

The Full Humanity of Christ: What Kind of Man Was Jesus?

The Scriptures clearly present Jesus as both fully human and fully divine. He is one person, but he has two natures: one human and the other divine.

Affirming the full humanity of Christ is critical to the Christian faith. In fact, the apostle John strongly condemned those who deny that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (1Jn 4:2; see also 2Jn 7). These words spoke against an early form of a heresy known as Docetism (from the Greek word *dokeo*, "seem"). Docetists taught that Jesus was divine (though not God himself) but that he only seemed to be human. In reality, they alleged, he was a kind of phantom, a teacher who did not actually live and die as a human being.

The Scriptures make it clear that Jesus was a man. He experienced human limitations such as hunger (Mt 4:2), weariness (Jn 4:6) and ignorance (Mk 13:32; Lk 8:45-47). He experienced the pain of weeping (Jn 11:35,38), agonizing (Mk 14:32-42; Lk 12:50; Heb 5:7-10) and suffering on the cross (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34). Being divine, Jesus could not sin (see theological article "[The Sinlessness of Jesus](#)"); but because he was human, he could still be genuinely tempted (Heb 4:15). Jesus could not conquer temptation without a struggle, but he always resisted and fought it until he had overcome (Mt 4:1-11). From Gethsemane we may infer that his struggles were sometimes more acute and agonizing than any we will ever know (Mt 26:36ff.).

The book of Hebrews stresses that if Jesus had not been fully human, he would not be qualified to help us as we go through the trials of human existence (Heb 2:17-18; 4:15-16; 5:2,7-9). As it is, his human experience guarantees that in our every trouble we may be confident that he sympathetically intercedes for us before the Father (Heb 7:25).

Unfortunately, many well-meaning Christians focus on Jesus' deity almost to the exclusion of his humanity, believing that they honor him by minimizing his human nature. Modern forms of the early heresy of Monophysitism (the idea that Jesus had only one nature) also tend

to downplay the fact that Jesus was fully human. It is assumed by some that Jesus only pretended to be ignorant of facts; he was after all, divine and omniscient (knowing everything). Similarly, some deny that Jesus was ever actually hungry and weary, believing that his divinity supernaturally and continually energized his human body.

The Biblical doctrine of the incarnation, however, asserts that the Son of God lived his divine-human life in and through his human mind and body at every point, maximizing his identification and empathy with those he had come to save.

The idea that Jesus alternated between his two natures, so that he sometimes acted in his humanity and sometimes in his divinity, is also mistaken. He endured all his sufferings, including those on the cross, and eventually died in the unity of his divine-human person.

Nevertheless, some of Jesus' characteristics and actions are rightly attributed to his divine nature, while others stem from his human nature. The Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) expressed this doctrine as "the peculiar property of each nature being preserved and being united in one person and subsistence" (NPNF2, vol. 14, p. 265). For example, while Jesus was ignorant in his humanity, he was at the same time omniscient in his divinity, as difficult as that may be for us to understand.

Acknowledgement of the full humanity of Jesus is essential to the Christian faith because of the special role God gave the human race as his image bearers. Humanity was ordained as the means by which God determined to display his glory and extend his kingdom over all the earth. Even after the fall into sin, God still declared that the descendants of Eve would crush the seed of the serpent under their feet (Ge 3:15). This early promise is fulfilled in Jesus because he was a fully human being who served God faithfully and received in reward a name greater than any other. Through Christ the victory of humanity over evil is assured.

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Comment from the ChristianFallacies.com editor:

In the 2nd from the last paragraph, where it refers to the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 4541) the council originated the term “hypostatic union,” which is now a theological term denoting the union of the two natures, divine and human, in the one person of Jesus Christ. It seeks to affirm the personal unity as well as the two natures. The reality is a divine mystery.¹

¹ Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms, Westminster Press, Louisville, KY, 1996, pg 135.