

BOOK REVIEWS

Ware, A. Bruce, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflection on the Humanity of Christ* Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2013, ISBN 13-978-1-4335-1305-3

Bruce A. Ware is an American theologian, former president of the Evangelical Theological Society and a key figure in the debate over open theism. In this new book by him, based on the Scripture, by making it readable, comprehensive, and delightful, Bruce Ware focuses on the humanity of Jesus Christ. In a world where the concept of humanity is distorted through different kinds of interpretations, Bruce lifts up the nature of mankind to the biblical standard by pointing to the God who became one of us in all respects but sin. And, in contrast to the view of many religions, who view God as transcendental, distant and unreachable, this book clearly portrays how the divine became human, lived among us and died for our sins.

Ware says, “Could it be that even though Jesus was fully God, he lived his life fundamentally as a man?” (p. 12). He argues throughout the book that a proper understanding of the humanity of Jesus is sorely neglected in the church today (p. 32). We are familiar with the points of his deity, he says, but many of us are not familiar with the importance of his humanity. Fundamentally the book is framed by Philippians 2:5-8 (Paul’s address on Jesus’s kenosis or self-emptying), Ware explains. As he lucidly describes the humanity of Jesus, following the argument of the Apostle Paul on the concept of kenosis, the author makes it clear that Jesus Christ is fully God. Even though Jesus took the form of a servant, he is equal to God. “Nothing is equal to God except God! As God declares of himself, through the prophet Isaiah, ‘I’m God and there no other; I am God, and there is none like me’ (Isa. 46, 9; cf. Ex. 8, 10; 15,11; Deut. 3, 24; 2 Sam. 7, 22; 1 Kings 8, 21; Ps. 71, 19; Mic. 7, 18)” (p.18). Starting from the words of the Apostle John, Bruce asserts that the Word is both “with God” and is “God” (John 1, 1), Christ is the “exact imprint” of the nature of God (Heb. 1, 3) (p.18).

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One could ask: If Christ was fully God who lived on this earth in human nature, what was the role of the Holy Spirit in Jesus's earthly life? What could the Spirit of God contribute to the deity of Christ? Bruce says: "The answer we must give is: Nothing! As God he possesses every quality infinitely, and nothing can be added to him. So then we ask instead this question: what could the Spirit of God contribute to the *humanity* of Christ? The answer is everything of supernatural power and enablement that he, in his human nature, would lack. The only way to make sense, then, of the fact that Jesus came in the power of the Spirit is to understand that he lived his life fundamentally as a man, and as such, he relied on the Spirit to provide the power, grace, knowledge, wisdom, direction, and enablement he needed, moment by moment and day by day, to fulfill the mission the Father sent him to accomplish" (p. 30). To illustrate this point biblically, Bruce engages in a quite extensive exegesis of Isa. 11,1-3.

The Man Jesus Christ sets an example of dependence on the Heavenly Father and obedience to Him in the context of suffering. "This incarnate obedience, we might call it, was rendered often within the context of opposition and affliction, with the result often, that his obedience was the cause of much further suffering. In other words, he knew that he obeyed the Father, he was inviting only greater opposition and was putting himself in a place of increased suffering. Obedience *per se* was not new; rather, this kind of obedience was indeed new" (p. 60). At a time when "wealth and health" gospel is preached, and suffering is considered as negative in spiritual maturity or labeled as lack of faith, the obedience of Jesus Christ in the context of suffering refreshes the authentic Christian and biblical outlook. "Oddly, some Christians seem instinctively to want to push away suffering. They think it best to keep suffering at an arm's length. But not only is this a mistake biblically and theologically; it is a huge mistake spiritually and practically" (p. 70).

We know that God has no gender and since he created man and woman in his image, He does not favour one gender over the other. However, when God sent a savior, he sent him as a man not a woman. "Therefore he has to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2, 17). Bruce gives the following reasons for which Jesus needs to be man not a woman:

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1. Jesus Christ's preincarnate existence and identity is clearly revealed to be that of the eternal Son of the Father (John 6, 37-38).

2. Our Savior must have been a man since he came as the second Adam, the man who stands as head over his new and redeemed race (Rom. 5, 12-19; 1 Cor. 15, 21-22).

3. The Abrahamic covenant requires that the Savior to come as the promised descendant of Abraham would be a man (Gen. 12, 2-3, Gen. 17, 16, 19).

4. The Davidic covenant explicitly requires that the one who will reign forever on the throne of David be a son of David. God's promise to David recorded in 2 Sam. 7, 12-13 reflects that. Both Ezekiel 34, 23-24 and 37, 24-28 indicate the ongoing longing and expectation of this promise.

5. The new covenant of Jeremiah 31, 31-34 requires that the Savior will actually accomplish the forgiveness of sins it promises, and to do this the savior must be male. The suffering servant whom Isaiah presents, who would bear our griefs and sorrows and have laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53, 4-6) should be male. Luke's account of the Last Supper of Jesus with disciples confirms this understanding (Luke 22, 21; 1 Cor. 11, 25).

6. The Savior must come as a prophet like unto Moses, as predicted by Moses and fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Deut. 18, 15).

7. Our new and permanent High Priest, whose office is secured as sins are atoned for and full pardon is pleaded on our behalf before the Father, must be a man (Heb. 7, 27-28).

8. Not only did our Savior come as the last and greatest prophet, like unto Moses, and as the High and Eternal Priest, but he also came as the glorious King of Kings, reigning over the nations in splendor and righteousness (Isa. 9, 6-7; Psalm 45, 6-7; Matt 19, 28; Rev. 19, 11-21).

9. The incarnate mission and ministry of Jesus required that he came as a man. Yes, Jesus was the great and final prophet (Heb. 1, 1), priest (Hebrews (7-10), and king (Luke 1, 32-33; Col. 1, 13), and for all these reasons he must have come as a man.

To this Bruce adds, "God designed male leadership sent his Son as a man, functioning and ministering within the very overall patriarchal structure God himself established. Therefore, for social and cultural reasons, many of which were themselves established by God, our Saviour had to be a man" (p. 104.)

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A critical reading of this book reveals a lack of accuracy in presenting the relationship between the two natures of Christ. Sometimes Ware seems to separate the two natures of Christ in a Nestorian manner. For example: “Some activities are tied, strictly speaking, only to one or the other of his two natures, and it is important that we discern this in order not to misunderstand either Christ’s deity or his humanity (p. 124). Perhaps an appeal to the great theologians of the christological controversies period would have benefited the author in this regard.

Apart from this quite serious flaw, this book is worth reading for the interesting biblical, theological insight on the divinity, humanity, incarnation and mission of Jesus Christ it offers.

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