

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST? - HIS TWO NATURES

When we studied the Name and titles of Jesus in Paper 007B we saw that the Scriptures identified Him as both man and God. Jesus is fully human and fully divine. In this paper we will be examining both Christ's humanity and His deity, why He had to be both man and God and how these two natures could exist in one person.

In 451 A.D. the Council of Chalcedon formulated the faith of the Church respecting the person of Christ, and declared Him *“to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeable, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of the natures being in no wise taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons.”*

This statement makes no attempt to explain the mystery involved – how God and man could be in one person – for the Church has always recognized the incarnation as a mystery which defies explanation. And so it will remain, because it is the miracle of miracles.

The necessity of the two natures in Christ:

Since man sinned it was necessary that man should bear the penalty of sin, and since all men were sinners only a sinless man could atone for others. Only such a truly human Mediator who could fully identify with fallen man and yet Himself be without sin could satisfy the requirements of the atonement by acting as a bridge between God and man. It follows that such a Mediator would have to be God Himself come in the form of a man that He might be a legally acceptable sacrifice and simultaneously render perfect obedience to the will of God. God thus had to atone to God and sinless man had to atone for sinful men. Hence, Jesus was both the offerer and the offering, the sacrificer and the sacrifice, the priest and the gift. Ordinary man could never fulfill these requirements. "The eternal Son of God became the sinless Son of Man that the sinful sons of men might become the beloved sons of God" (Robert Clarke).

Scriptures that speak of the Deity of Christ:

- a) *In the Old Testament:* Ps.2: 6-12 (Heb.1: 5); Ps.45: 6 & 7 (Heb.1: 8 & 9); Ps.110:1 (Heb.1:13); Isa.9: 6; Jer.23: 6; Dan.7: 13; Mic.5: 2; Zech.13: 7; Mal.3: 1.
- b) *In the Johannine writings:* Jn.1: 1-3, 14, 18; Jn.2: 24 & 25; Jn.3: 16-18, 35 & 36; Jn.4: 14&15; Jn.5: 18, 20-22, 25-27; Jn.11: 41-44; Jn.20: 28; I Jn.1: 3; I Jn.2: 23; I Jn.4: 14&15; I Jn. 5: 5, 10-13; I Jn.5: 20.
- c) *In the Pauline epistles:* Rom.1: 7; Rom.9: 5; I Cor.1: 1-3; I Cor.2: 8; II Cor.5: 10; Gal.2: 20; Gal.4: 4; Phil.2: 6; Col.2: 9; I Tim.3: 16; Heb.1: 1-3, 5, 8; Heb.4: 14.
- d) *In the Synoptic Gospels:* Matt.5: 17; Matt.9: 6; Matt.11: 1-6, 27; Matt.14: 33; Matt.16: 16 & 17; Matt.28: 18; Matt.25: 31; Mk.8: 38.

e) *In the words of Jesus*: Matt.11: 27 (Lk.10: 22); Matt.21: 37 & 38 (Mk.12: 6; Lk.20: 13); Matt.22: 41-46 (Mk.13: 35-37; Lk.20: 41-44); Matt.24: 36 (Mk.13: 32); Matt.28: 19; Lk.2:49; Lk.22: 29; Lk.24: 49; Jn.3: 13; Jn.5: 17, 18, 19-27; Jn.6: 37-40 & 57; Jn.8: 34-36; Jn.10: 17, 18, 30, 35 & 36.

Scriptures that speak of the humanity of Christ:

Jn.8: 40; Acts 2: 22; Rom.5: 15; I Cor.15: 21; Jn.1: 14; I Tim.3: 16; I Jn.4: 2; Matt.26: 26, 28, 38; Lk.23: 46; Lk.24: 39; Jn.11: 33; Heb.2: 14; Lk.2: 40, 52; Heb.2: 10, 18; Heb.5: 8; Matt.4: 2; Matt.8: 24; Matt.9: 36; Mk.3: 5; Lk.22: 44; Jn.4: 6; Jn.11: 35; Jn.12: 27; Jn.19: 28&30; Heb.5: 7.

Scripture proof for the sinlessness of Christ:

Lk.1: 35; Jn.8: 46; Jn.14: 30; II Cor.5: 21; Heb.4: 15; Heb.9: 14; I Pet.2: 22; I Jn.3: 5; Heb.2: 8&9; I Cor.15: 45; II Cor.3: 18; Phil.3: 21.

THE HYPOSTATIC UNION:

By this is meant the union of the two natures (of divinity and humanity) in one Person (*hypostasis* means “person”). In the incarnation Jesus did not change into a human person; neither did He adopt a human person. He simply *assumed*, in addition to His divine nature, a human nature which did not develop into an independent personality but became personal in the Person of the Son of God. Man did not become God but God became man. After this assumption of human nature the Person of the Mediator is not only divine but *divine-human*; He is the “God-man”, possessing all the essential qualities of both the human and the divine nature. He has both a divine and a human consciousness as well as a human and divine will. This is a mystery which we cannot fathom! In the words of Martin J. Scott (cited in Pearlman, M., *Knowing the Doctrines of the Bible*, 1981, Gospel Publishing House, Missouri, pg. 152):

As all Christians know, the **Incarnation** means that God (that is, the Son of God) became man. This does not mean that God was turned into man, nor that God ceased to be God and began to be man; but that, remaining God, He assumed or took a new nature, namely, human, uniting this to the Divine nature in the one being or person – Jesus Christ, true God and true man.....

