The Personal Union of Christ's Two Natures

SMPC | 12.17.2023 | Christian Bland

I. The Scriptural Evidence for the Union of Christ's Two Natures
   A. Christ's Two Natures.
      i. See previous two lessons (e.g., John 1:1; Heb 2:17).

   B. Christ's One Person.
      i. John 8:58: "Before Abraham was, I am."

      ii. John 17:5: "Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had… before the world."

      iii. Same person active in OT and NT: John 1:3; Heb 1:2; 1 Cor 10:6–9; Jude 5.

      iv. 1 Tim 2:5: "There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ."

      v. 1 Cor 8:6: "There is one God, the Father… and one Lord, Jesus Christ."

      vi. Col 4:4–5: "There is… one Lord, one faith, one baptism."

II. The Doctrine of the Personal Union ("Hypostatic Union")
   A. Distinguishing the Terms "Person" and "Nature."
      i. "Nature" describes a person or thing's "whatness" (attributes).
         1. Berkhof: "The term "nature" denotes the sum-total of all the essential qualities of a thing, that which makes it what it is" (*ST*, 321).

      ii. "Person" describes a thing's "who-ness" (self-consciousness).
         1. Berkhof: "A person is a nature with something added, namely, independent subsistence, individuality" (321).

   B. Christ is One Person in Two Natures.
      i. Jesus has one "who" and two "whats"—two sets of attributes.

      ii. The natures of Christ: equal to the Father in deity, and equal to us in humanity.

      iii. The person of Christ: the divine person of the eternal Son of God.

   C. The Personal Union of Christ's Two Natures.
      i. The actual union of Christ's two natures occurred in his incarnation.

      ii. It is a personal union, because the two natures are united to the one person.

      iii. Rationalism vs. "Faith seeking understanding."

   D. The Definition of Chalcedon
      i. The Council of Chalcedon was called in 451 AD to address Christological heresy.

      ii. Key words: "Inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably" (cf. WCF 8.2).

      iii. It closes: "As the prophets… declared about him, and the Lord Jesus taught us."

III. Relevant Christological Heresies

A. Too much distinction: Nestorianism.

i. Two errors: too much distinction or too much unity of Christ's two natures.

ii. Nestorianism does the former, and concludes that there are two persons of Christ.

B. Too much unity: Eutychianism, Monothelitism, Ubiquitarianism, and Kenoticism.

i. Eutychianism claims Jesus has one nature, a divine-human mix.

ii. Monothelitism claims Jesus has one will, the divine will (no human will).

iii. Ubiquitarianism claims that Jesus's human nature is everywhere present.

iv. Kenoticism claims that Jesus emptied himself of some divine attributes.

C. A brief response.

i. All of these errors are addressed by the Chalcedonian definition.

ii. All of these errors have serious implications on Christ's role as Mediator.

IV. The Significance of Christ's Two Natures United to One Person

A. Why did our Savior need to be God and man in one person?

i. WLC 40: Q. Why was it requisite that the Mediator should be God and man in one person?

1. A. It was requisite that the Mediator, who was to reconcile God and man, should himself be both God and Man, and this in one person, that the proper works of each nature might be accepted of God for us, and relied on by us, as the works of the whole person.

ii. In other words, it is not only biblical to say that there is one Mediator, one Christ, who is both true God and true man, but it is necessary for our salvation.

B. Athanasius

"For the Word, realizing that in no other way could the corruption of human beings be undone except by dying; yet being immortal and the Son of the Father, the Word was not able to die; for this reason he takes to himself a body capable of death, in order that it, participating in the Word who is above all, might be sufficient for death on behalf of all, and through the indwelling Word would remain incorruptible, and so corruption might henceforth cease from all by the grace of the resurrection" (*On the Incarnation*, 9.1).

C. Anselm

"The restoring of mankind ought not to take place, and could not, unless man paid the debt which he owed God for his sin. And this debt was so great that, while none but man must pay the debt, none but God was able to do it; so that he who does it must be both God and man. And hence arises a necessity that God should take man into unity with his own person; so that he who in his own nature was bound to pay the debt, but could not, might be able to do it in the person of God" (*Why the God-man?* Ch. 28).

D. Calvin

"Here is something marvelous: the Son of God descended from heaven in such a way that, without leaving heaven, he willed to be borne in the virgin's womb, to go about the earth, and to hang upon the cross; yet he continuously filled the world even as he had done from the beginning" (*Institutes*, 2.13.4).