

# The Divine and Human Nature of Christ

by Herman Bavinck

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*The apostolic preaching of the New Testament rests on the foundation of historical events and emphasizes the significance of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 4:10, John 1:14, Acts 1:7, Colossians 2:9, Hebrews 5:9

**Topics:** "Christology", "Dual Nature"

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## Description

Herman Bavinck preaches about the unique and profound union of God and man in the person of Christ, emphasizing that Christ is both fully God and fully man. The confession of Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of the world is foundational to the Christian faith. The apostles' preaching confirms Christ's identity as the Son of God, who was born of a woman, lived a sinless life, died on the cross, and was raised to life, achieving reconciliation and eternal righteousness. The doctrine of the Two Natures in Christ ensures that all attributes and works ascribed to Him in Scripture are maintained, preserving His deity and humanity in perfect unity.

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## Transcript

The testimony which, according to Scripture, Christ has given of Himself is developed and confirmed by the preaching of the apostles. The confession that a man, named Jesus, is the Christ, the Only-Begotten of the Father, is in such direct conflict with our experience and with all of our thinking, and especially with all the inclinations of our heart, that no one can honestly and with his whole soul appropriate it without the persuasive activity of the Holy Spirit. By nature everybody stands in enmity to this confession, for it is not a confession natural to man. No one can confess that Jesus is the Lord except through the Holy Spirit, but neither can anyone speaking by the Holy Spirit call Jesus accursed; he must recognize Him as his Savior and King (1 Cor. 12:3).

Hence when Christ appears on earth and Himself confesses that He is the Son of God, He did not leave it at that, but He also had a care, and He continues to have a care, that this confession finds entrance into the world, and is believed by the church. He called His apostles, and He instructed them, and made them witnesses to His words and deeds, to His death and resurrection. He gave them the Holy Spirit who brought them personally to the confession that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16), and who later caused them, from the day of Pentecost on, to minister as preachers of those things which their eyes had seen, and they beheld, and their hands had handled of the Word of life (1 John 1:1). The apostles were really not the real witnesses. The Spirit of truth, proceeding from the Father, is the

original, infallible, and almighty witness to Christ, and the apostles are that only in Him and through Him (John 15:26 and Acts 5:32). And it is that same Spirit of truth who by means of the testimony of the apostles brings the church of all ages to the confession and preserves them in it: Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God (John 6:68-69).

When the four Evangelists in regular order report the events of the life of Jesus, they usually refer to Him simply by the name of Jesus without any more particular qualification or addendum. They tell us that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, that Jesus was led into the wilderness, that Jesus saw the multitude and went up the mountain, and so on. Jesus, the historical person who lived and died in Palestine, is the object of their chronicle. And so we find a few times in the letters of the apostles, too, that Jesus is designated simply by His historical name. Paul says, for instance, that no one can say that Jesus is the Lord except by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). John testifies that whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God (1 John 1 :5 compare 2:22 and 4:20). And in the book of Revelation we read of the faith of Jesus, and of the witnesses and witness of Jesus.

Still, in the letters of the apostles the use of this name without qualification is rare. Usually the name occurs in connection with: the Lord, Christ, the Son of God, and like designations, and the full name usually reads: Our Lord Jesus Christ. But, irrespective of whether the name Jesus is used alone or in connection with other names, the connection with the historical person who was born in Bethlehem and who died on the cross always comes to expression in it.

The whole New Testament, that of the epistles or letters as well as that of the gospels, rests on the foundation of historical events. The Christ-figure is not an idea nor an ideal of the human mind, as many in past ages maintained, and as some in our time also assert, but is a real figure who manifested Himself in a particular period and in a particular person in the man Jesus.

True, the various events in the life of Jesus recede into the background in the letters. Those letters have a different purpose than the gospels have. They do not chronicle the history of the life of Jesus but point out the significance which that life has for the redemption of mankind. But all of the apostles are familiar with the person and life of Jesus, are acquainted with His words and deeds, and they proceed to show us that this Jesus is the Christ, exalted by God to His own right hand, in order to grant repentance and the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:36 and 5:31).

Often, therefore, in the letters of the apostles mention is made of events in the life of Jesus. They picture Him before the eyes of their auditors and readers (Gal. 3 :1). They stress the fact that John the Baptist was His herald and precursor (Acts 13:25 and 19:4), that He comes from the family of Judah and the stem of David (Rom. 1:3; Rev. 5:5 and 22:16), that He was born of a woman (Gal. 4:4), was circumcised on the eighth day (Rom. 15 :8), that He was brought up in Nazareth (Acts 2:22 and 3:6), and that He also had brothers (1 Cor. 9:5 and Gal. 1:19). They tell us that He was perfectly holy and sinless,<sup>1</sup> that He presented Himself to us as an example (1 Cor. 11:1 and 1 Peter 2:21), and that He spoke words that have authority for us (Acts 20:35 and 1 Cor. 7:10-12). But it is especially His dying that is significant for us. The cross stands at the central point in the apostolic preaching. Betrayed by one of the twelve apostles whom He chose (1 Cor. 11:23 and 1 Cor. 15:5), and not recognized by the princes of this world as the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8), He was put to death by the Jews (Acts 4:10; 5 :30; and 1 Thess. 2:15), dying on the accursed wood of the cross.<sup>2</sup> But, even though He suffered greatly in Gethsemane and upon Golgotha,<sup>3</sup> He has by the pouring out of His blood achieved the reconciliation and an eternal righteousness.<sup>4</sup> And therefore God

raised Him up, exalted Him to His right hand, and appointed Him Lord and Christ, Prince and Savior for all nations.<sup>5</sup>

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From these few data it is adequately evident that the apostles did not deny, ignore, or neglect the facts of Christianity but that they fully honored them and penetrated their spiritual significance. No trace is to be found in them of any separation or conflict between the redemptive event and the redemptive word, however much some in the past have tried to postulate such a conflict. The redemptive event is the actualization of the redemptive word; in the second the first takes on its real and concrete form and is at the same time therefore its illumination and interpretation.

