

Tenets of the Faith - Lesson 13

Attacks on the Faith: Incarnation

Introduction

The word *incarnation* means “in flesh” and denotes the act whereby the eternal Son of God took to Himself an additional nature, humanity, through the virgin birth. The result is that Christ is not only perfect Deity but also possesses true, sinless humanity in one person forever. John 1:14 - “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” And 1 Tim. 3:16 - “Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.”

Christ’s Genealogies

Two genealogies describe the incarnation of Christ: Matt. 1:1-16 and Luke 3:23-38. Some have argued that this shows an inconsistency in the Bible or that it proves that Jesus was born of a human father. Neither of these arguments stands up. The first genealogy is indeed the lineage through Joseph, who was Jesus’ adopted Father and gave him legal standing through Solomon to the throne of David. The second genealogy is that of His mother, Mary and goes back through Nathan and David and then all the way back to Adam, connecting Jesus with the predicted “seed of the woman.”

Virgin Birth

Three Reason for the importance of the Virgin Birth:

- 1) It shows the salvation ultimately must come from the Lord. Just as God had promised that the “seed” of the woman (Gen 3:15) would ultimately destroy the serpent, so God brought it about by his own power, not through mere human effort. The virgin birth of Christ is an unmistakable reminder that salvation can never come through human effort, but must be the work of God Himself. Our salvation only comes about through the supernatural work of God, and that has been evident since the very beginning of Jesus’ life.
- 2) The virgin birth made possible the uniting of full deity and full humanity in one person. This was the means God used to send His Son (John 3:16, Gal. 4:4) into the world as a man. God, in His infinite Wisdom, ordained a combination of human and divine influence in the birth of Christ, so that His full humanity would be evident to us from the fact of His ordinary human birth from a human mother, and his full deity would be evident from the fact of His conception in Mary’s womb by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit.
- 3) The virgin birth makes possible Christ’s true humanity without inherited sin. Luke 1:35 - “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow

you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.” This scripture connects the conception by the Holy Spirit with the holiness or moral purity of Christ, and reflection on that fact allows us to understand that through the absence of a human father, Jesus was not full descended from Adam, and that this break in the line of descent was the method God used to bring it about that Jesus was fully human yet did not share inherited sin from Adam.

Jesus Had a Human Body

The fact that Jesus had a human body just like our human bodies is seen in many passages of Scripture. He was born just as all human babies are born (Luke 2:7). He grew through childhood to adulthood just as other children grow: Luke 2:40 - “And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.” Luke also tells us that “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52). As fully human, Jesus became tired (John 4:6), thirsty (John 19:28), hungry (Matt. 4:2), physically weak (Matt. 4:11), weak (Luke 23:26) and eventually succumbed to death on the cross (Luke 23:46).

Even after His resurrection Jesus repeatedly demonstrated to His disciples that He had a real physical body: He says, “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39). Another evidence of this fact is that “they gave Him a piece of broiled fish, and He took it and ate before them” (Luke 24:42; John 20:17, 20, 27; 21:9, 13). In this same human body (though a resurrection body made perfect), Jesus also ascended into heaven. He said before He left, “I am leaving the world and going to the Father” (John 16:28; 17:11). The way in which Jesus ascended up to heaven was calculated to demonstrate the continuity between His existence in a physical body here on earth and His continuing existence in that body in heaven (Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9). All of these verses taken together show that Jesus’ human body was like ours in every respect before His resurrection, and after His resurrection it was still a human body with “flesh and bones,” but made perfect, the kind of body that we will have when Christ returns and we are raised from the dead or meet him in the clouds upon His return.

Jesus Had a Human Mind, Emotions and Soul

Luke 2:52 - Jesus “increased in wisdom...” Mark 13:32 - “But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” John 12:27 - “Now is my soul troubled.” John 13:21 - “When Jesus had thus spoken, he was troubled in spirit.” Matt. 26:38 - “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.” Jesus had a full range of human emotions. He “marveled” at the faith of the centurion (Matt. 8:10); He wept with sorrow at the death of Lazarus (John 11:35); and He prayed with a heart full of emotion, for “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 for His godly fear” (Heb. 5:7).

