

The Word Became Flesh

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[0 : 00] Thanks for this warm space where we can meet. Thank you for the privilege that we can open up your word and learn more about you and your son. Lord Jesus, we pray that as you promised at the end of Matthew's gospel, that you would be with us to the end of the age, that you'd be with us now by your spirit as we consider the deepest mystery of all, Lord, your incarnation and who you have become for us by becoming flesh.

Lord, give us humility as we approach these topics. Give us understanding. Above all, we pray, you'd give us hearts that are in all of you more and more and in worship of you, adoration of you. We pray this in your mighty name, Jesus, amen. Okay, so where have we been in this class on the person of Christ, which is sometimes called Christology.

So if you're ever reading books of theology or you're reading things, you run across Christology. Basically what that means is just the doctrine of the person of Christ. So who is Jesus, his person? And if you'll remember kind of where we've been in our class, we've been doing kind of a walkthrough of the person of Jesus. Two weeks ago, we considered that Jesus is fully human.

[1 : 16] So we looked through the gospel records and looked at how Jesus had a fully human body, how he had a fully human mind. He had fully human emotions. Just all the ways in which we think about ourselves as human, we see that reflected in the gospels, that Jesus was fully human.

And then just last week, we reflected on the fact that Jesus is fully God. And we looked at all those things that were, some of those moments in the gospels where Jesus is in his own words, in his own actions, sort of claiming to be the one true God here among us, like claiming to forgive sins, claiming that only he knows the father and only the father knows him, these sorts of things.

Okay, so we've established two wonderful things, that Jesus has a fully human nature and he's fully God, he's a fully divine nature. What more is there to talk about in a class on Christology, right? We're done. Ah, but one large question still remains, right? What is the relationship of these two natures in the one person, Jesus?

Right? We sort of say these two things, but man, what does that even mean? How do we relate those to one another? Is there a way we can press into the unity of the person of Christ?

[2 : 41] Now, this is a very difficult question. So as we approach this topic this morning, we'll do so with some humility and maybe even some trepidation.

One theologian, Millard Erickson, writes this. He says, this is the most difficult of all theological problems, how the two natures of Christ are in one person.

Ranking up there, he says, with the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the relationship of human free will and divine sovereignty. So Erickson, they're sort of locating some of these divine mysteries that are very deep, the doctrine of the Trinity, how our agency and God's sovereignty relate to one another.

But here's the sort of one that takes the cake, what we sometimes call the hypostatic union. How is it that there are two natures in the one being of Jesus? Okay.

And it's sort of obvious why that's a difficult question, right? Like Erickson goes on to say in that same paragraph I referenced. You know, it's difficult to comprehend because it posits the combination of two natures that by definition are contradictory, right?

[3 : 50] I mean, think about deity, right? Christ is infinite in his knowledge, power, and presence, being fully God. If he's God, he has to know all things. You know, if he's God, he can do all things that are proper objects of his power, right?

If he's God, he can be everywhere at once. But on the other hand, if he was human, he was limited in knowledge. He couldn't do everything. And he certainly was limited to being in one place at one time, right?

So how are those two natures combined in one person? So it's a difficult question, but it's also an important question, right? It's not one just that, you know, theologians can sort of write dissertations about and get tenure and teach at a seminary, you know?

It's actually important. And what's really neat, this morning we're going to walk through the historical development of how the church has thought about this, and we'll see that in the early centuries of the church, this was the issue.

This was the issue over which they spent most of their time and energy because it was central. Why was it central? Because, I mean, one way of thinking about it, right?

[4 : 58] This idea, this doctrine of the person of Christ, what we call Christology, is important because the incarnation involved, well, we might say the bridging of the gap, the bridging not just of sort of the kind of metaphysical or ontological gap, right, but bridging of the moral and spiritual gap between God and humanity, right?

The great chasm between us and God that sin had opened up, it's the incarnation that bridges that gap. And if it's really going to bridge that gap, then Jesus has to be divine and human in one person.

There has to be a unity of deity and humanity within Jesus, right? If they weren't, then it's almost as if the problem still remains, right?

Okay. We'll come back to some of the sort of deeper significance of these things as we get to the end. But let's think about this. So, again, this is Millard Erickson.

He has a really good chapter on this. I'll be referencing a lot of his stuff as we go. But Millard Erickson, it was a Baptist theologian in the South. I think he taught somewhere. Did he teach at Southwestern? Do you know, Tyler, where Erickson taught?

[6 : 18] Yeah, he's... I'm going to read something from his book, which is kind of funny, because it's a very dry textbook that he wrote. He wrote a big book called Christian Theology. And, you know, Millard Erickson isn't known for, like, you know, flowery language or things like this.

But then he comes to the end of his chapter on the unity of the person of Christ, and he says, it's sometimes been said that there are only seven basic jokes. And every joke is a variation on one of them.

I don't know what the seven are. He doesn't get into it, right? But then he says, a similar statement can be made about the errors regarding the person of Christ. So here's Millard Erickson sort of using comedy as an illustration for understanding the deepest mystery of all time, the person of Christ.

