



Our unique Mediator

Through the centuries Christians using the words of the Apostles' Creed have confessed their faith "*in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord*". While the term "only-begotten" is very familiar and definitely Scriptural (John 1:14, 18, 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9), it is often misunderstood. Usually, we think that the word means simply that Jesus is the only Son that God has, since, if we were using this rather dated word about someone, that is how we would use it. But if we carefully study the word *monogenes* (which is translated "only-begotten") we find that it comes from words which mean "one of a kind". In other words, this term "only-begotten" says that Christ is unique.

Now, this uniqueness is seen in many ways, but at the heart of it all is the fact that He is both God and man.

To be sure, not all who claim to be religious believe that Jesus Christ is both God and man. There have always been people who believe that Jesus was a mere man. He was merely a great prophet or teacher. Early in the history of the Church the Ebionites believed this. Today, this belief is known as liberalism.

Another heresy was that of Docetism. This taught that Christ had only a divine nature. He only appeared to be human. Thus, He only appeared to be born and to die.

Then, there were the Arians. They believed that Christ was not God, but only the highest of created beings. Today, in that tradition the Jehovah's Witnesses teach that He is only "a god", not God. While He was on earth He was "a perfect human nature". In answer to Arianism the Athanasian Creed was written. It declares that Christ is "*God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, being of one substance with the Father*".

What does the Bible say about our unique Mediator? Scripture teaches three things:

1. Our Mediator is truly God.
2. Our Mediator is truly man.
3. Our Mediator is God and man in one person.

1. Our Mediator is truly God

By revelation God has made this very clear. At one point Jesus says, "*I and the Father are one*" (John 10:30). The Jews understood Him and therefore believed that He blasphemed. Theirs was no reaction of faith!

That Jesus is God is seen in that *Divine* names are given to Him. One very important and strong proof of this is 1 John 5:20. Here we read of Jesus Christ: "*This is the true God, and eternal life.*" The importance of this text is that in the Greek Christ is called "*the true God*". Jehovah's Witnesses will say that Jesus is god, that is, "a god", but they refuse to say that He is "the God". 1 John 5:20 proves their teaching to be in error. Other passages which show Christ as God include Romans 9:5; John 20:28, 1:1; Jeremiah 23:6 and Isaiah 9:6.

Besides the Divine names, *Divine attributes* are ascribed to Christ. He was considered omniscient by Peter (John 21:17). He is spoken of as eternal (Micah 5:2). He is everlasting (Revelation 1:8).

Divine works are also said to be His. He is creator (John 1:14; Colossians 1:16, 17). He is the God of Providence (Hebrews 1:3). He forgives (Luke 5:20-24). He gives Life (John 5:21).

More, *Divine honors* are given Him. He is worshipped in Scripture (Acts 7:59; John 20:28). He is believed on for Life (John 3:36).

Quite in keeping with all of this is the fact that He is called the Son of God. There are times when Jesus' words imply this idea (John 10:15, 30, 14:20, etc.), and there are times when He comes very close to saying it (e.g., Matthew 11:27). Nevertheless, Jesus never calls Himself the Son of God. It remains for others to use this title of Him. When the disciples saw Him coming to them on the storm troubled waters they said, "*Of a truth thou art the Son of God*" (Matthew 14:33). In response to Jesus' question, "*But who say ye that I am?*" Peter calls Him "*the Son of the living God*" (Matthew 16:16). When Gabriel announced to Mary the great event of the incarnation he called Jesus the Son of God (Luke 1:35). The Holy Spirit directed the writers of the epistles to use the title, also (Romans 1:3, 4, 8:3; Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 1:1, 2).

What, exactly, does this title mean? It means that the Mediator is the eternal and absolute Son of God, one in essence, or being, with the Father. It means that Christ, the Son of God, is the Second Person of the Trinity.

Why must He be God? *The Heidelberg Catechism* summarizes the faith of the Church by saying (q. 17)

"That by the power of His Godhead He might bear in His human nature the burden of God's wrath; and that He might obtain for us, and restore to us, righteousness and life".

Only One who has the power to overcome death and hell can be a redeemer. Man is powerless over these. Only Divine power can withstand God's wrath. Jesus *must* be God.

Unless one believes that Jesus *is* God he cannot be a Christian (2 John 4:3). Therefore, any group which has a different doctrine, no matter how *slightly* different, IS NOT CHRISTIAN. Theirs is unbelief!

