
JOHN 1:14 : GOD'S SUPREME REVELATION [4]

... became flesh ... (3)

No. EE109

We take a third look at the statement in John 1:14, namely that the Word became flesh. We need to consider now Jesus Christ as Person, and more specifically the relation between His two natures, the Godly and the human.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

❑ We should be careful not to think of the incarnation as the coming into being of our Saviour - as His origin. As "the Word" He had existed from eternity and his conception and birth was not the beginning of his life. *No, He who had no beginning did not cease to be what he was from all eternity. But with the incarnation He began to be for all coming eternity what He had never been before.*

❑ The incarnation was an overwhelming event, as it meant the blending in *one* Person of all that is true of God and all that is true of man. The Man who was crucified, was the eternal Word! The carpenter of Nazareth was truly God! The babe in the manger was the One who had created all!

What the Bible teaches in this regard is nothing short of mind boggling. Nevertheless, if we say we are Bible believing Christians, exactly this is what we must embrace in faith.

❑ It would have been utter humiliation for the Son

to become a *perfect* human, like man before the Fall. But that was not what happened. No, the Word was sent to a world of sin and distress and death, with which He had to identify completely. He became exactly like one of the people on earth, subject to heartache, pain and even death, but with one, and only one exception: *He had no sin.*

❑ When we say the Word became flesh, we say amongst other things:

The One who had been timeless from eternity, now entered time and became subject to its limitations.

The unchangeable One became changeable.

The invisible One became visible.

The Maintainer of all became dependent.

The omnipotent One became subject to weakness.

The immortal One became mortal.

THE PERSON OF JESUS

❑ We have seen that the early church had difficulty in understanding and expressing in words the concept of the divine and human natures being united in the person of Christ. Eventually the Council of Chalcedon formulated it in the way that is still being regarded as the orthodox interpretation. Even the articles of faith of the 16th century Reformation carefully followed in these footsteps.

❑ When we talk of the union of the divine and human natures of Christ, we refer to it as the *hypostatic union* of Christ. In essence it means something like this:

- The word *hypostatic* is derived for the Greek word for substance or nature - the essential character or nature of something, as distinguishable from its outward appearance or manifestation.

- Our Lord Jesus Christ is both *fully God* and *fully man*. The Council of Chalcedon formulated the

unity of his person and separateness of his two natures as follows: the two natures are *without confusion, without change, without division, without separation*. The two natures of Christ must therefore not be seen as such an intimate mixture or combination so that a third God-man nature is formed (they are without confusion and without change). But they are also not to be understood as a loose cohabitation of two natures which brings into question the unity of Christ's person (they are without division and without separation).

- During the Reformation the same truth was formulated somewhat differently. And about a century later the Westminster Confession (1647) describes it with the following words: "two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without *conversion, composition, or confusion*. Which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man" (Art VIII.2).

The divine is therefore not humanised or the human deified - there has been no *conversion*. Moreover, the divine and the human elements do not blend to form a third nature, as it were - there has been no *composition*. Finally, the divine and human natures do not simply alternate so that only one of them is up front at any one time - there is no *confusion*.

❑ Truly, the two natures of the Lord Jesus Christ is a deep and unfathomable mystery, which we shall never fully understand. But we must believe it, because that is what God has revealed to us in his Word.

There are other such incomprehensible truths in the Bible. Take, for instance, the holy Trinity: One God, three Persons. What could be more unfathomable? We also find it difficult to reconcile the concept of God's total sovereignty with man's responsibility.

Yet we must, as far as we can, think clearly

about these matters, because lopsided thinking always gives birth to heresies, which dishonour God and have disastrous pastoral effects.

In a nutshell: *Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly man - one Person, with two natures, that have not been changed or mixed or do not alternate.*

A FEW POINTS OF APPLICATION

1. The Son's incarnation explains all the other miracles in the New Testament.

Sceptics find it impossible to believe many things in the Bible: the miracles, the resurrection of Jesus, the ascension, and many more. But if Jesus of Nazareth is, in fact, the second Person of the divine Trinity who became man, all these objections against the supernatural in his life fall away. Can anything, after all, be too wondrous for the living God!

