

CHRISTOLOGY

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Who is Jesus of Nazareth? According to the Bible, this question is of surpassing significance. So important, that our eternal destiny rests upon what you believe concerning who Jesus Christ is (John 8:24). Just who is he? Jesus consistently drew attention to the question of His own identity. For example he asked his own disciples, “But what about you?”... “Who do you say I am?” (Matt. 16:15). The Bible unequivocally presents Jesus as the long awaited Messiah of Israel, the Savior of lost humanity. But these titles only take on true significance in light of the astounding revelation of his own identity. Scripture reveals Jesus of Nazareth to be none other than God in human flesh (John 1:1-14).

Scriptures reveal that Jesus Christ existed in eternity as God the Son; that He was begotten, not made; that He is, in fact, God incarnate. (Isa. 9:6; Mic. 5:2; John 17:5). The Latin term incarnation actually means “becoming in flesh.” This eternally divine person, without diminishing His deity, took upon himself a truly human nature. Christ’s deity seen in His personal claims to be equal with God (John 5:17-18; 8:58). But also, because He performed miracles that gave sin, and raised Himself from the dead — thus demonstrating that he was, in fact, God. At the same time, Scripture depicts Jesus as fully human. The fact that he experienced birth, growth, development, and ultimately death fully bore eloquent testimony to his humanity (Luke 2:40-52; 22:63; Heb. 5:8).

More precise, Jesus Christ was and is the theanthropos — the God Man. The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus was both fully God and fully man. He was one in substance (homoousios) with the Father in regard to His divine nature, and distinct in substance with humanity in regard to His human nature. The two natures were perfectly united in the one person Jesus Christ. To quote the Creed of Chalcedon, the Lord Jesus Christ is “one person in two natures, unmixed, unchained, undivided, inseparable.” And remember, every single cult and world religion compromises the deity of Christ. So don’t be fooled — you must believe in the real Jesus not a counterfeit Christ.

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Hypostatic Union

DEFINITION: At the Incarnation (point in history when the second person of the Trinity entered the human race. The word literally means enfleshment.), two natures (full deity and full humanity) were inseparably united in the one person of Jesus Christ. Whereas the Trinity involves three Persons who share the same nature, the hypostatic union involves one Person who has two natures.

- Col. 2:9* clearly teaches this doctrine. Against Gnostic false teachers who denied Jesus' deity and (probably) fleshly body, Paul insists that "in him dwells the fullness of deity in bodily form."
- Jn. 1:1,14 also affirm the hypostatic union. The Word "was" is in the imperfect tense which might be translated "always was" God (vs 1). Verse 1 stresses the eternality, distinct personality and deity of the Word. In verse 14 the emphasis is on a point in time event: "became" flesh (vs 14).

SUPPORT:

- *Full Humanity*: 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 2:14,17; 1 Jn. 4:2; 2 Jn. 1:7
 - *Importance*: As the Second Adam and the inaugurator of a new humanity (Rom. 5:12-19), Jesus has to be human. He also had to be human in order to die, and in order to be a true mediator-priest who could represent humanity before God (Heb. 2:17,18).
- *Sinless Humanity*: 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 Jn. 3:5
 - *Importance*: Although Jesus did not have a sin-nature, the Bible does not emphasize this or explain how he avoided this. Instead, it emphasizes his sinlessness, because Jesus had to be morally blameless in order to be able to die for others (Heb. 7:26-28; 9:14).
 - QUESTION #1: COULD JESUS FALL TO TEMPTATION?
 - Reformed syllogism: God can't be tempted (Jas 1:13). Jesus is God (Col 2:9). Therefore, Jesus could not sin (impeccability).
 - However, Jesus was also human and humans can be tempted. Jesus was tempted (Mt. 4) like we are (Heb 2:18; 4:15,16).
 - DID JESUS HAVE A SIN-NATURE? The scripture does not answer this question directly. However, it infers that Jesus did not have a sin-nature.
 - In Rom. 8:3, Paul stops short of affirming that Jesus had "sinful flesh"--he says Jesus "came in the likeness of sinful flesh."
 - Rom. 5:12-19 provides two important reasons why Jesus did not inherit the full effects of Adam. First, he is the "second Adam" (vs 14). This would suggest that, like Adam before the Fall, Jesus made his choice to obey God without a sin-nature. Vs 16,18 also say that those "in Adam" are born under condemnation--which clearly was not the case with Jesus (Matt. 3:17).
 - "Then Jesus didn't agonize as much as we do!" Only those who successfully resist temptation feel its full weight. And a lot more was at stake for Jesus (the salvation of humanity).

