

10-2017

How Does the Hypostatic Union Fit into the Incarnation?

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Recommended Citation

Willmington, Harold, "How Does the Hypostatic Union Fit into the Incarnation?" (2017). *The Second Person File*. 46.

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How does the hypostatic union fit into the incarnation?

It is a Greek word meaning “subsistence,” referring to Jesus’ divine and human natures. In essence it is a theological truth affirming that Jesus Christ, since His incarnation has been, is now, and ever shall be one hundred percent God, one hundred percent man, one hundred percent of the time!

- Note the following observations:

A. From Paul Enns:

The hypostatic union may be defined as “the second person, the preincarnate Christ came and took to Himself a human nature and remains forever undiminished Deity and true humanity united in one person forever.” When Christ came, a Person came not just a nature; He took on an additional nature, a human nature—He did not simply dwell in a human person. The result of the union of the two natures, is the theanthropic person (the God-Man). (*Moody Handbook of Theology*, Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1989, p. 227)

B. From Robert Lightner:

To deny either the undiminished deity or the perfect humanity of Christ is to put oneself outside the pale of orthodoxy. Equally as essential to orthodox theology is the belief that these two are inseparable and will remain eternally united in the person of Christ. The hypostatic union is the theological description of this and refers to the two hypostases, or natures, forming the one person of Christ.

Apart from this union Christ could not have been mediator between God and man. If he had only been man, his death could not have atoned for man’s sin. If he had been only God, he could not have died, since God cannot die. If he had not been man, he would not have had a genuine link with humanity and would not have had perfect sympathy with man. (*Evangelical Theology*, Kregel, Grand Rapids, MI, 1995, p. 81)

- Thus, to summarize the above:

A. At the incarnation Jesus added to His eternal God nature (having no beginning or end), a second everlasting human nature (having a beginning but no end).

B. These two natures were perfectly united, yet on occasion the one nature did things the other nature could not do.

- A classic example of this can be seen by an event recorded by Mark:

“On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, ‘Let us cross over to the other side.’ Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they

awoke Him and said to Him, 'Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?' Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace, be still!' And the wind ceased and there was a great calm" (Mark 4:35-39).

A. Here we see the weary human nature, "in the stern, asleep on a pillow." The divine nature however never is weary nor needs to be awakened:

"Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isa. 40:28-31).

B. Now we hear Him rebuking the ferocious wind and calming the raging waves by a simple command! No human being could ever do this!

- These two natures never disagreed, and both were one hundred percent controlled by the Person of Christ!
- The question is often asked, was Jesus, while on earth, omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient? The answer is two-fold – yes and no!

A. Yes!

1. He was omnipresent

"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:20).

2. He was omnipotent

a. He walked on water—

"Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away" (Mt. 14:22).

b. He raised the dead—

"Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth!' And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Loose him, and let him go'" (Jn. 11:43, 44).

c. He healed the multitudes—

"When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick" (Mt. 8:16).

3. He was omniscient

He knew the thoughts of men—

“Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men” (Jn. 2:23, 24). (See also Mt. 9:4; Lk. 6:8; Jn. 6:64.)

B. No!

1. He was not omnipresent—

“Then Jesus said to them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him’” (Jn. 11:14, 15).

2. He was not omnipotent—

“Then Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner’” (Jn. 5:19, NKJV).

3. He was not omniscient—

“Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is” (Mk. 13:33). (See also Lk. 8:45, 46, NKJV)

- So then, how do we reconcile these apparent opposite statements? As has been previously demonstrated these are not opposites at all. The “yes” omnis refer to Jesus’ divine nature, and the “no” omnis refer to His human nature.

- Here is a summary of all the above:

A. Christ’s eternal glory was not surrendered at the time of the incarnation, but rather was covered and contained by His fleshly body. The body of Christ was to the disciples what the veil of the tabernacle was to Old Testament Israel.

1. Both “veils” housed and protected the glory of God from within.

2. Both “veils” were broken at Calvary.

“And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me’” (Luke 22:19, NKJV).

“Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split” (Matt. 27:51, NKJV).

Satan tried unsuccessfully to imitate this inward splendor of Christ (2 Cor. 11:14).

B. Note the description of Jesus as offered by John the Apostle:

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14).

A case could be made here that, in all the universe, the strongest object ever created by God was the earthly body of Jesus! Ponder this amazing thought: for thirty-four years this vessel of clay actually contained and confined the resplendent glory of

Almighty God Himself, only allowing for one brief moment a tiny ray to escape, which temporarily blinded Peter, James, and John!

C. A clear event illustrating this truth is seen by the transfiguration of Jesus as recorded by three of the four gospel writers:

1. Matthew 17:1-8
2. Mark 9:1-7
3. Luke 9:28-35

D. From these passages we learn the following:

1. Jesus takes three of His disciples on a high mountain (probably Mt. Hermon) and was transfigured.
2. His face began to shine as the noon day sun.
3. His clothes became whiter than snow.
4. His disciples were temporarily blinded.
5. It should be observed that the light was from within, and not from some gigantic cosmic spotlight suddenly focusing down upon Jesus. His countenance was affected first, then His garments. This was the same glory that shone in both the Old Testament tabernacle (Exod. 40) and the temple (1 Kings 8). It would be withdrawn because of Israel's sin in the days of Ezekiel (Ezek. 10-11). Later it was revealed to the shepherds (Lk. 2:9), to the disciples (Acts 1:9), to Stephen (Acts 7:55), to Saul (Acts 9:3), and to John the apostle (Rev. 1:16). Finally, at Christ's second coming this glory will be revealed to the whole world.

"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mt. 24:30).

- One final thought: For those who still have difficulty understanding how one person (Jesus) could possess two natures (divine and human), consider the following:

All of us are born with one nature, the fallen human nature. However, all born-again individuals (Jn. 3:3, 6) now possess two natures, the fallen one and the new one.

A. Passages referring to our old nature:

"So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8).

"Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1).

B. Passages referring to our new nature:

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

“ . . . that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man . . .” (Eph. 3:16).

“ . . . and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24).

“ . . . and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him . . .” (Col. 3:10).

“ . . . as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby . . .” (1 Peter 2:2).

C. Passages referring to both:

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:1).

“I say then: walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16).

D. Passages telling us these two natures are constantly at war with each other, totally unlike the two natures of Jesus:

“ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be” (Rom. 8:5-7).

“For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish” (Gal. 5:17). See also Gal. 5:19-23.