

Prolegomena: Since He ascended to heaven, the question of who Jesus is was of the utmost importance to the early church. Is Jesus God? Is He a man? Can He be both? As the scriptures were copied and distributed among the churches, it became evident to those who studied them that the answer was yes to all of the above. Scripture affirms that Jesus was fully God and fully man, the Son of God; that He is one with the Father and the Spirit, yet distinct from them; and that there is only one God. Once this question was settled, new questions arose: what was the relationship between Jesus divine and human natures? Was He truly fully God and fully man? Was there some compromise between these natures within His person or was there a new, unique nature composed of the human and divine? These questions are of the utmost importance, for they are critical questions upon which the entire salvific economy is established. Furthermore, all of scripture most fit with all of scripture and it is of the utmost importance that our understanding of who God is be shaped by how the Bible has revealed Him to be. Indeed, as 1 John 4:2-3 points out, Christ is God come in the flesh and that which teaches to the contrary is of the spirit of antichrist.

I. From the beginning of the church, Christians contended with false teaching of who the person of Jesus was. Belief in a Jesus not taught in the Bible is not saving belief. It was (and still is) critical that Christians know who Jesus is revealed to be. Some of the early deviations from sound teaching included:

A. Ebionism taught that Christ was only a very holy prophet but not God. The Church firmly rejected this, stating that Scripture clearly demonstrated the deity of Christ.

B. Docetism claimed that Christ was not a man but was a spirit or apparition that lacked physical form and only appeared as a man. The Church repudiated this, asserting not only the deity of Christ but His full humanity.

1. The **Gnostics** held many views similar to Docetics, especially the corrupt and evil nature of the physical world.

2. Gnostics, however, were distinct from Christianity and Docetism and their views of Christ were part of a much larger cosmology that was radically different from that taught by Christians and even Docetic heretics.

C. Adoptionism sought a middle ground between these teachings and argued that Christ was born a righteous man and was subsequently exalted into deity by the Father on account of his righteousness. The Church dismissed this, declaring that if Christ was God, then He was fully God and fully preexistent and eternal.

D. Modalism was the most sophisticated attempt at explaining the Scriptures by means other than what the Church taught. It taught that Christ was fully god and took the form of a man, but that there was no distinction between the Father, the Son, or the Spirit. Instead, Modalists affirmed the Biblical teaching that God was one. Again, the Church rejected this on account of Scripture's clear teaching regarding the distinction between the persons of God. In its early iterations, this false teaching was known as Sabellianism, after one of its early teachers.

E. Arianism was a much more subtle departure from Biblical teaching. It affirmed the teachings of the Bible, and had great reverence for the exalted person of Christ. However, rather than seeing Christ as fully God, Arians believed that the Son was the first created thing and that, through him, all other things were made. In this system of belief, Jesus was the Son, but he was not God.

1. This system of belief was begun by Arius in Alexandria, Egypt but quickly spread into parts of the Levant and Anatolia. It gained a large following within the church. For the first time, the primacy of the true teaching of the Bible were cast into doubt.

2. The focal point of debate between the two groups within the church was the use of the terms ὁμοουσιος (homoousios, **same** essence) and ὁμοιουσιος (homoiousios, **similar** essence). The church taught that the persons of the Trinity were all of the same substance. This is another way of saying that they were all equally God. The Arians, in contrast, claimed that Christ and the Father were of similar substance, yet that in the similarity there is still difference. Consequently, Christ was not one with the Father, as they were not both equally God.

3. In A.D. 325 an ecumenical council was convened in the city of Nicaea to determine what the proper teaching of the church would be. Through the work of great defenders of the Trinity, especially Athanasius, the true teaching of the church was successfully defended. The Nicene Creed was drafted to constitute a universally agreed on expression of the Biblical revelation of who God is.

4. Though repudiated, Arianism persisted for 50 years, due in large measure to patronage from Roman emperors. However, through the faithfulness of Athanasius and his successors, Trinitarian theology weathered the storm and in A.D. 381 a second ecumenical council was convened. The clarifying statements were added to the creed and it took the form in which we know it today.

