

# **Was Christ Human and Divine?**

**A reply to an enquirer who writes: -**

“My difficulty is in reconciling His divinity with His humanity. Most of the New translations refer to His being of divine nature and emptying Himself so as to take on human nature. I refer mainly to Philippians 2:5 in Weymouth, Moffatt; and the New Bible says, “The divine nature was His from the first.” Now my problem is how could He have emptied Himself of the divine nature if He did not pre-exist to occupy it at first? Perhaps I have a wrong conception of human nature and divine nature.”

My dear X. Loving greetings in Jesus Name and thanks for your letter of the 26th. I am pleased to know you were interested in the Circular Letter and will be glad to answer your question to the best of my ability.

If you can accept it, the way out of your difficulty is perfectly easy - it is to realise that in His life in the flesh Jesus had no divinity in the sense generally believed, so that the problem of reconciling divine nature with human nature does not arise.

I know the passages of scripture which are relied upon by those - the great majority of Christians - who believe either in the pre-existence of Jesus or in His divinity or both, and although I cannot in all cases go back to the Greek or Hebrew and say exactly how they ought to be translated, I am quite satisfied from the simple factual evidence given us in our own tongue that no one is justified in believing that Jesus existed in any shape or form before He was born or that He had a nature which was a mixture of human and divine. The explanation of such passages is that He existed in the mind and purpose of God as a building may exist in the mind of an architect or in his drawing before it is commenced and that when He came He was in Himself and in His teaching a manifestation or revelation of God.

In my view this is not a difficult problem at all; it has been made difficult by those who mix up things that ought to be kept separate and confuse physical nature with inheritance and flesh with relationship.

All we need to do is keep in mind that Jesus was a man; and if a man then not a half-man half-God being. To me, the value of the Gospels is that the accounts of His birth, life and death prove this fact - as John says, The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth - and I am certain that the views held by modern Churchmen and by Christadelphians would have been denounced by the Apostles as heresy, because they knew that Jesus was a man, not a half god.

In the Epistle of John, chapter 4, verses 2 and 15, there is what I think is the basic confession of faith: “Hereby know ye the spirit of God; every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God,” and “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God.” To believe that Jesus was partly divine appears to me to constitute a denial that He came in the flesh, for we are flesh and we are not mixtures of human and divine nature, so how could Jesus have been that, seeing He was also a man of flesh like ourselves?

Do not misunderstand me; there is, of course, a vast difference between Jesus and other men and this is the counterpart of the true confession just mentioned - that He is the Son of God. What we have to understand is the true significance of the one vital fact which alone can harmonise these two apparently contradictory facts. If we deduce that His being the Son of God implies that His nature was partly divine and therefore different from ours we are denying that He came in the flesh; on the other hand if we conclude that His nature must have been unclean and condemned because it was like ours' - we are in effect denying that He was the Son of God. What is the solution? It is that the virgin birth accounts for the origin of His life, not for His nature. His physical being came from His mother and was therefore the same flesh and blood as hers, but His life came from God, not from a child of Adam. This is the great mystery revealed by the Gospel, so wonderfully enlightening and logical when it is properly understood but so woefully destructive when it is misapplied.

This is the point - the purpose of the virgin birth was not to produce a man of superior nature, because such an one could not be said to be made in all points like His brethren - could not in fact be a true man at all. The purpose was to produce a man in a different legal position from all others, a man not under the condemnation brought into effect by Adam and passing upon all his children. I need not go further into this as it is fully dealt with in our literature and no doubt you are familiar with it, but I hope I have been able to explain how we look at this question of Jesus' nature. I shall be sending you a copy of Edward Turney's lecture when it is ready and he deals with it very fully and clearly, and if you keep in mind the distinction between physical flesh and the abstract conceptions of name and ownership I think you will soon pick your way through your difficulties.

Now I will deal with the particular passage you mentioned, namely Philippians 2:5, and explain how I think it should be understood. As you say, the translators and especially the N.E.B. leave no doubt of their view that it teaches that Jesus had a former existence in heaven, that He emptied Himself of divine nature in order to take on human nature and so on. I attach no importance whatsoever to any of them. Without exception, before they start their work of translation they are believers in some degree in trinitarianism or that Jesus had divine nature, and consequently however honest their intentions any passage which will bear it will tend to be coloured with their view simply because they have never considered any other.

I quite enjoyed reading the N.E.B. but it falls very far short of being an accurate translation and in this place in particular it is a gloss which is quite unwarranted. There is not one atom of evidence in the original Greek for the translation, "the divine nature was His from the first" nor for the words "assuming the nature of a slave." There is no word in the Greek for nature, as you can verify from an interlinear word for word translation like the Diaglott, and our A.V. rendering "the form of God" and "for form of a servant" is far better. The very words of the second phrase ought to have warned them they were out of their depth, for why the "nature" of a slave? What is the difference between the nature of a slave and any other man? Divine nature may be a proper conception when it relates to God, but why set it against "the nature of a slave"? - why not the nature of man? The fact is, of course, that they could not do so because the Apostle had already spoken of this in the words (A.V.) "and being found in fashion as a man," or as they say, "made in the likeness of a man" - that is to say, when He was a man. He assumed the nature of a slave. How could He assume what He already had? The fact of the matter is there is nothing whatever about nature in the passage.

