

PROOF THAT THE DIVINITY OF THE SAVIOUR IS IMPASSIBLE

Theodoret

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1. Alike by the divine Scripture and by the holy Fathers assembled at Nicaea we have been taught to confess that the Son is of one substance with God the Father. The impassibility of the Father is also taught by the nature and proclaimed by the divine Scripture. We shall then further confess the Son to be impassible, for this definition is enforced by the identity of substance. Whenever then we hear the divine Scripture proclaiming the cross and the death of the Master Christ we attribute the passion to the flesh, for in no wise is the Godhead, being by nature impassible, capable of suffering.

2. "All things that the Father hath are mine" says the Master Christ, and one out of all is impassibility. If therefore as God He is impassible, He suffered as man. For the divine nature does not undergo suffering.

3. The Lord said "the bread which I will give is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world," and again "I am the good shepherd and know my sheep and am known of mine ... and I lay down my life for the sheep." So body and soul are both given by the good shepherd for the sheep who have soul and body.

4. The nature of men is compounded of body and soul. But it sinned and stood in need of a sacrifice free from every spot. So the Creator took a body and a soul, and keeping them clean from the stains of sin for men's bodies gave His body and for their souls His soul. If this is true, and true it is, for these are words of truth itself, then wild and blasphemous are they who ascribe passion to the divine nature.

5. The blessed Paul called the Christ "the first born of the dead;" and I suppose the first born has the same nature as they of whom He is called first born. As man then He is first born of the dead, for He first destroyed the pangs of death and gave to all the sweet hope of another life. As He rose so He suffered. As man then He suffered but as awful God He remained impassible.

6. The divine Apostle calls our Saviour Christ "the firstfruits of them that slept," but the firstfruits are related to the whole whereof they are firstfruits. He is not therefore called firstfruits as God, for what relationship is there between Godhead and manhood? The former is an immortal nature, the latter mortal. Such is the nature of them that sleep, of whom Christ is called firstfruits. To this nature belong death and resurrection, and in its resurrection we have a proof of the general resurrection.

7. When the Master Christ wished to persuade the doubting Apostles that He had destroyed death and risen, He shewed them parts of His body, His side, His hands, His feet and the marks of the passion preserved therein. This body then rose, and this, I ween, was shown to the disbelievers. What rose is what was buried, and what was buried is what had died, and what had died is of course what was nailed to the cross. So the divine nature united to the body remained impassible.

8. They who describe the flesh of the Lord as giver of life make life itself mortal by their words. They ought to have seen that it was giver of life through the life united to it. But if according to their argument the life is mortal, how could the flesh being itself by nature mortal, and made life-giving through the life, remain life-giving?

9. God the Word is by nature immortal, and the flesh by nature mortal, but after the passion by union with the Word the flesh itself became immortal. How then is it not absurd to say that the giver of such immortality shared death?

10. They who maintain that God the Word suffered in the flesh should be asked the meaning of what they say, and should they have the hardihood to reply that when the body was pierced with nails the divine nature was sensible of pain, let them learn that the divine nature did not fill the part of a soul. God the Word had assumed a soul with the body. Should they reject this argument as blasphemous, and should they assert that the flesh suffered by nature, and that God the Word made the passion His own as of His own flesh, let them not propound puzzling and murky phrases, but let them clearly propound the meaning of the ill sounding phrase. They will have all those who wish to follow the divine Scripture as their supporters in this interpretation.

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11. The divine Peter in his Catholic Epistle says that Christ suffered in the flesh. But he who hears that Christ suffered does not understand God the Word incorporeal, but incarnate. The name of Christ indicates both natures; but the word "flesh" connected with the passion signifies not that both, but that one of the two, suffered. For he that hears that Christ suffered in the flesh thinks of Him as impassible in that He was God, and attributes the passion to the flesh alone. For just as when we hear him saying that God had sworn to David of the fruit of his loins according to the flesh to raise up the Christ, we do not say that God the Word derived His origin from David, but that the flesh which God the Word took was akin to David, so must he who hears that Christ suffered in the flesh, recognise that the passion belongs to the flesh, and confess the impassibility of the Godhead.

12. When on the cross the Lord Christ said, "Father into Thy hands I commend my spirit," this spirit is said by the Arians and the Eunomians to be the Godhead of the only-begotten, for they hold that the body which He took was without a soul, but the heralds of the truth say that the soul was so called and they base their opinion on the following passages. The right wise Evangelist immediately adds "And having said thus He gave up the ghost." So says Luke, and the blessed Mark similarly adds "He gave up the ghost." The divine Matthew writes, "yielded up the Ghosts" and the divine John, "gave up the Ghost." All speak according to the usage of men, for we are accustomed to use all these expressions about those who die; none of them conveys any meaning of Godhead, but they all signify the soul, and if any one were to receive the Arian sense of the passage none the less even thus will it shew the immortality of the divine nature. For Christ commended it to the Father. He did not yield it to death. If then they that deny the assumption of the soul, and maintain God the Word to be a creature, and assert that He was in the body in place of a soul, deny that He was delivered to death, how can they obtain pardon who while they confess one substance of the Trinity, and leave the soul in its own immortality, impudently dare to say that God the Word of one substance with the Father tasted death?

13. If Christ is both God and man, as the divine Scripture teaches, and the illustrious Fathers persistently preached, then He suffered as man, but as God remained impassible.

14. If they acknowledge the assumption of the flesh, and declare it to be passible before the resurrection, and preach that the nature of the Godhead is impassible, why, leaving the passible nature, do they attribute the passion to the impassible?

15. If our Lord and Saviour nailed the handwriting to the cross, as says the divine Apostle, He then nailed the body, for on his body every man like letters marks the prints of his sins, wherefore on behalf of sinners He gave up the body that was free from all sin.

16. When we say that the body or the flesh or the manhood suffered, we do not separate the divine nature, for as it was united to one hungering, thirsting, weary, even asleep, and undergoing the passion, itself affected by none of these but permitting the human nature to be affected in its own way, so it was conjoined to it even when crucified, and permitted the completion of the passion, that by the passion it might destroy death; not indeed receiving pain from the passion, but making the passion its own, as of its own temple, and of the flesh united to it, on account of which flesh also the faithful are called members of Christ, and He Himself is styled the head of them that believed.