



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 6.5.1 – The Doctrine of Jesus, Son of God, Messiah (Christology)

The Sharing of Attributes: *In the Person of Jesus Christ*

Jesus' divine nature does not change into His human nature. His human nature does not change into His divine nature. Both natures remain intact with all of their attributes and characteristics. But because "**the Word became flesh**" (John 1:14), each nature shares or becomes a participant in the attributes of the other nature. This is clear from the way the Scriptures speak about the natures and their attributes.

What are the attributes of the divine nature? What are the attributes of the human nature? One of our Lutheran confessions, the *Formula of Concord*, gives this summary: "*To be almighty, eternal, infinite, and present everywhere at the same time naturally, and to know all things, are essential characteristics of the divine nature, which will never in all eternity become essential characteristics of the human nature*" "*To be a bodily creature, to be flesh and blood, to be finite and circumscribed, to suffer and die, to ascend and descend, to move from one place to another, to suffer from hunger, thirst, cold, heat, and the like are characteristics of the human nature, which will never become characteristics of the divine nature*" (*Book of Concord*, Kolb-Wengert Edition p. 617).

For purposes of study, the Scripture passages that speak about this sharing of attributes have historically been divided into three classes:

1. Personal: the divine and human natures share attributes in the person of Jesus Christ. This type of sharing has given the Latin name *genus idiomaticum*.
2. Of Majesty: the attributes of Jesus' divine nature (His majesty) are given to Jesus' human nature. This type of sharing has been given the Latin name *genus majesticum*.
3. In Work: both the Jesus' divine and human natures participate in Jesus' work of salvation. This type of sharing has been given the Latin name *genus apotelesmaticum*.

In the first class, the sharing of attributes in the person of Jesus, there are six different ways in which Scripture speaks of the various attributes of the two natures:

1. The subject is the person of Christ and the predicate is the divine nature, that is, the person of Christ is described as having divine attributes. These verses show that the person of Jesus Christ has a divine nature with divine attributes. For example:
 - **Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God.** (Romans 9:5).
 - **Christ...is...mighty in you... He lives by the power of God.** (2 Corinthians 13:3-4)
 - **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.** (Hebrews 13:8)
2. The subject is the person of Christ and the predicate is the human nature, that is, the person of Christ is described as having human attributes. These verses show that the person of Jesus Christ has a human nature with human attributes. For example:
 - **From whom (the Israelites), according to the flesh, Christ came.** (Romans 9:5)
 - **Christ... was crucified in weakness.** (2 Corinthians 13:3-4)
 - **Christ also suffered for us.** (1 Peter 2:21)
 - **Christ... Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree** (1 Peter 2:21, 24)

3. The subject is the divine nature and the predicate is the human nature, that is, the divine nature is described as having human attributes. These verses show that Jesus' divine nature shares in the attributes of Jesus' human nature. For example:
 - **You... killed the Prince of life** (Acts 3:14-15).
 - **Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.** (Acts 20:28)
 - **Had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.** (1 Corinthians 2:8)
 - **I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.** (Galatians 2:20)
4. The subject is the divine nature and the predicate is the divine nature, that is, the divine nature is described as having divine attributes. These verses show that Jesus' divine nature did not change in the incarnation, but still has all the same divine attributes. For example:
 - **The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.** (John 1:18)
 - **Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.** (John 8:36).
5. The subject is the human nature and the predicate is the divine nature, that is, the human nature is described as having divine attributes. These verses show that Jesus' human nature shares in the attributes of Jesus' divine nature. For example:
 - **What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?** (John 6:62)
 - **Then the Jews said to Him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM'** (John 8:57-58)
 - **The second Man is the Lord from heaven.** (1 Corinthians 15:47).
6. The subject is the human nature and the predicate is the human nature, that is the human nature is described as having human attributes. These verses show that Jesus' human nature did not change in the incarnation, but still has all the same human attributes. For example:
 - **Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.** (Matthew 17:12).
 - **And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.** (Mark 8:31)

God as God cannot suffer or be crucified or die. Yet when God became human in the person of Jesus Christ, He did indeed suffer; He was crucified; He died. Acts 3:15 says that the Prince of life was killed, and so the divine nature shares in the action of being killed in the person of Jesus. Without the personal union of God and man in the person of Jesus Christ this would be impossible.

Ulrich Zwingli was a church leader in Switzerland at the time of Martin Luther. His theory was that when the Bible says that the Prince of life was killed, the divine subject (the Prince of life) needs to be changed into a human subject, such as Son of David, so that the human predicate (attribute) was ascribed to the human subject. But as we have seen, that is not the way the Bible presents this truth. Martin Luther maintained that if the divine nature did not share in Jesus' death, Jesus' death would have no value for us. No mere man can redeem us. We need a Savior who is both God and man. We need a Savior in which both natures share in His suffering and death.

Reformed teachers tend to follow in Zwingli's footsteps. They are in danger of splitting the one person of Christ into two persons: the human person and the divine person. Because they do not understand how the two natures of Jesus share attributes, they teach that Jesus cannot give us His body and blood in the Lord's Supper, because Jesus' human nature is in heaven and not on earth. They teach instead that Christ is present *spiritually*, as God, in the Lord's Supper, but not as man. This, in effect, separates the two natures into two separate entities: the bodily Christ in heaven and the spiritual Christ on earth.

Questions

1. List some of the characteristics of the divine nature.
2. List some of the characteristics of the human nature.
3. What are the six ways in which the Bible speaks of the relationship between the divine nature and the human nature?
4. Why is it so important to know that the Son of God gave Himself for you?
5. Since man as man cannot raise Himself from the dead, how could Jesus raise Himself from the dead?
6. Since God as God cannot suffer or die, how could Jesus suffer and die?
7. What was the theory of Ulrich Zwingli with regard to the two natures?
8. Why did Martin Luther object to the teaching of Zwingli?