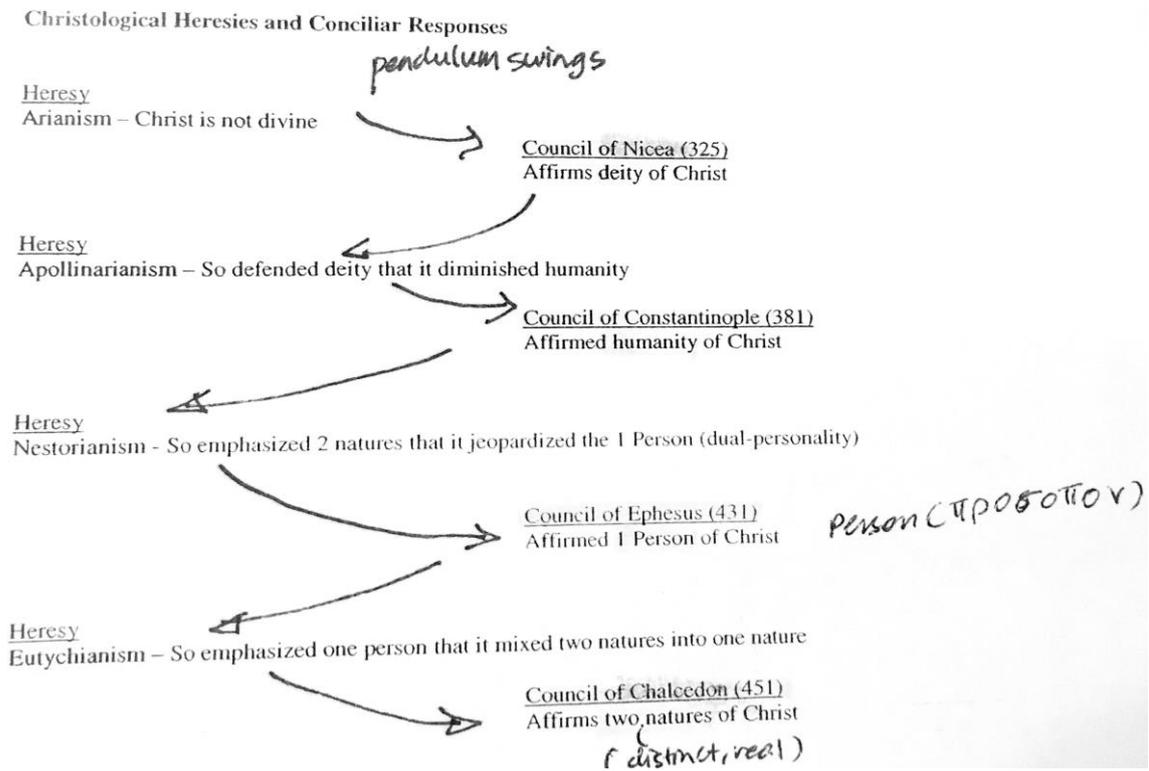


DOCTRINE OF CHRIST – part 2

C. Who is Jesus?

1. Our Lord Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man, one person with two natures.
2. Q.21. Shorter Catechism. *Who is the redeemer of God's elect?* Answer: **The only redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continues to be, God [Nicaea] and man [Constantinople] in two distinct natures [Chalcedon], and one person [Ephesus], forever.** Each of these church councils held at Nicaea (AD 325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), contributed to the orthodox doctrines of the person and natures of Christ.
3. In this lesson, we will survey, very briefly, the heresies concerning Christ in the first five centuries. Heresy in 1 Cor 12:25 refers to anything that causes divisions/schisms in the body of Christ. Later, the word *heresy* came to mean a *serious* error in teaching that leads to a different gospel. Why should I know this? Those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it. Many modern day heresies (eg. Jehovah's Witness) are variations of the ancient.
4. Heresies are often attempts to rationalize a mystery, such as how Jesus Christ could be 1 person yet fully God and fully man. Like a pendulum, some theologians swing too far from scriptures and were denounced as heretics by church councils.



