

The Whole Counsel of God
Study 28

THE INCARNATION AND THE CREATED NATURE OF MAN

*And the Word became flesh...
(John 1.14).*

In the Bible, the incarnation is presented within the mission of Christ, which covers his entire movement from being sent by the Father to his return to the Father via death, resurrection and ascension. Within this context, we can take a closer look at the incarnation itself, but here we must step back to ensure a biblical perspective. The event of the incarnation was carried out in secret. It happened by the mysterious operation of the Spirit in the womb of the Virgin where no human eye was allowed to see. But, what was brought about is made clear in revelation. Human nature was joined to deity in the one person of Jesus Christ. Scripture gives us a clear understanding of human nature and deity. Scripture also presents the one person in whom the two natures are joined. In this study we will examine this union of the two natures in the person of Christ.

Throughout this study, we must keep in mind the orthodoxy (correct thinking) on the subject of the person of Christ, which sets the parameters of our thinking on the incarnation by pointing out the fixed reference points within which we must work. Jesus was fully and truly divine and human, and in the incarnation each nature was preserved without being modified or corrupted in any way. The deity of the Son of God was not changed or diminished by being joined to humanity. It was not made lower than full deity. Also, the humanity Christ took was not altered in the union. By being joined to deity, it was not made superhuman. Jesus was not a superman. But, neither was Jesus' humanity made a hollow form as if it were a mere costume in which a divine actor lives, moves and expresses himself. Jesus' humanity was real and living. In the incarnation, the two natures were not mixed. A hybrid of deity and humanity was not formed. Through the virginal conception, a crossbreed was not formed that had traits of both natures but was neither fully and truly. The deity remained pure deity, and the humanity was genuine humanity. The divine and human natures of Christ did not each have their own personhood as if two persons were living in Jesus. Jesus is one person, and in his one person the two natures are joined. These parameters which we have outlined for our study are given in the facts of revelation. The scriptures present one person, Jesus Christ, who is truly God and truly man.

When it comes to examining Christ's human nature, we must determine where to look for the standard of true humanity. It is natural for us to hold up our own experience of what it means to be human as the standard by which we measure Jesus, but this is fatal. Our self-consciousness has been altered by sin so that what we naturally and intuitively think of as human is a distortion of created humanity. The true measure of what it means to be human is given in creation, and we must bring the creational view of human nature to our study of the incarnation.

A. THE IMAGE OF GOD

The first view we get of man in the Bible is given in Gen 1.26 in which God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." This first truth in the biblical doctrine of man makes the incarnation possible.

1. The image and likeness of God (Genesis 1.26)

In our study of the doctrine of man, we saw that the idea in the *image* of God is that of the representation of God. Man was created within a relationship with God in which he represents God within the physical universe. The specific idea in the *likeness* of God is that of resemblance. This resemblance is not a physical resemblance as if man's body was a copy of a divine body. God is Spirit and does not have a body. The resemblance is dynamic rather than spatial. Man has been endowed with faculties that correspond to God. Having said this, we must add that man's body is essential to the image of God. God is invisible and above the world, and man was created as a physical being to give visible representation to God within creation.

The language of image and likeness focuses our attention on the fact that man can express what is of God in this world. However, we must also see this from God's side. God created man so that he could express himself in the physical world through man. We see this in all of biblical revelation in which God reveals himself in human terms. This has been named, anthropomorphism, which means to take human form. If we look at God's revelation from a human point of view, we will see it as anthropomorphic, and God is not embarrassed by this. The Bible was written with this built in confidence that the revelation of God in human terms is a true revelation and that there is no distortion of the truth of God in it. The basis for this confidence is given in Gen 1.26. Before there ever was anthropomorphism, theomorphism happened. When God made man in his image, he raised the physical to the divine image, and only because of this could God reveal himself in human terms. The incarnation takes this a step further. Because God created man in his image, he could not only express himself in human terms but he could become human.

The point we are pressing is important for the doctrine of the incarnation. People have objected to the incarnation in the name of monotheism with its emphasis on the fact that God transcends his creation and is categorically different from the creature. But, the fact that we can know God personally and relate to him points to another side of God. In his transcendence, God relates to man and makes himself known to him, and this means that God has created man with a capacity to know him and relate to him. If we accept that man is made in the image of God so that the revelation that God gives of himself in human terms is true, then it follows that there is built into human nature the full capacity for God to become identified with man and reveal himself in man.