If any doubt about this remains at all, it is entirely removed by the battle which the apostles already in their day had to conduct. It was not merely in the second, third, and following centuries but also in the apostolic period that certain men appeared who regarded the facts of Christianity of subordinate and transient importance, or else ignored them altogether, and who held that the idea was the main thing or in itself quite enough. What difference does it make, they argued, whether or not Christ bodily rose from the grave? If only He lives on in the spirit, our salvation is sufficiently assured! But the apostle Paul thought very differently about that and in 1 Corinthians 15 he placed the reality and the significance of the resurrection in the clearest possible light. He preaches Christ according to the Scriptures, that Christ who, according to the counsel of the Father, died, was buried, and was raised again, who after His resurrection was seen of many disciples, and whose resurrection is the foundation and surety of our salvation. And, if possible, John puts even more emphasis on the fact that he is a declarer of what he has seen with his eyes and handled with his hands of the Word of life (1 John 1:1-3). The principle of the antichrist is this that he denies the incarnation of the Word; and the Christian confession, to the contrary, consists of the belief that the Word has become flesh, that the Son of God has come by water and by blood (John 1:14 and 1 John 3 :2-3 and 5 :6). The whole apostolic preaching of the letters and of the gospels, hence of the whole New Testament, comes down to the claim that Jesus, born of Mary and crucified, is -- witness the evidence of His exaltation -- the Christ, the Son of God.<sup>6</sup>

Now it deserves notice that, in connection with the content and purpose of the apostolic preaching, the use of the single name Jesus, without further qualification, is rare in the letters. Usually the apostles speak of Jesus Christ, or of Christ Jesus, or, even more fully, of the or our Lord Jesus Christ. Even the Evangelists who in their chronicle for the most part speak of Jesus make use, either at the beginning or at an important turning point of their gospel, of the full name Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup> This they do by way of indicating who the person is concerning whom they are writing their evangel. In the Acts and in the letters this usage becomes the regular practice. The apostles speak not of a human being whose name was Jesus, but, by adding the terms Christ and Lord, and the like, they give expression to their appreciation of who that man is. They are preachers of the gospel that in the man Jesus the Christ of God has appeared on the earth.

Thus they had gradually, during their going about with Him, learned to know Him. And especially after that important hour in Caesarea Philippi a light had dawned for them upon His person, and they had all confessed with Peter that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16). Thus Jesus had revealed Himself to them, at first more or less concealed under the name Son of man, but gradually more clearly and plainly as the end of His life approached. In the highpriestly prayer He designates Himself by the name Jesus Christ whom the Father has sent (John 17:3). Precisely because He gave Himself out to be the Christ, the Son of God, He was charged by the Jewish court with blasphemy and was condemned

to die (Matt. 26:63). And the superscription above His cross read: Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews (Matt. 27:37 and John 19:19).

It is true that the disciples could not reconcile these Messianic claims of Jesus with His approaching passion and death (Matt. 16:22). But through the resurrection, and after it, they learned to know also the necessity and the meaning of the cross. Now they recognized that God had by the resurrection made this Jesus, whom the Jews had destroyed, to be Lord and Christ and had exalted Him to be a Prince and Savior (Acts 2:36 and 5:31). This does not mean to say that before His resurrection Jesus was not yet Christ and Lord, and that He became this only after the resurrection, for Christ had proclaimed Himself as the Christ beforehand and He was then also acknowledged and confessed as such by the disciples (Matt. 16:16). But before the resurrection He was Messiah in the form of a servant, in a form and shape which concealed His dignity as Son of God from the eyes of men. In the resurrection and after it He laid aside that form of a servant, He re-assumed the glory which He had with the Father before the world was (John 17:5), and was therefore appointed as Son of God in power, according to the spirit of holiness that dwelt in Him (Rom. 1:3).

It is therefore that Paul can say that He now, after it has pleased God to reveal His Son to him, no longer knows Christ according to the flesh (2 Cor. 5:16). Before His repentance He knew Christ only according to the flesh, judged Him solely by His external appearance, according to the form of a servant in which He walked about on the earth. Then he could not believe that this Jesus, who was without any glory and was even hanged on the cross and put to death, was the Christ. But by his conversion all that has changed. Now he knows and judges Christ not according to appearance, not according to external, temporal, servant forms, but according to the spirit, according to what was in Christ, according to what He really was internally and in His resurrection externally proved to be.

And the same can in a sense be said of all the apostles. It is true that they had before the passion and death of Christ been brought to a believing confession of His Messianic reality. But in their mind there remained an irreconcilability of this reality with the passion and death. The resurrection, however, reconciled this conflict for them. He was to them now the same Christ who has descended into the lower parts of the earth and is ascended up far above all heavens, in order that He might fulfill all things (Eph. 4:9). Speaking of Christ, the apostles think in one and the same breath of the deceased and of the raised Christ, of the crucified and of the glorified Christ. They connect their gospel with the historical Jesus not only, who lived a few years back in Palestine and died there, but also to that same Jesus as He is, exalted, and seated at the right hand of God's power. They stand, so to speak, at the point of bisection of the horizontal line, which is tied to the past, to history, and the vertical line, which connects them with the living Lord in heaven. Christianity is therefore an historical religion, but at the same time a religion which lives in the present out of eternity. The disciples of Jesus are not, according to His historical name, Jesuites, but, according to the name of His office, Christians.

