

LECTURE 5
THE INCARNATION OF JESUS CHRIST
(Latin for “in” and caro, stem carn, meaning “flesh”)

“The Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ is the central fact of Christianity. Upon it the whole superstructure of Christian theology depends.” ~ John F. Walvoord

Five Areas of Study within Christology when it comes to the Person of Jesus Christ:¹

A. Preincarnate:

1. Existed eternally before Creation
2. Participated in Creation
3. Manifested Himself after Creation (Old Testament)

B. Divine Nature:

1. Possesses Divine Attributes
2. Possesses Divine Offices
3. Possesses Divine Prerogatives
4. He is identified with the Old Testament Jehovah
5. Possesses Divine Names
6. Possesses Divine Relations
7. Accepts Divine Worship
8. Claims Himself to be G-d

C. Human Nature:

1. Had a human birth
2. Had a human development
3. Had the essential elements of human nature
4. Had human names
5. Had the sinless infirmities of human nature
6. Was repeatedly called a man

D. Union of Natures:

1. *Theanthropic*: The person of Christ is theanthropic: He has two natures (divine and human nature in one person). Emphasis is on two natures.
2. *Hypostatic union*: Constituting one personal substance; two natures in one person. Emphasis is on person.

¹ H. Wayne House, *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 59.

3. Includes the human and divine qualities and acts: Both the human and divine qualities and acts may be ascribed to Jesus Christ under either of his natures.
4. Constant presence of Both Humanity and Divinity: His natures cannot be separated.

E. Character:

1. Absolutely holy
2. Possesses genuine love
3. Truly humble
4. Thoroughly meek
5. Perfectly balanced
6. Lived a life of prayer
7. Incessant worker

I. How is the incarnation of Jesus Christ defined in Christian thought?

A. Key elements of a definition:

1. Eternal Son of G-d
2. One God in Three Persons
3. Undiminished deity
4. Added perfect humanity to undiminished deity
5. No Sin Nature

Scripture Support Christians Use: John 1:14; Rom. 1:3; 8:3; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:7-8; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7 (cf. also Eph. 2:15); Col. 1:21-22; 1 Peter 3:18; 4:1.

A. Pre-existence of Jesus Christ:

1. Micah 5:2 teaches the eternity of the Son, for the word translated “from of old” is used in Habakkuk 1:12 of G-d’s eternal nature; thus what God is, the Son is (see also Is 9:6).
2. “Before Abraham [came to be], I am” (Jn 8:58). The statement, “I am,” is not only a claim to existence before Abraham but also is a reference to the sacred name of God, *Jehovah*, and thus a claim to be G-d (Ex 3:14–15).
3. Certain works which are said to have been done by Christ could only have been accomplished if He existed before time (e.g., creation, Col 1:16).

4. Claims to be G-d includes preexistence.²

B. Union of Deity and humanity in Him (Isaiah 9:6):

1. *el gibbor* means *Mighty God*. *El* is a reference to G-d.

2. *Gibbor* means *hero*.

a. Thus the phrase means a hero whose chief characteristic is that He is G-d. Thus in the single verse both the humanity and deity of G-d-Man, the Messiah is predicted.

C. Prediction of the Virgin Birth (Isa. 7:14): The virgin birth has been debated among certain scholars because if the author specifically meant “virgin” then “*bethulah*,” a more technical word for “virgin” would have been used.

Also, belief in the virgin birth requires belief in miracles. But if one embraces a worldview that includes the idea that G-d is both infinite and personal, then it is possible that the Messiah could have been born from a virgin. Moreover, if G-d were to become a man, what expectations would one have? One expectation is that the G-d man would have an utterly unique entrance into human history.

1. Virgin is from the word *almah* which is not a technical term for virgin, but refers to a young woman, sexually mature, marriageable maiden, one of whose characteristics is virginity (Gen. 24:43).

2. There is no instance where it can be proved that *almah* designates a young woman who is not a virgin.

3. The word means a young woman of marriageable age, one of whose characteristics was virginity, and necessarily so in the case of the fulfillment of this prophecy in Christ’s birth.