Since the incarnation has its basis in the fact that God made man in his image, God could only enter the world as a man. It would be utterly impossible for God to become an animal, a plant or an inanimate object. This does not mean that we cannot see attributes of God portrayed in animals, plants or things. All creation reflects the glory of God and shows something of his wisdom and power. For example, a lion symbolizes to us power and majesty. But, while a lion symbolizes this trait, it is not a personal being that can represent God in his personal nature. We might put it this way: we can see an analogy between a creature's characteristic trait and its God, but only in man is God in his personal nature represented, and we can add that in man we find the full range of personal attributes corresponding to God.

Our understanding of the incarnation must steer clear of pagan notions of the connection between deity and nature. In paganism, the divine nature is seen as the vital power in all created natures. The divine nature and the creature are thus linked by the nature of things. This way of seeing reality lies behind idolatry and polytheism. The Bible rules this out. The first truth about God in the Bible is that deity stands in contrast to the nature of the creature as the creator is in contrast to his creation. The connection between God and his creation is not one of nature but of relationship, and God is personally active in the world through his personal relationship with man, and only man. The doctrine of the incarnation is based on this biblical view of things.

2. The image of the invisible God (Colossians 1.15)

Being made in the image of God, man has a derivative personal identity. He is not a personal being that holds his identity in and of himself. He is an image, and all that he has as a personal being is given to him by God within a personal relationship with God. This means that God the Father could not become human. In God the Father, we have God in his absolute being as the source of all things without having his source in any. In this character, God stands absolutely in contrast to all creatures, including man, and could not possibly become human. The Son, however, receives all from the Father to express the Father. He is, in the language of Col 1.15, the image of the invisible God, and this means that he can take up the human relation to God without contradicting his divine relation to the Father.

The expression, the image of the invisible God, answers to the fact that man was made in the image of God. But, in Col 1.15 Paul does not have the human Jesus in mind, who was born in the image of God as a human being. The movement of the apostle's thought makes clear that he is speaking about the pre-incarnated Son through whom God created all things in the beginning (Col 1.16f.). The universe was created through the one who is the image of the invisible God.

What the human mind can see of the glory of the creator is, in reality, the glory of the Son. The human mind cannot perceive the glory of the Father, i.e., of God in his absolute being that entirely transcends creation and the human mind. Thinkers have realized that the deity exists wholly above and independently of creation, and this has led them to the conclusion that they can only speak of God in the negative. Whatever the human being says positively about God is said in terms of the creation. So what can be said of God independent of the creation? The human mind can only answer in the negative: God is not this, God is not that. Consequently, all is shrouded in darkness. But, at the same time that God is hidden, he is revealed through creation. What is seen of God through creation is really the attributes of the image of the invisible God in the Son. The revelation of the trinity clarifies all this. The Son is the image of the invisible God; and he is one with the Father, and in him God is fully revealed. But, here we have to be precise in what we say. The revelation of God before the incarnation was not a revelation of the Father. Through creation, the Father is concealed. Only the revelation of the Son in the incarnation reveals the Father. Just as the incarnation went beyond creation (the created order) so the revelation of God in Christ rises higher than the revelation of the glory of God through creation.

We must return to our main point. Only the Son of God could become human. The union between his deity and our humanity is possible because he is the eternal image of God to which man as the created image corresponds. The image of the invisible God could become the created image of God. If the Father became human, he would have to become the image of God, and this would be incompatible with what he is: the absolute source of all. The Son is equal with the Father, but receives all from the Father to reveal him. As the image of God within the Godhead, he can become human and carry out his divine role in the trinity as the human image of God.

In Col 1.15, Paul first of all relates the Son to the Father by calling him the image of the invisible God. Then, he relates him to creation by calling him the firstborn of all creation. The position of the firstborn was important in biblical thinking. The relationship of father and son was established in the firstborn, and all who were subsequently added to the family joined in his relationship with the father. It is significant that Paul uses this concept for the Son's relation to creation. He alone holds the eternal relationship with the Father, and all other creatures simply are given their being within his relationship. This is true of all angelic realms as well as of the physical world that was placed under man and through man was brought into a personal relationship with God. In Col 1.16 Paul points out that the Son holds this position of firstborn by virtue of the fact that all things were created through him.

The incarnation has two foundations. The first is the eternal basis in the trinity, and the second is the basis laid in creation.

