

Fully Man And Fully God? (2001)

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Will someone please explain how a person can be more than the sum of his parts? It seems illogical, when we consider all the parts of something separately, that a fully constructed whole could be greater than the combined value of its constituent pieces.

Though this is, of course, a word game, there is a serious purpose behind it. Some in the church of God have begun to doubt its traditional teaching regarding the makeup of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Many may not be aware that this issue was a major controversy in the first-century church, especially when Gnosticism—particularly Docetism, the belief that Jesus was a human, but Christ was a separate, spiritual being—began to make inroads.

In the May/June 1994 issue of *The Plain Truth*, the phrase that Jesus was "fully man and fully God" appeared. In the August issue of this publication, while expounding on John 2:19 ("Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up'"), the author writes, "Thus, when Jesus spoke of raising himself, he spoke of God in the flesh."

This presents us with two questions. First, if Jesus were dead, how could He raise Himself from the dead? Second, how could He be both fully man and fully God at the same time? The answers to both of these questions seem obvious, but, because they deal with theological issues, many—scholars and laymen alike—have clouded these issues with their vigorous and often convoluted arguments.

Death

The Bible makes some very plain points about the condition of the dead:

» In Psalm 146:3-4, the psalmist writes, "Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans [*thoughts*, KJV] perish."

» Solomon adds, "For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten" (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

» Speaking of a dead man, Job tells his friends, "His sons come to honor, and he does not know it; they are brought low, and he does not perceive it" (Job 14:21).

These verses are very clear: People who have died can no longer think. They are not merely unconscious—every function of their body, including the brain, has stopped. They have no recognition of anything, not even of a vast emptiness or nothingness. *Webster's Dictionary* defines *dead* as "in a state of complete and permanent cessation of vital functions; inanimate, having no life; having no feeling, movement or activity."

In I Corinthians 15:3, Paul writes, "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." The resurrected Jesus Himself adds in Revelation 1:18, "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore." He

introduces the message to the Smyrna church by saying, "These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life" (Revelation 2:8).

Death, according to these scriptures, is a state without awareness. If Jesus was unaware, how could He raise Himself from the dead? It is impossible! He was not even aware that He was dead! If a dead person has no awareness or thought, how can he have the power and control to perform a resurrection?

Furthermore, Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." When one sins, death is the result. Jesus did not sin (Hebrews 4:15), but "He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness" (I Peter 2:24).

Many more scriptures of this nature could be added, but it is clear that, if Christ did not truly die, the penalty for sin has not been paid, and we have no Savior!

Does God not mean what He says in His Word? If He does not, how then can we trust Him? Jesus says, "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Surely someone is either badly deceived, and thus does not understand, or a deliberate lie is being perpetrated on the church of God!

Who Raised Jesus?

In Acts 2:24, as part of Peter's sermon on Pentecost, the apostle says, "[Jesus] whom *God* raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it." Twenty-three times a similar statement is made in the Scriptures. Someone else, the Father, God, raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Jesus could not do it Himself! He was dead.

The rest of the answer to John 2:19 is quite simple. The word "temple" also appears in verse 14, but it derives from a different Greek word, *hieron*, meaning a "shrine" or "holy building." In verses 19-21, John uses the word *naos*, signifying the "dwelling place" of deity.

In the New Testament, *naos* is used metaphorically of the bodies of believers (I Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19). Whereas the Jews of John 2:19 were thinking in terms of a building, the Temple, Jesus was referring to His body, the church.

During Jesus' trial the Jews brought up what He said in John 2:19 as an accusation against him. However, Mark 14:58 adds two significant phrases that clarify what Jesus said beyond a shadow of doubt: "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple *made with hands*, and within three days I will build another *made without hands*.'"

To understand what He meant, we must consider what occurred as a result of His death and resurrection. The instant God the Father raised Jesus from the dead, the church—the "body" in which God dwells—became an accomplished fact. Jesus Christ is its first member and Head. This is also one of the senses of Matthew 16:18: "On this rock [Jesus Himself] I will build My church, and the gates of Hades [the grave] shall not prevail against it."

The true meaning, then, of John 2:19 is that Jesus makes a parable-like statement about His nature then and in the future. His physical body at that time represented the extent of His church; He was the only believer, its only member. But once the Father resurrected Him and He became Mediator and High Priest, He indeed raised up a body of believers, the Temple of God, of which we are part.

Fully God?

