

CHRISTOLOGY (23)

There are several passages of Scripture that clearly speak of the union between Christ's Divine and human nature:

- 1) John 1:1-14 ; 2) Rom. 1:2-5 ; 3) Rom. 9:5 ; 4) Philippians 2:6-7 ;
5) I Tim. 3:16 ; 6) Heb. 2:14 ; 7) I John 1:1-3 .

Dr. Walvoord, in speaking of these critical texts said: "The hypostatic or personal union of the human and divine natures in Christ is given explicit divine revelation..." (Walvoord, p. 112).

QUESTION #13 – What is the history of the hypostatic union?

Theologians have always been faced with the problem of defining the word "nature." As it pertains to Jesus Christ, the issue really comes down to this—"What is meant by His human nature and His Divine nature?"

Most agree that "nature" refers to all the attributes that comprise the entire substance. When referring to Christ's Divine nature, we are referring to all of the attributes of Deity, which comprise Divine nature. When referring to Christ's human nature, we are referring to all of the attributes of humanity, which comprise human nature.

In the days of the early church, a problem arose as to how two such seemingly incompatible natures—divine and human—could be joined together without one or the other losing some of its essential characteristics and qualities. To say that Christ is one person comprised of a human and divine nature, is something that goes far against the norm of human thinking:

1. It is somewhat logical to assume that the divine nature of Christ would far surpass the human nature. But the problem here is that the human nature is just as important as the divine nature, for His redemptive work largely rests upon His humanity.
2. It is also logical to assume that if a human nature were joined to a divine nature, the divine nature would be somewhat tarnished. It is difficult for us to conceive of both a perfect Deity joined together with a perfect humanity.
3. It is also logical to assume that since there are two natures, it must be that Christ has two distinct personalities. But Christ was one person, not two.

When we consider these things, we begin to see the problem that developed from the hypostatic union. As a result, at the early stages of church history, several false views began to surface concerning the Person of Jesus Christ.

1) Ebionism - This seems to be one of the first Christological heresies that surfaced near the end of the first century until the year A.D. 107. Ebionism denies the Divine nature of Jesus Christ. In other words, **Ebionism denied Christ's Deity**. It taught that Christ was merely a man, although it did admit that Christ had a peculiar relationship with God from the time of His baptism. Ebionism was really Judaism within the context of the Christian Church.

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Dr. Augustus Strong writes: “Ebionism was simply Judaism within the...Christian Church” (*Systematic Theology*, p. 669).

2) Docetism - This heresy flourished from the years A.D. 70 to A.D. 170. **This was the belief that denied the humanity of Jesus Christ.** It denied that Jesus Christ was a real human. Docetism is closely connected to Gnosticism—in fact it is Gnosticism. This doctrine was introduced to the church by Marcion and the Gnostics. It was later taught by Manicees in the third century. Docetism teaches that matter is evil, therefore it denies the reality of the body of Christ, saying that He could not have a body because that would mean He was evil. From all initial appearances, this seems to be an attempt to defend the Divine nature of Jesus Christ. The Apostle John, however, makes it very clear that this is a dangerous heresy and one who holds to this is not of God (I John 4:1-3). To the Gnostics and Docetists, Christ’s appearance was really a theophany—He appeared in a human body much in the same way water would pass through a reed or light would pass through colored glass.

2) Arianism - **This is a heresy that attacked the Deity of Jesus Christ.** It downplayed His Deity by saying that Christ was not “the” God, but was the first and highest created being of God. This view started to infiltrate the Church in the third century as a result of misinterpreting the Bible. Arians interpreted the Scripture accounts of Christ’s humility in a manner which made Him unequal with God. For example, Philippians 2:6-8 would be misrepresented in such a way that the temporal humiliation and subordination are viewed as a permanent inequality. This doctrine very subtly attacks the Deity of Jesus Christ. Arius and Arianism were totally condemned by the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325. It was this council that carefully defined and defended the doctrine of the Trinity.