The incarnation is truly an unfathomable mystery - but it gives sense to all the other miracles in the New Testament.

2. Jesus' incarnation is a prerequisite for the fullness of our salvation.

This is worked out in some detail in the second chapter of Hebrews.

- Hb 2:5-8: Two things are true:
Firstly, at creation, the authority to rule over this earth was given to *man*.

Secondly, for now we do not see anything of this rule at all.

- Hb 2:9-10: This does not mean that God's promise was not fulfilled. It was! Man does, in fact, rule over everything. How is this?

While it is true that we have not as yet been crowned with glory and honour, we do have a Head who has perfectly met all God's demands. He *already* has authority over everything in heaven and on earth. He is our representative, and in Him vests the guarantee of our eventual glory and rule.

Our sin has disqualified us from being crowned with glory and honour. Before this can therefore happen, we will first need to be reinstated as holy before God. But how? We ourselves would never, in all eternity, have been able to pay the debt. In our own strength we would never have been able to extract ourselves from the swamp of sinfulness. What therefore was required was a substitute.

The only acceptable substitute for man was another man, but one without sin - in other words a man who was not already under the penalty of death for his own sins. Alas, no one out of the seed of Adam qualifies for this. All have sinned. In any case no man is capable of dying for the sins of millions.

That is why God the Son had to become man! As a sinless man He could be our substitute; as fully God He was able to endure the punishment due to millions.

- Hb 2:11-15: The new humanity in Christ is one huge family of brothers and sisters - those truly united to Christ by true faith. And this universal family - from all nations, and all centuries - has Him as their eldest brother.

- Hb 2:16-18: We need to understand this very clearly: in order for the Son to qualify to stand before God on our behalf, then and now, He had to become one of us.

3. Is the ongoing and eternal humanity of Christ indelibly engraved in your mind?

Do you fully take into account the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ in your relationship with Him? We can so easily over-react to the heretical theology of our day - which teaches that Christ was no more than a wonderful man - and forget that He was indeed also fully man and will be so for all eternity.

Many Christians think that the Lord Jesus left his humanity here on earth when He went back to heaven. This is not so. There is a glorified, understanding, and sympathetic Man in the throne-room of heaven who lovingly looks after the interests

of His flock here on earth (1Tm 2:5).

4. You are also perfect and glorified man - for all eternity!

If you are truly united with Christ by true faith, the Word of God teaches that you are to share his glorified state one day. Look at Him - after his resurrection - and know what you are to be like for all eternity!

Do you realise that you are, and will forever be, fully human, like Him? We will rule here on earth with Christ for all eternity as humans, albeit in a glorified state. And the recreated earth will still be fully earth, not so much different from what it is now.

The idea that we will be simply harp-playing angels in the hereafter is not only unscriptural, but an insult to God. No, we will be fully human, but much more than now. We will be exactly what Adam would have become, had he remained true to his calling. God will not compromise one iota on his original plan for man. We who are indeed in Christ will live and rule on this glorified earth as *people* - let there be no doubt about this. But unlike Adam, we will *no longer be able to sin*. The test that the first Adam failed so miserably, has been passed triumphantly by the last Adam, our Head - the Head of the new humanity.

Nico van der Walt

- Nico van der Walt subscribes to the historically respected and internationally recognized 1689 Baptist Confession - like most Reformed Baptists worldwide - as well as the Confession of Sola 5, an association of God-centred evangelicals in Southern Africa.
- Subscriptions, changes of address, cancellations and correspondence: E: dupleissismh@telkomsa.net; P.O. Box 35289, Menlopark, 0102, South Africa. Tel. 012-804 0316; 083 5544 941.
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