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This peculiar position which the apostles took in their preaching after the resurrection is the reason why they no longer referred to Jesus by His historical name merely, but virtually always spoke of Him as Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus, our Lord Jesus Christ, and so on. As a matter of fact the name Christ soon lost its official significance in the circle of the disciples and began to take on that of a given name. The conviction that Jesus was the Christ was so strong that He could simply be called Christ, even without the article preceding it. This occurs a few times even in the gospels.<sup>8</sup> But with the apostles, particularly with Paul,

this becomes the rule. Moreover, the two names, Jesus Christ, were more than once reversed, especially by Paul, with a view to accentuating even more the Messianic reality of Christ, and then the name became Christ Jesus. This designation, Jesus Christ or Christ Jesus, was the pre-eminent name for the early churches. The use and significance of the name in the Old Testament is carried over to Christ in the New. The Name of the Lord, or the Name alone, was in the Old Testament the denomination of the revealed glory of God. In the days of the New Testament that glory has appeared in the person of Jesus Christ; and thus the strength of the church now stands in His name. In that name the apostles baptize (Acts 2:38), speak and teach (Acts 4:18), heal the cripple (Acts 3 :6), and forgive sin (Acts 10:43). This name is resisted and it is attacked (Acts 26:9). The confession of it brings on suffering (Acts 5 :41). It is appealed to (Acts 22:8) and is magnified (Acts 19:17). In this sense the name of Jesus Christ was a sort of compendium of the confession of the church, the strength of its faith, and the anchor of its hope. Just as Israel in ancient times gloried in the name of Jehovah, so the church of the New Testament finds its strength in the name of Jesus Christ. In this name the name of Jehovah has come into its full revelation.

The name of Lord, which in the New Testament is constantly connected with that of Jesus Christ, points in the same direction. In the gospels Jesus is addressed by the name Lord a number of times by persons who were not of the disciples, but nevertheless call on Him for help. In such instances the name usually carries no more force than that of Rabbi or Master. But we also find this name often spoken by the disciples.<sup>9</sup> Further, in the gospel accounts the name of Jesus is sometimes interchanged by Luke and John with that of Lord.<sup>10</sup> And, finally, Jesus Himself also makes use of that name, designating Himself as the Lord.<sup>11</sup>

In the mouth of Jesus Himself and of the disciples this name of the Lord takes on a much profounder significance than is contained in the appellation Rabbi or Master. Just what everybody who came to Jesus for help and addressed Him with the name Lord meant by it cannot be said with certainty. But Jesus was in His own consciousness the teacher, the master, the Lord pre-eminently, and He ascribed an authority to Himself which went far beyond that of the scribes. So much is evident already in such passages as Matthew 23:1-11 and Mark 1:22 and 27 where Jesus exalts Himself as the only Master above all other. But it is much more resolutely expressed, and is put beyond all possibility of doubt, when He calls Himself a Lord of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:8) and elsewhere calls Himself David's Son and David's Lord (Matt. 22:43-45). In these claims nothing less is involved than that He is the Messiah, who is seated at the right hand of God, shares His power, and judges of the living and the dead.<sup>12</sup>

This deep significance which attaches itself to the name of Lord is owing in part also, presumably, to the fact that the names of Jehovah and Adonai of the Old Testament were translated by the Greek kurios, Lord, in the New, that is, by the same word which was also applied to the Christ. As Christ more and more clearly explained Himself, who He was, and as the disciples understood better and better which revelation of God had come to them in Christ, the name of Lord took on a richer and richer significance. Texts of the Old Testament in which God was spoken of were applied to the Christ in the New without hesitation. Thus in Mark 1:3 the text from Isaiah, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight, is referred to and applied to the preparation by John the Baptist as its fulfillment. In Christ, God Himself, the Lord, has come to His people. And the disciples, by confessing Jesus as Lord, have thus more and more clearly expressed that God Himself had revealed and given Himself to them in the person of Christ. It is Thomas who mounts to the very climax of this confession during Jesus' sojourn on earth when he falls at the feet of the resurrected Christ and addresses Him with the words: My Lord and my God (John 20:28).

After the resurrection the name of Lord becomes the name commonly used for Jesus in the circle of His disciples. We find it continually in the Acts and in the letters, especially the letters of Paul. Sometimes the name Lord is used alone, but usually it goes combined with other designations: the Lord Jesus, or the Lord Jesus Christ, or our Lord Jesus Christ, or our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and so on. By using this name of Lord the believers express that Jesus Christ who was humiliated to the point of death and the cross, has by reason of His perfect obedience been raised to Lord and Prince (Acts 2:35 and 5:31), who is seated at God's right hand (Acts 2:34), who is Lord of all (Acts 10:36): first of all the church which He has purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28), and further of all creation which He will sometime judge as the Judge of living and dead (Acts 10:42 and 17:31).

Whoever, therefore, shall call upon the name of Jesus as Christ and Lord, shall be saved (Acts 2:21 and 1 Cor. 1:2). To be Christian is to confess with the mouth and to believe with the heart that God has raised Him up from the dead.<sup>13</sup> The content of the preaching is: Christ Jesus, the Lord (2 Cor. 4:5). So completely is the essence of Christianity epitomized in this confession that in the writings of Paul the name of Lord almost comes to be used as a given name applied to Christ in His distinction from the Father and the Spirit. As Christians we have one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him, and one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will (1 Cor. 8:6 and 12:11). Just as the name of God in the writings of Paul becomes the domestic name of the Father, so the name of Lord becomes the domestic name of Christ.

