

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH VIII: 2

(Reading: John 1:1-18; Colossians 3:6-23)

How Christ Was The One To Do It

In the first Article of Chapter 8 we saw Who God chose as the way through which we would be reconciled to Himself. That One is Christ Jesus. He was appointed to the office to the office of Mediator. As we heard, the name “Christ” means anointed. In this office Christ became the true prophet, priest, and king.

To fulfil this appointment the Son of God was given every means at His disposal. In the words of Ephesians 1, the verses 22 and 23, “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

Now Article 2 looks at what has to make up this person. In his commentary on the Confession of Faith, Rowland Ward helps us here. He writes: “The Mediator could not be God simply. And neither could He be man simply. Man has sinned and cannot meet his obligations. God is the One sinned against and he cannot ignore man’s guilt. Hence, God himself is the way back to himself.”

Indeed, this is one lesson that comes out of the Old Testament. For while that part of Scripture is very much laying out the way by which Christ will come, it also shows us just how inadequate men are - even when specially gifted and empowered by God.

That’s why the Son took to His divine nature a true human nature. He had a body and soul like ours, except for sin. In the words of a first aspect to this Article, this is **WHO WE CONFESS HERE**.

Who We Confess here

WHO WE CONFESS HERE can be summed up in the phrase “two natures in one person”. As Article 2 concludes, Jesus “is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.” God in person and God in nature also took upon Him the nature of man. He derived it from the substance of humanity through the virgin Mary, of whom He was born. And so He joined it to His divine nature within the unity of His person.

You see, you cannot account for Jesus as simply a great man. Many have tried to compare Him with Socrates and Confucius and other great men. And, to be sure, no such gallery would be complete without Him.

But Jesus is in a category of His own. The Gospels are clear about that. The opening chapters of Mark, for example, have people asking question about Him that you don’t find being asked of any other man. In chapter 1 verse 27 the people are so amazed they say, “What is this? A new teaching - and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.”

In chapter 2 verse 7 the teachers of the law are thinking to themselves, “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” In chapter 4 verse 41 the disciples, terrified after Jesus has calmed the storm, ask, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him! And in chapter 8, verse 27, Jesus asks His disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And then, after they gave Him the answers coming from the people, Jesus asks, “But what about you? Who do you say that I am? And I’m sure you know the confession Simon Peter gave then. He replied, “You are the Christ.”

It's at this point that many leave the Lord. This question puts them on the spot. And from here on everything is heading to the cross.

It's at the trial of Jesus by the Jewish and Roman authorities that the question comes up again. In Mark 14 verse 61 the high priest interrogates Jesus with the question, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?"

The charge against Jesus there is not whether he claimed an undeserved place of eminence amongst men. It was about His declaring, implicitly and explicitly, that He was God.

Now, there are those who said Jesus was a fraud or at least deluded about His own identity. But the whole lifestyle of Jesus, His death, and the events after His death, were hardly the hallmarks of a fraud. And how could a man who spoke the greatest truth and insights be deluded about His own identity?

So what you are left with is simply this: Jesus was who He claimed to be. Jesus Christ is God Incarnate. That's an awesome mystery. But it fits the Scriptural proof. He was not one person nor were the two natures so mixed as to make one new nature.

His humanity didn't become divine. If it did He wouldn't have been human and so be able to represent us. Nor did His deity take the limitations of humanity. For then God would destroy Himself. He didn't stop being what He was from all eternity when He became what He wasn't. He was and stayed the Son of God when He became the Son of Man. As John 1 verse 14 says, "The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us."

It is like this story from ancient Greece tells us. In the nation of Sparta, at that time, there were sometimes more kings than one. They would rule by joint authority.

Now a king was sometimes sent to some neighbouring country in the character of a Spartan ambassador. Did he, when doing that, stop being a king of Sparta, because he was also an ambassador?

Not at all. He didn't have his royal authority taken away - he only added to it his new position of being an ambassador.

So Christ, in becoming man, didn't stop being God. For even while He was, and continued to be, King of the whole creation, He acted as the voluntary servant and messenger of the Father.

How Others Have Become Mislead Here

This is WHO WE CONFESS HERE. And it's exactly because it is so crucial WHO WE CONFESS HERE that we move on to see, in the second place, HOW OTHERS HAVE BECOME MISLEAD HERE. This is exactly why there's been Docetism, Ebionitism, Arianism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, Eutychianism, and Monothelism. And now you're really wondering what I'm going on about!

Well, these are all false views that developed in the early New Testament period that in some way deny that Jesus Christ is both God and man. They believe that He is either only man, or only God, or neither God nor man.

It was the false teaching which the apostles themselves rebutted in their New Testament letters. Take, for example, the apostle John. In his first letter chapter 4, the verses 2 till 4, he writes, "This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world."

In his second letter the apostle is clear about how dangerous this false teaching is. He directs the churches, in verses 9 and 10 there, that "anyone who does not continue in the teaching of Christ

does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him.” With such warnings, it’s no wonder that there’s been so much dispute through-out church history over this. And particularly in the 5th till 7th centuries the quarrels about the two natures in the one person of Christ came to a head.