3. Jesus' relation to the Father (John 5.19ff.)

In John 5, Jesus presented his deity within a relationship with God that is true to the divine-human relationship. We must keep in mind that in Jn 5.19ff., the subject is his deity. The Jews understood Jesus as claiming to be equal with God and wanted to kill him for this (v 18). Jesus answered them in terms of his relationship with God as that of the Son and his Father, and these are the terms in which the deity of Jesus is presented.

Jesus first presented the relationship of the Son to the Father as one of complete dependence. He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing" (v 19). Jesus expressed this perfect submission to God when he prayed in Gethsemane, "...not my will, but yours, be done" (Lk 22.42). We all can hear in this prayer the ideal of perfect manhood. But, what Jesus said in Jn 5.19 goes beyond the divine-human relationship in one significant way. Adam could and did act contrary to God, but the Son could not. The Son's self-limitation was absolute. This difference rests in the essential difference between the Son and Adam. Adam was not one with God. He had his being "outside" of God's being, and that means that he could act independently of God. By the way, the angels who sinned showed that this was also the case with angels. The Son, being in the trinity, cannot exist or act apart from God. There is perfect and absolute unity.

While we must keep in mind the difference between the eternal Son and created man, it is also important to see that the Son's relation to the Father is parallel to man's created relationship with God. Man was created to be

the image of God and so to represent God and not express himself. In the first law given in the Garden of Eden, God forbade man to take to himself the knowledge of good and evil by which he would become a self-determining being. As long as Adam obeyed, he did “nothing of his own accord.” He only acted on the basis of God’s word and will. This was the ideal set for human action. By setting before Adam the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, however, God put before Adam the fact that his life in God’s will was not a matter of his nature. He could act independently of God. So, to stay within God’s will Adam had to deny himself the role of acting on his own initiative. When Adam sinned, he acted contrary to his position in relation to God. Sin is thus the contradiction of what man was made to be.

The Son’s total self-limitation in relation to the Father is essential to his total oneness with the Father. He cannot go beyond the Father in any way. At the same time, the Father knows no limit in what he shows to the Son, so that the Son is equal to the Father by the Father’s own initiative. This goes beyond anything that God does for common mankind. But, the alignment of the relationship of the Son with the Father is parallel to the divine-human relationship set up in creation. When God made man in his image, God committed himself to being represented by man. It remains true for the rest the Bible (after Genesis 1) that God only acted within history through man. In his role as creator, maintaining creation, he acts independently of human participation and involvement. But, in any of his works beyond this, he limited himself to that which he did in relation to man and to what he revealed in and through man. The incarnation sealed this. The great divine works of forgiving sins, giving eternal life, judgment and resurrection are only carried out in man, the man Christ Jesus.

In uniting humanity to deity, Jesus did not stop with himself. He set up the disciples in a relationship with him that is parallel to his relationship with the Father. In John 14.12 he said to his disciples, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.” This saying echoes what Jesus said of his relationship with the Father in John 5.19ff.: that he did what he saw the Father doing and that he would do greater works. As the Father showed all that he was doing to the Son for the Son to do as well (Jn 5.19-20), so the Spirit takes the things of Christ and declares them to the disciples (Jn 16.13-15). The relationship of the Son to the Father is the divine archetype for the human relationship with the Son. This answers to what we saw earlier: the Son is the image after which man was made the image of God.

The relationship between the Son and the Father in the trinity is the archetype for the relationship between human beings and God, and this fact provides the foundation for the incarnation.

B. THE CONSTITUTION OF MAN

The first creation account presents man in his function in relation to God and the world. The second account presents him from his visible side. Here man is seen in his body made of dust into which the breath of God was breathed so that he became a living soul. This view enables us to see the created constitution of man. He is a composite being, made of dust and brought to life by spirit, and as a result he is a living soul.

What sets man off from animals in Genesis 2 is that God breathes the breath of life (spirit) directly into him. This places him in an intimate and personal relationship with God, and it is this that makes him the image of God. But, we are not allowed to isolate the spirit of man as his essential nature. The order of creation is important. God first formed the body of dust, and the nature of this body defines the whole nature of man. Man is flesh. He is a physical being. The spirit imparted to him was breathed into the dust and has its seat in the body, so that spirit is man’s spirit only within his body. Man is not a spirit who happens to have a body. He is flesh that has spirit.