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- *Full Deity*: Jn. 8:58; 10:30; 14:9; Heb. 1:8-10**; Rom. 9:5; Jn 1:1; Col 2:9
 - BIBLICAL CASE FOR JESUS' DEITY
 - Jesus' claims
 - John 5:17 But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."
 - John 8:58 Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am."
 - John 10:30 "I and the Father are one."
 - The response to Jesus' claims
 - John 5:18 For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.
 - John 8:59 Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple.
 - John 10:31 The Jews took up stones again to stone Him.
 - The apostolic witness
 - John's view of Jesus - see Jn 1:1,14
 - Paul's view of Jesus - see Col 2:9 and Phil 2:6
 - The author of Hebrews says that Jesus is "the radiance of (God's) glory and the exact representation of God's nature" (1:3), greater than the angels (1:4), and he attributes a Psalm about YAHWEH to the son (1:8-10** - 8 But about the Son he says, . . . 10 "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.)
 - The author says in vs. 8 that the following Old Testament passages are about the Son. In vs. 8, he quotes Ps. 45:6,7 which clearly describes the Messiah as elevated above "his companions" (the angels). In vs. 10, he quotes Ps. 102:25, which is addressed to YHWH (Ps. 102:22). Therefore, the author clearly states that Jesus is YHWH.
 - *Importance*: Because Jesus is God, he is able to reveal God to us in the fullest way that we can comprehend (Jn. 1:18; 14:9; Heb. 1:1-3). Because he is God, he was able to pay for an infinite amount of sin and endure God's infinite wrath against sin in a finite amount of time (Heb. 10:10,12).

Kenosis

DEFINITION: At the Incarnation, Jesus gave up not only the environment of the Godhead and his position as Ruler, but also the *use* of his divine attributes. (If you fail to say "use," you are using heretical language and your answer will be counted as wrong!!!) "By taking on human nature, he accepted certain limitations upon the functioning of his divine attributes. These limitations were not the result of a loss of divine attributes, but of the addition of human attributes." (OLYMPIC SPRINTER IN 3-LEGGED RACE; CHAMPION

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BOXER FIGHTING WITH ONE HAND TIED BEHIND HIS BACK; PARENTS BATTING "LEFT-HANDED" AGAINST KIDS)

SUPPORT:

- He gave up a perfect environment - review Jn 1:1,14.
- Phil. 2:6,7* states that Jesus did not "hold on to" (*harpagmos*) his equality with God. While the context emphasizes that he relinquished his position as Ruler, it probably also implies that he "emptied" (*kenoo*) himself of his other divine privileges (ENVIRONMENT; USE OF ATTRIBUTES).
- Jesus demonstrated non-use of *omniscience* (Matt. 24:36; Lk. 2:52), *omnipotence* (Mk. 6:5; Jn. 5:19), *omnipresence* (Jn. 4:4), *righteousness* (Heb. 9:14), *self existence* (Lk. 4:2 - Jesus began to starve at the end of his 40 day temptation), and *justice* (Jn. 5:30). (It is possible that he exercised his infinitude while on the cross, so as to bear the infinite wrath of God in a finite period of time.)
- "How then did Jesus perform miracles?" Both Jesus and the apostles state that he performed these works by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - In Lk. 4:18, Jesus declares that the anointing of the Holy Spirit empowers his public ministry. In Jn. 5:19, Jesus states that he "can do nothing of himself." In Jn. 14, Jesus states that "the Father abiding in me does his works" (vs 10). He also tells his disciples that they will be able to perform the same works that he has performed because they will receive the same source of empowering--the Holy Spirit (vs 12-17).
 - Luke explains the power source of Jesus' healings in Lk. 5:17 - "the power of the Lord was present for him to heal." Peter, in summarizing the entire miracle ministry of Jesus, states that God empowered him through the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:22; 10:38).
 - We are not saying that Jesus never performed a miracle by his own power (Mark 6; Luke 8) as deity. If he did, the Father certainly gave him authorization to do so (Jn. 5:19).
- **IMPORTANCE:** Jesus lived just like we do--by dependence on God and by the empowering of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:10-17). In Phil. 2:3-13, Paul argues that we can live a life of other-centered, sacrificial love (like Jesus lived) because we have access to God's motivation and empowering (like Jesus did).

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Understanding the Incarnation by Matt Perman

"Here are two mysteries for the price of one--the plurality of persons within the unity of God, and the union of Godhead and manhood in the person of Jesus. ...Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is this truth of the Incarnation," writes contemporary theologian J.I. Packer.[1] What is the Incarnation? It is simply what Packer refers to here as "the union of Godhead and manhood in the person of Jesus." It is, I would venture to say, the greatest and most stunning miracle that has ever been or ever will be. It is also the answer to the most important and relevant question in the universe: "Who is Jesus Christ?" The answer revealed by the truth of the Incarnation is: Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man in one Person. In other words, He is *God incarnate*.

Since the Incarnation is so deeply bound up with who Jesus is, a good understanding of it is not dry and boring head knowledge to the Christian. Rather, we will delight in striving to obtain a deeper and more accurate understanding of how Jesus can be both God and man because this will result in having a deeper understanding of the Savior whom we confess and adore. Words are not enough to explain how a greater understanding of Christ's Incarnation is able to deepen our devotion to Him, our worship of Him, and our joy in Him--as well as strengthen our trust in Him. Furthermore, we cannot appreciate Christ's worth with the depth we are able to, marvel at His Person with the awe we are able to, or glorify His name with the enthusiasm we are able to, if we do not understand His Incarnation to the extent that we are able to.

