

What We Believe: Knowing and Loving our Doctrines
 Adult Sunday Studies 2023-24
 14 | The Person of Christ, cont.

Where the Church Landed in Describing Who Jesus is:

Nicene Creed

“... And we believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven; he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human;”

WCF 8.2:

“The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. **So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.**”

Key phrases throughout church history:

1. Christ's divine nature is *of one being/essence (homoousios)* with the Father and Spirit
2. Two natures (human and divine) in one person
3. Each nature is *distinct, but never separate* from the other
4. “Begotten, not made” - “only God” in John 1.14, 18 is “only born/begotten/generated God” - *monogenes*

*** There are several texts that make Jesus' divinity clear (John 1; Phil. 2.5-10; Rom. 1.3-4; 1Jn. 5.20), others where the obvious implication must be that Jesus is divine (i.e. instances where an OT passage is cited that only applied to Yahweh and now applies to Christ, or where Jesus Himself is saying as much); then there are additional texts where what is claimed could only be claimed by someone

who is divine; and all of these being in the Jewish context where monotheism was a bedrock truth, and yet they start worshipping Jesus!

“If in Jesus Christ humans do not **encounter God directly**, then they cannot confidently embrace God’s reconciling love. Furthermore, worrying that God hides behind an emissary, humans treat salvation as reaching toward God via this quasi-divine intermediary instead of receiving divine grace.” - Daniel Treier

If Jesus is truly human and truly divine, what does that do to our assurance of his revelation? Our trust in His power? Our doubts about our own insufficiencies?

On God Being Unchangeable, yet Loving; or, Foundations for a Christian Theodicy in the Incarnation

“The person of Christ is not an amalgam of two natures, but rather is the eternally divine person of the Son who has taken a human nature into personal union.” - Robert Letham

Relations between the Human and Divine nature - Communication of Idioms - WCF 7.7 - “VII. Christ, in the work of mediation, acts according to both natures, by each nature doing that which is proper to itself; yet, by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture attributed to the person denominated by the other nature.”]

*** Notes from Thomas Weinandy’s book, *Does God Suffer?* ***

Does God really relate to us? “As Creator, he is in no way limited. The term Creator specifies both the relationship between Yahweh and his creation and simultaneously his radical distinctiveness from creation. It is the very otherness of God, as Creator, which allows him to be so close and intimate.” - 49

Does God need to be so transcendent and holy? - “The whole significance of Yahweh’s presence and activity, expressed in his love, care, and compassion, is

predicated precisely on the truth that it is **actually God, in his wholly otherness as God, who is present and active**. To make God less than wholly other in order to promote or protect his presence and activity is to undermine the very importance of his presence and activity. If it is not the wholly other God who is acting in time and history and forming personal relationships with his people, then the whole significance of this activity and these relationships is lost." - 54-5

Does God change his mind? - "The very language that is used, being 'sorry,' 'relenting,' 'repenting,' and 'changing' of mind seeks to express Yahweh's **unswerving and unalterable love which is expressed** in his compassion, mercy and forgiveness, and equally, that he is adamant in his demand for goodness and justice. Yahweh then is sorry that he appointed Saul not just because Saul had changed, but he is equally sorry because he, as God, has not changed. The sorrow is an expression of the fact that 'the Glory of Israel will not recant or change his mind; for he is not a mortal that he should change his mind.' The All Holy God consistently demands righteousness and this very consistency is expressed in his sorrow." - 61

Can God have compassion if He doesn't change? - "God is, for Irenaeus, 'total sympathy and total love' precisely because his mercy and love are not predicated of a changeable being. For God to be impassible and immutable is not to deny love and compassion of him, but to establish in his unchangeably perfect being a love that is **absolutely and utterly passionate**." - 94

"Eternally God is immutably and impassably adapted to every situation and circumstance, not because his love is indifferent and unresponsive, but because his love, with all its facets, is **fully in action**, and so he is supremely and utterly responsive to every situation and circumstance." -

Does God Suffer? - "No, God in himself as God does not suffer. . . . Since God does not suffer, his **love becomes absolutely free in its expression and supremely pure in its purpose**. If God did suffer, it would mean that God would need not only to alleviate the suffering of others, but also his own suffering, and thus there would be an inbuilt self-interest in God's love and consolation. However, since God does not suffer, his care for those who do suffer is freely given and not evoked by some need on his part." - 153, 160

So what happens in the Incarnation? - "It is *truly* the Son of God who *truly* is man and so suffers *truly* as man. . . . If the Son of God changed in becoming man, it would no longer be the Son of God who is man. . . . Who is it who truly experiences the authentic, genuine, and undiminished reality of human suffering? **None other than the divine Son of God!** He who is one in being (*homoousion*) with the Father. What is the manner in which he experiences the whole reality of human suffering? **As man!** It is actually the Son of God who lives a comprehensive human life, and so it is the Son who, as man, experiences all facets of this human life, including suffering and death." - 175, 201

So did God suffer? - "He who is impassible as God actually is passible as man. The Impassible suffered. To say, in accordance with Cyril and the Christian tradition, that '**the Impassible suffers**' is not, then, to be incoherent, but to state the very heart of the incarnational mystery. First, the term 'the Impassible' guarantees that it is **actually God, in all his wholly transcendent otherness as God, who suffers**, and not 'God' in some mitigated or semi-divine state. The fact that God does not lose his wholly transcendent impassible otherness in so suffering **enhances to the extreme the import of the suffering**, for it means that the Son who is incapable of suffering as the wholly other God is precisely the same one who is **actually suffering as man**. But it is at this juncture that those who advocate a suffering God miss the logic and so the heart of the communication of idioms. The communication of idioms, secondly, equally ensures that it is **truly human suffering** that the Son of God experiences and

endures. Even if one did allow the Son of God to suffer in his divine nature, this would negate the very thing one wanted to preserve and cultivate. For if the Son of God experienced suffering in his divine nature, he **would no longer be experiencing human suffering** in an authentic and genuine human manner, but instead he would be experiencing 'human suffering' in a divine manner which would then be neither genuinely nor authentically human. If the Son of God experienced suffering in his divine nature, then it would be God suffering as God *in a man*. But the Incarnation, which demands that the **Son of God actually exists as a man and not just dwells in a man, equally demands that the Son of God suffers as a man** and not just suffers divinely in a man. . . . Within the Incarnation the Son of God never does anything as God. If he did, he would be acting as God *in a man*. This the Incarnation will never permit. **All that Jesus did as the Son of God was done as a man** - whether it was eating carrots or raising someone from the dead. He may have raised Lazarus from the dead by his divine power or, better, by the power of the Holy Spirit, but it was, nonetheless, as man that he did so. . . . If the Son of God, as God, were deprived of some good which would cause him to suffer as God, it would mean that he is actually no longer God. Strange as it may seem, but not paradoxically, one must maintain the unchangeable impassibility of the Son of God as God in order to guarantee that it is actually the divine Son of God, one in being with the Father, who truly suffers as man. As man the divine Son of God was deprived, as are we, of human goods which did cause him, like us, to suffer." - 203-5

"Even if we were to suppose the impossible situation that in Christ God suffers as God in his divine nature, his suffering would then have little to do with us, **for we do not suffer as God, but as humans.**" - Dodds

Hallelujah! God himself suffered as a human!

What are some of the manifold implications that we can draw from these wonderful truths?