As in other matters, we can best get at the correct meaning of a passage by taking into account the argument or purpose of the whole passage. In Philippians 2 Paul is exhorting the members of the church to behave themselves as true Christians should and show the spirit of Christ, "Let this disposition be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Now I think you will agree that it would neither be to the point, nor helpful to his readers for Paul to introduce the question of Christ's physical nature at this point. On the contrary it would have been the worst sort of encouragement to the Philippians to manifest the mind of Christ if He had gone on to tell them that Jesus' nature was divine from the first and that He had only put it off temporarily. They would have said to themselves, as would any logical mind, such an one is no true pattern or example! How different, and how much more to the point, if Paul had drawn their attention to Jesus' high standing and pre-eminence as the Son of God and then reminded them that He had foregone His Just claim to the honour and authority of a Prince and had made Himself their servant? And this is in fact exactly what Paul did - he said nothing about divine nature at all.

The Authorised Version and the Emphatic Diaglott translate the word "*morphe*" as "form": it is only used 3 times and never to mean "nature" - this word nature, as in 2 Peter 1:4, "The divine nature" is "*phusis*" so that if this had been what Paul was speaking about in Philippians 2 this is the word he should have used and not "*morphe*." This word means form or appearance; the Dictionary says "Form - visible aspect; mode in which a thing exists or manifests itself; fashion or mould." This is certainly its proper meaning as used in this passage; we should say to-day probably "status" or "standing." It is a certain fact that never while on earth did Jesus have divine nature; but what He had, from His birth the status of Son of God. He was the heir of the world and the representative of His Father on earth. As He said to Philip. "Have I been so long with you and yet hast thou not known me Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." This is the sense in which He was in the form of God; and if He had chosen to put His own right first He was entitled to claim His inheritance and the protection of the angels, counting it not robbery to be equal with God - in the same sense as any son is of similar status to his father. But He did not do so; instead He made Himself of no reputation (again implying status and not nature, for reputation has to do with character and standing, not physical condition) and humbled Himself and became obedient unto the death of the Cross. He could not have done so had He not been as Paul says, "found in fashion as a man" or as the E.D. renders it "Made in the likeness of men." This is what was accomplished by His birth of Mary - it made Him the same flesh and blood corruptible human nature as His brothers and sisters and therefore capable of death but not destined to death. But being the only Begotten Son of God He inherited a status higher than the angels and a birthright which placed Him above all others - do you follow - not a higher nature but a higher name - just as the son of our monarch is the same flesh and blood as other men but legally their sovereign,

It was this high standing and reputation, belonging to Jesus by right, which he surrendered when He took upon Himself the form of a servant. As I see it, in Philippians Paul is only re-stating the teaching of Jesus when He washed the disciples' feet. "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands and that He was come from God, and went to God., Ye call me Master and Lord; and ye say well, for so I am. If then, your Lord and Master have washed your feet... For I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you." So when Paul speaks of Jesus as assuming the form of a servant in the example he gave, he is not suggesting that Jesus was formerly in some way part of the Deity in heaven but changed Himself into a man at His birth, nor that He was a mixture of divine nature and human nature; he was showing how Jesus in His life had humbled Himself

from His high standing even to the loss of life itself as a condemned criminal in order to serve and to save mankind.

Amongst all the various aspects of error into which the Christadelphian doctrine of sinful flesh leads, I think perhaps this one is the worst, because it robs Christ of His honour. To believe that the purpose of His being begotten by God was to give Him a partially divine nature and thus to endow Him with the superior strength necessary to overcome temptation not only takes from Him all credit for His victory over sin but makes a mockery of God's justice in putting Him forward as our example.

If I have not cleared up any point to your satisfaction I hope you will let me know and I will try again. I am very pleased you are pursuing the subject and not allowing yourself to be frightened off it by the fact that the vast majority of Christadelphians seem to be untroubled by it. Some may be, but personally I think from things I have heard that many of the leaders know that the statement of faith is wrong but they cannot face the trouble that such an admission would cause, and they therefore satisfy themselves by what they term "mental reservations." You are fortunate in having men like Williams and Rowley available to talk to, and I hope you will keep in touch with them and discuss any problems you have with them - they have no axe to grind and neither have I - all that matters to us is the truth and if your aim is the same there can be no doubt about the outcome.

With sincere good wishes and prayers for your guidance, Yours in Jesus name,

Ernest Brady.

