

Introduction to Christology

Matthew 16:15-16 (ESV) – And he asked them, But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Christology (from Greek Χριστός *Christós* and -λογία, -logia) is primarily concerned with the nature and person of Jesus Christ.

Primary considerations include the relationship of Jesus' nature and person with the nature and person of God the Father. Christology is concerned with the details of Jesus' ministry -- his acts and teachings -- in order understand who He is in His person and His role in salvation.

While we can derive some important facts concerning Christ's ministry, character, and nature in the gospels, the most developed Christology is derived from Paul's epistles. It's from Paul we learn things like Christ's pre-existence, prior to His earthly ministry (although it can certainly be argued the John's gospel presents Christ that way in the opening words) and His worship as Lord (Gr. *Kyrios*) – {The Pauline epistles use *Kyrios* to identify Jesus almost 230 times, and express the theme that the true mark of a Christian is the confession of Jesus as the true Lord}.

On the heels of the Apostolic Age, there was debate in the early church, centering on Christology, arguing about the relationship between Christ's divine and human attributes. By the second century, a number of opposing theories arose, factions were formed, and political divides erupted. For instance:

- *Arianism* did not endorse Christ's divinity.
- *Ebionism* argued Jesus was an ordinary mortal.
- *Gnosticism* held Docetism (apparition or phantom) views, arguing that Christ was a spiritual being who only appeared to have a physical body.

The topic was addressed at each of the first seven ecumenical councils. In fact, the second, third, and fourth councils are generally known as the "Christological councils," with the remaining meetings working to clarify what was taught in the earlier three -- while condemning other incorrect interpretations.

Perhaps the most significant of these councils was The Council of Chalcedon in 451. It was at that council that the formulation of Christ was determined to be that of two natures, one human and one divine, "united with neither confusion nor division." This is the hypostatic union from the Ancient Greek ὑπόστασις – hypostasis. That idea – that Christ was perfect man and fully God – became a standard creed of the Christian church.

In the 13th century, Saint Thomas Aquinas provided the first systematic Christology that consistently resolved a number of the existing issues. In his Christology from above, Aquinas also championed the principle of perfection of Christ's human attributes.

The Middle Ages also witnessed the emergence of the "tender image of Jesus" as a friend and a living source of love and comfort, rather than just the Kyrios image.

After the Middle Ages, systematic approaches to Christology began developing.

- "Christology from above" -- an approach to understanding Christ that begins with the divinity and pre-existence as the Logos (the Word). Christology from above was emphasized in the ancient Church, beginning with Ignatius of Antioch in the second century.
- "Christology from below" – an approach to understanding Christ starting from His human aspects -- His ministry of Jesus, teaching, miracles, parables, etc. From there, Christology from below moves toward his divinity and the mystery of His incarnation in human flesh.
- "Cosmic Christology" – some say that was Paul's approach. It focuses on how the arrival of Jesus as the Son of God forever

changed the nature of the cosmos. {As in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." Or, Colossians 1:15: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation."}

- The "functional" approach concentrates on His words.
- The "ontological" approach concentrates on His being.
- The "soteriological" approach focuses on His work of salvation.
- "Scholastic Christology" is a systematic approach that embraces all or most of the topics encountered by the other methods. The first historic systematic theology is usually attributed to Thomas Aquinas in the 13th Century. (He lived from 28 January 1225 – 7 March 1274)

Early Christian creeds

Colossians 1:15-20
Philippians 2:5-11

The Apostles' Creed

The origin of the Apostles' Creed is less clear than that of the Nicene Creed. The most common view is that it was originally developed in the first or second century and was influenced later by the Nicene Creed. The earliest historical evidence of the creed's existence is in a letter written by the Council of Milan in 390 A.D.

Almost every denomination has a slightly different version of the Apostles' Creed. Below is the ecumenical version of the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC) ---

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is

seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

The church councils --

The First Council of Nicaea occurred from May to August, 325 AD. (Nicaea was a city in what is today northwestern Turkey.)

That group essentially defined the persons of the Godhead and their relationship with one another. Their conclusions (and written creed) were later ratified at the First Council of Constantinople in 381. It is at the council of Nicaea that we see the Trinity developed. They wrote that the one God exists in three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). They also affirmed that the Son was *homoousios* (of same substance) as the Father.

The Nicene Creed:

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being *of one substance* with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

In 431, the First Council of Ephesus was convened in 431 by the Roman Emperor Theodosius II. It met in June and July 431 at the Church of Mary in Ephesus in Anatolia. The council was initially called to address the views of Nestorius on Mariology, but the problems soon extended to Christology, and schisms followed.

This third ecumenical council was an effort to attain consensus in the church through an assembly representing all of Christendom. They confirmed the original Nicene Creed and condemned the teachings of Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople that the Virgin Mary may be called the Christotokos, "Birth Giver of Christ" but not the Theotokos, "Birth Giver of God".

During the council, Nestorius defended his position by arguing there must be two persons of Christ, one human, the other divine, and Mary had given birth only to a human, hence could not be called the Theotokos, i.e. "the one who gives birth to God". The debate about the single or dual nature of Christ erupted.

The Council of Ephesus debated hypostasis (coexisting natures) versus monophysitism (only one nature) versus miaphysitism (two natures united as one) versus Nestorianism (disunion of two natures). The council adopted hypostasis, but its language was less definitive than the 451 Council of Chalcedon, twenty years later.

The Oriental Orthodox church rejected this conclusion and all subsequent councils (subsequent to Chalcedon). To date, they consider themselves to be miaphysite. By contrast, Roman Catholics continue to believe in the hypostatic union and the Trinity (as do we and most Protestants). The council also confirmed the Theotokos title and excommunicated Nestorius.

The 451 Council of Chalcedon fully promulgated the hypostatic union, stating the human and divine natures of Christ coexist, yet each is distinct and complete. Although, the Chalcedonian Creed did not put an end to all Christological debate, it did clarify the terms used and became a point of reference for many future Christologies.

Today, most of the major branches of Christianity — Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Anglicanism, Lutheranism, and Reformed — subscribe to the Chalcedonian Christological formulation, although many branches of Eastern Christianity - Syrian Orthodoxy, Assyrian Church, Coptic Orthodoxy, Ethiopian Orthodoxy, and Armenian Apostolicism - reject it.

So, we are going to develop our Christology from the Bible.

He was not merely a “good and wise teacher.” He was either a lunatic or a purposeful, lying deceiver. The record tells us that He said things about Himself that cannot be true IF He is not God. So, either he’s delusional, or He is a very clever fake.

Like: There is something wrong with all mankind that can only be set right by my death.

Or: Before Abraham was, I am.

Or: No man comes to the Father but by me.

Like the councils of the early church, we agree that Christ is fully God and fully man. We cannot divide or separate Him.