

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

CHRISTOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ

UNIT 3: THE INCARNATION OF THE SON OF GOD

Lesson 8

The True Humanity of Christ

Like Us in Every Way, Yet Without Sin

What Has Not Been Assumed Has Not Been Healed

Key Texts: Hebrews 2:14–18; 4:15; Luke 2:52; Luke 22:42–44; 1 Timothy 2:5

“We Do Not Have a High Priest Who Cannot Sympathize with Our Weaknesses”

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SERIES VERSE

*“For we do not preach ourselves
but Christ Jesus as Lord,
and ourselves as your bond-servants
on account of Jesus.”*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:5, NASB 1995

INTRODUCTION

The Christian confession of the full humanity of Christ has always been more difficult to maintain than the confession of His full deity. The temptation to protect the divine dignity of the Son by attenuating His humanity, to make Him less vulnerably, less messily, less embarrassingly human than the Gospel accounts actually present Him, is as old as the church itself. Docetism, the earliest and most persistent of all the Christological heresies, arose from exactly this impulse: the conviction that a truly divine being could not have genuinely suffered, genuinely wept, genuinely hungered, genuinely died. The God who is impassible, immutable, and infinite cannot have been born in a stable, wept at a tomb, or sweat blood in a garden. Therefore, the human elements of the Gospel narrative must be appearance rather than reality, a divine performance of humanity for the benefit of those who could not otherwise receive the divine message.

The church rejected Docetism with clarity and energy, and for good reason: a Christ who did not truly suffer cannot truly save. The entire soteriological edifice of the New Testament rests on the genuine, physical, mortal humanity of Jesus. He had to be genuinely hungry so that He could genuinely fast. He had to genuinely weep so that He could genuinely mourn with those who mourn. He had to genuinely fear the cup of the cross so that His prayer in Gethsemane was a genuine act of submission and not a theatrical performance. He had to genuinely die so that the resurrection could be a genuine victory over death rather than merely an exit from a temporary disguise. The humanity of Christ is not a concession to creaturely limitations; it is the indispensable means of our redemption.

Gregory of Nazianzus, the fourth-century theologian who more than any other shaped the orthodox doctrine of Christ's full humanity, formulated the principle that has stood as the theological touchstone of this doctrine ever since: "What has not been assumed has not been healed." If the eternal Son did not assume a genuine human body, then human bodies are not redeemed. If He did not assume a genuine human soul, then human souls are not redeemed. If He did not assume a genuine human will, then human wills are not redeemed. The scope of the redemption is coextensive with the scope of the assumption. And the New Testament's account of what He assumed is comprehensive, unequivocal, and deeply pastoral in its implications: He assumed everything that is genuinely human, short of sin.

I. THE EVIDENCE OF THE GOSPELS: A SURVEY OF CHRIST'S HUMAN EXPERIENCES

The New Testament's Cumulative Portrait of the Genuine Humanity of Jesus

A. A True Human Body: Born, Growing, Hungry, Thirsty, Weary, Suffering, Dying

The Gospel accounts present the humanity of Jesus with a directness and a specificity that leaves no room for a docetic interpretation. He was born (Matthew 1:25; Luke 2:7), not merely appeared on the scene as a fully formed adult, but entered the world through the biological process of birth, with all its vulnerability and dependence. He was circumcised on the eighth day (Luke 2:21), a rite applied to His physical body in full accordance with the requirements of the Mosaic Law. He grew physically: Luke 2:40 reports that “the Child continued to grow and become strong,” using the same Greek verbs (*auxanō*, *krataiōmai*) used for the physical growth and strengthening of ordinary human children.

He hungered. Matthew 4:2 reports that after His forty-day fast in the wilderness, “Heater became hungry”, the aorist verb expressing the onset of genuine physical need, not a simulation of need for didactic purposes. He thirsted. John 4:6–7 records that He sat wearily at Jacob’s well and asked the Samaritan woman for a drink. He was weary: “Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well” (John 4:6, NASB 1995), the word translated “wearied” (*κεκοπιακῶς*, *kekopiakos*) describes the exhaustion that results from genuine physical labor. He slept, with a depth that allowed Him to remain asleep through a storm severe enough to terrify experienced fishermen (Mark 4:38). He bled. He suffered. He died, a real, physical, biological death, confirmed by the spear thrust into His side that produced blood and water (John 19:34), and by the professional Roman executioners who certified that He was already dead before His body was taken down from the cross (John 19:33).

B. A True Human Soul: Grief, Joy, Compassion, Anger, Fear

The humanity of Jesus extends beyond His physical body to His inner life, His emotional experience of the world, His psychological responses to the people and events He encountered, His interior life as a genuinely human person. The Gospel writers, with characteristic restraint and characteristic specificity, give us repeated and vivid access to this inner life. He wept (*ἐκλαυσεν*, *eklaien*) at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35), not merely as a performance of sympathy for the benefit of the mourners, but as a genuine expression of grief at the reality of death in a fallen world. The same root is used of Mary’s weeping (v. 33) and the weeping of the Jews who gathered with her (v. 33), Jesus’s tears are the same kind of tears they are shedding.

