

WEEK 6 | THE THEANTHROPIC PERSON OF CHRIST

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. . . one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by 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 the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ

CREED OF CHALCEDON

Having affirmed Christ's full deity and full humanity, and having discussed the kenosis and the virgin birth—two critical doctrines that address how the divine and human natures came together—it makes sense to now turn to the question of how the two natures exist and interact in the one theanthropic person Jesus Christ.

I. THE HYPOSTATIC UNION

A. Definition

Since his incarnation, Jesus Christ has been, is, and forever will be one person consisting of a complete divine and complete human nature. The hypostatic union is the union of the two natures in the one person.

B. Evidence from Scripture

1. Scripture clearly teaches Jesus was fully human and fully divine (see previous lessons)
2. Jesus presented himself as one person – Jesus always speaks and acts as one person and one personality. He never evidences anything that would indicate a split personality, nor does he ever use a plural noun referencing himself.¹

¹ Vernon D. Doerksen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, by Henry C. Thiessen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 223.

3. Scripture presents Jesus as one person with two natures
 - a. John 1:1, 14 – In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
 - b. Romans 1:3-4 – concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. . .
 - c. Romans 9:5 – To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.
 - d. Galatians 4:4-5 – But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.
 - e. Philippians 2:6-11
 - f. 1 Timothy 3:16 – Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.
4. Scripture assigns divine perfections and actions of Jesus as a human, and human characteristics and actions of Jesus as God
 - a. John 6:62 – Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? (Son of Man is a title that emphasizes Jesus' humanity, yet here Jesus says the Son of Man was in heaven, where God dwells.)
 - b. 1 Corinthians 2:8 – None of the rulers of this age understood [God's hidden wisdom], for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (Lord is a title of divinity, yet here Paul says the divine Lord was crucified, something that happens to human beings.)

C. The Nature of the Hypostatic Union

1. What it is not

- a. Union of replacement – the Logos did not replace the all or part of the human nature
- b. Union of absorption or mixture – the Logos did not absorb the human nature into itself, or vice versa. This would either have changed the divine nature, violating God’s immutability, or the human nature, making it something it is not (e.g. Eutychianism).
- c. Union of ownership – the Logos did not simply take ownership of the human nature. This would imply the union is optional rather than permanent.
- d. Union of marriage – the Logos did not unite with the human nature in a way analogous to marriage. In marriage, two persons are involved and they can disunite.
- e. Union of indwelling – the Logos did not simply indwell the human nature. This would imply two persons, and the potentiality for the Logos to depart without any change to the personhood of Jesus.
- f. Union of willing – the Logos did not unite with the human nature because the man Jesus willed what the Logos willed. This would imply a moral union between two persons that could be broken (e.g. Nestorianism).
- g. Union of Sympathy – the Logos did not unite with the human nature because He had strong feelings for Jesus, or vice-versa. This would imply an emotional union between two persons that could be broken.

2. What it is

Union of Person – the Logos took on human nature in such a way that in his incarnate state he has two natures that are not and cannot be mixed nor can either be eliminated without destroying the entire person; thus, his person is and forever will be both divine and human, having full divine intellect, emotion, and will and full human intellect, emotion, will, and body, while only having one self-consciousness.

Critical to this definition is the Nicæan distinction between “person” and “nature.” At the Council of Nicæa, the church fathers developed a

conceptual distinction between nature (Greek *ousia*) and person (Greek *hypostasis*) in order to accurately represent how the Scriptures described Jesus Christ (before the Council of Nicaea, the two terms were viewed largely as synonyms in Greek thought).

A “nature” is “what a thing is, or, in the words of Herman Bavinck, ‘that by which a thing is what it is.’”² God’s nature describes what God is as the Creator and Lord—it speaks of His attributes as that which is essential and necessary to Him.

A “person” is “the who, or the active subject of the nature, not reducible to the nature.”³ An active subject is one who does things and to whom things happen; in regard to a nature, the person is the subject that *acts* and *lives* through a nature.

These definitions enabled the church fathers at Nicaea to explain the Trinity as three persons—three separate, active subjects—living and acting through one and the same divine nature.

These definitions also enable us to understand the hypostatic union more deeply. The Logos, the Christ, the Son of God, is one person who subsists in *two natures*—the human and the divine—and is able to live and act through both.

3. The Chalcedonian description of the hypostatic union⁴

“. . . two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by 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. . . .”

- a. Christ was fully God (contra Arianism) and fully man
- b. There is a distinction between “person” (*hypostasis*) and “nature” (*ousia*). “Person” is an irreducible principle in its own right and is not deducible from “nature.” When the Logos took on human nature, a new person did not come into existence. Rather, it was the

² Wellum, *The Person of Christ*, 90.

³ Wellum, *The Person of Christ*, 91.

⁴ Adapted from *ibid.*, 104–7.

second person of the Trinity, the eternal Son, who took on flesh (John 1:14). It was a person, not a nature, that became incarnate and lived and acted through a human nature.

