

DAILY DOSE OF DOCTRINE

December 31, 2007- January 4, 2008



December 31, 2007

Son of Man

*"In my vision...was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him...."*¹

The 'Son of Man' was a common title for the Messiah in the first century and the most common self-designation of Jesus. Rather than veiling his identity, it was a bold claim. Jesus may have used it because it was a title that would have been less offensive to the Romans and, among the Jews, it had less 'baggage' than others. However a survey of Jesus' usage indicates that it is employed in passages that:

- a) Teach about the second coming², thereby affirming that he is the Messianic king who will fulfill all the prophecies made of him in the Old Testament prophets;
- b) Speak of his coming suffering and death³, reinforcing that the divine Word truly will experience the cross;
- c) Refer to the pre-existence of Christ or stress his heavenly nature⁴, perhaps to remind us that he is truly human as well as divine.

In recent years the revitalized quest for the 'historical Jesus' has emphasized his humanity at the expense of his divinity. However, there has historically been a tendency to stress the latter at the expense of the former. Jesus was not merely God-wearing-a-human-disguise. God the Son truly took on a human nature. He truly became one of us and suffered on our behalf.⁵

¹ Daniel 7:13-14 (TNIV)

² E.g. Matthew 16:27-28; Mark 8:38; 13:26

³ Matthew 17:22; 20:18,19, 28

⁴ E.g. John 1:51; 3:13-14; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28, etc

⁵ Philippians 2

January 1, 2008

Son of God

“When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that happened, they were terrified and exclaimed, ‘Surely he was the Son of God!’”¹

In the Old Testament, ‘son of God’ is applied to the people of Israel², to the coming Messianic king³ and to angels⁴. While the New Testament follows the precedent of the Old in applying ‘sons of God’ to believers⁵, the title ‘Son of God’ is in a different league, clearly emphasizing to Jesus’ divinity.

For example, in the birth narratives, Son of God points to Jesus’ supernatural paternity: human through Mary and divine through the work of the Holy Spirit.⁶

While in his early ministry, Jesus kept his identity under wraps, the demons were not so reticent. They repeatedly identified him as the Son of God⁷, seeing with spiritual eyes the One whom they hate and fear.

Jesus’ opponents saw his claim to Sonship as equivalent to claiming divinity for himself⁸. Jesus and his followers concurred with that assessment.⁹ Jesus is God the Son united with the son of Mary: fully human and fully divine.

¹ Matthew 27:54 (NIV)

² Exodus 4:22; Jeremiah 31:9; Hosea 11:1 See also John 8:41

³ 2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2; 89:27

⁴ Genesis 6:2,4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Psalm 89:6

⁵ John 1:13; Galatians 3:26 (note the masculine ‘sons’ for both male and female Christians – emphasizing that Creation-equality is restored in the Kingdom of God.)

⁶ Luke 1:35; See also Matt. 1:18-24; John 1:13

⁷ Matt. 4:3,6; 14:33; Mark 3:11; 5:7; Luke 4:41; 8:28 See James 2:19 re. demonic ‘faith’.

⁸ John 5:18; 19:7

⁹ John 1:14, 18; Romans 1:3-4; Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 1:1

January 2, 2008

Fully Human

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.”¹

Jesus was not simply God the Son disguised as a human being. He was fully human. This is important for a number of reasons.

First, in order to pay the penalty for human sin, Jesus had to be one of us. That penalty involved not only ‘death’ as separation from God, but also suffering of body and soul.² As the only sinless human³, he was uniquely qualified for this task.

As our intermediary, Jesus is also one who has experienced every dimension of human life. He has known temptation, sorrow, betrayal, disappointment, success, joy - the whole gamut of the human experience. We have no need of saints or other go-betweens whom we feel may be more ‘user-friendly’. Jesus has been there and sympathizes with our situation.⁴

And, Jesus is our role model. His is the perfect example of one who loved God and others. He wrestled with other ways, but chose sacrificial obedience. Having ‘walked in our shoes’, Jesus wants us to ‘follow in his footsteps’⁵.

¹ Hebrews 2:14-17

² John 12:27; Acts 3:18; Hebrews 2:14-17, 9:22

³ Hebrews 4:15; 7:26

⁴ Hebrews 4:14-16

⁵ John 13:13-15; Phil 2:5-8; 1 Peter 2:21

January 3, 2008

Fully Divine

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”¹

Other religions and offshoots of Christianity generally deny the divinity of Jesus Christ. They assert that he was a great Teacher, a Prophet, the first among the Angels or a first century Palestinian rebel against an oppressive regime.

The Scriptures boldly declare his divinity. The Old Testament hints at it, Jesus quietly nurtured the revelation and his followers asserted it verbally and in their worship of the risen Christ.

Christ’s divinity matters because the sacrifice of a human for sin, even a perfect human, would be inadequate. If Christ were a creature, God could have cloned a million more. Were would the cost be in that?

*“No one can redeem the life of another
or give to God a sufficient ransom—
the ransom for a life is costly,
no payment is ever enough—
so that someone should live on forever
and not see decay.”²*

The sacrifice of one perfect human could conceivably atone for the wrongdoing of one sinner. Only the sacrifice of God himself can atone for the wrong of all humanity.

And only God himself could be in a position to turn around and offer that dearly purchased pardon as a free gift to us.

¹ John 3:16 (TNIV)

² Psalm 49:7-9 (TNIV)

January 4, 2008

Interlude...

“Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.”¹

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there was a trend in many seminaries to discover the ‘true’, ‘historical’ Jesus of Nazareth. These scholars either accepted the Enlightenment dogma that God does not work miraculously or they felt that, to appeal to a ‘modern’ audience, the Church needed to strip away anything in the Bible that seemed ‘mythic’. Based on these presumptions, many preachers set aside the supernatural interventions of God, including the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection of Jesus and teaching on his divinity. The ‘historic’ Jesus of 20th century mainline Christianity was a human rabbi who was crucified for teachings that ran afoul of Jewish and Roman authorities. ‘Liberal’ theologians conceded that he might have been ‘spiritually’ resurrected, but their focus was primarily on following his moral teachings and his example in opposing political, social and economic injustice.

As with the first-century Sadducees, this outlook is based largely on a lack of faith in the Scriptures and in the power of God which lies behind the events that they record. Truths such as the incarnation and the resulting divine/human nature of Jesus do defy human comprehension. But our lack of understanding does not make them impossible.

If the Creator of the Universe is able to fashion galaxies, animals and sub-atomic particles, why is it impossible for him to cause a virgin to have a child? Can he not sort out how to unite the human and divine in one person? *“Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With human beings this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.’”²*

¹ Matthew 22:29 (TNIV)

² Mark 10:27 (TNIV); also Matthew 19:26