Matthew - Commentaries by Frank Binford Hole

Foundations of the Faith: Key Teachings, Deity and Humanity of Christ, The

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There is no greater question between the covers of the Book than that which the Lord Himself raised with the unbelieving men of His day — “What think ye of Christ?” (Mt. 22:42). In these five short words He set before them the pivotal point upon which everything turns. The deepest foundations of the faith lie here, and any error or fault in this matter is sure to make its influence felt throughout the whole building. As John Newton puts it: “‘What think ye of Christ?’ is the test to try both your state and your scheme; You cannot be right in the rest, unless you think rightly of Him.”

Our object is to show that the Scriptures present our Lord Jesus Christ as the true God who in grace beyond all comprehension became true Man for the vindication of God’s glory and our redemption. We will take the two parts of our subject separately, and begin by affirming the deity of Jesus.

First of all, turn to the Old Testament. It is a true saying that “Coming events cast their shadows before.” Little events cast little shadows; great events great shadows. Commencing with Genesis 3:15, references to the coming of One who should be a Deliverer abound. The Coming One is of such majestic importance that He casts a shadow which stretches over the complete four thousand or more years before His advent. We may well inquire who He is.

Let Isaiah 9:6 furnish us with an answer: “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” Take careful notice of this remarkable prophecy. It does not speak of some passing manifestation of God as was the case when Jehovah appeared for a brief moment in human guise to Abraham as recorded in Genesis 18. “The mighty God” is the name of the Child who is to be born, the Son who is to be given, who is, as the next verse shows, to sit on David’s throne, and exercise government thence, producing an age of justice and consequent peace upon earth.

Further, Isaiah 9:6-7 are the climax of a prophecy which began in Isaiah 7, when Isaiah encountered Ahaz, King of Judah, and gave him a sign from the Lord. The sign was, “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” —Immanuel meaning “God with us,” as explained in Matthew 1:23.

Isaiah 8 makes further reference to the coming Immanuel, and His rejection is hinted at in verses 14 -18 of that chapter; and then in Isaiah 9 we discover that the virgin’s Son is to be born not for herself alone, but as God’s gift to the whole of Israel, the coming Deliverer and King, and His Name is given us in five-fold completeness.

Now, bear in mind that in Scripture a name is, generally speaking, descriptive of the one who owns it, and not a mere label without any such meaning as names often are with us today; and then ponder the meaning of “the Name” of the virgin’s Son in its fivefold character.

“Wonderful” — Something singular or unique, altogether surpassing ordinary human knowledge.

“Counselor” — One marked by wisdom, resource, and authority. He who is in the secret of the divine counsels and able to put them into effect.

“The mighty God” — The full title of Deity. The Hebrew word for God is in the singular El, not Elohim, which is plural. The virgin’s Son is singularly God, if one may so speak.

“The everlasting Father” or “Father of Eternity.” He from whom eternal ages spring and have their being.

“The Prince of Peace” — He who will ultimately end all the discords of earth under righteous rule.

We may sum up the whole passage by saying that there is only one word which adequately describes the real character and being of the virgin’s Son, and that word is God.

Turn now to Micah 5:2. Just as the prophecy of the virgin’s Son is recalled in Matthew 1, so this is quoted in Matthew 2, and both are there referred to Christ. Bethlehem was of small consequence in itself, insignificant amongst the thousands of Judah, yet was it to leap into undying fame. And wherefore? “Out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”

Here, notice, we have, not the Child born, the Son given “unto us,” i.e., Israel, but that One who should come forth “unto Me,” i.e., Jehovah, to be His Ruler in the midst of Israel. As “judge of Israel” he would be rejected as verse 1 intimates, for He was Jehovah’s “holy Child [or Servant] Jesus,” against whom “both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together” (Acts 4:27). Yet this holy Servant was so infinitely great that His goings forth were from of old, from “the days of eternity” (marginal reading).