He was moved by compassion (*ἐσπλαγχνίσθη*, *esplagchnisthē*), a word derived from the Greek for the visceral organs, connoting the deepest kind of gut-level emotional response, when He saw the crowds who were “distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36, NASB 1995), when He saw the leper who knelt before Him (Mark 1:41), when He saw the widow of Nain following the funeral procession of her only son (Luke 7:13). He experienced righteous anger: He looked around at the Pharisees in the synagogue “with anger” (*μετ’ ὀργῆς*, *met’ orgēs*) and was grieved at their hardness of heart (Mark 3:5, NASB 1995). He drove the money-changers from the temple with a whip of cords (John 2:15). He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit (Luke 10:21). He experienced

the sorrow that He described as “deadly” (περίλυπος ἕως θανάτου, *peri lypos heos thanatou*, Matthew 26:38, NASB 1995) in the garden of Gethsemane.

C. A True Human Will: Submitting to the Father in Gethsemane

The most theologically significant evidence for the genuine humanity of Christ’s inner life is the prayer of Gethsemane: “Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done” (Luke 22:42, NASB 1995). This prayer presupposes a genuine human will that is distinct from the divine will, a will that recoils from the prospect of the cross with genuine human fear and revulsion, and that submits to the Father’s will through an act of genuine human obedience. The Chalcedonian tradition, and specifically the Third Council of Constantinople (681 AD), affirmed on the basis of this prayer that Christ possesses two wills: the divine will, which is the will of the triune God, and the human will, which is the will of His genuine human nature. These two wills are not in conflict; the human will always operates in perfect, voluntary submission to the divine will. But the submission is real: it is not a performance of submission by a divine being who has no genuine will of His own; it is the genuine human will of Jesus, freely and obediently surrendering to the Father’s purpose.

Luke’s account adds the most physically vivid detail of the entire Gethsemane narrative: “And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground” (Luke 22:44, NASB 1995). Whether this is a description of hematomidrosis (a rare medical condition in which extreme psychological distress causes the rupture of capillaries near the sweat glands, producing a bloody sweat) or a simile (“like drops of blood” in quantity and heaviness), the point is the same: the physical and psychological intensity of the agony in Gethsemane was real, bodily, and extreme. The author of Hebrews confirms it: “In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death” (Hebrews 5:7, NASB 1995). This is not the description of a divine being wearing human costume; it is the description of a genuinely human person in the depths of genuine human anguish.

“We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”

HEBREWS 4:15, NASB 1995

II. THE GROWTH OF CHRIST: LUKE 2:52 AND THE REALITY OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Jesus Kept Increasing in Wisdom and Stature, The Genuine Maturation of the God-Man

A. The Statement and Its Theological Significance

Of all the statements in the New Testament about the humanity of Jesus, perhaps none is more theologically challenging or more theologically important than Luke 2:52: “And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (NASB 1995). The verse is disarmingly simple and theologically explosive. The eternal Son of God, through whom all things were created and in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (Colossians 2:3), increased in wisdom. The one who is the same yesterday and today and forever grew in stature. The one who is already perfectly loved by the Father before the foundation of the world grew in favor with God and men.

The verb translated “kept increasing” is the imperfect of προέκοπτεν (proekopten), which implies a continuous, progressive, ongoing process of development. It is not a single event but a sustained trajectory of growth. And the four dimensions of the growth are comprehensive: intellectual (wisdom), physical (stature), spiritual (in favor with God), and social (in favor with men). The growth is not a performance for the benefit of those observing it; it is a genuine, real, biological and intellectual and relational development of the human nature that the Son of God has assumed.

B. Reconciling Human Growth with Divine Omniscience

The most pressing theological question raised by Luke 2:52 is how the genuine intellectual development of Jesus’s human nature can be reconciled with the omniscience of the divine nature. The question is sharpened by Mark 13:32, where Jesus declares that “of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone” (NASB 1995), an apparent limitation on the Son’s knowledge that has exercised interpreters from the earliest days of the church.

The Chalcedonian framework provides the conceptual tools for a coherent answer. In the hypostatic union, the two natures each retain their own properties: the divine nature is omniscient; the human nature grows in knowledge through the ordinary processes of human intellectual development. There is no contradiction in affirming both simultaneously, because they belong to different natures united in the one Person of the Son. What the divine nature knows exhaustively, the human nature knows partially, and grows in knowing through experience, study, and the progressive illumination of the Spirit. The Son did not exercise His divine omniscience through His human nature in a way that bypassed the genuine processes of human cognitive development; He chose, in the mystery of the incarnation, to allow His human nature to know what it was given to know by the Father, growing in wisdom in the manner appropriate to genuine human existence.

This does not mean the divine nature was ignorant of the day or hour that Mark 13:32 describes. It means that the human nature of Jesus, in the state of His humiliation, was not given access to that knowledge by the Father for the purposes of His earthly mission. The limitation is real, located in the human nature, and theologically significant: it demonstrates the genuineness of the incarnation. A Jesus whose human nature was supplied with exhaustive divine knowledge from conception would not have genuinely grown in wisdom (Luke 2:52) and would not have genuinely “learned obedience

from the things which He suffered” (Hebrews 5:8, NASB 1995). The genuine limitations of His human knowledge are among the most powerful evidences of the genuine reality of His human nature.

