

JESUS CHRIST, THE UNIQUE SON OF GOD: THE RELATIONSHIP OF HIS DEITY AND HUMANITY REPORT

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In many and various ways the New Testament declares that Jesus Christ combines in his unique person the fullness of the nature of God and the fullness of the nature of man. While this truth is not a required element in every declaration of the Gospel, it is nevertheless the essential and fertile ground out of which the Gospel grows and from which it derives its beauty, strength, and glory. Apart from this truth there would be no Good News at all.

Jesus himself is the one who conveyed this truth to his Apostles and out of their profound conviction of its reality they have taught the church. His humanity was clearly evident to the Apostles in the way he lived, walked, and behaved before them. His essential deity gradually dawned upon them as they observed his doing works attributed in the Old Testament only to God himself; as they became convinced, by the Spirit, and through witnessing his many miracles, that he was the long-expected Messiah whose divine qualities were described by the prophets — eternal Father, mighty God; and by the direct claims of Jesus to identity in nature with the Father and the spoken confirmation of the Father at the baptism and transfiguration.

It is apparent, however, that the Apostles did not proclaim Jesus as the Son of God until after the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, and when they subsequently preached Jesus they began with statements presenting his humanity and ended with clear declarations of his Lordship, rooted in his essential deity.

We affirm, therefore, that though the preaching of the Gospel in today's world should properly begin wherever man is, taking note of his hurts, his sorrows, his hungers, and dreams it must conclude with declarations, explicit or implicit, that Jesus Christ is Lord, whether men acknowledge it or not, and that all judgment is committed into his hands and from that judgment there is no escape but by means of the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins through calling on the name of the Lord.

We take special note of those working among the 600 million of the Moslem world and urge them to make it clear that the title "Son of God" as applied to Jesus means an essential oneness with the Father and not physical procreation.

As a necessary follow-up of evangelism we urge churches everywhere to make clear that the humanity of Jesus is the pattern for Christian living, both as to what Christians do and also as to the power and resources by which they do these things. As the Father sent the Son into the world to live by means of the Father, so the Son sends us, to live by means of him.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS AND OF THE RESURRECTION IN OUR UNIQUE SALVATION

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1. Evidence of the importance of the Cross and the resurrection in Paul's letters.

The importance of Christ's death and resurrection for our salvation is best demonstrated by the way in which the apostle Paul esteems the two salvation acts with regard to the church's belief as well as to man's conduct. "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (I Cor. 15:3,4). "And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (II Cor. 5:18).

Besides this combined appearance of the Cross and the resurrection, Paul often mentions the former separately, laying special stress on it, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2), "The word of the Cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (I Cor. 1:18); "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?" (Gal. 3:1); "Many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the Cross of Christ" (Phil. 3:18).

On the other hand Paul also attaches great importance to the resurrection, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9); "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (I Cor. 15:17). Further examination (see 4/below) will show that between the Cross and the resurrection there exists a close relation, being one of cause and effect.

2. The significance of the Cross for our salvation: the forgiveness of sins.

The apostle Paul once depicts the result of Christ's death on the Cross as the cancellation of an IOU, "And you, (who were dead in trespasses and the circumcision of your flesh), God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the Cross" (Col. 2:13,14).

The metaphor of the bond (IOU) Paul derives from the rabbinic thought that God registers all good and bad acts of men. The settlement of their deeds, then, results in an IOU on the part of man. The apostle can borrow the figure without falling into the rabbinic doctrine of merits, because the covenant relation between God and man obliges man to keep the rules of the covenant.