The apostolic blessing, accordingly, prays that the church may have the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:13). The one name of God interprets itself in the three persons of Father, Son, and Spirit (Matt. 28:19).

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If Christ, according to the testimony of the apostles, occupies so high a place, it is no wonder that all kinds of Divine attributes and works are ascribed to Him, and that even the Divine nature is recognized in Him.

The figure we encounter in the person of Christ on the pages of Scripture is a unique figure. On the one hand, He is very man. He became flesh and came into the flesh (John 1:14 and 1 John 4:2-3). He bore the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3). He came of the fathers, according to the flesh (Rom. 9:5), of Abraham's seed (Gal. 3:16), of Judah's line (Heb. 7:14), and of David's generation (Rom 1:3). He was born of a woman (Gal. 4:4), partook of our flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14), possessed a spirit (Matt. 27:50), a soul (Matt. 26:38), and a body (1 Peter 2:24), and was human in the full, true sense. As a child He grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:40 and 52). He was hungry and thirsty, sorrowful and joyful, was moved by emotion and stirred to anger.<sup>14</sup> He placed Himself under the law and was obedient to it until death.<sup>15</sup> He suffered, died on the cross, and was buried in a garden. He was without form or comeliness. When we looked upon Him there was no beauty that we should desire Him. He was despised, and unworthy of esteem, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isa. 53:2-3).

Nevertheless this same man was distinguished from all men and raised high above them. Not only was He according to His human nature conceived by the Holy Spirit; not only was He throughout His life, despite all temptation, free from sin; and not only was He after His death raised up again and taken into heaven; but the same subject, the same person, the same I who humiliated Himself so deeply that He assumed the form of a servant and became obedient unto the death of the cross, already existed in a different form of

existence long before His incarnation and humiliation. He existed then in the form of God and thought it no robbery to be equal with God (Phil. 2:6). At His resurrection and ascension He simply received again the glory which He had with the Father before the world was (John 17:5). He is eternal as God Himself, having been with Him already in the beginning (John 1:1 and 1 John 1:1). He is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Rev. 22:13); He is omnipresent, so that, though walking about on the face of the earth, He is simultaneously in the bosom of the Father in heaven (John 1:18 and 3:13) ; and after His glorification He remains with His church and fulfills all in all;<sup>16</sup> He is unchangeable and faithful and is the same yesterday, and today, and forever (Heb. 13:8); He is omniscient, so that He hears prayers;<sup>17</sup> He is the One who knows all men's hearts (Acts 1 :24; unless the reference here is to the Father); He is omnipotent so that all things are subjected unto Him and all power is given to Him in heaven and on earth, and is the chief of all kings.<sup>18</sup>

While in possession of all these Divine attributes, He also shares in the Divine works. Together with the Father and the Spirit He is the creator of all things (John 1:3 and Col. 1:5). He is the firstborn, the beginning, and the Head of all creatures (Col. 1:15 and Rev. 3:14). He upholds all things by the word of His might, so that they are not only of Him but also continuously in Him and through Him (Heb. 1:3 and Col. 1:17). And, above all, He preserves, reconciles, and restores all things and gathers them into one under Himself as Head. As such He bears especially the name of the Savior of the world. In the Old Testament the name of Savior or Redeemer was given to God,<sup>19</sup> but in the New Testament the Son as well as the Father bears this name. In some places this name is given to God,<sup>20</sup> and in some places it is given to Christ.<sup>21</sup> Sometimes it is not clear whether the name refers to God or to Christ (Tit. 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1). But it is Christ in whom and through whom the saving work of God is wholly effected.

All this points to a unity between Father and Son, between God and Christ, such as nowhere else exists between the Creator and His creature. Even though Christ has assumed a human nature which is finite and limited and which began to exist in time, as person, as Self, Christ does not in Scripture stand on the side of the creature but on the side of God. He partakes of God's virtues and of His works; He possesses the same Divine nature. This last point comes into particularly clear expression in the three names which are given Christ: that of the Image, the Word, and the Son of God.

Christ is the Image of God, the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of His person.<sup>22</sup> In Christ the invisible God has become visible. Whoever sees Him sees the Father (John 14:9). Whoever wants to know who God is and what He is must behold the Christ. As Christ is, such is the Father. Further, Christ is the Word of God (John 1:1 and Rev. 19:13). In Him the Father has perfectly expressed Himself: His wisdom, His will, His excellences, His whole being. He has given Christ to have life in Himself (John 5 :26). Whoever wants to learn to know God's thought, God's counsel, and God's will for mankind and the world, let him listen to Christ, and hear Him (Matt. 17:5). Finally, Christ is the Son of God, the Son, as John describes Him, often without any further qualification (1 John 2:22 if. and Heb. 1:1, 8), the one and only-begotten, the own and beloved Son, in whom the Father is well pleased.<sup>23</sup> Whoever would be a child of God, let him accept Christ, for all who accept Him receive the right and the power to be called the children of God (John 1:12).

Scripture finally places its crown upon this testimony of Scripture by also allowing Him the Divine name. Thomas confessed Him already before the ascension as his Lord and his God (John 20:28). John testifies of Him that as the Word He was with God at the beginning and Himself was God. Paul declares that He is from the fathers according to the flesh but that according to His essence He is God above all, to be blessed forever (Rom. 9:5). The letter to the Hebrews states that He is exalted high above the angels and

is by God Himself addressed by the name of God (Heb. 1:8-9). Peter speaks of Him as our God and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:1). In the baptismal mandate of Jesus as reported in Matthew 28:19, and in the benedictions of the apostles,<sup>24</sup> Christ stands on one line with the Father and the Spirit. The name and essence, the attributes and works of the Godhead are recognized in the Son (and the Spirit) as well as in the Father.

Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God -- upon this stone is the church built. From the very beginning the wholly unique significance of Christ was clear to all believers. He was confessed by them all as the Lord who by His teaching and life had accomplished salvation, the forgiveness of sins, and immortality, who was thereupon raised by the Father to His right hand, and who would soon return as Judge to judge the living and the dead. The same names that are given Him in the letters of the apostles are given Him also in the earliest Christian writings. By those names He is addressed in the early prayers and songs. All were convinced that there is one God, that they were His children, one Lord who had made sure and granted to them the love of God, and one Spirit, who caused them all to walk in newness of life. The baptismal mandate of Matthew 28:19, which came into general use at the end of the apostolic period, is the evidence of this unanimity of conviction.

But the moment Christians began to reflect on the content of this confession, all kinds of difference of opinion became apparent. The members of the church, who were previously educated in Jewry or heathendom and for the most part were among the untutored of the country, were not in position immediately to appropriate the apostolic teaching in their own minds. They lived in a society in which all kinds of ideas and currents of thought were criss-crossing, and thus they continuously were subject to much temptation and error. Even during the life of the apostles we notice that various heretical teachers had forced their way into the church and tried to wrench it from the fixity of its belief. At Colosse, for instance, there were members who did injustice to the person and work of Christ and changed the gospel into a new law (Col. 2:3ff. and 16ff.). At Corinth certain libertines stood up, who, abusing Christian liberty, wanted to be bound to no rule (1 Cor. 6:12 and 8:1). The apostle John in his first letter conducts an argument against certain so-called prophets who denied the coming of Christ into the flesh and thus did violence to the genuineness of His human nature (1 John 2:18ff.; 4:1ff.; 5:5ff.).

And so it remained in the post-apostolic period. In fact, the errors and heresies grew in variety, force, and distribution from the second century on. There were those who believed in the real human nature of Christ, in His supernatural birth, His resurrection and ascension, but who recognized the Divine in Him in nothing more than an unusual measure of the gifts and powers of the Spirit. These were thought of as having been given Him at His baptism in order to equip Him for His religious-moral task. The followers of this movement lived under the influence of the deistic, Jewish idea of the relationship of God and the world. They simply could not conceive of a more intimate relationship between God and man than one which consisted of a sharing of gifts and abilities. Jesus, accordingly, was indeed a richly endowed person, a religious genius, but He was and He remained a man.

But others, brought up formerly in heathendom, found themselves attracted rather to the polytheistic idea. They thought that they could very well understand that Christ, according to His inner nature, should be one of the many, or even perhaps the highest, of all Divine beings. But they could not believe that such a Divine, pure being could have assumed a material and fleshly nature. And so they sacrificed the real humanity of Christ and said that it was only temporarily, and in appearance merely, that He had gone about on earth, much as the Angels according to Old Testament report had often done. Both thought-currents, both movements, continue up to the present day. At one time the Divinity of Christ is

sacrificed to the humanity; at another it is the humanity that is sacrificed to the Divinity. There are always extremes which sacrifice the idea to the fact, or the fact to the idea. They do not comprehend the unity and harmony of the two.

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But the Christian church from the very beginning stood on a different basis and in the person of Christ confessed the most intimate, the profoundest, and therefore the altogether unique, communion of God and man. Its representatives in the earliest period sometimes expressed themselves in an awkward way. They had to struggle, first to form a somewhat clear notion of the reality, and then to give expression to this idea in clear language. But, all the same, the church did not for that reason let itself be pushed off its base. Rather, the church avoided the one and the other extreme and clung to the teaching of the apostles concerning the person of Christ.

However, when one and the same person shares in the Divine nature and also is very man, it follows that an effort at definition must be made, and at a sharp delineation of how that person is related both to the Deity and to the world. And when this effort was made, a path of error and heresy defined itself again to the right and to the left.

When, in other words, the unity of God -- which is a fundamental truth of Christianity -- was understood in such a way that the being of God was perfectly coterminus and coincident with the person of the Father, then there remained no room in the Godhead for the Christ. Christ then was pushed outside the pale of deity, and placed alongside of man, for between the Creator and the creature there is no gradual transition. One could then go on to say with Arius that in time and status He transcended the whole world, that He was the first among created creatures, and that He was superior to them all in position and in honor. But Christ thus remains a creature. There was a time when He did not exist, and it is in time that He, like every other creature, was called into existence by God.

In the attempt, however, to hold to the unity of God and at the same time to grant the person of Christ the place of honor proper to Him, it is easy to fail into another error, the error named after its foremost proponent, Sabellius. While Arius, so to speak, identified the being of the Godhead with the person of the Father, Sabellius sacrificed all three of the persons to the being of the Godhead. According to His teaching, the three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, are not eternal realities, contained in the being of the Godhead, but they are forms and manifestations in which the one Divine Being manifests Himself successively in the course of the centuries: namely, in the Old Testament, in the earthly sojourn of Christ, and after Pentecost. Both heresies have throughout the centuries found their adherents. The so-called Groningen Theologie, for instance, renewed essentially the doctrine of Arius, and Modern Theology at first walked in the way of Sabellius.