III. AGAINST DOCETISM: THE HERESY THAT DENIES THE BODY

What Was at Stake in the Church’s Earliest Christological Controversy

A. The Docetic Claim and Its Appeal

Docetism, from the Greek *δοκεῖν* (*dokein*), “to seem” or “to appear”, is the christological heresy that holds that Christ only appeared to be human, that His body was a phantom or a spiritual semblance rather than a genuine physical reality. In its various ancient forms, Docetism typically arose from a dualistic philosophical framework that regarded matter as inherently inferior or evil and spirit as inherently good, a framework derived from certain strands of Platonic philosophy and given its most systematic expression in the Gnostic systems of the second century. Within this framework, the idea that the infinite, spiritual, divine being could genuinely take on material, mortal, corruptible flesh was considered not merely improbable but philosophically scandalous.

The docetic solution preserved the divine dignity of Christ at the cost of His genuine humanity: He appeared to be born, appeared to eat and drink, appeared to suffer, appeared to die, but none of these appearances were metaphysically real. The cross was a divine performance, not a genuine death; the resurrection was an exit from a temporary disguise, not a genuine bodily resurrection. The appeal of this solution lay in its apparent protection of the divine transcendence: a God who appears to suffer is not a God who actually suffers, and a God who appears to die is not a God who actually dies. The infinite, impassible, immutable divine being is safely insulated from the indignity of genuine creaturely limitation.

B. The Apostolic Refutation

The apostolic refutation of Docetism is direct, emphatic, and repeated. John 1:14 announces that “the Word became flesh”, not “appeared as flesh” or “adopted the semblance of flesh.” 1 John 1:1–3 opens with a threefold appeal to physical, sensory verification: “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life.” The language is deliberately physical and deliberately plural: we (not merely I) heard, saw, looked at, touched with our hands. The bodily reality of the incarnation is attested by multiple witnesses through multiple physical senses.

1 John 4:2 identifies the confession of genuine incarnation as the decisive test of orthodoxy: “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God” (NASB 1995). The present perfect

ἐληλυθότα (elēlythota, “has come”) is significant: it describes a completed action with continuing present results. Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, and He remains in the flesh, the incarnation is permanent, not temporary. The docetic Christ who merely appeared in flesh for a period and then departed from it is not the Christ of the apostolic testimony. 2 John 7 makes the identification between Docetism and antichrist explicit: “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist” (NASB 1995).

C. Against Apollinarianism: The Complete Human Nature

A related but distinct heresy is Apollinarianism, named after Apollinarius of Laodicea (c. 310–390 AD), who taught that in the incarnate Christ, the divine Logos replaced the human rational soul or mind (nous). On Apollinarius’s account, Christ had a genuine human body and a genuine human lower soul (the seat of animal desires and emotions), but the higher rational soul, the seat of genuinely human thought, decision-making, and spiritual life, was the divine Logos Himself. This was intended as a solution to the problem of how Christ could be sinless despite having a human nature: if the rational soul (the seat of sin in Platonic psychology) is replaced by the Logos, sin is impossible.

The church rejected Apollinarianism at the First Council of Constantinople (381 AD) on the grounds that it denies Christ a complete human nature, and Gregory of Nazianzus’s principle applies with full force: “What has not been assumed has not been healed.” If the Logos did not assume a genuine human rational soul, then the human rational soul is not redeemed. The redemption of the human mind, the human will, and the human spiritual life, which the New Testament explicitly promises (Romans 12:2; Philippians 2:5; Colossians 3:10), requires that the Logos assumed a genuine human mind, will, and spiritual nature. Apollinarianism produces a Christ who can redeem the human body but not the human soul, a partial Savior for a partial humanity.

IV. THE THEOLOGICAL NECESSITY OF TRUE HUMANITY

Why Only a Genuinely Human Savior Could Accomplish What Sinners Need

A. The Mediatorial Argument: 1 Timothy 2:5

The theological necessity of Christ’s genuine humanity is stated with the directness and economy of a creedal confession in 1 Timothy 2:5: “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (NASB 1995). The term “mediator” (μεσίτης, mesitēs) denotes one who stands between two parties and acts on behalf of both, the go-between who has access to both sides and who can represent each to the other. The mediator between God and humanity must have access to both. He must be genuinely divine in order to stand in the presence of the holy God and bear the

weight of divine justice; He must be genuinely human in order to represent humanity, to stand in humanity's place, and to identify with the people He is representing.

Paul's specific identification of the mediator as "the man Christ Jesus" is significant: not merely "Christ Jesus" in an unspecified sense, but "the man Christ Jesus." The humanity is not incidental to the mediation; it is constitutive of it. The Mediator is a man, a genuine human being who belongs to the human race He represents. This is the theological bedrock of the priestly Christology of Hebrews: the High Priest must be taken from among men, able to deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, because He Himself is beset with weakness (Hebrews 5:1–2). The genuine humanity of Christ is not a limitation on His priestly ministry; it is its indispensable qualification.

B. The Substitutionary Argument: He Must Represent Us

The substitutionary atonement requires genuine humanity. For Christ to die in the place of sinners, He must be genuinely one of them, genuinely a member of the human race, sharing its nature, subject to its mortality, standing under its legal and moral obligations. Hebrews 2:14 makes this explicit: "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (NASB 1995). The word translated "partook" (μετέσχεν, meteschen) describes a genuine participation, a genuine sharing in the same nature. The Son shared in flesh and blood, not a version of flesh and blood that was similar to ours but different in crucial ways, but the same flesh and blood that the children share.

