

POSITION PAPER

THE TRUE HUMANITY OF JESUS CHRIST

Introduction

Uncompromising monotheism is one of the clearest themes of Scripture. Simply stated, God is absolutely and indivisibly one. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD” (Deuteronomy 6:4). There are no essential distinctions in His eternal nature. All names and titles of the Deity—such as God (Elohim), Jehovah (Yahweh), Lord, Father, Word, and Holy Spirit—refer to one and the same being. Any plurality associated with God merely relates to attributes, titles, roles, manifestations, or aspects of God’s self-revelation to humans.

God is holy—pure, perfect, undefiled by sin or evil (Leviticus 11:45). Therefore, God cannot be defiled by matter or flesh. He is absolute, incorruptible, immutable, unchanging. (See Psalm 102:27; Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 1:12; 6:17-18; James 1:17.)

Jesus Christ is the one God “manifest in the flesh” (I Timothy 3:16). “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (II Corinthians 5:19). “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell” (Colossians 1:19). “In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9).

“Manifest in the flesh” means much more than “inhabiting flesh.” The use of the word “bodily” in Colossians 2:9 eliminates the idea of God merely dwelling in a fleshly container. Rather, all the fullness dwelt “in him” and “in him ... bodily.” “In him” is a reference to Christ in all the scriptural significance of the title and person. For this reason we should avoid terminology that does not fit scriptural usage or reflect the full meaning. For example, it is erroneous to say that God dwells in flesh like water in a glass. The glass is merely a container, but when God came in flesh, deity and humanity were joined together in the one person of Jesus Christ. Christ was the Word become flesh (John 1:14). He was “conceived” by a virgin (Luke 1:31; 2:21), gestated in her womb (Luke 2:5-6), and born of her (Luke 1:35; 2:7; Matthew 1:16-25).

Jesus is God in the Old Testament sense; that is what New Testament writers meant when they called Jesus God. Jesus accepted Thomas’s confession of Him as “my Lord and my God” (John 20:28-29). Many other scriptural passages reveal the identity of Jesus as God. (See Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; 35:4-6; 45:21-23; John 1:1-14; 8:56-58; 10:30-38; 14:9-11; Acts 20:28; Romans 9:5; II Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15-19; Titus 2:13.) Some people maintain that only one of three divine persons, a second person who is called “God the Son,” came in flesh, but the Bible does not make such a claim; it simply says that God was manifest in the flesh. Jesus is not the incarnation of one person of a trinity but the incarnation of all the identity, character, and personality of the one God.

When God came in the flesh, God did not become defiled, for He is unchanging in holiness and incorruptible (Romans 1:23). Instead, He made it possible for sinners to become pure, and indeed our salvation rests upon this truth. Therefore, when Jesus was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary, He was not tainted by the nature of sin. Instead, the Spirit of God caused the child to be holy (Luke 1:35).

Jesus is unchanging as to His deity and holiness (Hebrews 13:8). He cannot be defiled by sin, flesh, or matter: “For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens” (Hebrews 7:26). When humans touch something unclean, it does not become holy; rather, they become unclean. (See Haggai 2:11-14.) For example, under Old Testament law, people became unclean when they touched a corpse, a leper, or someone with a discharge of bodily fluid (Numbers 5:1-3). Because Jesus was God

manifested in the flesh, however, when He touched something unclean, He did not become unclean: instead the unclean thing became clean. When Jesus touched a leper, the leper was healed. When He touched the bier of a dead man, the man was raised from the dead. When a woman with an issue of blood touched Jesus, He was not defiled, but the woman was healed. When Jesus took a dead girl by the hand, the girl came back to life. (See Luke 5:12-14; 7:14-15; 8:43-44, 53-55.) Thus Jesus could come “in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin” in order to become the sacrifice for sin, yet without being tainted by sin; instead He “condemned sin in the flesh” and “taste[d] death for every man.” (See Romans 8:3; II Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 2:9.) Although Jesus can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, He is without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

The Scriptures proclaim the genuine and complete humanity of Jesus. (See Romans 1:3; Hebrews 2:14-17; 5:7-8.) “The Word was made flesh” (John 1:14). Here, “flesh” does not merely mean a physical body but true and complete human identity. In whatever way that we define the essential components of humanity, Christ had them. He was human in body, soul, spirit, mind, and will. (See Matthew 26:38-39; Luke 23:46; Acts 2:27-31.) Jesus was both the Son of God and the Son of man (Son of humanity). God’s Spirit caused a virgin to conceive; therefore, the holy child to whom she gave birth is the Son of God (Luke 1:35). Because “that holy thing” which was born of her was God manifest in the flesh, He is also the Son of man.

