

The Error of Denying the Incarnation of Christ

Written by Sylvester Hassell

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Hardly less mysterious and incomprehensible by our finite minds is the doctrine of the Incarnation of the Son of God, His manifestation in human nature, than the doctrine of the Divine Trinity; but no fact is more clearly revealed, in the Scriptures, to our faith, than the real humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ, and no fact is more vitally essential to the truth of Christianity. "Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God". {1Jo 4:3}

I do not suppose that as many as a hundred Primitive Baptists deny the incarnation or real humanity of Christ; but, sad to relate, and in additional proof of the evil and perilous times upon which we have fallen, an insidious and industrious attempt has been made this year by one of our aged ministers in Alabama to corrupt the simplicity of the Primitive Baptist faith in Christ, and to break the bond of union between the Church and her Living Head, by leavening the doctrine of the incarnation with that form of heathen philosophy, known as Valentinian Gnosticism, which arose in the second century, and looking down, from the giddy heights of carnal speculation, with pitying contempt, upon the sharp, simple Bible doctrine of the perfect created humanity of Christ, represented that His body was an eternal spiritual substance, which passed through the body of Mary only as water through a channel. This proud philosophy "did not lead to humility, or call for repentance, but left erect the great idol of paganism - humanity, which could behold itself deified upon the naked summits of the Valentinian metaphysics, no less than upon the golden heights of Olympus." May the Lord preserve the faith of His Church from this new invasion of heathenism. If Christ did not spring from Adam, according to the flesh, He is not a real human being; the possession of an ethereal body, flesh, blood, and bones, would make Him look like a man, but yet not be a man. The likeness in Ro 8:3, refers especially to sinful in the phrase sinful flesh; Christ came in real flesh, {Ro 1:3; 9:5} but that flesh, from its infirmities, sorrows, sufferings, and death, appeared as if it was sinful, though it was not. {Joh 8:29; 14:30; 2Co 5:21; Heb 4:15; 7:26}

The Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah or Christ were so plain that no Jew ever doubted that the Messiah would be a man. He was to be the seed of the woman, {Ge 3:15} of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah, {Ge 12:3; 26:4; 28:14} Jesse {Isa 11:1-10} and David. {Jer 33:15} He was to be born of a virgin, {Isa 7:14} in Bethlehem of Judea, {Mic 5:2} just before the sceptre departed from Judah, {Ge 49:10} in the days of the fourth universal (Roman) empire, {Da 2:44} and to enter upon His ministry 70 weeks of years (490 years) after the issuing of the Persian king's decree for the restoration of Jerusalem, {Da 9:24-27} and before the destruction of the second temple. {Hag 2:6-9} He was to be a child born, a son given unto us, {Isa 9:6} a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, {Isa 53:3} the son of man, {Da 7:13} a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, {Ps 8:5; Heb 2:9} to have His heel bruised by the serpent, {Ge 3:15} to be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, {Zec 11:12-13} to be numbered with

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transgressors, {Isa 53:12} to have His hands and feet pierced by the inhabitants of Jerusalem, {Ps 22:16; Zec 12:10-14} to have His garments parted and lots cast for His vesture, {Ps 22:18} be given gall and vinegar to drink, {Ps 69:21} be smitten by the sword of Divine justice, {Zec 13:7} stricken for the transgression of His people, bruised for their iniquities, cut off out of the land of the living, and be with the rich in His death. {Isa 53:5,8-9} And so we find in the New Testament, His descent is traced, in long genealogies, from David, Abraham, and Adam. {Mt 1:1-25; Lu 3:1-38} He is declared to have been the fruit of the loins of David, {Ac 2:30} the son of the Virgin Mary, {Mt 1:24} conceived in her body, nourished of her substance, born of her, made of a woman, {Ga 4:4} made flesh, {Joh 1:14} manifest in the flesh, {1Ti 3:16} a partaker of flesh and blood (Heb 2:14, and He nearly always called Himself the Son of man. {Mt 8:20; 9:6, etc.} He hungered and thirsted, ate, drank, was wearied, slept, increased in stature, was baptized in the Jordan, could be seen, felt, and handled, had a rational soul, increased in wisdom, groaned in spirit, was tempted, troubled, grieved, amazed, feared, loved, wept, was recognized by all men as a real man, bled, died, was buried, rose, and proved His identity by bodily signs.

