

LESSON 10

Belgic Confession Articles 18 and 19 The Person of Jesus Christ

General:

In this lesson we confess the *incarnation* of Jesus Christ and examine the consequences of this incarnation for His Person.

1. Incarnation

The word "incarnation" means, "coming into the flesh." This does not imply that Christ laid down His Divine Nature (for such would be impossible), but that He, remaining true and eternal God, took upon Himself also a true human nature according to body and soul. He did temporarily lay down His Divine *glory*, and humbled Himself, taking the form of a servant (see: Philippians 2; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 14).

In His incarnation, Christ fulfils God's own requirements for the Mediator:

- a) true God: conceived by the Holy Spirit
- b) true man: born of the virgin Mary
- c) righteous man: without sin.

It is important to note that His "conception by the Holy Spirit" indicates a breakthrough of "original sin," His birth is without the means of man. Yet He was like unto us in all things ("the real human nature with all its infirmities"), sin excepted.

Hebrews 7:26, "For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens."

This conception and birth belong to "the great mystery of our religion" (1 Timothy 3:16), and we cannot fully comprehend its manner. Yet this does not render it incredible, "for with God nothing will be impossible," Luke 1: 37. Where God can create life out of nothing, and also work conception in a woman "advanced in years" (Sara, Elizabeth), He can also cause life in the womb of a virgin. Especially when it comes to the work of *redemption*, there are no barriers for God.

The incarnation is a clear fulfillment of *divine* prophecy. The Scriptures proclaim that the Mediator will be:

- a) God manifest in the flesh: *Immanuel* = God with us (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6,7)
- b) Of the lineage of David = from the stump of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1).

This incarnation, clearly revealed already in Paradise, took place at a specific historic moment (Galatians 4:4, "When the time had fully come"), and is therefore a unique occurrence (contra the "reincarnation" idea in "pantheism"). It is the heart and core of all history.

The Confession specifically mentions the heresy of the Anabaptists (Mennonites) who feel that if Christ truly partook of the real human nature, He would invariably have been sinful. Christ is said to have passed through Mary only *formally*, not *essentially*. This not only neglects the revelation of Christ's holy conception, but also negates the possibility of salvation.

Hebrews 2:14, "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself *likewise* partook of the *same* nature"

Through the centuries Satan has unsuccessfully tried to prevent the incarnation; when this failed, he tried to destroy Christ in His earthly ministry; when this failed, he concentrated his attacks on the Church. (Revelation 12).

2. The Two Natures

The *consequence* of this incarnation is that Christ – as a unique Person – has *two* natures, a divine and a human nature.

The Scriptures clearly teach this, ascribing to the Lord both human and divine characteristics, e.g. need for sleep and food, yet the power to forgive sins.

The difficulty has been the *relationship* between these two natures. There are two *natures*, but not two *persons*. These natures are inseparably united, yet they also remain distinct and are not mixed.

In the early Christian Church a great struggle arose also on this point:

- a) Eutyches: made *one* nature out of it ("Godman")
- b) Nestorius: made *two* persons, the man Christ and the God Christ.

The ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) made the following doctrinal statements: the two natures of Christ are:

- a) inconfusable: each nature remains independent or distinct,
/ distinction
- b) unchangeable: each nature retains its own characteristics,
- c) indivisible: each nature is united with the other in the same Person,
/ unity
- d) inseparable: each nature is always present in the one Person.

The Church has never tried to "explain" this mystery, but has simply upheld it, perhaps with inadequate formulations. Differences on this point arose again during the Reformation with the Anabaptists and the Lutherans. The Lutherans taught that in the Ascension the human nature received divine characteristics (omnipresence), see: Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 18. However, we may not "humanize" Divinity, nor may we "divinate" humanity.

The necessity of the two natures is confessed in Lord's Day 6 of the Heidelberg Catechism.

QUESTIONS (Lesson 10):

1. What does the word "incarnation" mean?
2. How does Christ fulfil the divine requirements in His incarnation?
3. Why is this incarnation not incredible?
4. Show how the incarnation is fulfillment of prophecy.
5. What is the heresy of the Anabaptists with respect to the incarnation?
6. How has Satan tried to hinder the fact and the results of the incarnation?
7. What is the consequence of this incarnation for the Person of Christ?
8. What did the early Christian Church decide on the subject of the "two natures of Christ"?
9. What did the Lutherans teach concerning the "two natures"?
10. Why is it necessary that our Lord has two natures?

ASSIGNMENT:

Memory Work: Heidelberg Catechism, Questions and Answers 15, 19 and 35.

ARTICLE 20

THE JUSTICE AND MERCY OF GOD IN CHRIST

We believe that God, who is perfectly merciful and just, sent His Son to assume that nature in which disobedience had been committed, to make satisfaction in that same nature; and to bear the punishment of sin by His most bitter passion and death. God therefore manifested His justice against His Son when He laid our iniquity on Him, and poured out His goodness and mercy on us, who were guilty and worthy of damnation. Out of a most perfect love He gave His Son to die for us and He raised Him for our justification that through Him we might obtain immortality and life eternal.