While the spirit intimately imparted to man by God raises him above animals and makes the incarnation possible, we are not to conclude from this that in the incarnation the deity of the Son was only tied to the spirit of man. The Bible nowhere speaks of the incarnation as happening in relation to the human spirit. The idea in the word, incarnation, is that of enfleshment, and this focus on the flesh catches the biblical message. The scriptures say that the Word became flesh (Jn 1.14), that Jesus came in the flesh (1Jn 4.2), that he partook of flesh and blood (Heb 2.14) and that God sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom 8.3).

The focus on the flesh does not mean that we are to think of incarnation only in terms of the body. The word, flesh, is not synonymous with the word, body. When the Bible speaks of flesh, it is not thinking of the organ with its members but of the physical nature. This nature cannot be limited to the body and held off from the human spirit and soul. Man in his entire being is flesh, and this must be brought to the doctrine of the incarnation. The divine Son did not simply take a human body through which he expressed himself. He took the whole nature of man, and that means he took a human spirit, soul and body so that his humanity is just like ours.

We must think of the incarnation as the union of the deity and human nature as body, soul and spirit. Two wrong ways of thinking about the incarnation must be ruled out. The one error sees the divine Logos, the Son of God, replacing the human spirit and simply inhabiting a human body. In this view, Jesus would not have a human spirit and so would not be truly human. This would be possession of a body and not incarnation. It would also be erroneous to see the divine Son directly joined to the human spirit and not to the body. This view is wrong in its understanding of man, for man is not a spirit in a body. This view would also side step the very idea of incarnation, that God became flesh. The union of the two natures in Jesus is a perfect union in one person.

The incarnation did not result in two persons tied together, as if Jesus acted as God in one way and as man in another way. Christians easily slip into this way of thinking and speaking about Jesus as they focus on a manifestation of his true deity in one instance and on an expression of true humanity in another. For example, in Matt 8.23-27 Jesus is sleeping in the boat and then stands up and calms the wind and sea with a word. It is true that his sleep was a real sleep and shows his human nature and that his authority over the elements of nature shows his deity. But, it would be wrong to say that in sleeping he was human and in speaking the powerful word he was divine. He both slept and commanded the elements as the Son of God and the Son of Man. Jesus only had one "I" that was at all times both divine and human. He was the Son of God and the Son of Man at all times. In this incarnate state, everything Jesus did he did as the divine Son and as the man who acted by his human spirit, with his human soul and through his human flesh. Only as such was he fully God and fully human.

C. FLESH

The view of man presented in Genesis 2 presents the real challenge for the doctrine of the incarnation. The fact that God made man in his image provides for continuity between the Son in the trinity and the man Jesus. The fact that man has spirit provides the vital link between human nature and God within the created constitution of man. But, as a being of flesh man has a nature that is opposite to God, and this means that the incarnation is the union of opposite natures. Here lies the mystery, the challenge and the wonder of the incarnation.

1. The two natures

We tend to see the contrast between flesh and spirit as the difference between two states of being: physical and non-physical. In seeing things this way, we are looking at spirit or divine nature from the point of view of our physical sight. The result is that since the human spirit is not visible we actually say nothing positive about it. We speak of spirit in negative terms as that which is non-physical, immaterial and invisible. The Bible looks at things differently. It begins with God and the positive and powerful nature of spirit and sees flesh for what it lacks. The Bible does not focus on two states of existence (physical and not physical) but on the dynamic reality of two natures. Spirit is powerful and flesh is weak, dependent and vulnerable to death.

The contrast between flesh and spirit is presented poetically in Ish 31.3:

Now the Egyptians are man, and not God,
and their horses are flesh, and not spirit.
When the LORD stretches out his hand,
the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall,
and they will all perish together.

The contrast is between men and flesh, on one hand, and God and spirit-nature, on the other. The point is clear. Flesh (with all its strength) is weak, and God (who is spirit) is strong and has absolute power over flesh.

The keynote in the OT is that human beings are flesh and that this flesh is frail and in itself has no strength (Gen 6.3; 2Chr 32.8; Ps 78.39; Jer17.5). The weakness of flesh is eloquently stated by Elihu in Job 34.14-15: “If he (i.e., God) should set his heart to it and gather to himself his spirit and his breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to the dust.” Flesh cannot give life or even keep itself alive. In itself it is dust. It is spirit that makes and keeps the dust alive, and this spirit belongs to God.

