

GOD IN THE FLESH

By

Curtis Dickinson

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

In Christ we do not see a mere similarity to God, but we see God in the flesh. And in Him we do not see a mere paragon of man, but we see a man, representative of all men — One hundred percent God; one hundred percent man.

A young Bible College graduate was loudly condemning a liberal preacher for not believing in the virgin birth of Jesus. A friend of mine asked him why the virgin birth was important to the Christian faith. He could not answer. For decades a theological battle has been waged over the question of the deity of Jesus. It is generally held in most churches that Jesus was God in the flesh, but after this facet of faith is affirmed, there still remains the question of WHY?

Many in Christendom today insist upon doctrines without any understanding of their meaning. The “good news” of Christianity is powerless if that “news” is without meaning to those who hear it. One does not rejoice over “news” if it has no personal significance.

At this season there is much being said and written about the death and resurrection of Jesus. Many see only a symbolical connection between God and man in these great events. Others maintain that the atonement is too great a mystery for any explanation at all, and they use the event as the source for multitudes of illustrative parallels from which are drawn ideas of God’s love and man’s sin. But these are not to be mistaken for the event itself. If there be rivulets and springs and ripples found along the river’s shore, this leaves no excuse for anyone to say he cannot find the main stream. One who knows the map will immediately say, “Here is the river.” It is easy to realize how significant this knowledge would be to one whose life depended on getting across the river!

The apostles not only believed in the virgin birth and the atonement and resurrection, they knew why Christ was born of a woman and why He suffered and died. They pursued the fleshly appearance of the Christ to the very last detail in explaining why it was necessary for Him to become flesh and blood, why He was hanged on a tree, why He had to suffer indescribable pain and death and why there is no other possible means of delivering man from his “bondage of death.”

Well, why **did** God become flesh?

The writer of Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus was actually the fleshly Son of God “being the effulgence of His glory, and the very image of His substance” (Hebrews 1:3). There is a rather detailed proof of the deity of Jesus in Hebrews Chapter one, down to the 9th verse of Chapter two. Then the writer explains the reason: “that by the grace of God

He should taste of death for every man” (Hebrews 2:9). He then states in plain words that “since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death he might bring to naught him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:14-15).

The death of Jesus was not the death of a “spirit” or the death of a “god.” It was the flesh and blood death of a human being. It was not a “spiritual death” nor a “spiritual separation from God.” Such a so-called spiritual separation would hardly have necessitated His sharing in the flesh and blood of humanity. While Jesus was indeed forsaken from God the Father when He accepted the responsibility and guilt of the sin of man, it was not His “separation” that met the demands of God’s law that the penalty for sin is death. Repeatedly the Bible speaks of His giving His “blood,” and his “life.” When He gave His life-blood He was giving up His life, and dying as a man dies, as a representative died for all mankind who receive Him in faith.

It is inconsistent to say that the wages of sin is “spiritual separation from God,” then insist that Jesus became a flesh and blood man in order to suffer the wages of sin. In fact the Bible leaves out the “spiritual separation” bit and simply states that the wages of sin is death, and this death underwent for all believers.

Peter writes that “He bare our sins in His body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24). In Hebrews it is written of Him, “But a body did thou prepare for me” and “by which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:6-10).

If God were to execute man for his sin and rebellion then man would have no hope, for all have sinned. But God, in unfathomable love and mercy became the one to bear our sins. “He who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Thus the justice of God is met in the punishment of sin through the death of Jesus, and that not in some mystical spiritual sense, but in the flesh and blood death of Jesus as a man hanging on a Roman cross, the instrument ordinarily used for the execution of insurrectionists and criminals.

In the light of the fact that Christ had to become human in order to die a human death as the judgment of sin, the virgin birth takes on real significance. Jesus was planted in the womb of Mary by the power of God, and without the aid of man. But from that point on he developed physically as a human being, through birth, childhood and manhood. He is, therefore, the son of God and the son of Humanity (of Mary) and He readily adopted both titles: Son of God and Son of Man. As Son of God He was God offering Himself to man as One Who would bear man’s sin and thus be man’s Savior. As Son of Man He was a perfect sinless human being, accepting the guilt of man’s sin and voluntarily suffering the judgment and penalty of that sin — death.

