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Teaching Letter

Behold the Man



Teaching Letter
By Derek Prince

What every man ought to be, but no one else has ever been.

> Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, "Behold the Man!" (John 19:5)

Did Pilate realize, as he spoke those words, that he was both quoting and fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 6:12, "Behold, the Man"? Almost certainly not! Yet the words of Zechariah refer just as directly to Jesus as did those of Pilate when he presented Him to the multitude.

The Greek word used by Pilate signifies "man" as a member of the human race, with no specific reference to sex. But the Hebrew word used by Zechariah signifies "man" as distinctively male rather than female. Both these meanings apply to Jesus. He is the perfect embodiment of both: humanity and masculinity. He is what every man ought to be, but no other one ever has been.

The incarnation of God as man in the person of Jesus was predicted by the Old Testament prophets. Isaiah declared, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). In Matthew 1:23 the Hebrew name Immanuel is translated "God with us." The "Immanuel Race" is the "God-Man" race, blending the two natures of God and man.

Son of Man

The title Jesus applied to Himself more than any other was "Son of Man." This corresponds to the Hebrew phrase *ben Adam*, meaning literally "Son of Adam." It thus identifies Jesus specifically as a member of Adam's race. In harmony with this, Paul calls Him "the last Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45).

The true humanity of Jesus is likewise emphasized throughout the rest of the New Testament. For example, the writer of Hebrews says concerning Him, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same ... For verily he took not on him the nature of angels: but he took on him the seed of Abraham" (Hebrews 2:14, 16, kjv). Jesus was a lineal descendant of Abraham—and therefore also of Adam.

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He did not take on angelic nature, but He did take on true human nature.

The genealogy of Jesus in each Gospel is in harmony with its particular presentation of Him. Matthew traces Him back to Abraham, emphasizing His identity with Israel (Matthew 1:1–17). Luke traces Him back to Adam, emphasizing His identity with the whole human race (Luke 3:23–38). John presents Him without any human genealogy, as the eternal Word, coexistent with God (John 1:1–2). Mark likewise gives Him no genealogy, but for a different reason: according to ancient custom a servant (or slave) needed no genealogy.

Although He became fully human becoming by incarnation, Jesus never ceased to be divine. In Him God and man were fully blended.

Two Natures in Balance

The two natures of God and man in Jesus are set forth side by side in various passages of the Gospels. In John 4:5–14 we read how Jesus, as Man, was physically wearied and sat down by Jacob's well. Yet a little later He spoke as God to the Samaritan woman: "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." By these words Jesus identified Himself as the God of Israel, concerning whom the psalmist had said, "For with You is the fountain of life" (Psalm 36:9).

By the Sea of Galilee it was as God that Jesus received the worship of Peter falling down at His knees and crying:

> Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord! (Luke 5:8)

But later, on the same Sea of Galilee, it was as Man that Jesus fell asleep in the boat and had to be awakened by His disciples (Luke 8:23–24).

In Exodus 3:13–14 the Lord revealed to Moses His divine, unchanging name, "I AM." Fifteen centuries later, in the Garden of Gethsemane, identifying Himself to those who had come to arrest Him, Jesus pronounced the same words, "I am" (John 18:8). (The pronoun "he" supplied by the English translators is not found in the original text.) When this sacred name was pronounced by the One to whom it truly belonged, it was charged with such divine power that all those who had come against Jesus "drew back and fell to the ground" (John 18:5–6). This was testimony to His unchanging divinity. Yet from that point onward it was as Man that Jesus endured the shame and agony of His trial, scourging and crucifixion.

The Pattern Son

In Ephesians 1:5 Paul says of all believers that God has "predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself." In Romans 8:29 he further describes God's purpose for His children:

> For whom He [God] foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He [Jesus] might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Thus Jesus is the pattern Son—the One to whom we must all conform in coming to perfection or maturity. He Himself is the "new and living way" by which we "go on unto perfection," "enter the Holiest," and "draw near" to God (see Hebrews 6:1; 10:19–22). The way that led Jesus to perfection is the same one that each of us must follow.

