

The Doctrine of the Trinity

Is the Son Inferior?

A Biblical Look at the Trinity

TOM HICKS, PhD

1



Is the Son of God inferior to God? The answer to this question, after the incarnation, is both “yes and no.” The Son of God is indeed inferior to God, according to His assumed human nature, but He is not inferior to God, according to His divine nature. To understand this answer, it is necessary to understand that the incarnate Son of God has two natures, a true divine nature and a true human nature, united in the one person of the Son of God. At the incarnation, the eternal Son of God took to Himself a true human nature. In theology, this union of Christ’s two natures in one person is called the “hypostatic union” which refers to a “personal union” of true God and true man.

THE HYPOSTATIC UNION

Consider the hypostatic union in a bit more detail. The term “hypostatic” is from a Greek word, *hupostasis*, or person, and refers to the manner in which a rational nature subsists. The term “person,” according to Boethius, refers to “an individual substance of a rational nature.”¹ Others have defined it as “subsistence endowed with reason.”² “In general, ‘person,’ is defined as a substance, or individual nature, endowed with intelligence,

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, q. 29, a. 1.

² William Den Boer and Reimer A. Faber, eds., *Synopsis of a Purer Theology*, vol. 1 (Davenant: China, 2023), 70.

The Doctrine of the Trinity

subsisting by itself, really and truly distinguished from others by its own incommunicable property.”³

To understand the hypostatic union, it is necessary to reflect on the terms “nature” and “person.” The difference between a rational nature and a person is that a person refers to the particular way in which a rational nature acts. Rational natures do not act. Only persons act. Or to put it differently, rational natures subsist as particular persons, which act distinctively within and by those natures.

Consider three examples of rational natures that subsist as persons: God, angels, and human beings. God’s being is rational, and His nature exists in three ways, persons, or subsistences: the Father is neither begotten nor proceeding, the Son is eternally begotten from the Father, and the Spirit is eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son. Angels also have a rational nature, and each individual angel subsists as a particular person, or way of being and acting as an angel. Each human being also has a rational nature, and each individual human being exists as a particular person, or way of acting as a human.

This brings us to the Lord Jesus Christ. At the incarnation, the eternal person of the Son of God assumed a human nature. The eternal Son of God is nothing other than the very being of God subsisting personally, and thus at the incarnation, the whole divine essence, subsisting in the manner of the Son, joined Himself to a human nature. The Bible speaks of the incarnation of the Son of God in various ways. It says “the Word became flesh” ([Jn 1:14](#)), “came in the flesh” ([1 Jn 4:2-3](#)), “took the form of a servant” ([Phil 2:7](#)), was made a “partaker of flesh and blood” ([Heb 2:14](#)), and was “manifested in the flesh” ([1 Tim 3:16](#)).

The Son of God is indeed inferior to God, according to His assumed human nature, but He is not inferior to God, according to His divine nature.

But how are the divine and human natures united in Christ? What sort of union is it? It is not an essential union, in which the two essences are blended together. It is not a covenantal union, such that the two natures simply agree together. It is not a natural union as in the union of the human body and the soul. It is not an external union, like the union of God with the angel of the Lord, or of angels to their bodily manifestations. Rather it is a true personal union.

³ Ibid., 71.

The Doctrine of the Trinity

But what is meant by personal union? The great Reformed theologian, Francis Turretin helpfully describes the personal union of Christ's two natures. He said that God the Son (the divine nature subsisting) assumed to Himself a human nature, which does not subsist in the manner of a human person. It is crucial to grasp that the human nature of Christ is not a human person and has no personal subsistence of its own. If the human nature subsisted, it would be a human person, not a divine person. If it is claimed that the human nature subsisted as the Son of God, then the human nature would subsist as God, which is impossible because the finite cannot grasp or contain the infinite. Rather, Christ's human nature, a true body and a reasonable soul, which did not subsist personally, was assumed into the person of the Word, or the Son, and was so joined to Him that the human nature became "substantial with the Logos."⁴

Turretin goes on to explain the way this personal union happens. He says that the union of the two natures is by a "personal sustenance," activity, or operation, of the Son of God within and by the human nature, such that Christ's human nature really is one of the two natures of the Son of God.⁵ Put differently, the action of God the Son within, throughout, and by His rational human nature is nothing other than the very person of God the Son, according to His human nature. Herman Bavinck, quoting Thomas, writes, "The human nature in Christ must be considered as though it were a kind of organ of the divine nature."⁶ The Triune God so acts upon a human nature that the resulting action, or personal operation, within, throughout, and by that nature is that of the Son of God.

