

DOCTRINE OF THE HYPOSTATIC UNION AND KENOSIS

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I. Definition of terms.

- A. **Hypostatic** is a term taken from the Greek noun ὑπόστασις, hypostasis which refers to the union of the two natures οὐσίαι (ousiai, nature) of Christ, the divine and the human.
- B. **Incarnation** is the term which refers to the act whereby the eternal Son of God "became flesh". It also refers to the whole experience of His human life. It also embraces the fact that Christ bears His humanity forever. The term can be traced to the Latin version of Jn.1:14. The closest Greek equivalent is ἐν σαρκί, en sarki: in the flesh, 1Jn.4:2.
- C. **Condescension** means a voluntary descent from one's rank or dignity in relations with an inferior. The verb condescend means to descend to a less formal or dignified level. It is used of the willingness of God the Son to assume the nature of man. Phil.2:6 presents the fact of His condescension.
- D. **Kenosis** comes from the Greek verb κενόω, kenoo: to empty, Phil.2:7, and refers to the manner in which Christ chose to restrict the use of His divine attributes during His humiliation.
- E. **Humiliation** is the term which refers to the action of Christ's humanity by which He voluntarily agreed to submit Himself to the sufferings and limitations associated with His life on earth, including His death on the Cross, Phil.2:8.

II. The three phases of Christ's existence include:

- A. His eternal preexistence as the Son of God, which is affirmed in Scripture, Jn.1:1,14; 8:58; 17:5; Phil.2:6; Col.1:16,17; Rev.1:8.
- B. His humiliation as the God-Man, extending from His birth to His death, Heb.5:7.
- C. His exaltation via resurrection and ascension as the glorified God-Man into the eternal future, 1Thess.4:17; 1Tim.6:14-16.

III. The humanity of Christ in the hypostatic union, Phil.2:8a "*And being found in appearance as a man*".

- A. The doctrine of the true humanity is as indispensable to Christian faith as is the doctrine of His deity (see Doctrine of the Deity of Christ).
- B. The evidence for His human body is seemingly even more compelling than the evidence for His deity.
- C. According to the Scriptures, Christ was born of the virgin Mary, fulfilling in this notable historical event of His incarnation all that would normally be expected of a human birth.
- D. The Scriptures also testify that His body possessed flesh and blood, Heb.2:14; 1Jn.4:2,3.
- E. The life of Christ subsequent to His birth in Bethlehem reveals the same normal human development and growth, Lk.2:52 "*And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*"
- F. He experienced in His life similar feelings and limitations as other human beings and His physical movements were such as correspond to a genuine human nature and human body.
- G. He, according to Scriptures, was able to suffer pain, thirst, hunger, fatigue, pleasure, rest, death, and resurrection.
- H. Both before and after His resurrection, He could be seen and felt. His human body was tangible to human touch, Jn.20:24-29.
- I. His true humanity is also recognized in scripture by the human titles which were given to Him, such as "Son of Man", "the Man Christ Jesus", "the Son of David", etc.
- J. The Scripture also declares that He possessed a rational human soul and spirit, Mt.26:38; Jn.13:21.
- K. For those who accept the Bible as authoritative, there can be no question that Jesus Christ was in all reality true humanity.

IV. The union of the divine and human natures.

- A. The evidence from both the deity and true humanity of Christ makes it evident that these two

widely differing sets of attributes were brought together into a personal union, which will continue forever.

- B. Though sometimes Christ spoke and operated in the sphere of His humanity, and in other cases in the sphere of His deity, in all cases what He did and what He was could be attributed to His one person.
- C. Even though it is evident that there were two natures in Christ, He is never considered a dual personality.
- D. The normal pronouns such as I, You, and He are used of Him.
- E. The hypostatic union of the human and the divine natures in Christ is given explicit treatment in at least seven passages, Phil.2:6-11; Jn.1:14; Rom.1:25; 9:5; 1Tim.3:16; Heb.2:14; 1Jn.1:13.
- F. These passages make it evident that the eternal Son of God took upon Himself a complete human nature and became a man.
- G. The act of the incarnation was not a temporary arrangement that ended with His death.
- H. His earthly body, which died on the Cross, was transformed into a resurrection body suited for His glorious presence in heaven.
 - I. The continuance of His humanity is reflected in such verses as Mt.26:64; His post resurrection appearances, Mt.28:9; and His bodily ascension into heaven.
 - J. The human name Jesus is associated with the final judgment, Phil.2:10.

