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JESUS OUR BROTHER AND SAVIOR

Hebrews 2:11-15

By

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Hebrews Lesson 7

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Many years ago, I came to the realization that *ideas drive the world*. Karl Marx had some ideas about politics and the economy, called Communism, that held millions under its sway for the better part of the 20th century. Over a billion Chinese are still under that ideology. Quite often, the man in the street is unaware of the philosophic underpinnings for his behavior, but he is still very much influenced by certain prevailing philosophies and ideas.

For example, the teenager who dresses in black, mutilates his body, and listens constantly to rock music that exalts death, probably has not read any books on the philosophy of nihilism, but it controls his thought patterns and behavior. Millions of Americans could not articulate the philosophy of post-modernism, but it governs their daily lives. Wrong ideas can have devastating effects.

That is why I am committed to sound doctrine. Our ideas about God, man, sin, and salvation greatly affect the way we think, feel, act, and relate to one another. Sound doctrine produces healthy minds, hearts, and relationships. False doctrine results in wounded minds, hearts, and relationships.

Several years ago, I read a book titled *The Cruelty of Heresy* [Morehouse Publishing, 1993], by C. FitzSimons Allison, an Episcopalian bishop. In trying to communicate to his students the importance of the early church councils and creeds, Allison began asking the question, "What happens to someone who follows heretical teachings?" He says (p. 17), "It became quickly and readily apparent how cruel heretical teachings are and how prevalent the heresies are in contemporary times." Then he makes this astute observation:

We are susceptible to heretical teachings because, in one form or another, they nurture and reflect the *way we would have it be* rather than the *way God has provided*, which is infinitely better for us. As they lead us into the blind alleys of self-indulgence and escape from life, heresies pander to the most

unworthy tendencies of the human heart. It is astonishing how little attention has been given to these two aspects of heresy: its cruelty and its pandering to sin (*ibid.*, italics his).

The Letter to the Hebrews begins by spelling out the vital doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ. In chapter one, the author makes it clear that the Son of God is distinguished from the Father, and yet is fully God. "He is the radiance of [God's] glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (1:3). He goes on to show that the Son of God is higher than the angels, whom He created and who worship and serve Him (1:4-14).

In chapter 2, after a brief exhortation, the author sets forth the truth that Jesus is also fully human. As the Cappadocians, a group of early church fathers, affirmed, "What he (Christ) did not assume he could not redeem" (Allison, p. 107, citing Gregory of Nyssa, *Against the Eunomians*, 2.10). To redeem people, Jesus had to assume human nature in its entirety, yet without sin.

In the early centuries of the church, there were several heresies regarding the person of Christ. All heresies contain *some* truth, but they emphasize those truths to the neglect of other biblical truths. The Docetic (from the Greek, *dokeo*, "to seem") heresy affirmed Jesus' deity, but denied His true humanity. They could not accept that, as God, Jesus really suffered. So they taught that He only *appeared* to suffer. A modern version of this heresy is Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science cult, which teaches that suffering and even death are illusory and only exist because we lack faith (Allison, p. 30).

The Arian heresy denied Jesus' true deity, and declared that He was an intermediate deity, neither fully God nor fully man. Arius affirmed that Jesus was God's agent in creation, but he taught that Jesus was the first created being and was therefore subordinate to the Father. The Jehovah's Witnesses are modern Arians.

Apollinarius joined with Athanasius in fighting the Arians, but he went too far by asserting the unity of Christ's person as God, but at the expense of His true humanity. He did not go as far as the Docetists, in denying Jesus' physical existence or His suffering. But

he limited Jesus' humanity to the physical, and taught that His soul and mind were divine only. Jesus had a human body, but His nature was not human, but divine. This is also called the Monophysite (= "one nature") heresy (Allison, pp. 107).

All of these imbalances were worked out at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, which affirmed that Christ is one person with two natures, the divine and the human, in unchangeable union. It maintained the unity of Christ's person, while distinguishing between His two natures, which are not confused or abolished because of the union (J. H. Hall, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. by Walter Elwell [Baker], p. 204).

All of this is background to our text, which affirms the humanity of Jesus. The author is showing that ...

As the Captain of our salvation, Jesus became man
in order to bring us to God.

The Puritans used to structure their sermons as "Doctrine" and "Use," which meant, "application." I think that their approach is helpful with this text, and so I follow it here:

The doctrine: Jesus became man to save us.

There are three points here:

1. As a man, Jesus' death secured our salvation (2:11a).

The word "for" directs us back to 2:10, where he said that God saw fit "to perfect the author of [our] salvation through sufferings." To save humans, Jesus had to assume full humanity. But, for His suffering and death to have merit before God, Jesus had to be fully God. In the incarnation, He did not lay aside His divinity, although He set aside His glory and He temporarily gave up the use of some of His divine attributes (omniscience, for example, John 11:34; Matt. 24:36). But He did fully assume our human nature.

