

DOCTRINE OF CHRIST
Incarnation, Dual Natures, and Hypostatic Union
Lesson #7

The dual natures of Christ have been an issue of intense theological discussion from the conception of the church. The reason for this is that while the Scriptures affirm Jesus was fully God and fully man, they don't explain in detail how the two natures, both divine and human, existed and functioned in the single person of Jesus Christ. This has led theologians to put forth various theories which attempt to explain what the Scriptures do not explain. Thus every theory of the dual natures of Christ must be hammered out on the anvil of the Word of God to test its quality. The dual natures of Christ relate directly to incarnation (the Second person of the Trinity taking on human flesh), the Kenosis (what it means that the second person of the Trinity emptied himself in order to become a man), and the hypostatic union (the unique combination of both fully human and divine attributes which existed in the single person of Jesus Christ).

Many questions arise. How could Jesus be both God and man? What does that mean? Was Christ more God than man or more man than God, equal portions of both, or 100% of both? If the latter is true, how can it be true? What heresies, both ancient and modern, have an improper view of the dual natures of Christ? In this lesson we will examine the Scriptures, theories, and heresies that theologians have had to deal with throughout the ages concerning the dual natures of Christ. In previous studies we have already established that Jesus is both God and man. In this lesson we will focus on how those two natures existed in the person of Jesus.

I. DEFINITION

- A. *“Therefore, following the holy Fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body: of one substance [hypostasis] with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence [hypostasis], not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the Fathers has handed down to us.”¹*

¹This statement is probably the greatest attempt to define the dual natures of Christ. It was written by the church fathers at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD in response and reaction to the many heresies about Christ's nature. This translation was taken from Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, pgs. 51-52.

- B. *“The Christ of God took on Himself human nature in order to reveal God to men in a way they could grasp, to become their Savior by ransoming them from their sins and to deal sympathetically with their needs. Today, in glory, He is still the God-man. The incarnation persists.”²*
- C. *“In New Testament usage “flesh,” by metonymy, means “human nature.” “Incarnation” is from the Latin meaning “becoming flesh,” that is, “becoming human.” The doctrine of the incarnation teaches that the eternal Son of God became human, and that He did so without in any manner or degree diminishing His divine nature.”³*
- D. *“The union of the two natures in Christ is a personal or hypostatic union. By this is meant, in the first place, that it is not a mere indwelling of the divine nature analogous to the indwelling of the Spirit of God in his people. Much less is it a mere moral or sympathetic union; or a temporary and mutable relation between the two. In the second place, it is intended to affirm that the union is such that Christ is but one person. As the union of the soul and body constitutes a man one person, so the union of the Son of God with our nature constitutes Him one person. And as in man the personality is in the soul and not in the body, so the personality of Christ is in the divine nature. . . . Human nature, therefore, although endowed with intelligence and will, may be, and in fact is, in the person of Christ impersonal. That it is so is the plain doctrine of Scripture, for the Son of God, a divine person, assumed a perfect human nature, and, nevertheless, remains one person.*

The facts, therefore, revealed in Scripture concerning Christ constrain us to believe, (1.) That in his person two natures, the divine and the human, are inseparably united; and the word nature in this connection means substance. (2.) That these two natures or substances are not mixed or confounded so as to form a third, which is neither the one nor the other. Each nature retains all its own properties unchanged; so that in Christ there is a finite intelligence and infinite intelligence, a finite will or energy, and an infinite will. (3.) That no property of the divine nature is transferred to the human, and much less is any property of the human transferred to the divine. Humanity in Christ is not deified, nor is the divinity reduced to the limitations of humanity. (4.) The union of the natures is not mere contact or occupancy of the same portion of space. It is not an indwelling, or a simple control of the divine nature over the operations of the human, but a personal union; such a union that its result is that Christ is one person with two distinct natures forever; at once God and man.”⁴

² Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, pg. 156.

³ Ibid., pg. 373.

⁴ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Originally Published 1872. 2:391.

