

The Incarnation: Tradition and Truth

Lesson 1: The Light of the World

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Incarnation: Tradition and Truth: Lesson #1a "Did God Come In The Flesh?"

Introduction: Tradition or truth?

My birthday? My adoptive parents celebrated my birthday on May 4th—the day that they brought me home from the Children’s Home Society of America. My real birthday is December 30—but since it was so close to Christmas and New Years—they celebrated it on May 4. So when my REAL birthday came around—I always felt cheated—bummed out.

How do you think Jesus feels? Well hold on—we’re really giving a party—and like my parties they were ok, fun – it was not who I really was.

The Glory of Christmas—a weaving of tradition and Biblical truth—it’s in the telling of the story that the “incarnation” gets lost.

What does the ‘incarnation’ mean? Is the word “incarnation” in the Bible?

Neither the noun ‘incarnation’ nor the adjective ‘incarnate’ is biblical, but the Gk. equivalent of Lat. *in carne* (*en sarki*, ‘in flesh’) is found in some important NT statements about the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Christ manifested in the flesh...

NKJV: 1 Tim 3:16 “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:
God was manifested in the flesh,
Justified in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Preached among the Gentiles,
Believed on in the world,
Received up in glory.”

Confessing Christ in the flesh—truth from error

NKJV: 1 John 4:2-3 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

Paul says that Christ did his reconciling work ‘in his body of flesh’

Gk. Greek
Lat. Latin
NT New Testament

NKJV: Col 1:21-22 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled ²²in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—

And that by sending his Son 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' God 'condemned sin in the flesh...

NKJV: Romans 8:3-4 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

I. Why is the incarnation so important?

***Christology* is the study of his person**

***Soteriology* (salvation) is the study of his work.**

Who Christ is will determine what he is able to do. Virtually every heresy denies the deity of Christ and therefore also denies his work on the cross for us.

II. Definition of the incarnation:

The point in history when the second person of the Trinity entered the human race. The word literally means "enfleshment."

a. Also called the Hypostatic Union

Hypostatic union is a theological term used with reference to the [Incarnation](#) to express the [revealed truth](#) that in [Christ](#) one person (ὑπόστασις, *hypostasis*) subsists in two natures (φύσεις, *physeis*); the divine and the human. [Hypostasis](#) means, literally, "that which stands beneath"; as the basis or foundation. Hebrews 1:3.

NKJV: Heb 1:3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person*, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

* *hupóstasis*; gen. *hupostáseōs*, fem. noun from *huphistēmi* (n.f.), to place or set under. In general, that which underlies the apparent, hence, reality, essence, substance; that which is the basis of something, hence, assurance guarantee, confidence (with the obj. sense).

- So....At the Incarnation two natures (full deity and full humanity), were inseparably united in the one person of Jesus Christ.
- Whereas the Trinity involves three Persons who share the same nature, the hypostatic union involves one Person who has two natures: Man and God!

Two Key passages

1. Col. 2:9* clearly teaches this doctrine. Against Gnostic false teachers who denied Jesus' deity and (probably) fleshly body, Paul insists that "in him dwells the fullness of deity in bodily form."

NKJV: Col 2:8-9 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

2. Jn. 1:1,14 also affirm the hypostatic union. Verse 1 stresses the eternity, distinct personality and deity of the Word. In verse 14 the emphasis is on a point in time event: "became" flesh (vs 14).

(John 1:1,14) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . (14) And the Word became flesh . . .

III. Biblical Nature of the Incarnation—the Birth of Jesus Christ on Earth

1. Full Humanity—Christ was fully human: 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 2:14,17; 1 Jn. 4:2; 2 Jn. 1:7

(1 Tim. 2:5) For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus . . .

(Heb. 2:14, 17) Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil . . . (17) Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

(1 John 4:2) By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God . . .

Importance: As the Second Adam and the inaugurator of a new humanity (Rom. 5:12-19), **Jesus has to be human. He also had to be human in order to die, and in order to be a true mediator-priest who could represent humanity before God** (Heb. 2:17,18).

(Heb. 10:4-7) . . . because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (5) Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; (6) with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. (7) Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll— I have come to do your will, O God.'"

a. Sinless Humanity: 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 Jn. 3:5

(2 Cor. 5:21) He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

(Heb. 4:15) For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

(1 John 3:5) And you know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.

Importance: Although Jesus did not have a sin-nature, the Bible does not emphasize this or explain how he avoided this. Instead, it emphasizes his

sinlessness, because **Jesus had to be morally blameless in order to be able to die for others** (Heb. 7:26-28; 9:14).

b. Could Jesus fall to temptation?

Reformed teaching: God can't be tempted (Jas 1:13). Jesus is God (Col 2:9). Therefore, Jesus could not sin (impeccability).

However, Jesus was also human and humans can be tempted. Jesus was tempted (Mt. 4) like we are (Heb 2:18; 4:15,16). These biblical accounts that he successfully overcame temptation and that we can go to him for help in overcoming temptation strongly imply that these temptations were real in the sense that Jesus could have fallen to them.

c. Did Jesus have a sin nature?

Scripture does not answer this question directly. However, it **infers that Jesus did not have a sin-nature.**

In Rom. 8:3, Paul stops short of affirming that Jesus had "sinful flesh"—he says Jesus "came in the likeness of sinful flesh."

Rom. 5:12-19 provides two important reasons why Jesus did not inherit the full effects of Adam.

First: He is the "second Adam" (vs 14). This would suggest that, like Adam before the Fall, Jesus made his choice to obey God without a sin-nature.