Thus the birth of Jesus is directly connected with His death and resurrection. If he were not born of a virgin, then He was only a man, and not God at all and without power to

appropriate our sins and die in our place. And if He were not truly human, He could not die a human death and thus take our place in judgment. But thanks be to God He was both. “For there is one God, one mediator also between God and man, himself man, Christ Jesus who gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

Furthermore, being truly human, He has in His resurrection given a living demonstration of the ultimate hope of a sinless person. The resurrection of Jesus in the body is more than a proof of His deity. It is a preview of what is to happen to every one who is free from the guilt of sin. “But now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of them that are asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20). The first-fruits are representative of the fruit that follows, and since Christ literally arose in the body, we can be sure that all who are freed from sin by His death will be raised up in this same fashion.

God has once and for all given an answer to man’s problem of sin and death. It is reasonable, understandable and directly connected with our mortal problem. Therefore we are under the deepest obligation, not merely to pursue the answer to this question but to find it, and to share it. There is something better than the pursuit of truth. That is: finding it. And there is something even better than that. That is: telling others.

JUST FOR YOU–TH

Sometimes great pressure is applied to persuade a person to accept Christianity. This isn’t right, but it happens, and young people are often the subjects of this pressure, especially at youth camps. The result is that many youth have found themselves a part of the Christian group without any of the feeling of responsibility toward that group.

Many times when a person grows up to see what is really expected of him as a Christian he simply gives up the idea of Christianity rather than meet the responsibilities.

But there are a lot of youth who love God and have a deep desire to please Him, and who really do your best to fulfill your responsibility as a Christian citizen. Maybe the church hasn’t made any demands upon you. Maybe you often wonder just what is expected of you as a Christian and a part of the Lord’s church. No matter how young you might have been when you become a Christian, and no matter what your present age, here are a few things to be expected of you:

1. You are expected to take God seriously. While God doesn’t frown upon “fun,” there is nothing funny about His commands and what He is doing in this world. Some youth programs are punctuated with songs that can be classified only as silly. The purpose is probably to give everyone the sense of joy and happiness, but these things do not come from a made-up joy, nor from jokes and shallow songs.

To be serious doesn’t mean to be solemn. It means that one considers the true meaning of his actions and speech. It might seem like a terrible ordeal to sit through church and Bible School without a giggle or a remark or at least a note to express some frivolous

idea. But try it, and see if that hour or two of serious thought with God doesn't make your life more worthwhile and happy.

2. You are to take the church seriously. You are as much a member as the teacher or the elder or even the preacher. Do not think of the church as "they" or "it." Think of the church as "we" and "us." YOU have a share in the worship, fellowship, learning, praying and general life of the church. All the older members now have a stake in your life, and you should have a genuine interest in them. And whether you are at the drive-in, the swimming pool, or in the automobile dragging the streets, you are still the church!

3. Youth should respond to the material needs, for buildings and maintenance and other expenses, just like their parents. If you have an allowance or earn money, you are responsible as a good steward to share it with the church. According to recent surveys YOU-th spend a lot of money. Three out of four teenagers own watches, four out of five own radios and 49% own record changers. More than 800,000 youth own a set of "wheels" (cars to the old folks) and more than 10 billion dollars yearly is spent by the nation's 18 million teenaged youth. Of course the church depends on the adults to carry the load, financially, and this isn't brought up just to increase the weekly offering, either. But you are morally responsible to God for your total life and all you possess, now that you are a Christian. And you are expected to live up to this moral responsibility.

4. Youth are expected to grow. You should be a much better Christian than you were a year ago, or even 6 months ago. I think that YOU-th are capable of deep and serious commitment to God, and I believe that God expects it.

Now, **YOU-th**, what do you expect of the church? Let us hear from you.

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