2. Our Mediator is truly man

While it is absolutely essential that Jesus be truly God (or we have no salvation) it is equally necessary that He be truly man. Further, He must be righteous, or sinless man. The *Heidelberg Catechism* (q.16) teaches us to confess this by stating that the Mediator must be true and righteous man

"Because the justice of God requires that the same human nature which has sinned should make satisfaction for sin, and because one who himself is a sinner cannot satisfy for others."

For two reasons Jesus must be man, and righteous man at that. First, the payment for sin must be made by man for it is man who has sinned. He alone can suffer in body and soul. The Old Testament offerings did not pay for the sins of God's people. They couldn't (Hebrews 10:4). They spoke vividly of a blood that would be shed — the blood of Jesus Christ. At the same time that shedding of animals' blood brought a ceremonial cleansing. How much greater in effect is Christ's blood (Hebrews 9:13, 14)! As man, our Savior knew the depths into which we have plunged and thus could act as our merciful High Priest before God (Hebrews 2:17, 18).

He had to stand in relationship to the Law in our place. Only as man could our Mediator do this. He had to answer God's demands with an uncompromised and perfect "yes". To put it another way, He had to fulfill all righteousness for us.

For this reason, it is always emphasized that Christ is, in the second place, truly righteous man. He knew no sin. Only a sinless man can stand before God and have communion with Him, as Isaiah testified (Isaiah 6:5). Jesus had to be sinless in order to fulfill His work as our Substitute (1 Peter 3:18). Besides, only a sinless man, one who has never committed any sin can suffer punishment for someone else's sin. Because of the completeness of God's wrath on sin a sinner would spend

eternity bearing God's wrath, and eternity never ends. Jesus was without sin (2 Corinthians 5:21) and therefore could take on Himself our sins and at the same time be utterly obedient to the Father so that He would pay for all the sins of His people. To do this He had to be man.

But how do we know that Jesus is man? Some, in centuries past, have denied this. Today, perhaps the emphasis is too heavily on Jesus as man. Nevertheless, Scripture speaks clearly of Christ's humanity in many different ways. We are told that Jesus came in the flesh, i.e., the human nature (John 1:14; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 John 4:2). Furthermore, we know how this happened: Jesus came through the instrument of a woman (Luke 1, 2; Galatians 4:4). Studying the Gospels we realize that though others were astounded by what He did, they always saw Him as a man. Having a body as do all men, He ate, drank, slept and grew (Luke 2:52). He had human wants and experienced suffering, too (Hebrews 2:10, 18, 5:8). He had the feelings of the human nature: He groaned in spirit, was troubled and He wept (John 11:33, 35).

In addition to this, He called Himself the Son of Man. Though this title is first found in the Old Testament (Psalm 8:4; Daniel 7:13), it was used by Jesus as a self-designation more than forty times. By using it, Jesus focuses on the depth of His humiliation, but also the honor and glory which will be His in the everlasting Messianic kingdom.

Only as He is God *and* man can He deliver us from the bondage and death of sin. What a marvellously unique Savior God saw fit to give His Church. Is it any wonder that believers have testified:

*Beautiful Savior! King of creation!
Son of God and Son of Man!
Truly I'd love Thee,
Truly I'd serve Thee,
Light of my soul, my joy, my crown.*

The Church has always confessed that our Mediator "**is *very God* and *very man*: Very God by His power to conquer death; and very man that He might die for us according to the infirmity of His flesh**" (Belgic Confession, Art. XIX). Of this confession, Charles Hodge wrote:

Here the subject might be left. All the ends of the spiritual life of the believer, are answered by this simple statement of the doctrine concerning Christ's person as it is presented in the Scriptures. False explanations, however, create the necessity for a correct one.

(Systematic Theology, II, 386)

Therefore, it is necessary that we go one step further. We must see that our Mediator is God and man in one person. This part of our study is more complex. In fact, it is one of the mysteries of Bible Truth. Nevertheless, we can say some things about this truth — and we must.

To get as clear a picture as possible of this truth we will be considering it in two installments. First, we consider the mystery of this truth and the precise statement of it.

3. Our Mediator is God and man in one person

That is, indeed, a mystery. How our Mediator can be God and man in one person is beyond us. There has never been a birth like that one in Bethlehem and there has not been one like it since. He is unique. There is no one with whom He can be compared. All we can say is, "*And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness*" (1 Timothy 3:16).

