Suffering and the Humanity of Christ

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Since the Fall, human existence has been marked by suffering. In his incarnate life, Jesus entered into this condition, living in perfect faith and obedience, ultimately giving his life as a substitute for sinners, accomplishing their redemption from sin through his death, resurrection, and ascension. As one who assumed true humanity within a fallen world, Christ's earthly life was characterized by profound suffering. According to Scripture, Jesus suffered not only physically in his crucifixion, but as the prophesied "suffering servant" (Isa 52:13–53:12), he also endured the betrayal and loss of close companions (Matt 26:14–16; John 6:66), rejection (John 1:11), abandonment (Matt 26:69–75), misunderstanding (John 12:16), false accusations (Mark 14:55–56), physical abuse (John 19:1), mockery (Matt 27:27–31), and public humiliation (Luke 23:35–39) that culminated in his death on the cross (Matt 27:45–54).

As theologians consider the suffering of Christ, two common errors tend to emerge: (1) theologians assert that God himself experienced the suffering of Christ, denying the impassibility of God, while (2) others maintain that Christ utilized divine resources, such as the beatific vision, which enabled him to endure suffering in a manner inaccessible to believers today.[1] These errors carry significant implications, not only for our understanding of the nature of God and the person of the Son, but also for how believers find hope amid present suffering.

This article will examine the suffering of God the Son incarnate and seek to answer the questions: in what sense did the incarnate Son suffer as a man, and what are the implications of his suffering for believers? I will answer these questions in four ways. First, it will present a theological account of the person of the Son, affirming the person-nature distinction and the Chalcedon definition that maintains the duality of divine and human natures without confusion, mixture, or compromise. Second, I will explore the suffering of Christ as recorded in Scripture, examining the biblical data to ascertain both the purpose of Christ's suffering and the means by which he obediently endured. Though uniquely sinless and unfallen, Christ endured genuine human suffering utilizing the same spiritual resources available to believers including the knowledge of God, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the exercise of faith. Third, in contrast to Jürgen Moltmann's theology of divine passibility, I will argue that the suffering of Christ was experienced solely in his humanity, maintaining the classical doctrine of divine impassibility. I will conclude by examining how the genuine suffering of Christ shapes the Christian life, focusing on the believer's call to follow Christ's example of faithful, obedient endurance (1 Pet 2:21; Heb 12:1–3).

Jesus, the Incarnate Son

Chalcedon confirmed the biblical teaching regarding the hypostatic union of Christ as having two complete natures, divine and human, united without confusion, change, division, or separation, with the properties of each nature being preserved.[2] Still, centuries later, theological errors concerning the person of Christ continue to obscure both theology proper and Christology, with significant implications for practical theology and biblical counseling.[3] This section will first examine the "person-nature" distinction, followed by a brief treatment of Christ's divine and human natures.

The Person-Nature Distinction

Prior to Chalcedon, categories of person and nature were developed to make sense of the biblical teaching of the oneness and threeness of God: that God is one divine nature subsisting in three distinct persons. The Synod of Alexandria (362) played a pivotal role in clarifying the "nature-person"

distinction by uncoupling the terms ousia and hypostasis to provide separate terms in identifying the one nature of God (ousia) and the three persons of the Trinity (hypostasis). Successive church councils helped define a person as the who — the active subject, the one who says "I" and performs actions and defined the nature as the what — or the essence or qualities that make something what it is, including the mind and the will.[4] Indeed, a person has a nature and can act only according to the capacities inherent in that nature.[5] Building upon this foundation, Chalcedon affirmed that Christ exists as one person in whom two distinct and complete natures, divine and human, are united without confusion or division:

> Christ, Son, Lord, unique; acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation — the difference of the natures being by no means taken away because of the union, but rather the distinctive character of each nature being preserved, and [each] combining in one Person and *hypostasis* — not divided or separated into two Persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ.[6]

Contra Monophysitism, the definition articulates a clear distinction between *person* and *nature,* thereby defining the orthodox formulation of the hypostatic union.[7] The definition likewise rejects heresies such as Nestorianism which falsely asserted two distinct persons in Christ. This person-nature distinction aided the church in rightly understanding the Son's incarnation by upholding both his divine and human natures as articulated in Scripture.

The church fathers established that God exists as one *nature* in three distinct *persons* (Father, Son, Spirit) and that Christ exists in one *person* (the person of the Son), with two distinct *natures* (divine and human). God is one in nature, "a unity (not uniformity), who reveals himself as possessing a single will, a single activity, and a single glory … All three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, subsist in the divine nature and possess the same divine attributes equally, not as three separate beings but as the one true and living God."[8] It is only through the external works (*opera ad extra)* and immanent relations (*opera ad intra*) that the distinctions between the persons of the Trinity can be observed.

The immanent relations of the Trinity are summarized as paternity, filiation, and spiration. "The Father eternally begets the Son ("paternity"), and the Son is eternally begotten of the Father ("filiation"). The Father and the Son eternally breathe forth the Spirit ("active spiration"), and the Spirit is eternally breathed forth by the Father and the Son ("passive spiration")."[9] In salvation, the economic works of the Trinity are evidenced in how the Father elects (Eph 1:3–5), the Son redeems (Gal 3:13), and the Spirit applies redemption (Eph 1:13–14). The person-nature distinction is foundational for rightly understanding both the triune nature of God and the union of divine and human natures in the person of the Son.[10]

Christ's Human Nature

Genesis 2:7 presents human nature as a union of material and immaterial elements, created in the image of God. Adam is formed from the "dust of the ground," signifying the material aspect, and receives the "breath of life" which some theologians identify as the immaterial component, commonly identified in theological terms as the soul, or inner man.[11] John Cooper describes this integrated constitution as a "holistic dualism," highlighting the inherent relationship between the material and immaterial.[12] To be human, then, is to exist as an embodied soul, a psychosomatic unity in which the material and immaterial are intrinsically joined.[13] The essential components of a human nature therefore include a body-soul composite, with shared properties and capacities. Gregg Allison identifies these common human capacities as "rationality, cognition, memory, imagination, emotions, feelings, volition, motivations, purposing, and more," while noting the common human properties of "gentleness, courage, initiative, nurturing, patience, protectiveness, goodness, and more."[14] While these essential capacities and properties vary in degree among individuals, they are what constitute the essence of embodied-soul humanity. Thus, in the incarnation, God the Son assumed a complete human nature to his person containing all the common capacities and properties that are essential to humanity including a physical body and rational soul made through the hypostatic union.