But what he says is really, really helpful. He says, you know, there are basically, there are basically six ways in which, as humans, we sort of go wrong in thinking about the person of Christ.

And as we think about those six ways historically that developed, we can sort of figure out, like, okay, well, there are the kind of edges of the sandbox, right? As we've tried to push up against it with our human intellect, we have found where, like, we drift off into error.

[7 : 26] And he says, and I'll write some of these down as we go, but he says, here are the six. Either they deny the genuineness or the completeness of Jesus's deity.

There's the first two. Either Jesus isn't divine, or he's not totally divine. There's the first two. Or they deny the genuineness or completeness of his humanity.

So Jesus either just isn't really human, or he's, like, not totally human. Or, here's the other two, they divide his person or they confuse his natures.

Now, those are the two we'll spend a little more time on this morning because those are maybe the little more harder ones to wrap our minds around. And then Erickson says, all departures from the orthodox doctrine of the person of Christ are simply variations of one of these heresies.

And when he says orthodox there, he just means this is what the scriptures teach and this is what the church faithfully has affirmed throughout the ages. This is sort of right belief and right worship or in line with, or, like, when you go to the orthodontist, what are they doing?

[8 : 35] They're ortho-ing your dontics, right? They're straightening your teeth, right? So what is orthodoxy? Orthodoxy is, doxy, right, is belief or even worship, right?

Ortho is the worship that's in line with, in line with what? In line with the scriptures and what the church has proclaimed the scriptures to teach, right? So, all departures from the orthodox doctrine of the person of Christ are simply variations of one of these heresies.

Okay, so this will be some fun. Let's look, let's look at some of these and let's figure out the edges of the sandbox, right? So, let's think about heresies or errors concerning Christ's deity. Can I ask something before we even start this? Quickly, Richard, because otherwise I'll run out of time. Go ahead. This is a primary issue, right? This is not a secondary or tertiary issue. Yes, but we will see as we get into this that some of the distinctions we're making are very fine. So, we do want to have grace if someone maybe doesn't use the exact language that we do or maybe is just prone to misunderstanding.

[9 : 43] This is one of those doctrines where we have to be gracious as one other. But, with that being said, the short answer to your question, Richard, is yes, this is a primary doctrine.

To deny the full humanity or the full deity of Christ takes you outside of the realm of Christianity. Right? You've stumbled into something else. Yeah. So, okay, heresies regarding Christ's deity. Hey, that looks pretty, that's readable, right? I'm getting better. Yeah, so the first, the first one is what we might call, well, what's been called historically, Evianism.

Okay, so what does Evianism? Evianism is basically, and this cropped up very early in the church, was basically the belief that Jesus was merely human. He wasn't God. He wasn't fully God. However, Jesus was, he was the, he was the human Messiah. God was active in him. His power was active in him to, to a superlative degree. But, but he wasn't God.

[10 : 53] We just saw in him humanity come fully alive with the power of God, right? Now, of course, the church very early on said, no, no, no, that's a departure from what Jesus himself taught us, who he was, and what we believe him to be.

A sort of variation of this is called adoptionism. Stop, whoops, shun, ism, adoptionism. So, adoptionism, if you run across that in conversations about Christology, is basically saying that, so Jesus was born as if, he was fully human when he was born. There was nothing kind of ontologically special about him, but at a certain moment in his life, God came upon him.

A lot of times, they'll say at his baptism, at his baptism, the Christ came upon him, and at that moment, he became something greater than human. And then he did his earthly ministry that way, and then oftentimes, adoptionism will say, but then the Christ left him, right? usually somewhere around his crucifixion, right? Now, you can see that that gets way far out from what the New Testament taught, right? But both of these were ways of trying to say, like, well, we know God can't become a human being, right?

[12 : 11] It was kind of working with this prior philosophical assumption that God can't become a human, so how do we make sense of it, right? But both of these were out of bounds, right? Because they really just deny what we talked about last week, that Jesus was fully God.

Okay, those are kind of easy to spot, right? There was a second one that denied Christ's deity, although this one was a bit more sophisticated.

And this one goes under the name of Arianism. Okay, in the early 4th century, there was an Alexandrian presbyter, sort of elder, leader in the church, named Arius.

who was a very smart guy, and a lot of people liked him. And he was even a songwriter. And, because we know, right, because we know that God is one, and God is eternal, and God is majestic, right?

Surely, that one awesome, majestic God, right, can't, there can't be two of them, right? And that one awesome, majestic God can't, like, become a human being.

[13 : 22] So, what do we believe, then, about the Son? Even about the eternal Son? So, now, let me take a step back. Everything I'm telling you about the history of these is very truncated, and the story's way more complicated, but I'm just giving you the overview.

So, if you hear someone say, well, it's a little more like this, yeah, there's nuance here, but I'm going to give you the broad outline. So, basically, Arius and his followers began to teach that the word that John talks about was actually the highest and best and first created being, that the word had a beginning.

and Arius and his followers actually wrote songs for worship, and one of the great choruses was, there was a time when the word was not.