There can be no evading the force of this astounding statement. The Babe who lay in Bethlehem’s manger was He whose “goings forth” had been from the days of eternity. He had gone forth as the active Worker in creation, for by Him God made the worlds (cf. Heb. 1:2). He had gone forth, too, as the Angel of Jehovah’s presence in former days, but never in such fashion as when, becoming flesh by means of the virgin’s womb, He came forth unto Jehovah at Bethlehem. Again we must say that there is only one word that will adequately set forth the real character and being of the Babe of Bethlehem, and that word is God.

We pass to the New Testament, and in Romans 1:1-4 we read that “the gospel of God” is “concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh.” It was the Son of God who became David’s seed by incarnation, and though He was rejected as Son of David yet He was declared “the Son of God with power... by the resurrection from the dead.” This is the way the gospel is introduced to us and it is worthy of close attention. That a Person in the Godhead, who cannot be described, became by incarnation the Son of God, is a false theory, given a fresh lease of life in our day. That the Son of God became by incarnation the Son of David is the truth presented in the gospel of God.

Then again in Romans 9:5 we read of Israel’s crowning glory, i.e., that of their race “as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever.” In these words we have the clearest possible corroboration of what we have just been seeing in the Old Testament. If, however, we wish for the fullest setting forth of the deity of Christ we shall find it in the first chapters of John, Colossians, and Hebrews. Let us take the first of these passages and analyze the first four verses.

In this brief passage six tremendous facts are stated as to “the Word.”

1. “In the beginning was the Word.” He did not begin to be in the beginning, but He was, i.e., He existed in the beginning. The Word has eternal existence.

2. “The Word was with God,” and if with then He must be distinguished as having a personality of His own. The Word has distinct personality.

3. “The Word was God.” Though distinct as to His Person yet none the less God. The Word has essential deity.

4. “The same was in the beginning with God.” He is not, therefore, merely a manifestation of the Deity in time. The Word has eternal personality.

5. “All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made.” He was the active Creator and nothing originated apart from Him. The Word had creatorial originality.

6. “In Him was life.” Here we pass from “all things” which includes inanimate creation, to that which in its lower manifestations characterizes animate creation— to that profound mystery of life which in its very nature must remain unsolved to the creature. The Word has essential vitality.

And now does any lingering doubt remain as to who “the Word” is? Simply then continue reading the passage until verses 16 and 17 be reached. “And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us... full of grace and truth. John bare witness of Him... and of His fullness have all we received and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” The Word has assumed perfect humanity, and as such His name is Jesus Christ.

It is a fact quite worthy of note that each of the four passages we have already examined (Isa. 9, Mic. 5, Rom. 1, John 1), while emphasizing the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ quite clearly declares His true humanity.

Indeed, the humanity of the Lord Jesus would seem to lie so clearly upon the surface of the New Testament that any detailed proof of it should be quite superfluous. And yet the great adversary and corrupter of the faith has not failed to assault this truth, and from very early days in the Church’s history unto today there have been subtle theories afloat which, while extolling Him as Man, yet deny the fullness and perfection of His Manhood. This we say bearing in mind that man as created of God is made up of three constituent parts, “spirit and soul and body,” according to 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

The Lord Jesus clearly claimed each of these three for Himself. We find Him saying, “My spirit” (Luke 23:46), “My soul” (Mark 14:34), My body (Matt. 26:12).

The danger, however, is that some would assent to this, but proceed to whittle away the force of what they admit by claiming that these words on His lips did not mean just what they would have meant on ours; that His spirit, His soul, His body must be understood in some special sense, so that, for instance, His sacred body must not be thought of as a real human body, nor His spirit as a real human spirit. If this were true we should not have “the Man, Christ Jesus” in any real sense at all.

We are not, however, left to reason in this matter. Hebrews 2:16 and 17 plainly states that since He stooped not to take hold of angels but of the seed of Abraham, “in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren.” Note those three important words in all things. If in all things then in spirit and in soul and in body.

Hebrews 4:15 adds a further corroboration of this great fact in stating that as our High Priest He “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” Again we say, note the three important words in all points qualified in this instance by the further three words “yet without sin” or “apart from sin.”

