

The Purple Pulpit

Installment #11

July 29, 2018

The Hypostatic Union

Many of the things we deal with in these papers are truths that have come to the fore in church history as a result of genuine believers seeking to deeply understand the Person of our faith. As we have loved Jesus Christ, over the years the One Who is our occupation has been misunderstood, misperceived, as some of our number in history have mistaken matters that deal with Who He is in His Deity, humanity, and incarnation. Scriptural and orthodox responses to such doctrinal flaws have been articulated throughout our history, with the benefit to the church being that of a sharper apprehension of our Lord Jesus Christ by thousands of believers.

Today we look at one of these cases in point. The true church of the Lord Jesus Christ worldwide, having faced and condemned Nestorianism, saw some saints overreact to a division of the Person of Christ with a pendulum-like swing in the opposite direction. Knowing that the Lord is one Person, they posited that He has only one nature (by which word they meant the same as we have been speaking of with the word “essence”). These became known as “Monophysites,” a word that comes from the Greek for “one nature.” They were also called “Eutychians” from the name of their most famous advocate, one

Eutychus of Constantinople. The idea that they held is that the Lord Jesus has one intermediate nature, a “theanthropic” nature (from the Greek words for “God” and “man”), a God-man nature. That may sound good to you, because my readership believes in Jesus as God and man, but it is very different from saying that the Lord Jesus is the God-man. You see, Monophysites hold that His humanity was divinized or deified, and that His Deity was humanized, resulting in His having one divinely-human nature. This means, for example, that His humanity was omniscient, or that His Deity hungered or needed sleep. It was a concept that mixed, rather than joined two essences. It is correct to say that the Lord Jesus Christ is a theanthropic Person, but not to say that He has a theanthropic essence. In defining monophysitism, it is important to state that this misunderstanding of the Person of Christ is one that true believers can hold. Those believing such are not to be considered unbelievers or antichrist.

The solution to this misunderstanding is to see the Scriptural evidence for what we call the “hypostatic union.” This term means that there is in Christ incarnate a union of essences in one Person. That is to say that, the essences, substances, forms (or “natures,” the usual word employed for these things in theological discussions) are conjoined in the one Person that is Jesus Christ.

Plenty of Scriptures have been produced to prove the Deity, humanity, and inhumanation of Christ in these papers and in our church life from years back. But what

verses can be brought forward to show that the essences of Christ remained distinct after His incarnation? Consider Mk. 13:32. In the kenotic protocol (Phil. 2:6-8) in “the days of His flesh” (Heb. 5:7), did the humanity of Christ possess omniscience? While the divine attributes were voluntarily put in abeyance, did the humanity of Christ know all things? It is evident from this verse that it did not. Therefore the humanity of Christ didn’t become something other than humanity, to receive attributes natural to Deity. Consider next Jn. 5:19. Did the humanity of Christ possess omnipotence? It appears that it did not. What if we went in the other direction? In incarnation, was Deity temptable? Jas. 1:13 says that the Deity of Christ wasn’t tempted. Yet Mt. 4:1; Mk. 1:13; Lk. 4:1,2; and Heb. 2:18 say that Jesus was tempted. We must say that the humanity of Christ was temptable while His Deity was not. Such distinctions can be Scripturally drawn, and must be recognized by the Biblicist Christologist to maintain a thoroughly orthodox comprehension of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our next number of installments in these papers will develop these distinctions of essences and their attributes in the one Person of Christ incarnate. Until then, continue to “consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus Christ.” (Heb. 3:1)