Why Was Jesus' Full Humanity Necessary? As John states in no uncertain terms in 1 John 4:2-3 - "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist." The apostle John understood that to deny Jesus' true humanity was to deny something at the very heart of Christianity, so that no one who denied that Jesus had come in the flesh was sent from God. Jesus had to be fully man if he was going to be the Messiah and earn our salvation. There are seven reasons why Jesus had to be fully man:

1) For Representative Obedience. Romans 5:18 - 19 - "Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."

2) To Be a Substitute Sacrifice (Penal Substitution or Vicarious Atonement). If Jesus had not been a man, he could not have died in our place and paid the penalty that was due to us. Hebrews 2:16-17 - "For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."

3) To Be the One Mediator Between God and Men. Because we were alienated from God by sin, we need someone to come between God and ourselves and bring us back to Him. We needed a Mediator who could represent us to God and who could represent God to us. There is only one person who has ever fulfilled that requirement: 1 Tim. 2:5 - "There is one God, and there is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." In order to fulfill this role as Mediator, Jesus had to be fully man and fully God as well.

4) To Fulfill God's Original Purpose for Man to Rule Over Creation. God put mankind on the earth to subdue it and rule over it as God's representatives. But man did not fulfill that purpose, for he instead fell into sin. When Jesus came as a man, He was able to obey God and thereby have the right to rule over creation as a man, thus fulfilling God's original purpose in putting man on the earth. Indeed, we shall SOMEDAY reign with Him on His throne (Rev. 3:21) and experience, in subjection to Christ our Lord, the fulfillment of God's purpose that we reign over the earth (Luke 19:17, 19; 1 Cor. 6:3). Jesus had to be a man in order to fulfill God's original purpose that man rule over His creation.

5) To Be Our Example and Pattern in Life. John tells us in 1 John 2:6, "He who says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked," and reminds us that "when He appears we shall be like Him," and that "this hope of future conformity to Christ's character even now gives increasing moral purity to our lives" (2 Cor. 3:18), moving us toward the goal for

which God saves us, that we might “be conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29). Throughout our Christian life, we are to run the race set before us “looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrew 12:2). Our goal should be to be like Christ all of our days, up to the point of death, and to die with unflinching obedience to God, with strong trust in Him, and with love and forgiveness to others. Jesus had to become a man like us in order to live as our example and pattern in life. WWJD!?

6) To Be the Pattern for Our Redeemed Bodies. Paul tells us that when Jesus rose from the dead He rose in a new body that was “imperishable... raised in glory... raised in power.... raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15:42-44). This new resurrection body that Jesus had when He rose from the dead is the pattern for what our bodies will be like when we are raised from the dead, because Christ is “the first fruits” (1 Cor. 15:23). We now have a physical body like Adam’s, but we will have one like Christ’s: “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven” (1 Cor. 15:49). Jesus had to be raised as a man in order to be the “first-born from the dead” (Col. 1:18), the pattern for the bodies that we would later have.

7) To Sympathize As High Priest. The author of Hebrews reminds us that “because He Himself has suffered and been tempted, He is able to help those who are tempted” (Heb. 2:18; 4:15-16). If Jesus had not been a man, He would not have been able to know by experience what we go through in our temptations and struggles in this life. But because He has lived as a man, He is able to sympathize more fully with us in our experiences. (Source: Grudem, Wayne)

The Major Heresies Regarding the Incarnation:

Arianism. The heresy that denies the full deity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Arius (ca. 250-336) proposed that the Son was created by the power and will of the Father, one who served in creation and revelation. Proverbs 8:22 served as his major proof text. With this OT passage he failed to see how Proverbs 8 only speaks typologically of Christ as God’s wisdom. Arius’ views were officially overturned at the Council of Nicea (325), but it continued to be the predominant view in the middle of the fourth century. Today, Jehovah’s Witnesses propagate a kind of Arianism by rewording the language of John 1:1-3 and Colossians 1:15, 18 and denying the full, eternal deity of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

