

DOCTRINE OF THE HYPOSTATIC UNION AND KENOSIS

- I. Definition of terms.
 - A. **Hypostatic** is a term taken from the Greek noun ὑπόστασις-
HUPOSTASIS which refers to the essential or basic nature of an entity.
When used of Christ, the noun signifies the union of His two natures, the
divine and the human, in His person.
 - B. **Incarnation** is the term which refers to the act whereby the eternal Son of
God became humanity. It also refers to the whole experience of His
human life. In addition, the term embraces the fact that Christ bears His
humanity forever. The term is a Latin derivative of “became flesh” (John
1.14 cp. also ἐν σαρκί- EN SARKI, “in the flesh, 1 John 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, to lower oneself. It is used of the willingness
of God the Son to lower Himself and assume the nature of man.
 - D. **Kenosis** comes from the Greek verb κενόω-KENOO, “to empty” and
refers to the manner in which Christ chose to restrict the use of His divine
attributes during His humiliation. Philippians 2:7 “but emptied Himself,
taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of
men.”
 - 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. Philippians 2:8 “And being found in appearance as a man, He
humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death
on a cross.”
- II. The three phases of Christ's existence include:
 - A. His eternal preexistence as the Son of God, which is affirmed in Scripture
(John.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 (1 Thess.4:17, 1 Peter 3:22).
- III. The humanity of Christ in the hypostatic union. Philippians 2:8a “And being
found in appearance as a man...”
 - A. The doctrine of the true humanity of Christ is as indispensable to Christian
faith as is the doctrine of His deity.
 - B. The evidence for His human body is as compelling as 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. Physiologically, His birth was normal and
not extraordinary (Isa. 7:14, Matt 1:23 cp. Lk. 2:7).
 - D. The Scriptures also testify that His body possessed flesh and blood
(Heb.2:14; 1 John 4:2, 2 John 1:7).

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- E. The life of Christ subsequent to His birth in Bethlehem reveals the same normal human development and growth. Luke 2:52 “And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”
 - F. In His life, He experienced similar feelings and limitations as other human beings. His physical movements corresponded 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 (John 19:18).
 - H. Both before and after His resurrection, He could be seen and felt. His human body was tangible to human touch (Matt. 26:67, Lk. 24:39, John.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 (Mk 2:10, 10:47).
 - J. The Scripture also indicates that He possessed a rational human soul (Matt.26:38, John 12:27).
 - K. For those who accept the Bible as authoritative, there can be no question that Jesus Christ was in all reality true humanity.
- IV. Why was it necessary for the Lord to become humanity?
- A. To be our Savior (Heb 2:15).
 - B. To be the mediator between God and men. A mediator must be equal with both parties (1 Tim 2:5 cp, Job 9:32-33)
 - C. To be the High Priest who can represent believers before God the Father (Heb. 7:12-14, 24-28; 10:5-14).
 - D. To be David's Greater Son sitting on His throne. In order for the promise to be fulfilled, not only did Jesus Christ have to be true humanity, but He had to be born into the direct line of David (2 Sam. 7:8-16, Psa. 89:20-37).
- V. The purposes of the incarnation.
- A. To reveal God to the human race (John 1:18, 14:7-9).
 - B. To bypass the curse of Adam via the virgin birth (Lk. 1:35 cp. Rom 5:15).
 - C. To be the sacrifice that made atonement for sin (Eph. 5:2, Heb. 9:26, 10:12).
 - D. To set an example (1 Peter 2:21, 1 John 2:6 cp. Col 1:10).
 - E. To destroy the works of the Devil (1 John 3:8).
 - F. To be a judge (John 5:22-27).
- VI. 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. Sometimes Christ spoke and operated in the sphere of His humanity and in other cases, in the sphere of His deity. However, 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 singular pronouns such as I, You, and He are used of Him.

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- E. The hypostatic union of the human and the divine natures in Christ is given explicit treatment in the N.T. (Phil.2:6-11; John.1:1, 14; Rom. 9:5; Heb.2:14; 1 John.1:1-3 cp Gal. 4:4-5).
 - 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 Matthew 26:64 “Jesus said to him, “You have said it *yourself*; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” Also, post resurrection appearances. Matthew 28:9 “And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him”, 1 Corinthians 15:5-6 “and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep;”
 - J. The human name Jesus (Ἰησοῦς-IESOUS) is associated with the final judgment. Philippians 2:10 “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth...”
- VII. 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 and 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.

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- 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 referred to as the kenosis doctrine or the self-emptying of Christ.
 - K. In terms of manifestation, He gave up the outward appearance of deity.
 - 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.
 - N. Everything that Jesus Christ spoke came from one of three sources:
 - 1. From His deity (John 8:58).
 - 2. From His humanity (John 19:28).
 - 3. From the Hypostatic Union, His whole person (Matt 11:28, John 14:6).
- VIII. 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 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 we can change our nature.
 - F. This is inherent in the divine attribute of immutability which is expressly affirmed of Christ. Hebrews 13:8 "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever."
 - G. Furthermore, a loss of any Divine attribute would mean in effect that Christ was not God at all. This is contradicted by innumerable Scriptures and specifically by the gospel of John. John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."
 - 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 (i.e. deity) in order to take upon Himself the form of man. Philippians.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, the eternal manifestation was restored in connection with His resurrection and ascension (δόξα-DOXA, "glory", John.17:5). .
 - K. Second, during the incarnation, Christ did not surrender the attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience, but He did voluntarily restrict their use.

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- L. Christ did not exercise His divine attributes to make His way easier, but they had abundant display in His miracles (cp. Acts 2:22).
 - M. Christ exercised His own power when He commanded the waves to be still and caused Lazarus to be raised from the tomb (Matt. 8:26, John 11:43).
 - N. Many of His miracles were performed in the power of the Holy Spirit (Lk.4:14,18; Acts 10:38).
 - O. The act of kenosis as stated in Phil.2:7 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.
- IX. 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 (cp. Lk 2:42, 46-49).
 - D. He had both a divine and human self-consciousness, and these were never in conflict.
- X. 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. Hebrews.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, His deity, was not subject to temptation (cp.Jam.1:13).
 - 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 or not He could have sinned.
 - 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? The sympathy would be empty.
 - G. Infinite power to resist temptation is called impeccability, while the ability to sin through temptation is called peccability (cp. James 1:14-15).
 - 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 (Matt. 26:39).
 - K. The argument that Christ is now impeccable in heaven, therefore He must have been impeccable while on earth is not valid. Consider the fact that

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- 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. The notion of risk is not applicable to deity.
 - M. Certainly the humanity of Christ, possessing no sin nature, had all the resources not to sin short. However this does NOT preclude the ability to sin.
 - N. Indeed, there is no support in Scripture which declares that He could not sin, only that He did not sin (1 John.3:5, 2 Cor.5:21).
 - O. 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.
 - P. So why postulate that which is not the pattern for other free moral agents? It would be atypical of the human experience.
- XI. The interpretation of Phil.2:5-8.
- 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) **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 bonds slave** (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. Cp Heb 12:2).
 - E. Vss.9-11 constitute the reward for His condescension and humiliation.
- XII. The Doctrine of the Hypostatic Union clearly involves a great mystery that we must accept by faith 1 Timothy 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."

James Allen, 4/20/06