The weakness and vulnerability of flesh is not due to sin but to the very nature of flesh—it is as weak as dust and must be sustained as living flesh by God’s grant of spirit. This point is made in Genesis 2. Man is made from the dust, and in himself is dust. Only the infusion of spirit given directly from God makes the dust living flesh, and the whole creature becomes a living soul. After man sinned, God did not say to him, “You came from dust,” but, “You are dust” (Gen 3.19).

In contrast to flesh, spirit is powerful. Given by God, it makes flesh alive and sustains it. God who is spirit has complete power over human beings or flesh. Angels are spirits (Heb 1.14), and they are the “...mighty ones who do his word...” (Ps 103.20). In the OT angels have power over people and armies. They do not have the limitations of flesh and are not mortal. They appear in the form of men, but do not suffer and are not weak. Against any human assault, they are invincible.

What we have seen from the OT throws light on Jesus’ saying, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing...” Indeed, the flesh is weak and cannot give life.

2. The two natures in Christ

The Word became flesh—what does this mean in light of what the OT says about flesh in contrast with spirit? The answer is worked out in Hebrews 2 to 5.

a. Christ’s humanity as flesh (Hebrews 2 to 5)

Hebrews 1.1-2.4 focuses on Christ’s divine position. In chapter 2 verse 5, attention is turned to Christ’s humanity. The discussion begins with a citation of Ps 8.4-6 in Heb 2.6-8. The Psalmist asks God the question, “What is man...or the son of man?” Still speaking to God, he answers, “You made him for a little while lower than the angels...” (Heb 2.7). Psalm 8 refers to mankind, but since Jesus took up the role of mankind to fulfil God’s purpose for man, this Psalm is applied to Jesus. The citation from Psalm 8 is followed up with the application of man’s inferiority to angels: “But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus...because of the suffering of death...” (v 9). Jesus was made lower than the angels in being made a man to die.

In Heb 1.14 we are told that angels are ministering spirits. Man is made lower than angels in that he is flesh. That the author has this in mind is clear from Heb 2.14-16. He says,

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise also partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.

To help mankind (which is flesh) instead of angels (who are spirits), the Son of God took on flesh in order to die. The writer to the Hebrews goes on to say that Jesus had to be made like his brothers in all things, and this involved being tempted in that which he suffered, i.e., death (Heb 2.17-18). Through this temptation he can sympathize with our weaknesses (4.15), and that means he experienced the weakness of flesh. The reality of his experience in the weakness (and so genuineness) of flesh is stressed when we are told that “in the days of his

flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence (5.7).

What we saw about flesh in the OT is attributed to Jesus. He shared this nature with us and experienced its weakness and trials. He lived in total dependence on God. Finally, he experienced what seals the weakness of flesh—he died.

b. Divine and human in Jesus

At one point the writer to the Hebrews shows that he is sensitive to the tension between Christ being in the flesh and being a divine person. After pointing out Jesus' utter dependence on God in the weakness of flesh, he says, "Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered" (5.8). As Son he is God (1.8) and the eternal LORD who created all and will remain forever though the universe will perish (1.10-13). He is the one through whom God made the world, and he is the exact representation of God's nature (Heb 1.2-3). All that is true of divine nature as spirit (its creative power and immortality) is true of him, and yet all that is true of human nature in its weakness and dependence also became his genuine experience.

In Jesus, the two natures—divine spirit that is dynamic, creative, untiring and immortal and flesh in its total weakness, dependence and possibility of dying—are united. These natures are polar opposites. From an OT point of view, it is impossible to think of God as flesh. Divine nature is spirit in an absolute and infinite sense and is the opposite of flesh. The NT does not say God is flesh, but it does affirm that the divine Son became flesh and partook of the whole experience of flesh as his own experience.

The NT does not wrestle with how the two opposite natures can be joined in one person. It simply states and works with the truth that the divine Son became human and that the human Jesus was divine. The deity and humanity are held together in the fact that Jesus carried out his divine role in the world by dying in the flesh. This is brought into focus in Heb 1.2-3 where Christ's act of making purification for sins (through death) is presented in a resume of his divine glory.

We can put it this way: the creative and life-giving power of divine spirit was carried out in this world by Jesus through his flesh in its utter weakness in death. Herein lays the key to understanding the union of the two natures. The focus in the NT is not on the way two natures with opposite qualities are held together but on how they work together in that the role of the divine nature is carried out in the utter weakness of the flesh in dying.