This mystery is important. Though we cannot begin to plumb the depths of how our Mediator is this unique person, we are still called on to answer the relevant question of Scripture: "*What think ye of Christ?*" In answering this we must be as precise as possible because every Christian truth really depends on the doctrine of the Person of Christ. How we answer the question has farreaching implications. Even the missionary activity of the Church will be in trouble if the wrong answer is given. Without a proper Christology God's salvation will not be proclaimed. You see, the Christ who is preached must be the Christ of the Bible.

John Owen (1616-1683), the great Non-conformist leader and writer of the Puritan age, wrote:

It is of great importance unto our souls that we have right conceptions concerning him ... (the) knowledge of his person (is) the foundation of all the rest, wherein if we mistake or fail, our whole building in the other parts of the knowledge of him will fall unto the ground."

(Works, Goold edition, I, 223)

How our Mediator is God and man in one person is impossible to explain. Many attempts have been made at explanation and these have brought great trouble to the Church. The reason for this is simple: man with his finite mind cannot begin to analyze and explain the infinite God. This is impossible. Any attempt at explanation can open the door for heresy. This has already happened!

The early centuries of the Christian Church were battlegrounds over the doctrine of Person of Christ.

Arianism was condemned by the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. The Arians admitted the pre-existence of Christ, but believed that He was not Divine. He was only the *best* man who ever was. While the present Nicene Creed which we use is not the original statement written in 325 AD, it adequately expresses the doctrinal position decided on by that Council. The Council decided that the proper understanding of Jesus is that He is "*the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God ... very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father...*"

In 381 AD, another council was called — this time at Constantinople. Two erroneous views of Christ's person had to be condemned. Semi-Arianism was one. This heresy conceded that though Christ did not have the same nature as God, he had one like God's. The other heresy condemned was Apollinarianism which did not do justice to the human nature of the Mediator. It taught that though Christ had a complete human nature, the Divine "logos" — a word used by John (1:1, 14) meaning the Second Person of the Trinity — took the place of the human soul.

Still there was controversy. It took another seventy years to attain doctrinal stability over Christ's person. In 451 AD, the Council at Chalcedon was called. There, a monumental statement on the two natures and the person of Christ was written. Followers of Nestorius were proclaiming that the Mediator has two persons. Followers of Eutyches were proclaiming that there was no distinction between the two natures; they were fused together. In answer to all this came a very precise statement which, among other things, clearly defined the faith of the Church as being in

one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ; the same perfect in Godhead, and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man ... consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood ... to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably, the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only begotten, God the Word, the Lord, Jesus Christ...

While we do not often read these words, words similar to them appear in one of our creeds — the Athanasian — sections 29-36.

The relationship of the two natures of our one Mediator is called the *Hypostatic Union*. These words simply mean "a union of two substances" or "a personal union".

While we ought not to get bogged down with all kinds of strange terms there are some which we must know if this truth is to make any sense at all to us.

One term is *nature*. By *nature* we mean the sum-total of all the essential qualities of a being. Other words which are used in place of nature in discussions of the Mediator are "essence", "being" and

"substance". To put it in other words, *nature* is what makes a being what it is. Thus, our Mediator has a human nature and a divine nature because He is both God and Man.

The other term we must understand is *person*. By *person* we mean an independent, individual subsistence (a living being) who has the ability to reason and who is responsible for his own actions. The person is that which says "I". In other words, a person is a rational, moral being.

We do not confess that Christ is *two* persons, but that He is *two* substances or natures in *one* person. The relationship of these two substances or natures is called the Hypostatic Union. This union is personal because through the Incarnation the Second Person of the Trinity established a personal union between Himself and a human soul and body. John Murray wrote:

"The incarnation means that he who never began to be in his specific identity as Son of God, began to be what he eternally was not."

(*Collected Writings*, II, 132)

Of this we read in John 1:14, *"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us..."* When we say that the Word *became* flesh we do not mean that the Son of God ceased to be God and was converted into a human being alone. God did not change Himself into man. Instead, it means that the Word came to possess a new nature without abandoning the first. Only then could it be said that *"we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father"* (v. 14).

As hard as this is to understand, we must carefully state what the Church has always believed on the basis of God's revelation in Scripture — and it must be done with care or we risk opening the door to heresy. The *Westminster Confession* put it this way:

"Two whole perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion."

(*Westminster Confession* VIII, ii)

What do we believe about this Hypostatic Union?

