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## The Two Natures of Jesus Christ

Seventeen hundred years ago, in the year 325 AD, leaders of the church met in the small city of Nicea (near what is known as Istanbul) to talk about Jesus. Christianity had just been made legal and had become the preferred religion in the Roman Empire, and a lot of people had questions about what the Bible teaches. Among them was the question of the exact nature of Jesus. Is Jesus divine? Is he human? Is he both?

Let's consider ourselves first. All human beings alive today are the result of the combination of genetics from both a man and a woman. (There is no evidence that says there are cloned human beings today, contrary to the claims of some.) Every single person alive has attributes of both their biological father and mother, but they have only one nature, the human nature which is ours since we were conceived. We are all fully human and we are only human.

Jesus is different from us. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, we learn in both Matthew and Luke, and the Holy Spirit is God. Jesus has no biological earthly father. His conception was a miracle, and it makes Jesus quite different from us. Somehow in Jesus there is both a divine nature and a human nature, but how those two interact had to be defined. Christians wanted to know who Jesus is.

As people considered Jesus' conception, they began to ask, "How do his two natures, his human nature and his divine nature interact?" Some suggested that perhaps Jesus' body was a lot like a costume which he put on for the duration of his time on this earth. He never really became human, they say. Others suggested that Jesus was more human than divine, perhaps more like a superhero who has had something happen to him that gives him extra powers. Neither answer to the question of the nature of Jesus is entirely satisfactory in that neither answer can be fully supported by Scripture.

The church of the early 4<sup>th</sup> century decided that it needed to study Scripture to find a definitive answer, and after years of research, conversation, and writing, the basis for the Nicene Creed was developed. The Nicene Creed says that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine, meaning that he is fully God and he is fully human. He has two different natures while the rest of the people who walked this earth have only one. While this is difficult to wrap our minds around (it is outside of normal experience), we have to accept the teaching of Scripture as being true.

This whole discussion might seem a little "ivory tower," meaning that it is of interest only to those who want to write doctoral dissertations, but there happen to be some very practical implications.

The first implication has to do with God the Son. God the Son always existed and is as eternal as God the Father. It wasn't until just over 2000 years ago that God the Son was conceived and born of Mary. It was at that moment in time that God the Son took a human nature even while maintaining his divine nature. God the Son became one of us even while he remained fully God. Although the Bible does not state this explicitly, all the evidence points to the fact that Jesus will remain fully human for the rest of eternity. We know, for example, that Jesus will return in bodily form, returning as he left on Ascension Day.

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When we consider that God the Son, for the remainder of eternity, will remain fully human, we should be astounded. Why would the eternal Son of God bind himself to humanity in such a way? We know the answer, of course: he did it so that we can be saved. And this leads to the implications of the natures of Jesus for us.

The most important one is that Jesus can offer himself as a fitting sacrifice for our sins. Up to the point of Jesus' death on the cross, the sacrifices that were offered didn't have lasting value. Those sacrifices had to be repeated because, as beneficial as the sacrifices were, the death of a lamb or young goat is not sufficient to fully pay the price for our sins. The only appropriate sacrifice for human sin is the life of a human. Jesus gave his life for us, and his life was sufficient to earn for us our salvation. Jesus had to be fully human to do this or else we would not be saved.

But there is another important aspect for us today. As we know, Jesus serves as our mediator in heaven. When we pray, we do so in the name of Jesus, and our prayers are mediated to the throne of God the Father through Jesus Christ. To put it another way, we know with absolute assurance that God the Father hears our prayers because of Jesus Christ, his Son who is also God. He is our great High Priest, a task and role reserved for a human being, something that we would not have if Jesus did not stand in God's throne room and speak on our behalf, and he can speak with confidence because he is the eternal Son of God.

We might say, in a sense, that in becoming human, the eternal Son of God sacrificed himself, and he did it for us. There was no benefit for him in so doing. But the benefit for us is without equal: we are saved for eternity, and we always have someone interceding for us before the throne of God the Father. We may not have access to the office of the Prime Minister or the Premier of Alberta, but we have access to the most powerful seat of government that is, God's throne room. And our voices may never be heard by our Prime Minister or Premier, but they will always be heard by God because of Jesus Christ.

What is so amazing, to repeat something that was said earlier, is that the eternal Son of God, took on human flesh, knowing that this would be a permanent thing. When we join him in eternal life, we will see him as a human being, even while he remains fully God. One would wonder why Jesus would give up so much, and the only answer we can give is this: because he loves us and invites us to enjoy his gracious presence for all of eternity.

The church gathered to talk about Jesus, and their discussion can seem esoteric. Let us be assured, however, that the theology they found in Scripture has significant and life-changing implications for us and our salvation. What Jesus did has life-changing significance for him as well, but he did it for us, and that was enough.

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