

What We Believe about Jesus Matters for Eternity

In my last article in this series on John 1:14 we looked at the fact that biblical doctrine is very important for practical living. It's often the case in our Evangelical world today that people are prone to say something like, "All I need to do is believe in Jesus." Sadly, this may be a "Jesus" of their own making without a right understanding of what the Bible teaches about Jesus. Who is he? What did he really come to this earth to accomplish? There are many who teach that it really doesn't matter what we believe about Jesus, or what religion we choose, as long as we're sincere and we're trying to be "good" people. But the Holy Scriptures will not allow such beliefs. This is an important reason why we need true, biblical doctrine to inform us. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us....."

John uses a verb form here that speaks of the fact that the Word "*became flesh*" at a point in time. Paul says the same thing in Gal. 4:4. "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law..." I should also call attention to the word translated "flesh." John often uses the word simply to point to the *humanity* of man—the *physical* as over against the *spiritual*. (see also, 1 John 4:2).

In contrast to this, the apostle Paul will often use the word translated "flesh" to speak of the base and sensual desires of fallen man (e.g., Galatians 5:16-17). And yet, Paul also uses the word to speak of the *physical nature* of man. For example, in Romans 1:3 we read: "...concerning the Son, who was descended from David, *according to the flesh*....." John is calling our attention to the fact that, at a certain point in time, the eternal second person of the Trinity, took to himself a full and complete human nature the only exception is that he was *without sin*. And so we see that the Word is *truly divine* as well as *truly human*—except for sin. Jesus truly is the God-man.

It's generally believed by Bible scholars that John is combating an early form of the heresy known as Gnosticism that was later developed further into what came to be called Docetism from a Greek word that means "to appear." Some were teaching that material/physical substance was evil and because of this God could not defile himself by any real contact with humanity so Jesus only *appeared* to have a human body. Any faithful reading of John's gospel, or his epistles, would have to conclude that the Word did, in fact, take to himself a human nature. Although John, in this one verse, doesn't unpack all that the Incarnation means, other New Testament writers take up this same theme and expand it further.

In Philippians 2:7 Paul writes that that Jesus, "...made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men..." The phrase translated "made himself nothing" comes from one word in the Greek text and it can be translated, "he emptied himself." Jesus Christ set aside the glories and privileges of his pre-incarnate, exalted state in heaven to come to earth. Luke's gospel makes it clear that Jesus was born in a lowly condition, including, likely, the filth and unsanitary conditions of a place where animals are kept; and he took the form of a servant (Mt. 20:25-26; Luke 2:7).

As we look further in this verse we'll see that it was absolutely necessary that Jesus, the Son of God, took on human flesh in the incarnation. But for now, I simply want to note the

importance of the teaching of scripture that Jesus is both God and man, one *person* with two distinct *natures*. These two natures are “united but not mingled” (Calvin). And as the Westminster Confession of Faith (8.2) teaches: “...the two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition or confusion...” It’s incredibly important that we do not confuse the two natures of Jesus. Biblical scholars teach us:

—No “conversion”: the divinity is not lost in the humanity or the humanity lost in the divinity.

—No “composition”: the incarnation did not result in some new creature that was neither God nor man.

—No “confusion”: *in any sense* between the human nature and the divine nature.

Jesus had to be both fully God and fully man to atone for sin. The doctrine of the Incarnation is absolutely mind boggling! *This* Jesus is the one who we must believe in. He is the only one who saves sinners from their sins. Getting this doctrine right matters for eternity!

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