- c. Christ's human nature (*ousia*) did not have a *hypostasis*, a "person," of its own; rather, it was *anhypostasis*. There was not an individual person Jesus apart from the Son assuming a human nature (contra Adoptionism). Rather, the person of the Son, "who always possessed the divine nature, now subsisted in two natures as the subject of both. This enabled the Son to live a fully human life through his human nature yet not to be completely circumscribed by it since he subsisted in two natures."⁵ Donald Macleod writes,

In him [the Son], God provides and even becomes the atonement which he demands. In him (in his flesh, within the finitude of his life-time, the finitude of his body and the finitude of his human being) God dealt with our sin. He is a man; yet the man of universal significance, not because his humanity is in any sense infinite but because it is the humanity of God.⁶

- d. The union of the two natures in the one person Jesus Christ does not diminish or obscure the integrity of either one (contra Monophysitism). Even within the one person, the Creator-creature distinction is preserved. The two natures are neither mixed nor blended together; no new, hybrid nature is created. At the same time, the two natures are not so separate that they do not interact (contra Nestorianism). Rather, they subsist in the one person who acts fully through both but not contrary to either.
- e. The Son assumed a complete human nature comprised of a material body and an immaterial, rational soul (contra Apollinarianism). The Council of Chalcedon drew a distinction between "person" and "soul" and located the soul within the human nature. This

⁵ Wellum, *The Person of Christ*, 105

⁶ Macleod, *Person of Christ*, 190.

means that Christ had a human will and mind (a truth that would be formalized at the Third Council of Constantinople in 681AD).

II. THE COMMUNICATION OF PROPERTIES

A. The Issue

The issue to which we now turn is describing *how* the two natures relate to each other in the one person Jesus Christ. How do the two natures—and the attributes essential to them—relate in such a way that the integrity of each is preserved without diminishing the unity of the person? This question has to do with how the properties of each nature are predicated upon the one person.

B. The Wrong View: *Perichoresis*

Some in the early church—especially leaders in the Eastern Church—answered this question with the concept of *perichoresis*. They believed that Christ’s divine nature completely permeated his human nature, though the two remained distinct. Thus, the divine attributes (e.g., omniscience, omnipotence, etc.) are given either occasionally or continuously to the human nature, but human attributes are not given to the divine nature.

There are some significant issues with this concept:

1. First, it undermines what Scripture teaches about Jesus “growing in wisdom” over the course of his life. If his divine nature had fully permeated his human nature at conception, then he would have already possessed complete knowledge in his humanity by virtue of his divine omniscience.
2. Second, it seems to treat the natures as acting subjects, with the divine overpowering the human nature. If this were true, it would undermine Christ’s ability to render genuine human obedience to the Father on our behalf, thus disqualifying him from accomplishing a genuine atonement for us.

C. The Right View

Rather than seeing the divine nature permeating and, in a sense, overpowering the human nature, it is proper to say that the attributes of both natures have been communicated to the person in such a way as to protect the integrity of both natures and the unity of the person simultaneously. Louis Berkhof writes,

This means that the properties of both, the human and the divine natures, are now the properties of the person, and are therefore ascribed to the person. The person can be said to be almighty, omniscient, omnipresent, and so on, but can also be called a man of sorrows, of limited knowledge and power, and subject to human want and miseries. We must be careful not to understand the term to mean that anything peculiar to the divine nature was communicated to the human nature, or vice versa; or that there is an interpenetration of the two natures, as a result of which the divine is humanized, and human is deified. The deity cannot share in human weakness; neither can man participate in any of the essential perfections of the Godhead.⁷

There are several elements of Chalcedonian Christology that illuminate this point:

1. *Enhypostasia* – in-personal humanity

The idea of *anhypostasis* would need further clarification and was discussed at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553AD. Rather than thinking of Christ's human nature as impersonal (as *anhypostasis* implies), it is better to think of it as *in-personal* (*enhypostasis*). That is, the human nature (*ousia*) has its "person" in the "person" (*hypostasis*) of the Son. Christ's humanity has no independent existence apart from the divine Son. His humanity was not incomplete because it lacked personhood; rather, its personhood is in the person of the Son. This is an important clarification because, as we have discussed previously, "What has not been assumed has not been healed." To be our Redeemer, it was necessary that Christ be fully human as we are (Hebrews 2:14–17).

2. *Communicatio Idiomatum* – Communication of Attributes

Rather than perichoresis, the church instead affirmed the language and concept of *communicatio idiomatum*, or the communication of properties. The teaches that "the attributes of each nature are 'communicated' not to the natures but to the person of the Son."⁸ In other words, what is true of each nature is also true of the Son, the person who is the subject of both, but not true of the other nature. This is how Scripture can speak of the person Jesus Christ possessing the divine perfections while also possessing those attributes characteristic of humanity.

3. *Communicatio Operationum* – Communication of Operations

⁷ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (London: Banner of Truth, 2021), 324.

⁸ Wellum, *The Person of Christ*, 116.

Closely connected to the concept of the communication of attributes is the communication of operations. Here, we are speaking about Christ's work in relation to his two natures. Because the two natures are united in the one person, the entire work of Christ is a divine-human work, so that he is able to save us completely.