As we probe the glorious truths regarding the Incarnation of the Son of God, we will discover that a proper understanding of these truths clears up much confusion and many difficulties we may have in our mind. How can Jesus be both God and man? Why doesn't this make Him two people? How does His Incarnation relate to the Trinity? How could Jesus have hungered (Matthew 4:2) and died (Mark 15:37) when He was on earth, and yet still be God? Did Jesus give up any of His divine attributes in the Incarnation? Why is it inaccurate to say that Jesus is a "part" of God? Since Jesus is God as well as man, then does that mean that He was praying to Himself when He was on earth? Is Jesus still human now, and does He still have His human body?

As you read, do so prayerfully and thoughtfully.

Jesus is God

In order to have an accurate understanding of who Jesus is, one of the first things we must know is that He is God. If we first understand what this does not mean it will help us greatly in understanding more clearly what it *does* mean.

A common liberal view today is espoused by philosopher John Hick. Hick first points to the

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"distinction between the metaphysical attributes of God ([independence], eternity, infinity, etc.) and God's moral attributes (goodness, love, wisdom, etc.)." He then says that "the doctrine of the Incarnation involves the claim that the moral (but not the metaphysical) attributes of God have been embodied, so far as this is possible, in a finite human life, namely that of Jesus." In simple language, this embodiment of God's moral attributes in Jesus means that "Jesus' compassion for the sick and the spiritually blind was God's compassion for them; his forgiving of sins, God's forgiveness; and his condemnation of the self-righteous, God's condemnation of them." [2] In other words, this view says that Jesus is not God Himself, God in His fullness of moral and metaphysical attributes, but rather He is a merely human individual who expressed and contained within him, in a unique way, God's moral character.

I cannot state strongly enough my outrage at such a view. It is not simply a minor theological error, but blasphemy of the greatest proportions and utterly insulting to the name of Christ. *Do not be misled by the wolves of modern liberal theology.* We must stand strong in the truth about who our Savior is, for salvation itself is at stake in what we believe about His identity (John 8:24).

Jesus is not simply a person in whom God's moral attributes of goodness, love, wisdom, and so forth are present in a special way. Rather, it is God Himself, God's very being, that became truly and really incarnate in Christ. The Bible states this without ambiguity. The apostle Paul declares "For in Him *all the fulness* of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9). It is not merely God's moral qualities that became incarnate in Christ, but the fulness of God's being and thus God's metaphysical attributes as well. "For it was the Father's good pleasure for *all the fulness* to dwell in Him" (Colossians 1:19). Titus 2:13 says that as Christians we are "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of *our great God* and Savior, Christ Jesus." When Thomas similarly cries out to Jesus after the resurrection, "My Lord and *my God!*" (John 20:28), we find Jesus acknowledging that Thomas' belief about Him is true (v. 29). Likewise, the book of Hebrews gives us God the Father's direct testimony about Christ: "But of the Son He says, 'Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever' and the gospel of John calls Jesus "the *only begotten God*" (John 1:18). Peter begins his second letter with the words, "Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of *our God and Savior, Jesus Christ*" (2 Peter 1:1).

We see, then, that Jesus Christ does not merely resemble God, He does not merely love with the love that God loves with, or show compassion with the same compassion that God has, or live the way God would, but actually is Himself the Most High God. Jesus Christ really and truly possess all the attributes of deity moral and metaphysical. He is the omnipresent (Matthew 18:20; 28:20; Acts 18:10) omniscient (Mt 16:21; Luke 11:17; John 4:29), omnipotent (Mt 8:26, 27; 28:18; Jn 11:38-44; Lk 7:14-15; Revelation 1:8), self-existent (Jn 1:4; 14:6; 8:58), sovereign (Mt 28:18; Rev 19:16; 1:5) eternal (John 1:1; 8:58) creator (Colossians 1:16) God (Titus 2:13). Everything that God is, Jesus is. For Jesus is God.

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Specifically, Jesus is God the Son

In order to have a more complete grasp of Christ's incarnation, it is necessary to have some sort of understanding of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity states that God is one being, yet this one God exists as three distinct Persons. This means, first of all, that we must distinguish each Person of the Trinity from the other two. The Father is not the Son or the Holy Spirit, the Son is not the Holy Spirit or the Father, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son. They are each a distinct center of consciousness, a distinct form of personal existence. Yet, they all share the exact same divine nature/essence. Thus, the *three persons are one being*. The divine being/essence is not something that is divided between the Persons, each Person receiving one-third. Rather, the divine being is fully and equally possessed by all three Persons such that all three Persons are each fully God.

How does the fact that God is three Persons in one Being relate to the incarnation? To answer this, let me ask another question. Which Person became incarnate in Jesus Christ? All three? Or just one? Which one? The Biblical answer is that *only God the Son became incarnate*. The Father did not become incarnate in Jesus, and neither did the Holy Spirit. Thus, *Jesus is God, but He is not the Father or the Holy Spirit. Jesus is God the Son*.

The truth that it is only God the Son who became incarnate is taught, for example, in John chapter one. In verse one we read, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God." Thus, Jesus *is* God ("the word was God") and yet He is a different Person than the Father ("the word was *with* God"). So the word is God the Son (He is explicitly identified as such in vv. 14, 18) and is distinguished from the Father. Then, in verse fourteen, we read, "And the word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." So who is it that became incarnate? This verse answers clearly: God the Son (the word) became incarnate. Not God the Father or God the Holy Spirit, but God the Son.

