

The Hypostatic Union: Debate Cheat Sheet

What Is It?

Council of Chalcedon (451 AD): Christ has two natures (divine + human) united in one person (hypostasis) — "inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably."

Key terms (all Greek philosophy, NOT biblical): *Hypostasis* (concrete subsistence), *Ousia* (substance/essence), *Physis* (nature), *Homoousios* (same substance — coined by Gnostics), *Communicatio idiomatum* (properties of either nature attributed to one person). **NONE of these terms appear in the Bible.**

6 Logical Problems

1. The Coherence Problem

One person cannot be simultaneously omniscient & ignorant (Mk 13:32), omnipotent & weak, immortal & mortal, infinite & finite. "He knew it according to His divine nature but not His human nature" is incoherent — **persons** know things, not natures.
John Hick: "Logically incoherent, hence meaningless."

2. The Two-Minds Problem

Thomas V. Morris's fix: Christ has a divine mind + human mind. **Problem:** Two separate centers of consciousness = two persons = Nestorianism (the very heresy Chalcedon condemned). Which "I" speaks in "I don't know the day or hour"?

3. Communicatio Idiomatum Failures

If "God died on the cross" works, then so does "God was ignorant" and "God was tempted by Satan." Defenders apply the rule selectively. **Lutherans & Reformed can't agree** how it works after 500 years — proving the doctrine is incoherent even among its defenders.

4. The Kenosis Dilemma

Phil 2:7 — Christ "emptied himself." **If He gave up divine attributes** → not fully God (heresy). **If He kept them** → His human experiences were theatrical, not real (Docetism). **If He "chose not to use" them** → still fundamentally different from us; suffering diminished.

5. Impassibility vs. Suffering

God is impassible (can't suffer) + Jesus is God + Jesus suffered = pick two. If God suffered → abandon classical theism. If Jesus didn't really suffer → Docetism. If Jesus isn't God → Arianism.

6. Anhypostasia Problem

Christ's human nature has no independent personhood. **But what IS a human nature without a person?** An abstraction, not a real human being. If it's abstract properties worn by a divine person = sophisticated Docetism.

Historical Red Flags

7 councils over 350 years trying to "fix" Christology — each solution spawned new heresies requiring ANOTHER council.

- **Nicaea (325):** Constantine (unbaptized) forced *homoousios*; dissenters exiled
- **Ephesus (431):** Cyril convened early before opposition arrived; **bribed officials**
- **Chalcedon (451):** Emperor Marcian controlled proceedings; **threatened to relocate** council to force compliance
- **Constantinople II (553):** Justinian **imprisoned Pope Vigilius** to force agreement
- **Oriental Orthodox still reject Chalcedon today** — 1,500-year schism

Harnack: "The dogma of the church is a work of the Greek spirit on the soil of the gospel."

Pre-Nicene Subordinationism Was Universal

R.P.C. Hanson: "Until Athanasius began writing, every single theologian had postulated some form of Subordinationism."
Justin Martyr: Christ held "in the second place."
Origen: "The Son, being less than the Father."
Irenaeus: No difficulty considering Christ "inferior to the Father."
Tertullian: "Who will deny that God is a body?"

Biblical Counter-Evidence

Scripture	What It Shows
John 17:21-22	Father-Son unity = same kind as believer unity (purpose, NOT substance)
Acts 7:55-56	Stephen sees TWO separate beings — God + Jesus at His right hand

Matt 3:16-17	Three separate manifestations simultaneously at baptism
John 14:28	"My Father is greater than I " — implies distinction + subordination
Mark 13:32	"Neither the Son" knows the hour — genuine ignorance, not role-play
John 20:17	"My God and your God" — Jesus calls the Father "my God"
Matt 26:39	"Not as I will, but as thou wilt" — two separate wills
Luke 2:52	Jesus "increased in wisdom" — genuine growth

The Bible NEVER says "two natures in one person." The entire framework is extrabiblical Greek philosophy.

The LDS Alternative

Three separate divine beings, united in purpose, power, and glory. No impossible philosophical gymnastics required.

Why It Works

- **No ontological gap:** God and humans are same species at different stages — no "hypostatic union" needed to bridge incompatible natures
- **One nature, not two:** "LDS Christology bypasses traditional debates about how one person could have two complete natures" (BYU RSC)
- **Kenosis works:** Christ genuinely emptied himself, grew "grace for grace" (D&C 93:12-14) — real growth, real suffering, not theatrical
- **First Vision:** Two separate Personages — empirical witness, not philosophical theory
- **D&C 130:22:** "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also"

Non-LDS Scholars Who Agree

Timothy Bartel (Oxford): Three distinct divine individuals = "only logically tenable account."
Cornelius Plantinga (Reformed): Social Trinitarianism is natural biblical reading.
Stephen H. Webb: Mormon theology = "counterfactual post-Nicene development of pre-Nicene theology."

Theosis: Church Fathers Agree

Irenaeus: "He became what we are, that He might bring us to be what He is Himself."
Clement: "The Word became man, that man may become God."
Athanasius: "He became man that we might become God."
2 Pet 1:4: "Partakers of the divine nature." **Rom 8:17:** "Joint-heirs with Christ."

Quick-Fire Responses

"The hypostatic union is biblical."

The phrase never appears in Scripture. Neither does "two natures," *homoousios*, or *communicatio idiomatum*. The entire vocabulary is borrowed from Greek philosophy. John 17:21-22 shows the Father-Son unity is the same kind believers can have — purpose, not substance.

"It's a mystery — you're too simple to understand."

Calling it a "mystery" is admitting it can't be rationally defended. The LDS view is straightforward: separate beings, united in purpose. Biblical. Logical. No mystery needed.

"If Jesus isn't fully God (Chalcedonian), He can't save us."

LDS affirm Jesus IS fully God — divine, the Creator, the Redeemer. We reject the Greek philosophical framework, not His divinity. His saving power comes from His identity and Atonement, not from a metaphysical theory.

"The early Church unanimously taught this."

False. EVERY pre-Nicene Father was subordinationist (Hanson). The hypostatic union wasn't formulated until 451 AD. Oriental Orthodox reject it to this day.

"The councils were guided by the Holy Spirit."

Convened by emperors, enforced by exile, corrupted by bribes (Cyril at Ephesus), achieved by imprisoning the Pope (Justinian, 553). Why did the Spirit need 7 tries over 350 years?

"LDS theology is polytheistic."

We worship ONE God — Father, through the Son, by the Holy Ghost. The Bible teaches henotheism (Ps 82:1,6; Jn 10:34-36; 2 Pet 1:4). No Trinitarian is "strictly monotheistic" either — three persons. Ours make logical sense.

"You can't become God — that's blasphemy."

Tell that to Irenaeus, Clement, Athanasius, and Basil. 2 Pet 1:4: "partakers of the divine nature." Rom 8:17: "joint-heirs with Christ." Theosis is ancient, biblical, and still taught in Eastern Orthodoxy.