MYTHCONCEPTIONS:
“Mind over Matter”
A sermon by
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Sunday, November 15, 2020

TEXT: 2 John 1:7-11, 1 Timothy 2:1-7 and Romans 2:1-2

2 John 1:7-11

Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist! Be on your guard, so that you do not lose what we have worked for but may receive a full reward. Everyone who does not abide in the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God; whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching; for to welcome is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person.

1 Timothy 2:1-7

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings should be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all —this was attested at the right time. For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Romans 12:1-2

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

My brother was eleven years old when the television series The Incredible Hulk first aired. It was one of his favorite shows. It starred Bill Bixby as mild-mannered Dr. Bruce Banner. It co-starred body-builder Lou Ferrigno as the big, green Hulk. David loved the television show because the cartoon version of The Incredible Hulk had premiered the year he was born, 1966.

The cartoon only lasted two seasons. However, syndication of reruns meant that the show got regular play on Saturday mornings as David grew up.

The show’s theme song told the whole story of how the Hulk came to be. I came to hate the song, but I will take one for the team and sing it for you now.
Okay, I’ll wait a few seconds for our collective IQ to return to normal.

There you have it. Dr. Banner’s DNA is damaged when he is over-exposed to gamma radiation. When he becomes angry or enraged, he transforms into the big, green Hulk. In his anger, the Hulk goes on a rampage, destroys the bad guys, and causes much property damage. The Hulk is an insurance adjustor’s nightmare! As Dr. Banner, he would often say, “Don’t make me angry. You wouldn’t like me when I’m angry.”

When Dr. Banner does become angry, it is as if a completely different entity takes over his body. When the rage passes, Bruce Banner will often find himself in an unfamiliar location with no memory of what has just happened.

As in the Snickers commercial whose catchphrase is, “You’re not yourself when you’re hungry,” Bruce Banner is not himself when he is angry. He becomes the Hulk. One part of his nature rules the other. One part of his nature becomes lost in the other. When Banner becomes the Hulk, there is little of Dr. Banner that is left or may be seen.

This brings us to Apollinaris. Apollinaris is the fourth century Bishop of Laodicea. He is a friend of Athanasius, the defender of the faith against Arius, whom we studied last week. Apollinaris fully accepts the Nicene formula. He passionately believes that Jesus is fully God and fully human. Had Apollinaris stopped there, he would have been fine. Heresies often arise when we try to precisely define how Jesus is fully God and fully human.

Apollinaris drifted into heresy by giving more weight to Jesus’ divinity than to Jesus’ humanity. Allow me to illustrate. I want you to think of a weighing scale made up of two pans attached to a moveable arm. [SLIDE] Think of the symbol of the scales of justice. Let the entire scale represent Jesus Christ. One pan represents Jesus’ human nature. The other pan represents Jesus’ divine nature.

Christian doctrine teaches that in Jesus Christ, these two pans, representing the human nature and divine nature of Jesus, are in balance. Jesus is fully God. Jesus is fully human. He is not more human than God. Neither is he more God than human. He is uniquely the God-man Jesus Christ. Christian heresies come about when more weight is given to one pan than the other.

If you emphasize Jesus’ human nature more than his divine nature you are in error. That is what Arius did.

Last week, we looked at Arianism. Arianism teaches that Jesus is the first of the created beings but less than God. Remember what Arius said? “There was a time when the Son of God was not.” That makes Jesus more human than divine.

If you emphasize Jesus’ divine nature more than his human nature, you are also in error. Docetism teaches that Jesus is a divine being who only appears to be human. We covered that heresy several weeks ago.

The Council of Nicaea in 325 AD resolves that Jesus is one person with a divine nature and human nature, fully God and fully human. The question is, “How?”

The problem for Apollinaris centers around two questions: 1) “How can Jesus be sinless if Jesus is fully human? Simply put, if Jesus is human, he must be a sinner. The second question is this: 2) How can the divine Son of God be born in a sinful human body?
Apollinaris affirms the full divinity of Jesus. However, to get around the problem of sinful flesh, the Jesus that Apollinaris presents must be less than fully human.

Thanks to Plato, the whole world at this time believed human beings to be made of three things. Those three things are a 1) body, 2) a sensitive soul (animal soul), and 3) a mind or spirit (rational soul). Apollinaris got around the question, “How could the Son of God dwell in a sinful human body?” by stating that the human Jesus, born of a woman, supplied only the flesh and the animal soul. The Logos, the Word of God, as Jesus’ intellect or rational soul took over his body. It controlled everything that Jesus did, everything that Jesus taught, and every miracle Jesus performed.

