

**D. The Person of Christ: the Glory of His Unique Constitution
“Perfect in Godhead, Perfect in Manhood”**

“And the Word became flesh . . .” (John 1:14).

Jesus is “very God, very Man.” He is fully God and fully man. He is perfect in Godhead, perfect in manhood. *Two natures, divine and human, united in one Person.* He is best called the God-Man.

Here we are “lost in a mystery.” *“The person of Christ is the bankruptcy of human logic”* (Relton). We consider a great mystery when we consider His unique person—the “theanthropic” person of Christ (cf. 1 Tim. 3:16).

But this is a mystery that is to be reverently and adoringly explored within the boundaries of the Scriptures. The question remains as to how they are related to one another. The Scriptures do not set forth in a “formula” or precise statement how Christ’s person and natures is to be understood, how two metaphysically incompatible things—the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal, the immutable and the mutable—are truly united in one indivisible Jesus Christ of Nazareth (Reymond, 583-584).

All we can do is to seek the light the Scriptures give us and go no further. If we go beyond the Scriptures we go into human speculation and can run into serious error. We must stay on the narrow but sure and safe path of truth.

1. **The SUMMARY DECLARATION of this Mystery.** Without ceasing to be God, He assumed our nature. “[T]he Word became flesh and tabernacled among us . . .” (Jn. 1:14). *Being* fully God He *became* fully man as well, without losing His deity or comingling it with His humanity. Not only did He come into this sin-cursed place, but He took on the nature of our sin-cursed race. He became what we are, yet without sin. He remained what He always was, God, and assumed what He never was, humanity. His deity was not humanized, nor His humanity deified. He assumed a true body and a reasonable human soul. He assumed the weaknesses, infirmities and limited condition of our humanity, yet not our sin. In the tent of this humanity His divine glory was concealed. He had no “**stately form or majesty**” that any would take a second look. He had no “**appearance**” that any would desire Him (Isa. 53:2). In fact, says Owen, “*the world . . . was so far from looking on Him as the true God, that it believed Him not to be a good man*” (Owen, 327; cf. Macleod, 218)!

Here is what Paul called in 1 Timothy 3:16 the “**mystery of godliness.**” Here is the promised Child, the given Son, who is at the same time “**Mighty God, Eternal Father**”! A “mysterious matrimony” of deity and humanity, two natures, unmixed and unconfused, in one Person. A mysterious, yet necessary matrimony if we would be saved. Our Redeemer must be a man if He is to take a man’s place. In this humanity He was tempted by the devil. In this humanity He was tired by travel and labors. In this humanity He shed tears. In this humanity He trembled at death. In this humanity He trusted in God the Father.

Consider Mark 4:35-41.

Consider Chrysostom’s remarks: “*I do not think of Christ as God alone, or man alone, but both together. For I know He was hungry, and I know that with five loaves He fed five thousand. I know He was thirsty, and I know that He turned the water into wine. I know He was carried in a ship, and I know that He walked on the sea. I know that He died, and I*

know that He raised the dead. I know He was set before Pilate, and I know that He sits with the Father on His throne. I know that He was worshiped by angels, and I know that He was stoned by the Jews. And truly some of these I ascribe to the human and others to the divine nature. For by reason of this He is said to have been both God and Man.”

2. **The FAITHFUL DESCRIPTION of this Mystery—the Council of Chalcedon (451).** This has been called “*the touchstone of Christological orthodoxy.*” As the product of men it has stood the test of time as a careful description of the mystery of Christ’s person.

“In agreement, then with the holy Fathers, we all unanimously teach [Christians] to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in deity and the same perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, the same of a rational soul and body, consubstantial [coessential] with the Father according to the deity and the same consubstantial with us according to the manhood; in all things like us except sin; begotten of the Father before the ages according to the deity and in the last days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the God-bearer, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, being made known in two natures without confusion, without change [conversion], without division, without separation [never to be separated]; the distinction of the natures being by no means removed because of the union but rather the property of each nature being preserved and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons but one and the same Son and Only-begotten, God, Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of our Fathers has been handed down to us.”

Chalcedon sought to resolve the Christological debate.

It was apologetical--it set up a standard for the defense of His Person.

