

Of Christ the Mediator (Part 3)

John 3:22-36; WCF 8.3

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 2 June 2019, 16:30

(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)¹

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

This afternoon, by way of the WCF 8.3, we want to look again at how our Lord Jesus got fully equipped for the office of Mediator between God and human beings!

But before we do that, we need to first, by way of introduction, refresh our minds on the two natures of our Lord Jesus...

We heard, again, last Sunday that Jesus' divine nature and human nature were not blended, mixed or confused in His one Person. Yet, they were perfectly *united*, and in such a way that His human & divine *attributes* could clearly be identified!

Indeed, at times during Jesus' earthly ministry, His human *attributes* as well as His divine *attributes* were clearly seen. You see, as fully human being (yet without sin), He was able to get tired. He wept. He slept! Then, on the Mt of Transfiguration, the divine nature of Christ clearly broke through – so, too, after His resurrection when His glorified body was able to perform actions which an ordinary human nature can never do!

Why did our Mediator have to have two natures!? Well, He had to have a complete human body & soul, for He had to be the perfect Adam – yes, the last Adam! He had to receive Adam's punishment!

But He had to also be fully God, or else He would not have been able to bear that punishment, neither would He have been able to do what the first Adam failed to do – i.e. blamelessly keeping the Law of God!

Question: Were our Lord's human & divine natures ever separated?

No! Since His human birth, His human nature has never been *separated* from His divine nature, but His human nature was *distinguished* from His divine nature!

But were His two natures not separated from one another *when He died on the cross*?

No! On the cross, *Jesus Christ* died, but *God* did not die! Yes, Jesus' *divine* nature did not die! And re Jesus' human nature – only His *body* died, for, at His dying moment, our Lord committed His human spirit into the hands of His Father (Lk 23:46)!²

In other words, prior to the death of Jesus, His divine nature was united with a living, breathing human nature. Then He died, but His death did not destroy the union of the two natures. Yes, when Jesus' physical body was in the grave, His divine nature was *still united with it*!

Indeed, the union of the two natures was not severed by the death of Jesus! Yet, at the same time, the divine nature did not die!

Well, now that we have briefly refreshed our minds regarding the two natures of our Lord Jesus, let's have a look at our Mediator's equipping from three different angles.

¹ In writing this sermon, I am greatly indebted to my two main sources whose guidance I appreciate: 1) Van Dixhoorn, Chad. 2014. *Confessing the Faith: a reader's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Carlisle, PA : The Banner of Truth Trust. 484p.

2) Sproul, R.C. 2006. *The truth we confess*. (In: Sproul, R.C. ed. *Truths we confess: a layman's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith – in three volumes*. Vol. I (chapters 1-8 of the Confession) Phillipsburg, NJ : P&R Publishing. 279p.).

Many words & phrases I have written, I have gladly borrowed with great thankfulness from this source.

² Lk 23:46 ***Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.***

Here's the first one...

Fully Equipped by the Holy Spirit

How did our Lord get fully equipped?

Well, in that the Father anointed the Son *with the Holy Spirit beyond measure!* Indeed, as Col 1:19 says, “***For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.***”³

Thus, our Mediator was given all power – Mt 28:18, “***...All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.***”

Yes, our Lord needed all power to fulfill that enormously arduous and painful task – not just of *Mediator*, but also of *Guarantor* – yes, as person who willingly made Himself liable for the sins of all God's loved ones!!

See why He needed to be fully equipped with the Holy Spirit by His Father!?

Perhaps someone might say, “But I thought the Son – being the Second Person in the Trinity – was *already* well-enough equipped!” “Why did the Son now suddenly need to be anointed with the Holy Spirit beyond measure?”

And the answer would be, because the Son has now *clothed Himself with human nature* – a human nature united to His divine nature! And this human nature needed all the strength & equipping for an above-human-nature task!!

Thus, on top of the empowerment which Jesus would have received from His own divine nature, He also needed the equipping power of the Holy Spirit.⁴

Perhaps you say, “But at what stage did our two-natured Lord then get that extra empowerment by the Holy Spirit?”

Well, at the time described by our New-Testament passage – yes, at His baptism, at the age of about thirty!

