

## He Who on Earth as Man Was Known

*John Newton (1725–1807)*

He who on earth as man was known,  
And bore our sins and pains;  
Now, seated on th' eternal throne,  
The God of glory reigns.

His hands the wheels of nature guide  
With an unerring skill;  
And countless worlds extended wide,  
Obey his sov'reign will.

While harps unnumber'd sound his praise,  
In yonder world above;  
His saints on earth admire his ways,  
And glory in his love.

His righteousness, to faith reveal'd,  
Wrought out for guilty worms;  
Affords a hiding place and shield,  
From enemies and storms.

This land thro' which his pilgrims go,  
Is desolate and dry;  
But streams of grace from him o'erflow,  
Their thirst to satisfy.

When troubles like a burning sun,  
Beat heavy on their head;  
To this almighty rock they run,  
And find a pleasing shade.

How glorious he! how happy they  
In such a glorious friend!  
Whose love secures them all the way,  
And crowns them at the end.

## ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### He Dwelt Among Us

*Kevin T. Bauder*

The apostle John calls Jesus the *Word*. He affirms that the Word was God. He also affirms that the Word became flesh. The same person who was God before the beginning assumed a complete human nature in time. He became the God-man. While continuing to subsist as one, single person, He now had two natures.

This assumption of humanity is a great mystery. Finite beings can never fully understand what it means. Still, Scripture does reveal some of what it means, if we are willing to think hard about it. For example, Christians affirm that the Word now subsists “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.”

The Word became flesh. Furthermore, the Word “dwelt among us” (John 1:14). He did not assume human nature as a mere theoretical construct. Rather, He came and lived as a human among humans. The God-man lived a fully human life. He plunged into the natural world that He had created. The Uncreated became part of His own creation.

This truth staggers the imagination. He who was before all beginnings had a beginning. He who made all things became a thing made. How can a rational person affirm such seeming opposites?

The answer lies in the one-person-two-natures doctrine of Chalcedon. The one person Jesus Christ is both God and man. Because He is God, He possesses all divine attributes. Because He is human, he possesses all human attributes. He claims any property that is essential to being human.

Before explaining what that means, one qualification is necessary. Jesus does not display features that were not part of the original human nature but that humans later picked up. In particular, the Word does not sin. Sin is not a necessary property of human nature. Sin is an accretion (or, more accurately, a deprivation) that has never been necessary to complete humanity. Before the fall, humans did not sin. After glorification, saved people will never sin again. Christ never sinned, and, as a divine-human person, never could sin. More on that in a moment.



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Here is where the apparent conflict comes in: the properties that the person of Christ displays in His human nature seem incompatible with those that He enjoys in His divine nature. According to His divine nature, He is eternal—before all beginnings. According to His human nature, He had a beginning when He became flesh.

According to His divine nature, Christ is everywhere present in the fulness of His being. Yet while He dwelt among us, He could be found in some particular place at any given moment. He occupied specific locations: a manger, a ship, a mountain, a cross, a tomb.

Similarly, according to His divine nature, Christ knows all things and possesses all wisdom. But when He dwelt among us, Christ did not know the day or hour of His own coming (Mark 12:32). He even had to ask who touched Him (Luke 8:45–46). According to His human nature, He was ignorant of some things.

The whole point of Christ’s arrival in the world hinged on one of these apparent contradictions. As God, He was eternal, immortal, and invisible (1 Tim 1:17). But when He came to earth, He was given a mortal body (Heb 10:5–9). For the time He was here, He was made lower than the angels so that He could suffer death (Heb 2:9), and He actually did taste death for everyone.

Christians hold certain simple propositions to be true. God cannot die. Christ is God. Yet Christ died. Is this a brute contradiction?

The answer is *no*. Christ is one person in two natures. Each nature retains its native properties or attributes. Whatever can be said about either nature can be said about the person, but only *according to that nature*. In other words, the properties of each nature communicate to the person. Yet the properties of each nature do not communicate to the other nature.

Therefore, while He dwelt among us, Christ was eternal according to His divine nature but temporal according to His human nature. His human nature did not become eternal. His divine nature did not become temporal. But as one person, He is truly eternal and truly temporal, according to the respective natures.

This is why biblical Christianity affirms that Christ could not sin. God cannot even be tempted to sin (Jas 1:13). He is utterly holy (Hab 1:13; Rev 4:8). According to His divine nature, Christ could not be tempted and could not sin. Yet according to His human nature, He could be tempted, and He really did experience temptation (Matt 4:1–11). Does the temptability of His human nature mean that Jesus could sin?

Even supposing that Jesus could sin according to His human nature, His human nature was never free to act on its own. To affirm two natures that

can act independently (like two separate persons) is the heresy of Nestorianism. Jesus’ human nature was always joined to His divine nature in His one person. To use an analogy, even if His human nature could be bent like a paperclip, the paperclip was permanently welded to a massive bar of iron (His divine nature) that could never bend. Even if Jesus could sin according to His human nature, His person never could. And natures never sin. Only persons do.

The rule is this: whatever can be said about either of Christ’s natures can be said about His person according to that nature. Nevertheless, it cannot be said about the other nature. This “communication of predicates” is fundamental to right thinking about the incarnation of Christ. But it also raises other questions that John does not address directly. It may be worth taking a brief detour to discuss some of those questions.



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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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