Before that period there had been the time in the first two centuries after Christ that the Gospel as a whole had to be defended. Gnosticism and Judaism taught a different salvation altogether. But once the Church had met these threats the devil changed into attacking the Trinity. Who could forget the way that Arianism almost took over the whole Church? It even swung a major council around!

It was Athanasius, and those who stood firmly in the Trinitarian orthodox tradition, who in the end brought the Church back from the brink. But how close it had been!

It’s actually a Creed named after Athanasius which shows us how the Church dealt with the next raft of attacks from Satan. Because then the devil got into the work and person of Christ.

Through such men as Apollinaris he subtly suggested that, while Christ had a body and soul, instead of a human spirit He had the divine Logos or Word in Him.

Against these errors, the Church formulated the true doctrine of Christ’s person at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D.. And later the Athanasian Creed reflected this doctrinal safeguarding.

It is the statement from Chalcedon which is reflected in this Chapter of the Westminster Confession. When Article 2 says “that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion” it’s crystallising centuries of battle between the devil and the Church.

It was a battle right from the beginning of the New Testament Church. As Paul wrote to the Colossians in chapter 2 and verse 9 of that letter, “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.” And that was a congregation which were plagued by a heretical sect amongst them – which is the same today, also, for there has been a real proliferation of these heresies in many modern cults. And so, we see, in the third place, WHAT IT MEANS FOR US HERE.

What It Means For Us Here

Well, here we have a wonderful opportunity for witness. For anyone we meet who has views that seem a little less than orthodox we can simply ask: Who is Christ to you?

In fact, it’s a good question to ask of everyone who says they Christian! It was a sermon preached by George Whitefield called “What think ye of Christ?” which the Lord used to convert many people. For that passage in Matthew 22 verse 42 has the words of Christ directly challenging the Pharisees as to who He really is!

These are the words which we should be prepared to ask of the Jehovah’s Witness or Mormon who comes to the door. It’s this kind of question we have to raise with our Roman Catholic neighbour. And what about the friend who’s from that “really alive” pentecostal church?

Because what is it that all these different groups do? What do they have in common?

They all use pictures of Christ. You only need to look at the J.W. magazines, the Mormon video, any Roman Catholic Church, or a vast range of Pentecostal publications and especially their testimonies, to see that.

Now you could ask, “What harm can that do?” Well, it does an injustice to Christ’s divine nature. The Scripture is equally insistent that Christ was but one person. At no time did God or men speak or deal with Jesus as one or the other. And He never Himself acted at any time as if He were one or the other.

Yet most of Christianity today do exactly that. I mean, you've seen those pictures. They're true to type. You get the blond, blue-eyed Jesus. You get the always-smiling Lord. And He's inevitably handsome in form and appearance.

Actually "Handsome in Form and Appearance" are the words a hairdresser put up on the sign outside his barber shop after he became converted. And while we must always rejoice when someone is saved, the influence of the church he joined was quite obvious!

You see, the text on that sign is actually a misquote. In Isaiah 53 verse 2 it says of the Messiah, "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him."

Sadly, these different churches and cults bring Jesus down by picturing Him the way they do. And certainly when many Christians have their mystical experiences today, and share that time when they got to talk and walk with Jesus, He's always a pretty boy!

In John chapter 4 Jesus tells the Samaritan woman to stop that idolatry. As He says to her in verse 24 there, "God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Some may argue here that there's a place for images to be used as teaching aids, especially for new or young Christians. But isn't that exactly the worst thing for those believers? No wonder the Heidelberg Catechism in Answer 98 says that we shouldn't be wiser than God. He has said He wants His people instructed simply by the living preaching of His Word. And isn't that precisely what's missing in those different churches and cults?

The Church today is at such a vitally crucial point as it was back in the days of Athanasius and Augustine. The battle for the Bible is as fierce as it ever has been before. For it is His-Story, the story of the coming of God's Son prophesied in the Old Testament, fulfilled in the Gospels and lived out of in the Epistles. To do injustice to any part of who Jesus Christ was and is, is to preach another gospel. This person is truly God and truly man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

We have to leave that as the mystery it is. For while man's reason cries out for a logical explanation, or his emotions for some kind of meaningful experience, neither can satisfy. His humanity didn't become divine. Then he wouldn't be human and he couldn't act for us. And His deity didn't take the limitations of human nature. Then God would have destroyed Himself. When He became what He was not - a Man - he didn't stop being what He always was - God's Son. Jesus appearing to Thomas in John 20 makes this absolutely clear.

And now you're really wondering! Wasn't that occasion when the Lord actually physically confronted that doubting disciple in His glorified body? Isn't that really proof that a picture of Jesus does help?

Think again. And read those verses again. Because what did Thomas see then? He saw those nail marks in Jesus' hands and the hole in His side. But most of all Thomas saw that the Master's words were all true! The Spirit convicted his heart. He believed! He confessed in verse 28, "My Lord and my God!"

And then Jesus said the most liberating words to him and to us. Words that put who He Himself is in the right perspective, for in verse 29 he says, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."