The path to maturity was no easier for Jesus than it is for us. He "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). In His human nature Jesus experienced every form of temptation that any of us experiences—and yet He was never driven to sin. How important it is for us to realize that it is no sin to be tempted! Sin comes only when we yield to temptation.

What was it that enabled Jesus, in spite of His true humanity, to overcome all temptation? The basis of His success lay in His single-hearted, unchanging motivation: to do the Father's will. This was prophetically foreshown by David in Psalm 40:7–8: "Then I said, 'Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God'" (see also Hebrews 10:7).

During His earthly ministry Jesus repeatedly disclosed this as the underlying motive of all that He did. He could never know full and final satisfaction until He had finished every task His Father had assigned to Him. By Jacob's well He told His disciples, "My food [that which upholds and strengthens Me] is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (John 4:34). In subsequent discourses He twice reaffirmed this: "I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me" (John 5:30); "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38).

In His great high-priestly prayer at the close of His earthly ministry, Jesus was able to say to the Father, "I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4). Finally, in the last moments of His agony on the cross, He uttered that great, triumphant cry, "It is finished!" (John

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19:30). Without wavering, without flinching, at the cost of His own life, He had finished the task assigned to Him by the Father. With that assurance, He yielded up His spirit into the Father's hands (Luke 23:46).

The same motivation that kept Jesus from sin and carried Him through to complete victory will do the same for us. We must come to the point of a single-hearted determination that the supreme purpose of our lives, as God's children, is to do the will of our heavenly Father. When every other personal desire or ambition is made subject to this single, overriding motive, we may still falter or stumble at times, but sin will never regain dominion over us and ultimate victory will be ours.

Righteousness and Loyalty in Tension

In Isaiah 11:5 the prophet sets forth two interrelated aspects of the character of Jesus: "Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist." Righteousness is a right attitude toward God; faithfulness (or loyalty) is a right attitude toward man. The order is important. Righteousness comes before loyalty. Our duty toward God is primary. We are not free to make any commitment to man that interferes with our obligations to God. But once the claims of God have received due recognition, loyalty demands that we observe every obligation and commitment to man.

There is always the potential for tension in reconciling righteousness with loyalty—that is, in rightly adjusting the claims of God and the claims of man. The life and teaching of Jesus provide us with various examples of how this tension should be handled.

In interpreting the law of Moses, Jesus set forth the two great basic commandments in their correct order: first, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart," second, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:36–40). His own life exemplified both forms of love in their perfection, but always in their proper order of priority.

In the only incident of Jesus' boyhood recorded in the New Testament, the tension between these two obligations first appears. At the age of twelve He was taken by Joseph and Mary to Jerusalem for the Passover, but remained behind in the temple after the rest of His party had set out on their journey back to Nazareth. Eventually Joseph and Mary returned to Jerusalem and found him "sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions" (Luke 2:42–46).

Mary said to Him, "Look, Your father [Joseph] and I have sought You anxiously." But Jesus replied, "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:48–49). Note the double application of the word father in these verses, bringing out the double obligation to God and to man. In effect, Jesus was saying, "The claims of my heavenly Father take precedence over those of the one who is known as my father on earth." However, the record continues, "Then He went down with them [Joseph and Mary] and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them" (Luke 2:51). Once Jesus had fulfilled His obligations to His heavenly Father, He was faithful also in every duty to Joseph as His earthly father. He was in every respect the model son, combining righteousness toward God with loyalty toward Joseph.

Later, when Jesus had entered into His public ministry, His mother and His brothers sought an interview with Him, but "He stretched out His hand toward His disciples, and said, 'Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother'" (Matthew 12:46–50). Here again there is a delicate adjustment of priorities. The spiritual relationship of the disciples to God the Father, produced by their obedience, took precedence over the purely natural relationship to His mother and His brothers (who were not at that time disciples).