V. The relationship of the two natures.

- A. The two natures are united without any loss of any essential attributes, and the two natures maintain their separate identities.
- B. Through the incarnation, the two natures were inseparably united in such a way that there was no mixture or loss of their separate identity, and without loss or transfer of any property or attribute from one nature to the other.
- C. The union thus consummated in a personal or hypostatic union, in that Christ is one person, not two.
- D. It should be clear that the divine attributes must necessarily belong to the corresponding divine nature and that human attributes belong to the corresponding human nature. Furthermore, the attributes of both the human and the divine nature belong to the person of Christ.
- E. Because the attributes of either nature belong to Christ, Christ is theanthropic in person, but it is inaccurate to refer to His natures as being theanthropic as there is no mixture of the divine and human to form a third new substance.
- F. The human nature always remains human; the divine nature always remains divine.
- G. Christ is, therefore, both God and man, no less God because of His humanity and no less human because of His deity.
- H. The two natures of Christ cannot lose or transfer a single attribute.
 - I. In the incarnation (the phase of His hypostasis from His birth to death), no attribute of the divine nature was changed, though there was a change in the manifestation of His deity.
 - J. This is sometimes referred to as the kenosis doctrine or the self-emptying of Christ.
- K. It is clear that Christ, while on earth, following His incarnation, did not manifest the pre-incarnate glory of God except on rare occasions (i.e., transfiguration). But He surrendered no attributes.
- L. This union should not be viewed as deity possessing humanity or humanity being indwelt by deity.
- M. This union of the two natures was not one of sympathy alone or merely a harmony of will and operation (liberal view).
- N. The various attributes of His person can be traced to the corresponding nature as seen in:
 - 1. Jn.8:58, true of His deity only.
 - 2. Jn.19:28, true of His humanity only.
 - 3. Jn.6:62, which describes Christ according to His human nature, but the predicate of

ascending up where He was before could have reference only to the divine nature.

VI. The doctrine of His kenosis as related to the hypostatic union.

- A. This concept addresses what was involved in the condescension and humiliation of Christ in becoming man.
- B. How could the eternal God take upon Himself human limitations while retaining His eternal deity?
- C. The proper interpretation of Phil.2:5-11 deals with this subject.
- D. Some have interpreted the significance of His self-emptying (i.e., kenosis) in the sense He gave up part of His deity to become man.
- E. In opposition to all kenotic views which deny His deity during the incarnation, it must be pointed out that God cannot change His nature by an act of His will any more than any other being can.
- F. This is inherent in the divine attribute of immutability which is expressly affirmed of Christ, Heb.13:8 "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever.*"
- G. Further, a loss in attributes would mean in effect that Christ was not God at all, which is contradicted by innumerable Scriptures and specifically by the gospel of John (see Doctrine of the Deity of Christ).
- H. First, it may be stated that the humiliation of Christ was the veiling of His pre-incarnate glory.
 - I. It was necessary to give up the outer appearance of God in order to take upon Himself the form of man, Phil.2:6 "*who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,*".
 - J. In answer to the prayer of Christ to the Father (Jn.17:5), the eternal manifestation was restored in connection with His resurrection and ascension.
- K. The glory was still evident as seen in His transfiguration.
- L. Second, during the incarnation, Christ did not surrender the attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience, but He did embark on a discipline to submit to a voluntary nonuse of these attributes.
- M. Christ did not exercise His divine attributes to make His way easier, but they had abundant display in His miracles.
- N. Christ exercised His own power when He commanded the waves to be still and caused Lazarus to be raised from the tomb.
- O. Many of His miracles were performed in the power of the Holy Spirit, Mt.12:28; Lk.4:14-18.
- P. The act of kenosis as stated in Phil.2 may therefore be properly understood to mean that Christ surrendered no attribute of deity, but that He did voluntarily restrict their independent use in keeping with His purpose of living among men and under their limitations.