The fact that humans are created in God's image clarifies the mystery of how the second person of the Trinity assumed a human nature. Since humanity reflects the *imago Dei*, it is entirely coherent to affirm that the person of the Son can subsist in a human nature whose capacities are patterned after

God himself.[15] As Christ was entirely without sin, he perfectly embodies the image of God as man was intended (Gen 1:26–27; Heb 1:3) with all of the common human capacities and properties unmarred by sin. The divine Son, then, took on a complete human nature, perfectly bearing God's image as both a son and a vice regent as God intended humanity to do in the Garden of Eden (Gen 1:26–28).[16]

As a man, the divine Son fully experienced life through his human nature, as consistently affirmed in Scripture. Through the incarnation, he assumed flesh and embraced the spatial and temporal limitations inherent to humanity (John 1:14; Luke 2:7). In his human nature, Jesus developed physically, spiritually, and intellectually, following the typical pattern of human development (Luke 2:40, 52). He experienced the limitations intrinsic to human finitude including hunger (Matt 4:2; 21:28), thirst (John 4:7), fatigue (John 4:6), the need for rest (Mark 4:38), and a full range of sinless human emotions (Matt 14:14; 26:37; Luke 10:21; John 2:15; 11:35). His human nature also entailed a limitation of knowledge (Matt 24:36) and a human will (Luke 22:42). Furthermore, Christ faced genuine temptation, though he remained entirely without sin (Matt 4:1–11; Heb 4:15).[17]

In his human nature, Christ endured various forms of suffering (Matt 27:27–31; Mark 14:55–56; Luke 23:35–30; John 1:11, 19:1) and underwent a real, physical death (Matt 27:50; Luke 23:46). He was then raised bodily from the dead (1 Cor 15:45) and ascended bodily into heaven (Luke 24:50–53) where he now reigns as the Incarnate, Davidic Son (Rom 1:3–6; Col 3:1), awaiting the day of his return to judge the world as the glorified God-man (Acts 1:11; Col 3:4). Christ did not relinquish his human nature in his death and resurrection but retains his humanity in a glorified state. He continues to rule as God the Son incarnate.[18] However, while *fully* human, Christ was not *merely* human.[19] As the eternal Son incarnate, he continued to possess the fullness of the divine nature even as he assumed a complete human nature.

Christ's Divine Nature

The divine nature of the Son is the one nature of God. The divine nature is not a generic category shared by the persons of the Trinity in the same way that individual humans share in the human species; rather, it is fully, indivisibly, and uniquely possessed by each of the three divine persons: Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit.[20] Thus, the Son, just as the Father and the Spirit, is identical to God, distinguished only by his external or economic works (*opera ad extra)* and the immanent relations within the trinity (*opera ad intra*).[21] As the eternally begotten Son of the Father (filiation), the external mission was the assumption of human nature in the incarnation and atonement (*opera ad extra*). The Father and the Spirit did not become incarnate; the incarnation terminated solely on the person of the Son.[22] Yet, in becoming incarnate, the Son did not divest himself of the divine nature, nor did the incarnation temporarily terminate his eternal divinity or his divine functions. Stephen Wellum notes, "the Son continued to be who he had always been as God the Son. His identity did not change, nor did he change in ceasing to possess *all* the divine attributes *and* performing and exercising all his *divine* functions and prerogatives."[23]

In retaining his divine nature, the incarnate Son possessed the full range of both communicable and incommunicable divine attributes including omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, immutability, eternality, infinity, self-existence, aseity, sovereignty, impassibility, and transcendence. Simultaneously, he continued to exercise his divine role as the eternal Word through whom all things were created (John 1:3) and by whom all things are sustained (Heb 1:3). The incarnate Christ remained the divine Son even as he assumed a human nature into his person and simultaneously upheld his divine functions while living as a man.[24]

While kenotic theories seek to reconcile Christ's full humanity with his divinity by proposing a temporary limitation or suspension of divine attributes during the incarnation, such views ultimately compromise the doctrine of divine immutability.[25] Moreover, they stand in contradiction to the Chalcedonian definition of the hypostatic union, which affirms the full and undiminished union of both natures in the one person of the Son. The Son of God did not surrender or diminish any of his divine attributes in the incarnation. Rather, he lived fully as a man according to his human nature, while retaining the fullness of his divinity by living and acting as the divine Son through his divine nature. Wellum rightly observes, "Once we understand that Christ's nonhuman properties are not properties of his human nature but of his divine nature, we can see how a *person* who is fully human could have properties that no one who is *merely* human could have."[26] Using the person-nature distinction, there is no contradiction, then, to say

that the person of Christ was both omniscient *and* limited in knowledge.[27] In his divine nature, the Son possessed all knowledge; in his human nature, he only had the knowledge God the Father provided by the Spirit. Christ, then, did not need to empty himself of his divinity to assume a true human nature. He was and is fully God *and* fully man.

The Suffering of Christ

When the "Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), the second person of the Trinity stepped into a fallen world marred by sin and decay. In the incarnation, Christ subjected himself to the full range of human experience, including human pain, suffering, and even death.[28] Though impeccable, Christ was not immune to the suffering caused by the Fall. Indeed, in many respects, Christ experienced the effects of the Fall to a greater degree precisely because he was unfallen and without sin, suffering innocently in every way and experiencing the fullness of each and every temptation presented to him.[29] His obedient endurance in extreme suffering set an example for believers to emulate in their own experience of suffering (1 Pet 2:21; Heb 12:1–3). This section will examine how Christ suffered and endured according to his human nature. It will begin by analyzing the biblical evidence that affirms the reality of his suffering, then explore the theological rationale offered by the biblical authors regarding the purpose of his suffering.[30] Finally, it will address the means by which Christ persevered in suffering.

The Biblical Data

Centuries prior to the incarnation, the prophet Isaiah foretold of the suffering Messiah who would be "despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief … stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted … pierced … crushed … [and] oppressed." (Isa 53:3–7). The cause of his suffering is identified as the transgressions and iniquities of God's people, while its redemptive purpose is to bring healing to the nation of Israel through his wounds (Isa 53:5). The suffering servant Isaiah depicts is not the political redeemer the nation of Israel anticipated; however, his suffering allowed him to identify with the people he came to redeem. The NT

provides evidence that Christ is the Messiah Isaiah prophesied by detailing the suffering he experienced.[31]

The NT authors clearly portray the genuine suffering of Christ in every dimension of human existence: physical, emotional, and relational. In his humanity, he endured scourging (Matt 27:26), beatings (Luke 22:63), and crucifixion (Matt 27:35). He also endured the ordinary suffering of hunger (Matt 21:18–19), thirst (John 19:28), and weariness (John 4:6) that are native to a creaturely existence. Emotionally he faced verbal abuse, mockery (Luke 22:63–65), temptation (Heb 4:15), and profound anguish (Matt 26:38–39). Relationally, he was betrayed and abandoned by friends (John 13:21–30), grieved the death of loved ones (John 11:35), and was rejected by his own family (John 1:11). In his humanity, he felt the full weight of suffering: the lashes of the whip, the pain of betrayal, and the sorrow of death.