Interesting, right? Imagine singing that one in church. There was a time when the word was not. You were not the word in the beginning.

Right? So, but you can see how that sort of makes sense, right? There's one God and God creates this superhuman being and it's through that sort of ultra, super, first created being that he does

everything else.

[14:43] Right? But again, that sort of makes Jesus mostly God, but not God. Right? He's actually not God.

And here's how it started to come down. And this was what, there was a council that was called by the church, Council of Nicaea in 325, because this controversy raged for many, many, many years and it continued to rage for many, many years.

And there was a man named Athanasius, who was a great hero of the faith, who fought this battle. And late in the new year, later in the new year, in the spring, we're going to look at more of this in detail. But it came down to this.

Is Jesus, you're going to like this, this is good.

Is Jesus homoiosios? Or is he homoiosios? Ah, this little letter right here is the Greek letter iota.

[15:48] It's like our I. Blood wish, not blood wish, literally, but controversies raged over this letter because the difference between this word and this word, if you know Greek, is homoiosios is similar in being.

Really alike. Oosios is just being. But homoiosios is insane. The same in being.

Now, in writing, that's not a big difference, is it? One little I. But in meaning, it's a world of difference. That Jesus isn't just mostly like God, he's fully God.

Homoiosios, of one same nature with the Father. And at the Council of Nicaea, that's what they will affirm. This is from the Council of Nicaea, I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, born of the Father before all ages.

There's an eternal generation of the Son, is what we're talking about. There was no time when the Son was not. And then it goes on to say this, God from God, speaking of Jesus the Son, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial, which is just the Latin phrase, homoiosios, of one nature, of the same nature with the Father.

[17:18] Okay, so here's one edge of the sandbox, Christ's deity. He's not God, he's mostly God. Both of those are ruled out, he's fully God, right? Okay, what about when it comes to Christ's humanity?

How does this start to cook in the early church? Well, we talked about this a couple weeks ago. The first one that cropped up, especially as the gospel began to take root in, as the gospel began to take root in cultures, docetism, that were more heavily influenced by Greek thought, and again, that was everywhere, it wasn't just, I mean, there were plenty of Jews who were heavily influenced by Greek thought, so you see this pretty early, but where the kind of Greek worldview was more heavily in place, you began to see this thing crop up, docetism.

Now, what is docetism? Docetism, we talked about earlier, is that Jesus only seemed to be human. He had the appearance of being human, but he wasn't actually human. Now, why would you believe something like that? Why would you believe that Jesus is fully God but not fully human? Yeah, Ivor, go ahead. It sure does, doesn't it? Isn't it easier to believe that God just kind of showed up as an avatar, but if you got close enough to him, your hand would go straight through, right?

[18:40] Yeah. Yeah, and also several religions at the time thought about avatars. Mm-hmm. Yeah, that's right. Yeah, especially if you get into Eastern religions, right? Yeah, that's right.

That's right. Yeah. Part of else what was going on here is that in, in, in, in a particularly kind of Greek cast of mind, in some of them anyway, matter, the material stuff of the world, was, was negative, right?

It was a kind of a negative approach to the material world, right? Why? Well, because matter's changing, matter's painful, right? So, some of the Greek worldview had the idea that what's the goal of existence, right?

Well, the real goal of existence is to get out of this shell into the one, into the eternal, right? You see that in Stoicism especially, right? You know, the goal is to sort of get a piece of, get to a place of equanimity in this life so that when you die, you're kind of absorbed into the one, right?

Sounds very Eastern to our ears, doesn't it? Obviously, the church rejected this. No, Jesus was fully human. Why? Because from a biblical worldview, matter's good. God created everything and said it was good.

[19:54] So, there's nothing sort of necessarily wrong with his full humanity besides, look at the records that we have. Look at the apostolic witness that we talked about two weeks ago. Jesus was fully human.

He was eating with them. He was touching them, right? Can a spirit do these things? The resurrected Christ said to them. Okay, so that one was out. The second one though, and again, you kind of see the, oh, I'm going to spell this wrong.

I-N-A. Ah. This one was a little more sophisticated though. And this one, man, this one, this one sounded right on the surface.

It was kind of a clever, Apollinarianism was a clever solution to the problem, right? How is Jesus fully human and fully divine in one person? So around 361, so this would be about 40 years after the Council of Nicaea, right?

These two were pretty early on. They kind of co-existed and kept going, right? Arianism cropped up early 4th century, Apollinarianism kind of mid to late 4th century. Bishop of Laodicea around 361, Apollinarius, I think is how you would pronounce it, said that, hey, Jesus clearly had a fully human body.

[21 : 07] That's obvious, right? But, his soul or his mind was divine. So that's how God becomes fully human.

God, who we know, the one God, God is a spirit, right? Has no body. That spirit just comes down and takes a human body. Boom! Done!

Solution solved, right? How easy is that? You know, I kind of joked about this a couple weeks ago when we talked about this. This is sort of like, this is sort of like the earth suit approach to Christology.

