

Christology

Christology is a theological topic that involves our understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. Now that we have determined that Jesus was fully God, we must explore the relationship between His physical person and His deity. Through out history heretical groups have distorted orthodox views about Jesus. Distortions of the person of Jesus is evident today in groups such as the Mormons, Jehovah Witness, and Oneness. Here are some key terms to be aware of.

Vocabulary

Christology: Christology is the study of the person of Christ.

Incarnation: The biblical understanding that Christ took on a human nature.

Hypostatic Union: The theological description of the union of the two natures of Christ.

Theanthropos: The theological name of Christ affirming that He is *fully* God and *fully* man.

The Deity of Christ

The deity of Christ sits at the pinnacle of controversy and belief concerning the Christian faith.¹ Heretical views quickly emerged concerning the nature of Jesus. Some people questioned if Jesus was *fully* God. Maybe he was only a man. Orthodox Christians believe that Jesus is *fully* man and *fully* God. Today liberal theologians deny that Jesus was God. Their beliefs about the deity of Christ can be summed up in the words of a modern day theologian. John Hick wrote,

Now it used to be assumed-and in some Christian circles is still assumed-that this Jesus, who lived in Palestine in the first third of the first century AD, was conscious of being God incarnate, so that you must either believe him or reject him as a deceiver or a megalomaniac. "Mad, bad, or God" went the argument. And of course if Jesus did indeed claim to be God incarnate, then this dilemma, or trilemma, does arise. But did he claim this? The assumption that he did is largely based on the Fourth Gospel, for it is here that

¹ Erickson, Millard. Christian Doctrine, page 234

Jesus makes precisely such claims. He says "I and the Father are one," "No one comes to the Father, but by me" and "He who has seen me has seen the Father." But it is no secret today, after more than a hundred years of scholarly study of the scriptures, that very few New Testament experts now hold that the Jesus who actually lived ever spoke those words, or their Aramaic equivalents. They are much more probably words put into his mouth by a Christian writer who is expressing the view of Christ which had been arrived at in his part of the church, probably two or three generations after Jesus' death. And it is likewise doubted whether the few sayings of the same kind in the other gospels are authentic words of Jesus. How, then, did this Christian deification of Jesus-which began within the first decades after his death and was essentially completed by the end of the first century-take place? Such a development is not as hard to understand in the ancient world as it would be today.²

In current philosophical circles it is common to deny the deity of Christ while acknowledging his humanity. Claiming that a man named Jesus lived in the 1st century tends to be more palpable than accepting Christ's deity. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th theologians started questioning some of the most basic tenets of the Christian faith. A well known theologian, Adolf von Harnack, was influential in bringing the deity of Christ into question. He extensively wrote that Jesus might have existed but he never claimed to be the Son of God. Thus Jesus only asked people to believe in the Father but never the Son. His influence continued throughout the 20th century and into today.³

Incarnation

Jesus Christ, the God-man, bridged the gap between sinful man and holy God. Apart from Jesus Christ this gap could not be filled. Christ is fully God and added human flesh in the incarnation.

Jesus is the only person who ever lived before He was conceived.⁴ Christ is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. He existed before His birth which makes him unique. Throughout history some heretical groups claimed that Christ came into existence at his birth. There was never a time when Christ did not exist.

The Scripture clearly asserts that Christ was involved in the creation. This further indicates that He existed before His birth. Notice the following scriptures about creation.

² John Hick, *The Center of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1968), 27-28.

³ Adolf von Harnack was a German Theologian who wrote the book "What is Christianity?" in 1900. Albert Schweitzer wrote the book "Quest for the Historical Jesus" in 1906. The modern day Jesus seminar finds is rooted in the philosophical beliefs of Schweitzer and Harnack.

⁴ Lightner, Robert. Sin, *The Savior*, and Salvation. page 46

Colossians 1:16-17

16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Hebrews 1:2

2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

Virgin Birth

John 1:14 (NIV)

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Luke 1:34-35 (NIV)

34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

Catholic View of the Incarnation: The miracle is in the conception not the birth. Roman Catholics see the miracle in the birth process as well.

The virgin birth was necessary to fulfill prophecy (Isa. 7:14). Christ's virgin birth substantiates His deity and points to His uniqueness. Since, Jesus was born in the same way as the rest of humanity, this directs us to His human nature.

Humanity of Christ

The Scriptures are clear that was fully human. Sometimes evangelicals have so defended Christ's deity that they have neglected His human side. Important Scriptures pointing to the humanity of Christ:

Human Emotions

Love	John 13:1 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.
Compassion	Matthew 9:36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.
Anger	John 2:15-16 So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"
Grief	John 11: 35 Jesus wept.

Physical Characteristics

Tired	John 4:6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.
Sleep	Luke 8:23 As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.
Hungry	Luke 4:2 ...where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.
Thirsty	John 19:28 Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."
Pain & Death	John 19:34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.