Christ's experience of typical human suffering was exacerbated by his unfallen and sinless state. Having never experienced imperfection, Christ felt the weight of suffering in its deepest form. Theologians have noted, "by virtue of the hypostatic union with the Logos, the natural operations of Christ's human being function at a superlative pitch of perfection in all their capacities, with the result that he sorrowed and suffered to the fullest human extent."[32] Just as Christ endures the fullness of temptation by never yielding, he also bears the fullness of sorrow and suffering because he alone is without sin. He feels the frailty of his physical body as he labors toward the cross, calling on his disciples to hold him up in prayer. Macleod notes, "Could there be a more impressive witness to the felt weakness of Jesus than his turning to those frail human beings and saying to them, 'I need your prayers!'?"[33] But in his weakest moment the disciples failed him, adding to the pain and anguish of his suffering. They slept when they should have been praying; they denied him when they should have been with him (Mark 14:66–72). Christ bore the full weight of redemption alone.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ is described as "sorrowful and troubled" (Matt 26:37), pleading with the Father to remove the suffering that awaited him, yet ultimately submitting to the will of God. Bruce Ware notes, "We dare not trivialize the agony of Christ here by thinking that somehow, because he was God, this obedience was easy or automatic. It was no such thing. Rather, as a man, Jesus obeyed the Father,

in the power of the Spirit, and as such he had to "learn obedience" by being tested in harder and harder ways."[34] This act of surrender mirrors a common form of human suffering: yielding personal desires to God's sovereign plan. In his humanity, Christ expressed a genuine desire to avoid the cross if redemption could be accomplished by any other means. Yet, in keeping with the doctrine of inseparable operations, his divine will remained perfectly united with the will of God. Christ's submission to the divine will in his humanity involved deep sacrifice that led to unimaginable pain and suffering.

Physically on the cross Christ was pulled to the extreme of human limitations. After being whipped and forced to carry his cross to the place he would die, Christ was physically nailed to the cross (John 19:17–18). According to medical experts, the nails in the wrists and feet would have damaged or severed major nerves causing continuous pain to radiate up both of Christ's arms and legs as he hung on the cross for hours.[35] The weight of his body would have dislocated his shoulders and elbows, while placing extreme pressure on his diaphragm making it nearly impossible to breathe and leading to a slow suffocation or eventual heart attack.[36] But though his physical pain was excruciating and unbearable, his loss of his sense of filial relationship with the Father was most devastating. Macleod writes,

> In the moment of dereliction, there is no sense of his own sonship. Even in Gethsemane, Jesus had been able to say, 'Abba!' But now the cry is, '*Elōi, Elōi'*. He is aware only of the god-ness and power and holiness and otherness of God. In his self-image, he is no longer Son, but Sin; no longer *Monogenēs*, the Beloved with whom God is well-pleased, but *Katara*, the cursed one: vile, foul and repulsive.[37]

This loss of awareness marks unimaginable suffering for the eternal Son who has always known Sonship. Though the loss is one of conscious awareness alone, the sheer weight of God's wrath in that moment faced without the awareness of his Sonship was unbearable. The suffering and punishment that was intended for sinful humanity was placed on the sinless Christ. What began in the incarnation with the assumption of a human nature culminated in the awful weight of agony on the cross where Christ faced not only brutal physical suffering but also deep emotional turmoil. As Macleod notes, "The humiliation of Christ was not a point, but a line, beginning at Bethlehem

and descending towards Calvary. But Calvary itself, in turn, is a line, as, on the cross, the Lord moves deeper and deeper into the abyss."[38]

The author of Hebrews notes that in his earthly ministry, Christ cried out with loud cries and supplications (Heb 5:7), demonstrating that his suffering was substantive, not symbolic. "It is clear from all the accounts that Jesus' experience of turmoil and anguish was both real and profound. His sorrow was as great as a man could bear, his fear convulsive, his astonishment well-nigh paralysing."[39] There is no category of human suffering that Christ did not experience in his human nature, and though he suffered greatly, he did not respond in sin, but humbly embraced the purpose for which he had been sent.

The Purpose of Christ's Suffering

The central purpose of the incarnation was the atonement. Indeed, redemption was dependent on Christ's suffering, which required his incarnation.[40] The divine Son assumed a true human nature to identify with humanity and serve as the perfect propitiation for sin (Rom 3:25). Since the penalty for sin is death (Rom 6:23), Christ became man so that he might die as a substitute for humanity, thereby satisfying God's wrath for sin and crediting those who trust Christ by faith with his righteousness (Rom 4:5). Suffering, therefore, is not merely a consequence but an essential aspect of the incarnation and of Christ's divine mission to satisfy God's wrath as a propitiatory sacrifice.[41]

John Piper identifies seven achievements of Christ's suffering: satisfying the wrath of God (Gal 3:13), bearing the sins of humanity and purchasing forgiveness (1 Pet 2:24), providing a perfect righteousness to sinners (Phil 2:7–8), defeating death (Heb 2:14–15), disarming Satan (Col 2:14–15), purchasing perfect final healing for his people (Rev 7:17), and ultimately bringing his people to God (1 Pet 3:18).[42] Christ's suffering was the means by which he satisfied God's wrath, set a model for the redeemed to follow, and revealed the surpassing greatness and glory of God.

The author of Hebrews notes that to bring many sons to glory, "it was fitting that he [God]… should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering" (Heb 2:10). As the sinless Christ, the perfection he acquired through suffering was not ethical in nature but vocational, demonstrating his qualification to accomplish the work of redemption.[43]

Christ was able to bring "many sons to glory" precisely because he suffered as a man. The fittingness of the suffering of the Son corresponds to the fact that to redeem humanity, the Son had to be made like man "in every respect" (Heb 2:17). Wellum observes,

> Unless the Son took upon himself our humanity and suffered for us, there would be no suffering to help humanity, no fulfillment of God's promises for humanity, and no return to the planned glory of humanity. Jesus's suffering and death, then, was not a failed end to the incarnation but the precise purpose of the incarnation, all of which fulfills the Creator-Covenant Lord's plan to perfect a new humanity to rule over his good creation.[44]

The suffering of Christ ultimately fulfilled God's promise to redeem a people for himself. It is by the wounds of Christ that God's people are healed (Isa 53:5) and brought back into right relationship with God. The suffering of Christ equipped him for his mediatorial role, enabling him to bear the penalty for sin and serve as the Great High Priest on behalf of the redeemed and are the basis of his continuing high priestly work in heaven.[45] In his role as High Priest, Christ is able to sympathize with his people precisely because he endured real temptation and suffering. He understands human frailty, having taken on a full human nature and shared in its weaknesses. Apart from suffering, then, there is no savior.

