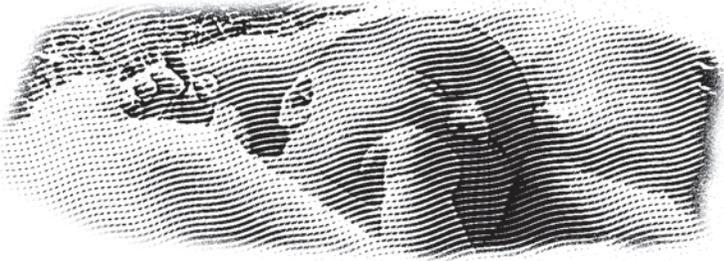


The Reality of His Humanity



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gal. 4:4; 1 Tim. 2:5; 3:16; Heb. 4:15, 16; 1 John 4:1–3.*

Memory Text: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (*John 1:14, NIV*).

In the New Testament, without any rationalistic explanations whatsoever, Jesus Christ is presented as both human and Divine. After beginning his Gospel with the Word, who is God (*John 1:1*), John makes the extraordinary declaration that this same Word, this same God, “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (*vs. 14, NIV*). And perhaps anticipating future concerns about moral contamination, the New Testament maintains the sinless life of Jesus with unequivocal consistency (*Heb. 7:26, 1 Pet. 2:22*). Moreover, the writers of the New Testament matter-of-factly regard Jesus as a proper object of worship and veneration (*Acts 7:59, Rom. 9:5, Heb. 1:6*). These earliest Christians were not detained by the philosophical problems inherent in the concept of the God-man or by the difficulties it would pose for later thinkers. “The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. . . . When we approach this subject, we would do well to heed the words spoken by Christ to Moses at the burning bush, ‘Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground’ (*Exod. 3:5*). We should come to this study with the humility of a learner.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 244.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 19.

In the Presence of Mystery (*1 Tim. 3:16*)

Last week's lesson spoke about the mystery of Christ's deity. But as we contemplate His humanity, we stand also in the presence of a profound mystery. As Paul expressed it: "Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He [Jesus] appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory" (*1 Tim. 3:16, NIV*).

One scholar makes the point that the claim that the founder of Christianity was Divine was not a big shock in the Roman world; after all, their emperors routinely claimed divinity. But the claim that "the Christian God was concerned about humanity; concerned enough to suffer in its behalf. This was unheard of."—Huston Smith, *The Illustrated World's Religions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), p. 219. But however strange to the Greco-Roman world, that, precisely, was the testimony of the New Testament.

What do the following passages teach about this amazing condescension?

Matt. 1:18–24

Luke 1:26–35

John 1:1, 14

Gal. 4:4

Phil. 2:5–11

It is fascinating to watch the unstudied precision with which the New Testament writers approach the issue of Christ's humanity. Matter-of-fact and straightforward, they simply tell the story, with no knowledge (perhaps) of the firestorm that would follow in succeeding centuries. But it is precisely the absence of any posturing that helps give credibility to the documents that we have. It is not as if the earliest disciples faced no controversy in regard to the nature and identity of Jesus; they did, as we see in the New Testament itself. But their arguments in regard to Jesus' person clearly were not designed to counter the position of rationalistic or *scientific* opponents, which gives an unspoiled freshness to their witness. It was as though they argued their case out of surprise that anyone would dare to doubt the uncommon mystery that had affected them so dramatically, both corporately and personally.

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Hebrews 4:15*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Recognize that Jesus was both divine and human.

Feel: Cultivate a desire to overcome sin just as Jesus did.

Do: Live a life that is free from the slavery of sin through the power of Christ.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. The Divine and Human

A In the New Testament, Jesus is presented as both human and divine.

B Although He was human, Jesus lived a sinless life.

C The man Jesus—being also God—deserves our worship.

II. Opposing Views of the Nature of Christ

A The disciples testified with conviction about the mystery of the divine-human nature of Jesus, notwithstanding any opposition that would arise.