That just like astronauts put on a space suit to go into space, God put on an earth suit to come to earth, right? And that earth suit was his human body. But everything going on side of that human body was God.

But wait a second. This is what the church is saying as the teachings of Apollinarius start growing steam. But when we read the apostolic witness, that's not what we see, is it?

[22 : 11] Do we not see that Jesus has a human mind and a human soul and even a human will, which will become a debate a little later in church history? Does Jesus have a human will or is it just God's will, right?

And think of it this way. One of the things we've been saying over and over again in this class on the person of Christ is that the full humanity and full deity of Christ are so important.

Why? For our salvation, right? If God the Son doesn't assume it in the incarnation, if he doesn't take it up into himself, then it's not going to be redeemed, right?

And friends, do our bodies need saving? Yeah, the older I get, the more I realize our bodies need saving, right? As I can, you know, get a little creakier and get a little older, right?

But let's push a little deeper. Do not our minds and our souls also need saving? If Jesus is going to save us, then he needs a fully human nature, not just a human body.

[23 : 19] So both on account of the scriptural witness and the theological implications of it, Apollinarianism was ruled out. That no, no, no, Jesus had a fully human mind or soul as well as a fully human body.

And that was at the Council of Constantinople in 381. So this would have been Nicaea in 325 and this would have been 381, right?

Constantinople, 381. Constantinople. Constantinople. Okay.

381. Constantinople. All right. Well, how far have we gotten now as we progress through church history? Okay. Jesus is fully God and Jesus is fully human. We haven't gotten very far, have we? But look at where the sandbox lies, right? Good work was done by our forebears in the faith, right? We've defended Jesus' full divinity, right?

[24 : 21] We've also defended his full humanity. Okay. So then, the story continues as we progress.

So, we're in now into the 5th century, into the early 5th century. Now these, what I'm going to call these are, well, let me write it this way.

These would be errors concerning the unity of Christ's person. Okay.

If I, if I abbreviate Christ with an X, that's not because I'm like taking the Christ out of Christmas. X is a Greek letter, chi, which is how Jesus' name starts in the Greek.

It's just shorthand. It's an abbreviation. It's not a deletion. So, the unity of Christ's person. Ah, okay. First one that crops up is in the early 4th century with a guy named Nestorius.

[25 : 27] And what we're going to see with these two is that there's a bit of a tragedy in some of these stories because a lot of the names under which these two things I'm going to talk about get called, so poor Nestorius, right?

He was a very good preacher. He was a very godly man, but he got himself into a lot of theological trouble. And he actually got slandered a lot for things he didn't believe.

But what happened was is as he struggled to articulate the unity of Christ's person, it got a little messy. And then, what he believed ended up, what, what, the, something got labeled with his name that maybe he didn't actually believe when you dig down into his writings.

But, what it came to be called was Nestorianism. Okay? And what Nestorianism is, is that basically, the way it gets shorthanded is, is that there's two persons.

And two natures. Basically, you've got, you've got Jesus' humanity and his divinity, and it starts driving them apart.

[26 : 49] That they, that, that, that they're both kind of almost protected from one another. Right? That we don't want them kind of commingling. But you can see how immediately this, this becomes a nonsensical proposition.

Right? How can there be two persons within Jesus? Right? So, how this debate got started is very interesting because there was some debate flying around in the fourth century of whether we should call Mary the theotokos, the God-bearer.

Right? Is it appropriate to call Jesus the mother of God? The bearer of God? Right? Now, I think today in the church we think, well, yeah, of course, because Jesus was fully God, so she was the mother of God.

We were comfortable saying with that. But someone like Nestoria says, yeah, but don't we need to be careful there? Did a human like give birth to the one true, like the infinite God?

Right? So suddenly the mystery of the incarnation starts pushing against our language. So Nestoria says things like, well, I'm fine with theotokos as long as we quickly add anthropotokos, that she was the bearer of a human.

[28 : 06] But then it starts to get squirrely, right? Well, did that human person Jesus exist before the incarnation?

Was there a pre-existing human Jesus before the word became human? In other words, is there a human person and a divine person that are somehow being melded in the incarnation?

And the answer to that is no, theologically, right? But these were the things that were trying to be guarded against when the church came up against Nestorianism. Now, here's why I say I sort of have some sympathy for Nestorius because I think when you go back and look at the historical records, there's a good case to be made that Nestorius actually affirmed what the church would eventually affirm, but he was just struggling to find the language for it.

He was struggling to find the right language for it, right? And there are some churches today even that sound a little more Nestorian in how they articulate the person of Christ, right?

But I think they're just trying to find language to articulate the inarticulable. Okay. Any questions about Nestorius? I know this is quick and this is probably the most confusing of all of them.

[29 : 28] I usually think of it as two cats in a bag. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That's right. But this produces like a schizophrenic Jesus, right?

Well, and here's the theological problem. Yeah. Well, go ahead. We'll keep going. Kim, yeah, go ahead. In the Old Testament?