It required much prayer and much struggle for the church to take the right way through all these heresies, the more so because each of them was modified and mingled with all sorts of departures and variations. But under the leadership of great men, eminent by reason of their piety as well as their power of thought, and therefore justly called fathers of the church, that church remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles. At the Synod of Nicea in 325 the church confessed its faith in the one God, the Father, the Almighty, creator of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was begotten by the Father as the only-begotten, that is, out of the being of God, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things in

heaven and earth were made, and in the Holy Spirit.

Very significant as this Nicean result was it by no means put a stop to the doctrinal disputes. On the contrary, the confession of Nicea gave opportunity for new questions and different answers. For, although the relationship of Christ to the being of God and to the world of men was now determined in the sense that in His person He shared in both, and that He was in His own person both God and man, the question would not down as to the nature of that relationship between those two natures in one person. In the answer to that question, too, various ways were taken.

Nestorius concluded that if there were two natures in Christ, there also had to be two persons, two selves, which could only be made one by some moral tie such as that which obtains in the marriage of a man and a woman. And Eutyches, proceeding from a like identification of person and nature, came to the conclusion that if in Christ there was but one person, one self, present, then the two natures had to be so mingled and welded together that only one nature, a Divine-human one, would emerge from the blending. In Nestorius the distinction of the natures was maintained at the cost of the unity of the person; in Eutyches the unity of the person was maintained at the cost of the duality of the natures.

After a long and vehement struggle, however, the church got beyond these disputes. At the Council of Chalcedon in 451 it stated that the one person of Christ consisted of two natures, unchanged and unmingled (against Eutyches), and not separated nor divided (against Nestorius), and that these natures existed alongside of each other, having their unity in the one person. With this decision which, later, at the Synod of Constantinople in 680 was amplified and completed on one specific point, the century-long struggle about the person of Christ came to an end. In these disputes the church had preserved the essence of Christianity, the absolute character of the Christian religion, and thus also its own independence.

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It is of course self-evident that this confession of Nicea and Chalcedon may not lay claim to infallibility. The terms of which the church and its theology make use, such as person, nature, unity of substance, and the like, are not found in Scripture, but are the product of reflection which Christianity gradually had to devote to this mystery of salvation., The church was compelled to do this reflecting by the heresies which loomed up on all sides, both within the church and outside of it. All those expressions and statements which are employed in the confession of the church and in the language of theology are not designed to explain the mystery which in this matter confronts it, but rather to maintain it pure and unviolated over against those who would weaken or deny it. The incarnation of the Word is not a problem which we must solve, or can solve, but a wonderful fact, rather, which we gratefully confess in such a way as God Himself presents it to us in His Word.

But, understood in this way, the confession which the church fixed at Nicea and Chalcedon is of great value. There have been many, and there still are many, who look down upon the doctrine of the two natures from a lofty vantage point, and try to supplant it by other words and phrases. What difference does it really make, they begin by saying, whether we agree with this doctrine or not? What matters is that we ourselves possess the person of Christ, He who stands high and exalted above this awkward confession. But before long these same persons begin introducing words and terms themselves in order to describe the person of Christ whom they accept. Nobody can escape from this situation, for what we do not know we cannot claim to possess. If we believe that we have the Christ, that we have communion with Him, that

we are His own, then such belief must be confessed with the mouth and be spoken in words, terms, expressions, and descriptions of some kind or other. And then history has taught that the terms of the attackers of the Doctrine of Two Natures are far poorer in worth and force, and that they often, indeed, involve doing injustice to the incarnation as Scripture explains it to us.

In modern times, for instance, there are many who think of the Doctrine of Two Natures as the acme of unreasonableness and who in their minds form an entirely different picture of the person of Christ. They cannot deny that there is something in Christ which differentiates Him from all men and raises Him above them all. But this Divine element which they recognize in Christ they regard not as a partaking of the Divine nature itself, but as a Divine endowment or strength granted to Christ in a particularly high degree. They tend to say, accordingly, that there are two sides to Christ, a Divine and a human side; or that He can be looked at from two points of view; or that He lived in two successive states, that of humiliation and that of exaltation; or that He, although human, by His preaching of the Word of God and the founding of His kingdom, nevertheless was the extraordinary and perfect vehicle of God's revelation and so has obtained for us the value of God. But any unprejudiced reader will feel that these representations are simply so many modifications in the language of the church not merely, but also that they make something of the person of Christ other than that which the church at all times on the basis of the testimony of the apostles has confessed.

After all, Divine gifts and powers are in a certain sense given to everyone, for all good and perfect gifts come down from the Father of lights. And even the unusual gifts, such as were the portion of the prophets, for example, do not raise these prophets above the plane of human beings. Prophets and apostles were men of like passions as we have. If Christ therefore received no more than extraordinary gifts and powers, He was no more than a human being, and then there can be no such thing as an incarnation of the Word in Him. But then He cannot, as others nevertheless maintain, by virtue of His resurrection and ascension be raised to the being of God, or have obtained the value or worth of God for us. The separation between God and man is not a gradual difference but a deep gulf. The relationship is that of Creator and creature, and the creature from the nature of his being can never become Creator, nor have the significance and worth for us human beings of the Creator, on whom we are absolutely dependent.

It is remarkable, therefore, that some in modern times, after having compared all these newer representations concerning the person of Christ with the teaching of the church and of Scripture, have come to the honest conclusion that in the last analysis the doctrine of the church does most justice to the doctrine of Scripture. The teaching that Christ was God and man in one person is not a product of heathen philosophy but is based on the apostolic witness.

