

## A VERY IMPORTANT ASPECT OF TEACHING ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

The *Formula of Concord* says: “Since both natures are personally united (that is, united in one person), we believe, teach, and confess that this union is not a connection or association of the sort that neither nature shares things with the other personally (that is, because of the personal union), as if two boards were glued together, with neither giving the other anything or receiving anything from the other. Instead, here is the most complete Communion, which God truly has with this human being; out of this personal union and out of the most complete and most indescribable communion that results from it flows everything human that can be ascribed to and believed about God and everything divine that can be ascribed to and believed about the human Christ. The ancient teachers of the church have explained this union and communion of the natures using similes of a glowing iron and of the union of body and soul in the human being (*Epitome*, VIII, 5 (tr. Kolb and Wengert)).

It is important to say that Jesus’ human nature received divine qualities and powers in its union with the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. We watch Athanasius’ in his three authentic *Oration against the Arians* arriving at the important principle that whatever is said in the Scriptures to be given to Jesus Christ, whenever He is said to become anything, or made anything, or appointed anything, those things are said about Him with respect to His human nature. The reason is that, as God, He already, from eternity, had all divine majesty.

For example, the Father has given Him what did not belong to His divine nature, the cup to drink (J 18:11). However, He is also said to have been given powers that make His human nature majestic. He is said to be given all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18). He is given all judgment (J 5:22), specifically, “authority to carry out judgment, because He is the Son of Man” (J 5:27). He is given authority to forgive sins and heal (Mt 9:8). He is given everlasting dominion, glory, and a kingdom (Dn 7:13-4). He is given the name, “Lord”, which is above every other name (Ph 2:9).

In His humble life on earth He received, as a human being, commands from the Father (J 10:18). However, He also received things that made Him majestic, as a man. He received the kinds of things that other human beings do not receive. In the parable in Luke 19 about the ten minas, Jesus is indirectly referring to Himself. He is the “man of noble birth” who “went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself and then to return” (v.15).

He is said to have become flesh (J 1:14). He became obedient to death (Ph 2:8). He also became “greater than the angels” (H 1:4). He became “a merciful and faithful High Priest” (H 2:17, 5:5; 6:20), and “the Guarantee of a better testament” (H 7:22).

During His life on earth He was made lower than God (or the angels) for a little while (Ps 8:5; H 2:7). However, He is also said to have been made things that make His human nature majestic. He was “made Lord and Christ” (Ac 2:36). “Made Lord and Christ” (Ac 2:36) is particularly arresting, because the references to “Lord” in the context of Peter’s sermon have YHWH, the special personal name for God, behind them in his quotations from the Old Testament.

Jesus is also said to have been appointed (H 3:2; 7:28).

Similar things are said that are appropriate to a human being, like “raised from the dead by the Father” “taken up into heaven”, “seated at God’s right hand”, and “glorified.” In other words, Jesus’ human nature is elevated in the personal union with His divine nature. The entire fullness of the Spirit is imparted to His human nature.

The message of the Gospel is intimately tied up with such statements. The obedience of Jesus Christ to the Law of God as a human being in our place has the great power to redeem because it is also divine obedience. Ordinary human blood may benefit another person physically through a transfusion, but ordinary human blood on its own has no power to redeem from sin. Because the blood that He shed in sacrifice is the very own blood of God the Son, it has the infinite power to redeem from sin. His incarnate flesh and blood are the means of our redemption. Christ’s death is “God’s death.” Ordinary human flesh has no power to give others life. However, Jesus is the bread of life, and His flesh is life-giving (J 6). He promises that He will raise at the last day those who have eaten His flesh and drunk His blood, and He will give them eternal life.

After the *Book of Concord* was published, the Lutherans in Saxony wanted to be very sure that their pastors were teaching correctly. They drew up Visitation Articles in 1592, which were positive and negative statements on four crucial points. One of the four articles on the Person of Christ to which clergy were required to subscribe concerned the majesty of Christ’s human nature. The fourth part of it was:

“Through this personal union and the exaltation that followed upon it, Christ, according to His flesh, has been placed at God’s right hand, and has received all power in heaven and on earth, and has become partaker of all divine majesty, honour, power, and glory” (Article II, iv).

During the controversy between Cyril, the Patriarch of Alexandria and Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople in the years leading up to the Council of Ephesus (AD 431), Cyril summed up the points he made in twelve antitheses at the end of his *Third Letter* to Nestorius. He made an important point about the right understanding of the two natures of Christ in one person in connection with the Lord’s Supper, writing in point eleven:

“If anyone does not confess that the Lord’s flesh is life-giving, and that it is the own flesh of the Word of God the Father, but affirms that it is the flesh of another than he, connected with him by dignity, or as having only a divine indwelling, and not rather... that it is life-giving, because it has become the own flesh of the Word who is able to quicken all things, let him be anathema.”

Christians should believe the “spiritual, supernatural, heavenly way in which Christ, is present in the Holy Supper, and bestows comfort and life on them. In the early Second Century, Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, had called the one loaf in the Lord’s Supper a “medicine of immortality and the antidote that wards off death but yields continuous life in union with Jesus Christ” (*Letter to the Ephesians*, 20, 2). In the *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther explained that this life comes by way of the forgiveness of sins: “Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.” (*The Sacrament of the Altar, What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?*).

These truths point to a clear understanding of several aspects of the Lord’s Supper. His word has the power to bring into

being what He says, because His human words are the very words of God the Son. If He says that His body and blood are present in the Lord's Supper, they are present. We do not pretend that we understand this, but believe it. He took the bread, and said, "This is My body."

Ordinary human beings can be present at only one place at a time. It belongs to God's nature to be present everywhere. We do not mean that a part of God is in one place and another part of Him in another place. He is wholly present everywhere. However, the exalted and glorified humanity of Christ is present not only at the right hand of God in heaven, but also among Christians as they gather in His name, and truly present in the Lord's Supper. His exalted human nature is present to all things in His creation. His presence with His body and blood at many different places where believers are receiving the Lord's Supper is different from this repletive presence. We are, indeed, in Him, and receive His gracious benefits as we contemplate the mystery of His one person in two natures.