Docetism. Opposite of Arianism, docetism is the belief that Christ was a spiritual being with only the appearance (*dokein*) of humanity. In the second century, Gnostics taught this view; in the fourth century, Manichaeans did. Proto-Gnosticism was present during the time of the Bible (cf. 1 John 1:1-4; 4:2; 5:6). Today, secular scholars who divorce the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith are in danger of docetism.

Apollinarianism. The heresy that mingled the deity and humanity of Christ, making him neither fully God, nor fully man. While respectable in many ways (e.g., he fought against Arius), Apollinarius put together a divine nature with a human body (Logos + sarx; not Logos + anthropos). Thus, he deified human nature and reduced the divine, making Christ 'a mean between God and man, neither wholly man nor wholly God, but a combination of God and man' (Syllogsmoi, frag., 113). Today, scholars like William Lane Craig come close to Apollinarianism by suggesting that the divine mind inhabits the human Jesus, and that he has only one will (monotheletism).

Nestorianism. The heresy that makes Christ two, separate persons. Instead of a hypostatic union, he is a composite. Nestorius was a fifth century theologian who limited his understanding to a superficial reading of Scripture. For instance, he was unwilling to assert that Mary was the mother of God (theotokos); instead she was the Christotokos. Today, there are some in the Eastern Orthodox Church who support Nestorius' view.

Eutychianism. The heresy that human nature was absorbed into the divine. Eutychius was a fifth century theologian who responded to Nestorius, and conceived of Christ's incarnation as a mixture of divine and human (tertium quid).

Source: <https://davidschrock.com/2013/11/21/the-incarnation-getting-a-handle-on-five-heresies/>

Gnosticism

1 Timothy 4:1 - "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils..."

"All heretics are like this. They imagine that they have found something higher than the truth . . . They set off on all kinds of uncertain paths, holding now one opinion, now another, on the same subject! They are like the blind who lead the blind and rightly fall into the ditch of ignorance at their feet. They are always seeking, but they never find the truth . . . Their thoughts soar above the permitted measure of thought. That is why the apostle says: 'Do not think more loftily than you ought to think, but think prudently' (Rom 12:3). He is warning us not to taste the knowledge of the Gnostics, which 'thinks more loftily than it ought to think', and leads to our banishment from the 'paradise of life'." - Balthasar, Hans Urs von. The Scandal of the Incarnation: Irenaeus Against the Heresies (p. 48). Ignatius Press. Kindle Edition.

Gnosticism is a multifaceted religious and philosophical movement that emerged during the early Christian era and has had a lasting impact on various spiritual traditions. The term "Gnosticism" comes from the Greek word "*gnosis*," which means "knowledge." Central to Gnosticism is the pursuit of spiritual knowledge and the belief that this knowledge can lead to salvation and liberation from the material world. In its essence it is the age-old lie, "... don't you

know that you can become like God!?" At the core of Gnosticism is a metaphysical dualism that distinguishes between the spiritual and material realms. Gnostics perceive the material world as flawed and governed by an inferior deity or demiurge (known as Yaldabaoth). This demiurge is often equated with Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament in the Bible. The true divine reality, which is ineffable and beyond human comprehension, exists in a spiritual realm called the "pleroma."

The goal of Gnosticism is to attain gnosis, a special kind of knowledge that leads to salvific enlightenment and the liberation of the divine spark within each individual. (This is the origin of the "Christ Consciousness" of the New Age Movement) The ultimate aim is to reunite the divine spark with the transcendent God from whom it originated. This divine spark, known as the "pneuma," is trapped within the material body and can be freed through the acquisition of spiritual knowledge and the practice of specific rituals and strict disciplines.

