

What If Jesus Were Only a Man?

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EDITORIAL NOTE.—The above theme was discussed by the author during his Lenten noonday services at Cleveland, O., in 1925. Dr. Dan. F. Bradley, one of the prominent clergymen of Cleveland, took exception to some of Rev. Lankenau's remarks. The nature of these exceptions can be gathered from Rev. Lankenau's answer: they relate chiefly to the question whether the term "deity" is really applicable to Christ. Thinking that his argument might be of interest and useful to others, Rev. Lankenau has offered what is substantially his answer to Dr. Bradley for publication in the THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY. DAU.

First of all, dear Doctor, I wish to make it plain that you can in no way more strongly insist than I do on the reality of the incarnation of Jesus and the actuality of His humanity. Christ was not merely clothed in human form, nor was He a spirit without flesh and blood, but a real, actual man. Heb. 2, 14. He was the man Christ Jesus. 1 Tim. 2, 5. When He is called the Son of Man, which is done more than eighty times in the Bible, Matt. 8, 20, etc., I firmly believe that the Scriptures intend to tell us primarily that He is flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone, a very man born of woman. The Seed of Abraham, Gen. 22, 18, the Root of Jesse, Jer. 23, 5, the Son of Mary, Luke 2, 7, derived His human nature, and real human nature it was, from His Israelite forebears. To deny the real humanity of Christ would be a denial of the Scripture-texts that speak of Christ's body, John 2, 21, His soul, Luke 24, 39, His spirit, Matt. 26, 38, and His human will, Luke 23, 46. Then, too, Scripture brings out the reality of Christ's humanity when it ascribes to Him the peculiarities and ways and functions of a man. Luke 22, 41. 42. 44; Matt. 26, 37; John 19, 28.

However, this essential equality of Christ with all other men does not mean that His human nature has not certain peculiarities. These peculiarities are strongly emphasized by Scripture. One of these distinctive characteristics is that, unlike other men, Christ's human nature came into existence by the operation of the Holy Ghost. Matt. 1, 18. 20. It was, therefore, the Virgin Mary that became the mother of the Son of God. Is. 7, 14; Matt. 1, 23; Luke 1, 35. Hence Christ is called the *woman's* Seed. Gen. 3, 15. We concede that this makes Christ's conception miraculous, but with the angel we say, "With God nothing shall be impossible." Luke 1, 34—37.

Another singularity of Christ's human nature is its sinlessness. Though God's Son came in the likeness of sinful flesh, Rom. 8, 3,

He was without sin, 1 Pet. 1, 19; Heb. 4, 15, did no sin, 1 Pet. 2, 22, and could not justly be accused of any wrong-doing, John 8, 46. Christ "knew no sin," 2 Cor. 5, 21, and was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," Heb. 7, 26.

A third peculiar feature of Christ's human nature is that it has no personality of its own. Scripture makes it plain that the person of the eternal Son of God received the human nature into His person at the moment when it came into existence. Gal. 4, 4; Luke 1, 43. According to Col. 2, 9, the human nature of Christ is the body of the Son of God. This anhypostasis or enhypostasis of the human nature of Christ is essential to the incarnation of the Son of God. To deny it is to deny the incarnation of God's Son; its denial is equivalent to denying that God's Son came into the flesh and tantamount to the assertion that Mary gave birth to a mere man.

In answer to the possible objection that the above teaching is contrary to all human experience, since there is no single instance on record where a human nature did not have its own personality, we can say that the coming of the Son of God into human flesh is something unique, since never before did the Son of God become man in any human nature and then, above all, that we have God's own word in Scripture in substantiation of the enhypostasis of Christ's human nature. Should "science" not agree with Scripture, "science" will have to be revised, as has been done in thousands of instances before, and should our past experience lead us to think that the enhypostasis of Christ's human nature is contrary to the "laws of nature," let us not forget that He that created nature and its laws Himself gives expression to this teaching in His infallible Word.

The range of human observation and experience is, after all, but very limited, and therefore it may turn out, in a thousand instances, as it has done so often, that there are more things in heaven and earth than were ever dreamed of in the seemingly most accurate philosophy of man. The time over which scientific observations can travel, even if it be extended into ages, is but as a watch in the night compared with the eternity of God, and all the deductions of scientists from known instances, though they be a million in number, may be upset by a single discovery. If it, therefore, ever comes to a matter of decision whether we shall believe God's revelation or man's experience or science, we shall always unhesitatingly cry, "Let God be true, and every man a liar."

And so also in this matter of the impersonality of Christ's human nature. God has spoken; therefore we humbly bow our heads and say, "Thy Word is Truth." . . .

The deity of Christ is no less emphatically insisted upon in Scripture than is His humanity. No idea of our Lord Jesus approaches to the testimony given of Him in the New Testament which does not see in His one person the two natures of God and man united, and for this reason we "insist upon the term 'Deity' as applied to Jesus Christ." We should have no reason not to be satisfied with the term "Divinity," since for us it is synonymous with the term "Deity," if it were not for the fact that many are not willing to accept the two terms as synonyms, but use the term "Divinity," as applied to Christ, to express the idea that He is only godlike, a being inferior to God, but superior to man, hence, in reality, not "fully God."

