

Examining Christian Doctrine

Lesson 10: The Doctrine of Christ: The Person of Jesus

This begins a new topic in our examination of the Christian Doctrine: The Doctrine of Christ, or theologically known as "Christology". The nature of who Jesus Christ was, and is, is essential and crucial to the foundation of Christianity since it is built upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. While other religions may acknowledge Jesus, the claims of Christianity are unique in its teachings on the person of Christ, especially having to do with the nature of Jesus' humanity and divinity. In this lesson we will look at some of the various views of the nature of Jesus and discuss how scripture and church doctrine define the person Jesus.

Jesus In Other Religions and Faiths

Before we outline the Christian distinctions of the person of Jesus, let's give a brief look at how Jesus is viewed in other religions and faiths as well as some early controversies of the person of Jesus.

- **Judaism:** In Judaism, Jesus is not recognized as the Messiah. He is generally viewed as a historical figure, but his claims to divinity and messiahship are rejected.
- **Islam:** In Islam, Jesus (known as Isa) is considered one of the most important prophets, but he is not divine. He is viewed as a human prophet sent by Allah (God) to convey the message of monotheism and to prepare the way for the final prophet, Muhammad. Muslims believe in Jesus' virgin birth, miracles, and his second coming, but they reject the Christian doctrines of his divinity and crucifixion.
- **Mormonism** (Latter-day Saint movement): In Mormonism, Jesus Christ plays a central role as the Savior and Redeemer. Mormons believe in Jesus' divinity and his role in atoning for humanity's sins through his death and resurrection.

In Mormon theology, Jesus Christ is believed to be divine but not of the same essence as God the Father. Mormons teach that Jesus is a separate being from the Father, the firstborn spirit child of Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother, and thus a distinct deity. While Mormons affirm Jesus' divinity, they do not adhere to the doctrine of the Trinity as understood in orthodox Christianity.

Mormons teach that Jesus' atonement not only provides forgiveness for sin but also enables human beings to progress and become like God, participating in the process known as exaltation or becoming gods.

- **Jehovah's Witnesses:** Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus is the Son of God and the first creation of Jehovah God. However, they do not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, teaching instead that Jesus is a separate entity from God the Father. They regard Jesus as the Messiah and the agent through whom God created all other things, but they reject the belief in his preexistence as the divine Logos or Word.

Early Controversies and Councils Surrounding the Nature of Christ

Early on in the history of the church, there was much debate concerning the nature of Christ, many heresies arose that were condemned by the early church, two of these heresies were:

- **Arianism:** Taught that **Jesus, while exalted and divine, was a created being and not co-eternal with God the Father.** According to Arianism, there was a time when the Son did not exist.
 - **The Council of Nicaea (325 AD)** addressed the Arian controversy. It affirmed the full divinity of Jesus Christ and condemned the teachings of Arius.
 - **The Council of Constantinople (381 AD)** This council affirmed the full humanity and full divinity of Jesus Christ without confusion or separation of his natures.
- **Docetism:** Originating from the Greek word "dokeo," meaning "to seem" or "appear", docetists **believed Jesus only seemed to have a physical body and that his human form was merely an illusion.** They asserted that Jesus' divine nature was incapable of experiencing human suffering or death. Many Gnostic groups embraced a form of Docetism.
 - **The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD)** condemned Docetism and further clarified the doctrine of the hypostatic union, affirming that Jesus Christ is one person in two natures, fully divine and fully human. The Chalcedonian Definition became the standard formulation of orthodox Christology.

The Nature of Christ

We may summarize the biblical teaching about the person of Christ as follows: ***Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man in one person.***

The Humanity and Divinity of Jesus

The theological term that we use for this is the “**Hypostatic Union**”, this affirms the union of Jesus Christ's divine and human natures in one person. It emphasizes that Jesus is fully God and fully human without mixture or confusion of the two natures.

Evidence for the Humanity of Christ

When we speak of the humanity of Christ, it is appropriate to begin with a consideration of the **virgin birth** of Christ. Scripture clearly asserts that Jesus was conceived in the womb of his mother, Mary, by a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit and without a human father (Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 1:26-37).

