

DAILY DOSE OF DOCTRINE

January 7 - 11, 2008



January 7, 2008 **Two Natures – One Person**

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”¹

The doctrine of two natures (divine and human) in one person is one of those things that baffles human reason. In this context, ‘nature’ may be defined as “the sum-total of all the essential qualities of a thing, that which makes it what it is....The term ‘person’ denotes a complete substance endowed with reason, and, consequently, a responsible subject of its own actions.”²

In this case, the second Person of the Trinity, the Son or ‘Word’, who possessed a divine nature from eternity, assumed from Mary a human nature.³ As a result, “the divine Saviour could be ignorant and weak, could be tempted, and could suffer and die, not in His divine nature, but derivatively, by virtue of his possession of a human nature.”⁴

The Bible indicates that Jesus was both God and human, yet a single person⁵. Not, as in our case, a human being whom the Spirit ‘comes upon’, but God taking humanity upon himself. Jesus was and is absolutely, mysteriously unique.

¹ John 1:14 (TNIV)

² L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 321

³ “The Son of God...did when the fullness of time was come, take upon Him man’s nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.” Westminster Confession” 8:2

⁴ Ibid., pp. 323-324.

⁵ E.g. Romans 1:3-4; Galatians 4:4-5; Philippians 2:6-11

January 8, 2008

Emptying

*“Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to
be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.”¹*

The metaphysical questions surrounding the incarnation may leave us scratching our heads and grappling with unfamiliar terms and concepts. But the glorious heart of the matter is that in becoming Jesus of Nazareth, God the son ‘emptied’ himself and ‘humiliated’ himself.

The ‘emptying’² or ‘making himself nothing’ does not mean that the Son ceased to be God. Rather it means that he did not consider his divine status as something he had to hold onto at all costs. He set that status aside, voluntarily limiting himself, taking on the status, not just of humanity, but that of a bond-servant.

God the Son went from a state of sovereignty, in which he had the absolute right to command, and entered a state of servitude, in which he submitted himself to render obedience. He sought the Father’s will and did it. He surrendered himself for our good.

The Bible commands us to, “in your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had”.³ In response to the love and grace of God, we are called to ‘empty’ ourselves of our status and our ‘rights’ to serve God and one another.

¹ Philippians 2:6-7 (TNIV)

² Greek: ‘kenosis’ – Phil. 1:7

³ Philippians 2:5

January 9, 2008

Humiliation

“But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.”¹

The Son of God ‘humbled’² himself by being born under the Law. From the time of his infancy when he was dedicated in the Temple, Jesus observed and upheld the Law of Moses. He ‘fulfilled all righteousness’ by participating in the sacrifices, celebrating the festivals and submitting to its regulations.

Most importantly, Christ acknowledged the justice of the Law in its penalty of death for sin. Though personally without sin, he took the curse of our sins upon himself and submitted to the penalty of the Law. “He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!”³ The King of kings, the supreme Lawgiver, put himself under the Law on our behalf.

While the critical focus of the Son’s ‘humiliation’ was his suffering, death and descent into hades, we should not lose sight of the fact that all of his life was in fact a ‘humbling’ of himself for us. Each time Jesus placed a prayer shawl on his head or observed one of the Law’s daily requirements, God was choosing to ‘humble’ himself because of his great love for us.

As his followers, we too are called humble ourselves and live in sacrificial obedience. Those acts of obedience are sometimes singular and noteworthy. More frequently they are ‘routine’ and ‘small’ and may be noticed only by God.

¹ Galatians 4:4-5 (TNIV)

² Philippians 2:8 - Greek: ‘tapeinosis’ Latin: ‘humiliatio’

³ Philippians 2:8 (TNIV)

January 10, 2008

Christ as Prophet

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your own people. You must listen to him.”¹

Israel had many prophets over the centuries, but the one promised here through Moses is the Prophet par excellence, fulfilled in the person of Christ².

The Old Testament uses three terms for prophets. ‘*Nabi*’ designates one who comes with a message from God for the people: *“Then the LORD said to Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country.”³*

The terms ‘*ro’eh*’ and ‘*chozeh*’ are used interchangeably and indicate that a prophet is one who receives revelations from God, particularly in the form of visions. The New Testament word, ‘*prophetes*’, literally means one who speaks forth. So a Biblical prophet is one who receives revelations from God in the form of verbal communications, dreams or visions and who serves God by speaking in his name.

Not everyone who receives revelations is a prophet. Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar had revelations, but were not prophets. A prophet must also have a divine calling to communicate God’s revelation to others.

¹ Deuteronomy 18:15 (TNIV)

² Acts 3:22-23

³ Exodus 7:1-2 (TNIV) See also Deuteronomy 18:18

January 11, 2008

A Prophet's Duty

“And he said to me, ‘Son of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you. Go now to your people in exile and speak to them. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says,’ whether they listen or fail to listen’.”¹

Broadly speaking, Old Testament prophets did three things. Their primary role was to communicate God's truth to people to their own specific time and context. They interpreted the Law, especially in its moral and spiritual aspects, protesting against its violation or mere formal observance and urging repentance and genuine, heartfelt obedience to God.

Secondly, they often ‘forth-told’ the near future, giving warnings of the judgments that would take place if people continued to ignore or disobey God and promising blessing if they repented and returned to the Lord's ways.

Thirdly, they often gave God's people glimpses of the coming Messianic kingdom or of the way things will be at the end of the age. In this respect, Christ was active in the Old Testament period, long before the Incarnation:

*“Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which **the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing** when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit...²*

¹ Ezekiel 3:10 (TNIV)

² 1 Peter 1:10-12