II. THOUGHTS TO PONDER

- A. *“If the divine nature had been converted into the human, or the human into the divine, there had been a change, but they were not so. The human nature was distinct from the divine. Therefore there was no change. A cloud over the sun makes no change in the body of the sun; so, though the divine nature be covered with the human, it makes no change in the divine nature.”⁵*
- B. *“Now, while Mercy was thus debating with itself, what to do for the recovery of fallen man, the Wisdom of God stepped in, and thus the oracle spake:-- Let God become man; let the Second Person in the Trinity be incarnate, and suffer; and so for fitness he shall be man, and for ability he shall be God; thus justice may be satisfied, and man saved. O the depth of the riches of the wisdom of God, thus to make justice and mercy to kiss each other! Great is this mystery, “God manifest in the flesh.” What wisdom was this, that Christ should be made sin, yet know no sin; that God should condemn the sin, yet save the sinner!”⁶*
- C. *“Melchizedek was a type of Christ, who is said to be ‘without father and without mother.’ Christ being born of a virgin, answered the type; he was without father and mother; without mother as he was God, without father as he was man.”⁷*
- D. *“To rob the divine nature of God of a single attribute would destroy His deity, and to rob man of a single human attribute would result in destruction of a true humanity. It is for this reason that the two natures of Christ cannot lose or transfer a single attribute.”⁸*
- E. *“The really staggering Christian claim is that Jesus of Nazareth was God made man — that the second person of the Godhead became the “second man,” determining human destiny, the second representative head of the race, and that He took humanity without loss of deity, so that Jesus of Nazareth was as truly and fully divine as He was human. Here are two mysteries for the price of one. . . It is here, in the thing that happened at the first Christmas, that the profoundest and most unfathomable depths of the Christian revelation lie. . . The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is this truth of the incarnation.”⁹*

⁵ Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, pg. 67.

⁶ *Ibid.* pg. 73.

⁷ *Ibid.* pg. 193.

⁸ John Walvord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, pg. 115.

⁹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pg. 46.

- F. *“Among conservative theologians the fact of the hypostatic union of the divine and the human natures in Christ is well established. The problem does not lie in the fact of the union, but rather in the relationship of the two natures of Christ, The nature of the self-consciousness of Christ and how the two natures relate to the will of Christ.”¹⁰*

III. SCRIPTURAL PROOF OF THE TWO NATURES OF CHRIST

- A. **Jn. 1:1-14** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. 5 The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. 6 There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light. 9 There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- B. **Rom. 1:1-5** Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, 4 who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake,
- C. **Phil. 2:5-8** Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

¹⁰ John Walvord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, pg. 114.

- D. **I Tim. 3:16** By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.

- E. **Heb. 2:14** Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,

- F. **I Jn. 1:1-3** What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life— 2 and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us— 3 what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

- G. **I Jn. 4:2** By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;

- H. **II Jn. 7** For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.

- I. The chart below was adapted from H. Wayne House’s work, *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*.¹¹

THEORIES OF HOW CHRIST EMPTIED HIMSELF (THE KENOSIS)	
Theories of How Christ Emptied Himself (Kenotic Theories)	
Christ Emptied Himself of <i>Divine Consciousness</i>	The Son of God laid aside his participation in the Godhead when he became a man. All the attributes of his deity literally ceased when the incarnation occurred. The Logos became a soul residing in the human Jesus.
Christ Emptied Himself of the <i>Eternity Form of Being</i>	The Logos exchanged his eternity-form for a time-form bound down by human nature. In this time-form Christ no longer had all the attributes commensurate with Deity, though he could use supernatural powers.

¹¹House in a footnote said that he adapted his chart from Robert E. Pricirilli, “He emptied Himself,” *Biblical Viewpoint*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (April 1969):23-30.