Oh, can I have pause on that and can we talk about that after because it's a yes, but there's both exegetical things going on there and theological things going on there, but we'll talk about them afterwards.

Yeah. Okay. So this kind of language to talk about the unity of Christ's person wasn't going to fly, right? The other thing that cropped up in the wake of kind of this battle against what came to be called Nestorianism, oh, by the way, Council of Ephesus for, I think, 31, right?

Yes, 431. Okay. So they get together, they condemn this way of articulating the unity of person of Jesus, the Council of Ephesus in 431. In the wake of that, there's lots of enthusiasm to not divide the person of Christ, and it gets a little out of hand because there's a formula flying around that kind of gets dubbed one nature, like one nature Christology.

[30 : 57] The unity of the person of Christ was so real and so actual that it's not even right to talk about two natures, we just talk about one nature. And again, this is where church history is a bit

tragic.

Hold on, I'm going to spell this wrong too. U, T-Y-C-H-E-S, yeah, that's it. Eutychus was an older kind of head of a monastery and he kind of gets pulled into this controversy, again, maybe not as clear of a thinker or as careful of an articulator, and he says things like that after his birth, Jesus only possessed one nature, that of God made flesh, right?

So this starts to develop into the view where the humanity of Jesus and the divinity of Jesus sort of create this third thing, this like new nature, right?

So it's like right? They like come together to create something new, a third thing.

Mixing red and blue makes purple. Exactly, yeah, yeah, yeah, or you have water, you have water, and you have ink, and you drip the ink into the water, and the whole thing kind of becomes something else, right?

[32 : 36] Eutychianism, which is sort of a confusion, or a combination of the natures, right? Now, why, when the church started to think about this, did it start to get uncomfortable, do you think, given what we've talked about in this class so far?

Well, our nature is not a fusion of two natures. Yep, that's right. Who is he redeeming? Who is Christ? Ah, yes, well, that's right, yeah, who is Jesus redeeming in this new third thing?

Anybody else want to add to that? It sort of seems, what is he now? And who is he saving? Yeah, anyone else want to jump in? Why is this kind of mixture of the nature something that feels problematic to the church, you think?

Yeah, he's not God anymore. What is he? He's not human anymore, and he's not God anymore. He's like, what did you say? Alien, yeah, he's got this new thing, right?

Yeah, this is exactly right. So when the church really started to think about this, they thought, well, then, well, goodness, Jesus is neither human nor divine, but something else altogether, and that means he can't do what he came to do, right?

[34 : 00] He can't actually save us because he's not us anymore. He's something else altogether, right? Now, again, here's where I want to be maybe charitable to our forebears in the faith, right?

Can you see how Nestorius or even Nestorianism and Eutychism or Eutychianism, how they're trying to hold two things together, but maybe falling off either end of the cliff, right?

Because what we want to do is we want to hold together he's fully human and fully divine, but he's not two cats in a bag, right? So we're trying to hold these things together, but you can see how it's easy to tip off one way or to tip off the other, to combine the natures together into one person, right?

One nature, one person, or two natures in two persons, right? So hard to find that balance, the balance that the scriptures present, right? That Jesus is fully human and fully God, but he is one person, right?

So how does the church try to sort this out? Well, the short story, it goes, that at the Council of Chalcedon, this one's Chalcedon, sometimes you hear it Chalcedon, Tyler, what's your preferred pronunciation of the Council?

[35 : 18] Chalcedon, doesn't it? Yeah, yeah, Chalcedon. Where do I write this? I'll just write it up here. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay.

Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. In 451, so in 451, the church has another council at Chalcedon to try to hammer out these controversies that we're developing.

So they're looking back over the last number of years, all the way back to Apollinarianism, actually, Historianism, Tuchianism, and they're saying, all right, how are we going to define, how are we going to define this thing according to scripture and according to what we feel like the church has taught through the years?

And this is what's sometimes called the Chalcedonian definition of 451. And I'll read this because this is really kind of a high watermark in the church's theological development when it comes to the person of Christ.

This is an English translation of it. It says, we then, following the Holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same, perfect in Godhead, and also perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body, consubstantial with us, right, of the same nature as us, consubstantial with us according to the manhood, in all things like us without sin, begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the mother of God, see how they slip that in there in these controversies, according to the manhood.

[37 : 07] And here's the sentence that will get kind of remembered most throughout history. One in the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, so one, right, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusably, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.

The distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union. The distinction of the natures being by no means taken away by the union. Who do they have in the eye there, right? The distinction of the natures, right?

But rather, the property of each being preserved and concurring in one person and one subsistence.

Okay, subsistence. This is sort of technical, that's a Latin phrase, but the Greek phrase there would have been hypostasis. Sort of one, again, they're grappling for language here.

Hypostasis typically means being, right? One person, one being, right? But two natures, not parted or divided into two persons, there they're glancing at Nestorius, right?

[38 : 23] But one in 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 taught us, and the creed of the holy followers has handed down to us.

