

Of Christ the Mediator (Part 7)

Acts 20:17-28; WCF 8.7

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 14 July 2019, 16:30

(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)¹

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Here's a question: Is our Lord Jesus the only mediator that ever existed between God and man?

Well, yes and no!

Let's look first at the "no."

No, our Lord Jesus is not the only mediator that has ever existed between God and man.

Why?

Well, because the Old Testament knew quite a number of prophets and priests who took that mediatory role, like e.g. Moses and the judges and Samuel...

Yes, these were all God-appointed mediators between God and man, but look, they were all only types of THE Mediator who was to come – our Lord Jesus! He is the ultimate and complete Mediator who transcends all those who, in God's will, came before Him.

Why is He so different – so superior?

Because He has what they never had! You see, they only had human nature, but He has both human nature and divine nature in one single Person!

Well, WCF 8.7 explains for us what God's Word says about how the two natures of our Lord Jesus worked together in His one Person to save His loved ones.

Now, in a way, WCF 2 and 3 have already explained some of this, but now WCF 8.7 wants to look deeper into this working-together between Christ's two natures and His one single Person.

Perhaps someone might say, "But why do we need to know all of this?"

Well, there are at least three quick answers I can think of:

- 1) So that we can marvel at the Person of our Lord Jesus and what God has done through Him;
- 2) So that we can defend our faith against people of other faiths who seem to always say, "You say that Christ is God." "Well, how can a god die?"
- 3) So that we won't make mistakes when we preach or when we write or select hymns about our Lord's saving work!

My brother & sister, is *Christ's two natures in one Person* difficult to understand?

Yes it is! Let's face it: some things in Scripture are simply hard to understand! But is that not to be expected? I mean, who wants to worship a God who is so simple (not complex) that He can be fully understood by tiny creatures formed by His hands?

Well, looking at WCF 8.7, our sermon has three points.

¹ In writing this sermon, I am greatly indebted to my two main sources whose guidance I appreciate: 1) Van Dixhoorn, Chad. 2014. *Confessing the Faith: a reader's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Carlisle, PA : The Banner of Truth Trust. 484p.

2) Sproul, R.C. 2006. *The truth we confess*. (In: Sproul, R.C. ed. *Truths we confess: a layman's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith – in three volumes*. Vol. I (chapters 1-8 of the Confession) Phillipsburg, NJ : P&R Publishing. 279p.).

Many words & phrases I have written, I have gladly borrowed with great thankfulness from this source.

Here's the first one...

It's the Whole Person who Saves Us

Here is the first important thing: i.e. that it is not just Jesus' *human nature* that saves us. Nor is it just His *divine nature* that saves us.

No, it is *both natures* working together in Jesus' *one whole Person* that saves us!

You see, Christ's two natures can be *distinguished* from one another, but they cannot be *separated* from one another!

Neither do these two natures do their work apart from the *Person* of Jesus!

Look, is that not why Heb 9:4 does not tell us it was the blood of Christ's *human nature* that purified our conscience, but that it was the blood of *Christ* that purified our conscience?²

See?

Although it makes sense (and it's technically correct) to say that it was the blood of Christ's *human nature* that purifies us, the Bible makes plain that it is the blood of the whole Person of *Christ* that purifies us. After all, the human nature alone cannot do anything without the Person of Christ!

Here's another example: You see, 1 Pt 3:18 does not tell us that the *human nature* of Christ suffered for our sins; yes, it does not tell us that Christ the *Man* suffered for our sins – although that would have been technically correct! No, it says, *Christ* suffered for our sins...!³

See, the Bible understands that if it's Christ's human nature (if it's Christ the *man*) that suffered and died for our sins, then it is Christ – yes, Him as whole person – who suffered and died!

But here is something we should never forget...

You see, whilst it is true that the whole Person of Christ has saved us, we must not never forget that the two natures within Christ's one Person may be *distinguished* from one another, but they should never be totally *separated* from one another – neither should they be *blended/mixed*.