The active obedience of Christ also requires genuine humanity. The righteousness that Christ earns on behalf of the elect is a genuinely human righteousness, perfect obedience to the law of God in the flesh, under the conditions of genuine human moral responsibility. If Christ's obedience to the law were not genuinely human obedience, if it were in some sense the obedience of the divine nature rather than the human nature, it would not be the kind of obedience that can be imputed to genuinely human sinners. The law was given to human beings; the obedience it requires must be performed by a human being; and the righteousness imputed in justification is the righteousness of a human being who kept the law perfectly on behalf of those who did not.

C. The Sympathetic High Priest: Hebrews 4:15

The most pastorally immediate expression of the theological necessity of Christ's genuine humanity is Hebrews 4:15: "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (NASB 1995). The double negative "who cannot sympathize" (οὐ δυνάμενον συμπάθῃσαι, ou dynamenon sympathesai) is an emphatic litotes: we do not have a High Priest who is incapable of sympathizing. We have exactly the opposite: a High Priest who is perfectly, personally, and experientially capable of sympathizing, because He has Himself been "tempted in all things as we are."

The Greek word translated “sympathize” (συμπαθέω, *sympatheō*) means literally “to feel with”, to share in the same experience, to understand from the inside what another is going through, to be moved by their suffering because you have suffered similarly. This is not divine condescension observing human suffering from a safe distance; it is divine participation in human suffering through genuine human experience. The High Priest of Hebrews 4:15 does not sympathize with our weaknesses by divine empathy alone (the way in which God’s omniscience might theoretically comprehend human suffering without having experienced it); He sympathizes because He has been there. He has been hungry, weary, afraid, grief-stricken, tempted, and in agony. His sympathy is the sympathy of one who knows, from the inside, in the flesh, what it is to be the kind of creature we are.

“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace.”

HEBREWS 4:15–16, NASB 1995

V. TEMPTED IN ALL THINGS AS WE ARE: THE REALITY OF CHRIST’S TEMPTATION

How Can the Sinless One Be Genuinely Tempted? Engaging the Deepest Question About the True Humanity of Christ

A. The Statement and the Problem

Hebrews 4:15 declares that Christ was “tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.” The declaration raises what is perhaps the most theologically challenging question about the true humanity of Christ: how can a sinless person, one who is not merely sinless in the sense of not having sinned, but impeccable in the sense of being constitutionally incapable of sinning, be genuinely tempted? Is temptation not, by definition, the possibility of a real alternative? Can there be genuine temptation where there is no genuine possibility of failure?

The question is not merely academic; it has direct pastoral implications. If the temptations of Christ were not genuine, if they were more like divine performances of resistance than genuine human struggles with the possibility of sin, then the High Priest of Hebrews 4:15 does not truly know what temptation feels like from the inside, and His sympathy with our temptations is correspondingly reduced. The entire pastoral force of the passage depends on the genuineness of the temptation.

B. The Resolution: Temptation Is Real Even Where Failure Is Impossible

The resolution to this apparent paradox begins with the recognition that the intensity of temptation is not measured by the probability of failure. An absolutely pure and holy nature does not experience

temptation less intensely than a corrupted nature; it may experience it more intensely, because it feels the full weight of what is contrary to its holiness without any mitigation from corruption or prior sin that has dulled the moral sensibility. The fallen human being has, in a sense, become habituated to sin; the perfectly holy human nature of Christ encountered every temptation with the full force of its assault, unmitigated by habituation or prior compromise.

The analogy of the unbreakable beam is helpful here. An engineer testing a beam to failure will apply increasing load until the beam breaks; the breaking point measures the maximum load the beam can sustain. A beam that is unbreakable does not therefore experience no load; it experiences the maximum possible load without breaking. The impossibility of breaking does not eliminate the reality of the strain; it means the strain is borne and resisted without yield. Jesus bore the full weight of every temptation without the yield of sin, and this means He knows the full weight of temptation in a way that no person who has ever yielded to temptation can fully know. When we yield to temptation, the temptation stops pressing; when He resisted, it continued pressing. He knows the full extent of the assault from the inside in a way that is unique to the one who never capitulated.

C. “In All Things as We Are”: The Scope of the Temptation

The phrase “in all things as we are” (καθ’ ὁμοιότητα χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας, *kath’ homoiotēta chōris hamartias*) establishes both the comprehensiveness and the limit of Christ’s temptation. “In all things as we are” means that no dimension of genuine human temptation was foreign to His experience. The temptations of the wilderness, physical appetite (stones to bread), the desire for significance and divine protection (throw Yourself down), the lust for worldly power and glory (the kingdoms of the world), represent the three great categories of human temptation that John identifies as “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life” (1 John 2:16, NASB 1995), and that Adam and Eve fell to in the garden: the tree was “good for food” (flesh), “a delight to the eyes” (eyes), and “desirable to make one wise” (pride, Genesis 3:6, NASB 1995). The Last Adam faced the same categories of temptation as the first Adam, and where the first Adam fell, the Last Adam prevailed.