While the primary purpose of Christ's suffering was redemption, his suffering also serves as an example for his people to follow (1 Pet 2:21; Heb 12:1–3). In 1 Peter, Peter writes to exiled believers who are enduring intense suffering for the sake of their allegiance to Christ. Peter exhorts these suffering Christians to look to Christ's example of suffering, emphasizing his patient endurance in suffering without sin or retaliation.[46] In addition, the author of Hebrews presents Christ as the supreme moral example of suffering who believers are called to emulate so that they won't grow weary or fainthearted (Heb 12:1–3). Christ's faithful, obedient endurance in his life and death are the model by which humanity is called to suffer, and it is only because Christ "despised the shame" of the cross that Christians are empowered by the Spirit to faithfully endure without growing weary.

The Means of Obedient Suffering

For believers to emulate Christ's obedient suffering, it is essential to understand the manner in which he suffered in his humanity. As demonstrated above, Christ endured real, profound suffering through his human nature in order to accomplish redemption.[47] "The Christological tradition, inherited from the Fathers and the Scholastics, held that the Son of God did suffer, but *as a man and not as God.*"[48] Misunderstanding the means of Christ's faithful endurance and the role of his divinity has far-reaching implications for Christology. Scripture presents Christ's endurance of profound suffering in his humanity through perfect faith and reliance on the Spirit, rather than by drawing upon his divinity.[49]

In his earthly ministry, Jesus was always dependent on the Father. As Wellum explains, "Christ, as the Son, in order to accomplish our redemption *as our mediator*, spoke, acted, and knew in dependence upon his Father and in relation to the Spirit, primarily in and through his humanity, unless the Father by the Spirit allowed otherwise."[50] In this way, "The Son of God abandoned any use of his divine prerogatives and capabilities which, as a man, he would not have enjoyed, unless his heavenly Father gave him the direction to use such prerogatives."[51] Though Christ used divine prerogatives to further his mission as permitted by the Father, Scripture never portrays Jesus using his divine capabilities to escape or diminish suffering, for doing so would have disqualified him from serving as our high priest (Heb 4:15), obeying as the last Adam (1 Cor 15:45), and becoming our propitiation for sin (Rom 3:25). D. A. Carson observes, "He therefore would not use his power to turn stones into bread for himself: that would have been to vitiate his identification with human beings and therefore to abandon his mission, for human beings do not have instant access to such solutions. But if that mission required him to multiply loaves for the sake of the five thousand, he did so."[52] In other words, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

In addition, Christ "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself" (Phil 2:6–7) by living a fully human life, suffering not as the divine Son, but as the man Christ.[53] Macleod shows how Christ's limited knowledge as a man is evidence of his genuine faith arguing, "He had to learn to obey without knowing all the facts and to believe without being in possession of full information. He had to forego the comfort which

omniscience would sometimes have brought."[54] Had Christ exercised his omniscience in his humanity, he would have no need of faith to endure, for his knowledge would have assured him of the outcome of his suffering. However, in fully embracing his humanity Christ suffered as a man exercising genuine faith in God and his promises. In addition, in his humanity,

> The assurance of the Fathers love, the sense of his own sonship and the certainty of his victory were all eclipsed, and he had to complete his obedience as the one who walked in darkness, knowing only that he was sin and that he was banished to the outer darkness. He suffers as the one who does not have all the answers and who in his extremity has to ask, Why? The ignorance is not a mere appearing. It is a reality. But it is a reality freely chosen, just as on the cross he chose not to summon twelve legions of angels. Omniscience was a luxury always within reach, but incompatible with his rules of engagement. He had to serve within the limitations of finitude.[55]

In order for Jesus to fulfill the office of mediator, he had to do so within the limitations of both a human body and a human mind.[56] His obedience was wrought by faith and trust in God, not by his omniscience or omnipotence. He endured his suffering obediently, without retaliation, by continually entrusting himself to God (1 Pet 2:21). Though he had the ability as the divine Son to call down legions of angels to rescue him from his suffering, he faithfully endured and accomplished redemption by continually "'handing over' (*paredidou*) to God every dimension of his life."[57] Though Christ had access to divine power as the divine Son, use of his divinity would have nullified his ability to redeem humanity. Therefore, he willingly suffered within the limits of his human nature in order to bear the penalty for sin as the perfect sacrifice and propitiation.

As a man, Christ was empowered by the Holy Spirit, just as believers are today.[58] It was through the ministry of the Spirit that Christ was "able to offer himself without spot to God (Heb 9:14)."[59] And it was the ministry of the Spirit that kept Christ's faith intact and aided him in not falling into despair. Macleod observes, "More remarkably still, Jesus' own faith remained intact. Even at the lowest point, where he cannot say 'Abba!' he says '*Elōi!*' ('*My* God!)… To lose faith and lapse into despair would itself have been sin. But what a tribute it is to the spiritual strength of Jesus that

even as he walks through this darkness he reaches out towards a God still perceived as his own."[60] Even in his darkest hour on the cross, perceiving, as a man, both the loss of his filial relationship to God and the experience of being forsaken by God in the place of sinners, Christ continues to cry out to him in a personal manner. Empowered by the Spirit, he never loses faith; never sinks into despair.[61]

Christ, then, does not lessen the reality of his suffering by drawing upon his divine nature. Rather, he endures suffering fully within his humanity, relying solely on the resources available in his human nature, namely true, enduring faith, and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. The efficacy of Christ's suffering signifies that it was not merely an example of endurance, but that it truly accomplished the redemption of sinners through his substitutionary atonement. Christ could not have accomplished this if he had drawn upon his divine nature or relied on divine resources uncommon to humanity, for doing so would have disqualified him from serving as the promised Last Adam, son of Abraham, true Israel, Davidic son, and Messiah.

Common Errors

A proper understanding of Christ's two natures and the person-nature distinction are essential for accurately interpreting how he suffered during his earthly mission. Theological misconceptions in this area typically fall into two major errors: the first denies the doctrine of divine impassibility, while the second attributes Christ's endurance of suffering primarily to his divinity. Both reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of the person-nature distinction, though in different ways. As Christ's suffering in his human nature has been addressed above, this section will examine Jürgen Moltmann's conception of divine passibility in relation to the suffering of Christ.

Jürgen Moltmann and Divine Passibility[62]

German theologian Jürgen Moltmann reconciled the problem of evil by concluding that for God to be loving, he must be able to fully identify with sufferers which, in his view, requires that God himself must suffer. For Moltmann, God cannot be impassible for in order for him to love and relate to humans, he must also be able to suffer.[63] Moltmann rightly sees the cross

as the focal point of the entire Bible, however, he rejects the person-nature distinction and thereby rejects the classical Trinitarian understanding of the cross, as well as Chalcedonian Christology.[64] In Moltmann's understanding of the *communicatio idiomatum*, the divine and human attributes are ascribed to the whole person of Christ rather than to one or the other nature. In this understanding, what pertains to his human nature also affects his divine nature.[65] For Moltmann, the oneness of Christ makes it possible "to ascribe suffering and death on the cross to the divine-human person of Christ. If this divine nature in the person of the eternal Son of God is the centre which creates a person in Christ, then it too suffered and died."[66] Moltmann ascribes Christ's suffering not to the nature but to the person. Thus, since Christ suffered, the person of the Son suffered, ascribing suffering to God himself. The suffering of God, for Moltmann, is not accidental but essential for God to have the capacity to genuinely love.