D. Heresies concerning Christ & decisions of early Councils.

1. **Gnosticism** [Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*]- from Greek *gnosis*, “knowledge”; a second century heresy that denied the humanity of Christ.
 - a. Gnostics claimed to have a secret knowledge of the truth. They were influenced by the eastern philosophies and believed in an absolute Supreme being from whom came a series of *aeons* (inferior gods). One *aeon* – the *demiurge* – that created the world (badly) was the God of the Old Testament. The Gnostics did not believe in the incarnation of Christ as all matter was intrinsically evil.
 - b. Cerinthus, a contemporary of apostle John in Ephesus, taught that Jesus was a mere man, while Christ was one of the *aeons*. John addressed this heresy in 1 John 2:22, 4:2,3: “Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.”, “Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is

come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, ... and even now already is it in the world.”

- c. Gnosticism soon died out, but shades of it can be found in today’s New Age movement. [Peter Jones, *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back: An Old Heresy for the New Age*]

2. **Monarchianism.** [Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*]. The heresy that desires to preserve the unity of the Godhead by denying the three persons of the Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are merely three different modes of revelation and operation of the one divine person. One form of this heresy, Modalism, says that God manifests Himself in 3 different modes: in OT as Jehovah God the father; in NT age as Jesus the Son, and in the age of the church as the Holy Spirit.

3. **Arianism & the Council of Nicaea AD 325** – *Arius said Christ is not divine.*

- a. Influence of Greek philosophy. To the Greeks, God is unchangeable and could have nothing to do with a flawed humanity or our world of matter, which is changing and corruptible. Some Christians began to think of God in the same way – and began to speculate that the supreme God created angels (eg. Jesus) who created the physical world and interacted with the physical world.
- b. The Arian Heresy. Arius, a popular elder in Alexandria, Egypt, was influenced by Greek philosophy. He taught that there was one Creator, who created the *Logos*, the Word of God, who in turn created everything else. This *Logos* became Jesus Christ. Moreover, because he is the closest thing to God that we can relate to, he could also be called God even though strictly speaking, he was not God. He was a unique created being, neither God nor man, created even before time itself was created. He was an intermediary between the perfect spiritual world and the ever-changing physical world. The motto of the Arians regarding Christ was “there was a time when he was not”.
- c. He relied on the following texts to prove that Christ was a created being inferior to God the Father: Jn 17:3 ‘the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent’; Jn 14:28 “my Father is greater than I”; 1 Tim 6:16 ‘(God) Who only hath immortality’, implying that Christ was not immortal; Col 1:15 Christ is ‘the firstborn of every creature.’ hence created; and Prov 8:22 (in the Septuagint, ‘The Lord created me at the beginning of his work.’ – “created” was a mistranslation; cf. KJV “possessed” or begotten).
- d. In 318 AD, bishop Alexander of Alexandria opposed elder Arius’ new doctrine. Bishop Alexander taught that the Word (Christ) existed eternally with the Father, not created. “If asked to draw a line between God and creation, Arius would draw that line so as to include the Word in creation, while Alexander would draw it so as to separate all of creation on one side from the Father and the eternal Word on the other” (Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 1, p. 161). Between 318 & 320 AD, bishops outside Egypt sided with Arius.
- e. The Roman Emperor Constantine who had just finished a war and united the empire, saw the religious debates as being politically divisive and destabilizing. Although he was not then a Christian, he was favorable toward the rapidly growing Christian faith. In 325 AD he invited all Christian bishops to meet at Nicaea to decide the issue once and for all.
- f. 300 bishops came, mostly from the Eastern Empire. The bishop of Rome could not attend due to age, but sent his elders. Alexander of Alexandria was the main opponent of Arius’ teachings, while Eusebius of Nicomedia was the chief spokesman for Arius. Among the attendees was a young deacon, Athanasius of Alexandria. Though he was unable to participate directly, not being a bishop, the council played a central role in his later articulating the doctrine of the Trinity.
- g. At the council of Nicaea, most of the bishops rejected Arius’ assertion that Jesus Christ was a created being. When they worshiped Christ, they worshiped God, not a creature. They were saved by God, not by a created being. The bishops crafted a creed (statement of faith) which summarised their belief that the Son of God was the very essence of God.
- h. The bishops stated that Jesus Christ was “God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father.” A key phrase was “of one substance,” (Greek *homo ousios*). This means that Jesus Christ the Son of God is also God in his essence. It’s amazing to see how God’s providence directed the majority to accept the correct ‘same essence’ view proposed by Athanasius’, instead of ‘similar