Likewise, at Jesus' baptism we see the Father affirming "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased" (Luke 3:22). He did not say, "You are me, and with myself I am well-pleased." Rather, the Father affirmed that Jesus is the Son, *His* Son, and that Jesus is well-pleasing to Him. In this same verse we also see that the Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son, for the Holy Spirit is present in "bodily form like a dove."

Why is it important to know that Jesus is specifically God the Son? For one thing, if we do not understand this we will be mistaken about the very identity of our savior. Further, it greatly affects how we relate to our triune God. If we think that Jesus is the Father and/or the Holy Spirit, we will be greatly misguided and confused in our prayers. Last, it is considered heresy to believe that the Father became incarnate in Jesus.

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Jesus is fully God

But if Jesus is specifically God the Son, why do we read in Colossians 2:9 "For in Him *all the fulness* of Deity dwells in bodily form." Doesn't this mean that *all three persons* of the Trinity dwell in bodily form in Christ? No, it does not, for that would contradict what we see in John 1:14 and Luke 3:22, as well as many other passages and the whole plan of redemptive history. Rather, this verse proves what I said earlier about the Trinity: Each of the three persons possess the divine being fully and completely. The divine essence is not divided into thirds between the three Persons, but is fully shared by all. In other words, each of the three Persons is fully God.

Since the second Person of the Trinity became incarnate in Christ, this verse, therefore, shows us in very clear terms that *Jesus Christ is fully God*. He is not part God, but 100% God. Because God the Son is fully God, and Jesus Christ is God the Son incarnate (John 1:1, 14), Paul says that "In Him *all the fulness* of deity dwells in bodily form" and that "it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him." Likewise, the verses which we saw earlier which call Jesus God make it clear that He is fully God. For if He was only "partially God," then it could hardly be said that He is God at all.

Jesus is man

It should be obvious that if Jesus is God, then He has always been God. There was a never a time when He became God, for God is eternal. But *Jesus has not always been man*. The fantastic miracle is that this eternal God *became man* at the Incarnation approximately 2,000 years ago. That's what the Incarnation was God the Son becoming man. And its this great even that we celebrate at Christmas.

But what exactly do we mean when we say that God the Son became man? We certainly do not mean that He turned into a man, in the sense that He stopped being God and started being man. Jesus did not give up *any* of His divinity in the Incarnation, as is evident from the verses we saw earlier. Rather, as one early theologian put it, "Remaining what He was, He became what He was not." Christ "was not now God *minus* some elements of His deity, but God *plus* all that He had made His own by taking manhood to Himself."^[3] Thus, Jesus did not give up any of His divine attributes at the Incarnation. He remained in full possession of all of them. For if He were to ever give up any of His divine attributes, He would cease being God.

The truth of Jesus' humanity is just as important to hold to as the truth of His deity. The apostle John condemns anyone who denies that Jesus Christ is truly man, saying that such people are of the spirit of the anti-Christ (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7). Jesus' humanity is displayed in the fact that He was born as a baby from a human mother (Luke 2:7; Galatians 4:4), that He became weary (John 4:6), thirsty (John 19:28), and hungry (Matthew 4:2), and

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that He experienced the full range of human emotions such as marvel (Matt. 8:10), weeping, and sorrow (John 11:35). He lived on earth just as we do.

Jesus is fully man

It is important to recognize that when we say that Jesus is man, we do not simply mean that He is partially man. We mean that He is *fully* human everything that belongs to the essence of true humanity is true of Him. He is just as truly human as the rest of us (though, of course, He is not merely human He is more than human, but not less than human).

The fact that Jesus is truly and fully human is clear from the fact that He has a human body (Luke 24:39), a human mind (Luke 2:52), and a human soul (Matthew 26:38). Jesus does not just look like a man, He does not just have some aspects of what is essential for true humanity but not others, but possess full humanity.

But Jesus is not only truly and fully man. He is also a *perfect* man. This means that He is sinless. He does not have a sinful nature, and neither did He ever commit sin, even though He was tempted in all ways (Hebrews 4:15). Thus, Jesus is fully and perfectly man, and has also experienced the full range of human experience. We have a Savior who can truly identify with us. This is an awesome truth to cherish, and sets Christianity apart from all other religions.

Jesus will be fully God and fully man forever

For most people it is obvious that Jesus will be God forever. But for some reason it escapes a lot of us that Jesus will also be *man* forever. He is still man *right now as you read this* and will be forever. The Bible is clear that Jesus rose physically from the dead in the same body that had died (Luke 24:39) and then ascended into heaven as a man, in His physical body (Acts 1:9; Luke 24:50-51). Almost thirty years after the ascension, the apostle Paul could write that in Christ "all the fulness of deity *dwells* in bodily form." Paul did not say *dwelt* (past tense), but *dwells* (present tense). Thus, at the time Paul was writing, the ascended and exalted Christ was still man in heaven, with His body.

For this reason we also find Paul writing in 1 Timothy 2:5, "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, *the man* Christ Jesus." It is as man that Christ mediates for us, and He was still mediator and therefore man when Paul wrote this in 63 A.D. The verse, furthermore, ties Jesus's role as savior and mediator between God and man with His humanity. If He wasn't human, He wouldn't be an appropriate mediator. Therefore, as long as He is going to be mediator, He must be man. Since He will be mediator forever, then He will also be man forever.