The phrase “without sin” (χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας, *chōris hamartias*) establishes the limit: the temptations were real and comprehensive, but they never resulted in sin. This is not because the temptations were not genuinely dangerous (as if the impeccability of Christ’s divine nature made the human temptations trivially resistible), but because the human will of Christ was always and perfectly aligned with the divine will, not by compulsion, but by the free, deliberate, obedient choice of the one who came to do the Father’s will (John 6:38; Hebrews 10:7). The sinlessness of Christ is the achievement of a genuinely human will in a state of perfect moral integrity, sustained and empowered by the Holy Spirit throughout the entire course of the incarnate life.

VI. DOXOLOGICAL CONCLUSION: THE PASTORAL GIFT OF CHRIST'S HUMANITY

The doctrine of the true humanity of Christ is not merely a christological technicality required to complete the definition of the hypostatic union; it is one of the most pastorally rich and most personally consoling truths in the entire Christian gospel. The High Priest who intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father is not a divine being who has set aside His human experience along with the mortal body He wore for thirty-three years. He is the risen, glorified, permanently incarnate Son of God, who retains forever the human nature He assumed in the womb of Mary, including the experiential knowledge of what it is to be human in a fallen world, to be weary, to be hungry, to be afraid, to be tempted, to grieve.

Hebrews 4:16 draws the pastoral conclusion that the doctrine demands: “Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (NASB 1995). The “therefore” is crucial: because we have a High Priest who has been tempted in all things as we are, therefore we can draw near with confidence. The confidence is not presumption; it is the confidence of those who know that the one they are approaching knows them from the inside, has walked in their shoes, and is not standing at the throne of grace as an impartial arbiter but as an advocate who has personally experienced everything they are bringing to Him.

This is the deepest pastoral implication of the true humanity of Christ, and it is the one that should most directly shape the practice of prayer, the exercise of pastoral care, and the preaching of the gospel. When you stand before a grieving widow, you bring her not a divine being who observes grief from a divine distance, but the one who stood at the tomb of His friend and wept. When you sit with a man being crushed by temptation, you bring him not a sinless ideal who never faced what he is facing, but the one who was tempted in the wilderness by the devil himself and resisted every assault. When you pray for the dying, you pray in the name of the one who said, “My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death” (Matthew 26:38, NASB 1995) and who drank the cup of suffering to its last, bitter dregs. The humanity of Christ is not a theological curiosity; it is the ground of the most intimate, the most personal, and the most powerful pastoral comfort the gospel has to offer.

Key Texts: *Hebrews 2:14–18; 4:15–16; 5:7–8; Luke 2:52; Luke 22:42–44; John 11:35; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 1:1–3; 4:2; 2 John 7*

THEOLOGICAL TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
True Humanity	The orthodox affirmation that Jesus Christ possessed a genuinely, completely, and permanently human nature, a real human body (subject to birth, growth, hunger, thirst, weariness, suffering, and death) and a real human soul (possessing intellect, emotion, and will). The true humanity of Christ is not a performance or an appearance but an ontological reality: the eternal Son genuinely assumed and permanently retains human nature. True humanity is the necessary condition for Christ's mediatorial work: only a genuine human being can represent human beings before God, die the death that humans deserve, keep the law on behalf of humans, and provide the experiential solidarity with human weakness that qualifies the High Priest of Hebrews.
Docetism	From the Greek δοκεῖν (dokein), 'to seem' or 'to appear.' The earliest and most persistent Christological heresy, holding that Christ only appeared to be human, that His body was a phantom or spiritual semblance rather than a genuine physical reality. Typically arising from a dualistic philosophical framework that regarded matter as inferior or evil, Docetism preserved the divine dignity of Christ at the cost of genuine incarnation. The apostolic refutation is explicit in John 1:14 ('the Word became flesh'), 1 John 1:1–3 (heard, seen, touched), 1 John 4:2 ('has come in the flesh'), and 2 John 7 (denial of Christ's coming in flesh is the spirit of antichrist).
Apollinarianism	The Christological heresy associated with Apollinarius of Laodicea (c. 310–390 AD), teaching that in the incarnate Christ, the divine Logos replaced the human rational soul or mind (nous). Apollinarius intended this to explain Christ's sinlessness but succeeded only in denying Him a complete human nature. Condemned at the First Council of Constantinople (381 AD) on the grounds of Gregory of Nazianzus's principle: 'What has not been assumed has not been healed.' If the Logos did not assume a genuine human rational soul, the human rational soul is not redeemed; if He did not assume a genuine human will, the human will is not sanctified. Apollinarianism produces a partial Savior for a partial humanity.
Communicatio Idiomatum	Latin: 'communication of attributes.' The classical theological principle that the properties of both the divine and human natures of Christ may be predicated of the one Person of the Son. Because the one Person is fully divine and fully human, statements true of either nature can be made about Him: 'the Son of God suffered,' 'the Son of Man created all things.' The communicatio idiomatum does not mean that the divine nature literally suffered or that the human nature literally created all things; it means that the one Person, who is both fully divine and fully human, is the subject of both kinds of statements.