Okay, there it is. The definition of Chalcedon. And again, note, two natures, right? One person, two natures, and the two natures are without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.

The property of each nature being preserved and concurring in one person. And as I mentioned, that word subsistence or hypostasis gets picked up in later theological language.

So when we're talking about this whole idea, we're talking about the hypostatic union. The hypostatic union. Okay, well, what did the Council of Chalcedon do for us?

Did it make any progress towards answering the question, do you think? Do you hear me read that and think, mystery solved.

[39 : 33] I've got it figured out. What do you think? So, these other two views, Nestorius and Eudakis, they obviously, historically precede the decision that the Council of Chalcedon.

Yes, yes, yes. That's right. So Nestorianism, what became known as Nestorianism, was denied in 431 in Ephesus, right? So, not that much longer after, about 20 years later, right?

But it's all in the same ballpark. But yes, this is after these debates have been raging for many years. So, Chalcedon merely adds another option. I wouldn't say that.

Well, sure, it depends. It depends what you mean by another option, right? It sounds like a summary. You're trying to make sense of all the other... Yes, that's right. That's right, yeah.

Yeah, what they're doing... Right, yeah. What they're doing at Chalcedon... So, sometimes this Chalcedonian definition is sort of disparaged. It's like, well, it doesn't really say anything. It sort of says what we can't say, right?

[40 : 38] We can't say this, we can't say this, we can't say this. And there is a sense in which it is saying that, right? Again, it is sort of defining the edges of the sandbox wherein we want to stay within. But it is making some positive statements, right?

And again, I think they're scriptural statements. They're looking at scripture and saying this is what the scriptures teach, right? that Jesus is fully human and fully God, right?

That these two natures exist without either one being diluted or changed, right? So, it's helping to keep us in this... What Chalcedon is doing, it's helping us stay in the center of the biblical revelation, right?

Here, right? What the scriptures teach. Oftentimes, we'll end up straying out of it because we're uncomfortable with the tension or the mystery of it, right?

None of these squiggles have any significance. I'm just sort of illustrating, right? So, is it just sort of another option on the way? Well, yes and no.

[41 : 44] I think what it is, it is an articulation at a certain moment in time, right? But, it's actually a pretty good one.

It's a pretty faithful one to scripture, right? And it's one that has guided the church for many years.

Now, here's where I think we need to be careful, right? That, I think we want to be careful that when we're struggling to define this mystery, we're not just like throwing heresy stones at everybody if they can't repeat the definition of Chalcedon.

Yeah, Rob, go ahead. Oh, goodness, no, yes, yes. There's a tension over the story.

There's a lot of intuition that this isn't quite right. It took a while to articulate the alternative. Yes, that's right. There's a broken one that everyone pointed out to the story, but everyone said that's wrong.

There's all intention over the thing. This doesn't quite feel right. Yeah, that's right. Thank you, Rob. It's not as if, yeah, it's not as if this was the first time people started using this language to talk about Jesus.

[42 : 49] It was the church getting together and saying, no, this is the way that we're going to walk in. This is the faithful expression of what scriptures teach, right?

Yeah, that's helpful. Yep. As they say at the end of this Chalcedonian definition, right? As the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the Creed of the Holy Father's handed down to us.

So they're basically saying, like, this is what the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the church so far has really taught. We're trying to articulate it as best we can and as clearly as we can in light of these recent ways of articulating it that we feel like stray from what scriptures teach and what the church has taught.

Make sense? Yeah, Richard, go ahead. But when those who are of Nestorius' persuasion or Eutychese' persuasion read the findings at Chalcedon, they didn't say, oh, this is what we've been struggling for years to say.

Now the church can be one in this matter. Instead, they hardened their positions and went their own way. Well, you see that a lot in church history, right?

[44 : 09] And there's a really, interestingly, Nestorius himself, later in his life, actually said, yeah, I'm fine with the Chalcedonian definition.

I'm grossly overstating things, but yes. However, what you have to keep in mind with church history is that a lot of these debates end up getting also caught up in culture, power, political things, right? So a lot of times things will get defended with a vigor because there's a lot loaded into it, right? So imagine if this particular way of trying to make sense of the person of Christ was also bound up with your culture, your language, your family, your church tradition, right?

It'd be hard to just sort of like chuck it and keep going, right? So I guess what I'm trying to say is this is where I want to have a view of the Council of Chalcedon that says, yeah, I actually think that's probably the best way of articulating what the scriptures teach, but you also want to be generous to those who are trying to capture this in ways that might not use the same kind of language to get at the same thing, right?

Because I think if you were to talk to a church today that holds something that feels a lot more like Nestorianism and you started to really talk about them, you pushed past the sort of creedal definitions, I think you'd end up really, really similar.

[45 : 54] But here's where my knowledge of things starts to get white because I'm no expert in the Church of the East or the current Nestorian churches of today and things like that, right?

So, but you're right. Even with Arianism, though, like when the Council of Nicaea happened, there were Arians running around for hundreds of years, right? Because bad ideas die hard.