B By the early first century, opposing views of the nature of Christ began to arise: Some supported His divine nature, others His human nature.

C The Bible reveals attributes of Christ's nature that prove His humanity, such as thirst, growing weary or tired, and weeping.

III. Tempted As We Are

A Jesus, of His own free will, denied the exercise of His divine power while here on earth.

B Jesus came to earth in the flesh, was tempted (as we are), was obedient, and finally suffered the death of a sinner, all for the benefit of fallen human beings.

C As our High Priest, Jesus understands our human weaknesses. Because He Himself lived and suffered in the flesh, He knows what it is like to be tempted in that flesh.

▶ **Summary:** Although Jesus was divine, He suffered in the flesh and experienced our weaknesses. He did not use His divinity to overcome sin and temptation, yet He lived a sinless life.

Then There Was Conflict

As Christianity spread through the Greco-Roman world and moved into the second generation, people began to reflect on its basic message about Jesus' person and to raise questions: How could Divinity and humanity cohabit the same body? How could Deity become mortal? What is Jesus' relationship to the Father? And so forth . . .

Beginning in the first century, two conflicting emphases emerged. One would stress Christ's humanity at the expense of His divinity; the other would do just the opposite. Among those denying Christ's deity were the Ebionites, early Jewish Christians who taught that Jesus became the Son of God only at His baptism, at which time He became united with the eternal Christ, a nondivine being who could not save humanity but came, instead, to call humanity to obedience. The Arians later would take up the struggle against Christ's divinity, beginning around the late third century, a position strongly condemned by the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325.

The heavyweights on the other side of the spectrum were the Gnostics, who taught that *spirit* was good and *matter* evil, particularly the matter that forms our body. Therefore, the human body could not serve as a vehicle for the revelation of the Supreme Being.

Study 1 John 4:1–3. In what way does John's concern relate to the Gnostic emphasis just described?

The controversy over who Jesus was raged for five solid centuries, from the second century all the way down to the sixth. At first it was over His deity. Was He God? And if so, how was He related to God the Father? The questions then shifted to His humanity and to how Divinity and humanity were combined in a single person. There were statements and counterstatements, pronouncements and counterpronouncements, accusations and condemnations and excommunications, with one "ism" after another claiming the day. Incredibly, amid all the turmoil and controversy, biblical orthodoxy in respect to Jesus' essential nature and person ultimately prevailed. (See the quotation from the Creed of Chalcedon in Friday's lesson.)

What are some of the questions in the church today about the human nature of Christ? Why must we be careful not to let these questions divide us, as they often did the early church?

Learning Cycle

► STEP 1—Motivate

Just for Teachers: Using John 1:14, lead your class to consider the question, **Why is the humanity of Christ important in our understanding of the person and mission of Christ?**

John 1:1–3, 14 is foundational to understanding the nature of Christ and its significance to Christ’s ministry. This passage teaches us three great truths. First, John, the beloved of Christ’s disciples, introduces Christ as the Word. This Word existed from the beginning, along with God, coequal and coeternal with Him. Second, being God, the Word took upon Himself the “flesh”—that is, human nature—and dwelt as Man on earth. Third, the reason for His incarnation is that the human race may see His glory, may know the Father and the fullness of His grace and truth. It is through this grace that we are saved (*John 3:16, Eph. 2:5–8*).

Consider This: Why is it necessary for Christ to become human to be our Savior? Can Christ be our Savior without either His divinity or His humanity? Explain.

► STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: “The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. . . . Christ was a real man. . . . Yet He was God in the flesh.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 244. As you study the humanity of Christ, consider its mystery, reality, and relevance.

Bible Commentary

I. Christ’s Humanity: Its Mystery

God Incarnate. The word *incarnation* is not found in Scripture, but the

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He Took Our Nature (Gal. 4:4)

Many of His contemporaries considered Jesus an unusual person, yet they each knew Him to be a human being, a man. When the Samaritan woman rushed to her village to spread the word about the unusual Jew she just had met at the well, her announcement was straightforward: “‘Come, see a man’” (John 4:29, NIV). Hers was the universal testimony of Jesus’ contemporaries. Even after He had calmed the storm, the exclamation of those closest to Him was, “‘What kind of man is this?’” (Matt. 8:27, NIV).