This yields an important insight for our understanding of the humanity of Christ. In Christ we have two natures that are polar opposites united in a dynamic way. All that he did in the weakness of flesh he did as the divine Son to realize in this world what he could not realize without working through the ultimate weakness of the flesh. We can put this the other way around. All that he did as the powerful Son (e.g., his miracles) he did in the weakness of his flesh, realizing in his flesh God's relation to man in his weakness. In Jesus we do not have a split personality, sometimes acting in the consciousness and power of God and sometimes acting in the weakness of man. The union of the two natures was inseparable and essential to who he was. Yes, we do see the different dynamics in him: sometimes the power is in focus and sometimes the weakness. But, the cross, in which he showed the greatest and ultimate weakness, seals the fact that in all of his weakness he was carrying out the dynamic role of God in bringing about a new creation.

3. Flesh in relation to God

We have stressed the genuineness of Jesus' human nature in its created weakness. But, his humanity could not contradict his relation as divine Son to God. As Son, Jesus holds the primary relationship with God through which all others must be related. By becoming flesh, he put human nature into the perfect relationship with God. Let's open this up.

The relationship between flesh and God is presented forcefully in Jer 17.5-8:

Thus says the LORD;
“Cursed is the man who trusts in man
and makes flesh his strength,
whose heart turns away from the LORD.
He is like a shrub in the desert,
and shall not see any good come.
He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land.
Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.
He is like a tree planted by water,
that sends out its roots by the stream,
and will not fear when heat comes,
for its leaves remain green,
and is not anxious in the year of drought
for it does not cease to bear fruit.

The curse is not only on people who trust other people but on those who take their strength from *flesh*, even their own. As water gives vitality to a tree, so the Lord is the source of life and strength to a person. Flesh by its very nature is no source of life. To draw on the flesh for life and strength is to turn in one's heart from the LORD and so to be cursed. This points to the true relation of flesh to God. In its utter weakness, it is designed for a relationship of total dependence on God in which the life and strength experienced in the flesh is God's direct action on man. Only man in the absolute weakness of flesh can be related to God in his absolute strength.

Jesus was a true man, and his humanity was no source of strength to him. His whole life and power was in his Father. This was not simply true in his relation as a man to God but first of all in his eternal relation as the Son to the Father. He makes this clear in Jn 5.19-30. In his divine relationship with the Father, all that he is and does has its source in the Father. In keeping with this, Jesus held his flesh in perfect weakness and dependence on God. He gave expression to this in Jn 6.57 when he said, “As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me.” Just as our life in the body is dependent on food and we receive eternal life from the incarnate Son, so Jesus was dependent on his Father. Through his perfect dependence on the Father, Jesus carried out as a man his oneness with the Father. This has the profound result that God is the Father, in the fullest sense, not only of the eternal Son but of the man, Jesus.

D. A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE INCARNATION

The union of deity and humanity in the person of Christ must be seen from two points of view. His deity must be understood within the trinity, and his humanity must be seen from the point of view set in creation. When seen in this way, humanity is the perfect fit for the Son's deity, and this made the incarnation possible.

The Bible does not present a simple or one dimensional view of man. To gain a full and true understanding of the incarnation, we must work with three aspects of human nature. The first aspect is presented in Gen 1.26-27. Here we see man in his vertical relationships. As the image of God, he is related up to God and down to the world in which he is to represent God and rule. This relative position of man corresponds to the position and function of the Son in the trinity. The Son is the image of the invisible God and the one through whom God relates to the world and because of this he can take the place of man as the image of God.

The second aspect of humanity that we must bring to our understanding of the incarnation is provided by the view of man in Gen 2.7. Here we see that the incarnation must be the union of deity with humanity in its concrete reality as a composite being of body, spirit and soul. Man is made up of two components: dust and spirit. The union of the two makes a living soul. For the Son of God to become human, he had to become the whole human unit. There is a definite order in the way God made man, and this order defines man. He is not defined by what we would call his higher nature, i.e., the spirit, but from the dust. He is flesh, and flesh involves his spirit. This defines the great act in which God became human as incarnation, i.e., enfleshment.

