

1. **Introduction:** Today our lesson is intended to answer questions recently asked about the nature of God and our understanding about God-incarnate, our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - God has not revealed everything. What He has revealed is ours to study and obey.
2. **Deuteronomy 29:29:** “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.
3. **The Beginning of Salvation - Ephesians 1:4:** *He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.*
 - The problem is that we are neither “holy” or “blameless.” (1.) Failing to be holy is an ontological issue (having to do with our state of being). Adam and Eve’s fall degraded our nature and inclined us to sin. Fixing the ontological problem requires a transformation that makes us a new creature.
 - (2.) We fail to be blameless because we break God’s moral law (resulting in a death penalty). Fixing this issue requires a way to obtain a pardon from the death penalty.
 - God sovereignly deals with both issues on our behalf. God planned salvation in “eternity,” but we are “in time.” How does salvation planned in eternity become real “in time?” By the person and work of the incarnate Son and the Holy Spirit.
 - The salvation work of the incarnate Son produced benefits for all who will believe.
 - When converted, the Holy Spirit “applies” Christ’s benefits individually to each believer.
 - Salvation is Trinitarian from beginning to end. It was planned by the Father, made possible by the Son, and applied by the Holy Spirit.
4. **God the Holy Trinity (WC):** There is one living and true God, a most pure Spirit, self-existing, self-sustaining, invisible, of one divine essence, immaterial, without body, parts, or passions, infinite and immutable (unchanging) in being and perfection.
 - God is incomprehensible (cannot be fully known) but not unknowable (what is revealed).
 - There are 3 subsistences (persons) within the one divine essence. The distinct persons are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are distinguished from one another, by their relationships to one another and by their external work, not by difference in being. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and Son. All are equal in power, glory, and eternity.
 - Unlike 3 human persons, the 3 divine persons do not exist alongside one another. They exist in eternal mutual indwelling, such that each person possesses the fullness of the divine essence
 - The divine essence is the basis for the attributes which are precisely the same for each of the 3 persons. Attributes belong to their essential, self-existent, sovereign, eternal being.
 - The divine essence of the Godhead, as well as the internal interactions between persons of the Godhead, are mostly hidden from us. We know what is revealed (Dt.29:29).
 - Three persons, one God, is not a contradiction. The law of non-contradiction says, “A” cannot be both “A” (what it is) and “non-A” (what it is not) at the same time in the same relationship. God is not 3 in the same way that He is one.

- God is one in essence, 3 in Person. Person means having a center of self-awareness, an “I” to the “You” of other persons. Persons may be material or immaterial. Each person in the Trinity is an immaterial thinking, willing, relational, active agent. See (Jn. 6:37,38;10:29; 17:2,11-12).
 - All 3 persons of the Trinity jointly participate in all work external to the Godhead, each in accordance with His distinct “properties” (Q. 9 WLC).
 - All 3 Persons have the same attributes, but they each have “properties” that belong to their specific Person. For example, the Father eternally begets the Son. The Father and Son send the Holy Spirit. Never different.
 - The Persons are distinguishable but inseparable, never one without the other two.
 - God’s external works include creation, sustaining creation, recreating fallen humans through regeneration and the transformation of sanctification.
 - The Father is the fountain and wellspring of all things. He originates all external activity and, in some activities, takes the lead (Jn. 6:44).
 - The Son, as mediator, embodies each plan doing whatever is necessary to make the Father’s plan possible. The Holy Spirit applies His power and efficacy (*i.e., ability to produce a desired result*) to produce the result intended.
 - The Trinity is one God, one divine essence, 3 distinct Persons. The persons mutually indwell one another. Their relationships make each distinct – Father, Son, Holy Spirit.
5. **Background for Understanding the Incarnation:** (Ref: Berkhof’s **Systematic Theology**, p. 321) Words often have multiple meanings. As used in the doctrine of incarnation, “nature” and “person” have precise meanings.
6. **Definition of a nature:** All things which exist have qualities, some of which are essential, some nonessential. The nature of a thing or person is all its essential qualities. For example, a 2-inch diameter iron pipe 3-feet long painted white has the essential qualities of the material iron plus length and hollowness. Specific dimensions, weight, and color are nonessential qualities. Change them and it remains an iron pipe.
- A “nature” signifies the complete set of essential qualities of a thing or a being, **that which makes it what it is**. For example, God is a living spirit. God’s nature includes all essential qualities of spirit and life.
 - The “nature” of the Trinity is the complete set of essential attributes and properties characterizing the divine essence and persons of the Godhead.
 - “Human nature” is the complete set of essential human attributes. **Human nature includes body, mind, will, and emotions.**
 - A human person has a human nature, but a human nature is not a person. This distinction between person and nature is essential to understanding the incarnation.
 - What is a human person? A human person is a human nature plus a source of “I.”
 - The “I” is the owner, possessor, and master of a being’s nature, the subject that lives, thinks, wills, and acts through that nature (Bavinck, Vol. 3, **Reformed Dogmatics**,306). The “I” can be thought of as something like a “mission control center.” A person’s “I”

directs the use of the attributes of their human nature. A human person is thus a human nature plus the source of their “I,” the source of their “mission control center.”