THE INCARNATE SON

The hypostatic union means that after the incarnation and for all eternity afterwards, the eternal Son of God really has two natures, a divine nature and a human nature, acting according to both natures at the same time. It means that when Mary conceived Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, she really carried God the Son in her womb. In [Luke 1:31-32](#), the angel Gabriel said to Mary, "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." Therefore, Mary is rightly called "Theotokos," the God-bearer.

The incarnation further means that when Christ died on the cross for our sins, the Son of God Himself really died for our sins, according to His human nature. The divine nature cannot die. But God the Son can die, according to His human nature by virtue of the

⁴ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 2 (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1994), 312.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3 (Baker: Grand Rapids, 2006), 307; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 3, q. 4, a. 2, ad. 2.

The Doctrine of the Trinity

hypostatic union. [1 Corinthians 15:3](#) says, “Christ died for our sins.” Without the hypostatic union, all we would be able to say is that a human nature died for us. But a human nature in itself cannot possibly atone for our sins. We must be able to say that the eternal Son of God Himself died for our sins, according to His human nature, and He did so by virtue of the hypostatic union.

4

But while it is true that the Son of God truly assumed a human nature into His person, it is also true that He continued to be God, and to act according to His divine nature. Thus, while the Son of God came down from heaven, and was born of a virgin, He did so in such a way that He never left heaven ([In 3:13](#)). The Son, according to His divine nature, remained in heaven and fully present in every place, even when He became flesh and dwelt among us. Similarly, though the Son of God ascended into heaven, He did so in such a way that He never left earth ([Matt 28:20](#)). Though the Son of God, according to His human nature, went back into heaven, His divine nature is present with us forever.

THE SON AS NOT INFERIOR TO GOD

The Bible speaks in ways that must be understood in terms of what has been called “partitive exegesis.” The Second London Confession 8.7 says, “Christ, in the work of mediation, acts according to both natures, by each nature doing that which is proper to itself; yet by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture, attributed to the person denominated by the other nature.” Thus, sometimes, the Bible speaks of Christ and His actions in terms of His divine nature, and sometimes it speaks of Christ and His actions according to His human nature. Other times, it speaks of the human nature in terms of the divine nature and the divine nature in terms of the human nature ([In 3:3](#); [Acts 20:28](#)). This is appropriate because of the real personal union of the two natures.

We must be able to say that the eternal Son of God Himself died for our sins, according to His human nature, and He did so by virtue of the hypostatic union.

Many passages of Scripture teach that Christ, the Son of God, is not inferior to God, but is in fact God Himself. Scripture says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” ([In 1:1](#)); He declares, “I and the Father are one” ([In 10:30](#)), which does not mean that they are the same person, but that they share the same essence. [Hebrews 1:8](#) says, “of the Son he says, Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;” and after the resurrection, “Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ([In](#)

The Doctrine of the Trinity

[10:28](#)); ([Heb 1:8](#)); He is declared to be the “King of kings and Lord of lords” ([Rev 19:16](#)). The Bible teaches that Christ created everything: “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” ([Jn 1:3](#)); He is present everywhere: “where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” ([Matt 18:20](#)); He is all powerful: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” ([Matt 28:18](#)). He does not change: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” ([Heb 13:8](#)); He forgives sin: “Your sins are forgiven” ([Lk 7:48](#)).

5

None of these attributes belong to the Son’s human nature, but only to the Son, according to His divine nature. Therefore, the Son of God, according to his divine nature is equal to God. But that is not the whole story.