“Son of” also means “having the nature or character of,” as in “sons of thunder,” “sons of Belial,” and “son of consolation.” Jesus had the very character of God as well as that of perfect humanity, for no one can be like God in every way, be equal with God, or have God’s complete character without being the one God Himself. (See Isaiah 46:9; 48:11; John 5:18.) The identification of Jesus as the unique Son of God signifies that He is God in flesh. Jesus was a perfect human. He was more than a visible appearance of God, and He was more than God animating a human body. He was actually God incarnate—God dwelling and manifesting Himself as a true human, with everything humanity includes except for sin. If He had anything less than full humanity, the Incarnation would not be genuine and the Atonement would not be complete.

Christ’s true humanity does not mean He had a sinful nature, for sin cannot attach itself to deity. Moreover, a sinful nature was not originally part of the human race. (See Genesis 1:27, 31.) Christ was subject to all human temptations and infirmities, but He was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). He committed no sin, and sin was not in Him (I Peter 2:22; I John 3:5).

The Union of Deity and Humanity in Christ

A true Christology must distinguish between God in His transcendence and God as manifested in the flesh. Otherwise, there is no way to explain the prayers of Christ, His submission to the Father’s will, the Son’s lack of independent knowledge and power, and so on. Oneness theology stresses that these examples and others like them do not prove a plurality of divine persons but simply demonstrate and arise from the authentic humanity of Jesus Christ. He was a real man in every way, and He underwent everything in the human experience, except for sin. His humanity, as well as His deity, was full and complete. In every way that we humans can speak of our humanity and our relationship to God, so could Jesus, except for sin. Yet He could also speak and act as God, for He was simultaneously God and man.

Sometimes He acted and spoke from the human perspective, as when He hungered; and sometimes He acted and spoke from the divine perspective, as when He fed a multitude from five loaves of bread and two fish. On the cross, He cried from the depths of His humanity, “I

thirst,” “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” and “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” Yet on the cross He also exercised the prerogative of God alone when He promised the repentant thief, “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” (See Matthew 27:46; Luke 23:43, 46; John 19:28.)

When the Bible says Christ died, it refers to the death of the human manifestation, for deity cannot die. When it says Christ dwells in the hearts of believers, it refers to His divine Spirit. Only as a human could Jesus be born, grow, be tempted by the devil, hunger, thirst, become weary, sleep, pray, be beaten, die, not know all things, not have all power, be inferior to God, and be a servant. Yet because He was also God, He could exist from eternity, be unchanging, cast out demons by His own authority, be the bread of life, give living water, give spiritual rest, calm the storm, answer prayer, heal the sick, raise His body from death, forgive sin, know all things, have all power, be identified as God, and be King of kings. In an ordinary person, these two contrasting lists would be mutually exclusive, yet the Scriptures attribute both to Jesus.

This distinguishing between deity and humanity explains the biblical difference in the use of the titles “Father” and “Son.” Any attempt to identify two persons from these two titles falls into either the error of ditheism or the error of subordinationism.

Although we can recognize both deity and humanity, it is impossible to separate the two in Christ. It is apparent that Jesus was human in every way, but it is equally apparent that in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Humanity and deity were inseparably joined in His one Spirit. (See John 1:1, 14; 10:30, 38; 14:10-11.) While there was a distinction between the divine will and His human will, He always submitted His human will to the divine will. (See John 5:19, 30; 8:28; 12:49-50; 14:10.)

There is no way to glorify God except through this union of deity and humanity we know as Jesus Christ, for He is God’s permanent self-revelation (Romans 16:27). He will never cease to be God and man united. (See Hebrews 13:8; Revelation 22:3-4.)

While on earth Jesus was fully God, not merely an anointed man. At the same time, He was fully human, not just in the appearance of a human. He was God by nature, by right, by identity; He was not merely deified by an anointing or indwelling. (See John 3:34.) The humanity of Jesus was inextricably joined with all the fullness of God’s Spirit. (See Colossians 1:19.)

Christ did not have two personalities. He had a unique personality that was the perfect union of deity and humanity. The divine personality permeated and colored every aspect of the humanity.

Scriptural Truths about Christ’s Humanity

From Scripture we discover the following truths about Christ’s humanity.