Likewise, the author of Hebrews argues that "He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (2:17). Because Jesus is human like us, He

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can more fully sympathize with us and therefore can effectively come to our aid when we are tempted (v. 18). I cannot help but believe that it is very destructive to our comfort and faith to not know that Jesus is still man and in His body. For if He is not still man in heaven, how could we have comfort knowing that He can fully sympathize with us? He can sympathize and be a faithful high priest and know what we are going through not just because He was once on earth as a man, but because He continues forever as that same man.

Jesus will still be man and still have His body at His return, for at that time He "will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with *the body of His glory*" (Philippians 3:21). Both Jesus and all Christians will then continue living together in their bodies forever, because the resurrection body cannot die (1 Corinthians 15:42). To think that Jesus no longer has His body, or that Christians will not have their resurrection bodies forever, is equivalent to thinking that Jesus' body died again after having been raised (for death is by definition the separation of the soul from the body) and that our bodies will die again after being raised. But the apostle Paul says that Christ was raised "never to die again" (Romans 6:9). Thus, we see that even after His return, when He judges the world, Christ will still be man: "[God] has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a *Man* whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31), and His manhood will for all these reasons continue forever.

What is the Hypostatic union?

What we have seen so far about the deity and humanity of Christ shows us that *Christ has two natures*--a divine nature and a human nature. But we should not conclude from this that Christ is therefore two people as well. Christ remains *one person*. There is only one Christ. The church has historically stated this truth in this way: Christ is *two natures* united in *one person* forever. This doctrine is called "hypostatic union." The Westminster Shorter Catechism very concisely and clearly states this essential doctrine: "The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be God and man, in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever." [4]

The doctrine of hypostatic union is not only a fantastic truth, but is an essential doctrine to Christianity--for it goes to the core of who our blessed Savior is. Therefore, it is of highest importance that we understand it clearly and correctly. Thus, it is not enough just to know that Christ is two natures in one Person. We must understand more clearly what this means, and how the two natures relate to one another. If we do not understand these things rightly, we will not only be wrong, but will be in danger of heresy.

In order to more fully understand how Christ can be two natures, yet one person, let us first examine some of the inadequate views which the church has condemned. Each of these views shows us something that we are to avoid believing about the hypostatic union, and therefore helps clarify what we *are* to believe.

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The first heretical view we must avoid is called *Apollinarianism*. This view held that "the one person of Christ had a human body but not a human mind or spirit, and that the mind and spirit of Christ were from the divine nature of the Son of God." [5] Since this view did not believe that Jesus has a human mind and spirit, it in effect denied that Christ is fully and truly man. Rather, it presented Christ as a sort of half-man which is made complete by the divine nature. But as we saw earlier, Jesus is just as fully human as the rest of us, for He has all the essential elements of human nature. Thus, "Apollinarianism was rejected by several church councils, from the Council of Alexandria in A.D. 362 to the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381." [6]

The second heretical view to avoid is called *Nestorianism*, a view which did at least acknowledge that Jesus is fully God and fully man. However, it denied that He was only one Person. This view taught that there were two separate persons in Christ as well as two natures. As we will examine in more detail shortly, the biblical teaching is that Christ is only one Person, and therefore the church rejected this belief as well.

The third heretical view to avoid is *Monophysitism*, which taught that Christ only had *one* nature, rather than two. This view held that "the human nature of Christ was taken up and absorbed into the divine nature, so that both natures were changed somewhat and a *third kind of nature* resulted. An analogy to [Monophysitism] can be seen if we put a drop of ink in a glass of water: the mixture resulting is neither pure ink nor pure water, but some kind of third substance, a mixture of the two in which both the ink and the water are changed. Similarly, Eutyches [one of the main advocates of this view, who lived 378-454] taught that Jesus was a mixture of divine and human elements in which both were somewhat modified to form one new nature." [7] This view is also unbiblical because it demolishes both Christ's deity and humanity. On this view, Christ is no longer truly and fully God and truly and fully man, but is some entirely different kind of being that resulted from a mixture of the two natures.

Remembering the names of these heresies is not as important as being aware of their errors. This awareness will not only help us to avoid falling into their mistakes, but prepares us for a more thorough understanding of the orthodox doctrine of the hypostatic union. In order to oppose these heretical views and make the truth clearly confessed, the church stated forth the true doctrine of the incarnation in the Chalcedonian creed. This creed was the fruit of a large council that took place from October 8 to November 1, 451, in the city of Chalcedon and "has been taken as the standard, orthodox definition of the biblical teaching on the person of Christ since that day by" all the major branches of Christianity. [8] The Chalcedonian creed basically summarized the biblical teaching on the hypostatic union with the following truths:

1. Christ has two natures.
2. Each nature is full and complete.

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3. Each nature remains distinct and retains its own properties.
4. Christ is only one person.

Christ has two natures

This fact has already been established by the Scriptural evidence we examined earlier. We saw that Christ is both divine and human, which means that He has a human nature and a divine nature. A "nature" is basically "the sum-total of all the essential qualities of a thing, that which makes it what it is." [9] It is what you consist of. Thus, Jesus "consists of" both humanity and deity.