> If God is truly involved in the lives of people, if he actually enters into acts within time and history, and most of all, if he does so as the God of love, then such a God must, by necessity, experience suffering … It is not only that God acts within history to change history, nor that he acts within the lives of human beings in order to affect them, but equally the course of history and vicissitudes of human life affect and change him.[67]

For Moltmann, it is God's passibility that enables him to love.[68] However, by attributing the human attribute of passibility to Christ's divinity, Moltmann has humanized the divine.[69] Thomas White observes, "There is an added danger in the language of divine passibility of projecting human pathos and suffering back from the economy of creation into the divine nature."[70]

Thomas Weinandy notes, "The catalyst for affirming the passibility of God … is human suffering. God must be passable for he must not only be in the midst of human suffering, but he himself must also share in and partake of human suffering. Succinctly, God is passable because God must suffer."[71] However, as Matthew Barrett has observed, the logic of passibility disregards the Creator-creature distinction.[72] In Moltmann's understanding of passibility, he ascribes human limitations to God's ability to relate to humanity by requiring that God suffer in order to know his people. However, as God, he does not have to be identical to humanity to know and relate

to humanity. In other words, as Creator, God does not have to experience every facet of human existence to relate to his creation.

Barrett counters Moltmann's claim that in order to truly love God must suffer by arguing that "Far from undermining love, impassibility actually safeguards God's love, guaranteeing that his love is and remains perfect. Only an impassible love can ensure that our God does not need to be more loving than he already is."[73] Barrett rightly emphasizes one of the primary issues with Moltmann's argument for passibility: If God cannot be fully loving apart from suffering, then God's love is subject to change. Rejecting the person-nature distinction, as Moltmann does, denies the doctrine of divine impassibility, which in turn undermines the immutability of God. Undermining the doctrine of divine immutability undermines the entire doctrine of God, for if God can change, he ceases to be God. Thomas White observes that "the notions of divine suffering and change frequently are associated with a mistaken idea of the incarnation which confuses God's humanity, in which God [the Son] truly suffered, with his divinity, in which the suffering Christ remains impassible and immutable."[74] White rightly argues that Christ truly suffered in his humanity while the divine nature of the Son remained both impassible and immutable. The person-nature distinction accurately delineates the suffering of Christ as terminating on the nature, not the person, upholding the doctrine of divine impassibility.

Hope and Implications for Sufferers

Suffering is an inevitable reality of life in a fallen world, yet the genuine suffering of Christ in his humanity offers profound hope to those who suffer in four ways. First, through his wounds, Christ secured redemption and the guarantee of future resurrection and then new creation, which serves as the basis of the believer's hope in this life (Isa 53:5; 1 Cor 15:20; Rom 8:17). Second, Christ fully entered into human weakness and suffering, identifying with the afflicted, and now serves as their compassionate High Priest who intercedes for them and provides help in their time of need (Heb 4:15). Third, his suffering affirms the redemptive purpose of trials, as even the Son learned obedience through what he suffered (Heb 5:8). In this way, suffering is not arbitrary but directed by divine purpose and meaning (2 Cor

4:16–18; Rom 5:3–5; Jas 1:1–2). Finally, Christ's perseverance in suffering serves as an enduring and accessible example for believers to follow in their own seasons of suffering so that they do not grow weary (1 Pet 2:21; Heb 12:1–3).[75]

The primary implication of Christ's suffering and the greatest hope for sufferers is the redemption from sin Christ secured through his blood, inaugurating the new covenant and guaranteeing the future resurrection and glorification of the saints in the new creation. Jesus's life, death, resurrection, and ascension are an ongoing reminder of the temporal nature of suffering.[76] Believers can endure amid suffering because they know their suffering has an expiration date. In the incarnation and atonement, Christ has dealt with the believer's biggest problem: the wrath of God that promised eternal suffering and damnation. Because Christ has been raised, believers have a guarantee of their own future resurrection and the end of all pain and suffering for all eternity (1 Cor 15:52–54; Rev 21:4).

The new creation offers such profound hope to believers that Paul refers to the present sufferings of Christians as light and momentary in comparison to the glory that will be revealed on the last day (2 Cor 4:17).[77] This contrast highlights the disparity between present suffering and future glory: suffering is light and momentary whereas future glory is heavy and eternal.[78] God's promise to accomplish something of eternal value through temporal affliction transforms how believers interpret the hardships he allows. Paul encourages believers to look not to what is seen (temporal suffering) but what is unseen (eternal realities) (2: Cor 4:18). Faith, then, looks to the future, standing on the promises of God, not on the reality of present circumstances. Ultimately, God assures his people that in Christ, all suffering will end at the final consummation, when redemption is fully realized, and all things are made new. The temporal nature of suffering and the guarantee of future resurrection (1 Cor 15:20) provide hope and endurance in present suffering, as believers look to the unseen realities of the coming new creation as they endure suffering in this present evil age.[79]

Second, Christ's genuine experience of suffering in his humanity enables him to fully empathize with human weakness, not as an abstract truth or theoretical concept, but through personal, lived experience. Because Christ truly suffered as a man, believers can be confident that he understands the depths of human pain, temptation, and sorrow, and that he faithfully walks

with them through every trial as one who intimately knows their affliction. One of the deepest pains of suffering is the feeling of isolation, whether real or perceived, yet Christ comforts the afflicted with his immanent presence as one who understands (Ps 34:18, 46:1–2, 11; Heb 4:15).

The book of Hebrews highlights several enduring implications of Christ's human suffering. First, his full participation in humanity enables him, even in his exaltation, to "sympathize with our weaknesses" (Heb 4:15). Second, having himself been tempted and having suffered, he is "able to help those who are being tempted" (Heb 2:18),[80] while also serving as the supreme moral example of enduring faith amid suffering (Heb 12:1–3). Believers find assurance not only in the sufficiency of Christ's atoning work, but also in the experiential reality that their High Priest has entered into human suffering and remains both willing and able to help them in their time of need. The isolating nature of suffering is alleviated by a Savior who was forsaken in their place, ensuring they will never be forsaken (Heb 13:5).