5. In this manner, the doctrine of the Trinity was fully accepted in the church, though pockets of Arianism and other false teachings persisted for centuries.

The Nicene Creed:

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation He came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.

For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate; He suffered death and was buried. On the third day He rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, Who proceeds from the Father who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, Who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic [universal] and apostolic Church.

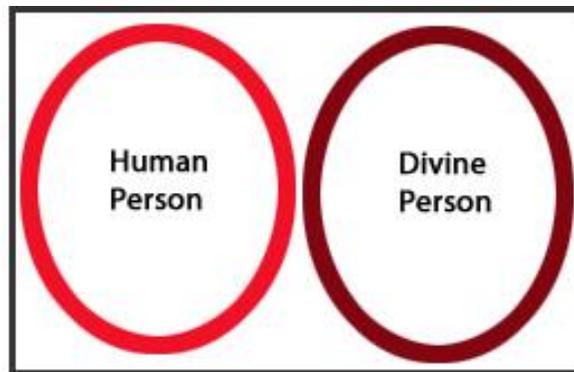
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

II. The matter of the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Spirit, having been clarified, theological study now shifted to the question of what relationship between His human and divine natures. It was taught by the church, in accordance with the scriptures, that Jesus was fully God and fully man, possessing the attributes of both natures. The union of these two natures in one person is referred to as the **hypostatic union**. This term is derived from ὑποστάσις (hypostasis, essential basic structure). While the church taught this in accordance to the scriptures, there were significant assaults on the doctrine.

A. Apollinarianism raised the first important challenge that the church was forced to confront. It claimed that Jesus had a perfect divine nature and assumed a normal body but the Logos taking the controlling place ordinarily held by the mind. While it affirmed the incarnation, it denied the full humanity of Christ.

B. Nestorianism was the next major deviation from a proper understanding of who Christ is. It taught that the human and divine natures of Christ were radically separated. As a consequence, it was argued that there were two persons of Christ, one divine and one human in the incarnation.

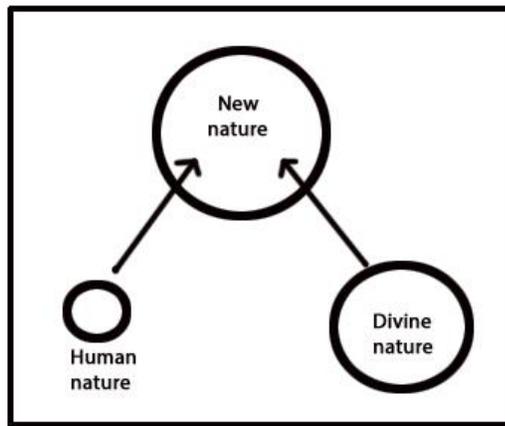


Nestorianism

In response to this new teaching, the church swiftly convened a third ecumenical council. The Nestorians were repudiated. Unfortunately, there were many who swung the pendulum too far in the other direction as a response.

C. Monophysitism taught that Christ had human and divine natures that were combined in the person of Christ and in being so combined, created a third nature. The third nature is new, unique and thoroughly unified in the incarnation. The name comes from the term φύσις (phusis, nature), which refers the supposed single nature of Christ.

1. The monophysite teaching began as a response to Nestorianism, pushing the unity of the person of Christ back toward where the church had consistently taught. Unfortunately, the boundaries were pushed too far and, in refuting the radical separation of the persons of Christ, they argued the opposite, that the two natures of Christ were combined and mixed within the single person of Christ.



Monophysitism

2. In response to the monophysite teaching, a fourth ecumenical council was convened A.D. 451 and, as before, the errant teaching was shown to be false and the teaching repudiated.
3. In order to guide the church through the turbulent waters of these challenging theological questions, the council formulated a second creed. It was intended to complement the Nicene Creed. Where the first articulated Trinitarian teaching, the second creed, known as the Chalcedonian Creed, articulated the teaching that Jesus was fully God and fully man.

