

## The Meaning of the Hypostatic Union

Fully divine and fully human; “This model of the person of Jesus Christ, carved out at the Council of Chalcedon, drawing on writings of several influential church fathers and leaders and completely consistent with Scripture is known in Christian theology as the doctrine of the hypostatic union” (Olson, 227). Being a doctrine that is difficult to understand and accept, the hypostatic union faced heresy throughout early church history, thus eventually leading to the fourth gathering of the council of Christian bishops to define Jesus Christ (226).

The Chalcedonian Definition states that Jesus is “perfect both in deity and also in humanness...actually God and actually man, with a rational soul and a body” (226).

“Before time began he was begotten of the Father...for us and on behalf of our salvation, this selfsame one was born of Mary the virgin...we apprehend this one and only Christ...without confusing the two natures, without transmuting one nature into the other, without dividing them into two separate categories, without contrasting them according to area or function...both natures concur in one ‘person’ and in one hypostasis” (227).

Rather than discussing who Jesus is to us, the council focused on “what” Jesus is and how he came to be—namely identifying Jesus as the Logos (227). “Hypostasis” means “subsistence” or “entity” and “is the belief in a perfect union of two distinct but never separate natures—one human and one divine—in one integral, eternal divine person” (227). Believing and attempting to grasp an understanding of this is important because if Jesus were not both fully divine and fully human, salvation would be impossible (233; 236). “‘What God has not assumed [taken to himself in incarnation] is not saved’” (236). It stands to reason that, since salvation requires

believing and receiving that Jesus is the Son of God, paid the price for our sins by dying on the cross, and was resurrected and ascended into heaven, salvation may also require the belief of Christ's hypostasis—yet this is debatable.

There are six main “Christological heresies” that were popular during the centuries of the early church and “all have reappeared from time to time” throughout the rest of history (232). Docetism denies Christ's humanity, stating that Jesus only appeared to be human and was actually only spiritual (232). Some docetists believe that Christ is spiritual and entered the human body of a man named Jesus during his baptism in water, then left the body before it died on the cross (232). This can be refuted by the recapitulation of Christ—he lived as a human without sin, which is what humanity was meant to be (233). If Docetism was correct, then humanity is not saved after all (233). Adoptionists believe that Jesus Christ was simply a human adopted by God as His prophet and son at Jesus' water baptism (233). This essentially robs the gospel of its power because it reduces salvation to “following God as the man Jesus did”—which is no different than other religions (234). Arianism is the belief that Christ predates the birth of Jesus on earth, and “claims that he was God's first and greatest creature but not God or equal with God” (235). This is no different than what Jehovah's Witnesses believe. But, if Christ had no divine power to save through his recapitulation in his human body, then he is nothing and humanity—again—is not saved (236). Apollinarianists believe that Jesus Christ was God [the Logos] in a human body. However, being fully human—which is necessary to redeem humanity—requires a human soul; this refutes Apollinarianism because it essentially supports a divine soul in a human body (236). Nestorianism is the belief that Jesus Christ was the result of a “‘moral union’ of two persons like a perfect marriage” (237). This, however, is not incarnation in the least,

and denies Christ's divinity and true humanity (237). Eutychianism/Monophysitism is the "'belief in one nature'" (237). This would essentially make Jesus a "hybrid of humanity and divinity" (238).

This has hopefully been a complete source of understanding for Christ's hypostasis—his "natures." Perhaps this concept cannot ever be fully understood, for a God as great as ours cannot be fully understood, either—not from a human point of view. Perhaps the simplest explanation is that the Logos bridged the gap between humanity and God by being both God and human.

#### Resources

Olson, Roger E.. *The Mosaic of Christian Belief*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, InterVarsity Press, 2002.