Here is a direct quote from Apollinaris: “So Christ, having God as his spirit—that is, his intellect—together with soul and body, is rightly called “the human being from heaven” ! Also this, “Christ is one, moved only by a divine will, just as we know that his activity is one, manifested in different marvels and sufferings of his one nature, for he is believed to be God enfleshed”III And this, “Christ is not a man, but like man, because He is not of one substance with mankind in respect to the highest directing principle of His existence.”

Arius said that Jesus is like God, but not God. Apollinaris said Jesus is like a human being but not really a human being. According to Apollinaris, people who saw Jesus, saw only Jesus’ body. He was like a man. He looked like a man. He talked like a man. He acted like a man. However, when they heard him teach, it was the mind and intellect of the Son of God that they were hearing, expressed through his flesh.

A good analogy would be a computer. Jesus body was the hardware. His animal soul (that which made him alive) was the operating system. These were fully human. Jesus’ mind, his intellect, were the divine part. They were the software that used the hardware and controlled the operating system to make it functional.

When the Hulk gets angry, Dr. Bruce Banner disappears. The Hulk takes over. It is likely a flawed analogy, but for Apollinaris, the mind of Jesus as a human being never existed. Only the divine mind, will, or intellect of the Logos, the Word, the Son of God existed from the moment of conception.

Here is the problem. Apart from our intellect, we are no different than the animals. We are called Homo Sapiens, thinking man, for a reason. It is the primary thing that makes us human. Our capability for rational thought separates us even from the higher animals.

When our brain activity stops, we are declared brain dead. Our body remains alive, but the operating system and software no longer function.

So, what is wrong with Apollinaris’ teaching?

Do you remember the story in Luke of Jesus astounding the Jewish leaders in the Temple when he is only twelve? One of the attributes of God is God’s immutability. Simply put, that means that God does not change. If Jesus has the mind of God, a divine mind only, then Jesus’ mind would never change or evolve.

Yet, the Scriptures testify in Luke 2:52, immediately after the incident in the Temple, “And Jesus increased wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.” Human intellect grows. It changes. It develops. Jesus experienced life the same way you or I do. We are born, we live, we die. We learn, we grow as humans, we evolve intellectually as humans.

If Jesus has the mind of God, Jesus knows everything that God the Father knows. Yet, in Matthew 24:36, Jesus teaches about the Second Coming, by saying, “But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” If Jesus possessed the divine mind in a human body, would Jesus not know what only God knows?

Also, could Jesus really be tempted as we are? In Luke’s Gospel, we have the story of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness. If Jesus’ mind is divine, he doesn’t have to consciously choose God’s way. He can make no other choice. He cannot choose any other way. Jesus cannot sin. If he cannot sin, he cannot choose to obey. He must obey.

Allow me to ask you a question. Scripture refers to Jesus as the Second Adam. We all know the first Adam sinned against God by choosing rebellion over obedience. Adam chose his own way over God’s way. The whole message of the Bible centers around God’s redemption through Christ.
Now, here is the question. Why did God not give Adam a divine intellect like Jesus at the outset? It would certainly have been a lot easier if Adam could never have sinned. It would have been much easier if Adam did not possess the capability of sinning.

How could a Jesus who cannot sin, possibly redeem the sons and daughters of Adam who not only are capable of sin, but do sin? To fully redeem us, Jesus must be made like us in every way. That is what Scripture says of him in Hebrews 4:15, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested[a] as we are, yet without sin.’

Adam, in an act of the will and intellect, chooses to obey God in eating the fruit of the forbidden tree. The tree is a test of the Covenant of Works.

How does Adam do with this test? Adam says, “Not Thy will, but my will be done.” Jesus, the Second Adam, in the Garden of Gethsemane, consciously chooses to obey God as a human being, saying, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, but Thy will, not my will be done.”

If Jesus is speaking as divine intellect, there is no sacrifice of obedience. He is merely doing what he is programmed to do. However, if he surrenders his human will to God’s will, he redeems with perfect obedience as the Second Adam what the first Adam refuses to do. It is his human intellect choosing by an act of will to do what the first Adam failed to do.