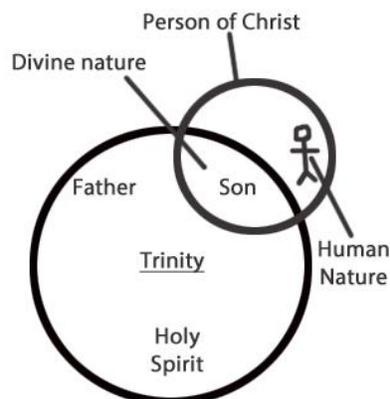
The Chalcedonian Creed:

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach people 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 [rational] soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto 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, according to the Manhood; 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 Fathers has handed down to us.



Chalcedonian definition

III. Having seen how the church charted a course through the turbulence brought about by errant teaching, the question then must be asked what the implications are for the proper understanding of who Christ is and why it is important. A short answer to this question is, quite simply, because the Bible has revealed this to be the case. A proper understanding of who God is requires all of scripture to inform and support the rest of scripture. The teaching that we have received, which has been passed on generation to generation, is the one that conforms to the entirety of the Bible. However, the matter is far more complex and the implications are immediate and have direct bearing on our salvation. It is incumbent on us, then, to examine this matter in a little more detail. First, it must be identified what exactly the Bible teaches regarding the hypostatic union and Christ's two natures. Subsequent to that, we must understand why it is important.

A. The deity of Christ having been established in the previous notes, we should look to the Bible to see how it affirms the human nature of Christ.

1. The Old Testament offers two indications that the Messiah would be human.

a. There are dozens of 'types' in the Old Testament that directly or indirectly indicate the humanity of Christ. Any time blood is spilled or a body sacrificed or a person is bodily present, that humanity is indicated.

Examples include:

- the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22)
- the Passover blood (Exodus 12)

- burnt offerings (Leviticus 1-7)
- the scapegoat (Leviticus 16:20-22)

It is worth noting that in the New Testament, all references to "the Lamb" are specifically referring to the human nature of Christ, for He is the fitting sacrifice that will remove the sins of the people.

b. The Old Testament is filled with prophesy that indicates the Messiah will be human. The expectation that God's salvation will be worked out by the human Messiah in no way preempts the reality that the Messiah will also be God.

- Protoevangelion (Gen 3:15)
- The Messiah will be born of a woman. (Isaiah 7:14)

- The Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7)
- The need for one to intercede with God. (Job 9:32-35)

2. The prophecy of the Old Testament is reflected in a prophecy made early in the New Testament. Luke 1:31-35 affirms the expectation that the Messiah will be a man, born of a woman, and will be a descendant of Jacob and David.

3. Hebrews 2:17 states "Therefore He had to be made like His brothers in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." In all ways was Christ human like us, but without sin. He is declared to be fully human. Furthermore, in being human, it is evidenced by His actions and attributes that he is like unto us.

a. Christ's human parentage and lineage are indicative of His human nature. He was born of Mary and descended from David, Abraham and Adam.

b. Not only did Christ have a human body, He also had a human soul and spirit.

- human soul: Matthew 26:38

- human spirit: John 13:21

c. The incarnation has human limitations. If He was not fully human, the divine nature of Christ would have overcome these limitations. Nonetheless, as fully man, Jesus experienced the same physical limitations that we do. It is striking that the weaknesses of Christ draw attention to His role as Messiah.

