

# Sample research paper on the christology debate

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



## **THE DEITY AND HUMANITY OF CHRIST**

### Introduction: A Theological Mystery

That Jesus Christ is God and, in the same time, man is an idea many people do not believe in. To some, Christ is just a normal man, who became a great religious leader of Judaism and Christianity. For instance, the heresy of Iconoclasm that started during the Byzantine Empire taught that Christ the God could not be depicted, and that the pictures of Christ can only show Jesus the man and so were not suitable objects for faith and worship. To some, God sent His spirit to possess a human being already born on earth. For many years since the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451, the early church remained firm in the confession of the faith that Jesus Christ is both God and man in one. However, many rationalistic attacks have affected even the church. People started shifting from the biblical basis to human reasoning. It was unworthy of any person to believe on the authority of the Scripture when it is clearly contrary to the human reason. Indeed, having two natures in one being is outside human comprehension. Even today, the Christian has a shallow understanding about Christ's incarnation. It is, therefore, necessary to consider essential arguments and thoughts concerning this matter - in light of the Christian faith.

### **The Relation of Christ's Incarnation to the Christian Faith**

Whatever the reasoning is, it is necessary that the position on Christ's incarnation be related to the essential Christian faith. If the position invalidates other essential truths of the Christian faith, then that position is definitely wrong. It should make sense in relation to the entire Christian

doctrine. This paper discusses a number of theories and opinions regarding the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, as well as the necessity of the matter in the Christian truth.

## 1. Different Views Regarding the Matter

The Christian conviction holds that God came to earth as an actual man, without ceasing to be the eternal and infinite God. It affirms that Jesus Christ lived on earth as fully God and fully man. However, there are opposing views regarding the relation between the divinity and humanity of Christ, as well as the extent of Christ's divine and human nature. The following will discuss these different views on Christology.

### 1. 1 The Heresies of the Manichees and Marcionites

In the ancient times, the reality that Christ was clothed with the true substance of human nature was impugned by the Manichees and Marcionites. The former hold that Christ's physical presence on earth was invested with celestial flesh. They imply that Christ did not possess the actual physical body of a human body. The latter, on the one hand, speaks of a phantom of Christ instead of the body of Christ. Marcion imagines that Christ, instead of having a human body, assumed a phantom, since it is said in Philippians 2: 8 that He was made in the likeness of man or being found in the fashion of a man.

However, taking the account of Scripture at hand, the oppositions to both beliefs are numerous and strong. The promise of the Messiah was not given in the aerial seed or a phantom, but in the seed of Abraham and Jacob. The covenant of the everlasting kingdom given to David referred not to a celestial man but to the Son of David. When the Scripture speaks of Christ's

humanity, He is called the Son of David and Abraham. Romans 1: 3 (NASB) reads, “ concerning His Son [Jesus], who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh” (emphasis added). Galatians 4: 4 (NASB) adds, “ But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.” Further, Marcion altogether overlooks what Paul actually explains in the passage of Philippians 2 – which Marcion used for his argument. Marcion interpreted the passage by saying that although God could have displayed His glory to the world, He gave up that right and voluntarily exhibited nothing but the attributes of a human being. That God contended with that humble condition and suffered the concealment of His divinity under the veil of human flesh was Marcion’s point. However, the context of the passage clearly tells that the humility of Christ was not seen in the expression of human attributes through a phantom. Rather, it was in His being in the true nature of man susceptible to death and suffering that Christ humbled himself. This affirms the actual human nature of Christ.

### 1. 2 Apollinaris of Laodicea

After the Council of Nice in 325 A. D., the church universally held the doctrine of the Trinity and the absolute divinity of Christ. However, men began to question how the substance of God and the substance of man could be united in Christ as a single Person. Apollinaris explained the matter on the basis on 1 Thess. 5: 23. He taught that one complete human person is composed of three distinct elements: soma (body), psyche (soul), and penuma (spirit). The psyche refers to the life, appetites, emotions, and logical understanding of a human being, while the pneuma pertains to the reason, will, and the moral/spiritual nature. Apollinaris held that in Christ the

soma and psyche are of human nature, while the pneuma is divine.