This certainly is the mystery of salvation that He who was Himself with God in the beginning and was God (John 1:1), who was in the form of God and did not think it robbery to be equal with God (Phil. 2:6), who was the brightness of God's glory and the express image of His person (Heb. 1:3), in the fulness of time became flesh (John 1:14), was born of a woman (Gal. 4:4), humbled Himself, having taken on the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:7).

\* \* \* \* \*

Christ was God, and is God, and will forever remain God. He was not the Father, nor the Spirit, but the Son, the own, only-begotten, beloved Son of the Father. And it was not the Divine being, neither the Father nor the Spirit, but the person of the Son who became man in the fulness of time. And when He

became man and as man went about on earth, even when He agonized in Gethsemane and hung on the cross, He remained God's own Son in whom the Father was well pleased (had all His pleasure). It is true, of course, as the apostle says, that Christ, being in the form of God, did not think it robbery to be equal with God, yet made Himself of no reputation and emptied Himself (Phil. 2:6-7). But it is a mistake to take this to mean, as some do, that Christ, in His incarnation, in the state of humiliation, completely or partly divested Himself of His Divinity, laid aside His Divine attributes, and thereupon in the state of exaltation gradually assumed them again. For how could this be, since God cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13), and as the Immutable One in Himself far transcends all becoming and change? No, even when He became what He was not, He remained what He was, the Only-Begotten of the Father. But it is true that the Apostle says that in this sense Christ made Himself of no reputation: being in the form of God, He assumed the form of a man and a servant. One can express it humanly and simply in this way: before His incarnation Christ was equal with the Father not alone in essence and attributes, but He had also the form of God. He looked like God, He was the brightness of His glory, and the expressed image of His person. Had anyone been able to see Him, he would immediately have recognized God. But this changed at His incarnation. Then He took on the form of a human being, the form of a servant. Whoever looked at Him now could no longer recognize in Him the Only-Begotten Son of the Father, except by the eye of faith. He had laid aside His Divine form and brightness. He hid His Divine nature behind the form of a servant. On earth He was and He looked like one of us.

The incarnation therefore also implies in the second place that He who remained what He was also became what He was not. He became this at a point in time, at a particular moment in history, at that hour when the Holy Spirit came over Mary and the power of the Most High overshadowed her (Luke 1:35). But all the same this incarnation was prepared for during the centuries.

If we are to understand the incarnation aright, we can say that the generation of the Son and the creation of the world were preparatory to the incarnation of the Word. This is not at all to say that the generation and the creation already contain the incarnation. For Scripture always relates the incarnation of the Son to the redemption from sin and the accomplishment of salvation.<sup>25</sup> But the generation and creation, especially also the creation of man in the image of God, both teach that God is sharable, in an absolute sense within, and in a relative sense out side of, the Divine being. If this were not the case, there would not be any possibility of an incarnation of God. Whoever thinks the incarnation of God impossible in principle also denies the creation of the world and the generation of the Son. And whoever acknowledges the creation and generation can have no objection in principle to the incarnation of God in human nature.

More directly the incarnation of the Word was prepared for in the revelation which began immediately after the fall, continued in Israel's history, and reached its climax in the blessing of Mary. The Old Testament is a constantly closer approximation of God to man with a view, in the fulness of time, to making perpetual dwelling in him.

Since the Son of God, who took on human nature in Mary, had existed before that time, and from eternity, as the person of the Son, His conception in Mary's womb did not take place through the will of the flesh nor the will of the man, but by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. It is true that the incarnation is linked with the preceding revelation and completes it, but it is not itself a product of nature or of humanity. It is a work of God, a revelation, the highest revelation. Just as it was the Father who sent His Son into the world, and the Holy Spirit who overshadowed Mary, so it was the Son Himself who took of our flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14). The incarnation was His own work; He was not passive in regard to it. He became flesh by His own will and His own deed. Therefore He sets aside the will of the flesh and the will of the man, and

prepares a human nature for Himself in Mary's womb through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit.

That human nature did not exist beforehand. It was not brought down with Christ from heaven and borne into Mary from the outside and, so to speak, conducted through her body. The Anabaptists teach this in order to hold to the sinlessness of the human nature in Christ. But in taking this stand, they are following in the example of the ancient gnosticism, and proceed from the idea that flesh and matter are in them selves sinful. But in the incarnation, also, Scripture holds to the good ness of creation and to the Divine origin of matter.

Christ took His human nature from Mary.<sup>26</sup> So far as the flesh is concerned, He is from David and the fathers.<sup>27</sup> Therefore this nature in Him is a true and perfect human nature, like ours in all things, sin excepted.<sup>28</sup> Nothing human was strange to Christ. The denial of the coming of Christ in the flesh is the beginning of the antichrist (1 John 2:22).

Just as the human nature of Christ did not exist before the conception in Mary, so it did not exist for sometime before, nor for some time after, in a state of separation from Christ. The seed conceived in Mary, and the child that was born of her, did not first grow up independently into a man, into a person, a self, in order then to be assumed by the Christ and united with Himself. This heresy, too, had its supporters in earlier and later times, but Scripture knows nothing of it. That holy thing which was conceived in Mary's womb was from the beginning the Son of God and from the beginning He bore that name (Luke 1:35). The Word did not later take a human being unto Himself, but became flesh (John 1:14). And therefore the Christian church in its confession said that the person of the Son did not assume a human person but a human nature, rather. Only in that way can the duality of the natures and the unity of the person be maintained.