How do the following texts help support the fact that Jesus was a genuine human being of flesh and blood?

Matt. 8:24

Matt. 21:18

John 4:5, 6

John 4:7, 19:28

John 11:33–35

While on earth, Jesus voluntarily surrendered the *independent* exercise of the Divine attributes. He *surrendered*; He did not relinquish. The attributes remained in Him. He could have used them at any time for His own advantage, but He did not. The temptation to call on these attributes to extricate Himself from difficulty (in ways not open to us) was a major ingredient of His daily trials.

It is helpful to keep in mind that the Scriptures are not definitive on every point that stirs our interest. They make no overt attempt, for example, to spell out precisely how the human and Divine components of Jesus’ nature are related. But they make it clear that Christ was *one unified person*. They do not discuss the technicalities of this union, limiting themselves, rather, to the clear confession that such a union did occur, that the Son made of a woman was, indeed, the Son of God (Gal. 4:4). “Christ did not make-believe take human nature; He did verily take it. He did in reality possess human nature.”—Ellen G. White, *Lift Him Up*, p. 74.

Why is Christ’s humanity so important to us? What does it mean to us to know that Jesus became a human being? How does it encourage you to know that Jesus shared our human limitations?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

doctrine that God in Christ took on humanity permeates throughout the New Testament. Christ called Himself “Son of Man” more than seventy times. He is “the second man . . . from heaven” as opposed to Adam, “The first man . . . of the earth” (*1 Cor. 15:47*).

Why incarnation? Other religions do teach incarnation, but the key difference between them and that of the Bible is twofold. First, the biblical narrative of incarnation has the end purpose of redemption from sin (*Mark 10:45*); it is through taking human nature, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (*2 Cor. 5:19*). Assumption of humanity is God’s ultimate revelation of His love toward a sinful human race (*John 3:16*). Christ took upon Himself human nature in order to bear “our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness” (*1 Pet. 2:24, NIV*). Second, the Bible never portrays incarnation as myth or magic that some divine being plays in the drama of human struggle. Rather, the Bible reveals incarnation as a real entry of God in space and time, whereby the Son of God takes a real body and a real human nature through which He inaugurates and completes the plan of salvation (*Gen. 3:15; Eph. 1:7, 8*).

Consider This: How does God become Man? How can Christ be God and Man at the same time? The biblical answer is an invitation to a faith affirmation: “Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh” (*1 Tim. 3:16*).

II. Christ’s Humanity: Its Reality

The issue. That Christ was really human would hardly be a theological issue today. But in the early years of the church, it was a hotly contested problem. As the gospel spread beyond the borders of Judea, its converts were largely from a Greek worldview rooted in a spirit-matter dualism, with the spirit being good and the matter being evil. Hence the question posed by the Greeks: How can God, who is good, incarnate in human flesh, which is evil? Therefore, Christ did not have a truly human nature but an appearance, an illusion, of a human body. Against such Gnostic heresy, John, whose Gospel is the most compelling in its emphasis on Christ’s divinity, not only affirms that Christ came in the flesh (*John 1:1–3, 14*) but pronounces that “every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit

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To Feel Our Pain *(Heb. 4:15, 16)*

Why did God need to come into the world in human flesh? The question is important. But we should wean ourselves away from purely rational answers to it. It is not as if we need to come up with an answer that makes sense to us. There is no independent research we can do in philosophy, science, sociology, or whatever, that would lead us to an answer. Nor should we concoct our own answer. The safest way is to listen carefully to what the Bible itself reveals on this point. And in the book of Hebrews, we find some of the clearest, most intentional statements on the issue. Nor is it without significance that Hebrews also happens to be the book focusing most directly on Jesus' present high priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

