

BIBLICAL CHRISTOLOGY – THE PERSON OF CHRIST (PART I)

PRAYER

I. INTRODUCTION

Last week we considered the problem of sin. For the next four weeks, we'll be basking in the glory of the solution to the problem of sin, namely, the God-Man, Jesus Christ, the One who came into this world to save sinners. Biblical Christology consists of two main parts: it's the study of the Person and the Work of Christ. Who is Christ (His person)? And what has he done (His work)? Our hope and confidence depend on how we answer these crucial questions.

So today and next week we're going to consider who Jesus Christ is: first, we'll consider the deity of Christ and draw out implications for our lives; next week, we'll study the humanity of Christ. And in the weeks that follow we'll turn our attention to what Jesus has done for us in and through His life, death, resurrection, ascension, heavenly session, and triumphant return. The center of our faith and the source of our hope isn't a creed, an idea, an experience, a church, or a philosophy. It's a person: Jesus the Messiah. Knowing him isn't only the beginning of the Christian life – it's the whole Christian life. As believers, we know Jesus personally, which means Christology is deeply practical.

When we discuss the person of Christ, we always want to keep in mind this great mystery, that since the incarnation Jesus Christ has been both fully God and fully Man in one person. He is one person, with two natures. Scripture teaches that: **“Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man in one person, and will be so forever.”**¹ Where do we see that in scripture? Let's start with the deity of Christ.

Jesus Christ is fully God. The teaching from both the Old and New Testaments concerning Christ's deity is overwhelming. If you acknowledge the authority of Scripture, then you can't miss the fact that Jesus Christ is God.

II. The Deity of Christ in the Old Testament

In Luke 24, Jesus tells his disciples on the road to Emmaus that the Old Testament is all about Him. In the Old Testament we see prophecies concerning His coming and His triumphant reign. And we learn how he has worked for the salvation of His people from the beginning.

24:44 He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 529.

What do we see in the OT? **A. Son of Man (Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14; Matthew 9:6, 12:8, 19:28, 20:28, 25:31-32)**

First, we have Daniel's vision of the Son of Man. In Dan 7, we find a glorious description of the heavenly throne room and at the center of this scene is the Lord, the "Ancient of Days", who is seated upon His throne. Just a few verses later, Daniel describes another vision, but this time he sees another figure, the Son of Man.

- **Daniel 7:13-14** "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Here the Son of Man receives worship from all nations and rules over an eternal kingdom. Who else could do that but someone who is divine? And who is this Son of Man? Jesus conspicuously used the title for himself, and taught in **Matthew 25:31-32**: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." You can hear how Jesus' words allude to Daniel 7.

B. Son of David (Genesis 49:8-10; 2 Samuel 7:12-13, 16; Psalm 2:6-7; Ps. 45; Ps. 72; Isa 9:6-7)

Next, the Old Testament builds expectation that a Son of David is coming who will reign on David's throne forever. God promises this to David in 2 Samuel 7:13: "He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." And yet this highly-anticipated Son begins to be described in terms that are unmistakably divine. The king himself sings in Psalm 2:7, "The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'" So, the son of David is also the Son of God. That could mean simply that this king represents God like a son; but other passages suggest that it means even more. **Psalm 72** depicts foreign kings bowing down before this king, and people from all nations blessing his name.

Psalm 45:6-7 gets even more explicit: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions." The king... is referred to as "God." Hebrews 1 teaches that this passage is about Jesus.

We see something similar in **Isaiah 9:6-7** "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore."

So, who is this king? A royal son of David who is also Mighty God. His name is Everlasting Father not in the sense that he *is* God the Father, but that he is a king who rules benevolently like a loving father. This royal figure is Jesus Christ. That's what Christ means, after all, -- it's the Greek translation for Messiah, which means "Anointed One." **Romans 1:2-3** Paul says the gospel is a message about God's "Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord."

III. The Deity of Christ in the New Testament

This gradual crescendo of expectation in a divine son of God climaxes in the New Testament. So let's look at 6 ways the New Testament teaches Jesus is fully God.

1. Jesus Christ is called God and Lord (Matthew 1:21-23; Luke 2:11; Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13)

John 1:1 says "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Rom 9:5 calls him "Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever." Titus 2:13 calls him "our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."

We also have many instances where the words used for God [*Theos*] and Lord [*Kyrios*]² in the Greek translation of the Old Testament [*Septuagint*] are applied directly to Jesus. Perhaps one of the most staggering examples of this is Phil 2:11, where Paul says that every tongue will "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Here, he is quoting Isaiah 45:23 nearly word for word. And yet the one to whom every knee bows and every tongue swears allegiance in Isaiah 45 is none other than Yahweh, the covenant Lord of Israel. For Paul's readers, immersed in the language of the Old Testament, Philippians 2 could not be any clearer: Jesus is Yahweh!³

2. Jesus Christ claimed to be God (John 8:58, 10:30)

And, second, of course, we have Jesus' claims of himself. There is his great statement in John 8:58, "**Before Abraham was born, I am!**" The Jews understood that he was claiming to be God. "I AM WHO I AM" was God's way of identifying Himself to Moses. They picked up stones to kill Jesus because their unbelieving hearts judged this to be a blasphemous statement. Jesus was equating himself with God! Later, in John 10:30, he says "I and the Father are one," and again the Jewish leaders attempt to stone him. Why? Verse 33, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God."