After all, when Heb 9 tells us that *blood* was needed to save us, this blood is indeed Christ's (the Person's) blood. However, God cannot bleed. So, this blood must have come from Christ's *human nature*. Yes, it's for the *shedding of blood* and for *dying* that the Son of God had to clothe Himself with human body & soul!

At the same time, we need to understand that when our Lord bled and died, it was not as if only a loose-standing (separate) human compartment suffered. No, Christ as Person suffered!

So, we need to remember the unity between our Lord's human nature and His Person, and the unity between His divine nature and His Person!

I say we need to remember this. I'm not saying we can fully understand this, for how could we!?

I mean, Christ's two natures being held in one Person – that's mind-bending and very unique; in fact, so unique that there's nothing else in all creation by which we could try to illustrate this intricate composition!

So far re Point 1: Christ's whole Person is Involved in Saving Us.

Here's point 2...

² Heb 9:14 “...*how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.*”

³ 1 Pt 3:18 *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit...*

How Two Natures Relate to One Person

Here is something important...

You see, what is true of the *human nature* of our Lord Jesus, is also true of His Person.

Similarly, what is true of the *divine nature* of our Lord, is also true of His Person.

(Theologians refer to this as the communications of attributes).⁴

But what is true of Christ's human nature is not true of His divine nature, and what is true of His divine nature is not true of His human nature!

Let's explain...

We said that what's true of Christ's human nature is also true of His Person. For example, when Christ's *human nature* bled and died on the cross, it's valid to say that *Christ* (the Person) died on the cross!⁵

Well, the same is true regarding Christ's divine nature and His Person. For example, when we say that Christ (the Person) is omniscient (all-knowing), we mean His *divine nature* is omniscient.

But here is what we cannot say: We cannot say that what is true of His *one nature* is also true of His *other nature*. For example, it is true that Christ's *divine nature* existed from all eternity, but it would be wrong to say that His *human nature* existed from all eternity!

And what about the characteristics of His human nature? Are they also true of His divine nature?

No! For example, Our Lord's human nature died on the cross, but it would be a great/grave error to say that Christ's divine nature died on the cross!

See? This is very important, because this will help you & me when we have to defend our faith before people of other faiths who tell us that Christ could not have been God because God can never die!

So, here we can help them (and ourselves) by saying to them (that) we agree that God cannot die, but that *that which* died on the cross was not Christ's divine nature; no, it was his human nature, for what is true of His one nature is not true of His other nature!

And where this doctrine also helps us, is with the selecting of hymns for our hymnbook, so that we don't pick songs whose words say that *God* died on the cross!

Someone might ask, "But where, then, was Christ's divine nature when His human body died and was dead in the grave?" And the answer is: Christ's divine nature never left His human nature even though His human *body* was dead and His human *soul* was with the Father in heaven! After all, Christ's human nature and His divine nature could never separate (Yes, they could/can be *distinguished*, but never *separated*). Besides, we must understand that Christ's divine nature has no spatial limitations. Thus, His divine nature is able to be with His human nature – even with His dead human body – and simultaneously everywhere else!

Well, here's a quick recap of Point 2...

What is true of the *human nature* of our Lord Jesus, is also true of His *Person*. Similarly, what is true of the *divine nature* of our Lord, is also true of His *Person*. But what is true of Christ's *human nature* is not true of His *divine nature*, and what is true of His *divine nature* is not true of His *human nature*!

So far re how the two natures of Christ relate to His one Person and to one another.

Here is the last point...

⁴ Or in Latin: "Communication idiomatum."

⁵ And, a few minutes ago under point 1, we have explained how Heb 9 and 1 Pt 3 make that connection between our Lord's human nature and His Person.

Don't Oversimplify Bible Language

My brother & sister, here's where things get tricky.

You see, we have just said that that what is true of Christ's one nature cannot be true of His other nature!

Yet, what do we see?

Well, we see that, sometimes (yes, only in a few cases), language which should only be used to describe Christ's *divine* nature, is used by the Bible to describe His *human* nature – and vice versa!