About this event, Jn 3:34 says, “***For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.***”⁵

So, our Lord received the Spirit without measure at the time of His baptism! And, in sync with this, the Bible gives us no record of any miracles Jesus performed from His human birth until straight after His baptism!

And was not this prophesied by Isaiah when he said (in Is 61:1), “***The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives...***”?

What's more, did not our Lord Jesus Himself, right at the start of His public ministry, read this very same word from Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth, His hometown?

Then, how did He comment on this Isaiah passage?

Well, He said (in Lk 4:21), “***Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.***” “...the LORD has anointed Me...”

Remember what *anointed* is in Hebrew? It's *māshîḥ*,⁶ from where we get *Messiah!*

And what is *anointed* in Greek? It's *christos*,⁷ from where we get *Christ!*

See? Even Christ's *name of office* points to the Holy-Spirit-anointing He received!

And to make that even clearer, remember what answer our Lord gave John the Baptist's messengers when even John was doubting whether Jesus was the expected Messiah (Anointed One)!?

³ ESV. Also cf. Col 2:9 ***For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily*** (ESV)

⁴ For a more-thorough explanation on this, cf. Sproul (ibid:249)

⁵ NIV84 (emphasis mine)

⁶ מָשִׁיחַ

⁷ Χριστός

Jesus told these messengers to go tell John what they were seeing Him (Jesus) doing, i.e. the deeds which Isaiah had prophesied the Anointed One would do – yes, that ***the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.***⁸

In other words, Jesus’ answer to John the Baptist was as good as, “John, go read again Is 61:1 and see for yourself the evidence of My anointing by the Holy Spirit!”

My brother & sister, see how Jesus, apart from being equipped by His own divine nature, was indeed also equipped by the Holy Spirit!?

Thus, our Lord, although He was perfectly human (yet without sin) had the ability to perform whatever miracles He wanted to perform! He was fully equipped!

But was He fully equipped *only to perform miracles*?

No, here comes the scary part – you see, as the last Adam, Jesus also had to *fulfil the whole Law of God perfectly* – and in His *human nature*!

*Indeed, what would it have helped if the Son of God never took on human nature, and appeared here on earth as God, and did everything correctly which Adam failed to do!? That would not have worked, for God required a human sacrifice, a human fulfilment of the law. And we would not have that if God kept the Law! Indeed, it was the God-Man who had to come keep the Law for us!*⁹

See why the WCF 8.3 now says, “*In his human nature, united to the divine nature, the Lord Jesus was set apart and anointed with the Holy Spirit beyond measure, having in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. In him the Father was pleased to have all fullness dwell, so that—being holy, blameless, and undefiled, full of grace and truth—he might be completely equipped to fulfil the office of a mediator and guarantor”?*¹⁰

Well, we come to point 2...

Did His Human Nature Have the Ability to Sin?

My brother & sister, we have just said that it would not have worked if Jesus had come in only His *divine* nature, and then had done what the first Adam failed to do, i.e. keeping the Law of God perfectly!

No! A *human* fulfilment of the Law would not have taken place if *God* had kept the Law! That enormous task had to be given to One who was a human being! And only *One* was made fit for the task, i.e. the God-Man Jesus Christ!

So, seeing that Jesus was perfectly human, yet, as God’s Word says, without sin,¹¹ was there the possibility that His human nature could sin?

The world’s best Christian theologians have been divided on this point!¹²

RC Sproul was one who believed that, although Jesus never sinned, yet, since He was fully human, it was possible for His human nature to sin!¹³

And here is how this is explained...

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Lk 7:22). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles. (Emphasis mine)

⁹ My adaptation of the words of Sproul (ibid:250)

¹⁰ Emphasis mine

¹¹ Cf. Heb 4:15 ***For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin*** (Emphasis mine).

¹² Cf. Sproul (ibid:251)

¹³ Cf. Sproul (ibid:251)

The Bible tells us that the evil one did everything in his power to corrupt Jesus and tempt Him to sin (Mt 4:1-11 and Lk 4:1-13)

Now, that whole temptation by the devil would have been an exercise in futility if he had been trying to tempt a *divine* Person to sin. So, the devil was not trying to get *God* to sin; no, he was trying to get the *human* nature of Christ to sin, so that Christ would not be qualified to be the Saviour!