If Jesus cannot sin, he is not like you or me. If he can sin, and yet does not sin, he offers to God what I owe, but cannot provide for myself . . . a sinless life, the righteousness that God demands. In that instance, Jesus chooses as a human being to obey God. He is not obeying as a divine being.

2 John 1:7-8, the first Scripture lesson this morning, records these words, “Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist! Be on your guard, so that you do not lose what we have worked for but may receive a full reward.”

You see, here is the danger. The obvious deceit is to say that Jesus Christ has not come in the flesh. Apollinaris would respond by saying, “I believe Jesus came in the flesh.” However, the less obvious deceit is the subtlety of his argument. Apollinaris would claim that Jesus came in the flesh, but not fully in the flesh. Only his body and animal soul are of the flesh. His hardware is human.

Apollinaris would say his higher soul, his rational part, his mind is divine. Only then could the divine take on sinful human flesh.

In other words, Jesus’ software is divine. His divinity absorbs his humanity, just as the Hulk absorbs the body, personality, and intelligence of Dr. Bruce Banner. Apollinaris comes down on the side of the Docetists. Jesus only appears to be fully human.

Now draw the conclusion. When Jesus goes to the cross to give his life, Jesus does not die as a fully human being. His flesh dies. His soul dies. His mind, being divine cannot suffer. His mind, being divine, cannot die.

If you have ever been depressed, anxious, worried, down, or discouraged, you know that sometimes the pain of the mind is greater than physical pain. You break your leg, and the doctor casts it. What do you do with a broken spirit? The Bee Gees were right. How can you mend a broken heart? Those are sufferings of the mind.

If Jesus does not share our mind, he does not fully share our pain. The most anguished cry of Christ on the cross is not, “This hurts,” or “I thirst.” That reflects physical suffering. Jesus’ greatest cry on the cross is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” That is rational, emotional pain. If Jesus does not share that psychic pain with you and with me, he is not fully human.

He is not like you. He is not like me.

If our human intellect has not died in Christ, been taken to the cross with Christ, can it really be redeemed? Has Jesus only saved our bodies? Has Jesus only saved our souls? Are we only two-thirds saved . . . just our soul and body, but not our mind?
Apollinaris was labeled a heretic. It is not enough to claim Jesus’ full divinity. Jesus embraces our full humanity. If he does not, what Paul writes to Timothy, again an early hymn of the Church, could not be true.

“For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all.”

Is Jesus’ rational soul divine and not human? The leaders of the Church at the Council of Constantinople answered with an emphatic, “NO!” Jesus is fully God. Jesus is fully human. Son of God and Son of Man.

In the Chalcedonian Creed the Church confesses “...one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and body; coessential with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin;”

Fully of the same substance as us...of the same substance, body, soul, and mind. Jesus came to redeem our mind because our mind also needed to be redeemed. If he did not fully share that mind, he could not redeem that mind.

Gregory of Nazianzus had a classic response to Apollinaris. It is this. “What is not assumed cannot be saved.” Jesus assumed our flesh in the Incarnation. He bore our sins in his body on the cross. He saved our flesh. However, if Jesus did not assume our rational soul, he could not save that part of us.

The Council of Constantinople knew and agreed. Jesus must be fully human, body, mind, and soul.

It was Christmas Eve. A young Norman Vincent Peale was shopping with his father, Dr. Charles Clifford Peale. Clifford Peale was a physician who gave up his medical practice to become a pastor in the Methodist Episcopal Church. They were walking along Fourth Street in Cincinnati when a bum -- what we would call today a street person -- approached them. The man stretched out his filthy hand, placing it like a claw on young Norman’s shoulder. Frightened and repulsed, Norman shook himself free and ran down the sidewalk.

Dr. Peale went to his son, gave him a dollar, and instructed him to return to the man and offer him the money in the name of Jesus Christ. Norman did as he was told. He was surprised when the gentleman graciously received the money. Then the man smiled, and a beautiful radiance shone in his face. Traveling home that evening, riding the streetcar up Gilbert Avenue, Clifford Peale asked his son to describe what happened. Norman did not fumble for words. Quickly he answered, "I saw the man as he really is." His father responded, "Always remember and never forget it. Jesus Christ can make men and women what they can be."

Only a Jesus who sees us as we really are, who becomes as we really are, can understand us as we really are, and can save us as we really are.

Soli Deo Gloria. To God alone be the glory. AMEN.

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ii Norris, Richard A. Christological Controversy (Sources of Early Christian Thought, 84)