1. The person of the Son of God is inseparably united with the human nature. This union is without mixture or fusion.

The fathers at Chalcedon tried to illustrate what they meant by this by pointing to iron made hot by fire. The fire and iron seemed to become one. You cannot distinguish the fire from the iron or the iron from the fire. Yet, neither loses its own properties. Also, they pointed to the union of the human soul and body. Both of these illustrations *begin* to show something of the relationship of the two natures of Christ, but they can go no further. Ultimately they will fail, as all illustrations do, to thoroughly clarify this truth.

Once these two natures are united they can never be separated — except in our thought.

William G. T. Shedd wrote: *When the infant Jesus lay in the manger, the Logos was present and united with the human nature as really and completely as he is this instant, but he made no exhibition of himself. There was no more thinking going on in the infant human mind of Jesus, than in the case of any other infant. The babe lay in the manger unconscious and inactive. Yet the eternal Logos was personally united with this infant. There was a God-man in the manger as truly as there was upon the cross.*

(*Dogmatics*, II, 275)

Even in death this union was not destroyed. True, the union of the human soul and human body was dissolved temporarily through the death on Calvary, but the union of the Divine and human natures was not.

Scripture never spells out this relationship, it is assumed, just as is the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity. However, there are many telling footprints of this relationship.

There is no distinction made between the two natures by our Lord. He never says, "*I speak as God*", or "*I speak as man*". What is said as true of the Divine nature, is true of the Person of Christ (John 8:58, 17:5). What is said as true of the human nature, is true of the Person, also (John 19:28, 11:35; 1 Corinthians 2:8).

Divine qualities and actions are ascribed to Christ in connection with human titles given to Him (John 3:13, 6:62; Romans 9:5; Ephesians 1:23; Acts 17:31).

Human qualities and actions are also ascribed to Christ in connection with Divine titles given to Him (Luke 1:31, 32, 35; Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 2:8; Colossians 1:13-29; Hebrews 1:3).

Of this union, Thomas Watson (d. c1690), known for his rectorship at St. Stephen's Wallbrook, London and later for leaving the Establishment because of the Act of Uniformity, wrote:

This union of the two natures in Christ was not by transmutation, the divine nature changed into the human, or the human into the divine; nor by mixture, the two natures mingled together, as wine and water are mixed; but both the natures of Christ remain distinct, and yet make not two distinct persons, but one person; the human nature not God, yet one with God.

(*Body of Divinity*, p. 114)

2. These two natures — human and divine — are united in *one* single person.

There are not two Sons of God. Nor is the human nature incomplete or imperfect. Further, they are united inseparably. However, the divine nature is still divine and the human nature is still human.

3. Both natures retain their own distinct properties. Commenting on this, John Murray wrote:

If there had been some kind of transfer of human properties to the divine nature, then the Lord Jesus Christ would have ceased to be truly God. If there had been some kind of transfer of divine properties to the human nature he would not have been truly man. In the one case he would no longer be the eternal Son of God and equal with God. In the other case he would not be of one flesh with us, made in the likeness of sinful flesh, clothed with our nature and the High Priest endued with a feeling of our infirmities, tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. Hence the preciousness of the statement, "two distinct natures, and one person, for ever."

(*Collected Writings*, I, 34)

Now admittedly, this is all very difficult for our minds. And while this truth is taught in Scripture it seems somewhat impractical as we think about it. But is it really so impractical?

First, unless our Mediator is this kind of person He could not have made the one and perfect offering for sin. In order for Him to save us the atonement has to be the act of His whole person. To be my Substitute He must be true man and at the very same time He must be God. All of His acts are the acts of His whole person: eating, raising the dead, forgiving ... and atoning. In His atoning death He could experience God's wrath on sin only because He is God and man. And then, being God and man, death would not destroy Him. Rather, He would conquer death for us. Therefore, we testify, "*Jesus, my God, Thy blood alone has power sufficient to atone*".

Second, because the Son of God is this kind of person He can sympathize with His people (Hebrews 4:15). He was tempted, touched by our infirmities and subject to the Law, as we are. He "*knows our every weakness*". Because He is both man and the God of Grace we can "*draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and find grace to help us in the time of need*" (Hebrews 4:16). If He were not this kind of person we would not have this comfort.

Besides, because He is the God-Man, He is our source of life. We, therefore, can testify with Paul, "*I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that **life** which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, **the faith** which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me*" (Galatians 2:20).

Indeed, if our Mediator is not God and man in one person we would not know salvation nor any of its blessings. Since He is, we can say:

***Jesus, my God, I know his name,
His name is all my trust;
Nor will He put my soul to shame,
Nor let my hope be lost.***

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