1. *Jesus did not inherit sin, for deity cannot be tainted by sin.* Instead, sinful flesh is made pure by the touch of deity. (See Isaiah 6:5-7.) The child Jesus was born holy because He was the Word become flesh and because His conception was the result of the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). “And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

2. *Jesus was the biological descendant of Adam and Eve, Abraham, and David.* He was born with the same kind of human identity that Adam and Eve had when they were first created. (See John 1:14; I John 4:2; I Timothy 3:16.) He was the seed of the woman, “the seed of

Abraham,” “the seed of David,” and “the offspring of David.” (See Genesis 3:15; John 7:42; Acts 13:23; Romans 1:3; Galatians 3:16; II Timothy 2:8; Hebrews 2:16; Revelation 22:16.) Jesus was a natural Israelite in the same way as Paul. (See Romans 9:3-5.) The Messiah was “of the fruit of his [David’s] loins, according to the flesh” (Acts 2:30).

In the New Testament passages that say Jesus is the “seed” of Abraham and of David, the Greek word *sperma* is used, meaning biological offspring. It is erroneous to say that the word “seed” refers metaphorically to Jesus Christ without reference to physical descent. God gave promises to Abraham’s seed, who are identified first and foremost as his physical descendants (plural). (See Genesis 17:7-13.) Galatians 3:16 points out that Jesus is the supreme descendant (singular) of Abraham through whom these promises would be fulfilled in the ultimate sense and made available all who have faith in Christ.

From a study of many passages, we see that both the Hebrew and Greek words translated “seed” in the Bible refer primarily to biological offspring of men and women and only secondarily serve as a metaphor for spiritual offspring. Jesus Himself identified the Jews, even those who sought to kill Him, as being Abraham’s seed (John 8:37). Mary understood Abraham’s seed to include “the fathers,” to whom God’s promises were made (Luke 1:55). Stephen, the church’s first martyr, identified Abraham’s child Isaac and his offspring as Abraham’s seed (Acts 7:5-6). Peter understood that the “men of Israel” were the covenant seed (Acts 3:12, 25). Paul wrote of “all the seed,” demonstrating that the word applies to all believers as well as all of Abraham’s physical offspring (Romans 4:16; 9:29). Paul included the many nations that came from Abraham’s offspring in the seed of which God spoke (Romans 4:18; 11:1; II Corinthians 11:22). Moreover, Paul extended the scope of the word “seed” to include all who would become believers in Christ as the spiritual offspring of Abraham and the children of God (Romans 9:7-8; Galatians 3:29).

Finally, God’s Word specifically uses the word *sperma* as a reference to the sex cell of a woman as well as that of men. In fact, the Bible uses no other word to refer to the female sex cell. “Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed [*sperma*], and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised” (Hebrews 11:11). Sara “conceived seed.” While it is true that women do not have sperm, the meanings of the Hebrew word (*zera*) and the Greek word (*sperma*) are not limited to the male sex cell, or to Christ. Thus, Scripture clearly teaches that Jesus Christ was biologically and genetically related to Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David through Eve and the virgin Mary, His mother.

3. *Jesus was the biological descendant of Mary.* Mary was not an “incubator” for “divine flesh.” She did not merely bear Christ, but she “conceive[d]” Christ in her womb (Luke 1:31). The Scriptures identify Mary as the mother of Jesus (Matthew 1:18; 2:11; Luke 2:34, 43, 48, 51). The angels specifically identified her as the true mother of Jesus (Matthew 2:13, 19-20). The word “mother” cannot be applied to a mere incubator. It demands a biological relationship. Jesus was “made of a woman, made under the law” (Galatians 4:4).

4. *It was necessary for Jesus to come as one of us, to be genetically part of the human race, with human flesh and blood, and yet without sin, in order to be our high priest and to reconcile us to God.* “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might

be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2:14-18). “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:14-15).

5. *As a human, Jesus grew mentally, physically, spiritually, and socially.* “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:52). “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:7-9).

6. *There was a change in Christ’s body at His resurrection.* Before His resurrection, Jesus had a flesh-and-blood body capable of suffering, death, and decay, but in His resurrection His body was changed to be incorruptible (incapable of decay) and immortal (incapable of death). “Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him” (Romans 6:9). David prophesied of Christ, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell: neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:27). Peter explained that this prophecy was fulfilled by the resurrection of Christ: “He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption” (Acts 2:31). Likewise, Paul quoted the same verse from Psalms, stating that Christ was resurrected from the dead “now no more to return to corruption” (Acts 13:34-35). According to this prophecy, as applied by both Peter and Paul, the body of Christ would have decayed except for the miracle of His resurrection.

In His resurrection, Christ is “the firstfruits of them that slept” (I Corinthians 15:20). Through Christ came “the resurrection of the dead” (I Corinthians 15:21). I Corinthians 15:42-44 explains what happens at “the resurrection of the dead”: “It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.”

Our resurrection will be the same as His and will give us a body like His. In both cases, “resurrection” refers to the same process, so that Christ’s resurrection made Him the “firstfruits” of believers. “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (I Corinthians 15:50-53). “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (I John 3:2).