In verse 11, Jesus is the one who sanctifies, which requires His being without sin. In Hebrews, the verb, "to sanctify," refers to the whole of salvation, not just to the aspect of progressive holiness (see 9:13; 10:10, 14, 29; 13:12). As Hebrews 10:10 puts it, "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." F. F. Bruce explains (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans], p. 45), "By His death they are

consecrated to God for His worship and service and set apart for God as His holy people, destined to enter into His glory. For sanctification is glory begun, and glory is sanctification completed." Philip Hughes explains (*A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans], p. 103), "the 'sanctification' of which our author speaks is intimately connected with and flows from Christ's priestly offering of himself on the cross. His consecration of himself is the source of our consecration (cf. Jn. 17:19)." The present tense participles in 2:11 "mark the continuous, personal application of Christ's work," both "in the individual soul and in the whole body of the Church" (B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans], p. 50).

The author says, "both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one" ("Father" has been added by the translators, but it is really an interpretation). Some (as the NASB) interpret this to refer to our common spiritual bond in God, but the context favors viewing it as a reference to our common human nature (see Hughes, pp. 104-105). The difference is that Jesus was holy and thus the sanctifier, whereas we are sinful and thus the object of His sanctification, which He accomplished on the cross. The main point is that Jesus had to assume our human nature fully in order to offer Himself as our substitute on the cross.

Before we leave this point, let me apply it briefly: *There is no such thing as salvation apart from sanctification.* It's all one package. When we get saved, we are set apart unto God. The actual working out of that holiness takes a lifetime, which invariably includes setbacks when we yield to sin. But the point is, every true believer is involved in the process of growing in sanctification, or holiness. As we're commanded in 12:14, we are to pursue "the sanctification, without which no one will see the Lord." It is *not optional* for believers to do battle against the flesh! Holiness is bound up with the very notion of salvation.

2. Jesus' humanity is so complete that He is not ashamed to call us brethren (2:11b-13).

Because Jesus took our humanity on Himself, He is not ashamed to call us brethren. In verse 14, it states that as God's children, we share in blood and flesh (literal order in Greek; it probably has no special significance; see Hughes, p. 110, note 101).

But Jesus “partook” of the same. Here a different verb and verb tense are used; the meaning is that the children naturally share in humanity (blood and flesh), but Jesus, at a fixed point in time, chose to partake of humanity (Bruce, p. 41, note 55). He existed eternally as God, but in the incarnation, He added a human nature and body to His deity, in order to redeem us. If Jesus were only a man, and not God, neither verse 11 nor 14 would make sense. Why would a man be ashamed to call fellow men “brothers”? Why would a man need to partake of human nature? Jesus’ deity is assumed behind both verses.

The author goes on to support his point about Jesus’ oneness with our humanity by quoting three Old Testament texts (from the Septuagint, the Greek translation), each of which makes a slightly different point.

A. As our brother, Jesus proclaims God’s name to us (2:12).

Verse 12 quotes from Psalm 22:22. Psalm 22 is one of the most obviously messianic psalms in the Bible. It describes in detail a death by crucifixion centuries before that was known as a means of execution. Jesus cited Psalm 22:1 from the cross: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” The psalm goes on to describe the mocking of those who witnessed the crucifixion, the physical agony of the victim on the cross, and even the gambling for his clothes on the part of the soldiers. This section ends with the cry, “Save me from the lion’s mouth,” and the confident affirmation, “From the horns of the wild oxen You answer me” (Ps. 22:21).

Then, the next verse is the one quoted in our text: “I will proclaim Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise.” There has been an obvious, radical change between verses 21 and 22, and we know that that change was the resurrection. God’s name refers to His character and attributes, and here, especially, to His grace and mercy as seen in the cross. The word “brethren” in the first line of this verse is parallel to “congregation” in the second line, which is the Greek *ekklesia*, usually translated “church” in the New Testament. Jesus’ brothers are the members of His church, those who are redeemed by His blood.

Two unrelated observations before we move on: First, *the fact that Jesus calls us His brethren should cause us to marvel and draw near to*

Him as One who understands our humanity. But, we should refer to Jesus as our brother only in the most reverent and careful manner. While we should draw near in fellowship to Christ, we should never be too casual about our relationship with Him. Yes, we can marvel that He condescends to call us His brothers and sisters, but we must always remember that He is Lord. It would be as if you were a private in the army, and a general told you to call him by his first name. You may do that in certain situations, but on the base, around other soldiers, you should respect his office and always refer to him as the general. It would be arrogant for a private to be too chummy with the general. It would be a mark of humility for the general to call the private his brother.

Second, notice that *Jesus sings!* I don't often think of Him in that way, but here He says, "In the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise." We know that after the Last Supper, Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn before they went out to the Mount of Olives (Matt. 26:30). If you want to know the words that they sang, you will find them in Psalms 115-118, the last part of the Hallel (they sang the first part, Psalms 113-114 before the Passover meal). We don't know the tunes! But if Jesus sang God's praise, and did it right before He went to the cross, as His people we, too, should sing God's praises, even when we face trials.