- Against the Docetists who asserted that Christ did not have a real body, it declared that Christ was “*perfect in manhood . . . truly man . . . consubstantial with us according to manhood.*”
- Against the Arians who asserted that Christ was “*consubstantial with the Father according to deity.*”
- Against the Sabellians who asserted that Christ was simply a mode of expression from the Father, it distinguished the Father and the Son.
- Against the Adoptionists who claimed that Christ became the Son after His human birth, it insisted upon the personal subsistence of One “*begotten of the Father before the ages according to the deity.*”
- Against the Apollinarians who asserted that Christ did not have a human mind or soul, it asserts that He was “*truly man, the same of a rational soul and body.*”
- Against the Nestorians who asserted that Christ was two persons united in one body, we have it declared that He was made known “*in two natures . . . the property of each nature being preserved and concurring on one Person.*”
- Against the Eutychians who asserted that Christ had only one nature and that His human nature was absorbed into the divine, we have it asserted that the two natures were each “*preserved.*”

It was ecumenical--it sought to bring the polarizing tendencies of the Alexandrian school and the Antiochene school to a better Scriptural position. The Alexandrian school tended to over-emphasize the divine nature, which could lead to a blending or merging of the natures into the divine. The Antiochene school, on the other hand, tended to over-

emphasize or stress the humanity of Christ, and thus make too much of a distinction between the natures.

It was clarifying--it attempted to clean up some of the confusing terminology. These are by nature “negative” statements, *apologetic* statements, designed to counter errors of understanding of His person (yet cf. Reymond, 620).

The Summary—the “Hypostatic Union.” The “hypostatic union” encompasses three realities: (1) that Christ is *one Person*; (2) that the union between His *two natures* arises from the fact that they belong to one and the same Person; and (3) this one Person, the Son of God, is the *Agent* behind *all* the Lord’s actions, the *Speaker* of *all* His utterances, and the *Subject* of *all* His experiences (Macleod, 189). Christ’s two natures are: not confused, not changed, not divided, and not separated.

This faithful “description” is, of course, subject to the truth of the Scriptures. While it is a *terminal point* to any assertion about the “one Person, two nature” doctrine about Christ, it is also a helpful *transition point* to further faithful Scriptural reflection on His unique Person (Reymond, 621).

3. **The SCRIPTURAL DEMONSTRATION of this Mystery.** [see Owen, I, 234-235] He assumed our human nature, already possessing divine nature. He did not change His divine nature (it is immutable). His divine nature did not become flesh. He “added” human nature to His person. The Second person of the Godhead, the Son of God, became flesh. He deliberately and voluntarily united to Himself “flesh,” i.e., human nature. He did not cease to be what He had been from all eternity, a divine person. He did not change His identity as the Son. He continued to be divine, possessing all the attributes of God, performing all His functions and exercising all His prerogatives (Macleod, 186). “*The Son did not become another [person] . . . He Himself became, and He became other. He became what He had never been before: flesh, poor, forsaken, dead*” (Macleod, 186).
 - a. **There is a union of two natures in a single Person.** (cf. Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Jn. 8:58). [This union is different from the union of the Godhead, which is a union of three persons. It is different from the living union of body and soul. It is different from the spiritual union of a believer with Christ.]
 - Our Lord always speaks of Himself as *one personality*. He distinguishes Himself from other men (Jn. 8:23). He distinguishes Himself from the Father (Jn. 8:18). He distinguishes Himself from the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:7). But He *never* distinguishes Himself as a divine person from Himself as a human person (Jn. 8:58; 17:5).
 - Human names are given to the Eternal Son (Matt. 1:23) and divine names to the man Christ Jesus (Heb. 13:8).
 - The various acts, powers, and attributes of the two natures are applied without distinction to the one person, not two persons (Lk. 1:31-33; Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 2:8; Phil. 2:5-11; Rev. 5:11-14).
 - Manifestations of our Lord’s two natures appear side by side, yet all are applied to one person, not two (Matt. 8:24-26; Mk. 11:1-6, 12-13; John 11:35, 38, 43, 44; Heb. 2:18; 4:15).