Each nature is full and complete

As we also learned above, Christ is not partially God and partially man, but is fully God and fully man. His divine nature is complete. It did not lose anything in becoming incarnate. Likewise, His human nature is full and complete. Christ does not merely have a human body, only to have His human soul replaced by His divine nature. Rather, we saw that Christ has all of the elements of true and complete humanity. For this reason, it can seem misleading to use phrases such as "Jesus is God in a body" or "Jesus is God with skin on." Christ is 100% God and 100% man.

There is one other thing that is important to understand about Christ's human nature. Had there been no incarnation, Jesus' human nature would never have existed. It is not as if God looked at a whole list of humans which could potentially have become united with the Son in one Person, and out of all these choices that He could have made, happened to select the human nature He did. This isn't the way it is because Jesus' human nature is not an independent human existence that once existed on its own or would have existed on its own. In other words, Jesus' human nature could never have been anyone other than the Christ, and thus could never have been anything other than united with God the Son. To deny this would seem to do violence to the very identity of Christ, for it implies that He could have had a different identity than He has (i.e., it implies that the Christ could have not been the Christ). I hope that this doesn't blow your mind too much!

Each nature remains distinct

It is probably at this point where most Christians either error in their thinking, or else do not know what to think. As we saw in our discussion of Monophysitism, it would be wrong to think that the two natures mix together to form a new third kind of nature. It would also be wrong to conclude that Jesus' human nature became divine in some ways, or that His divine nature became human in some ways. Rather, each nature remains distinct, and thereby retains its own essential properties and *does not change*. For if any of the natures underwent a change in its essential nature, then Christ is no longer truly and fully human, or

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truly and fully divine.

Thus, we must avoid deifying Christ's human nature and humanizing His divine nature. His human nature is human, and human only. His divine nature is divine, and divine only. For example, Jesus' human nature did not become all knowing through its union with God the Son, and neither did His divine nature become ignorant of anything. Neither did His divine nature become subject to any weakness, losing its omnipotence and on the other hand, neither did His human nature gain omnipotence. *Because the two natures remain distinct and do not mix, they retain their own individual properties.* As the council of Chalcedon stated it, "...the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved..."[10]

The truth that Christ's two natures remain distinct serves to explain why Jesus said that He did not know the day or hour of His return (Matthew 24:36) even though He is omniscient (John 21:17). In regards to His human nature, Jesus did not have all knowledge. Thus, in His human nature He really did not know the day or hour of His return, and could thereby say so. But this does not deny Christ's omniscience, because it is only in His divine nature that He does have all knowledge. Later on we will examine further Scriptural evidence for the fact that the two natures remain distinct.

Christ is only one Person

Finally, we must remember that the two natures of Christ do not make Him two persons. What this means is that there are not two Jesus Christ's. In spite of the fact that He has a duality of natures, He is not two Christs, but One. While remaining distinct, the two natures are united together in such a way so as to be one Person.

To put it simply, there is a certain sense in which Christ is *two*, and a different sense in which Christ is *one*. He is *two* in that He has two real, full natures one divine and one human. He is *one* in that, while remaining distinct, these two natures exist together in such a way as that they constitute "one thing." In other words, the two natures are both *the same Jesus*, and thus are one Person. As the Chalcedonian creed says, Christ is "to be acknowledged in two natures...concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ..."

If we deny this and say that Christ is two Persons, then we make the error of fracturing the union of His natures and thereby come close to denying the incarnation. For if the two natures are not united in one Person, in what sense was there an incarnation at all? Then the divine and human natures would not have a unique, special union to one another, but would have no more unique relationship than the divine nature has to any other human being.

Five points summarize much of the biblical evidence that Christ even though Christ has two

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distinct and unchanged natures that retained their own properties, He nonetheless remains one Person.

1. Both natures are represented in Scripture as constituting "one thing," that is, as united in one Person. We read in John 1:14, "And the word became flesh and dwelt among us." Here we see the two natures: the Word (His deity) and flesh (humanity). Yet we also see that there is one Person, for we read that the Word *became* flesh. "Became" requires that we acknowledge a unity of the two natures such that they are one thing that is, one Person. For in what sense could John write that the word *became* flesh if they do not constitute one Person? It surely cannot mean "turned into" flesh, for that is against the Scriptural teaching on the distinctness of the natures which we have seen and will see further. Additional Scriptures relating to this line of evidence are Romans 8:3, Galatians 4:4, 1 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 2:11-14, 1 John 4:2,3.

2. Scripture makes no distinction between "I" and "You" in Christ, but it does do this within the Trinity where we see one person addressing another. Christ's human nature is never presented as a "You" to the divine nature, nor is His divine nature ever presented as a "You" to the human nature. As Wayne Grudem remarks, "Rather, we have a consistent picture of a single person acting in wholeness and unity." [11] In contrast to this, the Scriptures do present the three members of the Godhead as relating to one another as "I" and "You" (and thus as distinct Persons), for the Scriptures often present one member of the Trinity addressing another member of the Trinity (Psalm 2:7-9; 40:7,8; Jn. 17:1, 4, 21-24, especially verse 5). In summary, a person is something that is "I" to himself, but sees others as "you." Scripture presents each member of the Trinity as regarding the other two members as "You," thus showing that they are distinct Persons. But Scripture does not present Christ's natures as regarding one another as "You," and thus indicates that the two natures are united in one Person.