- He grew weary
- He experienced hunger
- He grew thirsty
- He was in agony
- He grew strong in spirit
- He was tempted
- He was self-limited in knowledge
- He prayed (which is human action)
- He slept in the boat
- He was baptized
- He walked two days to Bethany
- He wept at the tomb
- He dies

- He called the weary to Himself for rest
- He was the bread of life
- He was the water of life
- He healed the sick and soothed pain
- He was from all eternity
- He, as God, could not be tempted
- He is the wisdom of God
- He answers prayer
- He rose and rebuked the storm
- He is declared the Son by the Father
- He knew the moment Lazarus died
- He called the dead to arise
- He is eternal life

4. The Kenosis in Philippians 2:5-8 is a critical passage that succinctly expresses the specifics of Christ's human nature. In verse 7 a dichotomy is established. 7c states the Christ looks like other men. The word *ομοιωμα* (homoioma, likeness) is the same word used in Romans 8:3. There Paul states that Christ took on the likeness of sinful humanity. However, being only a likeness, the sin is absent. This is sharply contrasted with Philippians 2:7d. The word used there is *σχημα* (schema, form) indicates a correspondence between form and reality. In this case, the human form of Christ corresponds to His human nature. The contrast here is that, with regards to sin, Christ is only a likeness since sin is absent. On the other hand, with the essential form or nature, Christ is human.

IV. With a brief but reasonable examination of the Biblical basis for the full humanity of Christ before us, the question of why it matters is now pressing.

A. It was necessary for Christ to be fully God and fully man for the salvation economy to function, it was necessary for Christ to be fully God and fully man. It took the blood of man to be a substitute sacrifice to atone for sin (Hebrews 2:14-17). Yet only an infinite sacrifice would be sufficient to cover all the sin of humanity. With the Arian, Monophysite, Adoptionist etc. views, there is a failure, in some way, to reach those two basic requirements.

B. The work accomplished by the incarnation was not limited to the atonement. Christ's full humanity is needed in other ways. Some of those reasons are:

1. As man, Jesus is our representative for obedience. Where Adam failed to obey God, Christ is triumphant in His obedience to the Father. Paul calls Christ the last Adam. Where Adam was the first man, Christ is the second man (1 Corinthians 15:45-47). It is necessary for Christ to be a man for him to function as our representative.

2. Referenced earlier, Job 9:32-25 indicates a need for a mediator between God and man. Christ is identified as such in 1 Timothy 2:5. By being both fully God and fully man, Christ is able to bridge the gap between God and humanity and stand on our behalf before God.

3. Looking back to Genesis, we see Adam given dominion over the earth. Yet in his sin, he failed to accomplish the task that he was given. In Christ we will see the fulfillment of this purpose of man, which is to rule over that which God created (Matthew 28:18, Ephesians 1:22). Jesus had to be man in order to fulfill this purpose.

4. By being fully human, Jesus functions as our example for how we are to live. John says that we are to walk how He walked (1 John 2:6) and that He sets the goal towards which we are to strive (1 John 3:2-3). In His suffering, Christ set the example for us (1 Peter 2:21). Ultimately, this is connected to the process of sanctification.

5. Paul states that Jesus' body when He was raised from the dead set the pattern for our own bodies, when we are all raised from the dead too (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

6. Christ has shared in our experiences. We do not have a distant high priest who is unconnected with what we have experienced. Instead, He has endured the travails of a human life. He has known hardship and temptation. Christ knows what we are going through because He has gone through it (Hebrews 2:18, 4:15-16).

C. Though not a reason for Christ to be fully man and fully God, it is important to realize that He will be so for all eternity. After the resurrection, Jesus did not give up His human nature. Instead, He appeared with physically with His wounds evident. It was proclaimed that He had flesh and bones and He ate with the disciples. He was then taken up into heaven and it is declared He will return the same way. Stephen and Paul both saw Christ as a man after He had ascended. He will forever be both the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity and, at the same time, Jesus the man, who was born of Mary and is the Messiah who saves His people.

V. The matter of Christ's will was the subject of some debate. In the early 7th century, a new doctrine, known as Monothelitism was put forward to function as a compromise between Chalcedonian Christians and Monophysites. The argument was that Christ had a divine nature and a human nature but they were joined by one will. While this lessens the chasm between the two camps to some degree it ultimately falls short, as a human nature without a human will is ultimately incomplete and the sinless life of Christ and the acceptability of His sacrifice come up short. It is interesting to look back at Matthew 26:39 and observe that in His humanity, Christ wants what is set before Him to pass. He nonetheless submits Himself to the will of the Father and the Son of God goes willingly to the cross.