- In some cases, attributes or works which belong to one nature, are given to His person, denoted by the name which is derived from the other nature (Jn. 3:13; Mk. 2:28). On the other hand, He is called God and the Lord of glory, when His blood and crucifixion, things pertaining to His humanity, are the subjects (1 Cor. 2:8; Acts 20:28; cf. Dagg, 202).
 - It is wrong to completely divide His words and acts and apply them to separate natures. For example, we must never say that His human nature died. It was the God-man who died, or else the atonement would not have had infinite value. He was God when He died, and is Man on the throne of the third heaven today (Zemek). *“This means that whenever we look at the life of Christ and ask, ‘Who did this?’ ‘Who suffered this?’ ‘Who said this?’ the answer is always the same: ‘The Son of God!’ We may never say, ‘The divine nature did this!’ or, ‘The human nature did this!’ We must say, ‘He did this: He, the Son of God!’ . . .”* (Macleod, 189-190).
- b. ***The center of this one indivisible personality is in the Divine Subsistence—the Logos, the Word*** (Jn. 1:1, 14; 1 Cor. 15:47). It was a Person, not a nature, who became flesh. The one person, the Son of God, is the Agent behind all of the Lord’s actions, the Speaker of all His utterances and the Subject of all His experiences (Macleod, 189).
- c. ***This union of natures in one person is eternal and never to be divided*** (Heb. 7:24-25). There will never be a “divorce” of His natures. He will ever be the Lamb in the midst of the throne (Rev. 5:6; 7:17), to whom all the praise and glory and adoration is given (Rev. 5:9-14).
- d. ***There is a distinction of natures in the single Person.*** As the Chalcedon statement affirms: *“the distinction of the natures being by no means removed because of the union but rather the property of each nature being preserved and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence.”* Distinct, but inseparable. Not two personalities. Nor are the natures made to be something different. The human and divine natures were not confused or changed when Christ became a man, but the human nature remained a truly human nature, and the divine nature remained a truly divine nature. The human nature was not deified. The divine nature was not humanized. However, whatever either nature does, the person of Christ does. Anything that is true of the human nature or the divine nature is true of the person of Christ.
- e. ***There is a communion of two natures in the one Person*** (cf. Macleod, 193ff; Owen, I, 233-234). They are not merged or confused. Neither are they simply lying side by side without contact or interaction.
- (1) Each nature preserves its own natural, essential properties entirely to itself; without mixture, without confusion, without such a communication of the one into the other so that the one should become subject to the properties of the other. The divine nature is not made the humanity, nor the human nature made the deity. The divine nature is not made temporary, finite, limited, subject to change; nor is the human nature made immense, infinite, omnipotent. Each nature retains its own distinctive attributes. This means that Christ is simultaneously visible and invisible, comprehensible and incomprehensible, temporal and eternal, servant and master, mortal and immortal.

(2) Each nature operates in Him according to its own essential properties (or attributes). The divine nature knows all things, upholds all things, rules all things; while the human nature was born, yielded obedience, died and rose again. Yet, it is the same person, the same Christ, that acts all these things.

(3) The perfect and complete work of Christ in all He did as the King, Prophet and Priest of His church is done not in one nature alone, but is the act and work of the whole Person, the God-man. *There is divine loving and a human loving; a divine willing and a human willing; a divine self-abnegation and human self-abnegation; a divine surrendering to suffering and a human surrendering to suffering; a divine sovereignty and a human sovereignty* (Macleod, 195; cf. Zanchius quote).

Scripture does not permit the divine nature to be viewed as threatening or somehow relativizing the human nature, nor does it present an absorption of this nature so as to render a mixed product in Christ Jesus—there is no amalgam of two natures forming some sort of *tertium quid!* Scripture never records a single instance of the denial of His humanity. Further, this union of the two natures implies impeccability without denying the experience of real testing.

“Since Jesus Christ, the God-Man, is 100% divine and 100% human, and since no new person came into existence at the miraculous conception, enhypostasis best integrates the Scriptural portrait of His holy person. His genuine human nature was given subsistence by the Divine Word resulting in the one perfect Divine-Human Person whom we worship as our Savior, Lord, and sympathetic Mediator and High Priest” (Zemek). [See the illustration on the next page]

