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Lecture Series: The Doctrine of Christ

Lecture 3: "Jesus Christ the God-Man"

THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST

Today there is very little controversy over the true humanity of Christ. In the early church the problem for many was not the deity of Christ, which they accepted, but the true humanity of Christ. E.g. the Docetists (from dokeo, meaning “to seem” or “to appear”) argued that Christ was totally divine, and that his humanity was merely an appearance.

New Testament passages on the true humanity of Christ

John 1:14

John 8:40

Romans 1:3-4

Romans 9:5

Philippians 2:8 (key Greek words: morphe, homoionoma, and schema)

Hebrews 2:14

Hebrews 2:17

THE UNION OF DEITY AND HUMANITY (HYPOSTATIC UNION)

Meaning: The Greek word hypostases means “nature.” So “hypostatic union” refers to union of the two natures in one person, Jesus Christ the God-man.

The Chalcedonian Definition (AD 451). The Council of Chalcedon expressed what the church, after 400 years of study, came to believe about the Person of Christ. After the many controversies that existed, the church finally came to agreement over the answer to the question, “Who is Jesus Christ?”

“Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards His Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards His manhood; like us in all respects apart from sin; as regards His Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards His manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-Begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one Person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two Persons, but one and the same son and only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of Him, and our Lord Jesus Christ Himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has been handed down to us.” (Council of Chalcedon AD 451)

Concise description: Full deity and perfect humanity united without mixture, change, division, or separation in One Person forever.

Key components

- Undiminished deity
- Perfect humanity
- United in one person
- Forever

Four major controversies leading to Chalcedonian definition

Arianism

Apollinarianism

Nestorianism

Eutychianism

Arianism

Full deity of Christ denied. Arius said Christ is of a similar substance (homoiousios) but not of the same substance with the Father. In other words Jesus is Godlike but he is not God.

Condemned by Council of Nicea, AD 325

The Nicene Creed

“We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end. And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. And we believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. And we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”

Apollinarianism

Full humanity of Christ denied

Apollinarius, bishop of Laodicea in the fourth century, argued that Christ had a human body and a human soul but not a human spirit. He had the divine Logos instead of a human spirit.

Condemned by the Council of Constantinople, AD 381 because it denied the reality of a full human nature. The Council affirmed the absolute humanity of Jesus.

Nestorianism

Denied the real union of the human and divine natures of Christ in one person. Divided Christ into two persons: one the eternal Son of God; the other the human Jesus

Condemned by the Council of Ephesus, AD 431; and again at the Council of Chalcedon, AD 451.

Eutychianism

Denied the distinction of the two natures of Christ.

Eutyches reacted against Nestorianism and taught that there was only one nature in Christ. The divine nature was not fully divine, nor was the human nature genuinely human. The result was a mixed single nature. This error is also known as monophysitism.

Condemned by the Council of Chalcedon, AD 451.

In response to Nestorius and Eutyches, the council at Chalcedon declared that in Christ existed a fully human nature and a fully divine nature in one person "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation."

The Orthodox Definition: Council of Chalcedon, AD 451

Christ is one person with a fully divine nature and a fully human nature.

Chalcedon defined with balance the fundamental principles and boundaries for interpreting the incarnation for the church as a whole. Therefore, it represents the orthodox interpretation of the hypostatic union of Christ.

Conclusion

- Jesus Christ is not God indwelling a man.
- Jesus Christ is not man deified.
- Jesus Christ is not God and man.
- Jesus Christ is the God-man. He exists as one divine person with a fully divine nature and a perfect human nature.
- This doctrine of the two natures in one person transcends human reason.

"Sometimes in the study of systematic theology, the following sentence has been used to summarize the incarnation: "Remaining what he was, he became what he was not." In other words, while Jesus continued "remaining" what he was (that is, fully divine) he also became what he previously had not been (that is, fully human as well). Jesus did not give up any of his deity when he became a man, but he did take on humanity that was not his before." Grudem, Systematic Theology, 563

"At the end of this long discussion, it may be easy for us to lose sight of what is actually taught in Scripture. It is by far the most amazing miracle of the entire Bible—far more amazing than the resurrection and more amazing even than the creation of the universe. The fact that the infinite, omnipotent, eternal Son of God could become man and join himself to a human nature forever, so that infinite God became one person with finite man, will remain for eternity the most profound miracle and the most profound mystery in all the universe." Grudem, Systematic Theology, 563

Modern controversy over the Person of Christ

Christians prior to the 18th century entertained few doubts that the Gospels were to be read as historically reliable accounts of the life of Jesus. Critical challenges to the classical Christology of the Orthodox Christian Church began around the 18th century during the period of the Enlightenment.

The Christologies of the past two centuries have largely been attempts to rethink the person and work of Christ in terms of an Enlightenment worldview. As a result, today there are two very different perspectives on Jesus. One is the Jesus of orthodox Christian faith, reflected in the great creeds and confessions of the Christian Church. The other view of Jesus is represented by modern liberal New Testament scholars who say that the Jesus of history, who lived nearly twenty centuries ago, is not the Jesus of the Bible. They say the Jesus of the Bible who was born of a virgin, declared to be God in human flesh, performed miracles, and rose from the dead never existed. He is an invention of the early church. This "Christ of faith" must be stripped of the "ancient myths" that surround him so that we can discover "the historical Jesus." Thus, to these modern revisionist theologians, Jesus is no longer the unique Son of God who provides the only way of salvation. He is just one of many alternate ways.

In contrast to the modern pictures of Jesus, the orthodox view of Jesus still stands as the most credible portrait when all of the evidence is considered, including the corroboration offered by ancient sources outside the New Testament. In a world of religious pluralism, the evangelical Church must continue to emphasize the uniqueness of Christ in line with the Scripture and the early creeds and confessions of the Church.