

Who Is Jesus? Ephesians 1:3-6

The question before us is this: “We call Jesus the Son of God and Jesus called himself the Son of Man. What’s the difference and does it matter?” In other words, “who is Jesus?” In order to respond to such a straight-forward question with a straight-forward answer about, then, we need to determine what Jesus in the gospels meant by claiming the title *Son of man*. We also need to answer some other questions. What did the early church mean by conveying onto Jesus the title *Son of God*? What difference was there, and is there, between these titles? Does it matter how we distinguish the two. Finally, we will need to address the question that lies behind all these questions: “what do we do with the humanity and divinity of ourselves?”

Jesus called himself the “Son of man” according to the gospels. What did that title mean to Jesus and to the gospel writers? It simply means a person, a human being. In the Old Testament book of Ezekiel, when the word of the Lord comes to Ezekiel, God addresses him, “Son of man.” It’s a little like saying, “hey you, fella!”

The most important use of this title before Jesus, and one that undoubtedly influenced Jesus, is from the Old Testament book Daniel (ch. 7). In Daniel’s vision, there is a heavenly trial of the four most recent empires – Babylon, the Medes, the Persians, and the Greeks of Alexander the Great. Each of the empires was represented as a beast. The empires were each judged and found wanting. The fifth and final empire was eternal. Its power, glory, and authority were given to “one like the Son of man.” This means that the domination systems have had their day and the eternal kingdom, God’s kingdom, belongs to human beings.

Jesus found inspiration and identity from this image. The title meant that in Jesus’ very human life, the true existence of God’s kingdom was revealed. Jesus was very much a human being as we are. The humanity of Jesus is an example for us to follow and a challenge for us to meet. Jesus’ life tells us that the eternity, the divine reality we call God, is the home of all human beings.

The New Testament also calls Jesus the “Son of God.” It’s not a title he ever seemed to embrace for himself. In Mark’s gospel, the earliest biblical gospel, it is highly questionable that any such claim was made by Jesus. Generally, when the gospels and Paul identified Jesus as “Son of God,” it signified Jesus embracing his identity and his calling to awaken people to the Kingdom of God. Only in John’s Gospel did the beginnings of Jesus as God appear that would come to be dominant in later Christianity. This idea grew and developed for reasons that were as much political as theological. Unfortunately, in some ways Jesus’ divinity came to prominence at the expense of Jesus’ humanity.

Casting Jesus as divine was a powerful and effective tool for raising the status of Christianity in its early days. It served to inspire abused and persecuted Christians that God would ultimately triumph over evil. It served as Jesus’ ultimate vindication from his crucifixion. Within the first couple of centuries, Christian theology settled on a paradox of Jesus’ human and divine nature without confusion. They cited the continuing revelation of the Holy Spirit for their unfolding understanding of Jesus’ nature as a result of Easter’s resurrection.

Jesus as “God the Son” was largely a creation of fourth-century Christian bishops with the encouragement of Emperor Constantine. The doctrine represented an effort to affirm the uniqueness of Jesus and, therefore, the superiority of Roman Christianity. This view of Jesus and Christianity was not really present in the earliest Christian writings, but definitely became dominant in much of the Christian thought and practice of the Middle Ages and into the modern era.

Jesus as God from heaven, seen as only as in the form of a human being, seemed to be just a divine masquerade. The prevalence of this view of Jesus led to a loss of the dynamic balance of the paradox of humanity and divinity in Jesus. Ironically, the reaction of modern rationalism in its approach to Christian faith, was to move to the other extreme and eliminate the divine Jesus – to focus only on the teacher, prophet, and social reformer of history.

Efforts to separate the divine Jesus from the human Jesus are about as successful as trying to separate heads from tails on a dime. In terms of perception, the difference is absolute: *heads you win and tails you lose*. But the reality is that they are *two sides of the same coin*. You simply can't have the Jesus of faith without humanity and divinity. You just can't separate them.

Jesus' nature is unity: one with God, one in God with zero degrees of separation. It doesn't matter which side you look on -- not in terms of our relationship with God or God's love for us. Jesus as *Son of Man* and Jesus as *Son of God* is one reality. We may see them from different perspectives, but they are the same coin. But there is a deeper question and a deeper issue that does matter a great deal.

Author Scott Peck has written:

A majority of American Christians know about the paradoxical Christian doctrine that Jesus is both human and divine, but then they put 99.5% of their money on [Jesus'] divinity and 0.5% on his humanity, a most comfortable disproportion that leaves us way down here on earth scratching out a very ordinary existence according to worldly rules -- 99.5% human. And because that gulf is so great, [we are] not seriously encouraged in an attempt to bridge it. When Jesus said that we are to take up our cross and follow him, be like him, and might even do greater things than he did, he couldn't possibly have been serious, could he? After all, he was divine and we're just human! So it is, through the large-scale ignoring of Jesus real humanity that we are allowed to worship him in name without the obligation of following in his footsteps. (M. Scott Peck, *A Different Drum*)

Scott Peck was right. When we separate Jesus' humanity from his divinity, we will likely fail to see and follow his example as a human being striving and succeeding in living awake to the Spirit of God, alive in him. We often, then, excuse ourselves from making the same journey of embracing our own oneness with the Spirit, our essential oneness with God. The result is that we fail to be fully human -- in concert with the struggles and joys of our fellow human beings. And we fail to embrace our own divine nature. The presence of God is in us as well.

We are in God and God is in us. We are one, inseparable. The dual natures of humanity and divinity that were present in Jesus are present in us as well. Let us remember that we all are

divine spiritual beings and we all are human, physical beings. We all are one in God. There is no distance between God and each of us, though at times the distance can seem infinitely large because of our perspective. In reality, we are *two sides of the same coin*.

We are called to awaken to the true and divine nature of ourselves and of each human being. As we do, we begin to see each other as reflections of God's very nature. As you recognize and treasure that divine nature in each human being, including yourself, you will find that you are working to transform the world into the *shalom* of God. You will begin to hear that voice within you saying, "this is my beloved child in whom I am well pleased." You will discover, even without intending to, that you are giving birth to God's new creation. And that matters a lot. In Jesus' name, it's what we're all about.