Gnosticism also believes in the existence of intermediary beings called "aeons," emanations of the divine that connect the spiritual realm with the material world. These aeons are seen as both divine aspects and divine beings, embodying different qualities or attributes of the divine. They play a crucial role in the Gnostic cosmology, acting as intermediaries between humanity and the ultimate divine reality. The aeons can also manifest as "egregores," which are sentient thought-forms emerging from the melding of human consciousness.

Gnostic teachings often emphasize the role of a spiritual savior or revealer, such as Jesus Christ or a figure like the Gnostic redeemer, the "Logos." These figures are believed to have been sent from the pleroma to impart divine knowledge, show the way to salvation, and provide a means to escape the flawed material world. In Gnostic thought, the death and resurrection of such saviors represent the liberation of the divine spark and serve as an exemplar for individual Gnostic seekers. These savior figures are not seen as greater than any other human (which is why they reject the Divinity of Christ) but are seen as humans who have been sent to show others the way of enlightenment and the release from the prison of matter.

The Dualistic Worldview and How it Seeks to Undermine the Incarnation of Christ

"Gnosticism is unmasked by the Word of God. It is the outcome of man's desperate arrogance, his refusal to submit to God, his determination to make his own way to Heaven. Irenaeus did not need to speculate. All he had to do was let the Word of God speak for itself and show its inner logic, the logic of Old and New Testaments in their perpetual unity. The biblical way to God has been opened up by God Himself - God's Word is the way." - Hans Urs von Balthasar

The Gnostic impulse secretly or openly animates all the modern world-views which see 'body' and 'spirit', nature and God, in antagonism or opposition. One of ancient Gnosticism's favorite doctrines is the glorification of the 'eternal quest' (or the "hero's journey"), the idea being that the

supreme principle, the 'Groundless One', is unknowable yet it is the Gnostic's path to search out the unknowable. For the Gnostic the ultimate goal is a hyper-spiritualized flight from matter and the flesh with the ascent of man to spirit; while the Word of God descends into flesh and blood. Gnosticism is ultimately about power through knowledge; while the Word of God asks for constant faith and, only within that faith, a growing, reverent understanding.

Gnosticism, the anti-Christian experiment, is a flight from the world and the body. It replaces the real world - violent, indeed sinful, yet redeemable by God, and actually redeemed through the Incarnation of the Word - with an imaginary world, thus splitting the one nature of man in two. Christianity, by contrast, acknowledges the goodness of creation and the necessity of the Incarnation. 1 John 4:1-3 - "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world."

The fact that God has become man, indeed flesh, proves that the redemption and resurrection of the entire earthly world is not just a possibility but a reality. Against the Gnostic separation of the Old and New Covenants is the unity of the Testaments in Christ: they were different, because they were different stages in the redemptive story of the human race. In contrast to Gnosticism's cold presumption is God's patience, visible in Christ and His Passion, given to us as the gift of grace in the form of faith, hope and love, by means of which we preserve a patient and humble distance from the eternal God whom we can never exhaustively comprehend.

If God is an unbounded being, the world cannot be something that 'fell' from Him to be outside Him. The Gnostics tried to explain the origin of the world, the origin of matter, in terms of a series of transitions or "emminations" between the Groundless One and us. In contradiction to this idea, Christianity is about the creature's direct relationship with the eternal God. This relationship with God demands the fundamental act of faith, that is to say, a humble, trusting, free submission to the Lord who eludes every attempt at capture. **Gnosticism refuses to make this fundamental act of faith.** It wants to get to know all of God's mysteries by its own powers. Gnosticism is a very old heresy that teaches that the truth has to be decoded, uncovered, unlocked, unveiled, discovered. Gnosticism is a heresy because, according to God, we are given all that we need for life and godliness (1 Peter 1:3) in God's Word. We don't need to decode secret mysteries, unravel sealed up messages, decipher clues, or pull back the veil on hidden things. All that we need, all that God wants us to know, is contained in the Bible.