Third, just as Christ's suffering served the divine purpose of qualifying him for his mediatorial role and securing redemption, so too, Christian suffering serves a redemptive purpose. To the sufferer, suffering may often feel meaningless, but for the believer, suffering is always used by God to produce his purposes, even when divine purposes may not be immediately observable (Gen 50:20; Rom 8:28–29). Believers are repeatedly called to look to the cross, the greatest example of suffering and evil, as the ultimate example of God's redemptive purposes in suffering. If God, in his sovereignty, used the evil of the cross to satisfy his wrath, so too, will he use the sufferings of sinners for redemptive purposes. Scripture connects trials and difficulty to the good things God wants for his people and is working to produce in them, namely sanctification (Rom 5:3–5; 8:28–29; 2 Cor 4:16–18; Jas 1:1–2). God's purposes in suffering bring great comfort and hope to believers because their suffering is not arbitrary, but deeply meaningful and essential in attaining their highest good, which is conformity to Christlikeness.[81]

The primary purpose of suffering in the life of a believer is sanctification (Rom 5:3–5; Rom 8:28–30; Jas 1:1–2).[82] For the believer, suffering is never punitive, but formative and corrective (Heb 12:6). In God's providence, he uses the suffering of this life to expose sin and lead his people in greater repentance and faith. Suffering serves to reveal the genuineness of faith (1 Pet 1:6–7) and substantiates the legitimacy of God's people as his sons

and daughters (Heb 2:10–13; 12:6).[83] Suffering also serves to keep believers dependent on God and far from the deceptiveness of self-sufficiency and pride (2 Cor 1:8–9). God uses suffering to humble his people (2 Cor 12:7–10) and to remind them that this world is not their ultimate home (Heb 13:14). Suffering serves the believer by conforming them to the image of Christ (1 Cor 3:18) and produces endurance and steadfastness (Jas 1:2–3). Peter, Paul, and James exhort believers to not only endure suffering, but to rejoice in their suffering because of God's redemptive purposes in it (Rom 5:3–5; 1 Pet 4:13–14; Jas 1:2–3).[84]

Finally, Christ's suffering serves as an example for believers to follow.[85] Peter exhorts believers to endure suffering in faith and obedience, grounding this exhortation in Christ's perfect example (1 Pet 2:21; 5:9–11). Christ's endurance was rooted in his unwavering trust in the Father: he "continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly" (1 Pet 2:23). Likewise, believers are called to a similar posture of trust amid suffering, entrusting themselves to their "faithful Creator while doing good" (1 Pet 4:19). This act of entrusting involves submitting to God's sovereign purposes and relying on his sustaining grace, empowered by the Spirit, to endure whatever trials he permits, following Christ's example, who submitted to the Father's will (Luke 22:42) and endured unimaginable suffering without sin. The author of Hebrews adds that Christ, who alone is the founder and perfector of the faith, endured the cross by looking to the ultimate reward of his suffering: sitting at the right hand of God (Heb 12:2). Similarly, believers are called to faithfully endure by looking to the future reward of glorification.[86]

Christ's obedience amid suffering and temptation was marked by sinlessness. Just as Christ was empowered by the Spirit in his endurance, so also the same Spirit now indwells, sanctifies, and strengthens believers who have been adopted by God to imitate Christ in their suffering (Eph 1:5;13–14). Though Christ was impeccable, his faithful perseverance provides an authoritative example by which believers may resist sin, endure trials, and grow in sanctification as they fix their eyes on him and the future resurrection, entrust themselves to God, and walk in the power of the Spirit.

Conclusion

The genuine suffering of Christ in his humanity is well documented in Scripture and constitutes an essential aspect of both the incarnation and the atonement. Denials of the authenticity of Christ's suffering and distortions of the person-nature distinction ultimately compromise the integrity of Chalcedonian Christology and render Christ's example useless for present suffering. Only through Christ's genuine suffering in both body and soul is he qualified to serve as the perfect mediator and atoning sacrifice for sin. It is this real and complete suffering that provides enduring hope to those who suffer as they look not to themselves, but to their empathetic high priest as the perfect model of faithful, obedient endurance in the face of unparalleled suffering.

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1 Due to space limitations, the traditional Roman Catholic position of the beatific vision is outside the scope of this paper. Thomas White argues that it is only by Christ's human vision of God that we can "understand the mystery of Christ's obedience and prayer without falling into either a confusion of the natures or a denial of the unity of his persons." Thomas Joseph White, *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 237. The central issue with this position is that the beatific vision is enjoyed by redeemed humanity only in glorification, putting Christ in a separate category from humanity. In addition, it diminishes the authentic suffering of Christ as a man and renders his cries on the cross as meaningless. See also Jean Galot, "Le Christ Terrestre et la Vision," *Gregorianum*, 67,3 (1986), 434 (translated), and Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology: Volume Two: Eleventh Through Seventeenth Topics* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1994), 349, 352.

2 Edward R. Hardy, ed., *Christology of the Later Fathers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954), 373.

3 Chalcedon rejected Christological heresies by establishing an orthodox definition of biblical Christology, however, some theologians who purport to embrace the Definition have functionally denied the Definition in their interpretation and application of the incarnation, perfect life, death, bodily resurrection, ascension, and rule of Christ. Misinterpretations, misapplications, and outright denials of classical Christology have massive implications for every facet of theology. In biblical counseling, misunderstandings and misapplications of both the deity and humanity of Christ have led to a downstream of heretical trauma theologies infused with notions of feminist and liberation theology that not only distort the Christ of Scripture but are foundational to counseling methodologies that are ultimately anti-gospel. See Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009); Karen O'Donnell, *Feminist Trauma Theologies: Body, Scripture, and Church in Critical Perspective*, ed. Katie Cross (London: SCM Press, 2020).

4 The mind/will issues was not resolved clearly until Third Council of Constantinople (681).

5 Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 449.

6 Edward R. Hardy, ed., *Christology of the Later Fathers*, 373. The person-nature distinction is essential for preventing inconsistencies within Christology. The affirmation of two distinct and separate natures in Christ upholds the Creator-creature distinction while denying the co-mingling of the divine and human in a *tertium quid* that is neither divine nor human. See Wellum *God the Son Incarnate*, 449–50 and Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 188–93.

7 Though Chalcedon made clear distinctions between person and nature, questions remained on the precise definitions of those terms until later councils. The Second Council of Constantinople (553) clarified that nature refers to *what* Christ is, while person/hypostasis refers to *who* Christ is.

8 Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate,* 287.

9 Swain, *The Trinity*, 61. For a full treatment of the immanent relations of the Trinity which is of vital importance to maintaining the doctrines of the Trinity and the dual natures of the Son, see Fred Sanders, *The Triune God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2016).

10 Misunderstandings concerning the person-nature distinction have profound ramifications for soteriology. If Christ was not fully God *and* fully man, he could not serve as a propitiation for sin. If he was simply man, he could only pay the penalty for his own sin; if only God, he could not identify with man and serve as their substitute or mediator.

11 Joshua R. Farris. *An Introduction to Theological Anthropology: Humans, Both Creaturely and Divine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 20. The Word-man and Word-flesh controversy is outside the scope of this paper. I will argue the Word-man perspective, affirming Christ's assumption of a complete human nature, comprised of a physical body and rational soul, including a human will (dyothelitism). See John E. McKinley, "A Model of Jesus Christ's Two Wills in View of Theology Proper and Anthropology," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 19.1 (2015): 69–89.