The humanity of Christ is seen through Jesus having a “normal human experience” throughout his life.

- He had a natural birth through a woman
- He had his upbringing in Nazareth and grew as a child (Luke 2:40,52)
- He participated in human life in things like eating, sleeping, working, and socializing.
- He had physical experiences such as hunger, thirst, physical suffering (Matt. 4:2, John 4:6, Luke 22:44),
- He had emotional experiences such as sorrow, compassion, and joy (John 11:35, Matt. 9:36, Luke 10:21)
- He experienced temptation and testing, yet without sin (Matthew 4:1-11)
- He had natural human relationships and interactions
- He died a physical death (Luke 23:46)

Hebrews 2:14-18 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil... 17 For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. 18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

1 John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

1 John 4:1-2 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God

2 John 1:7 I say this because many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.

Evidence for the Divinity of Christ

The divinity of Jesus is seen as Jesus coming from God, being one with God, and doing the work of God:

- There are direct scriptural claims to Jesus' deity (both NT claims, and OT references)
- Jesus is bestowed divine titles: God, Lord, Savior, Master, Christ, Son of God, I AM, etc.
- Jesus did miracles and taught in such a way as to identify him with deity
- Jesus forgave sins which only God could do (Mark 2:5-7)
- Jesus possessed attributes of deity (omnipotence, eternity, omniscience, omnipresence, sovereignty)
- Jesus was worshipped as God (John 20:28)

John 5:18 “For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.”

John 10:30-33 “I and the Father are one.” ... 33 The Jews answered Him, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.”

John 20:28 “Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

Colossians 1:19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,

Colossians 2:9 “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.”

The Preexistence of Jesus

The doctrine of the preexistence of Jesus teaches that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, eternally existed before his incarnation as a human being.

- The Gospel of John clearly shows Jesus as preexisting (John 1)
- Jesus taught his own preexistence ((John 3:13; 6:33, 38, 62; 8:23; 16:28)
- Jesus is shown to be in relationship with the Father in eternity past (John 17:5)
- Jesus declared that he was 'before' biblical figures such as Abraham (John 8:58-59)
- Jesus is declared to be the creator of everything, thus was never created and always existed (John 1:2-3, Colossians 1:16-17, Hebrews 1:2)

John 1:1-3 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

John 17:5 And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

John 17:24 Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

The Incarnation of Jesus

The doctrine of the Incarnation is one of the central and distinctive teachings of Christianity, emphasizing the belief that the eternal Son of God, the Word (Logos), became fully human in the person of Jesus Christ. The term "Incarnation" comes from the Latin meaning "enfleshment" or "taking on flesh."

In the incarnation:

- Jesus became one of us to identify with us; our human suffering and experience (Hebrews 4:15)
- Jesus died a physical death representative of our death (Philippians 2:8)
- God, through Jesus comes down in order to save us (John 3:16)
- Jesus displayed the full image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15, Hebrews 1:3)
- Jesus reveals the full nature of the Father to humanity (John 1:18)
- Jesus retains his full deity, though choosing to limit certain aspects (Phil. 2:7, Matt. 24:36)

John 1:14-15 The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'")

Philippians 2:5-8 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Jesus' Relationship to the Trinity

In Lesson 4 on the Trinity, we said that Jesus is one in ESSENCE, but distinct in PERSONHOOD. In the Trinity, Jesus is the Son existing together with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the one Godhead. He is fully God, possessing the same attributes of God. The three share in the one divine essence. However, The Son is a distinct person from the Father and the Spirit, distinguished from them by his particular eternal relation and his particular roles.

- We see the Trinity in Jesus' life (Jesus baptized, empowered by Spirit, spoken of by Father) Matt. 3:16-17
- Jesus uses familial language to reflect the relationship with the Father (John 5:17-18)
- Jesus speaks of his oneness with the Father (John 10:30)
- Jesus prays to the Father (John 17)
- Jesus refers to himself a 'coming from the Father' (John 17:25-26)
- Jesus submits to the Father's will (Luke 22:42)
- Jesus does the work of the Father with authority from the Father (John 5:19-23)

Matthew 11:27 "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

John 17:25-26 "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."