4. **The CONSEQUENCES of this Mystery.**

- *Theanthropic Constitution.* From the time of conception in the womb of the virgin, and forever, the second person of the Godhead is God-man. This identity did not suffer dislocation even in death. The death meant a separation of the elements of his human nature; but He, as the Son of God, was still united to the two separated elements of his human nature.
- *Economic Subordination.* By the incarnation and by taking the form of a servant, the Son came to sustain new relations to the Father and the Holy Spirit. He became subject to the Father and dependent upon the operations of the Holy Spirit. He came down from heaven, not to do His own will, but the will of the Father who sent Him (John 6:38). As the Father had life in Himself, so he gave to the Son to have life in Himself (John 5:26). It is in this light that we are to understand Jesus’ statement, **“The Father is greater than I”** (John 14:28). It is our Lord’s servanthood that advertises this functional subordination more than any other office. Many and varied were the activities of the Holy Spirit in His life.
- *Mediatorial Appointment.* By this union He becomes the One mediator between God and man (Job 9:32-33; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 4:14-16).
- *Communio Idiomatum* (Communion of Identity). Whatever can be predicated of either nature can be predicated of the person. Whatever is true of either nature is true of the person, and the person may be designated in terms of one nature when what is predicated is true only in virtue of the other.

- *Impeccability.* This union implies impeccability (*non posse peccare*, i.e., it was not possible for the God-man to sin) without denying (as we have seen) the fact that he experienced real testing.

5. The SPURIOUS DENIALS of this Mystery.

- *Apollinarianism.* Apollinaris (c. 310-c. 390), bishop of Laodicea, declared that while in all other men body, soul and spirit coexist in a union, in Christ there were of the human body and soul, the divine Logos having displaced the human spirit. Thus, while Christ was perfect God, He lacked complete humanity. He did not have a human mind or spirit.
- *Nestorianism (a Dividing of the Person).* A concern and stress on the humanity of Christ so as to distinguish it from His deity. A reaction to the prevailing blending of the two natures in Christ, human and divine, to the confusion of both, and a reaction to Mariolatry by Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, had him teach that the divine nature did not associate with the human nature until Christ's birth--Mary could not have been the *theotokos* in the sense of giving Christ His divine nature. The term posed a threat to the deity of Christ which suggested that Christ was a creature (as the Arians asserted). Desire on his part to assert the humanity of Christ was complete. It was not defective (Appolinarians). Nor was it absorbed into the deity (monophysites). He taught that after the incarnation there were two distinct subjects or agents in Christ, God and man, joined together in a graduated partnership rather than united in one being. This emphasis ended up sharply separating the two natures so that Christ was two separate persons, both God ("Son of God") and Man ("Son of Man") rather than the God-Man. However, in the Scriptures Jesus is always seen speaking as "I" and not "we."
- *Eutychianism (a Confusing of the Natures).* A reaction against Nestorius' teaching by Eutyches, a disciple of Cyril of Alexandria (c. 378-454), stressed the unity of Christ's person and overstressed His deity. He ended up teaching that in the incarnation the divine nature completely absorbed the human nature. Those who followed this emphasis were also known as monophysites ("one nature"). They argued that the union of the two natures resulted in a compound that was neither human nor divine but of a third kind (*tertium quid*). Some outwardly accepted Chalcedon's resolution but sought to retain something of their previous position by stressing "one-will," i.e. they were monothelites. This controversy was finally settled at the 6th Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 680 A.D., by deciding on two distinct and inseparable wills working in harmony with the human subordinate to the divine.

Applications of this Glory. [taken from notes of George Zemek]

This mystery instructs us. It demonstrates that there is no unbridgeable antagonism between God and human nature. In Christ both the Divine and Human dwell together in perfect harmony. The unbridgeable antagonism is between God and *sinful* human nature.

This mystery invites us. This mystery of Christ's unique person provides an endless field for reverent study and contemplation. This is the best truth we can think on (Phil. 3:8-10). Devotion proceeds from reflection on truth revealed and understood. This ought to drive us to the Scriptures that reveal Him (John 5:39; Luke 24:26-27, 45-46). "*We experience the power of His life in us only as our thoughts are filled with Him and we continually delight in Him . . .*" (Owen).

This mystery humbles us. There are some matters that are beyond us. After we have searched to the limits of our finite understanding under the guidance of the Spirit of God, we must at last fall

upon our faces before the mystery of God in Christ and confess humbly that we cannot explain Him. But thank God we know Him, which is better than explanation.

“The glory of the incarnation is that it presents to our adoring gaze not a humanized God or a deified man, but a true God-man—one who is all that God is and at the same time all that man is: one on whose almighty arm we can rest, and to whose human sympathy we can appeal” (Warfield).