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# JOHN 1:14 : GOD'S SUPREME REVELATION [2]

## The Word became flesh

*No. EE106*

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In his first letter John makes this momentous statement: "This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God..." (1Jn 4:2-3).

This underlines the seriousness of any error with regard to the doctrine about Christ. John continues: "Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ<sup>1</sup> does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him" (2Jn 9-10).

On this point the Bible is quite clear: If Satan has one goal as far as the church is concerned, it is to mislead it so that it embraces the lie. Without truth we can not be true Christians or the true church. And the apostle quite clearly states that *the teaching of Christ* lies at the heart of true doctrine.

□ During the first two centuries the battle between the truth and the lie was of a general nature. But during the third and fourth centuries the conflict became more specific. It focussed on the trinity of

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1. Here the Genitive is interpreted as being *objective: the teaching about Christ*. The Genitive can, however, also be understood as being subjective, in which case it would have to be translated: the teaching of Christ (i.e. the teaching he gave).

God. Eventually clarity was reached at the Councils of Nicea (325) and Constantinople (381). These Synods accurately formulated the orthodox doctrine of the trinity, while at the same time exposing the heretical teachings about it.

The next conflict was about the person of Jesus Christ. We need not go into the many errors and heresies in this regard.<sup>2</sup> Suffice to say that the church and all its most godly thinkers devoted considerable attention to the formulation of a clear and balanced Scripture-based formulation.

□ Finally, the orthodox and historical teaching about the person of Jesus Christ was formulated in 451 at the Council of Chalcedon ("630 holy and blessed fathers"). It is reflected in the great articles of faith of the 16th century Reformation<sup>3</sup>, as can be seen from the following extracts from the Belgic Confession, paragraphs 18 and 19:

*He ... became like unto man, really assuming the true human nature with all its infirmities, sin excepted ... did not only assume human nature as to the body, but also a true human soul, that He might be a real man ...*

*... two natures united in one single person; yet each nature retains its own distinct properties ... these two natures are so closely united in one person that they were not separated, even by His death ... Wherefore we confess that He is very God and very man: very God by His power to conquer death; and very man that He might die for us according to the infirmity of His flesh.*

### A CLOSER LOOK AT OUR TEXT

Our text from John 1:14 is made up of only two

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2. The most important heresies were Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, Monophysitism, Docetism, Samosatianism, Sabellianism, Arianism.

3. Belgic Confession of 1561 (§18-19); Westminster Confession of 1643-46 (ch.8, §2); 1689 Baptist Confession (ch.8, §2).

words in the Greek, both of which convey astounding truths, but can lead to some serious misunderstandings unless we look at them continually against the backdrop of the rest of New Testament witness.

□ The expression "the Word became flesh" is unique in the Bible. There are other statements which convey more or less the same idea, but we have here a conciseness and balance which makes it the classic pronouncement that it is.

Here are a few similar New Testament statements: Rom 1:3: "(Jesus) who as to his human nature was a descendant of David..."; Gal 4:4: "God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law"; Phil 2:7: "(Jesus took) the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness..."; 1Tim 3:16: "He appeared in a body..."; Hb 2:14 says that He became "flesh and blood" and 1Jn 4:2 that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh".

□ We should note that John does not say merely that the Word became a human being, or that He adopted a human body. The apostle uses a Greek word which is almost too shocking to use in respect of the eternal Word: he says that the Word became, as it were, "meat", and so emphasises the frailness, dependence and mortality of man. Of course it includes all of man, body as well as soul. *The Creator of heaven and earth entered the physical, mundane life of mortals, in fact, became one of us!*

□ He "became" flesh. This is an ordinary verb, pointing to a specific moment in the past. However, we need to consider this carefully to avoid any misunderstanding of its true meaning.

- One could deduce from this that the Word *did not exist previously*. However, John avoided this misinterpretation by stating in verse 1 that He was "from the beginning".

- It could also be interpreted as meaning that

the Word *ceased to be what He had been previously* - in other words that the Son changed his godly identity for that of a human being, that He surrendered his godly attributes and sovereign prerogatives either permanently or temporarily.

There is not the faintest suggestion that v.1 was replaced by v.14. In fact, John continues, "We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (14b). And in v. 18 he calls Him "God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side". Furthermore the Bible repeatedly assures us that He still is, and will remain for all eternity and in every respect, truly God.

❑ No, the only way of interpreting this prologue to the book of John is to see it in terms of *adding and combining*. The Son surrendered none of his deity, but rather added to it a human nature. He still is what He has been since all eternity. He did, however, acquire what He had never had before - but this He will never lose. Atanasius expressed it as follows 1500 years ago: "He became what He had never been before and will continue to be what He has always been".

This is a truth on which there can be no compromise: Jesus is both fully God and fully man, without affecting either of his two natures. He is God-man, not a godly man nor a humanly God.

## WHAT DOES IT SAY TO US?

❑ Much of the agonising attempts to understand the person of Christ accurately may sound like hair-splitting to some. And certainly one can place too much emphasis on orthodoxy, and in the process become scholastic, which in turn leads to a preoccupation with things which have not been revealed to us. It is equally true, however, that a clear understanding and meticulous formulation of the basic truths about the person of Christ are essential if we are to avoid crossing the subtle boundaries between orthodoxy and heresy. Many individuals and churches have perished because of

their failure to do so.

❑ Let us therefore get our thinking straight about our Lord Jesus Christ.

To many naive and sentimental churchgoers He is still the little baby in the manger, but then we could quite justifiably question the worth of such a Christ to you and me.

For many millions of Christians he is still on the cross - thus remaining a pathetic, helpless Christ who cannot help Himself, let alone save you and me in this life and for all eternity. Is it surprising that these people eventually turned to Mary and made her their mediator?

❑ The Son had to become man in order to become a perfect substitute for us. Man has sinned and therefore a man must lead us out of the dark maze of sinfulness. There is at this moment a glorified human being in heaven, who looks after our interests.

- As our great *Prophet* He, as fully God, but also as fully man, continues to lead us in the paths of truth. The teaching he gave, and the example He set, was that of a man. It is, in other words, not unreal and totally unattainable. For instance, what is there in his sermon on the mount that you and I cannot carry out in life? A child can understand it, a child can do it. Read it again and note the simplicity of His teaching.

- As our great *High Priest* He sacrificed Himself on the cross for us, both as fully God and as fully man. Only God could carry the burden of the sin of millions. But man sinned, and therefore a man had to pay the penalty.

Also think, for instance, of his intercession with the Father. It is not that of an outsider putting in a casual good word for us with God. No, it is the Head of the new humanity pleading for His people - those who have become part of Him through faith. There is an inseparable unity and solidarity between Him

and us. So great is his love for us, so unthinkable to Him is a future without us, that He prays as if it is He himself who is held helpless in the vice-grip of sin.

- As our mighty *King*, but also as perfect man, He will bring our salvation to its final conclusion. Man it is who has sinned and man must wrest himself from the consequences. There is a Man who managed to do this on our behalf, One who is now engaged in the cleaning up operations. There is a Man who will bring our salvation to its perfect conclusion.

Truly, in Christ man will reach all that he was created for in the beginning. God's plans and purposes are never thwarted! In fact, because of the fall His glory will shine forth so much more brilliantly than without it. Why? Because now we experientially understand God's grace. If it had not been for the fall, we would not have known it, because by definition God's grace is shown to people who not only do not deserve it, but who deserve the opposite - eternal damnation.

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