The scripture shows that Jesus had all of the attributes of a human being.

Kenosis

Kenosis is a Greek term that is found in Philippians 2:7, where Christ emptied himself. There has been entire books written to discuss this biblical passage. The discussion usually centers upon Christ's incarnation. Namely, did Christ limit His divinity when the incarnation occurred.

Kenotic theology grew out of rational thought from German theologians in the 1800's. Inevitably, some scholars insisted that Jesus left His divine attributes in heaven when He became a man. Instead of Jesus being fully God and fully man, Jesus was thought to be partially God and fully man.

Philippians 2:5-7

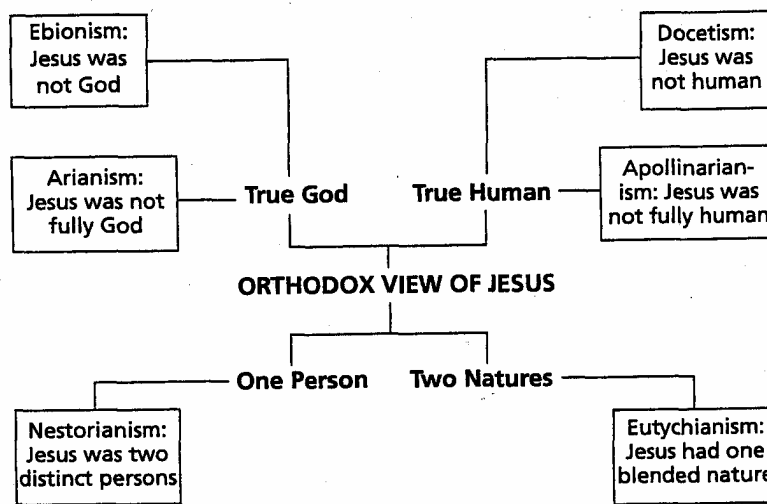
NIV	NASB	NKJV
5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:	5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,	5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,
6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,	6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,	6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,
7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.	7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.	7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, <i>and</i> coming in the likeness of men.

Hypostatic Union

Jesus is fully God and fully man. Christ was one person with two natures. He has a Divine nature and a human nature. This conclusion poses several difficult questions. The central discussion is the relationship between His two natures. The early church met at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 and spoke to this issue.

One and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Father has handed down to us.

Figure 3. The Six Basic Heresies Regarding the Person of Christ



The hypostatic union may be defined as "the second person, the preincarnate Christ came and took to Himself a human nature and remains forever undiminished Deity and true humanity united in one person forever." When Christ came, a Person came, not just a nature; He took on an additional nature, a human nature-He did not simply dwell in a human person. The result of the union of the two natures is the theanthropic Person (the God-man).⁵

⁵ Enns, P. P. (1989; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1997). *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Includes indexes. (electronic ed.). Chicago: Moody.

What happened at the incarnation?

1. Human attributes were gained and no divine attributes were lost.
2. The union of the two natures meant that they did not function independently. Jesus did not have a split personality.
3. The incarnation was God's idea before the foundation of the world. Thus our understanding is limited.

Special Issue

Could Jesus Sin?

Those who believe Jesus could have sinned call this peccable. There are two reasons to consider the possibility that Jesus could have sinned.

- A. The temptation of Jesus by the Devil would not have been genuine. If Christ could not have sinned then the temptation was not real.
- B. It is argued that if Christ were really human, it must have been possible for him to sin.

Those who believe Jesus could not have sinned call this impeccable. It is important to remember that Jesus is the God-man since the incarnation. His person cannot be divided. The first Adam did not have a sin nature. Jesus did not have a sin nature. Since Jesus was a divine Person with both a human and divine natures, he could not have sinned. Reasons for holding this position:

- A. Christ was immutable. This means that in His divine nature He could never change. Since, his divine nature cannot be divorced from His human nature He could not have sinned.⁶
- B. Two passages of Scripture lend support to this view.

Hebrews 4:15 (NIV) For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.

⁶ Lightner, Robert. *Sin, The Savior, and Salvation*. page 65

The writer of Hebrews seems to say that Christ can sympathize with us but he did not sin nor could he sin. Greek scholar A.T. Robertson writes this about the phrase without sin.

This is the outstanding difference that must never be overlooked in considering the actual humanity of Jesus. He did not yield to sin but more than this is true. There was no latent sin in Jesus to be stirred by temptation and no habits of sin to be overcome.⁷

1 John 3:5 (NIV) But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.

The entire issues centers about the temptation of Jesus. Was he really tempted? From God's perspective Jesus was tempted to prove to us he could not sin. Satan wanted to foil God's plan of the cross. Christ was tempted to prove he was sinless. Jesus' experience in the wilderness gave him a basis to sympathize with us.

Modern Day Christological Heresies

Mormons

Jehovah Witnesses

Oneness Movement

⁷ quoted by Lightner page 65