Term	Definition
	Misapplication of this principle generated several ancient heresies (Theopaschitism, Eutychianism).
Sympathy (Sympatheō)	Greek: 'to feel with,' 'to share in the same experience.' Used in Hebrews 4:15 for the High Priest's capacity to sympathize with our weaknesses because He has been tempted as we are. The sympathy of Christ is not merely divine empathy (the theoretical comprehension of human experience from the outside); it is the experiential solidarity of one who has genuinely undergone the same kinds of experience. Christ sympathizes because He knows from the inside what hunger, grief, fear, weariness, and temptation feel like in a genuine human body and soul. This experiential sympathy is the pastoral ground of the confidence with which the believer is invited to approach the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16).
Impeccability	The theological term for the impossibility of sin in Christ, as distinguished from sinlessness (the historical fact that He did not sin). Impeccability affirms that it was metaphysically impossible for the incarnate Son to sin, because the one Person who acts is a divine Person, and a divine Person cannot sin. The classic objection, that impeccability undermines the genuineness of the temptation, is answered by the observation that the intensity of temptation is not measured by the probability of failure: an unbreakable beam can still bear real weight, and the perfectly holy human nature of Christ experienced the full assault of temptation without any mitigation from prior sin or moral habituation.
Dyothelitism	The theological doctrine, defined at the Third Council of Constantinople (681 AD), that Christ possesses two wills: a divine will and a human will. Against Monothelitism (the claim that Christ has only one will), Dyothelitism holds that each nature has its own will, since will is a faculty of nature rather than person. The two wills are not in conflict; the human will always operates in perfect, voluntary submission to the divine will. The Gethsemane prayer ('not My will, but Yours be done,' Luke 22:42) is the paradigmatic expression of the two wills in their proper relationship: a genuine human will freely submitting to the divine will.
Last Adam	The typological title used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:45–49 and Romans 5:12–21 for Christ as the counterpart and reversal of the first Adam. Where the first Adam brought sin and death into the world through disobedience, the Last Adam brings righteousness and life through obedience. The parallel and contrast between Adam and Christ requires the genuine humanity of Christ: if the Last Adam is not genuinely human, if He does not share the same nature as the first Adam and the race that Adam heads, then His obedience cannot reverse what Adam's disobedience caused, and His righteousness cannot be imputed to those who are 'in Adam.'

Term	Definition
Gregory of Nazianzus	Fourth-century theologian and bishop (c. 329–390 AD), one of the three Cappadocian Fathers, whose theological precision was decisive in the formulation of orthodox Trinitarian and Christological doctrine at the First Council of Constantinople (381 AD). His most influential christological contribution is the principle formulated against Apollinarius: ‘What has not been assumed has not been healed; but that which is united to God is also being saved’ (Epistle 101). This principle, often abbreviated as ‘the unassumed is the unredeemed,’ remains the definitive theological argument for the completeness of Christ’s human nature: the scope of the redemption is coextensive with the scope of the assumption.
Impassibility	The classical divine attribute affirming that God does not undergo involuntary suffering, emotional change, or the kind of affective disturbance to which creatures are subject. Divine impassibility does not mean God is emotionally indifferent or incapable of genuine love; it means He is not subject to passions, involuntary emotional states imposed from outside, in the way creatures are. The doctrine creates the christological question of how the impassible God could genuinely suffer in the incarnation. The orthodox answer is that suffering is attributed to the one Person of the Son in His human nature, not to the divine nature as such. The Gethsemane anguish and the cross are genuine human sufferings of the incarnate Son, not violations of the divine impassibility.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the humanity of Christ is as real, as genuine, and as complete as our own, that when John says “the Word became flesh,” he means genuine flesh, with all its vulnerability, limitation, and mortality, and not some divinely sanitized simulacrum of flesh that only resembles the real thing from a safe divine distance. The docetic impulse, to protect the divine dignity by attenuating the human reality, is not merely a theological error; it is a pastoral impoverishment that strips the gospel of its most intimate and most powerful dimensions. The God who sympathizes with our weaknesses can only sympathize because He has genuinely shared them. Attenuate the humanity and you attenuate the sympathy; attenuate the sympathy and you undermine the confidence with which Hebrews 4:16 invites the suffering believer to approach the throne of grace.

We must also believe that the doctrine of Apollinarianism, in any of its ancient or contemporary forms, is incompatible with the gospel. Whenever Christ’s humanity is treated as a body without a genuine human soul, or as a human appearance without genuine human emotional life, or as a human will that is merely a facade for the divine will operating through it, the result is a Christ who cannot fully redeem what He has not fully assumed. Gregory of Nazianzus’s principle remains decisive: the scope of the redemption is coextensive with the scope of the assumption. We need a Savior who assumed every dimension of our humanity, because every dimension of our humanity needs to be saved.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

Let the true humanity of Christ be the ground of your confidence in prayer. Every time you bring to the throne of grace your weariness, your grief, your fear, your temptation, your sense of being overwhelmed by circumstances that exceed your strength, you bring it to the one who has been there. Not to a divine being who comprehends your suffering from a theoretical omniscience, but to the one who was genuinely weary at Jacob’s well, genuinely grief-stricken at Lazarus’s tomb, genuinely terrified in Gethsemane, genuinely tempted in the wilderness. The sympathy of your High Priest is not a courtesy extended from a safe divine distance; it is the sympathy of one who knows, from the inside, in the flesh, what you are going through.