The abundance of evidence for the deity of Jesus of Nazareth is so great that we may say that the whole New Testament is saturated with it and that its every page holds it in solution. The assumption of Christ's deity crops out everywhere in the most unexpected manner. Just as salt is present in solution in every drop of sea-water, so the deity of Christ is found in every part of the New Testament. Every word and assertion of the New Testament, every word spoken of Christ in its pages, and every word reported there as having been spoken by Him presupposes Christ's deity. And this assumption of Christ's deity as a matter of fact which we meet with everywhere in the New Testament is a most impressive Scripture-proof of our Savior's deity. The gospels and epistles plainly show that Jesus esteemed Himself God; that He was esteemed true God by those who were with Him constantly in the days of His public ministry; that His friends and His foes understood Him to lay claim to deity; and that those who were taught by the Spirit recognized His deity; in short, that He was God.

Jesus esteemed Himself God. When He calls Himself the Son of God, John 3, 18; 5, 25; 9, 35; 11, 4, or when He permits others to call Him by that title, Matt. 16, 16, He wants it to be understood that He is God. At the time of His trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus was closely examined as to His use of this title, and He admitted under oath that He laid claim to it. Matt. 26, 63; 27, 43; Luke 22, 70, 71; John 19, 7. The Jews understood this strong expression literally and therefore accused Him of blasphemy

and condemned Him to death as a blasphemer. They understood that Jesus, by calling Himself the Son of God, claimed equality with God, John 5, 18, and made Himself God, John 10, 33. If they were laboring under a misapprehension in believing that Jesus laid claim to being true God by calling Himself the Son of God, wasn't He under moral obligations to set them right? Did He not owe it to Himself, who was facing death because of this understanding of His words, and to the Jews, who wanted to murder Him because they so understood Him, to correct their opinion if it was wrong? Would not every principle of true morality have required Jesus to undeceive His enemies when He knew what they contemplated doing in consequence of their understanding of His claim? Jesus knew that if His claim to deity were false, it meant that deception and falsehood would run through the ages till the end of time if He did not then withdraw it; and yet He did nothing to remove this impression when under the sanction of a most solemn oath and in the face of death, — did nothing to soften down the offensiveness of His claim, but allowed it to stand in all its repulsiveness to the Jewish mind and died without intimating in any way that He had been misunderstood. He sanctioned the Jewish understanding of His claim and sealed the interpretation of the title "Son of God" with His life. Jesus died because He claimed to be equal with God, because He claimed to be God, and He never breathed a word of protest that the Jews had not understood Him and the nature of His claim. If Jesus, in the face of all this, is a mere man, He must either be a poor, deluded fanatic or an impostor and deceiver; there can be no other alternative. If Jesus was a mere man, His whole life was a life of conscious or unconscious deception; during His whole ministry He usurped honors to which He was not entitled; and He kept up the delusion to the last, even deceiving a dying fellow-malefactor, who called Him "Lord" and heaven His "kingdom," with the vain promise of future happiness which He had no power to confer. Luke 22, 43.

A strong proof of Jesus' deity may be found in the way in which He speaks of His relation to this world and the one to come. With reference to both He speaks in such a way that a person cannot but see that He claims sovereignty in both. He speaks of His kingdom here on earth and of His angels, of having His angels gather the elect into the place of bliss and cast those who do iniquity into the furnace of fire; and these angels of whom He speaks as *His* angels are the angels of God and not a peculiar

body of celestial beings, as a careful reading of the passages will show, Matt. 13, 41; 16, 27; 24, 31. In the fifteenth chapter of Luke He tacitly implies that the way in which He receives sinners when they come to Him is His way because it is Heaven's way, and for Him to do any other way is unthinkable.

Jesus openly claims divine prerogatives and attributes and does not hesitate to maintain His right to divine honor and homage. If Jesus' companions lagged in recognizing His essential deity, this was not because He was not actually God or did not sufficiently reveal it. As He told the disciples on the way to Emmaus on the day of His resurrection, it was all due to their slowness of heart to believe what the prophets had spoken and what was plainly revealed before their eyes.

Permit me to call your attention somewhat in detail to these claims of Jesus. Jesus claimed to have the right to do all that His Father did. John 5, 17—19. While admitting that He had received His authority to do these works from the Father, as the incarnate Son, that is, according to His human nature, He does not renounce one particle of His claim to divine Sonship, nor did He try to change the opinion of the Jews as to their understanding of His claim. The Jews understood His claim to this Sonship to mean that He "made Himself equal with God," and Jesus did nothing to change their opinion and repeated His claim that He had the right to do all the works of His Father. But who has the right to do all the works of God, and who can do all the works of God, but God only?

(To be continued.)
