

**O Thou Thro' Suffering Perfect Made***William Walsham How (1823–1897)*

O Thou thro' suffering perfect made,  
 On Whom the bitter cross was laid;  
 In hours of sickness, grief, and pain,  
 No sufferer turns to Thee in vain.

The halt, the maimed, the sick, the blind,  
 Sought not in vain Thy tendance kind;  
 Now in Thy poor Thyself we see,  
 And minister through them to Thee.

O loving Saviour, Thou canst cure  
 The pains and woes Thou didst endure;  
 For all who need, Physician great,  
 Thy healing balm we supplicate.

But, oh, far more, let each keen pain  
 And hour of woe be heavenly gain,  
 Each stroke of Thy chastising rod  
 Bring back the wanderer nearer God.

Oh, heal the bruised heart within!  
 Oh, save our souls all sick with sin!  
 Give life and health in bounteous store,  
 That we may praise Thee evermore!

**ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ***In the Nick of Time***Tried With Fire: Like Jesus, Part Two***Kevin T. Bauder*

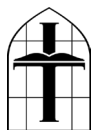
Last week we explored the concept of Jesus Christ as the God-man. We learned that He is one person in two natures. Each nature is complete, possessing all the essential properties of that nature. The properties of each nature communicate to the person but not to the other nature. Consequently, paradoxical statements may be applied to the person in view of the two natures. The babe in the manger was omnipotent according to His divine nature but weak according to His human nature. He was omniscient according to His divine nature but able to learn according to His human nature. He was omnipresent according to His divine nature but spatially localized according to His human nature.

Most puzzling of all, we saw that the person can be designated by the names of one nature while acting according to the properties of the other. Hebrews 13:8 states that Jesus (His human name) is immutable (a divine property). Matthew 1:23 names Him *Immanuel* (*God with us*, a divine name) while speaking of His gestation and birth (human processes). In Acts 20:28, Paul, referring to Christ, says that God (a divine name) purchased the church with His own blood (a human property).

If pressed, we will want to limit and qualify these descriptions. We are eager to avoid misunderstandings, such as the conclusion that the divine nature could be tempted or that the human nature is eternal. We know that if we go an inch too far in our affirmations, we shall precipitate ourselves into heresy. The problem is that if we stop an inch short we shall also plunge into heresy. What we affirm with clarifications and qualifications we must never deny.

Beginning with His incarnation, the acts of Jesus Christ were all done by the one person. Neither His divine nature nor His human nature ever acted separately from His person. Everything He did must be ascribed to His person, which is both divine and human. Whatever was done according to the human nature was nevertheless done by the divine person, and vice versa.

This joining of two natures in one person is called the *hypostatic union*. On the scale of doctrinal importance, the hypostatic union stands right at the



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top. It is essential to the gospel and to the Christian faith. To deny it is to deny Christianity itself. It is a fundamental of the faith.

Like other fundamentals, the hypostatic union can function as a theological paradigm. In other words, we can use it to discern what answers we should give when asked unanticipated questions. In this case, two examples will illustrate the kind of applications we might make.

The first involves a controversy over an ancient heresy called *Nestorianism*. The Nestorians became concerned about a cute devotional phrase that was coming into vogue. People were beginning to refer to Mary as *Mother of God*. The Nestorians objected that Mary was the mother only of the human nature of Christ, suggesting that the divine nature simply passed through her. The result of this move, however, was to divide the person of Christ and to view each nature as a distinct person. Jesus Christ was no longer one person but a divine person and a distinct human person.

The correct perspective is that Mary was the mother, not simply of the human nature but of the person of Jesus *according to His human nature*. Yet the person is also a divine person who can be designated by divine names. To say that Mary was the mother of the person is to say that Mary was indeed the mother of God. In fact, Matthew 1:23 comes close to saying just that when it affirms that the Son, conceived and born of the virgin, would be named *God with us*.

Can the assertion that *Mary is the mother of God* be misunderstood? Certainly! Does it mean that Mary herself is somehow divine? Of course not! Should we clarify and qualify this affirmation? Absolutely! What we must not do, however, is to *deny* it.

We must take a similar tack with the question, “Who suffered for our sins? Was it God or was it a human?” To frame the question in that way creates a false dichotomy—one that runs contrary to everything we have seen about the one person and two natures of Christ.

A nature did not suffer for our sins. A nature did not die on the cross. A person did. The Lord Jesus Christ did.

Granted, the Lord Jesus suffered and died *according to His human nature*. Deity cannot suffer. Deity cannot die. Nevertheless, the person who suffered and died was the God-man. Even though He suffered and died according to His human nature, He did not divest His person of deity while suffering and dying.

As we have seen, the epithets of one nature can be applied to the person, even while the person is acting according to the other nature. The Jesus who suffered and died according to His human nature is the same Jesus who is

God. Consequently, it is correct to say that God suffered for our sins and died on the cross.

Can that assertion be misunderstood? Certainly! Does it mean that Christ’s divine nature experienced mortality? Of course not! Should we clarify and qualify this affirmation? Absolutely! What we must not do, however, is to deny it. No amount of clarification can redeem a denial.

In this case, the fact that God suffered for our sins and died on the cross is very important. The divine *person* of Christ (not the divine *nature*) has experienced suffering and death. This experience could take place because of the hypostatic union. But the hypostatic union has never been dissolved, and it never will be. The Christ who is presently seated on His Father’s right hand is the same divine-human person who “learned...obedience by the things which he suffered” (Heb 5:8). Only in this way could He become the “author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him” (Heb 5:9).

Furthermore, the fact that Christ has experienced weakness and suffering is critical to His high priesthood. Like the Old Testament high priests, He can have compassion on the ignorant and wayward because He Himself has worn weakness (Heb 5:2). While He never sinned, He understands how and why we do, and He understands this because He had to offer up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears (Heb 5:7). He did these things *according to* His human nature, but He did them *as* the God-man.

A divine person understands our hurts because He has borne hurt. A divine person understands our temptations because He has endured temptation. The hypostatic union gives us a merciful and faithful high priest who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He invites us to come boldly to the throne of grace, and He promises mercy and grace to help in our time of need (Heb 4:14-16).

How is the hypostatic union possible? That is what the incarnation is for. That is what Christmas is about. God became one of us, pain and all.



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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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