essence' (*homo ousios*) held by the majority. Eventually all the bishops except for two signed the creed. The two bishops who opposed the statement were deposed and exiled. Arius was exiled and his writings were anathematized. But the controversy continued until AD 381.

- i. **The Creed of Nicaea** regarding Christ's divinity and co-eternal existence with the Father [not to be confused with 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, that is from the substance (ousia) of the Father; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance (homo ousios) with the Father, by whom all things were made. ... and those who say: 'There was a time when he was not' and 'Before he was begotten he was not' and 'He came into being from nothing', or those who pretend that the Son of God is 'Of another substance' (hypostasis), or essence (ousia) [than the Father] or 'created' or 'alterable' or 'mutable' the catholic (i.e. universal) church and apostolic church places under a curse."

4. Apollinarianism & the Council of Constantinople AD 381. - *Apollinarius so defended deity that it diminished humanity.* [Earle Cairns]

- a. Apollinarius, an elderly bishop from Syria taught that the spirit in man was replaced in Christ by the *logos* (divine spirit). The *logos* as the divine element actively dominated the passive element (human body and soul), in the person of Christ. He stressed the deity of Christ but minimized His humanity. He reasoned that the soul was intrinsically corrupt, and could not be responsible for motivating a Saviour of sinful people. To Apollinarius, Jesus Christ's divine nature displaced His human mind and will. Jesus possessed only a divine nature, and did not truly take on the fallen nature of humanity.
- b. This view was condemned at the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD. 'What is not assumed [by the Word] is not healed.' - Gregory of Nazianzus. 'If God did not lay hold of our full humanity, then it is not saved.' – (*History of Christianity, Tim Dowley, p.132*).

5. Nestorianism & the Council of Ephesus AD 431. *Nestorius so emphasized two natures that it jeopardized the One Person of Christ.* [Earle Cairns; Tim Dowley]

- a. Controversy about the relationship between the divine and human natures of Jesus continued with Nestorius of Antioch. He was a famous preacher at Antioch, and was appointed bishop of Constantinople in 428.
- b. Nestorius disliked the reference to Mary (mother of Jesus) as *theotokos* or 'God-bearer', in their monastic devotions, because it seemed to exalt her unduly. He suggested the word, *Christokos*, arguing that Mary was only the mother of the human side of Christ. He did not deny the deity of Christ, but by so arguing, made Christ out to be a man in whom, the divine and human natures were combined in a mechanical union rather than in essential union. Christ was a perfect man linked to deity, a God-bearer, rather than God-man. Nestorius concluded that Jesus had two separate natures and two wills, making him two persons— a double being — one divine and the other human, sharing one body. This is similar to human marriage – two distinct persons becoming one. His views made it appear that he held Christ to be two persons bound together in one union, morally agreed and bound together in purpose and action. He refused to attribute to the divine nature the human acts and sufferings of the man Jesus. In his own words, 'I hold the natures apart, but unite the worship.' But Scripture teaches the Mediator must be God and man in one, sinless Person - the unique, one Jesus Christ of the Gospels.
- c. Nestorius' teaching was condemned by a church council at Ephesus in 431. But Nestorianism could not be stamped out, as its followers taught in the eastern empire and carried the heresy to Persia, India, even China in 635.

