specifically the knowledge of God, had to come about the same way it does for us—through experience and through revelation (in communion with God and His Word). He

knew the will of the Father because the Father revealed it to Him. His intellect was pure and purely focused.

- c. **He Possessed Human Emotions.** He was subject to all sinless emotions. As Calvin wrote: “*Christ has put on our feelings along with our flesh.*” He had passions like us, yet they were sinless and regulated by moderation. Generally, He was serene, contented and happy. He experienced deep, habitual joy; He was not despondent nor depressed (Luke 10:21; John 15:11; 17:13). He experienced anger, even blazing indignation (Mark 3:5; 10:13; John 11:33). He “marveled” at faith (Matt. 8:10). He experienced grief (John 11:35; Luke 19:41). He experienced terror and anguish, especially at Gethsemane and at Golgotha (Mark 14:33-34; consider Macleod’s excellent discussion, 173-177).
- d. **He Possessed a Human Will.** He had a will of His own (John 6:38; Matt 26:39). His decisions were moved by appropriate considerations as are ours (John 7:1-10). He determined to fulfill His calling (recall “set his face like a flint”). Also, despite the determination of others or the advice of others, he exercised His own will (John 2:1-4; 6:15; Mk 3:31-35). Yet that will was subordinated to the divine will of God.

3. **The UNIQUENESS of His Humanity—the Sinlessness of Christ.** Christ possessed every essential characteristic of true human nature, but no sin. Sin is not essential to human nature. Sin is *not* what makes us “truly human.” It is an abnormality. Indeed, it is “an intruder” which makes us less than what we were made to be! Fallenness is not an essential part of our nature, for if it was, then Adam was not a man! And neither will we be, when glorified (and sin is removed)! Thus, Christ can be truly human being without sin. In fact He is the “truly normal man”—the one sinless man. Yet here is where He is quite “unlike” us. Though He was born of a fallen and sinful mother, He was born of her “without sin.” As the angel told Mary, it would be a “**holy offspring**” that would be born of her (Luke 1:35). The divine act that made His humanity made it holy (Macleod, 225). As He was unique in terms of His virgin birth, He is unique in terms of His sinlessness. He was tempted in all things as we are, “**yet without sin**” (Heb. 4:15). He is, rather, “**holy, innocent, undefiled**” (Heb. 7:26). He could challenge His enemies in John 8:46, “**Which of you convicts Me of sin?**” He is described by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:21 as “**Him who knew no sin.**” In 1 Peter 1:19 He is referred to as “**a lamb unblemished and spotless.**”

- Christ was free of *actual sin*. He never did a wrong act. Later, in 1 Peter 2:22 it is written that He “**committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth.**” He never had sin which He had to confess. He never had to ask for forgiveness. Everything He thought, said or did was in conformity to the will of God (Matt. 3:15; John 8:29, “**I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.**”).
- Christ was free from *inherent sin*. That means that nowhere in Him was there any sin. Satan had no foothold in Him (John 14:30). There was no lust. There was no affinity with sin. There was no proclivity to sin, no disposition to sin. There was no possibility of temptation from within. There was no “law of sin” in His members. In no respect was He fallen and in no respect was His nature corrupt (Macleod, 222). He was able to be tempted, and He was. He experienced, as a Man, real testing (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 22:39-46; Heb. 2 and 4).

**Was Christ able to sin? Could Jesus have sinned?** Surely He was able not to sin, for He never did. But was he not able to sin? Adam was able not to sin. As created by God, he was

very good (Gen. 1:31). Adam had the freedom and power to do good, but he could fall. But what about the Last Adam? Christ took on our nature, but not as fallen. He came into the closest connection with us, but without sin. There are no explicit Scriptures which directly address this. But it may be *proposed* that He was not able to sin (called the *impeccability* of Christ; cf. Grudem's arguments, 234-235). This inability to sin is tied to the uniqueness of His person, His very identity. It was holy deity which united itself to His humanity in One person. He was and remained the Son of God, "very God of very God." His human nature never existed apart from union and subsistence with His divine nature. Though there are things that Jesus experienced in His human nature that His divine nature would not (e.g., thirst, hunger, weariness), an act of sin would have been a moral act involving (implicating) His whole person. If He sinned, then God sinned. But God cannot act apart from His nature, which is holy. The union of natures compels us to conclude that it was not possible for Christ, the God-man, to sin. "*The Son of God may suffer, may be tempted, may be ignorant and may even die. But we cannot link God with the [act of] sin. God cannot in any situation or for any purpose commit a transgression of His own will. He absolutely cannot be guilty of lawlessness*" (Macleod, 230).

***Yet, His temptations remained real testings.*** His sinless integrity does not mean that temptation and testing were but a vapor to Him, a short, painless struggle, a "paper tiger." Rather, because He was sinless and in His humanity committed to wholly carrying out the will and pleasure of God, He did not yield as an easy prey (like us). He encountered the full force of temptation's violence with a "protracted resistance" which required all the resources of His manhood in dependence upon the Spirit (Macleod, 227-228; Grudem, 235). He fought the battle the way we are called to fight it: in reliance upon the fellowship of believers (Mk. 14:33), in prayerful dependency upon the Father (Mk. 14:35), and in obedience to the Word of God (Mt. 4:4).