THE SON AS INFERIOR TO GOD

The Bible teaches that the Son of God, according to His human nature, is in fact inferior to God. And that must be the case, since how could the Son of God identify with us, substitute for us, or represent us, unless He assumes a human nature, which is inferior to God? The ancient creeds recognize this fact. The Athanasian Creed declares that the incarnate Son is “Perfect God; and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and *inferior* to the Father as touching his Manhood. Who although he is God and Man; yet he is not two, but one Christ” (emphasis added). Therefore, the incarnate Son stands in a twofold natural relation to God the Father. With respect to His divine nature, He is equal to the Father, but with respect to His human nature, He is inferior to the Father.

The Bible plainly teaches that the Son, according to His human nature, is inferior to God. He changed and grew: “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man” ([Lk 2:52](#)); He experienced hunger: “He was hungry” ([Matt 4:2](#)); He experienced thirst: “I thirst” ([Jn 19:28](#)); He became tired: “Jesus wearied” ([Jn 4:6](#)); He was tempted: “He Himself suffered when tempted” ([Heb 2:18](#)); He was weak: “He was crucified in weakness” ([2 Cor 13:4](#)); He died: “He breathed His last” ([Lk 23:46](#)). None of these things can be true of the divine nature. They can only be true of Christ’s human nature, which is inferior to the divine.

One text that shows the inferiority of the Son of God, according to His human nature is [2 Corinthians 8:9](#), which says, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” The Son of God, prior to the incarnation, was rich only, but at the incarnation, He became poor, according to His human nature. Yet it is important for us to understand that He only became poor (according to His human nature) in such a way

The Doctrine of the Trinity

that He remained rich (according to His divine nature). The only way we can become rich through Christ's poverty is if He also remains rich! Thus, the Son of God, according to His human nature is inferior to God the Father, but He is equal to God the Father, according to His divine nature.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION



To summarize, Jesus Christ is true God and true man, united in the one person of the eternal Son of God. Therefore, He is equal to God the Father, according to His divine nature, but inferior to God the Father, according to His human nature. This means that the incarnate Son of God is simultaneously weak and all powerful, ignorant and all knowing, located in space and fully present everywhere, dependent and independent, creature and Creator, limited and infinite, temporal and timelessly eternal, changing and unchangeable, subject and sovereign, visible and invisible, and so forth.

This is absolutely necessary for our salvation. If Christ were less than God, He could not save us. If He were more than man, He could not be our substitute. JC Ryle puts it well:

I find a deep mine of comfort in this thought, that Jesus is perfect Man no less than perfect God. He in whom I am told by Scripture to trust is not only a great High Priest, but a feeling High Priest. He is not only a powerful Savior, but a sympathizing Savior. He is not only the Son of God, mighty to save, but the Son of Man, able to feel....

Had my Savior been God only, I might perhaps have trusted Him, but I never could have come near to Him without fear. Had my Savior been Man only, I might have loved Him, but I never could have felt sure that he was able to take away my sins. But, blessed be God, my Savior is God as well as Man, Man as well as God – God, and so able to deliver me – Man, and so able to feel with me.⁷

Tom Hicks serves as the Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church of Clinton, LA. He's married to Joy, and they have four children: Sophie, Karlie, Rebekah, and David. He received his MDiv and PhD degrees from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary with a major in Church History, emphasis on Baptists, and with a minor in Systematic Theology. Tom is the author of *The Doctrine of Justification in the Theologies of Richard Baxter and Benjamin Keach* (PhD diss, SBTS). He serves on the board of directors for Covenant

⁷ JC Ryle, *Holiness* (Charles Nolan: Moscow, 2001), 238-239.

The Doctrine of the Trinity

Baptist Theological Seminary and is an adjunct professor of historical theology for the Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies.

© Founders Ministries, March 17, 2025. Retrieved September 20, 2026.

<https://founders.org/articles/is-the-son-inferior-a-biblical-look-at-the-trinity/>



NOTE: This post is in compliance with the Fair Use clause of the US Copyright Act of 1976 (17 U.S. Code § 107). The US Supreme Court has issued several major decisions clarifying and reaffirming the fair use doctrine since the 1980s, most recently in the 2021 decision *Google LLC v. Oracle America, Inc.*