Each of the following passages highlights one particular aspect of Jesus' coming in human flesh, then proceeds to answer the implied question: **Why did He do that? And in each case a reason for that particular aspect of His humiliation is given. What are those reasons?**

Heb. 2:9

Heb. 2:14, 15

Heb. 2:16, 17

Heb. 2:18

Heb. 4:14–16

Heb. 5:8, 9

Notice that in each case, the focus is on Jesus; and in each case, the benefit is for us. These inspired reasons for Jesus' humanity and suffering should be taken with utter seriousness. They should bring us immense joy to know that Jesus meets us in our need; His arms are open wide for us; He knows our plight because He has been here; *He has felt our pain*. Can we imagine a more merciful Savior, a more understanding and compassionate High Priest? Immense joy and profound gratitude wells up in the souls of those who know that He suffered all for us. Thus encouraged, we "approach the throne of grace with confidence" (*Heb. 4:16, NIV*), giving ourselves to Him in complete abandon.

What trials are you encountering at the moment? How does it help you to know that Jesus feels and understands your pain?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

of the Antichrist” (1 John 4:3, NKJV).

Scriptural evidence for Christ’s humanity. Jesus called Himself a man (John 8:40) and was called a man by others: Peter (Acts 2:22), Paul (1 Cor. 15:21, 1 Tim. 2:5), Pilate (John 19:5), scribes (John 7:46). He had a human mother (Luke 1:26–35, Gal. 4:4), was subject to the normal laws of human development (Luke 2:40, 52), and had a real body and real blood (Matt. 26:26, 28; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 4:2). He experienced common human needs and emotions: hunger (Matt. 4:2), thirst (John 19:28), sleep (Matt. 8:24), weariness (John 4:6), love and compassion (Mark 10:21), anxiety (Heb. 5:7), need for obedience (Heb. 5:8), and dependence on God (Matt. 26:39–44).

Consider This: Read Philippians 2:5–8. How does Paul relate the two natures of Christ? Consider the apostle’s usage—“form of God” and “form of a slave.” In both cases “form” is the same Greek word *morphe*. What does this show regarding the reality of both natures of Christ?

■ “In taking our nature, the Saviour has bound Himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken. Through the eternal ages He is linked with us.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 25. *What does this passage mean to you?*

III. Christ’s Humanity: Its Relevance

Why did God the Son take upon Himself human flesh and retain it as an eternal link with humanity? Two significant reasons may be noted:

To reveal God (Matt. 11:27, John 1:14). Outside of Christ we have either incomplete or false concepts of God. The Greeks conceived God as pure mind, wisdom, or beauty. Some Eastern religions view Him as the immovable, the unchangeable force that plays hide-and-seek in the predicament of humanity and then withdraws to some mysterious self-contemplation. There are tribes that see God in terms of sexual force. Humanists interpret God in terms of moral imperatives and social justice. Against such notions, Christ came proclaiming that “God is love” (1 John 4:8, NIV) and that He is our Father (Matt. 6:9). “Christ came to reveal God to the world as a God of love, full of mercy, tenderness, and compassion.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 738, 739.

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An Eternal Solidarity (1 Tim. 2:5)

When we imagine the huge difference between God and ourselves, it is astounding to think that God would reach out to us by condescending to take on human flesh. But after He was done, most of us would have been content for Him to abandon His affinity with us and return fully to what He was before. However—and this absolutely astounds us—we learn that Jesus will forever remain in solidarity with us by retaining our nature!

Consider the implications of the following passages in regard to Jesus’ eternal solidarity with us:

Luke 24:36–43

Acts 1:10, 11

Acts 17:31

1 Tim. 2:5

“By His life and His death, Christ has achieved even more than recovery from the ruin wrought through sin. It was Satan’s purpose to bring about an eternal separation between God and man; but in Christ we become more closely united to God than if we had never fallen. In taking our nature, the Saviour has bound Himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken. Through the eternal ages He is linked with us. ‘God so loved the world. . . .’ He gave Him not only to bear our sins, and to die as our sacrifice; He gave Him to the fallen race. To assure us of His immutable counsel of peace, God gave His only-begotten Son to become one of the human family, forever to retain His human nature. . . . God has adopted human nature in the person of His Son, and has carried the same into the highest heaven. It is the ‘Son of man’ who shares the throne of the universe.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 25. “Christ ascended to heaven, bearing a sanctified, holy humanity. He took this humanity with Him into the heavenly courts, and through the eternal ages He will bear it, as the One who has redeemed every human being in the city of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1054.