Desire, above all, an incarnational spirituality, a way of relating to God through Christ that takes seriously the physical, emotional, and bodily dimensions of that relationship. The true humanity of Christ sanctifies the physical dimensions of human life: the body matters, the emotions matter, the physical sufferings and joys and hungers and griefs of human existence matter, because the Son of God shared them all and declared them worthy of the divine attention and the divine presence. The Christian who has grasped the full reality of Christ’s humanity will not despise or minimize the

physical and emotional dimensions of the Christian life but will bring them, with full confidence, to the one who knows them from the inside.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Read and reflect on the Gospel accounts of Christ's human experiences systematically. Compile a list of every instance in the Gospels in which Jesus experiences something characteristically human: hunger, thirst, weariness, grief, joy, fear, anger, compassion, disappointment, love. Let the cumulative weight of these instances press upon you with the full reality of what the incarnation means. Then bring this list to your prayer life: for each dimension of human experience on the list, there is a dimension of Christ's sympathy that covers it.
- Preach the full humanity of Christ as deliberately as you preach His full deity. The temptation in evangelical preaching is to emphasize the divine attributes of Christ (His omniscience, omnipotence, and sovereignty) while treating the human attributes as background noise. Both emphases are necessary, and the pastoral power of the human attributes is immense. The congregation that has genuinely encountered the weeping Christ at Lazarus's tomb, the anguished Christ in Gethsemane, and the tempted Christ in the wilderness will have a far more intimate and far more pastorally grounded relationship with their High Priest than one that knows only the divine attributes.
- Use the true humanity of Christ in your pastoral care. When you sit with the grieving, the tempted, the suffering, and the dying, bring the specific human experiences of Jesus to bear on their specific situation. Do not merely point people to the sovereignty of God or the promises of Scripture in the abstract; point them to the specific human experiences of their High Priest that directly address their specific pain. The grieving widow needs to know that Jesus wept. The man being destroyed by temptation needs to know that Jesus was tempted in all things as he is. The person in the agony of Gethsemane-like suffering needs to know that Jesus prayed with loud crying and tears to the one able to save Him from death.
- Engage the contemporary forms of Docetism in your congregation's spiritual culture. The tendency to imagine Jesus as a sort of serene, unruffled divine being who moves through the Gospel narrative with perfect equanimity and never really struggles with anything is a form of implicit Docetism that is widespread in popular evangelical piety. Challenge it gently but directly, by preaching the texts that reveal the full emotional and physical intensity of Christ's human experience. The Gethsemane narrative (Matthew 26:36–46; Luke 22:39–46) is the most powerful single antidote to implicit Docetism in the entire Gospels.
- Read Hebrews 4:14–16 and 5:1–10 as a devotional text every week for a month. Let the specific language of these passages, the sympathy of the High Priest, the temptation in all things, the loud crying and tears, the learning of obedience through suffering, shape your own understanding of what it means to draw near to the throne of grace. The believer who has

saturated herself in this passage will approach the throne of grace with the confidence that Hebrews invites, because she will know precisely why that confidence is warranted: her High Priest has been there.

STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OPENING QUESTION

1. When you imagine Jesus in your mind during prayer or devotion, how do you typically picture Him? Is your mental image more shaped by His divine attributes (omniscience, omnipotence, sovereign majesty) or by His human attributes (weariness, grief, compassion, fear in Gethsemane)? How does the balance or imbalance in your mental image of Christ affect the way you pray and the confidence with which you approach Him?

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DO THE TEXTS SAY?)

2. Read Hebrews 4:14–16 carefully. What specifically qualifies Jesus as a High Priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, according to verse 15? What is the logical force of ‘therefore’ at the beginning of verse 16? What specifically are we invited to approach in verse 16, and with what attitude? What two things does the author promise we will receive when we draw near?

3. Read Luke 22:39–46. Identify every specific indicator of genuine human suffering and anguish in this passage: the prayer, the content of the request, the angelic strengthening, the agony, and the physical phenomenon of verse 44. What does the phrase ‘not My will, but Yours be done’ (v. 42) reveal about the relationship between Christ’s human will and the Father’s will? How does Hebrews 5:7–8 interpret the theological significance of this scene?

4. Read 1 John 1:1–3 and 1 John 4:1–3. What specific sensory language does John use in 1:1–3 to establish the physical reality of the incarnation? Why does John consider the confession that Jesus Christ ‘has come in the flesh’ (4:2) the decisive test for distinguishing true and false spirits? How does the perfect tense of ‘has come’ (ἐλήλυθα) in 4:2 indicate the permanence of the incarnation?

5. Read Luke 2:40–52. What four dimensions of growth does Luke identify in verse 52? How does the statement that Jesus ‘kept increasing in wisdom’ (v. 52) relate to the divine omniscience affirmed in Colossians 2:3 (‘in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’)? What does the episode of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple (vv. 41–50) reveal about both the genuine humanity and the genuine divine identity of the boy Jesus?

INTERPRETATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT MEAN?)

6. Gregory of Nazianzus’s principle, ‘what has not been assumed has not been healed’, is the definitive argument for the completeness of Christ’s human nature. Apply this principle to the heresy of Apollinarianism: what specifically is lost soteriologically if Christ did not assume a genuine human

rational soul and a genuine human will? How does Romans 12:2, Philippians 2:5, and Colossians 3:10 demonstrate the need for the redemption of the human mind and will?

