

Jesus Christ is one Person with two natures, Divine and human. How exactly do we understand this? Well, the incarnation represents another sublime mystery of the Christian faith. While we cannot fully fathom the mystery of the incarnation, the ancient Chalcedonian confession provides us with some necessary boundaries. But first, let's ask:

I. How Did Christ Empty Himself?

Philippians 2:6 “*who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself...*” The translation “*but emptied himself*” leads theologians to ask: “*Of what did Christ empty himself?*” The Kenosis theory teaches that Christ emptied himself of his divine nature or some of his divine attributes while he was on earth as a man. The heretical theory teaches that the Son in the Triune God ceased to be God by virtue of his incarnation. Or others claim he voluntarily gave up his omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, etc. So, what did the Son empty himself of?

Verse six speaks of the Son of God before his incarnation. In other words, it tells us about the Son of God when he was *only* in the form of God and *without* the form of man. **What is the “form of God?”** The noun “*form*” can make it sound like Jesus outwardly appeared to be like God, but his inner reality was something distinguished from him, **like how a virtual reality avatar might manifest your form or shape but does not contain your substance**; it's not *actually* you.

The key to understanding the word lies in Paul's usage, so its meaning must be essentially the same as in v. 7 and 8.¹ Paul expresses that the Son took on the (v 7) “*form of a*

¹ B. B. Warfield said, :“‘Form’ is a term which expresses the sum of those characterizing qualities which make a thing the precise thing that it is. . . . ‘the form of God’ is the sum of the characteristics which make the being we call ‘God’ specifically God, rather than some other being – an angel, say, or a man. When our Lord is said to be in ‘the form of God,’ therefore, He is declared, in the most express manner possible, to be all that God is, to possess the whole fulness of attributes which make God, God” (*The Person and Work of Christ*, p. 39).

servant” and was (8) “*found in human form.*” In v. 8, he references his flesh (*likeness of men*), obedience, suffering, and death. Those references clarify that Christ did not merely look like a man, but he took on the essential characteristics and qualities of that humanity; flesh and blood are properties of humankind; obedience is characteristic of a servant; death is the universal experience of mortal man. Therefore, the “*form of God*” means Jesus possesses the very nature essential to God. The Son is the same kind of being as God. The hymn substitutes the phrase “*form of God*” with “*equality with God.*” The “*form of God*” is equality with God!

Now, let’s answer, how did Jesus empty himself? The English preposition “*by*” indicates the means of achieving this emptying. He emptied himself *by taking humanity to himself.* The Incarnation is itself the emptying! Emptying is equivalent to “*taking the form of a servant.*” He accomplishes this emptying not by giving up his divine nature but by adding a second nature to himself. The incarnation is an act of addition, not subtraction. In taking the form of a servant, he did not lose the form of God.

While on earth, his humanity veiled the open, visible exposure of his divine glory to human sight. Jesus spoke of the “*glory*” that was his in the presence of his Father “*before the world was made*” (John 17:5). He asks not for a return of his deity but the restoration of the recognized glory he let go of when he became man.

Scripture speaks of Christ in two ways: it says some things of Him concerning His divine nature (2:6 - “in the form of God”), and it says other things about Him referring to His human nature (2:7 - “taking the form of a servant”). Scripture upholds Christ's divine and human natures without confusing or dividing Him. Therefore, read Scripture so that you discern these two different manners in which Scripture speaks of Christ without confusing, dividing, or diminishing Him. Questions?

II. How does the Son of God subsist and act in two natures in one Person?

The Chalcedonian Creed was adopted at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. to respond to particular heretical views concerning the person of Christ. It is not so important to understand all the intricacies this creed covers. It is crucial, however, that you have a basic understanding of what the Scriptures teach about our Savior.

...we all, with one accord, teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body...one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, ***without confusion, without change, without division, without separation***; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ;

This creed teaches that the Person and natures of Christ are: **Without confusion**: The heresy called Eutychianism taught that Christ's divinity overwhelms and mixes with his humanity. Hence, Christ had only one new, third kind of nature. *It's like mixing red and blue together results in purple. Wayne Grudem shares the analogy of putting ink in a glass of water. The ink pollutes the entire appearance of the water, and the water dilutes the ink. So, there is no longer pure ink or pure water. Instead, both are changed and make some kind of third substance.*

Eutyches was excommunicated from the Church in A.D. 448, and his teachings were officially rejected at the Council of Chalcedon. *For, if Christ was neither truly God nor truly man, he could not be the One Mediator between God and man and earn our salvation.*

The Person of Christ is NOT the result of mixing or blending the Divine nature with the human. Instead, Chalcedon affirmed Christ is *“to be recognized in two natures without confusion.”* The union of a human and divine nature in one person did not erase their distinction. Instead, *“the property of each nature [IS] preserved.”* The human nature remained a truly human

nature, and the divine nature remained a truly divine nature. As a result, he is fully God and fully man.