Look, if this was not the case, then why does Heb 4:15 start off by saying, “***For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are...***”?

Thus, according to our Lord’s human nature, He had to have had the possibility to sin or not to sin,¹⁴ otherwise how could He have been *tempted in every respect as we are*?

But this is now where the importance of Father’s equipping of the Son comes in!

You see, our Lord was uniquely anointed, sanctified and ministered to by the Holy Spirit! For look, in order to sin, a person must first have a *desire* for sin. But Jesus’ human nature, throughout His life, was marked by a *zeal for righteousness*! Indeed, is this not why He once told the disciples (in Jn 4:34), “***My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work***”?

Thus, were satan’s temptations ever so strong against Jesus’ human nature, our Lord’s divinely empowered will was even stronger!¹⁵ That’s why Heb 4:15 does not just say that in Jesus we have ***one who in every respect has been tempted as we are***, but it straightaway adds the words, “***yet without sin.***”

My brother & sister, how beautiful! You see, this way, Jesus did not just *die* for us! No, He also *lived* for us! Yes, He also lived a life of perfect obedience for us, which is crucial to our redemption, in that one Man fulfilled the demands of the Law for all other who receive Him in faith!

So, *yes*, Jesus is our substitute Man *when He offers Himself on the cross*. But more – He alone is the sinless Man *who lived a sinless life*.

Says RC Sproul, “*In one respect, Christ’s sinlessness is more astonishing than His resurrection. Other people have come back from the dead, but no other person has lived a sinless life. His perfect life is amazing because none of us has ever loved the Lord with all our mind, heart, and strength. None of us has loved our neighbour as much as we love ourselves. There is just too much sin in us being manifested every hour of every day. Can you imagine someone living every minute of his entire life loving God with an undiluted, perfect affection, whose whole mind is devoted to the Father, who has no other desire than to obey the Father’s will? That is more difficult for me to comprehend than that Jesus came out of the grave!*” (So far, Sproul).

Here is point 3...

How Could a Sinless Man Die?

¹⁴ Augustine’s *posse peccare* and *posse non peccare*.

¹⁵ However, Sproul (ibid:251) thinks it’s wrong to believe that Christ’s divine nature made it impossible for His human nature to sin. Says he, “If that were the case, the temptation, the tests, and His assuming of the responsibility of the first Adam would have all been charades. This position protects the integrity of the authenticity of the human nature because it was the human nature that carried out the mission of the second Adam on our behalf. It was the human nature uniquely anointed beyond measure by the Holy Spirit.”

My brother & sister, before Adam & Eve sinned, there was no human death! And that makes perfect sense for, according to the Bible,¹⁶ where there is no sin, there is also no death!

Well, *that being the case*, how was it then possible for sinless Jesus to die?

The answer is: The only way Jesus could die – yes, the only way He could come under God’s death-demanding judgement for sin – was that He *took upon Himself the guilt of other people’s sin* – yes, the guilt of your & my sin!

Indeed, in & of Himself, the Son was not vulnerable to death. That’s why He even said (in Jn 10:17-18), “***For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again...!***”

My brother & sister, once Jesus allowed the transfer of the guilt of His people onto Himself, He was susceptible to death!

But look! Once He had paid the price for your & my sins – yes, once God accepted Jesus’ sacrifice as full payment for His loved-ones’ sins, there was no longer any reason for sinless Jesus to stay dead! In fact, it was impossible for Him to stay dead, for death only rules where there’s still sin!

Well, having heard again these things, why shall you & I not come in awe before our Lord? Why shall we not fall at His feet in adoration?

Why shall we not praise and thank Him – yes, He who, although He was fully God and equipped beyond measure, nevertheless experienced temptation with the full force behind it?

Why shall we not adore Him who so loved you & me that He took the way of God-forsakenness & death so that we could live!?

AMEN (2321 words excluding footnotes)

¹⁶ Indeed, look at Gn 2:17 “...***but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.***” Clearly, death followed upon sinful disobedience to God! Also cf. Rm 6:23 ***For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*** And cf. also Js 1:15 ***Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.***