But we should not let this throw us, for what's happening in these few cases is not that the Bible has confused the two natures of Christ, but simply that the Bible is using simplified language in describing Christ and His two natures.

It's a bit like when people say, "New Zealand has won the rugby world cup." But, technically speaking, it's not *New Zealand* (yes, not each and every New Zealander) that has won the rugby world cup. It's just the *All Blacks* (yes, just the fifteen or so men who were on the field)!

Can someone now say that the news media have lied when they said that *New Zealand* has won the rugby world cup?

No, for everyone with common sense understands that this is just a way of speaking!

Well, this is what the Bible does in only a very few cases, e.g. in our NT passage (in Acts 20:28), where Paul tells the elders of the church of Ephesus that they should care for the church of *God* which *He* had bought with *His own blood*!⁶

Well, the nit-pecking person could look at this verse and say, "See?" "I told you that the Bible says *God* has shed His own *blood*!" "See?" "It means that you Christians say that *God* died on the cross!"⁷

Well, such a person will truly be keeping himself busy with only nit-pecking, for what he says is on a par with somebody who has heard "New Zealand has won the rugby world cup," and then says, "See, NZ is so bad at rugby it needed all 4.7 million New Zealanders to win the game for them!"

My brother & sister, see how ridiculous such nit-pecking would be – and all this, only because of simplified language! For, I mean, what's easier to say, "The *fifteen All Blacks on the field with their reserves* won the rugby world cup," or, "*New Zealand* won the rugby world cup"?

Of course, it's the latter!

Similarly, what's easier for Paul to say (or for Luke who put it to writing), "***Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with his own blood,***" or, "***Be shepherds of the church of God, which God bought with the blood of His own Son***"?

Of course, it's the first one!

Well, here's another example – this time, where John (in Jn 3:13) refers to the Son of *Man* who came down from heaven!

⁶ Eph 20:28 ***Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.***

⁷ Such a nit-pecking person will probably also do the same with 1 Jn 3:16 in which Scripture (looking at the wider context of 1 Jn 3) even refers to God dying, "***By this we know love, that he*** (the Greek actually says *ekeinos* [ἐκεῖνος] "that one") ***laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers***" (ESV – Emphasis mine)

You see, again, some nit-pecking person could take this verse and say, “See?” “The Bible is saying that the Son of *Man* – not the Son of *God* – came from heaven!” “See?” “I told you that the Bible is mixing up Jesus human and divine natures!”

Well, again, this would be nit-pecking, and also a failure to understand that, when used of Jesus Christ, the Name “Son of *Man*” actually means the same as the “Son of *God*!” Yes, Christ’s title “Son of *Man*” relates to Daniel 7:13⁸ in which Daniel describes the first and second comings of Messiah who would be the divine Son of *Man* – yes, the eternal, most glorious King⁹ and Judge of heaven and earth!¹⁰

My brother & sister, what have learned from this sermon?

Well, that regardless of which *nature* of Christ was at work in a specific stage of our salvation, the Bible ascribes that saving work to His *Person* – to Christ!

We’ve also seen that what’s true of each nature is true of the *Person* of Christ, but that what’s true of one *nature* is not true of the other *nature*!

Lastly, we have seen that, in a very few cases, the Bible seemingly ascribes the characteristics of Christ’s one nature to His other nature. But in these instances, you & I are not allowed to oversimplify the Bible’s language.

Can we now see why the WCF 8.7 says, “*In the work of mediation, Christ acts according to both natures*”?

Each nature does what is proper to itself; yet, by reason of the unity of his person, that which is proper to one nature is in Scripture sometimes attributed to the person designated by the other nature.”

Well, I pray that God will use what we have learned to defend and protect His church from false religions and heresies!

AMEN (2,266 words excluding footnotes)

⁸ Dan 7:13 “*In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence*” (Emphasis mine).

⁹ Cf. Dan 7:14 *He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*

¹⁰ Cf. Dan 7:9-10 “*As I looked, “thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.*”