May we all submit our will to that of the Father, just as our faithful high priest did, and follow Him where He leads us. Amen.

A Biblical Argument For The Nicene Creed

1. **We believe in one God, the Father,** (Exodus 20:2,3, Mark 12:29-31, Ephesians 4:6, Malachi 2:10, Genesis 35:11)
2. **the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth,** (Genesis 1:1, Isaiah 44:24)
3. **of all that is, seen and unseen.** (Colossians 1:16, Romans 1:20)
4. **We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,** (2 Corinthians 1:3, I Thessalonians 1:1, Romans 13:14)
5. **the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father,** (John 3:16, Hebrews 1:6, Matthew 14:33, Revelation 1:8)
6. **God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made,** (John 1:1, I John 1:5, John 8:12, John 20:28, I John 5:20, Psalms 2:7, Hebrews 1:5, John 14:9,
7. **of one Being with the Father;** (John 10:30, Isaiah 44:6, Revelation 1:8, Philippians 2:6, John 10:38, Colossians 2:9)
8. **through him all things were made.** (John 1:1-3,10,14, Ephesians 3:9, I Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:15-17)
9. **For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,** (I Thessalonians 5:9, Acts 4:12, II Timothy 3:15, John 6:51, John 6:38)
10. **was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.** (Matthew 1:18, Luke 1:27,35, Philippians 2:6-7, Romans 1:3)
11. **For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;** (Acts 2:36, Matthew 27:2,26, Mark 15:15)
12. **he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;** (Matthew 16:21, Mark 15:46, Luke 24:5-7, I Corinthians 15:3,4)
13. **he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.** (John 20:17, I Timothy 3:16, I Peter 3:21,22, Acts 1:9, Mark 16:19)
14. **He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.** (Acts 1:10,11, Revelation 1:7, John 5:22, Acts 10:42, Luke 1:33)
15. **We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,** (John 14:17, II Corinthians 3:17, Acts 5:3,4, John 3:5, Titus 3:5)
16. **who proceeds from the Father who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,** (John 15:26, Luke 11:13, Matthew 28:19)
17. **who has spoken through the prophets.** (II Timothy 3:16, II Peter 1:21)
18. **We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.** (John 17:20-23, Ephesians 4:1-6, Colossians 1:18, Hebrews 12:23, Revelation 21:27, Philippians 4:3, Matthew 18:20, Philemon 1:2, Romans 16:5, I Timothy 3:15, Ephesians 2:20, Acts 2:42)
19. **We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.** (Matthew 28:18-19, Ephesians 4:5, Galatians 3:27, Matthew 26:28, Luke 24:47, Acts 2:38, I Peter 3:21, Romans 6:3-4, Mark 1:4, Luke 3:3)
20. **We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.** (1 Corinthians 15:12, 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, John 3:16, 1 Corinthians 2:9, Romans 11:36)

Important terms:

Trinity: *God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.*

Person: The persons of God are the members of the godhead that share in the divine nature. Each is fully God but they differ in position and role within the triune relationship.

Essence: The central, divine substance of which the persons of the Trinity exist and through which they one.

Nature: The form and attributes that are essential to being.

Hypostatic Union: The joining of the divine and human natures without confusion or loss of attributes in the person of Jesus Christ.

Aseity: God is self-existent and does not derive from or depend on anything outside of Himself.

Immutable: God and His attributes and nature do not change.

Impassible: God is above all human or other finite influences.

Omniscience: God knows all things.

Omnipotence: God is all powerful.

Omnipresent: God is everywhere always completely present.

Transcendence: God is distinct from and above all earthly and heavenly creation.

Immanence: God is everywhere present within creation.