In short, the Bible reveals that the humanity of Christ had to qualify for exaltation and glorification, which occurred by His death, resurrection, and ascension. (See Psalm 2:7 with Acts 13:32-24; Psalm 110:1-3 with Ephesians 1:19-23; Psalm 110:4 with Hebrews 5:1-11; Isaiah 28:16 with I Peter 2:6-8; John 7:39; 17:1; Acts 2:33; 3:13; 4:10-12; 5:31; Romans 1:3-4; Philippians 2:5-11.) If Jesus Christ were not truly human with full human potential for suffering, experience, obedience, growth, and transformation, then these texts would be meaningless when

they speak of Him as becoming perfect through suffering and being exalted by resurrection. If His body had no biological or genetic relationship to other human beings, if He were “divine flesh” or otherwise exempt from human frailty, such qualifications would be meaningless, because deity does not need to qualify for glorification, exaltation, or any role He chooses to take in the affairs of His creation.

Only when we acknowledge Jesus was a true human being descended through the human race can we understand these statements. The man Christ Jesus had to demonstrate Himself worthy of the task and titles He was sent to fulfill. “Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: but when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Galatians 4:1-5). In this regard Hebrews 5:5-9 explains, “So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.”

Summary

In denominational Christendom, Christology, or the doctrine of Christ, was defined by the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) as follows: Christ has two natures in one person. The technical terms *nature* and *person*, however, are not suitable under all circumstances. Derived from Greek philosophy and colored by trinitarian usage, they are inadequate to convey the full biblical concept of the Incarnation. For example, it is inaccurate to say one nature prayed to another or one nature loved another. It is more accurate to say simply that Christ prayed as an authentic human and that the Son loved the Father as all humans are to love God. We cannot speak of persons in the Godhead, but we can say Christ is a person who lived on earth.

In short, we cannot accept the trinitarian presuppositions and concepts of Chalcedon, nor do we endorse Chalcedon’s designation of Mary as the mother of God. Neither can we accept any doctrine that espouses a corruptible deity or that divorces Jesus Christ from a biological and genetic relationship to humanity. But we do accept the basic idea that humanity and deity are inseparably united in the one person of Christ.

In the final analysis, rather than debating Christology in historical and philosophical terms, from the Oneness perspective it is preferable to pass over the ancient creeds and councils and go back to Scripture. Based on Scripture we can make five important affirmations regarding the doctrine of Christ:

1. *Christ is full and perfect God, the one true God incarnate.*
2. *Christ is full and perfect human, without sin.*
3. *There is a distinction between the transcendent, eternal Deity and His manifestation in flesh as the man Christ Jesus.* The Gospels reveal that Christ is both human and divine. Some scenes and sayings primarily demonstrate His humanity and some His deity. None of the demonstrations of His humanity deny His deity, and none of the demonstrations of

His deity deny His humanity. His humanity did not exist separately from His deity, and His deity was not fully revealed without His humanity.

4. *Deity and humanity are inseparably united in Christ.* Christ is not a Spirit-filled person as we are, capable of living as a human apart from the Spirit. Rather, while we can recognize both deity and humanity in Christ, they are so united that Christ is one person in every way. Jesus is God manifest in the flesh—not God by an indwelling, but by incarnation, identity, and essence.
5. *The genetic relationship of Christ to humanity was inherited through His mother, Mary.* He is thereby part of the human race; the biological descendant of Adam and Eve, Abraham, and David; and qualified to reconcile sinful humans to God. Because the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary, Jesus was the unique, holy union of the Word of God and true genetic humanity. The doctrine of the “divine flesh” or “heavenly flesh” of Christ—defined as the denial that Jesus Christ was biologically or genetically related to humanity through His mother Mary—is scripturally false. Moreover, the denial of the biological or genetic relationship of Jesus Christ to other human beings is contrary to both the Articles of Faith and the International Articles of Faith of the United Pentecostal Church International, which state, “Jesus on His Father’s side was divine, on His mother’s side, human; thus, He was known as the Son of God and also the Son of man, or the God-man.”

Jesus Christ is the fullness of God dwelling as perfect humanity; God manifested Himself as a perfect human being. Jesus Christ is not a mere man, a demigod, a second person “in” the Godhead, a divine person temporarily stripped of some divine attributes, the transmutation of God into flesh, the manifestation of a portion of God, the animation of a human body by God, God manifesting Himself in an incomplete humanity, God coming in a “human” identity that is not biologically related to Adam and Eve, or God temporarily dwelling in a separate human person. Jesus Christ is the incarnation, the embodiment, the human personification and manifestation of the one God.