D. The Means of Incarnation:

1. What was the purpose of the Virgin Birth?

a. Was it a necessary mean of preserving Christ sinlessness?

²Ryrie, Charles Caldwell: *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*. Chicago : Moody Press, 1995, c1972

- b. Dr. Charles Ryrie contends that the incarnation serves as a sign of the uniqueness of the person who was born.

E. The Purposes of the Incarnation: Why did God send His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh? According to Christian thought, Scriptures reveal at least seven reasons for the incarnation according to Dr. Charles Ryrie:³

1. To reveal God to us.

The only way we can see the Father is to know about the Son, and the only way we today is through the record of His life in the Scriptures. Because He became a man, the revelation of G-d was personalized, because He is G-d, that revelation is completely truthful.

2. To be an example for our lives.

The earthly life of our Lord is held up to us a pattern for our lives today (1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6). Without the incarnation we would not have that example. As man He experienced the details and issues of life and furnishes for us an experienced example; as G-d He offers us the power to follow His example.

3. To Provide an atonement for sins.

Without the Incarnation we would have no Savior. Sin requires death for its payment. G-d does not die. So the Savior must be human in order to be able to die. But the death of an ordinary man would not pay for sin eternally, so the Savior must also be G-d. We must have a G-d-man Savior; Jesus fulfills this qualification (Heb. 10:1-10).

4. To Be Able to Fulfill the Davidic Covenant.

Gabriel announced to Mary that her Son would be given the throne of David (Luke 1:31-33). This is not fulfilled by the invisible G-d reigning over the affairs of men. To have an occupant of David's throne requires a human being. Therefore, Messiah had to be a human being. But to occupy that throne forever requires that the occupant never die. And only G-d qualifies. So that One who ultimately fulfills the Davidic promise has to be a G-d-man.

5. To Abolish the Works of the Devil (1 John 3:8).

³ Adapted from Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986, 1999), 281-2.

Notice that this was done by Christ's appearing. The focus is on His coming, not on His resurrection as might be expected. Why was the Incarnation necessary to defeat Satan? Because Satan must be defeated in the arena he dominates, this world. So Christ was sent into this world to destroy Satan's works.

6. *To be able to be our sympathetic High Priest (Heb. 4:14-16).*

Our High Priest can feel our weaknesses because He was tested as we are. But G-d is never tested, so it was necessary that G-d become man so that He could be tested in order to be a sympathetic Priest.

7. *To be able to be The Judge.*

Though most people think of G-d the Father as the Judge before whom all will appear, the truth is that Jesus will be that Judge (John 5:22, 27). All judgments will be executed by our Lord "*because He is the Son of Man.*" This is the title that links Him to the earth and to His earthly mission. Why is it necessary for the Judge to be human and to have lived on earth? So that He may put down all excuses people to might try to make. Why must the Judge also be God? So that His judgment will be true and just.

II. **Consider the following definition of the Incarnation:**

In the context of Christian theology, the act whereby the eternal son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, without ceasing to be what he is, God the Son, took into union with himself what he before that act did not possess, a human nature, "and so [He] was and continues to be God in two distinct natures and one person, forever" (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 21). Robert L. Reymond, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 555.

Though the word itself does not appear in Scripture, its components ("in" and "flesh") do. John wrote that the Word became flesh (John 1:14). He also wrote of Jesus coming in the flesh (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7). By this he meant that the eternal second person of the Trinity took on Himself humanity. He did not possess humanity until the birth, since the Lord became flesh (*egeneto*, John 1:14, in contrast to the four occurrences of "en" in vv. 1-2). However, His humanity was sinless, a fact Paul guards by writing that He came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3).⁴

⁴ Material adapted from Charles C. Ryrie's *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986, 1999), 277-91.