4. *Communicatio Charismatum/Gratiarum* – Communication of Gifts/Grace

The *communicatio charismatum* or *gratiarum* has to do with the gifts and grace Christ exhibited in his earthly ministry. Specifically, it addresses Christ's relationship to the Holy Spirit in his works (especially his miraculous works). Recall that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:10; Luke 1:35) and was given the Spirit "without measure" (John 3:34). Thus, as a man he was equipped and enabled to live a life of obedience to the Father by virtue of the indwelling Holy Spirit. As John Owen wrote, it is the Spirit who fills Christ's human nature "with grace according to the measure of its receptivity. . . to the utmost capacity of a creature; but it was so, not by being changed into a divine nature or essence, but by the communication of the Spirit unto it without measure."⁹

III. THE *EXTRA*

The *extra* refers to the reality that Christ, in his incarnation, not only retained his divine attributes but also continued to exercise them as the eternal Son of God. In other words, he "continues to live a divine life 'outside' (*extra*) his human nature; Christ's human nature does not totally circumscribe the life of the Son."¹⁰ This accords with what Scripture teaches in passages like Colossians 1:17 and Hebrews 1:3. From conception, the Son lived his life totally "in" the flesh and totally "outside" the flesh. As Cyril of Alexandria writes,

When seen as a babe and wrapped in swaddling clothes, even when still in the bosom of the Virgin who bore him, he filled all creation as God, and was enthroned with him who begot him. For the divine cannot be numbered or measured and does not admit of circumscription. So confessing the Word [to be] hypostatically united, we worship one Son and Lord Jesus Christ, neither putting apart and dividing man and God, as joined with each other by a union of dignity and authority—for this would be an empty phrase and no more—nor speaking of the Word of God

⁹ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, 16 vols. (London: Banner of Truth, 1965), 3:159–88, 1:93.

¹⁰ Wellum, *The Person of Christ*, 119.

separately as Christ, and then separately of him who was of a woman as another Christ, but knowing only one Christ, the Word of God the Father with his own flesh.¹¹

John Calvin gives further clarity to this doctrine when he writes that the Son's "eternal properties were exercised by Christ during the Incarnation not by the humanity of the One Person but by the divinity of the One Person." It should be noted that this teaching defends the integrity of *both* Christ's deity and his humanity, for this affirms that his obedience—even his death—was voluntary and done as a man without his divine nature compromising his full humanity.

IV. DYOTHELITISM

Significant to the distinction between person and nature developed at Chalcedon was the question of the will. Is the will connected to the nature, or to the person? If the former, then we would affirm, that Christ has two wills; if the latter, one will. At the Third Council of Constantinople in 681AD the church took up this question.

The council formally condemned Monothelitism (teaching Christ had one will) and affirmed that the will is connected to the nature and, thus, Christ had a divine and a human will.

A. The Will as a Part of the Nature

A significant point of discussion was where to locate the will: in the nature or in the person. Maximus the Confessor (580–662) made a significant and crucial distinction between the "faculty of will," which he located in the nature, and the "concrete acts of the will," which he located in the person. All rational beings have a "faculty of will" by virtue of their nature, but it is the person who does the concrete act of willing.¹² Christ, because he has two natures, has both a divine and a human will, and is able to will as both God and a man. "In Christ, there is one willer (the Son) who has two wills, hence the ability to will as human and as God."¹³

B. Significance of the Two Wills

1. They maintain Christ's full humanity

¹¹ Cited in Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology*, 59.

¹² A helpful analogy is the distinction between a person who thinks and their ability to think; the former is an act of the person, while the latter is an attribute of their nature.

¹³ Wellum, *The Person of Christ*, 124–5.

Both Apollinarianism and Monophysitism taught that Christ had only one will because they identified the will with the person. This would mean that Christ only had a divine will (the divine person, the Son, existed before the incarnation). However, as Donald Macleod notes, “For one thing, whatever doubts may attach to the definition of will, it is clear there can be no true human nature without the ability to make human choices.”¹⁴ We would have to ask if Christ was fully human and, if he was not, how could he fully redeem us?

2. They are decisive for soteriology

As hinted at above, this issue brings back up Gregory of Nazianzus’s maxim, “what is not assumed is not healed.” If Christ did not have a human will, then our wills would not have been redeemed. Further, it would have removed Christ’s ability to act as our model of volitional obedience to the will of the Father (as the divine Son, Christ’s divine will is the same will as the Father because it is located in the one divine essence). His obedience would not have been genuine, and thus not salvific.

3. They are required for Trinitarian orthodoxy

If the will was located in the person, then we would have to affirm that each person of the Trinity has a will unique to that person. This would be a surrendering of divine unity. Instead, orthodox Trinitarianism affirms that the Father shares and exercises the one divine will *as the Father*, and the same is true for the Son and the Spirit, respectively.

4. They are necessary for Christ’s genuine obedience

As noted above, it is necessary that Christ have a human will so that he, as the Last Adam, could render genuine human obedience to the Father where the first Adam failed. In this way, Jesus becomes our new federal head, and his righteous obedience is imputed to all who are united to him by faith.

¹⁴ Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 179.