And, at the same time, Christ is God, {Ps 45:6-7; Heb 1:1-14} the Son of God, {Ps 2:1-12} the equal of God, {Zec 13:7} Immanuel, or God with us, {Isa 7:14} the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, {Isa 9:6-7} the Lord of David, {Ps 110:1} the Lord of the temple, {Mal 3:1} the Sun of Righteousness, {Mal 4:2} who according to prophecy, rose from the dead, and reascended to His eternal throne, and has all power in heaven and earth, and will save all His people from their sins. {Isa 53:10; Mt 28:1-20; 1:21; Joh 6:37; 17:2} As foreshadowings of His incarnation, He presented Himself, in apparent temporary bodily form, to Abraham, Lot, Hagar, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, the elders of Israel, Joshua, Manoah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, and was called, in these appearances the Angel of the Lord, of His Presence, and of the Covenant, and the Lord, the God of Israel; but the real, permanent body which He assumed at His incarnation, was prepared of His Father, for Him to dwell in, and to make in it the one perfect sacrificial offering for the sins of spiritual Israel, and to reign in it forever. {Heb 10:5-22; Ac 1:11; Re 1:18} It would seem impossible for any intelligent and candid child of God to read such passages as Joh 1:1-14; 1Jo 1:1-3, 1-3; Ro 1:2-5; 1Ti 3:16; Php 2:6-11, and Heb 1:2, and not be fully and forever convinced of both the perfect Divinity and the perfect humanity of Jesus the Christ.

Thus Christ is both God and man in one person, and retains, in His one person the Divine and the human natures united but not confounded; just as every human being has, in his own person two substances, soul and body, mind and matter, joined but not confused, each substance remaining distinct, and not transferring its properties to the other. Although united in one person, the soul is not the body, and the body is not the soul; the soul, and not the body, thinks, knows, repents and believes; and the body, not the soul, breathes, chews, digests, and assimilates material food. What may be affirmed of one of these substances may not be affirmed of the other; and yet what may be affirmed of either one of them may be affirmed of the person - the person thinks, breathes, etc. Equally true and more mysterious is the union of the distinct Divine and human natures in the one person of Christ. In Him is a Divine, an infinite, an uncre-ated nature, and also a human, a finite, and a created nature, and these two natures can never be blended or confounded; if they could, Christ would be neither God nor man, but He is both God and man, the God-Man. His Divinity does not become His humanity, nor does His

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humanity become His Divinity; and yet whatever His Divinity or His humanity is or does, He Himself is or does. And His humanity inevitably implies His possession of both a human soul and a human body. Otherwise He could not properly represent us, obey for us, sympathize with us, set an example for us, suffer and die and rise and intercede for us, and be our Elder Brother and Redeemer. As man, he was born and prayed and suffered and died and rose from the grave; but as God, He is the eternal, unchangeable Creator, Upholder, Governor, and Judge of the universe, infinite in wisdom, power, holiness, mercy, and love.

Vain carnal Jewish and Heathen philosophy, in order to glorify itself by the explanation of these inexplicable mysteries, comes in here, and explains away or sets aside some of these clearest and most important declarations of the Scriptures, and, transformed as an angel of light, {2Co 11:13-15; Ge 3:4} belies the word of God, and robs the child of God of his comfort from the Scriptures. But the God of Israel, in His exceeding mercy and power, has always so ordered that the great majority of His children, the common people, "are either ignorant of or indifferent to the speculations of theological philosophers, and are kept in the simple belief of the truth by the word of God, the worship of the sanctuary, and the teachings of His Spirit." In the true Church of God, new theories are always poor, weak, dying things. In the early centuries, the Jewish Ebionites, Nazarenes, Alogi, and Artemonites, as, in later times, the Arians, Socinians, Rationalists, and Unitarians, denied the real Divinity of Christ; and the Heathen Gnostics denied His real humanity (from the idea of heathen philosophy that matter is the source of sin) - the Docetæ representing His earthly life as phantasmal, insubstantial, illusive; the Valentianians, and in the sixteenth century some Mennonites, representing His body as immaterial, ethereal, celestial; and the Basilidians representing that Jesus and Christ were distinct, Jesus being a mere man, the son of Joseph and Mary, and Christ being a spirit or power that descended as Jesus at His baptism, and left Him the night before His crucifixion. The Apollinarians maintained that there was no human soul in Christ; the Nestorians, that there were two persons in Him; the Eutychians, or Monophysites, that there was but one nature in Him; and the Monothelites, that there was but one will in Him. But the clear, though mysterious, teaching of the Scriptures is that Christ is both perfect God and perfect man, in two distinct natures, and in one person forever. This doctrine of the incarnation of Christ has been called "the key to the whole Scriptures; if it be denied, all is confusion and contradictions; if it be admitted, all is light, harmony, power. God manifest in the flesh is the distinguishing doctrine of the religion of the Bible, without which it is a cold and lifeless corpse. 'The Man Christ Jesus' and 'The God over all, blessed forever,' is the one undivided inseparable object of the adoration, love, and confidence of the people of God, who can each say:

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