12 John W Cooper. *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 164.

13 Anthony A. Hoekema. *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 217.

14 Gregg R. Allison. "What is a Man? Looking at a Historical, Contemporary, and Essential Answer," ERLC, June 6, 2022, https://erlc.com/research/what-is-a-man/.

15 David F. Wells, *The Person of Christ: A Biblical and Historical Analysis of the Incarnation* (Westchester: Crossway, 1984), 177–78. For further mysteries pertaining to the Incarnation, see Paul Helm, "The Mystery of the Incarnation: 'Great is the Mystery of Godliness,'" *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 19.1 (2015): 25–37.

16 Peter Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 200.

17 While the debate surrounding Christ's impeccability is beyond the scope of this paper, this paper maintains the position of impeccability. For a full treatment of the impeccability debate see John E. McKinley, *Tempted for Us: Theological Models and the Practical Relevance of Christ's Impeccability and Temptation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009). McKinley highlights the role of the Spirit as foundational to embracing both the genuine temptation of Christ as a man and his inability to sin. In contrast, Charles Hodge presents an argument for peccability in Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology Volume 2* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Academic, 1999), 452, though the Trinitarian implications of peccability make this position extremely problematic. See Macleod, *Person of Christ*, 229–30.

18 Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 171. In contrast, William Lane Craig has recently theorized what amounts to an "intermediate state" for the risen Christ, asserting that in his ascension he left the constraints of space and time, temporarily shedding his physical body only to regain it at the consummation. This view is highly problematic and has massive implications for Christology as it diminishes the ongoing reality of the resurrection, ascension, and exaltation. See William Lane Craig, "#714 Zygotic Jesus," *Reasonable Faith with William Lane Craig*, January 11, 2021, https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/zygotic-jesus.

19 Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate, 451.*

20 Scott R. Swain, *The Trinity: An Introduction* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 60.

21 Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 291.

22 Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 185.

23 Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 291.

24 The doctrine of the *Extra Calvinisticum* has been affirmed throughout church history. E. David Wills provides a thorough explanation of the doctrine in E. David Wills, *Calvin's Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-Called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), cited in Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 332.

25 Kyle Claunch argues against Kenotic Christology in Kyle Claunch, "The Son and the Spirit: The Promise of Spirit Christology in Traditional Trinitarian and Christological Perspective," (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 51–80. Claunch explores the emphasis on the full humanity of Christ in theologians Gerald Hawthorne, Klaus Issler, and Bruce Ware. Claunch ultimately, and I think rightly, sees their versions of Christology as functional kenoticism, leaning too heavily on the humanity of Christ while downplaying or negating the ongoing divine functions of Christ in the incarnation.

26 Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 451.

27 The communication of attributes (*communicatio idiomatum*) states that what is true of the *nature* is also true or predicated of the *person*. The attributes of Christ's human nature are therefore distinct from the attributes of his divine nature, yet the attributes of both can be ascribed to the person of the Son. For further discussion see Macleod, *Person of Christ*, 193–99; Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms 2nd edition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 72–75; or Richard Cross, *Communicatio Idiomatum: Reformation Christological Debates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

28 Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 291.

29 Some have questioned how Christ could have experienced the fullness of temptation if he was unable to sin. Macleod helpfully argues that though Christ was impeccable, in his human nature he may not have always had an awareness of it. He concludes that it would be unwise to assume Christ's knowledge of his impeccability, citing Christ's use of fellow believers, the Word of God, and prayer in his fight against Satan's temptations, but never finding comfort or taking refuge in his own impeccability. Macleod, *Person of Christ*, 230. Bruce Ware upholds the impeccability of Christ and the genuine temptation of Jesus by affirming his inability to sin but maintaining that Christ did not sin by relying on empowering grace of the Spirit to resist temptation. In this way he was both tempted and resisted in his human nature. Bruce Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 81.

30 Heresies such as Docetism deny the reality of Christ's physical body and thereby eliminate his ability to genuinely suffer as a true man. This stands in contradiction to the biblical data of Christ's authentic suffering in the fullness of his humanity. See Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

31 Jeremy R. Treat, *The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 66. Cf, John Bright, *The Coming Kingdom* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 152.

32 Aaron Riches, *Ecce Homo: On the Divine Unity of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 194.

33 Macleod, *Person of Christ*, 173.

34 Bruce Ware, *God's Greater Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 169.

35 Cahleen Shrier, "The Science of the Crucifixion," *Azusa Pacific University*, March 01, 2002. https://www.apu.edu/articles/the-science-of-the-crucifixion/ Accessed June 21, 2025. See also, Frederick T. Zugibe, MD, PhD, *The Crucifixion of Jesus: A Forensic Inquiry* (New York: M. Evans and Co, 2005).

36 Shrier, "The Science of Crucifixion."

37 Macleod, *Person of Christ*, 176.

38 Macleod, *Person of Christ*, 175.

39 Macleod, *Person of Christ*, 174.

40 Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 221.

41 The purpose of Christ's suffering is only fully realized in the Penal Substitution model of atonement. Other atonement models, including Christus Victor, Satisfaction, and Moral Example, provide aspects of redemption, but the biblical evidence shows that Christ suffered and died not simply to defeat sin and Satan, to satisfy God's justice, or to live a perfect moral life, but to satisfy God's wrath for sin and to be a propitiatory sacrifice. In addition, it is only through Christ's substitutionary atonement that sinners are imputed with his righteousness through their union with Christ (Rom 6:5–6; Gal 2:20). See William G. Witt and Joel Scandrett, *Mapping Atonement: The Doctrine of Reconciliation in Christian History and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022).

42 John Piper, "The Suffering of Christ and the Sovereignty of God," *Suffering and The Sovereignty of God*, ed., John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 87–88.

43 David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). See also Douglas Moo, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 81.

44 Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 221.

45 Emma Ford, "Our Suffering, Sympathetic High Priest: Accomplishments and Implications of Christ's Incarnation in Hebrews 2:14–18 and 4:14–16," *Presbyterian* (47 no 1, Spring 2021), 127.

46 Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2020), 159.

47 As maintained in the person-nature distinction above, Christ's human and divine natures remained entirely separate in the incarnation. In his human nature, Christ had access only to that which is common to humanity. Making use of the divine attributes to alleviate or avoid suffering would have disqualified him from serving as our high priest and mediator, and as a result, accomplishing our redemption. Christ had to suffer *as a man* in order to bear the penalty of God's just wrath owed by sinful humanity.

48 Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 15.

