

What We Believe: Knowing and Loving our Doctrines  
 Adult Sunday Studies 2023-24  
 13 | The Person of Christ

### The Person of Christ - Who is Jesus?

#### Reminder of how we started our discussion on the Doctrine of God:

1. **Mystery is appropriate** - "The true goal of theological inquiry is not the resolution of theological *problems* but the discernment of what the *mystery* of faith is. Because God, who can never be fully comprehended, lies at the heart of all theological enquiry, theology by its nature is not a problem solving enterprise, but rather a mystery discerning enterprise." - Thomas Weinandy
  1. Major heresies always try to resolve the problem as if the mystery can be dispelled and God can be comprehended.
  2. Much of our definitions are "negative" - not that, not that either...
2. **Posture of Receiving Truths Passed Down**
  1. Thank God for the Church's wrestling with the Trinity and Christology!
3. **The Thrilling Romance of Orthodoxy** - "It would have been easier to have accepted the earthly power of the Arians. It is easy to be a madman: it is easy to be a heretic. It is always easy to let the age have its head; the difficult thing is to keep one's own. . . . **It is always simple to fall; there are an infinity of angles at which one falls, only one at which one stands.** To have fallen into any one of the fads from Gnosticism to Christian Science would indeed have been obvious and tame. But to have avoided them all has been one whirling adventure; and in my vision the heavenly chariot flies thundering through the ages, the dull heresies sprawling and prostrate, the wild truth reeling but erect." - GK Chesterton

#### **The Person and Work of Christ are inseparable**

Though we have to start somewhere, let's keep in mind that *who Jesus is* always informs *what he did*, and *what he did* shows us *who he is*. The Incarnation points to the Atonement, and the Atonement saves because of who Jesus is in the Incarnation.

### What the Church Fought Against that Led to their Conclusions:

1. **How Could God be Human? Docetism** (from the Greek, *dokeo*, to seem) - *Jesus wasn't human* - Docetists claim that Jesus wasn't truly human, but only *seemed* to be human, as if on the cross he was wearing a human mask or illusion. The intent was to guard Jesus' divinity (which they affirmed) because becoming human and dying on the cross is so shameful a thing for God to do!
  1. Muslims actually say something similar in that such an end would be dishonorable for a prophet, so they don't believe he was crucified.
  2. This often comes with a denial of creation and the Old Testament, because the goal is to escape the body, which the Son of God didn't really inhabit anyway. Often called "gnosticism."
  3. *Returns today* in forms of New Age Spirituality that emphasize the "spiritual" to the exclusion of the physical.
    1. TV "church" or megachurches are often docetic or gnostic in practice - why? Physical, bodily presence is not valued or appreciated.
  
2. **How Could a Human be God? Arianism** (named after its fiercest proponent, Arius) - *Jesus wasn't divine* - Arians believe that Jesus was perhaps semi-divine (or not divine at all, simply the best human) but was not fully divine, on par with the Father. "There was a time when he was not" was their rallying cry, to show that Jesus was a creature, not eternal. This belief was meant to guard the monotheism that is so clearly biblical, so they couldn't imagine a Trinity without losing monotheism.
  1. This often comes back throughout history because it seems more "reasonable." Modern examples are Jehovah's Witnesses or Unitarians.
  2. This was the most significant debate the church faced, and we can be thankful to many saints of the church for fighting it.
  
3. **How Could the Divine and Human Natures be in One Person?**
  1. **Apollinarianism** - *Jesus wasn't human all the way down* - in trying to make sense of how two natures could exist in one person, one proposal that the Church rejected was considering his body as human but his soul as divine.
    1. The Church's response: "what is unassumed is unhealed" - if Jesus didn't assume or take on some part of our humanity, then that part

can't be saved.

2. This is docetism or gnosticism lite, recognizing that Jesus was obviously human, but not willing to believe he was fully human.
2. **Eutychnianism** - *Jesus was not fully human like he was fully God* - this led the Church to clarify that Jesus is not some kind of mixture between God and humanity, thus becoming a "third thing" (*tertium quid*). In this case, Jesus isn't actually human at all, but is some kind of monster, not truly human and not truly God.
  1. Hence, WCF below "So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were **inseparably joined** together in one person, **without conversion, composition, or confusion**. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ."
  2. Distinct but never separate is the key!
  3. Notice what this says about humanity and divinity when it comes to agency! They don't compete on a zero-sum level, so that we can say that God and I do one and the same thing, which is key in sanctification.

What is wrong *practically and pastorally* (aside from biblical and theological reasons) with these heresies? If we believed them, how would that change the story of Christ's accomplished redemption?

Which heresies do we tend toward in our emphases and practices if not in our creeds?

Note also that every heresy had a "half-truth", so they thought they were being faithful.

### **Where the Church Landed in Describing Who Jesus is:**

#### **Nicene Creed**

". . . And we believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven; he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human;"

**WCF 8.2:**

“The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. **So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.**”

**Key phrases throughout church history:**

1. Christ's divine nature is *of one being/essence (homoousios)* with the Father and Spirit
2. Two natures (human and divine) in one person
3. Each nature is *distinct, but never separate* from the other

\*\*\* There are several texts that make Jesus' divinity clear (John 1; Phil. 2.5-10; Rom. 1.3-4; 1Jn. 5.20), others where the obvious implication must be that Jesus is divine (i.e. instances where an OT passage is cited that only applied to Yahweh and now applies to Christ, or where Jesus Himself is saying as much); then there are additional texts where what is claimed could only be claimed by someone who is divine; and all of these being in the Jewish context where monotheism was a bedrock truth, and yet they start worshipping Jesus!

“If in Jesus Christ humans do not encounter God directly, then they cannot confidently embrace God’s reconciling love. Furthermore, worrying that God hides behind an emissary, humans treat salvation as reaching toward God via this quasi-divine intermediary instead of receiving divine grace.” - Daniel Treier

If Jesus is truly human and truly divine, what does that do to our assurance of his revelation? Our trust in His power? Our doubts about our own insufficiencies?