- Scripture identifies a person’s “spiritual heart” as their mission control center.
 - Here are some things Scripture says about the function of the spiritual heart.
7. ***Luke 6:45: The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.***
8. ***Proverbs 4:23: Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.***
- God’s nature (essence) is pure spirit, no material component whatsoever. Within the undivided divine essence, there exist three individual subsistences (Persons), each a center of consciousness with its own source of “I” or mission control center.
 - The one undivided divine essence is shared by each Person of the Trinity so that the attributes of each Person are the same.
 - Each Person regards Himself as “I” and the other two as “You.” Persons of the Trinity are distinguished from one another by “relationship” differences not difference in being.
9. ***Incarnate Christ, One Person, 2 Natures:*** In the incarnation, the divine Son united Himself with a human nature. The union of the divine Son with a human nature is essential for achieving Christ’s salvation work. No incarnation, then no substitutionary atonement, no salvation, and no Union with Christ.
- The divine Son, 2nd Person of the Trinity, retaining all attributes of His own divine nature, took to Himself (conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary) a human nature becoming incarnate as one person, Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man.
 - The Son retained His divine nature. He added a human nature including a human body. Did having both a divine and a human nature change the divine nature? No!
 - Though the two natures form one person, Jesus, there is no mixing, confusion, or combination of the two. His human nature is not made divine, nor the divine nature humanized. The divine essence of the Trinity is not changed in any manner. The two natures are parallel. Both are controlled by the Son’s divine “I” or “mission control center.” Jesus is one Person, God-Man,
 - Christ has and will forever continue to have a human nature including a human body. The Son’s divine essence (and person) were His from all eternity, eternally begotten by the Father. His human nature and body were acquired in time, derived from His mother.
 - The “nature/person” distinction is vital for understanding the incarnation. The Son took to Himself a “human nature” not a “human person.” It is a mystery how the eternal, omnipotent, infinite second person of the Trinity could add to Himself a finite, limited human nature and become one person in a human body.
 - He is and remains the Son, second Person of the Trinity, the divine person eternally begotten of the Father. He eternally possesses His divine nature and divine personhood (individual subsistence within the divine essence). Becoming incarnate, He is one person with both a divine and a human nature, each distinct and non- interacting with the other.

- What is the source of “I” (mission control center) for His human nature? Both natures of the incarnate Son are directed by the divine “I.” It is the same “I” that establishes His personhood as the second Person of the Trinity.
 - It is amazing but true that His human nature never existed as a human person. Christ has no human “mission control center,” no human “I.” His human nature from conception was controlled by His divine personal “I.”
 - Taking to Himself a human nature in no way diminished His divine being. Rather, a human nature, complete (but without sin) in every detail including body, was added to His divine Person. He could and did do things through both divine and human natures.
 - Anything done in either nature was done by the one person, Jesus Christ.
 - With respect to His human nature, He ascended to heaven and is no longer in the world (Jn. 1:28; 17:11; Acts 1:9-11). With respect to His omnipresent divine nature, Jesus continues to be everywhere present (Mt. 18:20; 28:20).
 - The one person Christ ascended to heaven but remains present with each of us. The presence of the risen Christ in heaven is mediated to us by the Holy Spirit.
 - In His human nature Jesus was at times weak and tired (Mt. 4:2; 8:24; Mk. 15:21; Jn. 4:6), but in His divine nature He was omnipotent, never weak or tired.
 - Once, when exhausted in His human nature, He slept in a boat while a storm raged. He woke from His human-nature sleep and, by His omnipotent divine nature, calmed wind and sea with a word (Mt. 8:26-27).
 - At all times in His incarnate state on earth (from conception to His death on the cross) His divine nature continued to uphold creation and to carry out the Father’s plan. But His human nature (including His human body) developed and grew from a baby to a man in the normal way, growing in stature and wisdom.
 - Jesus, the man from Nazareth, was and is the Christ, the God-man. He was not potentially God but was and is truly and fully God.
 - Jesus could learn things in His human nature, even though in His divine nature, He knew all things. He took to Himself a human nature which did not in any way disturb His divine attributes. On earth He lived in a human body.
 - Having both a human and a divine nature, Christ has both a human and a divine will. How does that work? We don’t know. We do know Jesus’ divine will and nature have always been in one accord with the Father and Spirit.
 - His divine “I” always controls His human nature, even now in His glorified state.
 - John says Jesus was willingly controlled by the Father.
10. **Jn. 5:19**, “*So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.’*”
11. **Jn. 12:49-50**, “*For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak.⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.*”
12. Reference: **Systematic Theology**, Wayne Grudem, InterVarsity Press, 1994 chapter 26.