Yeah. Matt, go ahead. Yeah. Two questions. Yeah. When was the issue of one or two wills? Oh. The person of Jesus brought up and the second one is, was there ever a council debate about whether Jesus had one or two centers of consciousness?

Yeah. So, I forget the year that the monothelite controversy happened. That's the debate over Jesus having a fully human will.

But it was after Chalcedon. Yep. Google search it. You'll find the date. I think it was pre, I think it was 100 or 200 years later, though.

[47 : 01] For some reason, 681 is in my mind, but I could be wrong about that. Well, that was the year in which it was settled. 681 is when the monothelite, thank you. Okay, thanks, Richard. Yep. 681.

681. Yep. Whether Jesus has two centers of consciousness, that way of speaking about the unity of Christ's person, to my knowledge, which is limited, wasn't really used in these early Christological debates.

I think that's more of a modern way of expressing things. Maybe it was never addressed. I don't, I don't, yeah, I don't think so.

Not to my knowledge. I could be wrong about that. But I do think that, just that language of a center of consciousness, you certainly don't find that in the first few hundred years, right? That could be a bit, that could be a bit of what they're getting at with language of person.

Does it, does a center of consciousness fall, is that a, is that, would that fall into the person or would that fall into the nature, right? This is where we start to, this is where we start to get into the realm of like, wow, what does that look like?

[48 : 11] Yeah, Matt, go ahead. So I was taught two centers of consciousness by a very Orthodox person. Sure, yeah. A seminary. Yeah, sure. And on one level, you know, some of these things, to me, my way of being seen, very speculative.

For sure, yes. However, that particular issue solved a little problem where, interpreted one way, the son does not know, you know, when the second coming.

Sure, yeah. Isn't that one, that's one of the verses that really is a test case, I think, for a lot of our Christological thinking. Or at least it starts to push out some of these distinctions.

Yeah, go ahead, Matt. So when you come to that, in my mind, you go back to hard evidence of Scripture. Yeah, right. How to fit all of those things in with my very limited understanding of theology and how all the logic fits together.

Yeah, right. You know, I want to say, oh, yeah, two centers of consciousness. Yeah. Because it addresses, for me, anyway, Yeah. Sure. Attention and spiritual evidence.

[49 : 23] Yeah. Oh, that feels, that's sweet. Yeah. And this is where theological language, right, is helping us approach how do we grapple and hold together these biblical truths with our finite minds.

So if language of two centers of consciousness helps us to affirm that Jesus is fully human and fully divine in one person, great. Right? If it begins to push Jesus into kind of a split personality, then it can become not helpful.

Right? But again, this is where with an issue like this, it usually takes more than a slogan to really capture what the Bible's talking about. But I actually think, Matt, you're bringing up a good point.

Right? If two centers of consciousness is helpful to capture what this is talking about, then great. I don't necessarily have any problem with it. Right? Yeah. Beth? I think it's interesting that most of the conversations you laid out around this mystery is coming from like a conception point as opposed to a like lived point.

Yeah. And I think one of the, as we try to reach for it, like the fact that we're sinners. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

[50 : 36] We can't even taste the sort of like, for lack of a better term, sort of the synergy, the working together of God's will and human will. Yeah.

We can't even quite grasp the uncontaminated, like really stirred together solution of God and man. Yeah. Yeah. So anyway, I think I'm sure in there, as they like did these deep dives into this mystery of like, what does it mean that Jesus was fully human but without sin, that he was so submitted, fully harmonious and submitted to the will of the Father?

Like, what does that even mean? Right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. No, it's a great point. I think you're making two really good points, Beth. Or one really overarching point, which is, you know, as humans, we don't just have finite minds, right?

But we also have fallen minds when we approach these things, right? So even if, even if sin had never entered the world, we would still not be able to fully comprehend, right?

Comprehend in the sense of understand in every degree what's going on in the incarnation. just like we would, we will never for all eternity fully comprehend God's triune nature, right?

[52 : 05] Now, add on top of that the fact that there are what are sometimes called noetic effects of the fall, which is a fancy way to saying our thinking too, our reasoning capacities have been affected by the fall.

So there's like strike two and we're really never going to get to the bottom of this, right? Right. Yeah. So we're going to try to find language to help us articulate the realities we see in scripture, but also acknowledge where we run up to.

There's mystery there. There really is. And I think as Christians that's okay, right? It's okay to say, here's what God's revealed and we have to just let them sit there.

You know, we can do our best to try to define and understand and look at the scriptural data, right? But at the end of the day, like we just have to, our posture before some of these things has to eventually end in awe and wonder and worship, right?

Yeah. Do you want to add to that, Beth? Go ahead. Well, and I just think what's been helpful for me to not feel overwhelmed with kind of stepping out of the boat on these things. At least the story has stepped out of the boat, right?

[53 : 19] Yeah, right, right. I think what's helpful is to always think in terms of like, one, what does the word of God say? And two, what's at stake? Yeah. Like, to understand what's at stake with the certainty that which you played out.