This is a remarkable passage, worthy of deepest study. Verse 14 emphasizes the greatness of our High Priest both in His person as Son of God and in His position in the heavens. Verse 15 emphasizes His graciousness by the fact that he has practically experienced every temptation that besets His saints, always excepting those that are only temptations to us by reason of our fallen sinful natures. Some temptations address themselves to the spirit, others to the soul, others to the body; indeed, it is not difficult to discern that in the wilderness the devil addressed his three temptations in those three directions. In Luke 4:1-13 they are presented in the ascending order: body—soul—spirit; the fiercest tests are always those that address themselves to the highest part of man. The Lord Jesus being truly and fully Man, the test was complete. He fully graduated in the school of suffering, and hence can fully sympathize in all things apart from sin.

These two passages in Hebrews make it abundantly clear that the truth as to the place of our Lord Jesus Christ as our Mediator and Priest hangs upon the fact of His becoming Man in the full and proper sense of that word; hence the emphasis placed upon His manhood in 1 Timothy 2:5: “There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.” He is, indeed, that “Daysman” whom Job sighed for, who “might lay His hand upon us both” (cf. Job 9:32, 33). He knew that God is not a man as he was, and hence the imperative necessity of One great enough to lay His hand upon God, yet gracious enough to lay His hand upon such an one as Job.

The New Testament is the revelation of the Daysman of Job's desire Jesus, who is both God and Man.

How do you explain such a statement as "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28) and other similar statements which, it is claimed by some, show that the Lord Jesus was not really God?

Supposing we could not explain them at all, these statements, many of which occur in John's gospel, would furnish a very slender basis for denying the great fact of His deity, so fully set forth in John 1:1-14, as we have already seen.

The explanation is, however, very simple. The Lord— Jesus was the sent One of the Father, "sanctified i.e., set— apart and sent into the world" John 10:36), and as such He became the Servant of the Father's glory and of man's blessing— the true Hebrew servant of Exodus 21:2-6. The incarnate Son, therefore, became subject to the Father, moving and acting in reference to Him instead of acting on His own initiative. Hence, to quote again from John's gospel, "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do" (John 5:19). All these and similar scriptures refer to the position which the Son took up in relation to the Father when He assumed manhood.

In the business world we sometimes see a father take his sons into an equal partnership and yet retain himself a controlling voice in matters of high policy and finance. The sons are on absolute equality with their father and far more active than he in executing the firm's transactions, yet subordinated to his ripe judgment and wisdom. Let this illustration show how amongst men these two things may be present together in perfect consistency with each other.

We distinguish, therefore, between what the Lord Jesus was and is essentially— equal with God, and what He became relatively— subordinate to the Father's will.

Another difficult passage is Mark 13:32, in which the Lord disclaims knowledge of the day and hour of His return. What is the force of that?

Very similar to what we have just been saying. We would add, however, this: that Scripture always attributes the purposes, counsels, plans of the Godhead; the fixing of times and seasons to the Father. Note particularly Acts 1:7: "The times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power." It equally attributes action, the execution of the purposes of the Godhead, whether in creation, redemption, or judgment, to the Son.

These are deep mysteries of which we know nothing apart from revelation and of which consequently we would speak with reserve and reverence. It is evident that in Mark 13:32 the Lord Jesus spoke in strict keeping with the whole tenor of Scripture. To Him alone belongs the glorious activity, the "coming in the clouds." To the Father alone belongs the times and seasons, the fixing of the day and the hour.

Some people believe that the Lord Jesus limited Himself in knowledge in becoming man. They have what they call the "Kenosis" theory. How does that agree with Scripture?

Like most of the devil's lies, it has the show of appealing to Scripture. The word "Kenosis" is taken from the Greek word used in Philippians 2:7, translated "made Himself of no reputation" in A.V., and "emptied Himself" in R.V., the latter being the more literal rendering. The passage tells us how our Lord Jesus— in the form of God and equal with God, without any "robbery" or "unlawful grasping" (as was the case when Adam aspired to be as God)— emptied Himself in becoming Man. That is, He divested Himself of all that made Him externally glorious till He was only known as the carpenter's son. Thereby He took a place in which He could receive from God all that which otherwise He might have had or done in His own right and power, rather than by the Spirit of God.

