

Doctrine of Christ

I. Introduction

- A. Christology is the study of the doctrine of Jesus Christ.
- B. Christology deals with the Person and work of Christ including His pre-existence, incarnation, resurrection, and ministry.

II. Important Theological Terms

- A. *Hypostasis*: Greek term used by later theologians to mean "person."
- B. *Person*: from the Latin *persona*, a self-aware subject who relates to others as subjects.
- C. *Nature*: that which is essential or inherent in someone or something.
- D. *Consubstantial*: equivalent to the Greek *homoousios* ("of the same substance").
- E. *Godhead*: an archaic English word for "Godhood" or divine nature, deity.
- F. *Hypostatic Union*: the union of two natures in one hypostasis, Jesus Christ.
- G. *Incarnation*: from the Latin *in carne* meaning "in the flesh."

III. Historical Views of the Person of Christ

- A. The **Orthodox View**: Jesus Christ has two natures, the human and the divine, perfectly united in one person. The distinction between the natures is not diminished by their union, but Jesus is not split or divided into two persons; he is one person, the Son of God.
- B. The **Ebionites**: This extreme remnant of Judaizing Christianity denied the deity and virgin birth of Christ. Jesus, the son of Mary and Joseph, fulfilled the Mosaic Law so God chose him to be the Messiah.
- C. The **Gnostics**: Gnosticism was based on dualism: the higher and the lower, the spirit and the flesh, the good and the evil. Because flesh was considered evil, God could not become flesh. Cerinthian Gnosticism taught that the divine Christ came upon the human Jesus at baptism and departed shortly before his death. Docetic Gnosticism held that Jesus was actually a kind of phantom that only had the appearance of flesh.
- D. The **Arians**: In the early fourth century, Arius of Alexandria taught that Christ was not equal with God in essence or eternity. God created the Logos who subsequently entered a human body, taking the place of the human spirit. Therefore, Christ was neither fully God nor fully man.
- E. The **Apollinarians**: Apollinaris argued that Jesus had a true body but not a rational spirit or mind; instead, the Logos filled the place of human intelligence. This view diminished Christ's full humanity.
- F. The **Nestorians**: Nestorius denied the real union of the two natures of Christ into one person and therefore implied a twofold personality. The Logos merely dwelt in the man Jesus, so that the union between the two natures was somewhat analogous to the indwelling of the Spirit.
- G. The **Eutychians** held that there were not two natures but only one nature in Christ. The divine and the human in Christ were mingled into one, which constituted a third nature.

IV. The Preincarnate Christ

- A. Christ existed before His human birth (Isa 9:6, Micah 5:2).
- B. He was with the Father in eternity past (John 1:1, 17:5).
- C. He created all things (1Cor 8:6, Col 1:16-17).
- D. He appeared to Moses (cf. Ex 3:1-15, John 1:18, 8:58).
- E. He accompanied Israel (cf. Ex 23:20-23, 1Cor 10:4).

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V. The Incarnate Christ

A. He took on human nature

1. He was given a human body (Heb 10:5).
2. He partook of flesh and blood (Heb 2:14, John 1:14).
3. He is fullness of deity in bodily form (Col 2:9).

B. He experienced human life

1. He had a human birth (Matt 1:18, 25, Gal 4:4).
2. He grew and matured (Luke 2:40, 52).
3. He was hungry and thirsty (Matt 4:2, 21:18, John 19:28).
4. He grew tired and slept (Matt 8:24, John 4:6).
5. He was tempted to sin (Heb 4:15).
6. He died (Luke 23:46, 1Cor 15:3-4).

VI. The Kenosis Question

A. Background

1. Some claim that the incarnate Christ could not be fully human and fully divine.
2. Philippians 2:6-8 states that the incarnate Christ “emptied (*kenoo*) Himself.”
3. The term *kenosis* (emptying) is used to denote this apparent contradiction.

B. Range of Theories

1. Full Kenosis Theories (Change of *Attributes*) are heterodox explanations that deny or diminish the deity of the incarnate Christ.
2. Partial Kenosis Theories (Change of *Action*) insist on the full deity of the incarnate Christ but hold that he ceased to act as God.
3. Non-Kenosis Theories (Change of *Appearance*) hold that Jesus continued to act as God even while on earth.

C. Interpreting Philippians 2:6-8

1. Paul does not mean that Christ emptied himself of His divine attributes.
2. He does not mean that Christ ceased to make use of His divine attributes.
3. Christ came in a form that did not exhibit or manifest His divine glory.

VII. The Sinlessness of Christ

A. The Range of Views

1. Christ was "not able to sin" in any sense (*hard impeccability*).
2. Christ was "able to sin" physically (*soft impeccability*).
3. Christ was made "not able to sin" by the work of the Holy Spirit (*soft peccability*).
4. Christ did not sin because he depended on the Holy Spirit (*hard peccability*).

B. Biblical considerations

1. Jesus was *physically* capable of sinning (Heb 4:15).
2. Jesus was *prophetically* incapable of sinning (Isa 9:6-7, 53:5).
3. Jesus was *psychologically* incapable of sinning (John 5:19).
4. Jesus had a human nature with the potential for sin (John 1:14).
5. Jesus had a divine nature with no potential for sin (Col 2:9).

VIII. Reasons for the Incarnation

- A. To fulfill God's promises (Gen 12:1-3, Isa 7:14, 9:6-7).
- B. To reveal the Father (John 1:18, 14:9, Heb 1:1-3).
- C. To be our example (Matt 11:29, 1Pet 2:21, 1John 2:6).
- D. To defeat the devil (Gen 3:15, John 12:31, Heb 2:14-15).
- E. To atone for our sins (Mark 10:45, Heb 9:26, 1John 3:5).
- F. To become our High Priest (Heb 2:17, 4:14-16).

IX. The Resurrected Christ

- A. Initially, His resurrection body was physical
 - 1. He had flesh and bones (Luke 24:36-40).
 - 2. He could eat food (Luke 24:41-43).
 - 3. He breathed on the disciples (John 20:22).
 - 4. His crucifixion wounds remained (John 20:26-28).
- B. Later, His resurrection body was spiritual
 - 1. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom (1Cor 15:50-51).
 - 2. He became a life-giving spirit; He changed (1Cor 15:42-45).
 - 3. Although changed, He is still a man (Act 17:30-31, 1Tim 2:5).

X. The Exalted Christ

- A. He governs the church (Matt 28:18-20, Eph 1:20-23, Col 1:18).
- B. He intercedes for His people (Heb 2:18, 4:14-16, 1John 2:1-2).
- C. He will rule the world (1Cor 15:25, Rev 11:15, 20:4).
- D. He will raise the dead (John 5:28-29, 1Cor 15:21-23).
- E. He will judge all people (Matt 25:31-33, 2Cor 5:10).

Sources

Basic Theology, Charles C. Ryrie

Lectures in Systematic Theology, Henry C. Thiessen

Outlines on Systematic Theology, Robert M. Bowman, Jr.