Yeah, yeah. And I wish, you know, three weeks was way too little time to do this class. I'm realizing now. We should have done it over six, I think, because it would have been a lot of fun to push even deeper. There's a lot we haven't talked about in this class, and I'll say this kind of by way of summing up, because we need to go.

You know, we haven't talked about Philippians 2, which I'm kind of, it's too bad we haven't. And we haven't talked about what's sometimes called Kenotic Christology. What does it mean that Jesus emptied himself in the incarnation?

incarnation? Now, I think, real briefly on that, what does it mean that Jesus emptied himself? When you look at Philippians 2, we want to be careful when we talk about Jesus emptying himself in the incarnation, that he doesn't sort of leave behind divine attributes.

because if Jesus just sort of left behind or gave up divine attributes when he became a human being, in what sense can we say that he's still fully God, right?

[54 : 36] And I think when you look at Philippians 2, what Jesus is, what the Son is emptying himself of is not necessarily attributes, but honor and glory, privilege and position, right?

Think of that. Let this mind be in you, which also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, right, being fully God, didn't consider equality with God a thing to be, what's the word there?

Grasp, sometimes we translate it. The sense of that word is sort of exploited for his own privilege, right?

Used. But emptied himself and took the form of a servant, right? And interesting, took the form of a servant, I think is explanatory of what the emptying was, right?

To give up, in a sense, not his divine attributes, but the honor, glory, privilege and position of heaven to come and be a servant and die. Now, of course, that raises all sorts of questions.

[55 : 44] Matt, you raised them. What does it mean that the Son doesn't know the day or the hour when the Father will come and clean up all things, right? And I think the answer there has been twofold.

One is, some people will say, well, that is Jesus speaking out of his human nature, right? In his divine nature, of course he knew everything. The end from the beginning. But in his human nature, he did not, right?

That's sort of one way to approach it. A sort of lesser way is that, this is sort of a soft version of Philippians 2, where it's like, Jesus wasn't giving up his divine attributes, he was limiting them in the incarnation.

Sort of a self-limiting. The illustration is sometimes given of a, imagine an elite sprinter having to do a three-legged race with me, right?

He's still an elite sprinter, but we're moving a lot slower because we've got to, like, stick together.

So that's one way that, again, we're trying to hold together the two natures in the one person, right?

[56 : 44] You know, I think either way is biblically acceptable, right? But what we don't want to say is that Jesus just gave up divine attributes when he became a human, right?

We don't want to say that because then Jesus, again, we're falling into this thing where Jesus wasn't fully God, right? Better to sit in that mystery of, yeah, there are times when his human nature really is shining through.

Or maybe when the kind of limitation of his divine natures in the incarnation is really shining through than to say he wasn't this, that, or the other thing, right? So that's what we didn't talk about in this class.

We also could have pushed so much harder into the practical difference that all this makes. So, yeah, let me just encourage you, you know, if you'd like to push deeper in these things, it really is a deep wellspring of wonder and comfort for us as Christians.

So, Beth, did you have a last word? I saw your hand go up. I thought I had something. Oh, Debbie, did you have something you wanted to add? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

[57 : 51] Yeah. Sure. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Sure.

Sure. I know. I know. Yeah. Yeah. Right, right, right. Yes. Yes, I know. I know. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. Right. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. You know, here's, here's how I think about it. Ah! So, I think what's, I think a good catchphrase in Christology is, remaining what he was, he became what he was not.

Remaining what he was, he became what he was not. He assumed a human nature, right? He assumed a human nature, the divine, the word of God, right?

God the Son assumed a fully human nature, right? So, one way I think about it is that what was happening when Jesus was born, right?

[59 : 03] That the fully divine second person of the Trinity had assumed into his divine nature a fully human nature, and in that moment was experiencing exactly what it's like to be an infant, right?

Without ceasing to be omnipresent and omnipotent and omniscient and all those things, he suddenly knew intimately what it was like to be helpless and hungry and crying for milk, right?

That's utterly mind-blowing, right? But there it is. I mean, that's the mystery of the incarnation, and you think about that through his whole life, right? So, I wonder if in that Mark 13 passage, not even the Son knows that there was the person of Christ experiencing in his humanity exactly what ignorance was like.

Isn't that powerful? Mind-blowing, right? That he knows what it's like to not know everything in that moment. What a comfort to know that our Savior was willing to stoop, give up his privilege and position, to even taste of ignorance for a moment.

Wild, right? And utterly unique in the history of religions. There's nothing like this. So, okay, let me pray and we'll close. Father in heaven, our Lord Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, God three in one, Lord, we just ask for your help and your grace to not just understand these things as limited as we can, but to live in the great truth that you, our infinite God, took on a finite nature for us and for our salvation.

[60 : 45] Thank you, Lord Jesus, that in you, in your one person, we can see, God, what you are truly like and we can know that you have reconciled and redeemed us.

We pray this in your mighty name, Jesus. Amen. All right, friends. If people look at you funny because you're late to church, you can blame the pastor. But let me encourage you to rush next door and catch the service.

Thank you.