VII. The relationship of the two natures to the self-consciousness of Christ.

- A. When did He, within His humanity, become aware that He was God?
- B. As His human nature developed and with it self-consciousness, He, as a man, became aware of His uniqueness.
- C. This, of necessity, must have occurred early on, even as a very young boy.
- D. He had both a divine and human self-consciousness, and these were never in conflict, and He sometimes spoke and acted from one or the other.

VIII. The relationship of the two natures to the volition of Christ.

- A. Each nature had its corresponding will.
- B. The human will of Christ was subject to real temptation, Heb.4:15 "*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.*"
- C. The divine will of Christ was not subject to temptation, Jam.1:1.
- D. The question among orthodox theologians is not whether the humanity of Christ was really tempted, but whether, as a man, He was capable of sinning.
- E. All agree that He remained sinless and had no sin nature, but there is a division over whether He

could have sinned or not.

- F. If Christ could tap into His deity and have infinite power to resist temptation, then He is not really on an equal standing with those He is supposed to sympathize with.
- G. Infinite power to resist temptation is called impeccability, while the ability to sin through temptation is called peccability.
- H. With regard to all angels and all of mankind from Adam, temptability presumes peccability. Why should the humanity of Christ be the exception?
 - I. If, for instance, Christ was tempted at the end of the forty days, but could not have sinned, then He was not our equal in temptation.
 - J. In Gethsemane, it was His human will which was tempted to avoid the Cross, Mt.26:39.
- K. To argue that since Christ is now impeccable in heaven, therefore He must have been impeccable while on earth does not follow, since believers are peccable on earth but impeccable in heaven (elect angels also seem to have gone from peccability to impeccability).
- L. To argue that God would not have risked the whole plan of grace on the peccability of Christ ignores the doctrine of foreknowledge.
- M. Certainly the humanity of Christ, possessing no sin nature, had all the resources not to sin short of a total inability to sin no matter what.
- N. The deity of Christ did not, in any fashion, override His human volition in the face of temptation by giving Him infinite power to resist.
- O. There is no passage in Scripture which declares that He could not sin, only that He did not sin, 1Jn.3:5; 2Cor.5:21.
- P. So why postulate that which is not the pattern for other free moral agents? (I have not seen a compelling reason or passage.)

IX. The interpretation of Phil.2:58.

- A. Vs.5 exhorts believers to have the same mental attitude as was in the God-Man.
 - B. Vs.6 presents the example with reference to Christ's deity as seen in the condescension phase "*who, although He existed in the form of God (this addresses His eternal preexistence as the second person and the pre-incarnate glory of that existence, Jn.17:5) did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped (His deity specifically did not so regard itself as being above entering into an incarnate state. This is the condescension of Christ)*".
 - C. Vs.7 presents the example from His humanity. "*but emptied Himself (this refers to a decision over the course of His life on earth not to exercise the independent use of His divine attributes to make His way easier and so circumvent the sufferings and limitations of the incarnation), taking the form of a bondsman (His deity agreed not only to associate with an inferior, but with one who was from the lower classes), and being made in the likeness of men (Christ looked just like true humanity).*"
 - D. Vs.8 continues the example as viewed from His humanity "*And being found in appearance as a man (His contemporaries recognized Him to be a normal man like themselves), He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (the humiliation of Christ constituted His willingness to undergo whatever was necessary to provide salvation for mankind, including the shame associated with the Cross).*"
 - E. Vss.9-11 constitute the reward for His condescension and humiliation.
- X. The Doctrine of the Hypostatic Union clearly involves a great mystery that we must accept by faith, 1Tim.3:16 "*And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Beheld by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.*"

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