Many false teachings and religions still stem from this heretical system in one way or another.

4) Apollinarianism - Apollinaris, a religious leader who lived in the 4th century (A.D. 300’s) and who was condemned at Constantinople in A.D. 381, taught that Christ did not have a human mind or spirit, only a human body and soul. He, as Dr. Strong states, developed “a Christ of great head and dwarfed body” (p. 671). **This was a heresy that attacked the humanity of Jesus Christ.**

5) Nestorianism - Nestorius was a man who lived and ministered during the early 400’s. He was removed from his pastoral responsibilities and condemned by the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431. **He denied any connection between the Deity of Jesus Christ and the humanity of Jesus Christ, thus making Christ two persons.** Instead of holding to the truth that Christ was one person with two natures, he believed Christ was two persons. Nestorius held that Christ’s two natures function like a marriage union—two distinct people brought together to become one flesh. As a result, Nestorius ended up attacking the Deity of Christ, as Strong writes, Nestorius “...regarded Christ as a man in very near relation to God” (p. 671).

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6) Eutychianism - Eutyches, who was condemned at Chalcedon in A.D. 451, taught that Christ did not really have a Divine nature that was really Divine or a human nature that was really human. He had one nature that was a mixture of a Divine and human nature. This view ultimately winds up minimizing Christ's humanity and making it like a "drop of honey mingled with the ocean." The humanity would be the drop of honey and the Deity would be the ocean (*Ibid.*, p. 672).

As we conclude this historical sketch of the many false theories regarding the person of Jesus Christ, Dr. Augustus Strong's comments are worth considering: "The foregoing survey would seem to show that history had exhausted the possibilities of heresy, and that the future denials of the doctrine of Christ's person must be, in essence, forms of the views mentioned. All controversies with regard to the person of Christ must, of necessity, hinge upon one of three points: first, the reality of the two natures; secondly, the integrity of the two natures; thirdly, the union of the two natures in one person. Of these points, Ebionism and Docetism deny the reality of the natures; Arianism and Apollinarianism deny their integrity, while Nestorianism and Eutychianism deny their proper union" (*Ibid.*, p. 672).

We certainly may see traces of these heresies still operative today:

1. Russellism (Jehovah's Witness) and Mormonism attack the Deity of Jesus Christ. They basically fall into the false teaching of Arianism that makes Christ the first and highest created being of God.
2. Unitarianism denies the Deity of Christ, making Christ out to be a mere man. This is nothing more than a resurgence of Ebionism. This heresy makes Christ a good teacher, a good man and a very spiritual man, but it denies His Deity. Liberalism and Modernism also follow this way of thinking.
3. Christian Science denies the humanity of Jesus Christ. It does not believe in the reality of matter. It is nothing more than a revival of Docetism, the Gnostic philosophy that flourished near the end of the first century.
4. None of these religious heresies are new. All attacks against Jesus Christ have been attempted before and when they have stood in the light of the revealed truth of God, they have been seen for what they really are—false heresies.

To make certain we clearly understand what the Bible does actually teach concerning Jesus Christ, the following statements are taken from Mr. John Miles' study of theology:

1. Christ was one person.
2. Christ possessed two natures.
3. Christ was not God and man; He was the God-man.
4. Never does one nature speak to another nature as between members of the Trinity.
5. The divine and human natures do not act independently of one another.
 - 1) It is the one person, the God-man who acts.
 - 2) It is the God-man who went to Calvary and died.
 3. As a real man, Christ can shed real blood and as the real God, His death can have infinite value.

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The study of the hypostatic union and the false theories which surround this critical doctrine should make us very cautious about what we say and believe and even allow to be said about Jesus Christ. Dr. Charles Ryrie says that such a study "...should help clarify the truth and make us more careful how we express it. Semantics are very important in statements of theology" (*Basic Theology*, p. 252).