The Incarnation, therefore, means that the Son of God, true God from all eternity, in the course of time became true man also, in the one Person, Jesus Christ, consisting of the two natures, the human and the Divine. This, of course, is a mystery. We cannot understand it any more than we can understand the Trinity.....

All the wise men in the world cannot explain the connection between thought and speech. We should not be surprised, therefore, if we cannot understand the Incarnation. We believe it because He who has revealed it is God Himself, who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

Scripture clearly points to the unity of the Person of Christ. It is always the same Person who speaks, whether the mind that finds utterance be human or divine, Jn.10: 30; Jn.17: 5

(cf. Matt.27: 46; Jn.19: 28). Human attributes and actions are sometimes ascribed to the Person designated by a divine title, Jn.3: 13; Jn.6: 62; Rom.9: 5.

Because the hypostatic union poses several questions which cannot be definitely answered, e.g. "When Jesus was still a baby could He still act as God?", two main theories have been postulated to try and account for this. They are as follows:

The Kenotic Theories:

The term *kenosis* (self-emptying) derives from Phil.2: 6-8, "*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!*" The word *kenosis* is found in only four other N.T. passages, Rom.4: 14; I Cor.1: 17; I Cor.9: 15 and II Cor.9: 3. In all of these it is used figuratively and means "to make void", "of no effect", "of no account", "of no reputation", and in this light "self-emptying" is probably a mistranslation! The Kenoticists, however, maintain that the *Logos, at the incarnation, "emptied" Himself of all His attributes and then, together with the assumed human nature, developed again into a divine-human Person.* The theory took various forms ranging from the extreme view that He emptied Himself completely of His deity and was limited to the natural knowledge and abilities of an ordinary man, to the view that while He retained the possession of all His divine attributes, He renounced their use and hid them from the observation of men.

The theory of gradual incarnation:

This theory states that our Lord suspended His divine consciousness from the time of His conception and that He re-assumed it in His manhood, the *Logos* joining Himself in an ever-increasing measure to the sinless Man until the full union was finally consummated at the resurrection.

Both of these theories are open to objection and find no support in Scripture. Our Lord's attributes of deity were at no time laid aside. Phillipians 2: 7, in fact, has nothing to do with questions concerning the divine attributes. It simply indicates the humbling moral self-renunciation involved for one who "was in the form of God" in "taking the form of a servant". Christ did not lay aside the form of God, He simply exchanged the state of sovereignty for the state of a servant. There is no theory that can satisfactorily explain the mystery of the incarnation. The incarnation joined two natures and not two persons. We hardly understand normal human development so there is no reason why the incarnation and Person of Christ should not be accepted purely on the basis of faith just as so many other things in life are!

THE COMMUNION OF PROPERTIES:

While each nature retained its own properties they were not held together merely as though the hypostatic union was a rope tying together two incompatible elements. There was an inseparable harmony between the two natures. For instance, it is not correct to say that our Lord walked on the sea because His humanity enabled Him to do the walking while His deity prevented His sinking. Much

controversy took place about this, particularly at the time of the Reformation, and two chief views, the Lutheran doctrine of the “Communicatio Idiomatum” and that of the Reformed Churches, were discussed. The first suggested that there was an inter-communication of the human nature and the divine, the one giving to and deriving from the other in the one Person. But the Reformed theologians objected that humanity could never fully have contained the divine and the divine could gain little or nothing from the human. They suggested that there was some other connecting link (similar to the gifts of the Holy Spirit) between the two natures through the one Person.

Neither view is entirely satisfactory. Scripture presents to us “one” Lord Jesus Christ who is both God and Man. As Edward W. A. Koehler says in his *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, "Thus Christ has two distinct natures, a human and a divine, each of which has its own essential attributes, functions and activities. But as both natures belong to the same person, the attributes and properties of either may be ascribed to the person. Christ was begotten of the Father from eternity according to His divine nature (Psalm 2: 7); Christ was born of the Virgin Mary in the fulness of time according to His human nature (Galatians 4: 4). Jesus was 30 years old according to His human nature (Luke 3: 23); according to His divine nature He could say 'Before Abraham was I am' (John 8: 58). Christ is equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood."

In discussing our Lord’s “unity with God and with the human race” the glorious truth of this statement in its proper meaning should be carefully safeguarded from the half-truths and misconceptions with which it is so frequently entangled. We will be looking at some of these wrong ideas about Jesus in our next paper.

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CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY
(PAPER 007C)

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST? - HIS TWO NATURES

Questions:

1. What do we mean when we speak of the two natures of Christ?
2. Why could only Jesus atone for the sins of mankind and not any other man?
3. What is meant by "the incarnation"?
4. What is meant by "the Hypostatic Union"?