Third, 3. Jesus Christ is presented as the object of the believer's faith and trust (John 14:1; 17:3; 2 Cor. 5:15; Eph. 3:12; 5:23; Col. 1:27; 1 Thes 1:3 1 Tim. 1:1)

In John 14:1, Jesus says "Believe in God; believe also in me." This is what believers do: they venture all their trust on Christ. 1 Thes 1:3, Paul speaks of the believers "steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." John 17:3, eternal life is to *know* Jesus Christ. Since the Old Testament consistently teaches us to hope and trust only in God, it follows that Jesus as the object of our hope is indeed divine.

Fourth, 4. Jesus Christ is presented as the object of the believer's worship (Matt 2:10-11, 28:17; John 5:23; Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 5:12)

Judaism was staunchly monotheistic, so this worship should intrigue us. **Matthew 2:10-11** When [the Magi] saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him.

² Kyrios could be used to mean "master" but was also used to translate the Hebrew YHWH.

³ Another classic example is Mark's citation of Isaiah 40:3 in Mark 1:3.

John 5:23, The Father “has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.”

Now, remember Isaiah 48:11 – God says “My glory I will not give to another.” And yet from his birth in Matthew 2 to the heavenly throne room in Revelation, *Jesus* receives worship, glory, and honor. This isn’t blasphemy or idolatry. It is appropriate, delightfully so, because Jesus is God. That leads us to number

5. Jesus Christ is described as both being God and performing the very works of God (John 1:1-3, 14-18; Hebrews 1:1-4; Colossians 1:15-20), like creating the universe, forgiving sins, and more.

John 1:1-3, 14-18 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” So Jesus is the Creator.

Hebrews 1:1-4 “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.” Jesus reveals God and sustains all creation.

Colossians 1:15-20 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Finally, **6. Jesus Christ is assumed to have been preexistent as the eternal Son of God prior to His incarnation (1 Cor. 8:6; 10:4, 9; 2 Cor. 8:9; Gal. 4:4; Rom 8:3; Col. 1:15-20; Phil 2:6; 1 Tim 1:15; 3:16; 2 Tim 1:9-10).**

This is an important point, because it emphasizes that God the Son has always existed. It’s not that Jesus, a human being, became God somehow – say, by his miraculous birth or marvelous baptism. No, it’s the other way around: God, the second person of the Trinity, took on a human nature in addition to his divine nature. The incarnation is not subtraction, but addition.

We see this in a passage like **Phil 2:6-7**: “Though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” He didn’t give up his divinity, but the status and privilege of his heavenly standing. Or **2 Tim 1:9-10**, God gave us grace “in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which has now been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ.”

In these passages, Paul isn’t trying to demonstrate the preexistence of Christ. Paul is arguing for something else on the basis of a commonly held belief in Christ as the eternal Son of God. In other words, he is not *arguing for* the preexistence of Christ. He’s *arguing from* it. That’s how bedrock a truth this is.

So, scripture is absolutely clear: Jesus Christ is God. One helpful way to remember the way the Scriptures speak of Christ's deity is:

HANDS

- Jesus Christ Shares the **H**onors Due to God (he receives worship).
- Jesus Christ Shares the **A**tttributes of God (holy, righteous, all-powerful)
- Jesus Christ Shares the **N**ames of God (Lord, God, Alpha and Omega)
- Jesus Christ Shares in the **D**eeds that God Does (forgives sin, raises the dead, creates the world)
- Jesus Christ Shares the **S**eat of God's Throne⁴

Questions or Comments?

IV. The Chalcedonian Definition

As you can imagine, the question of how Jesus has both a divine and human nature in one person has led to considerable thought (and delight!) for theologians over the centuries. We believe this because it is the evident teaching of scripture. Next week we'll think about the full humanity of Jesus. But right now, having considered his deity, it should be helpful to look at the key historical statement about his divine and human natures. It's called the Chalcedonian Definition of 451 A.D. and it's written in your handout. Bible-believing Christians agreed on this statement because they recognized that the person of Christ is a critical doctrine. If you get Jesus wrong, everything else falls out of place. This statement summarizes the Bible's teaching and that's why it has stood the test of time. To help you digest it, I've put the statements on Christ's divine nature in bold. The statements on his human nature are in italics. Everything else is in normal font. We're not going to go over this in detail, but I want to expose you to it.