When speaking to someone about Jesus Christ, or further still, when someone is speaking to us about Jesus Christ, we must be sure to ask the person to explain exactly what he means by the terms being used. Knowing that many false theories exist concerning Jesus Christ should prompt every one of us to make absolutely sure that what is being discussed is theologically accurate. Remember, all heresy, in one way or another, will attack Jesus Christ.

QUESTION #14 – What is meant by the impeccability of Jesus Christ?

The issue of the impeccability of Jesus Christ or the peccability of Jesus Christ is closely connected to one's understanding of the hypostatic union. As Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer says: "Here the fact of the unity of His Person is involved and becomes in a large measure the key to the solution of the problem" (Vol. 1, p. 393).

To simply state the issue:

- 1) **Impeccability** - means that Jesus Christ could not sin.
- 2) **Peccability** - means that Jesus Christ could sin.

Concerning this Christological matter there have been three different views, only one of which may be correct:

View #1 - Some hold to the position that Christ could sin. This view focuses on Christ's humanity.

View #2 - Some hold to the position that Christ would not sin. This view tends to hold to the belief that the possibility was there, but because of certain attributes He would not choose to sin.

View #3 - Some hold to the position that Christ could not sin. This view believes that Jesus did not have the possibility of ever sinning because He was God and God cannot sin. This is the position that I believe is correct, as do many other theologians—Dr. Chafer, Dr. Walvoord, Dr. Ryrie, Mr. Miles and many others.

This matter is really resolved by the hypostatic union. Any attempt to say Christ could have sinned is an attempt to somehow separate His humanity from His deity.

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Dr. Chafer writes: "In the course of the argument which this problem engenders, it is essential to recognize that, as demonstrated in the case of the first Adam, an unfallen human being may sin; and from this it may be reasoned, were there no other factors to be considered, that the unfallen humanity of Christ could have sinned. It is at this point that error intrudes. If isolated and standing alone, it is claimed that the humanity of Christ, being unsupported, could have willed against God as Adam did. The misleading fallacy is that the humanity of Christ could ever stand alone and unsupported by His Deity" (Vol. 1, p. 393).

There are certain things we specifically know about God:

- 1) We know from God's Word that He cannot be tempted to do evil. James 1:13
- 2) We know from God's Word that He does not and cannot change. James 1:17
- 3) We know from God's Word that He does not have any darkness in Him. I John 1:5

Therefore, knowing these things about God and knowing Jesus Christ is God, we must conclude that there is no possible way Jesus Christ could have sinned unless there is a tampering with the hypostatic union, which would attempt to separate His humanity from His Deity.

Dr. William T. Shedd gives a good illustration of the impossibility of Christ sinning. He says if you take a wire, it is very pliable and bendable by the hands of a human being. However, if you weld that wire onto an unbendable bar of steel, it is impossible for human hands to bend that wire. So it is with Christ's two natures—both humanity and Deity have been welded together into one Person. One nature is that of a man, but the other is that of God. It is very clear that God cannot sin; it is also clear that as long as these two natures are welded together, Christ cannot sin either, because He is God.

We may also observe a critical Christological statement found in Hebrews 13:8. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. If people concede that Christ could have sinned while on earth, then they must also concede that He is still capable of sinning today, for whatever He was then, He is still the same today.

Dr. Charles Feinberg gives a very noteworthy statement regarding this matter:

"First of all, the hypostatic union gave the world an impeccable Person. This predicates of Christ, mark you, not only anamartesia (sinlessness) but impeccability. It is not just a matter of posse non peccare (possible not to sin), but of non posse peccare (not possible to sin). It is not enough to say Christ did not sin; it must be declared unequivocally that He could not sin. To entertain for a moment the thought that Christ could sin, would involve issues that call for a radical revolution in our conception of the Godhead. To say that Christ could not sin is not tantamount to maintaining He could not be tempted, but because He was God He could not sin, for there was no sin principle in Christ that could or would respond to solicitation to sin" (Chafer, Vol. 1, p. 394).