By itself, His resurrection creates a problem regarding the second question. Like all men, Jesus died, but God cannot die because He has life inherent. He inhabits eternity (Isaiah 57:15); He has no beginning of days nor end of life (Hebrews 7:3). Is it too simple a question to ask that, if Jesus was fully God, how could He then die?

That Jesus is God is without dispute. One of His names is Immanuel, which is "God with us" (Matthew 1:23). John 1:1-3 identifies Him as "the Word," and John writes in verse 14, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Jesus Himself says in John 8:58, "Before Abraham was, I AM." He was God—absolutely!—but was He *fully* God?

It does not demean Christ in any way to realize that no scripture makes that claim. Rather, some *people* make that claim for Him. However, the Scripture, plus some logic and common sense, shows that we need to formulate a more accurate description of the divinity of our Savior and soon-coming King.

In Jesus' prayer in John 17:5, He requests, "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with you before the world was." Whatever this glory is that He asks to be restored, it is something He did not have as a human, but He did have when He truly was fully God. He had it before He was born of Mary, did not have it during His physical life, and had it returned to Him upon His resurrection and ascension.

In the New Testament, *glory* is used in the sense of anything that brings honor and praise upon a person. It can be one's works, attitude, manner of living, skill, strength, wisdom, power, appearance, or status. Some or all of these could be included within the framework of Christ's request. The Bible does not clarify or expand on what He specifically meant, but whatever it was, it was lacking in Him while He was human.

In the Form of God

Philippians 2:5-7 provides the background for Christ's incarnation: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men."

The first word we need to consider is *form* in verse 6. It is the Greek *morphe*, for which English has no exact equivalent. Unlike "form" in English, *morphe* does not mean "shape." It is a philosophical term that means "the outward expression of an inner essence." We can derive an illustration of this definition from figure skating. One might say, "I went to the Winter Olympics, and the figure skater's form was outstanding." What is meant is that skater's swift, rhythmic grace and coordinated movements were an outward expression of his inward ability to skate expertly.

Jesus was in the form (*morphe*) of God. The word *being* indicates a condition that began in the past and continues into the present. Therefore, while on earth, the outward expression of His inmost being was the expression of the divine essence, deity. Paul means that when the One who became Jesus, the Word, came to earth to assume the form of a man, He did not cease being God.

Also in verse 6 is the word *consider*, meaning "to make a judgment based on facts." Paul desires us to weigh the difference between Christ's original state with what He became as a man. He implies that the difference—and thus His humility in making such a sacrifice—is awesome.

The word *robbery* has two applications: "to seize unlawfully," or "a treasure to be clutched and retained at all hazards." Since the subject of this section is Christ's humility, the second meaning must be the proper application. Christ humbly did not assert His right to consider the expression of His divine essence such a treasure that He should hold on to it at all hazards. He waived that right. This is the very essence of humility.

Finally, *God* in verse 6 does not refer to a Personage, or it would say "the God" in the Greek. Since it does not, it must refer to deity in general, that is, the expression of the divine essence.

Verse 6, then, declares that, before His incarnation, the Word outwardly expressed His essential nature—Deity—and He judged that being equal with Deity in the expression of the divine essence was not a treasure to be clung to and held at all hazards. Thus, He gave it up to take on another outward expression.

In the Form of a Servant

Verse 7 is very meaningful toward understanding this question. The clause, "He made Himself of no reputation," more literally reads, "He emptied Himself." Instead of asserting His rights to the expression of the essence of Deity, He waived His rights and relinquished them. Compared to the fullness of God, He must indeed have felt empty once He gave up "the form of God"!

The word *form* in verse 7 is the same Greek word as in verse 6. The grammatical structure of the sentence demands that the "taking the form of a servant" preceded and caused His "making Himself of no reputation." Remember, *form* is the outward expression of inner nature. The sentence, though, indicates an exchange of such expression. Therefore, being a servant was not something of His inner nature that had been previously expressed. It was not His usual mode of outward expression. Before, He conveyed glory and sovereignty over all things, but afterward, He manifested servanthood.

An event in the life of Jesus may help explain this exchange of expressions. What happened in His incarnation was the exact opposite of what occurred at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-5; Mark 9:2-7). Luke writes that His "appearance . . . was altered" (Luke 9:29), and Peter, James and John "saw His glory" (verse 32). On the Mount of Transfiguration, He was changed from His normal, human outward expression as a servant to the outward expression of Deity.

Of what did He empty Himself? He did not empty Himself of His Deity, but rather the outward expression of His Deity and all it implies. As one author puts it, "He emptied Himself of His existence-in-a-manner-equal-to-God." He set aside His legitimate and natural desires and prerogatives as Deity so that He might express Himself as a servant.