For -- and this is the third point which requires our attention in this matter -- even though Scripture states as plainly as possible that Christ was the Word and that He became flesh, that according to the flesh He was from the fathers but that according to His essence He is God over all, blessed forever, still in that Christ it always presents one person to us. It is always the same Self that speaks and acts in Christ. The child which is born bears the name of the mighty God, the everlasting Father (Isa. 9:6). David's Son is at the same time David's Lord. The same one who came down is the one who ascended up far above all heavens (Eph. 4:10). He who according to the flesh is from the fathers is according to His essence God over all, blessed forever (Rom.9:5). Though going about on earth He was and He remained in heaven, in the bosom of the Father (John 1:18 and 3:13). Born in time and living in time He nevertheless is before Abraham (John 8:58). The fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Him (Col. 2:9).

In short, to one and the same subject, one and the same person, Divine and human attributes and works, eternity and time, omnipresence and limitation, creative omnipotence and creaturely weakness are ascribed. This being so, the union of the two natures in Christ cannot have been that of two persons. Two persons can through love be intimately united with each other, it is true, but they can never become one person, one self. In fact, love implies two persons and effects only a mystical and ethical unity. If the union of the Son of God with human nature were of this character it could at best be distinguished in degree but not in kind from that which unites God with His creatures, specifically with His children. But Christ occupies a unique position. He did not unite Himself in a moral way with man, and did not take an existing human being up into His fellowship, but He prepared a human nature for Himself in Mary's womb and became a human being and a servant. just as a human being can go from one state of life to another, and can live at the same time or in succession in two spheres of life, so, by way of analogy, Christ, who was in the form of

God, went about on earth in the form of a servant. The union which in His incarnation came to be effected was not a moral union between two persons, but a union of two natures in the same person. Man and woman, no matter how intimately united in love, remain two persons. God and man, although united by the most intimate love, remain different in essence. But in Christ man is the same subject as the Word which in the beginning was with God and Himself was God. This is a unique, incomparable, and unfathomable union of God and man. And the beginning and end of all wisdom is this: 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).

In this union Christ in the unity of His person commands all the attributes and powers which are proper to both natures. Some have tried to effect a still stronger and closer union of the two natures by teaching that the two natures, immediately at the incarnation, were welded into one Divine-human nature, or that the Divine nature divested itself of its characteristics and condescended to the limitation of human nature, or that the human nature lost its properties and received those of the Divine nature (be it all of them, or just some of them such as omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, and quickening power.) But the Reformed confession has always repudiated and attacked such a welding of two natures into one and such a communication of the properties of the one nature to the other. It was a view of the two natures which resulted in a mingling and confusion of them and so in a pantheistic denial of the difference in essence between God and man, Creator and creature.

True, there is an intimate relationship between the two natures and their properties and powers. But it is a relationship which comes into being in the unity of the person. A stronger, deeper, more intimate union is inconceivable. Just as -- to make a comparison and not an equating of the two -- soul and body are united in one person and nevertheless remain distinguished from each other in essence and properties, so in Christ the same person is the subject of both natures. The difference between soul and body is the assumption and condition of the inner union of the two in one and the same human being, and so too the difference between the Divine and the human nature is the condition and basis of their union in Christ. The welding of the two natures into one and the communication of the properties from one to another make for no more intimate relationship, but make for a mingling or fusion, and, in point of fact, impoverish the fulness which is in Christ. They subtract either from the Divine, or from the human, nature, or from both natures, and weaken the word of the Scripture that in Him, that is, in Christ, the fulness of the Godhead bodily dwells (Col. 2:9 and 1:19). That fulness is maintained only if both natures are distinguished from each other, communicating their properties and attributes not to each other, but placing them, rather, in the service of the one person. So it is always the same rich Christ who in His humiliation and exaltation commands the properties and powers of both natures and who precisely by that means can bring those works to pass, which, as the works of the Mediator, are distinguished on the one hand from the works of God and on the other hand from the works of man, and which take a unique place in the history of the world.

By this Doctrine of the Two Natures one has the advantage that everything which Scripture says of the person of Christ and everything it ascribes to Him comes into its own. On the one hand He then is and remains the one and eternal Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit has made all things, sustains and governs them,<sup>29</sup> and who therefore may remain the object of our worship. He was such an object already in the days of the apostles,<sup>30</sup> even as He was then, and now yet is, the object of the faith and confidence of all His disciples.<sup>31</sup> But He cannot and He may not be both of these things unless He is true God, for it is written: Thou shalt worship the Lord Thy God and Him only shalt thou serve (Matt. 4:10). The

basis for the religious worship of Christ can be only His Divine nature, so that whoever denies this and yet maintains the worship becomes guilty of deifying the creature and of idolatry. The Divinity of Christ is not an abstract doctrine but something which is of the highest importance for the life of the church.

On the other hand, the Christ became very man and perfect man, like us in all things, sin excepted. He was infant, child, youth, and man, and He grew in wisdom and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:40 and 52). All this is not appearance and illusion merely, as those must say who hold that the Divine properties belong to the human nature, but it is the full truth. There was in Christ a gradual development, a progressive growth in body, in the powers of the soul, in favor with God and man. The gifts of the Spirit were not given to Him all at once, but successively in ever greater measure. There were things which He had to learn, and which at first He did not know (Mark 13:32 and Acts 1:7). Even though He was in possession of the not-able-to-sin state of being, there was in Him, because of His weak human nature, the possibility of being tempted and of suffering and dying. So long as He was on the earth He was not according to His human nature in heaven, and hence He too did not live by sight but by faith. He fought and He suffered, and in all this He clung fixedly to the word and the promise of God. Thus He learned obedience from the things which He suffered, continually established Himself in obedience, and so sanctified Himself.<sup>32</sup> And in this at the same time He left us an example, and became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him (Heb. 5:9).

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