“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* [perfect here means complete in all respects]; **truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead,** and *consubstantial with us according to the Manhood* [consubstantial means having the same substance or essence of being]; *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 [that means not mixed up or in disorder], unchangeable, 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.⁵

⁴ The HANDS acronym is from Robert Bowman, *Putting Jesus In His Place* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007).

⁵ “Perfect” means complete in all respects. “Consubstantial” means having the same substance or essence. “Inconfusedly” means not mixed up or in disorder. “Begotten” can be difficult to define, but it is qualified by other words such as “before all ages” showing that Christ was eternal and not created at some point in history.

I'm not going to walk through that phrase by phrase. You can study it on your own – that would be a fruitful use of your time. I will say that the phrase “Mother of God” might seem confusing, but it simply means that Mary gave birth to God the Son who had taken on a human nature. It doesn't mean Mary is super-human or worthy of worship. Before we move on, **any questions?**

V. The Importance and Beauty of Christ's Deity

I share this creed with us not because it has a lot of big theological words, but because Christ's deity is supremely important and beautiful. When we rightly understand the person of Christ, it should lead us to joy, confidence, and worship. Why does the deity of Christ matter? Here are 3 reasons.

1. The deity of Christ matters for revelation.

God hasn't merely sent us a prophet, messenger, or press secretary. He hasn't just given us a book. He has given us himself. How would you feel if someone showed up on your doorstep with a message from the President? Now, what about if you opened your door and there was the President himself?

This point should reassure us. We don't have to wonder about what God is like, if he is really merciful or compassionate. Hebrews 1, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.” John 1:18, “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.” We can sometimes struggle with how to imagine God – is God for me? I love what Michael Reeves says: “For all our dreams, our dark and frightened imaginings of God, *there is no God in heaven who is unlike Jesus...* ‘Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father,’ he says (John 14:9). God cannot be otherwise.”⁶ If you want to know God, look to Jesus Christ. He is God in the flesh.

2. The deity of Christ matters for salvation.

The constant message of the Bible is that no mere man could achieve salvation for himself, yet alone on behalf of others. Salvation belongs to the *Lord*, Jonah 2:9 declares. God himself achieves this salvation, and he does so in the person of his Son. In a striking phrase in Acts 20:28, Paul teaches that God bought the church “with his own blood.” The blood of a mere man, it seems, would not atone for countless millions. Col 1:19-20, “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” Only the God-man could serve as the perfect mediator between man and God (1 Tim 2:5). Jesus didn't just die as a good example. He died as a sinless sacrifice, “the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18) And his resurrection proves his divinity – as Heb 7:16 teaches, Jesus is our high priest “by the power of an indestructible life.”

This means that sin-stained rebels like us have a sure and steady hope. Our salvation doesn't come through higher consciousness, positive thinking, religiosity, the five pillars of Islam or the eightfold path of Buddhism, all of which assume that human beings can basically be delivered from our plight with enough discipline and devotion. God himself accomplishes and guarantees our redemption. That is our only hope! Trust in Christ, and you will never be disappointed.

⁶ Michael Reeves, *Rejoicing in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 14.

3. The deity of Christ matters for the Christian life.

Our salvation isn't some sort of get-out-of-hell transaction. It's a transformation of who we are. We go from being represented by Adam to being united with Christ. "Jesus Christ is in you," Paul tells the Corinthians (2 Cor 13:5)! Christ dwells in us by his Spirit, and that is why we can walk in a way pleasing to God. Rom 8:10, "If Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness." So take heart, if you are struggling hard against sin and temptation. When you were born again, you became a new person, empowered by the Spirit of Jesus. Sin is never inevitable for the Christian. It no longer defines us. Christ is ours and we are his.

VI. Conclusion: Know and Adore Christ

How should we walk away from what we've learned today? For one, we should seek to know Christ! Abide in him. Listen to his Word. John Owen said, "You love Him not, because you know Him not."⁷ John Calvin wrote, "Since rich store of every kind of good abounds in [Christ], let us drink our fill from this fountain, and from no other."⁸

Then, we should adore Jesus Christ as God! As Paul says in 2 Cor 4:6, God has shone a light in our hearts, and that light is the "knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." There is no higher beauty, no greater glory, no better love than his. He shines forth with incomparable loveliness. He is our Prophet, Priest, and King, the radiance of the glory of God: worthy of worship, awe, wonder, and affection. He is supreme and lifted up, yet he humbled himself on the vilest cross. He took our filthy rags and clothed us in his brilliant righteousness. And one day he will return and we will sit with him at the banquet table of the Wedding Supper of the Lamb. The cleansed and radiant Bride with her glorious, loving, faithful, divine Bridegroom.

Questions?

PRAYER

⁷ John Owen, "Communion with God" in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William Goold, 24 vols. (Edinburgh: Johnson & Hunter; 1850-1855; reprint by Banner of Truth, 1965), Vol. 2:53.

⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. F. L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2.16.19.