7. The lesson argues that the doctrine of Dyothelitism (two wills) is established by the Gethsemane prayer ('not My will, but Yours be done'). How does this prayer demonstrate the existence of a genuine human will in Christ that is distinct from the divine will? What would be lost theologically and soteriologically if Christ had only one will (Monothelitism)? How does the genuine submission of Christ's human will to the Father's divine will relate to the doctrine of the active obedience of Christ?

8. The lesson presents two answers to the question of how the omniscient Son could genuinely grow in wisdom (Luke 2:52) and not know the day or hour of His return (Mark 13:32). First, the Chalcedonian framework of two natures (divine omniscience in the divine nature; genuine intellectual development in the human nature). Second, the concept of the Father's withholding of certain knowledge for the purposes of the incarnational mission. Evaluate these two answers. Are they complementary or in tension? Which do you find more satisfactory, and why?

9. The lesson argues that impeccability (the impossibility of sinning) does not undermine the genuineness of Christ's temptation, because the intensity of temptation is not measured by the probability of failure, and indeed, one who never yields knows the full weight of the assault in a way that one who yields does not. Do you find this argument convincing? What objections might be raised against it? How does the answer shape your pastoral approach to those who are struggling with temptation?

10. The lesson distinguishes between divine empathy (God's theoretical comprehension of human experience through omniscience) and the experiential sympathy of the incarnate Christ (who knows human experience from the inside through genuine participation). Why does this distinction matter pastorally? Is it possible for a divine being who had never become human to genuinely sympathize with human weakness in the sense described in Hebrews 4:15? What does the incarnation add to the divine knowledge of human experience?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT DEMAND OF US?)

11. The lesson argues that the doctrine of the true humanity of Christ is 'one of the most pastorally rich and most personally consoling truths in the entire Christian gospel.' Reflect honestly on your own prayer life and pastoral practice. To what degree do you actually draw on the specific human experiences of Jesus, His weeping, His temptation, His Gethsemane anguish, in your approach to prayer and in your pastoral care of others? What would change in your practice if you were to do so more deliberately and more specifically?

12. The lesson identifies implicit Docetism, the tendency to imagine Jesus as an unruffled divine being who moves through the Gospel narrative with perfect equanimity, as widespread in popular

evangelical piety. Where do you observe this tendency in your own congregation's spiritual culture? In worship songs? In devotional literature? In the way people speak about Jesus? What specific teaching or pastoral intervention would most effectively address it?

13. The lesson recommends using the specific human experiences of Jesus in pastoral care: bringing the weeping Christ to the grieving widow, the tempted Christ to the man struggling with temptation, the anguished Christ of Gethsemane to the person in extreme suffering. Can you describe a specific pastoral situation in your own experience in which one of these specific connections would have been (or was) the most pastorally powerful thing you could have offered? What would it look like to make this kind of christological specificity a regular feature of your pastoral care?

14. This lesson completes the third lesson of Unit 3 on the Incarnation. Looking ahead to Lesson 9 (the Full Deity of Christ), how does the establishment of Christ's true humanity in this lesson provide the necessary context for a proper understanding of His full deity? Why is it important to affirm both the complete humanity and the complete deity of Christ before moving to the Chalcedonian definition of the hypostatic union? What specifically would be distorted in the doctrine of Christ's deity if His humanity were not first firmly established?

PRAYER FOCUS

Open this lesson's prayer time with a meditative reading of Hebrews 4:14–5:10, the most theologically concentrated and the most pastorally powerful treatment of the High Priesthood of Christ in all of Scripture. Read it slowly, allowing the specific language to press upon the group with its full weight: "tempted in all things as we are," "deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness," "he offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears," "he learned obedience from the things which He suffered." Let the group notice that the High Priest described in these verses is not a remote, impassible divine being attending to human requests from a throne of infinite distance; He is the one who has been where we are, in the flesh, with loud crying and tears, and who has now passed through the heavens as the permanent, glorified, eternally interceding representative of every human being who draws near through Him.

Spend time in adoration of the incarnate, risen, and permanently human Christ, the God-man who retains His human nature forever at the right hand of the Majesty on high, and who intercedes for us with the experiential sympathy of one who has walked every road we walk. Adore Him specifically for the human experiences that qualify Him as our High Priest: for the hunger in the wilderness and the weariness at Jacob's well; for the weeping at Lazarus's tomb and the compassion for the crowds without a shepherd; for the agony of Gethsemane and the loud crying and tears of Hebrews 5:7; for the perfect, obedient "not My will but Yours be done" that secured our redemption. Let each of these

specific human experiences become a specific act of adoration: He was weary so that He could sympathize with our weariness. He wept so that He could sympathize with our grief. He was tempted so that He could sympathize with our temptation.

Pray the specific human experiences of Christ over the specific needs of your congregation. Bring to the throne of grace, with the confidence that Hebrews 4:16 warrants, the people in your congregation who are weary, grieving, tempted, afraid, and suffering. Name them before the one who knows every one of their experiences from the inside. Ask for the specific grace that each specific human need requires: mercy for the failures, grace to help in the time of need, sympathy for the weakness, and the advocacy of the one who “always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25, NASB 1995).

Close with a reading of John 11:32–35, the briefest, the most human, and perhaps the most theologically profound verse in the entire Gospel of John:

“When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping who came with her, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, and said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to Him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus wept. So the Jews were saying, ‘See how He loved him!’”

JOHN 11:33–36, NASB 1995

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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