While this secures the unity of Christ's person, Apollinaris obscured the integrity of Christ's humanity. If Christ did not take the complete human nature, which includes the pneuma, then He cannot be the High Priest who – as Hebrews 4: 15 says – sympathizes with man's spiritual weakness, having been tempted like us. Apollinaris's view implied that the eternal God took an irrational human body into union with His spiritual nature. However, the Scripture is clear that Christ had a complete human nature, only that He is perfect and sinless.

### 1. 3 The Nestorian Controversy

In nearly 450 AD, Mary became increasingly heralded by the name theotokos – which means “ Mother of God”. Nestorius took an opposition to this, arguing that theotokos compromises the divinity of Jesus. He holds that the name implies a degradation of Christ's divine nature into being a mere human, asserting that God being born of a woman makes God into someone equivalent to a human being. Instead of using this title for Mary, he deemed it more appropriate to use christokos – which means “ Mother of Christ”. However, Nestorius's position made a false distinction between Jesus's human and divine nature.

The Nestorian position pretends that the Son of God dwelt in the human flesh in such a way that He is not in the same time man. Instead of distinguishing the two natures of Christ, he dissected it. In other words, Nestorius devised a double Christ. However, the Scripture is very clear that there are no two Christs. In Luke 1: 31-32, the angel who visited Mary speaks of Jesus as the Son of the Most High, and that her child will be called the Son of God. In

verse 43, Elizabeth acknowledged Mary as the mother of the Lord.

Nestorianism could not confess the hypostatic union of the two natures into one Christ.

#### 1. 4 The Teaching of Eutychianism

Along with the school of Antioch (led by Theodore and Nestorius) in the 15th Century, the school of Alexandria (led by Cyrillus and Eutychius) generated Eutychianism. Unlike Nestorianism, Eutychianism could not confess the distinction between the divine nature and human nature of Christ as being united as one. Without a doubt, Eutychians believed that the two natures are not the same. Finding a way to contradict Nestorianism, they were led to view that the combination of the divinity and humanity of Christ resulted in a new nature of the incarnate Christ. The mixing of the two natures did not result in a being equally identifiable as divine and human, but rather in a mostly divine Christ. Since divine nature is higher than human nature, the emphasis was given on the divine nature of Christ.

This view regards that this one nature of Christ, which is based on his confusing mixture of the two natures, was not consubstantial with humanity. It is unclear whether this unbalanced view holds that the one nature of Christ is simply divine by having the human nature absorbed by the divine, or that it was another thing (a new nature) produced by the mixture of divinity and humanity. In general, this view was regarded to have similarities to the Apollinarian Christ, wherein the full humanity of Christ was taken out of consideration.

#### 1. 5 The Lutheran Doctrine of the Communication of Attributes

After the Reformation, the Lutherans established a new view on the doctrine

of Christ. While Eutychians taught that the humanity of Christ was absorbed in His divinity, Lutherans hold that the humanity of Christ was exalted to a state of equality with His divine nature. Their doctrine is called the *communicatio idiomatum*. Lutherans teach that in the incarnation of Christ the attributes of one nature are ascribed to the other on the basis of an actual transference, and that only by this transference that the unity of the person of Christ is secured. They explain that what can be said of the divine nature of Christ can be said of His human nature. For instance, the operative attributes of God (omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience) were said to be transferred to the humanity of Christ. Scriptural basis was provided for this position. Colossians 2: 9 reads, “ For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (emphasis added). John 3: 13 speaks of Christ as the Son of Man being identified as a heavenly being. Further, Lutheran interprets John 1: 14 to say that the incarnation included the divine essence of God. However, there is an opposition to this view, claiming that if it should be inferred from the statement of John then it should also be concluded from 1 Cor. 2: 8 that the ability of the human nature to suffer was transferred to the divine nature. The verse speaks of the “ Lord of glory” crucified by men. Lutherans, however, shun away from that conclusion. Moreover, speaking of a fusion of the two natures by the transference of its attributes, they imply that the attributes can be abstracted from the nature while the natures remain separate from each other. This concept is inaccurate since attributes and natures cannot be separated from each other. For instance, omnipresence is clearly incompatible with the human body. Further, the humiliation of Christ, which Isaiah 53 even portrays, is not a picture of an

omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient human nature. From His prayer in Gethsemane (Mark 14: 32-36; Matthew 26: 36), to His arrest and trials, and to His death on the cross, Jesus Christ was a suffering servant.

