

ANCIENT HERESIES IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Christology

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INTRODUCTION

- In the early 1st century of the church, worship hymns served the purpose of forming doctrinal belief
- “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! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:5-11)

THE DEITY OF CHRIST

- Jn 1:1-3, 14—The Word was with God, was God, and dwelt among us.
- Rom 1:2-5—Born of a descendant of David according to the flesh.
- 1 Tim 3:16—He was revealed in the flesh
- 1 Jn 1:1-3—What we have heard, seen, and touched concerning the Word of life
- Phil 2:6-8—He existed in the form of God but emptied himself, taking the form of man

KEY QUESTIONS

- Who was Jesus and what did he do?
- What are early Christians to make of their faith in Jesus Christ in view of OT monotheism?
- How can Jesus be both God and man?
- How are we to interpret biblical data for Christological construction?

2nd-3rd CENTURY CONTROVERSIES

- As the church grew and Christians began praying to Jesus, many from both within and without the church asked, “what are they doing?”
- Worshipping Jesus, a man, seemed idolatrous
- To preserve monotheism, Gnosticism held a docetic view of Christ, who only appeared to have a physical body (Marcion)
- To preserve monotheism, Ebionism (Judaizers) argued that Jesus was a unique human, but not divine. He was born to Mary in a natural way and adopted as the Son into the plan of God
- Heresies took 200 years to fully emerge and another 150 years for orthodox doctrines to be clearly formed

ARIAN CONTROVERSY, 325

- Arius, presbyter of Alexandria, challenged the deity of Christ
- How could anyone believe in one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
- He staunchly fought to preserve monotheism
- He concluded that Jesus was not God, based upon a collection of biblical references:

ARIAN CONTROVERSY, 325

- The term “word” (*logos*) in Jn 1:1 is related to God’s creative word (*dabar*) (Gen 1:3ff)
- The LXX translates *dabar* as *sophia* (“wisdom”) is said to be created in Proverbs 8:22
- The Greeks used *sophia* or *logos* to refer to intermediaries of gods that create material things
- Arius failed to realize that John’s use of *logos* was meant to subvert pagan thought (1:1-3)

ARIAN CONTROVERSY, 325

- “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (Col 1:15). “Firstborn” does not mean first in “time” but first in “rank.” Jesus created “all things”
- “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:36). God made him to be Lord and Christ, references to his office and function
- “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I” (Jn 14:28). This is a reference to Jesus’ function subordination to the Father during his incarnation

NICENE CREED, 325

- “We believe in one God, the Father all governing, creator of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father as only begotten, that is, from the essence of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not created, of the same essence (*homoousios*) as the Father, through whom all things came into being, both in heaven and in earth; Who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate, becoming human. He suffered and the third day he rose, and ascended into the heavens. And he will come to judge both the living and the dead. And we believe in the Holy Spirit.”

MAJOR CHURCH COUNCILS

- Nicaea 325
- Constantinople 381
- Ephesus 431
- Chalcedon 451
- Arianism
- Apollinarianism
- Nestorianism
- Eutychianism

WORD-FLESH CHRISTOLOGY

- Alexandria (North Africa) focused on an **integrated nature**
- Word-flesh: Tended toward a form of Platonic dualism between the divine *logos* and flesh
- Arianism: Jesus was not God in the fullest sense—*homoiousios* (similar in nature) but not *homoousios* (same essence) to the Father
- Athanasius: Word-flesh—affirmed divinity of the Word, who took on a human body
- Apollinarianism (310-390): Defended the divinity of Christ, but rejected his humanity by insisting the *logos* replaced the human mind or will of Jesus (one-nature Christology)

WORD-MAN CHRISTOLOGY

- Antioch (Syria) focused on **compartmentalized natures**
- Word-man: Concerned about the connection between body and soul; the human Jesus was necessary for knowing the divine *logos*
- Nestorianism: Affirmed the full deity and humanity of Christ but denied their unity
- Eutychianism: Blended the divine and human natures into a third admixture

CHALCEDONIAN CREED, 451

- “Following the holy fathers, we confess that the one and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, is perfect in Godhead and perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, and that he has a rational soul and a body. He is of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father as God, he is also of one substance (*homoousios*) with us as man. He is like us in all things except sin. He was begotten of his Father before the ages as God, but in the last days and for our salvation he was born of Mary, Son, Lord, only-begotten is made known in two natures (*physis*) without fusion, without change, without division, without separation. The distinction of the natures is in no way taken away by their union, but rather the distinctive properties of each nature are preserved. Both natures unite into one person” (*hypostasis*).

AFFIRMATIONS OF CHALCEDON

- Rejected Arianism—“one substance” (*homoousios*). Jesus is the same person as the preexistent *logos*
- Rejected Apollinarianism by speaking of “reasonable soul.” Jesus is truly human
- Rejected Nestorianism--the two natures joined “indivisibly” and “inseparably.” Jesus is one personality
- Rejected Eutychianism--the two natures joined “inconfusedly” and “unchangeably.” Jesus’ personality is complex in that the human nature has its subsistence in the *logos*. Jesus is the perfect God-man

AFFIRMATIONS OF CHALCEDON

- Christians do not worship a man, as Romans worshipped the emperor
- Being human is not simply reduced to having a body
- The bishops concluded that John's teaching meant God became a complete human being
- Salvation involves the human soul, personality, and spirit
- Jesus was a union of divine and human
- Jesus was not simply a human body but possessed human consciousness
- One person in two natures meant he was fully God and fully man—body, mind, and spirit

IMPLICATIONS OF CHALCEDON

- Provides a balanced statement of faith—Christ has two natures (*physis*) in one person (*hypostasis*) without confusion (contra Eutychianism) and separation (contra Nestorianism)
- Translates Christianity from Semitic roots into Hellenistic culture (Greco-Roman culture)
- Seems to focus exclusively on the person of Christ to the neglect of his work
- Jesus, in his divinity, shows us what it means to be truly human

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

- Age of the Holy Spirit: Charismatic groups make too much of the Holy Spirit and too little of Christ
- Jesus promised to send a helper who would empower and instruct them in his absence:
- “He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you” (Jn 16:14; cf. 14:26)

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

- Prosperity theology teaches that Christians are entitled to well-being, because physical and spiritual realities are seen as one inseparable reality
- Leaders view the atonement as providing for the healing of sickness, poverty, and righteous action
- “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isa 53:5; cf. 1 Pt 2:24)

DISCUSSION QUESTION

- What implications does this study have on doing ministry in terms of the spiritual, physical, and psychological aspects of human experience?