B. As our brother, Jesus shows us practically how to trust God in the midst of trials (2:13a).

The second quote probably comes from the LXX of Isaiah 8:17 (it could be from 2 Sam. 22:3), with the third coming from Isaiah 8:18. This is a messianic section of Isaiah. Isaiah 7:14 is the familiar prophecy of the virgin bringing forth a son whose name would be Immanuel. In 8:14, it mentions that the Lord would become to Israel "stone to strike and a rock to stumble over" (see Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:8). In 9:6 is the well known prophecy, "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace."

The point of this quote, where Messiah says that He puts His trust in God," is that in His humanity, Jesus depended on the Father for all things (John 5:19; 14:10). We see this supremely in His prayer life, since prayer is an expression of our complete depend-

ence on God. As a man, Jesus demonstrated for us how we are to live, taking everything to God in prayer, trusting God for His sustenance and strength in every situation.

- C. As our brother, Jesus is the Son of God and we are the children of God (2:13b).

Even though the quotes come from successive verses in Isaiah, the author adds, "And again," because he is making a different point. This quote may place Jesus in the role of Father (not brother), with the church as His children. Or, if Jesus is still viewed as our brother, then He is speaking as God's Son, thanking the Father for the spiritual children that the Father has given to Him, who are thus His brothers and sisters. Jesus is uniquely God's Son by eternal generation. We are God's children by the new birth, which God bestows on us through Christ (John 1:12). Either way, the point of the quote is that Jesus is identified with those He came to save. In John 6:37, Jesus refers to those who come to Him as those whom the Father gave to Him. Here, He calls us His children, whom God has given Him (John 13:33; 21:5). We can be sure that Jesus will not lose any of the children that the Father gives to Him (John 6:39). We are more precious to Him than any earthly father's children are to him, because Jesus gave His life so that we could join His family!

The first doctrinal point is that Jesus' death secured our sanctification. Second, Jesus' humanity is so complete that He is not ashamed to call us brethren. Finally,

- 3. Jesus' humanity and victory over death frees us from the power and fear of death (2:14-15).

This section goes to the end of the chapter, but for sake of time, we must close here. The fact of the incarnation is emphatically stated here, along with its purpose, "that through death, [Jesus] might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives." The bodily resurrection of Jesus is implicit behind these verses. If He had remained in the grave, He could not have rendered the devil powerless, nor could He have freed us from the power and fear of death. Those statements assume His victory over death through His resurrection.

Satan is described as the one who had the power of death. This does not mean that he has the power to kill people at will. The risen Christ holds the keys of death and Hades (Rev. 1:17, 18). God determines the length of each person's life (Ps. 139:16) and He alone has final authority in this matter (Job 2:6; Luke 12:5). But Satan tempted Adam and Eve to sin, and through sin, death entered this world. Satan was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). He delights in seeing people die outside of Christ, because they then join him in hell throughout eternity, which is the second death (Rev. 20:14-15).

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus paid the penalty of spiritual death that we had incurred through sin. Thus He delivers us from Satan's domain. Though believers still die physically, spiritually they are delivered from the second death. Thus Satan's power is broken. In Christ, we do not need to fear death any longer. As Jesus told Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die" (John 11:25-26).

Thus, the main doctrine of our text is that Jesus became man in order to save us. He took our humanity in order to bear the penalty for our sins. But this is only true for those who are His children through the new birth, to those who believe on His name (John 1:12-13).

The application: The fact that Jesus became man to save us should cause us to draw near to Him in times of trial and to proclaim His name, even in the face of persecution.

Remember, the Book of Hebrews was written to a suffering church that was facing persecution. They were tempted to give up their profession of Christ and retreat to their old, more comfortable ways. But the author is showing them the excellency and supremacy of Jesus Christ so as to say, "You can't go back!" If Jesus is eternal God who took on human flesh to die for our salvation, you can't turn back to any other system of belief. He is God's final word to us (1:2). He entered glory only after suffering; you must be prepared to follow the same path.

The doctrines of Jesus' deity and humanity are not just nice theological points for intellectual debate. They are precious truths

to sustain our souls in the trials of life! Whenever we face trials or are fearful of death, we have a personal refuge in our Brother who is our Savior! Jesus suffered in the flesh and was triumphant through His trust in God. "Since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted" (2:18).

Also, since in spite of our many sins and shortcomings, Jesus is not ashamed to call us brethren, we should not be ashamed to proclaim Him as Savior and Lord in this evil world, even if it results in persecution for us. Even if we die for our faith, we have a sure hope of being with Him throughout eternity.

Coming back to our starting point, I hope you see that sound doctrine matters greatly! As Baptists, I fear that we have gotten away from the great creeds, confessions, and catechisms that were learned verbatim by earlier generations of Christians. I close with the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563):

Question 1: What is thy only comfort in life and death?

Answer: That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ, who with his precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready henceforth to live unto him (in *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. by Philip Schaff [Baker], 3:307-308).

Discussion Questions

1. Some say that doctrine just leads to spiritual pride and division; thus it should not be emphasized. How would you reply?
2. Modern evangelicals are prone to believe in God as they want Him to be, not in God as revealed in His Word. What dangers does this expose us to? How can we avoid this propensity?
3. How can a believer who fears death overcome this fear?
4. Where is the proper balance between Jesus as our Brother and Jesus as the Lord to be feared?

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