It is not enough to say that deity was joined to humanity in its entire nature. This union brings out a third aspect of the incarnation, and this is the crucial one: opposite natures were united in one person. On the surface, it appears that the fact that they are opposites makes them incompatible, but a deeper look at what is involved shows that the two natures are polar opposites that can be perfectly joined. Divine nature is all powerful and life-giving. If there was any strength in flesh, it would compromise the integrity of the divine nature. It is precisely because flesh is opposite to divine nature in that it is wholly weak that it can be joined to deity, and in the union each nature maintains its full integrity. The divine is the life and strength and the flesh is dependent, weak and receiving. This perfect union between deity and humanity we see in Jesus Christ. In him, we also see the wonder of this. The divine strength is worked out through the ultimate human weakness on the cross so that the humanity in its weakness becomes the organ of the working of God's greatest power. The humanity is raised up to the divine function, not by becoming supernatural but in its true natural weakness.

To appreciate the union of divine power and human weakness at the cross, it is helpful to see the new creation in comparison with the first one. The creation of the universe was the display of God's eternal power (Rom 1.20). Our minds cannot naturally conceive of greater power than that of God speaking the universe into being. But, sin and death showed up a vulnerability. After all, for all of the power displayed in creation, death seems to reign over all. God's creative power could not overturn this power of death. God triumphed over death through the cross, and the resurrection of Jesus is the beginning of the new creation. This creation, which takes up human nature, cannot undergo decay. Here we have the power of an endless life. The power of God at work in Jesus through his resurrection is infinitely greater than the power of God in creating the world. This is power at an entirely new level, and this power was worked out in the weakness of Jesus' flesh and at the point of ultimate weakness—his death.

The doctrine of the incarnation develops and completes the doctrine of man. We based our study of the doctrine of man on Genesis 1 to 3, and this must be the case for the nature of man is established in creation. But, creation is only a beginning. Man was set up by God to develop and realize who he was. The first sin was the initial step man took to develop what it meant to be human. The faculties that man had as the image of God were used for man to be like God so that he no longer acted to represent God but made himself the source of his own action and identity. The image of God usurped the role of God. The movement in this is from the bottom up. The incarnation is the answer to this. It was God's intention that human nature be joined to deity, but this had to happen in a way that remained true to man's position as the image of God. Jesus showed what this involved. The perfect union with God consists in perfect submission so that in all God is represented and expressed.

In both creation accounts, man is seen as dust, a being whose nature is defined by the ground. This is expressed in the name for man, Adam, which comes from the Hebrew word *adamah* that means the ground. It is also made clear in Gen 2.7 where man is identified by the body of dust coming to life. The scriptures focus on man's weak nature and his utter dependence on God. In the original sin, Satan pointed to self-development in the area of spirit, i.e., of the mind, by suggesting that they will become like God by becoming wise. This shift has turned man's self understanding around. In the great cultures of the world, man is seen in terms of his higher faculties, so he is understood as a soul whose body is not an essential part of his being. This bears witness to mankind's chronic denial of the reality presented in creation—that man is essentially weak. The doctrine of the incarnation is beautifully true to creation in two ways. First, human nature is kept intact as one unit, which witnesses against the tendency in pagan and philosophical thinking of taking the human being apart and identifying the person with the immaterial soul to the disparagement of the body. Second, by becoming flesh the incarnation was true to the order of creation. God did not identify with the higher part of man in isolation from this weak and lowly flesh. In the incarnate Son we see that the true exaltation of human nature is in God taking up human nature as flesh, and the power and wisdom of God works through the weakness of human nature in death rather than through the strength and intellectual prowess of man.

In sin man understands himself in terms the faculties and powers he has as a result of having spirit imparted to him. He defines himself by what he calls his higher nature—his soul, his spirit, his mind. But, by exalting himself by his share in the higher faculties, he is in actual fact controlled and driven by his lower nature, i.e., his flesh. We see this in Genesis 3. Eve was motivated and moved from below, the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes. The mind that is autonomous and is not in subjection to God is set on the things of the flesh to carry out the lusts of the flesh. By the flesh, the mind and the whole person are degraded. When man sins he falls short of the glory of God with which he was endowed in creation and which he is to attain throughout his life. In

the incarnation, we see the true alignment of human nature and God. Jesus ever took all that he was from the Father. His eternal relationship with the Father governed him totally. The flesh never initiated a move in him. The result was he had complete mastery over his human nature and the world around him. His humanity did not degrade his higher powers. Rather, in perfect submission his flesh was exalted as the organ of full deity, and when this was fully carried out he was glorified in his body with the glory he had with the Father before the foundation of the world (Jn 17.5). The Son of God became incarnate to bring us into this perfect union with God, and to bring us to this glory which God prepared for us. To explore how this is brought about in us, we will have to continue our study of the whole counsel of God.