III. Historical View of Christ that are considered false by Christian Orthodoxy:⁵

- A. Ebionism: Denied Divine Nature:
 - 1. Proponents: Judaizers (second century)
 - 2. They argued that Christ had the Spirit after his baptism; he was not preexistent.
 - 3. Argument against Ebionism is that only a divine Christ is worthy of worship (John 1:1; 20:28; Heb. 13:8).
 - 4. Major opponents included Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Origen, and Eusebius

- B. Docetism: Denied Human Nature:
 - 1. Proponents included Basilides, Valentinus, Patripassians, and Sabellians (Late first century)
 - 2. They argued that Jesus appeared human but was really divine. See, this view is associated with the view that evil is associated with the material world.
 - 3. Argument against Doceticism is that if Christ were not human He could not redeem humanity (Heb. 2:14; 1 John 4:1-3).
 - 4. Major opponents included Irenaeus and Hippolytus

- C. Arianism: Denied Divine Nature:
 - 1. Argument is that Christ was the first and highest created being, *homoiousia*, not *homoousia*.
 - 2. Proponents include Arius, presbyter of Alexandria and possibly Origen (?)
 - 3. This fourth century view was officially condemned at the Council of Nicea, A.D. 325.
 - 4. Argument against Arianism is that only a divine Christ is worth of worship; this view tends toward polytheism. Only a divine Christ can save (Phil. 2:6; Rev. 1:8).
 - 5. Major opponents included Athanasius and Ossius

⁵ House, *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*, 54-55.

D. Apollinarianism: Denied Human Spirit:

1. The argument is that the divine Logos took the place of the human mind. Thus, they denied the completeness of humanity. This view was associated with the idea that “Logos” = “reason” in all people.
2. Proponents include Appollinarius, bishop of Laodicea and Justin Martyr.
3. This fourth century view was condemned at both Council of Antioch, A.D., 378, 379, and Council of Constantinople in AD 381.
4. The argument against this view is that if Christ did not have a human mind, he could not be truly human (Heb. 2:14; 1 John 4:1-3).
5. Opponents against Appollinarianism included Vitalis, Pope Damascus, Basil, Theodosius, Gregory of Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa.

E. Nestorianism: Denied union of natures:

1. This view denied the unity of the divinity and humanity in the Person of Jesus Christ. Rather, the union was moral, not organic, this two persons. The human nature was completely controlled by the divine. This view was associated with “Word-man” (Antiochene) not “word-flesh” (Alexandrian) Christology; opposed to using *theotokos* of Mary.
2. Proponent of this view was Nestorius, 5th-century bishop of Constantinople.
3. This view was condemned at Synod of Ephesus, AD 431
4. Major opponent was Cyril of Alexandria. The argument against this view is that if the death of Jesus was the act of a human person, not of God, it could not be efficacious (Rev. 1:12-18).

F. Eutychianism: Denied Distinction of Natures:

1. This 5th century view denied the distinction of natures by arguing that the human nature was swallowed by the divine to create a new third nature, a *tertium quid*.

2. This view was represented by Eutychius and Theodosius II
3. This view was condemned at the Council of Chalcedon at AD 451; defended by "Robber Synod" of Ephesus, AD 449; Condemned by Chalcedon, AD 451 AD.
4. Argument against this view is that if Christ were neither a man nor God, he could not redeem as man or as God (Phil. 2:6).
5. Opponents against Eutychianism included Flavian of Constantinople, Pope Leo, Theodoret, and Eusebius of Dorylaeum.

IV. The Famous Creed of Chalcedon: 451 AD which was adopted at the Fourth Ecumenical Council. This creed is the established view regarding the person of Jesus Christ: Two natures unified in one Person:

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 reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] 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.

V. Two additional questions pursued in class:⁶

- A. Did Jesus possess one will or two wills? Answer according to Dr. John Walvoord was that if we define will as an act then Jesus only had one will.
- B. Was Jesus always aware that He was God? Answer according to Dr. John Walvoord is that He was always aware that He was God in His Deity while in his humanity He grew in knowledge.

⁶ John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ our Lord* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969).