### 1. 6 The Kenosis Doctrine

The Kenotic Theory was rendered from the passage of Phil. 2: 6-8 in which God “ emptied” Himself and became human. The term used in the passage means “ to make void,” or “ of no account”. In general, considering the various forms of the Kenosis Doctrine, this view holds that while retaining His divine self-consciousness, the Logos laid aside His essential divine attributes and ceased from His cosmic functions and His eternal consciousness during the incarnation. In other words, He who formerly was the eternal God changed Himself temporarily into man, or exchanged His divinity for humanity during His life here on earth. This, they argue, is the reason why God was able to take to Himself full humanity.

However, this is inconsistent with the doctrine of the immutability of God as explained in Mal. 3: 6, Jas. 1: 17, and other parts of the Scripture. That God has changed from being God into man is not supported by the Scriptures. Moreover, if the Logos be considered as the humanized Son who self-emptied Himself of divine attributes, then the Logos could no longer be a divine person in the Trinity. If Christology be concluded by the way of this doctrine, then it is no longer evident that is the true God who comes to us in Christ.

## **The Difference between Nature and Person of Christ**

The Reformed Confession on this issue holds that there are two natures in one person of Christ. “ Nature” refers to the sum of all the essential qualities



of a thing, while “ Person” refers to a complete substance equipped with reason and consciousness. As the Westminster Confession puts it, two whole, perfect and distinct natures were united together without conversion, composition or confusion in one person of Christ as Mediator between God and man.

In the passage of Philippians 2: 6-8, the reference was given to the “ form” of God and of man. The term “ form” used refers to the parts of something. As John 4: 24 explains, God is spirit and that He cannot be reduced into any physical form (cf. Rom. 1: 23). When referring to God-incarnate, God simply took the parts of the human body since being a spirit is incompatible with being human. Nevertheless, He remained as fully God. Though fully human as from the seed of David, Christ was also pre-existent and divine and has become Lord over all. Moreover, the “ emptying” of Christ as a servant refers to his humility in that in Christ, God came in the state of rendering obedience for the sake of mankind, instead of the state in which He is to command. It does not denote a difference on God’s mode of being, but on the state/purpose of His action (cf. John 3: 17). It is not a change in the essence of God. Thus, Jesus Christ is fully man and fully God, and Scripture affirms it (cf. Luke 1: 35; Col. 2: 9; Rom. 9: 6; 1 Pet. 3: 18; 1 Tim. 3: 16).

Scripture attest to the necessity of the two whole, perfect, and distinct natures in Christ. Christ had to be born as human in order to be the exact representative of mankind (Rom. 3: 25; Heb. 2: 17). In the same way, He had to be God unblemished by Adam’s sin so that He would be the perfect substitute for mankind. Christ was fully man in that His development was natural like any other man (Luke 2: 52), and this allowed Him to sympathize

with us (Heb. 4: 15). In the same time, He is God in that He is able to render perfect obedience even in the midst of human suffering (Rom. 5: 19). In His humiliation, He is fully man in that He was able to receive the full penalty of the sins of man by an actual death in the cross. In the same way, He is fully God in that He was able to bear the sins of many (not just one), and although He was made sin and have died, He remained perfectly righteous and powerful over sin and death – making His work of redemption perfectly sufficient and complete (1 Cor. 5: 21; 2 Cor. 5: 14-15; 1 Peter 2: 22-24; Acts 2: 24; Heb. 9: 28; 10: 1-18; Rom. 8: 1, 38-39).

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