3. Both natures of Christ are presented as "I." Not only do the Scriptures never distinguish between an "I" and "You" in Christ, as is done in the Trinity, but the Scriptures explicitly refer to both natures as "I," thus proving that they are a single individual. We read an amazing statement in John 18:37: "Pilate therefore said to Him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say correctly that I am a king. For this *I have been born*, and for this *I have come into the world*, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.'" Jesus seems to be referring to His two natures in saying that "I have been *born*" and "I have *come into* the world." For His human nature was born, whereas it is His divine nature that came into the world. Yet, Jesus speaks of both natures as "I." "For this *I have been born*, and for this *I have come into the world*." Jesus refers to both of His natures as "I," and therefore we must affirm that He is one, and only one, Person.

4. Jesus never refers to Himself in the plural, as God (who is three Persons) does at times. Grudem writes, "Jesus always speaks as 'I,' not as 'we,' though he can refer to himself and the Father together as 'we' (John 14:23). The Bible always speaks of Jesus as 'he,' not as 'they.'" [12] In contrast to this, God does refer to Himself in the plural in Genesis 1:26; 3:22; 11:7. This, of course, is a reflection of the fact that God is three Persons.

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These last three points bring us to a difficulty that comes to mind. I will present it, together with its solution, for those who may still be confused or desire further understanding. But if it is more complicated than you wish to deal with, feel free to move on to the next section.

From the fact that both of Christ's natures are complete, we must conclude that Christ has two centers of consciousness and two wills. He has a human consciousness, and a divine consciousness; a human will, and a divine will. But doesn't that make Him two separate Persons? After all, in the Trinity one of the very things that distinguishes the three Persons from each other is the fact that they are each a distinct center of consciousness. Thus, wouldn't that make Christ two Persons, since He has two centers of consciousness?

This does not make Christ two Persons. When speaking of the Trinity, "center of consciousness" is not all that we mean by "Person." In order for a center of consciousness to constitute a different Person, it must also have a distinct awareness of identity that belongs only to it. In other words, distinctions of persons are not simply defined by distinct centers of consciousness. Rather, in order to be a distinct person, the center of consciousness must have a specific awareness of identity that is unique to it, and only it.

An example will clarify this. In the Trinity, the Father has a certain awareness that is unique to His center of consciousness. It is the awareness of the fact "I am the Father." Likewise, the Son is conscious of the truth that He is the Son, an identity which the Father and the Holy Spirit do not share in their center of consciousness. Thus, the Father is "You" to the Son, but "I" to Himself. The Son is "You" to the Father, but "I" to Himself. And so it is with the Holy Spirit.

In regards to the Person of Christ, we saw earlier that there is no such "I/You" distinction between His divine and human nature. Therefore, the center of consciousness of Jesus' divine nature has the awareness "I am Jesus." The center of consciousness belonging to Christ's human nature also has the awareness, "I am Jesus." Thus, Jesus' humanity is not "I" to itself but "You" to His divinity. Neither is His divinity "I" to itself but "You" to His humanity. Rather, they are *both* "I" to one another. Thus, they are one Person because they have the same awareness of identity, yet each nature has a distinct center of consciousness.

In summary, the center of consciousness of each nature is aware of the other as "I" *not* "You." The human nature looks both at itself and at the divine nature as "I," and the divine nature looks both at itself and at the human nature as "I." In contrast to this, the Trinity is three Persons because the Son does not look at the Father and Holy Spirit as "I," but as "You," and so forth with the other two members. Thus, the two centers of consciousness and two natures of Christ are one Person, while the three centers of consciousness of the Trinity are three Persons. We will now move on to the fifth line of evidence.

5. Many passages refer to both natures of Christ, but it is clear that only one person is intended. It is impossible to read the following passages, which clearly affirm

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Christ's two natures, and yet conclude that Christ is two Persons. "...the gospel of God...concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh..." (Romans 1:1, 3). "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh..." (Romans 8:3). "...and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever" (Romans 9:5). "But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law..." (Galatians 4:4). "For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9). "...who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped [that is, exploited to His own advantage], but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:6-7).

Having seen that Christ is two natures in one person, and having also seen what is involved in this, we will now examine one of the major implications of this, which should help us to complete the picture and our understanding.

Things that are true of one nature but not the other are nonetheless true of the Person of Christ

As we have seen earlier, the fact that Christ is two natures means that there are things that are true of His human nature that are not true of His divine nature. And there are things true of His divine nature that are not true of His human nature. For example, His human nature hungered, but His divine nature could never be hungry. So when Christ hungered on earth, it was His humanity that hungered, not His divine nature.

But the truth that we are now in a position to understand, and is necessary to complete the picture of the orthodox understanding of the Incarnation, is that by virtue of the union of the natures in one Person, the things that are true of or done by only one of Christ's natures, are nonetheless true of and done by the *Person* of Christ. In other words, things which only one nature does can be considered to have been done by Christ Himself. Likewise, things that are true of one nature but not the other are true of the Person of Christ as a whole. We will examine two sorts of evidence for this from the Scriptures. On a secondary level, this will not only be further evidence that Christ is one person, but give further evidence of that fact that the two natures of Christ remain distinct.