49 Gerald Hawthorne has noted that many theologians today, in an attempt to prove Christ's deity, have placed unbalanced weight on the Spirit's presence and role in the life of Christ. In doing so, theological traditions have underemphasized the full humanity of Christ which, Claunch points out, has led to a functional or implicit Docetism that treats Jesus as a "super-human" imbibed with the divine nature. See Claunch, "The Son and the Spirit," 53–54. See also Gerald Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003). While the emphasis on the Spirit may be taken to an extreme, it does not negate the Spirit's presence and power in the earthly ministry of Christ.

50 Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate, 456.*

51 D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 35.

52 Carson, *Farewell Discourse*, 35–36.

53 As previously discussed, Christ's self-emptying cannot be understood as a literal emptying of his divine attributes as proposed by kenotic theories. Christ retained both his ontological and functional divine attributes even as he took on the form of a servant in the incarnation. Kenotic Christologies undermine the Chalcedon Definition by suggesting a temporary separation or suspension of the Son's divine attributes which stands in opposition to the hypostatic union and the dual natures of Christ.

54 Macleod, *Person of Christ,* 169. Macleod maintains Christ's infallibility despite his limitation of knowledge. See also Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate,* 458–459.

55 Macleod, *Person of Christ,* 169.

56 Macleod, *Person of Christ,* 169.

57 Schreiner, *1&2 Peter and Jude,* 160.

58 Believers share the same access to the Spirit as Jesus had; however, while Jesus received the Spirit "without measure" (John 3:34), believers experience the Spirit's presence and power with increasing measure through the ongoing process of sanctification.

59 Macleod, *Person of Christ,* 178.

60 Macleod, *Person of Christ,* 178.

61 Ware, *The Man Jesus Christ,* 34.

62 A full debate over the passibility of God is outside the scope of this article. For current scholarship and historical account of this debate, see James Keating and Thomas Joseph White, *Divine Impassibility and Human Suffering* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

63 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: 40th Anniversary Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 324. Ironically, the heresy of Arianism argued that the Son's passibility made him less than God thereby rendering Christ a created being precisely because he was able to suffer, cf. Donald Fairbairn, "Patristic Exegesis and Theology: The Cart and the Horse," *WTJ* 69, no. 1 (2007): 10.

64 Moltmann, *The Crucified God,* 333–346.

65 Blurring the Creator-creature distinction produces disastrous theological outcomes, as seen in Moltmann, process theism, and open theism. As noted previously, a misunderstanding of the *communicatio idiomatum* has massive implications for every facet of theology.

66 Moltmann, *The Crucified God,* 345.

67 Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, 8.

68 Moltmann, *The Crucified God,* 325. One question that arises out of Moltmann's view of passibility is how the Triune God was capable of love prior to his ability to suffer with his creation. Was the Triune God incapable of the fullness of genuine love in eternity past because of lacking creatures with whom to identify in suffering? Moltmann's framework makes the Creator dependent on the creature for the full expression of his divine attributes, which stands in direct opposition to biblical revelation. Further, if suffering and genuine love are ascribed to the whole Christ and not the nature, then it would seem to follow that only the person of the Son, and not the Father or Spirit, could experience the fullness of love because suffering terminated on his person alone. The Son shares the same divine nature with the Father and the Son, yes, but Moltmann's reasoning seems to require the Son to know a love that the other persons of the Trinity do not. How can God be love (1 John 4:8), if only the Son is capable of the fullest expression of love?

69 Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: The Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019), 131.

70 Thomas Joseph White, *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 306.

71 Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 2.

72 Barrett, *None Greater*, 120.

73 Barrett, *None Greater*, 123.

74 Thomas Joseph White, *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 307. To avoid confusion White could be more precise with his language here by ascribing suffering to Christ (the man) and impassibility to God (the divine Son).

75 The implications of Christ's suffering are immense for the purpose of counseling. Secular counseling modalities seek to help sufferers by providing temporary symptom relief or unbiblical rationales for sinful responses to suffering. Biblical counseling does not provide a system but a Savior; one who is both empathetic and all-powerful, able to understand and to help. It is precisely because of the incarnation, perfect life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ that sufferers can walk in joy and peace amid horrifying life circumstances — not diminishing the reality of their suffering but humbly embracing God's redemptive purposes in suffering and imitating their Savior who perfectly endured, relying on the Spirit's help in times of weakness.

76 The Lord's Supper offers a recurring reminder of Christ's suffering and promise of future resurrection (1 Cor 11:26). This corporate meal is not designed to last forever, but only to be observed "until he comes again." For the believer who persists in faith amid suffering, a better meal is coming (Rev 19:6–10).

77 In contrast, for those outside of Christ, life in this fallen world represents the height of their experience, since in eternity their suffering will only intensify as God's wrath remains unsatisfied against their sin.

78 Dane Ortlund, *2 Corinthians*, in *Expository Commentary*, vol. X, *Romans-Galatians*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton, Jr., and Jay Sklar (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 462.

79 Viewing trials in light of the coming new creation does not end the very real experience of intense suffering in this life, but it does provide genuine hope for the believer and places the temporal suffering of this life in right relation to the eternal cosmic realities that exist. Helping sufferers to rightly view their suffering in this way helps diminish the all-encompassing nature that suffering tends to have in a person's life and reorients their experience in light of the truths of Scripture.

80 Ford, "Our Suffering Savior," 129.

81 See Elisabeth Elliot, *Suffering is Never for Nothing* (Nashville: B&H, 2019); David Powlison, *God's Grace in Your Suffering* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018); Paul Tripp, *Suffering: Gospel Hope When Life Doesn't Make Sense* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018).

82 Though not original to him, I am indebted to my pastor who has repeatedly driven home the point that God is far more concerned with changing me than changing my circumstances. God cares far too much about our holiness to focus on our temporal happiness. Brian Powell, "Remain Here with God" (Sermon preached at Holy City Church, Charleston, SC, May 30, 2021). Bruce Ware also emphasizes this point in *God's Greater Glory*, 164–70.

83 Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 137.

84 This does not mean that we rejoice in suffering itself, for suffering is a result of the Fall. Rather, we rejoice that though we suffer due to sin (either our own or the general effects of living in a fallen world), suffering does not have the final word, nor is it meaningless. Suffering in the life of the believer is the crucible that purifies faith as pure gold (Prov 17:3).

85 Claunch makes a helpful clarification in the believer's imitation of Christ's suffering: "While Christians are to imitate the sufferings of Christ with respect to how he responded to his revilers and persecutors, they are not to imagine that the purpose of their suffering is the same as the purpose of his. Rather, just as the Spirit empowered the Son in and through his human nature to complete the mission on which the Father had sent him, so the Spirit empowers Christians to complete the mission on which the Father and Son send them (see John 20:21–22)." Claunch, "The Son and the Spirit," 110.

86 Cockerill observes that in Hebrews 11 "God's faithful people have always been empowered for endurance by keeping their vision on the present power and future-oriented promises of God (11:1, 3, 6)," noting how Abraham and Moses were sustained by the vision of God's future reward. Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 610.