Yet on the cross one of the last acts of Jesus was to commit His mother to the keeping of His beloved disciple, John, thus providing her with a son to provide and care for her after His death (see John 19:25–27), With His mother thus provided for, He had faithfully fulfilled the last of His human obligations.

Still and Forever Man!

It is marvelous indeed that, by incarnation, Jesus became truly and fully Man. But the greatest marvel of all is this: He has never since ceased to be a Man! While acknowledging the reality of the incarnation, many Christians are left with the impression that Jesus was a Man only for a brief span of about thirty-three years, and now is Man no longer. But the New Testament teaches otherwise.

Writing at least thirty years after the ascension of Jesus, Paul said to Timothy: "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). Everything Paul said here is in the present tense. Jesus is still Man. There is a Man enthroned at God's right hand, to whom has been granted all authority in heaven and in earth, and to whom are subject all angels,

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principalities and powers. (See Matthew 28:18, Ephesians 1:20–21, 1 Peter 3:22.)

Viewing with prophetic foresight this mystery of the God-Man exalted to God's right hand, the psalmist David cries out in wonder:

> What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet. (Psalm 8:4–6)

Contemplating the mystery of Jesus the God-Man exalted to God's right hand, who can offer a full or final answer to the question, "What is man?"

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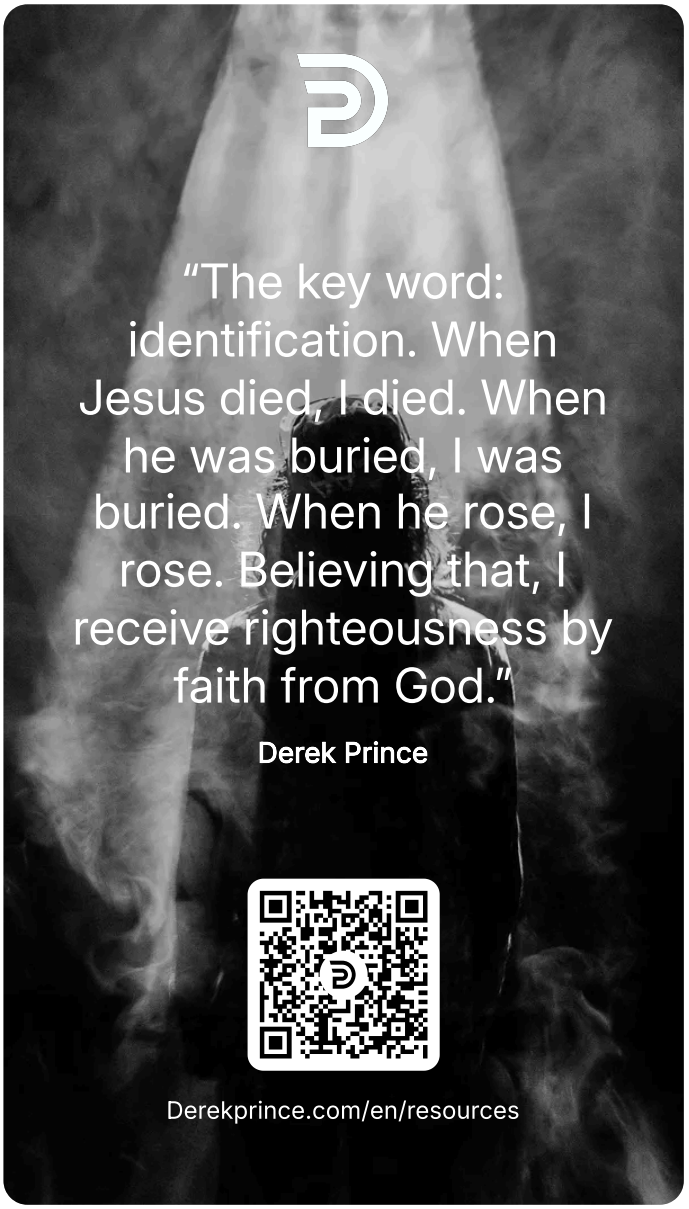

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