Without change: In assuming human flesh, the Word did NOT cease being what he had always been, the Divine Son of God, nor did He empty Himself of any of His Divine attributes. The incarnation affected no substantial change in the divine Son as God. The Chalcedon Creed states Christ is “*to be recognized in two natures... without change.*” He did NOT lose His divinity at the incarnation, and IS “*one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word.*”

But how can an immutable God become a man without change? God can become man without changing because there is no confusion between the natures; each is wholly preserved. Therefore, God the Son is unchangeable *concerning his divine nature* but changeable *concerning his human nature*. Only in his humanity did he undergo change.

Augustine shared a helpful, even if abstract, analogy. When we speak, our thoughts become an outward sound, called speech, and enter into the minds of others. Yet, the thought itself does not experience a change in its immaterial nature when communicated with sound. It “*remains complete in itself, and takes the form of speech without being modified in its own nature by the change: so, the Divine Word, though suffering no change of nature, yet became flesh.*” So, our ‘immaterial thought’ remains essentially the same with or without sound. The sound effects change in our atmosphere/experience as waves through the air that vibrate our eardrum. Adding speech to a thought does not change the immaterial essence of the thought. The speech only changes outward material realities. So, likewise, the immaterial, spiritual divine nature does not change. The change happens to material creation, his human flesh.

Therefore, God cannot experience *intrinsic* change but *appears* to change from the temporal perceptive of his creatures. Compare this solution with how the landscape *appears* to

move when you are traveling fast on a train. However, the landscape remains motionless, and *you* are moving on the train. So, likewise, it appears that God underwent a change in becoming a man. However, his Divine nature actually experienced no change. Material creation itself changed.²

Without division: Jesus Christ is NOT half God and half man (not 50% God and 50% human). Apollinarianism taught that the one person of Christ had a human body but a divine mind and soul. His person was divided: he had a human flesh but a divine soul. You can imagine an astronaut in his space suit: the space suit represents Christ's human flesh, and the person inside controlling it represents Christ's divine soul and mind.

The church fathers rejected this teaching at the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381. They said, 'that which Christ did not assume, he did not redeem.' Therefore, he could not redeem our souls and minds without taking a human mind and soul. Jesus is "*at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood.*" The author of Hebrews affirms this, "*Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people*" (Heb. 2:17).

Without separation: Jesus Christ is NOT two persons united in one body. Nestorianism is the heresy that there were two separate persons in Christ, a human person and a divine person, instead of one person.³ Imagine a person with a split personality or even a possessed person. In both cases, two 'persons' or 'personalities' talk to one another and struggle against each other.

² John Starke, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/you-asked-did-god-change-at-the-incarnation/>

³ Harold O.J. Brown writes, "Nestorius' incarnate person was a single person, not two as his critics thought, but he could not convince others that it was so. Consequently, he has gone down in history as a great heretic although what he actually believed was reaffirmed at Chalcedon" (*Heresies* p. 176). He, himself, may have never taught the heretical view that takes his name.

On the contrary, Scripture portrays Christ speaking and acting as a single, unified, and whole person. Jesus always speaks as “I,” not as “we,” and the Bible consistently describes Jesus as “he,” not as “they.”⁴ The Scriptures sometimes distinguish between sayings and actions of his divine nature with those of his human nature to help us better understand the person, teachings, and work of Christ. But the Bible never pits them against one another or speaks as if two separate persons taught or acted. The creed, therefore, states that the union of the human and Divine in the Person of Jesus Christ is a real, organic union, where his Divine and human nature come “*together to form one Person and subsistence.*”

How does the Son of God subsist and act in two natures in one Person? Without Confusion, Without Change, Without Division, and Without Separation. Questions?

III. Could Christ have Sinned?⁵

Jesus is unfallen, sinless, and impeccable (meaning he could not sin). We will unpack this with three Biblical and indisputable propositions. **First, the Bible affirms that Christ did not sin.** Jesus is a high priest who is “*holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners*” (Heb. 7:26). Paul refers to Jesus as one “*who knew no sin*” (2 Cor. 5:21). Peter speaks of Jesus as “*a lamb without blemish or spot*” (1 Peter 1:19). Peter directly states, “*He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips*” (1 Peter 2:22). John, calls Jesus Christ “*the righteous*” (1 John 2:1) and says, “*In him there is no sin*” (1 John 3:5).