Second: Vs 16,18 also say that those "in Adam" are born under condemnation—which clearly was not the case with Jesus (Matt. 3:17).

"Then Jesus didn't agonize as much as we do!" Only those who successfully resist temptation feel its full weight. And a lot more was at stake for Jesus (the salvation of humanity), and he undoubtedly experienced a greater frequency and degree of temptation than we do.

2. Full Deity: Jn. 8:58; 10:30; 14:9; Heb. 1:8-10**; Rom. 9:5; Jn 1:1; Col 2:9

Biblical Case For Jesus' Deity

a. Jesus' claims and the response to Jesus' claims

1a. Claim: (John 5:17) But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."

Response: (John 5:18) For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.

1b. Claim: (John 8:58) Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am."

Response: (John 8:59) Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple.

1c. Claim: (John 10:30) "I and the Father are one."

Response: (John 10:31) The Jews took up stones again to stone Him.

In the above passages, Jesus makes these claims to a strictly monotheistic audience. They would understand him to be claiming to be the one true God, not just saying that he was God in some sense that we all are (like pantheists might). Also, when his audience objected or tried to stone him for blasphemy, Jesus never tries to correct their misunderstanding of his claims.

b. The apostolic witness

Heb. 1:3,4

The author of Hebrews says that Jesus is "the radiance of (God's) glory and the exact representation of God's nature" (1:3), greater than the angels (1:4), and he attributes a Psalm about YAHWEH to the son

The author says in verse 8 (Heb. 1:8) that the following Old Testament passages are about the Son. In vs. 8, he quotes Ps. 45:6,7 which clearly describes the Messiah as elevated above "his companions" (the angels). In vs. 10, he quotes Ps. 102:25, which is addressed to YHWH (Ps. 102:22). Therefore, the author clearly states that Jesus is YHWH.

(Heb. 1:8, 10)** But about the Son he says, . . . (10) "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.

John's view of Jesus: Jn 1:1,14

Paul affirms Jesus' deity, especially in Col. 2:9* (see above) and Phil. 2:6 (see below).

Importance:

Because Jesus is God, he is able to reveal God to us in the fullest way that we can comprehend (Jn. 1:18; 14:9; Heb. 1:1-3).

Because Jesus is God, he was able to pay for an infinite amount of sin and endure God's infinite wrath against sin in a finite amount of time (Heb. 10:10,12).

(Hebrews 10:10-12) And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (11) Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. (12) But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

See also Col. 2:9-15. Here Paul connects his assertion of Jesus' deity to his ability to provide a full salvation, including forgiveness of all sins.

(See Lesson 2 for remainder of this teaching)

Tradition or Truth: Lesson 1b "Light of the World"

Review from Friday

- What is the incarnation?

Introduction...

- Next four Sunday mornings we'll go through John 1:1-18 to see the Biblical basis for the incarnation.
- I won't spend much time dispelling the 'tradition' of what has become the celebration of Christmas.
- On the positive side it was an accommodation to Gentile believers but it is NOT a Biblical festival nor is the tradition based on a Biblical imperative or command.
- That is not to say that believers cannot make the celebration Biblically based—or at least based on the Biblical account of Christ's birth.
- Unfortunately—the birth story as wonderful as it is—does not reveal the full picture of what took place.

A. The Truth: God became flesh *John 1:1-18*

- At the end of verse 1 John says, "**The Word was God.**"
- And at the beginning of verse 14 he says, "**The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.**"
- ***Everything we are and believe depends upon this:***
 - That Jesus Christ is God and...
 - Jesus Christ is man.
 - Fully God--fully human. ***Everything depends on this...***

B. The Light of the World—the Power of the Incarnation

The birth of Christ brings LIGHT to the world!

John 1:5 ...the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend [overcome or lay hold of] it.

- When John says "the Light shines in the darkness," he means that the Word has become flesh.
- Jesus has come into a dark world and is the light of the world.
- In John 8:12 Jesus says, "I am the light of the world."
- The darkness is the world of evil and unbelief and death and judgment.

- John 3:19 says, "This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil." So darkness is the power of evil and unbelief.
- So what verse 5 is saying is that Jesus Christ, the light of the world has entered into the darkness of evil and unbelief and lostness and death, and this darkness does not overcome Jesus.

C. How can we be sure the light will triumph over darkness?

Three reasons: Looking at this passage in reverse order...

1. The Light is Alive Verse 4

John 1: 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

- This means that the light that shines in the darkness is the light of LIFE. The life of the Son IS the light of the world. The first reason the light will triumph over the darkness is that it is life. It is living light. What does that mean?
- So the first reason the light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it is that...
 - This light is living —
 - It has energy and purposefulness and growth and
 - Reproduction [***Light of life begets offspring. John 12:36, "Believe in the light, that you may become sons of the light."***] It is not a static thing like a stop light that might be ignored. The light that shines in the world today is the very life of the Son of God.

2. The Light Created All Things Verse 3

Someone might say...The powers of darkness may be as strong as the light!

John 1: 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made

- The Him of verse 3 and 4 are the same—the life and light **MADE** all things ***including the darkness***.
- The powers of darkness **CANNOT** be as strong as the power of light since the power of light created all things including the darkness. No created thing is more powerful than its creator.
- The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it...

3. The Light is God

Not only is the light a living light, and not only is the life of this light the life of God's Word through whom He created all things, but this Word, this life, this light, IS GOD! And God Almighty cannot be overcome.