*"In every way His life is what human life was meant to be. He loved God with His whole mind and heart and soul and strength, for His was the life of perfect worship. He fulfilled all the requirements of the blessed life, making actual those beatitudes which He taught to His disciples . . . The consecrated life of which Romans 13 is an outline found in Him incarnate reality"* (H. D. McDonald).

*"No miracle of Christ equals the miracle of His sinless life"* (H. R. Mackintosh).

#### 4. **The WRONG VIEWS of His Humanity.**

- ***Docetism.*** [*Theory of an "Apparent" Humanity*] They refused to accept that God could in any real sense become man. Their objections rested on two grounds: first, that matter is evil and, second, that the divine cannot experience change or suffering. It was proposed by some that Jesus was born as an ordinary man and that Christ, a heavenly being, came upon Him at His baptism and left before His crucifixion. Others suggested that the humanity of Christ was simply apparent, i.e., He appeared to be a man, but His flesh had no reality. His humanity was a mere image without substance. Christian Science denies the real humanity of Christ on account of its general belief that matter is not real and the flesh is a "delusion of the mortal mind." This heresy was attacked by the apostle John in his first epistle (1 John 2:22; 4:2, 3; 5:5, 6).
- ***Apollinarianism.*** [*Theory of an Incomplete Humanity*] Apollinarius (310-390) considered man as composed of body and soul (rational and irrational). He taught that when "the Word became flesh," the Word only took on a human body, but did not take

on a human mind (intellect) and will. He taught a “divination of the human soul.” Christ did not possess a human soul. The presence of two minds and two wills in one person was seen as producing a state of perpetual turmoil and conflict. Appolinaris’ Christ was a truncated Christ. “*He is not a man, though like man,*” he wrote. The end result is that there is no real incarnation, no full assumption of humanity. There is only God assuming the conditions of human existence. The problem with the denial of Christ’s full humanity is that it is fatal to the Christian doctrine of salvation. If Christ did not become human (in all that means), He did not save humanity. Gregory of Nazianzen stated the issue clearly when he wrote, “*If anyone has put his trust in Him as a man without a human mind, he is wholly bereft of mind, and quite unworthy of salvation. For that which [Christ] has not assumed He has not healed . . .*” In other words, if the incarnate Christ did not have a human mind, then this aspect of our sinful nature could not have been redeemed at Calvary. It was the whole man—body and soul and mind and will—that was lost. If Christ did not assume the whole of manhood, then all of man is lost!

## 5. **The NECESSITY of His Humanity.**

- ***To be Our Real Representative for Obedience.*** Adam, as our representative man in the Garden of Eden, fell from his obedience and brought guilt upon us all. Jesus, the last Adam, stands in our place and obeys (compare Luke 4:1-13 with Genesis 3). We needed this Man to obey and fulfill all righteousness. See Paul’s wonderful words in Romans 5:12-21 comparing and contrasting what came by the one man, Adam, and what came by the one Man, Jesus Christ!
- ***To be Our Substitutionary Sacrifice for Penalty (Payment).*** If Christ had not been a man, He could not have died in our place and paid the penalty that was due to us. It is impossible that the blood of goats and bulls should take away sins (Heb. 10:4). Therefore He comes to do so by assuming our nature, assuming our guilt, tasting death that He might deliver us from our sins and from him who had the power of death, even the devil (Heb. 2:14-17).

### **Applications of this Glory.**

***It assures us of our salvation.*** “*If Jesus Christ is not true God, how could He help us? If He is not true man, how could He help us?*” (Bonhoeffer). But He is both, and therefore He can. As guilty, lost and helpless sinners, our only hope is a substitute that is acceptable to God. The substitute would have to be God, for God is the One who has been wronged and only God can provide a sacrifice of infinite value. However, the substitute must be a man, a sinless man, so that He would not have to answer for his own sins and could take the place of men.

*Because the sinless Savior died,  
My sinful soul is counted free;  
For God, the Just, is satisfied  
To look on Him, and pardon me.*

***It assures us of His sharing in our situation.*** “*He came into, and shared, our environment. For the Son of God, the incarnation meant a whole new set of relationships: with His father and mother; with His brothers and sisters; with His disciples: with the scribes, the Pharisees and the Saducees; with Roman soldiers and with lepers and prostitutes. It was within these relationships that He lived His incarnate life, experiencing pain, poverty and temptation; witnessing squalor*

*and brutality; hearing obscenities and profanities and the hopeless cry of the oppressed. He did not live in isolation or detachment, but “with us” as a fellow-man among men, crowded, busy, harassed, and molested . . . He saved us from alongside us” (Macleod, 180; Winslow, 133).*

***It assures us of His sympathy and help*** (Heb. 2:18; 4:15-16). *“At the throne of God we are understood. Mercy still has a human heart and pity a human face . . . He who knows [and took] our human pathway with its toils and twists still cares . . . He who has shared so intimately with us can sympathize with us fully” (H. D. McDonald).*

*“The glory of the incarnation is that it presents to our adoring gaze not a humanized God or a deified man, but a true God-man—one who is all that God is and at the same time all that man is: one on whose almighty arm we can rest, and to whose human sympathy we can appeal” (Benjamin Warfield).*

*Hallelujah! What a Savior!*