However surprising it may seem, Gnosticism appeals to the Scriptures and so it is forced to teach a secret tradition, coming down from Jesus and the apostles, alongside the official proclamation of God in the simple and revealed Gospel. This “secret knowledge” is the basis of most Secret Societies and/or Mystery Schools today such as the Rosicrucians, the Knights Templar (the “Christian” branch of Freemasonry), The 4th Way (often called “Esoteric Christianity”), Theosophy, the Jesuits, and many others.

Irenaeus shows the secret wisdom of his opponents to be nothing but arrogance and folly, and convicts it of contradiction. This contradiction, which makes Gnosticism the forerunner of later ‘dialectical’ thought, is resolved in Christianity in the fundamental relationship of analogy between God and the world. Man, composed of body and soul, is made in the image and likeness of God; and although God towers above man in every respect, He chooses to love us and enter into relationship with us. It is through the incarnation of God as Jesus Christ - His sinless life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension and imminent return - that the Christian Believer has the great privilege of having a relationship with God Himself.

Quotes from Irenaeus “Against the Heresies”:

(2) “Not one of the heretics is of the opinion that the Word was made flesh. If you examine their creeds carefully, you will find that, in every one of them, the Word of God is presented as without flesh and incapable of suffering, as is ‘the Christ who is above’. Some say that He revealed Himself as a transfigured man, but was not born or made flesh. Others deny that He took human form at all. They say that He descended, in the form of a dove, on the Jesus born of Mary . . . and after He had announced the ‘unknown Father’, He went up again into the ‘divine Pleroma’. . . The Lord’s disciple shows all these people to be false witnesses when he says: ‘And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us’ (John 1:14).¹ III 11, 3 (3) All the solemn declarations of the heretics come down ultimately to this: blasphemy against the Creator, denial of salvation to God’s handiwork, which is what the flesh is.”

(28) “You [Gnostics] are insufferable! You force the Word of God, the Creator, the Author and Maker of all things, into categories and numbers (sometimes thirty, sometimes twenty-four, at other times only six). You cut Him up into four syllables and thirty elements. You reduce the Lord of all, the One who founded the heavens, to the number eight hundred and eighty-eight. You treat Him like the alphabet. You subdivide the Father, who contains all but is contained by nothing, into a group of four, of eight, of ten, of twelve, hoping that these multiplications will help you to expound the nature of the Father, which, as you say yourself, is inexpressible and inconceivable.”

“Through the Incarnation the image of God is shown forth. The truth of this was shown when the Word of God became man, assimilating Himself to man and man to Himself, so that, by His resemblance to the Son, man might become precious to the Father. For in times past it was said

that man was made in the image of God, but not shown, because the Word, in whose image man was made, was still invisible. That is why man lost the likeness so easily. But when the Word of God was made flesh, He confirmed both things: He showed the true image, when He Himself became what His image was; and He restored and made fast the likeness, making man like the invisible Father through the visible Word.” - Balthasar, Hans Urs von. The Scandal of the Incarnation: Irenaeus Against the Heresies (p. 71). Ignatius Press. Kindle Edition.

Irenaeus (/ɪrɪˈneɪəs/; **Greek: Εἰρηναῖος Eirēnaios; c. 130 – c. 202 AD**) was a Greek bishop noted for his role in guiding and expanding Christian communities in the southern regions of present-day France and, more widely, for the development of Christian theology by combating heterodox or Gnostic interpretations of Scripture as heresy and defining proto-orthodoxy. Originating from Smyrna, he had seen and heard the preaching of Polycarp, who in turn was said to have heard John the Evangelist, and thus was the last-known living connection with the Apostles. Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irenaeus>

An **egregore** (also spelled egregor; from French égrégore, from Ancient Greek ἐγρήγορος, egrēgoros 'wakeful') is a concept in Western esotericism of a non-physical entity or thoughtform that arises from the collective thoughts and emotions of a distinct group of individuals. Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egregore>