The Word Became Flesh

Can anything that has some part removed from it still be as much as it was before? In the Word's case, He surrendered a level of existence never experienced by any human being, since only God lives at such a level in terms of both quality and length. We should not forget that what He gave up included immortality. If this is the case, was He as fully God as a human as He was before?

Of course, the other side of this picture is His humanity. If we understand Philippians 2:5-7 properly, then Paul is saying that God exchanged one form of expression for another. Therefore, He never ceased being what He originally was, just the expression of what He was changed. Therefore, He was not a man in the strictest sense of what a man is—as we are. He was the Word of God manifest in the flesh and nature of a man. Can we then say He was fully man?

When the Word became a man, He entered into a new state of being. He was a fleshly person with two natures. The word *likeness* in the Greek text (Philippians 2:7; Romans 8:3) refers to "that which is made like something else." His humanity was a real likeness. He was not a phantom, as some of the Docetists believed, but His human likeness did not and could not express the whole of His being. Jesus was also God, but His human form could never express the fullness of God, even though He was God.

"Fully man and fully God" is a cliché that has an appealing simplicity to it. At the least, however, it obscures a reality that should be more accurately articulated and understood. At the worst, it is a confusing and misleading statement that defies accurate biblical explanation.

It would be far better to use the expressions already inspired in the text of our Bibles. John, as mentioned above, writes, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). He gives no percentages of fullness of either humanity or divinity. Paul says something similar in Hebrews 2:14: "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same."

Jesus Christ was Immanuel, God with us. Jesus of Nazareth had as much of God's nature in Him as could be expressed in a human being. Can we just accept that at face value?

Inset: Traditional Church of God Teaching About Jesus Christ

The following paragraphs from *Mystery of the Ages* (pp. 34-36) convey Herbert W. Armstrong's belief and teaching on the nature of Jesus Christ:

In time-order the earliest revelation of who and what God is is found in the New Testament: John 1:1.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:1-4).

"The Word" in this passage is translated from the Greek *logos*, which means "spokesman," "word" or "revelatory thought." It is the name there used for an individual Personage. But who or what is this Logos? Notice the explanation in verse 14:

"And the Word was made 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."

When he was born as Jesus Christ, he was flesh and blood, materialistic and could be seen, touched and felt. But what was he? As God—as the Logos? That is answered in John 4:24, "God is a Spirit," and spirit is invisible. We know what was his form and shape as the human Jesus. But of what form and shape was he as the Word? We will explain that later [on pp. 38-40].

The Word, then, is a Personage who was made flesh—begotten by God, who through this later begetting became his Father. Yet at that prehistoric time of the first verse of John 1, the Word was not (yet) the Son of God. He divested himself of his glory as a Spirit divinity to be begotten as a human person. He was made God's Son, through being begotten or sired by God and born of the virgin Mary.

So here we find revealed originally *two Personages*. One is God. And with God in that prehistoric time was another Personage who also was God—one who later was begotten and born as Jesus Christ. But these two Personages were spirit, which is invisible to human eyes unless supernaturally manifested. Yet at the time described in verse one Jesus was *not* the Son of God and God was not his Father.

Who Was Melchisedec?

We find regarding the beginning of his existence, something further described in Hebrews chapter 7. Speaking of Melchisedec, who was king of Jerusalem in the days of Abraham, it says also that he was the Priest of God Most High. This Melchisedec had existed from eternity—"without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; *abideth a priest continually*" (Heb. 7:3).

Since Melchisedec was "*like* unto the Son of God," and abides as High Priest forever continually, and Jesus Christ is now High Priest, Melchisedec and Jesus Christ are one and the same Person.

Therefore Christ was "without father, without mother, without descent [in Abraham's time], having neither beginning of days, nor end of life." God also had existed *eternally* with the Word. Jesus, when he was "the Word," was an immortal being who had existed always—there never was a time when he did not exist—without beginning of days. He was, then, "*like*" the Son of God—but he was not yet the Son of God. He also was God, along *with* God.

These passages show that the Word, in the beginning—before anything had been created—was with God, and he, also, was God. Now how could that be?

There might be a man named John. And John might be with the man named Smith, and John might also be Smith because John is the son of Smith, and Smith is the family name. Yet they are two separate persons.

The only point of difference in that analogy is that the Word, at the time of John 1:1, was not, yet, the Son of God. But he was *with* God, and he also was God.

They were not yet Father and Son—but *they were* the God kingdom!