It does not mean that He ceased to be what He was, or that He became ignorant and subject to the common opinions and delusions of His day, as is blasphemously asserted. The whole gospel record denies such an evil interpretation of this text. What did He say concerning Himself and His teachings? — "My record is true," "My judgment is true," "As my Father hath taught Me I speak," "I speak that which I have seen with My Father," "Ye seek to kill Me, a Man that hath told you the truth which I have heard of God," "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" All these quotations come from one chapter, John 8.

Unbelieving men hold theories which are quite inconsistent with the teachings of our Lord, therefore His words must be discredited. The discrediting process is more likely to succeed if His trustworthiness can be undermined under cover of rendering homage to His condescension, and also if the whole thing can be labeled with a "scientific" name which sounds very learned while conveying little or nothing to the plain person. Hence the "kenosis" theory.

A great deal has been said in current preaching and literature about "the Christ" and "the historic Jesus" as though they were hardly the same. Is there any Scriptural foundation for this?

Jesus is His personal name as a Man born in this world. Christ, meaning the Anointed One, is rather descriptive of an office He fills. But Jesus is the Christ (cf. Acts 17:3), and there is no other Christ but He. The talk to which you allude is just an instance of that "sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." "The Christ" is turned by them into an empty ideal, and "the historic Jesus" is treated as One of the Christ order showing us how we too may become "Christs." Thus they deny "Jesus Christ come in the flesh," and prove themselves of that spirit of antichrist of which 1 John 4:3 speaks.

No one can really confess Him "come in flesh," save those who believe in His Deity and His Manhood. He came in flesh, therefore He is Man. He— that Person— Jesus Christ, came in flesh. Therefore He is God. We mere men do not come in flesh. We are flesh.

Scripture plainly teaches us that our Lord was born of a virgin. Modern unbelieving theologians as plainly deny it, and treat it as a matter of quite minor importance. Is it after all a matter of vital concern?

It is vital in the last degree. Everything that touches the truthfulness of the Scriptures is vital, for if they are not reliable in one detail, can they be accepted as reliable in any?

It is vital, further, inasmuch as the foundations of the faith are connected with it. In 1 Corinthians 15:45-49 we have the Lord Jesus contrasted with Adam. "The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second Man is the Lord from heaven" (v. 47).

As a matter of mere enumeration Cain was the second man; from the point of view of this verse he was not: he was only Adam reproduced in the first generation. The people walking the earth today are but Adam reproduced in— let us suppose— the 150th generation. But— mark it well— the Lord Jesus was not Adam reproduced at all. He was the second Man. He was Man, indeed, for He was conceived by the virgin Mary. He was an altogether unique Man of another order, for He was conceived of the Holy Ghost.

Every other man inherits the Adamic nature; Jesus did not. Every other man comes into the world under the sorrowful entail (to use a legal word) of sin and death and condemnation, of which the latter part of Romans 5 speaks. In the case of our blessed Lord the entail was broken. He was not born according to the laws of human reproduction. He was not of the Adamic race, but Himself, the last Adam, the Head of a new race in virtue of death and resurrection.

All these great facts go by the board if the virgin birth be not true. It is vital indeed!

It is difficult to understand how the Lord Jesus can be God and Man at the same time. What theory do you hold to account for it?

We hold no theory at all. Rather we hold that all theories on this sacred matter should be rigidly eschewed.

The Lord’s own words were, “No man knoweth the Son but the Father” (Matt. 11:27), and that being so it shows that there are depths of mystery about Him which the creature, however favored and exalted, can never fathom.

There are unfathomable mysteries in creation. Is it then to be wondered at that, when He who was Creator deigned to enter the ranks of creation by becoming Man, there are mysteries connected with the manner of His doing it which forever transcend the creature mind?

The truth as to the absolute and essential deity of the Lord Jesus is abundantly stated in Scripture, as also is the truth of the reality, fullness, and perfection of His Manhood. To start theorizing as to how these things can be is but the natural impertinence of the human mind. We rather take the place of believing what is revealed, bowing our heads and worshipping.

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