

Why Was Jesus' Full Humanity Necessary?

When John wrote his first epistle, a heretical teaching was circulating in the church to the effect that Jesus was not a man. This heresy became known as *docetism*. So serious was this denial of truth about Christ, that John could say it was a doctrine of the antichrist: “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” (1 John 4:2–3). 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.

As we look through the New Testament, we see several reasons why Jesus had to be fully man if he was going to be the Messiah and earn our salvation. We can list seven of those reasons here.

a. For Representative Obedience: As we noted in the chapter on the covenants between God and man above, Jesus was our representative and obeyed for us where Adam had failed and disobeyed. We see this in the parallels between Jesus' temptation (Luke 4:1–13) and the time of testing for Adam and Eve in the garden (Gen. 2:15–3:7). It is also clearly reflected in Paul's discussion of the parallels between Adam and Christ, in Adam's disobedience and Christ's obedience:

Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so *one man's act of righteousness* leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so *by one man's obedience* many will be made righteous.
(Rom. 5:18–19)

This is why Paul can call Christ “the last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45) and can call Adam the “first man” and Christ the “second man” (1 Cor. 15:47). Jesus had to be a man in order to be our representative and obey in our place.

b. To Be a Substitute Sacrifice: If Jesus had not been a man, he could not have died in our place and paid the penalty that was due to us. The author of Hebrews tells us that “For surely it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he *had to* be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation [more accurately, “propitiation”] for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:16–17; cf. v. 14). Jesus had to become a man, not an angel, because God was concerned with saving men, not with saving angels. But to do this he “*had to*” be made like us in every way, so that he might become “the propitiation” for us, the sacrifice that is an acceptable substitute for us. Though this idea will be discussed more fully in chapter 27, on the atonement, it is important here to realize that unless Christ was fully man, he could not have died to pay the penalty for man's sins. He could not have been a substitute sacrifice for us.

c. To Be the One Mediator Between God and Men: Because we were alienated from God by sin, we needed 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: “There is one God, and *there is one*

mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). In order to fulfill this role of mediator, Jesus had to be fully man as well as fully God.

d. To Fulfill God’s Original Purpose for Man to Rule Over Creation: As we saw in the discussion of the purpose for which God created man, 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. The author of Hebrews realizes that God intended everything to be in subjection to man, but he admits, “As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him” (Heb. 2:8). Then 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. Hebrews recognizes this when it says that now “we see Jesus” in the place of authority over the universe, “crowned with glory and honor” (Heb. 2:9; cf. the same phrase in v. 7). Jesus in fact has been given “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18), and God has “put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church” (Eph. 1:22). 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 (cf. 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.

e. To Be Our Example and Pattern in Life: John tells us, “He who says he abides in him ought to walk *in the same way in which he walked*” (1 John 2:6), 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 (1 John 3:2–3). Paul tells us that we are continually being “changed into his likeness” (2 Cor. 3:18), thus moving toward the goal for which God saved us, that we might “be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29). Peter tells us that especially in suffering we have to consider Christ’s example: “Christ also suffered for you, *leaving you an example* that you should follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). Throughout our Christian life, we are to run the race set before us “looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). If we become discouraged by the hostility and opposition of sinners, we are to “consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself” (Heb. 12:3). Jesus is also our example in death. Paul’s goal is to become “*like him* in his death” (Phil. 3:10; cf. Acts 7:60; 1 Peter 3:17–18 with 4:1). Our goal should be to be like Christ all our days, up to the point of death, and to die with unfailing 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.

f. 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)—an agricultural metaphor that likens Christ to the first sample of the harvest, showing what the other fruit from that harvest would be like. 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.

g. 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; cf. 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.

6. Jesus Will Be a Man Forever. Jesus did not give up his human nature after his death and resurrection, for he appeared to his disciples as a man after the resurrection, even with the scars of the nail prints in his hands (John 20:25–27). He had “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39) and ate food (Luke 24:41–42). Later, when he was talking with his disciples, he was taken up into heaven, still in his resurrected human body, and two angels promised that he would return in the same way: “This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, *will come in the same way* as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). Still later, Stephen gazed into heaven and saw Jesus as “the Son of man standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56). Jesus also appeared to Saul on the Damascus Road and said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5)—an appearance that Saul (Paul) later coupled with the resurrection appearances of Jesus to others (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8). In John’s vision in Revelation, Jesus still appears as “one like a son of man” (Rev. 1:13), though he is filled with great glory and power, and his appearance causes John to fall at his feet in awe (Rev. 1:13–17). He promises one day to drink wine again with his disciples in his Father’s kingdom (Matt. 26:29) and invites us to a great marriage supper in heaven (Rev. 19:9). Moreover, Jesus will continue forever in his offices as prophet, priest, and king, all of them carried out by virtue of the fact that he is both God and man forever.

All of these texts indicate that Jesus did not *temporarily* become man, but that his divine nature was *permanently* united to his human nature, and he lives forever not just as the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, but also as Jesus, the man who was born of Mary, and as Christ, the Messiah and Savior of his people. Jesus will remain fully God and fully man, yet one person, forever.¹

¹ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology : An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), 540-43.