THEORIES OF HOW CHRIST EMPTIED HIMSELF (THE KENOSIS)	
Christ Emptied Himself of the Relative Attributes of Deity	This view differentiates between essential attributes, such as truth and love, and those that relate to the created universe, such as omnipotence and omnipresence.
Christ Emptied Himself of the Integrity of Infinite Divine Existence	At Christ's incarnation the Logos took up a double life. One "life center" continued to function consciously in the Trinity while the other became incarnated with human nature, unaware of the cosmic functions of Deity.
Christ Emptied Himself of the Divine Activity	The Logos turned over all of his divine roles and duties to the Father. The incarnate Logos was unaware of the happenings within the Godhead.
Christ Emptied Himself of the Actual Exercise of Divine Prerogatives	The Logos retracted the mode of the divine attributes from the realm of the actual to the potential. He retained his divine consciousness but renounced the conditions of infinity and its form.
Theories of How Christ Chose not to Exercise (Sub-Kenotic Theories)	
Christ Emptied Himself of the Use of the Divine Attributes	The Logos possessed the divine attributes but chose not to use them.
Christ Emptied Himself of the Independent Exercise of the Divine Attributes	The Logos always possessed and could utilize the prerogatives of Deity but always in submission to and by the power of the Father (and the Holy Spirit). The incarnate Christ never did anything independently by virtue of his own deity.
Christ Emptied Himself of the Insignia of Majesty, the Prerogatives of Deity	The Logos emptied himself of the outward form of Deity. (This view is vague as to what is precisely meant.)

IV. ERRORS CONCERNING THE TWO NATURES OF CHRIST

A. Early Heresies Concerning The Deity of Christ

1. **Ebionism** – The Ebionites were a second century group of professing Christians who were also Judaizers. They professed to be saved by grace but justified by keeping the law. They were strict monotheists (believed in one God) and had a hard time accepting the fact of the Trinity. They rejected the virgin birth and taught that "the Christ" came upon Jesus at His baptism. This left Jesus as a mere man who received some supernatural anointing from God, but not fully God and man. The cause of their heretical teaching partially is from the fact that they rejected the teachings of Paul.

2. **Arianism** – Arius was a church leader (A.D. 318) from Alexandria. Arius also denied the deity of Christ and was more of a threat because he believed in the writings of Paul and was more systematic in his beliefs. Arius denied the trinity but believed that Jesus was the Wisdom and Word of God, but not fully God. Arius explained away the Scriptures which speak of Christ's deity by saying that they were accommodations or expressions of courtesy so we could understand the exceptionally human Jesus.

3. **Dynamic Monarchianism** – The Monarchian's were another group which denied the deity of Christ. They believed that when the Spirit of God rested on Jesus at his baptism Jesus became a godlike man. They were steeped in Greek logic and because they could not form a syllogistically correct explanation for the Trinity they denied it.

B. Early Heresies Concerning the Two Natures of Christ

1. **Nestorianism** – Nestorius lived in A. D. 428. Nestorius embraced some of the Arian heresy that Jesus was just a son and the Apollinarian heresy (see below) which says Jesus manhood was incomplete. This made Jesus not quite God and not quite man but a split personality of some of each. He believed only the man part of Jesus suffered and the God part did not. Hence he used this kind of reasoning to explain the many godly and human characteristics of Christ.
2. **Apollinarius** – Apollinarius was a fourth century friend of Athanasius who labored to refute the Arian heresy. Apollinarius was appalled that anyone might believe that Jesus had a human and divine soul. He wanted to maintain the unity of Christ's nature but could not be convinced that Jesus had a divine and human soul. He believed that Jesus' divine soul eclipsed or usurped Jesus' human soul therefore making Jesus not fully man for he did not have a human soul.
3. **Modalistic Monarchianism** – The Modalistic Monarchians also rejected the dual natures of Christ. They believed that God was only God the Father and to say Jesus was also God was a denial of the oneness of God. Hence, Jesus was not God in their view, only a man.