Can he be truly human without sin? God created man upright (Ecc 7:2), holy, and righteous. Remember, Adam and Eve were truly and fully human *before* they sinned. Sin is an

⁴ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 555.

⁵ Credit to Dr. Stephen Wellum, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-incarnation-and-two-natures-of-christ/>

aberration of God's original creation, and our glorification will eternally free us from it.

Therefore, Fallenness is *not* essential to humanity.

Christ is not "*in Adam*" as we are in Adam (Romans 5), so the Son does not assume our fallenness in his incarnation. Instead, God sent his Son "*in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin*" (Rom. 8:3). Paul taught that Jesus became truly and fully human, with a natural human body, even though he did not have a sinful nature like us.

Yet, secondly, the Bible affirms he was genuinely tempted in every way. The Gospels portray Jesus' successful resistance to the Devil's temptations in the desert, paralleling Adam and Eve's failure with temptation in paradise. Jesus is "*one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin*" (Heb. 4:15). Because "*he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted*" (Heb. 2:18). The author Hebrews also asserts, "*Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered*" (Heb. 5:7-8). **Yet if Jesus never sinned, how could he "*learn obedience*"?** Like all human children, Jesus grew, took more responsibility, and experienced greater temptations over time.

Although Jesus is fully human, he is also the divine Son. His temptations were not all identical to ours in every respect. **For example, we are not tempted to turn stones into bread or to leap from the Temple.** Therefore, Jesus was tempted by normal *sinless* human weaknesses in a fallen world and *external* forces, not internal sinful desires.

Thirdly, the Bible affirms that "*God cannot be tempted with evil*" (James 1:13). God is purely good, "*with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change*" (James 1:17). God *in His divine nature* is unable to be tempted. This is because he, unlike us, is not subject to the involuntary movements of his soul or emotions. God acts with perfect self-control that is consistent with his character. Please understand, we need a God who doesn't experience

temptation like us. Consider this scenario: “If you are ill and in bed, and your doctor comes to visit, what do you want him to do? Are you interested in hearing about how he suffers alongside you, telling you about all his aches and pains so that you will know he understands your feelings? Or do you want a healthy doctor who, because of that, is fully capable of treating you with the expectation that you will get better?” That latter is precisely what God has done for us. He does not “share” in our temptations *in his divine nature*, but sets us free from them, which he can only do if he is not subject to them himself (in his divine nature).

How do we put these three truths together? They come together in two propositions that are like two pieces of a puzzle that complete picture. First, Jesus’ temptations were genuine, for he was tempted in His human nature, and his victories rendered human obedience for us. Jesus’ temptations were more challenging and, in a sense, *more real* because he experienced the full force of Satan without yielding. We give in once we reach a threshold. He never gave in, and so experienced the highest possible degree of pain and temptation. (compare it to extreme physical pain. After a certain threshold, we faint. Likewise, as fallen humans, after a certain intensity of temptation, we typical give up instead of taking the way of escape). Jesus resisted every temptation in his human nature by the strength of his perfect dependence on God the Father and the Holy Spirit at every moment (e.g., refusal to turn stones into bread; a temptation directed at his humanity). He actively resisted temptation and obeyed for us as a man. So, in his humanity, the Son of God could suffer and experience temptation.

Second, in his divinity, it was impossible for *him* to sin and to yield to temptation because God cannot sin. Indeed, he was genuinely tempted to sin (way beyond us) in his human nature. Yet he couldn't sin due to his divine nature. Therefore, God grounds our assurance of salvation in that He and his plan cannot fail nor can ever be thwarted.

So, first, his humanity made his temptations genuine. And second, his divinity made sin impossible. Remember, read Scripture so that you discern these two different manners in which Scripture speaks of Christ without confusing, dividing, or diminishing Him.

Christianity literally teaches Jesus is the true God and true man and that without him, people have no way to God. Consider this doctrine's implications: His humanity made his sacrifice for sins possible, but his divinity made it priceless. Without holding fast to this truth, the church loses its missionary zeal and genuine love for its fellow man. The prestigious King of Heaven willingly laid aside the riches of his glory and became human. 2Corinthians 8:9, "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake, he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*" Christ, equal with God and possessor of heaven and earth, became poor in the humility of his incarnation so that believers might become rich. Beloved, are you willing to be poured out so that others may be filled?