A friend of yours, hearing about Jesus’ eternal solidarity with us, says, “That is going too far. It is too much!” What would you say to that person? And how do you feel about the fact He will be like us for eternity? However incredible a concept, what does it tell us about God’s love for humanity?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

To deal with the problem of sin (*Gen. 3:15, Isa. 53:4–6, John 3:16, Rom. 5:6–11*). The core purpose of incarnation is that Jesus “shall save his people from their sins” (*Matt. 1:21; cf. 1 John 4:9*). Hence, God’s Son came in the form of a helpless babe in Bethlehem and allowed Himself to be the Man of the cross. So, the apostle says God “loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (*1 John 4:10*). Without His divinity, Christ could not have been qualified to be our Savior; without His humanity, He could not have taken the cross on our behalf. It is the God-Man, Jesus the Christ, who saves us from sin and concludes the great controversy by His victory over sin, death, and Satan (*Rev. 11:15–18*).

► **STEP 3—Practice**

Just for Teachers: Note the implications of the humanity of Christ to our Christian faith and life.

Thought Questions:

- 1 “I perceive that there is danger in approaching subjects which dwell on the humanity of the Son of the infinite God.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1129. What are some of these dangers, and how should we deal with them?
- 2 Christ is both God and Man. And He was tempted “as we are” (*Heb. 4:15*). Did Christ’s nature provide Him an advantage over us in facing sin? In what ways are the temptations of Jesus the same as or different from ours?

► **STEP 4—Apply**

Just for Teachers: We have learned so far that Jesus is both God and Man. As His followers, how do we relate to this great truth?

Thought Questions:

- 1 “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (*Phil. 4:13*). How can we relate this promise to the divine-human nature of Christ?
- 2 Some say that the moral and ethical example of Christ as a man is what makes Him our Savior. Is this right? If so, why? If not, why not?

Further Study: In the centuries-old controversy over the person of Jesus, the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) marked a significant milestone. Essentially, it agreed and proclaimed that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man: “We all with one voice teach that . . . our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same God, the Same perfect in Godhead, the Same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, . . . [one] with the Father as to his Godhead, and . . . [one] with us as to his manhood; in all things like unto us, sin only excepted.”—Cited in Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), p. 390. For an assessment of the implications of the Chalcedon statement from an Adventist perspective, see Roy Adams, *The Nature of Christ* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1994), pp. 57–72.

“In contemplating the incarnation of Christ in humanity, we stand baffled before an unfathomable mystery. . . . The more we reflect upon it, the more amazing does it appear. How wide is the contrast between the divinity of Christ and the helpless infant in Bethlehem’s manger! How can we span the distance between the mighty God and a helpless child? And yet the Creator of worlds, He in whom was the fullness of the Godhead bodily, was manifest in the helpless babe in the manger. Far higher than any of the angels, equal with the Father in dignity and glory, and yet wearing the garb of humanity! Divinity and humanity were mysteriously combined, and man and God became one. It is in this union that we find the hope of our fallen race.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, July 30, 1896.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What, for you, are the big issues surrounding Christ’s humanity? Why are they important for you? At the same time, why must we be careful not to be too harsh or dogmatic about the finer points of Christ’s humanity?
- ❷ Ellen G. White says that Christ’s humanity is everything to us (see *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 244). What did she mean? In what practical ways does the idea of Christ’s humanity affect you in your Christian walk?
- ❸ How might we use what we have studied in this week’s lesson in our personal witness? How does the reality of Christ’s humanity touch people where they live today?