1. Scriptures showing that things which are true of only one nature are true of the Person of Christ. We have many instances in Scripture which demonstrate this. For example, even though it was only Christ's divine nature that has existed from eternity past (for His human nature came into existence at the incarnation 2,000 years ago), Jesus still said, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). As Wayne Grudem points out, the fact that He did not say, "Before Abraham was, my divine nature is," reveals that things that are true of one nature are true of His person. Thus, He can say that it is true of Him as a Person, even though it was an exclusive action or truth of only one of His natures.

Another example is how Jesus' human nature did not know when He would return while His divine nature did. Since the two natures are united in one Person, we can say that the

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Person of Christ did *not* know when He would return. Thus, Jesus could truly say, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone" (Matthew 24:36). At the same time, we can also say that the *Person of Christ* *did* know when He would return. Knowledge and ignorance of the time of His return are both true of the Christ, but in different ways. In His human nature, the *Person of Christ* was ignorant of when He would return. In His divine nature, the *Person of Christ* did know when He would return. Thus, Christ Himself both knew and did not know when He would return.

Likewise we see this in the death of Christ. God cannot die. We should never speak of Christ's death as the death of God. But humans can die, and Jesus' human nature did die. Thus, even though Jesus' divine nature did not die, we can still say that *the Person of Christ experienced death* because of the union of the two natures in the one *Person of Christ*. Because of this, Grudem says, "by virtue of union with Jesus' human nature, his divine nature somehow tasted something of what it was like to go through death. The *person of Christ* experienced death."^[13]

Grudem brings out some other great illustrations of this. In regards to Jesus' human nature, He has ascended to heaven and is therefore no longer on earth (John 16:28; 17:11; Acts 1:9-11). Yet, in regards to His divine nature, Jesus is everywhere (Matthew 18:20; 28:20; John 14:23). "So we can say that both things are true about the person of Christ he has returned to heaven, *and* he is also present with us."^[14] Jesus' human nature got weak and tired (Matthew 4:2; 8:24), but His divine nature never tires because it is omnipotent (Matthew 8:26-27; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3). Grudem remarks at this wonder: "Tired yet omnipotent!"^[15]

2. Titles that remind us of one nature can be used of the Person even when the action is done by the other nature.^[16] For example, many Scriptures speak of things done by His human nature alone, yet in doing so use a title that refers specifically to His divine nature (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 2:8; Col. 1:13, 14). For example, Paul speaks of "the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). Now, God does not have blood. It was the human nature of Christ that shed blood on the cross. The fact that Paul intermixes an action done by Christ's *human nature* with a title of His *divine nature* is therefore further proof that Christ is one Person. Because Christ is one Person, Paul can say that the church of God was purchased with God's own blood. Paul does a similar thing in 1 Corinthians 2:8 where he says that the rulers of this age crucified "the Lord of glory" (see also John 3:13; 6:62).

Conclusion

We have seen the biblical evidence for the fact that Christ has both a divine and human nature, that each nature is full and complete, that each nature remains distinct, and yet Christ is one Person. These are fantastic truths that should always be a part of the way we think about Christ.

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We exist to worship God. Having this richer understanding of the Incarnation of God the Son should greatly enhance our worship. We will have great marvel and gladness at the fact that the eternal Person of God the Son became man forever. Our recognition of Christ's worth will be heightened. And our faith in Him will be strengthened by having this deeper understanding of who He is.

Because Jesus is God, He is all-powerful and He cannot be defeated. Because He is God, He is the only adequate Savior. Because He is God, believers are safe and can never perish; we have security. Because He is God, we can have confidence that He will empower us for the task that He commands us for. And because He is God, all people will be accountable to Him when He returns to judge the world.

Because Jesus is man, He has experienced the same things that we do. Because He is man, He can identify with us more intimately. Because He is man, He can come to our aid as our sympathetic High Priest when we reach the limits of our human weaknesses. Because He is man, we can relate to Him--He is not far off and uninvolved. Because He is man, we cannot complain that God does not know what we are going through. He experienced it first-hand.

Finally, we need to be ready to defend our faith against those who oppose it. Therefore, make sure you can remember many of the verses which teach that Jesus is both God and man, and be able to explain the relationship between Christ's two natures (the hypostatic union) to others.

May we look forward to the day when we see Him face to face, and until then may the joyful hope of this day inspire in us a great diligence in serving and worshiping Him.

Notes

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*, copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1977, by the Lockman Foundation.

1. J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993 edition), p. 53.
2. John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990 edition), p. 88.
3. Packer, p. 57.
4. Quoted in John Murray, *The Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. I (Carlisle, Pennsylvania, 1976), p. 30.
5. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (InterVarsity and Zondervan Publishing, 1994), p. 554.
6. Grudem, p. 555.
7. Grudem, p. 556.
8. Grudem, p. 556.

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9. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, fourth revised and enlarged edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1939) p. 321.
10. Chalcedonian Creed, quoted in Grudem, p. 557.
11. Grudem, p. 556.
12. Grudem, p. 556.
13. Grudem, p. 560.
14. Grudem, p. 559.
15. Grudem, p. 559.
16. This heading is quoted from Grudem, p. 562.