C. Early Heresies Concerning the Humanity of Christ

1. **Docetism** – They believed all matter was evil. They did believe Jesus was God but denied that he was a physical man. They believed He was only spirit. Hence, they rejected the humanity of Christ.
2. **Gnosticism** – The Gnostics believed that some members of the church lived by faith and others lived by knowledge. They believed some Christians didn't need faith only knowledge. This elite group of super knowledgeable individuals believed that Jesus was a lesser god but still God. They believed that Jesus was a "psychic substance" and did not have a human body. Hence, they denied the full humanity and deity of Christ.
3. **Eutychianism** – The Eutychian heresy denied the dual natures of Christ. They believed that the Father became the perfect God-man but denied the two natures of Christ. They believed the humanity of Christ was absorbed in His deity. This made Jesus only God and not man.
4. Other heresies of the time could be considered here as they intersect with the dual natures and person of Christ. Yet they might better be discussed in a study addressing improper views of the trinity. Heresies such as Sabellianism, Dynamic Monarchianism or Socinianism promote wrong views of the Trinity and as a consequence promote wrong views of the dual natures and single personhood of Jesus Christ.

D. Modern Heresies Concerning The Hypostatic Union

It is interesting to note that every modern cult has a faulty view of Christ.

1. **Christian Science** – Modern day example of the Docetic heresy i.e., “all matter is evil, Jesus only spirit.”
2. **Jehovah's Witnesses, The Way International, The Unification Church** – Modern day examples of the Arian heresy. “Jesus was only a man not God.”
3. **Mormonism** – Believe in many gods (polytheism). They believe in the evolution of God that men may become god and that God once was a man.
4. **Liberal theology** – Denial of the deity and miracles of Christ.

V. APPLICATION OF THE TWO NATURES OF CHRIST

- A. The incarnation proves God’s love for you.
- B. The incarnation proves there is a way of salvation.
- C. The incarnation was such a great sacrifice and act of humiliation that it should motivate you to serve God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength.
- D. If God was able to save you when you were hopelessly lost through His Son, He can surely help you if you are eternally saved through His Son.
- E. You have an Advocate, a sympathetic High Priest who is fully human and being fully human He is able to sympathize with you in your weakness.
- F. As a man, Jesus suffered more than you ever will. He can relate to you. Being God, Jesus has infinite resources and can comfort you and meet your every need.
- G. Let us not forget as we live in this world that Christ is in us and with us. And let us not forget that some day in heaven, we will see Jesus face to face. We will look into the face of Jesus, and behold the face of God. For all eternity, we will see the omnipresent God in the person of Jesus Christ.

The love of Christ in its sweetness, its fulness, its greatness, its faithfulness, passeth all human comprehension. Where shall language be found which shall describe his matchless, his unparalleled love towards the children of men? It is so vast and boundless that, as the swallow but skimmeth the water, and diveth not into its depths, so all descriptive words but touch the surface, while depths immeasurable lie beneath. Well might the poet say, “O love, thou fathomless abyss!” For this love of Christ is indeed measureless and fathomless; none can attain unto it.

Before we can have any right idea of the love of Jesus, we must understand his previous glory in its height of majesty, and his incarnation upon the earth in all its depths of shame. But who can tell us the majesty of Christ? When he was enthroned in the highest heavens he was very God of very God; by him were the heavens made, and all the hosts thereof. His own almighty arm upheld the spheres; the praises of cherubim and seraphim perpetually surrounded him; the full chorus of the hallelujahs of the universe unceasingly flowed to the foot of his throne: he reigned supreme above all his creatures, God over all, blessed for ever.

Who can tell his height of glory then? And who, on the other hand, can tell how low he descended? To be a man was something, to be a man of sorrows was far more; to bleed, and die, and suffer, these were much for him who was the Son of God; but to suffer such unparalleled agony—to endure a death of shame and desertion by his Father, this is a depth of condescending love which the most inspired mind must utterly fail to fathom. Herein is love! and truly it is love that “passeth knowledge.” O let this love fill our hearts with adoring gratitude, and lead us to practical manifestations of its power.¹²

¹² Charles Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*, Morning March 28, Logos Bible Software.