

“Historical Theological Christological Heresies”

Class 10

Introduction: We are discussing Christological heresies this evening. And, we are thinking about these heresies in view of how they misunderstand and misrepresent Christ.

We will be focusing on the early church councils and creeds that deal with and corrected Christological heresies. We are doing this for a number of reasons.

1. Modern Christological heresies repeat the heresies that are found in the early church.
2. The creeds that addressed those heresies are very good at helping us to get our Christology straight.
3. All Christological heresies fail in one or more of the following areas:
 - 1) Heresy about the deity of Christ
 - 2) Heresy about the humanity of Christ
 - 3) Heresy related to the nature of Christ and the person of Christ
 - 4) Heresy regarding the authority and Lordship of Christ

Historical Theological Heresies

1. Arianism – Jesus was not God, Jesus was created by God
 - 1) The Nicene Council (AD 325) condemned this heresy and asserted the coeternity and coequality of Jesus Christ with God the Father.
 - 2) Socinianism (16th century) continued the heresy (or Arianism) in later centuries following the teaching of Laelius Socinius and Faustus Socinius, who taught against the following:
 - i. Trinity
 - ii. Deity of Christ
 - iii. Reality of the devil
 - iv. Total depravity
 - v. Vicarious atonement
 - vi. Eternal punishment
 - 3) Socinianism always results in thinking of Jesus only as a man and is found in modern form in liberal theology.
2. Docetism – Docetism comes from the Greek word, dokeo, meaning “to seem.” (Gnosticism developed this heresy more) – Jesus only appeared human; was the Logos without humanity
 - 1) Denial of Jesus’ humanity.
 - 2) Denial of Jesus’ physical body.
 - 3) Denial of Jesus’ suffering.
3. Apollinarianism – Jesus was only a man in whom the eternal Logos invaded for a time / Adoptionism – Jesus was a man (denies Jesus’ deity and pre-incarnate existence as deity); God adopted him at baptism and left him on the cross / Ebionites (Jewish-Christian early group) believed this. This heresy was more fully developed in the AD 8th century in Spain.
4. Nestorianism – separates the deity and humanity of Christ in one person into two separate persons with each a separate nature (divine nature is in the God person; human nature in the human person) / denies the union of Christ’s person as the God-man
5. Monophysitism – Jesus only had one nature, not two, resulting in a belief that only affirmed the deity of Christ, not His humanity.

Summary: The Main Ideas in Christology often Misrepresented

1. The denial of Christ’s deity
 - 1) How does this heresy injure Christian thinking and misrepresent Christian teaching?
2. The denial of Christ’s humanity

- 1) How does this heresy injure Christian thinking and misrepresent Christian teaching?
3. The denial of Christ's two natures in union (two natures in one person)
 - 1) How does this heresy injure Christian thinking and misrepresent Christian teaching?

Orthodox Christianity teaches and asserts that there is a union in the person of Jesus Christ of two natures, divine and human, combined in one single person without violation of each of the natures.

These heresies affect a number of Christological issues, including key and fundamental teachings regarding the saving work of Christ. We must come to recognize that unless we have a biblical understanding of the Person of Christ, we cannot have a biblical understanding of the saving work of Christ.

Historical Confessions for Christological Teaching

Each of the following councils and their resultant creeds condemned these Christological heresies:

1. Nicene Creed (Council of Nicaea in AD 325)
2. First Council of Constantinople (AD 381)
3. Council of Ephesus (AD 431)
4. Chalcedonian Creed (AD 451)
5. Second Council of Constantinople (AD 680) (condemned Monothelitism)
6. Frankford Synod (AD 794) (condemned Adoptionism)

Conclusion:

Christology and Christianity

1. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is at the very center of Christianity's explanation of who Christ is.
2. The person of Jesus Christ is at the very center of Christianity's explanation of salvation.

What is at stake in Christology?

1. Christology and the salvation of sinners
 - 1) The cross and the imputation of sins
 - 2) The cross and the imputation of righteousness
 - 3) The cross, the federal headship of Christ, and the legal satisfaction of the atonement
 - 4) The cross and the justification of believers
 - 5) The resurrection and the gift of eternal life to believers
 - 6) The resurrection and the victory of Christ over the devil
 - 7) The ascension of Christ and the power for transformational redemptive hope
 - 8) The exaltation of Christ and the second coming/eschatos and eternity
 - 9) The exaltation of Christ and the kingdom
2. Christology and the exaltation and authority of Jesus Christ resulting in Christian hope
 - 1) Christology, Christian Hope, and the Gospel
 - i. The gospel is good news for believers
 - ii. The gospel is good news for righteousness
 - iii. The gospel is good news for the world
 - iv. The gospel is about Jesus
 - 2) Christology, Christian Hope, and the Preaching of the Gospel
 - i. We preach Christ crucified for sins applied to believers.
 - ii. We preach Christ as the giver of new life to believers.
 - iii. We preach Christ and the hope for a hopeless world.

Note: A handout containing the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian Creed was made available. See below:

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 and 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 in 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.

Chalcedonian Creed

“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 rational soul and body; coessential 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, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; 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.”