6. Eutychianism & the Council of Chalcedon AD 451. - *Eutyches so emphasized one person that it mixed two natures into one (divine) nature.*

- a. In the 440s, a respected monk from Constantinople, Eutyches, taught that after the incarnation, Jesus did not exist in two natures because his human nature was absorbed by his divine nature, like a drop of wine in the sea. The two natures were intermixed into one divine nature. This sounds almost like the heresy, Monophysitism.

- b. Flavian, bishop of Constantinople, convened a synod in 448, condemning Eutyches' position. Eutyches appealed. The fight took a nasty turn when Dioscorus, Patriarch of Alexandria, became determined to reinstate Eutyches and his views.
 - c. "Robbers' Council". Eastern emperor Theodosius II, also favoring Eutyches' position, called a church-wide council to meet at Ephesus in August 449. He appointed Dioscorus to chair the proceedings. Leo I, bishop of Rome, sent delegates to the synod with his letter that expounded on how the two natures, divine and human, are joined in Christ. Dioscorus did not permit Leo's letter to be read. Flavian was deposed, and Eutyches reinstated. Bishops who refused to accept the council's decision were deposed. Bishop Leo labeled the synod a 'den of robbers'.
 - d. No redress was possible until Theodosius died suddenly in 450, by a fatal fall from a horse. His sister Pulcheria became empress with her husband, Marcian, as co-emperor. Marcian opposed Eutyches' teaching and called for a church council at Chalcedon.
 - e. Council of Chalcedon 451. More than 500 bishops attended - the largest church council gathering. All delegates were from the Eastern Church, except the few representatives from Rome and two from Africa.
 - i. Leo again sent representatives with his *Tome*, which was read and approved by the council. The Chalcedon Council reversed the decision of the "Robbers' Council", and condemned Eutyches' heresy: "Christ is the eternal Son of God complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, made known in two natures without confusion [i.e. mixture], without change, without division, without separation, the difference of the natures being by no means removed because of the union, but the property of each nature being preserved and coalescing in one person [*prosopon*] and one subsistence [*hupostasis*] - not parted or divided into two persons [*prosopa*], but one and the same Son, only-begotten, divine Word, the Lord Jesus Christ."
 - ii. It denounced those who taught that Christ had only a single, divine nature and those "who imagine a mixture or confusion between the two natures of Christ." The two natures of Jesus Christ are:
 - Without division and without separation (against Nestorius);
 - Without mixture and without change (against Eutyches).
 - iii. The Roman Catholic Church, by mixing the two natures of Christ, teaches the worshipping of Jesus' human nature. It practices bowing before, and worshipping, of bread (a wafer) which is 'changed into the body of Christ. Martin Luther believed that Jesus' human nature mixed with the divine and became everywhere -present after His ascension; Jesus' body attached itself to the bread served at the Lord's Supper – coming in, with, and under the bread.
7. The early church councils did not produce desired unity and stability, but divided the empire and made it vulnerable to Muslim invaders from Persia and Arabia. Except for John of Damascus in the 8th century, Eastern church theology remained dormant until today.

8. **Conclusion:** 4 key elements have emerged in the orthodox doctrine of Christ's person & nature:

4 elements	of Christ's person & natures	Council of (AD)
He is true God	Deity / Divinity	Nicaea (325)
He is true man	Humanity	Constantinople (381)
He is one Person	Uni-personality	Ephesus (431)
He has two natures	Human and Divine	Chalcedon (451)

9. **John Chrysostom** (c.345-407) wrote about Christ the God-man: "I do not think of Christ as God alone, or man alone, but both together. For I know he was hungry, and I know that with five loaves he fed five thousand. I know he was thirsty, and I know that he turned the water into wine. I know he was carried in a ship, and I know that he walked on the sea. I know that he died, and I know that he raised the dead. I know he was set before Pilate, and I know he sits with the Father on his throne. I know that he was worshipped by angels, and I know that he was stoned by the Jews. And truly some of these I ascribe to the human and others to the divine nature. For by reason of this he is said to have been both God and Man."

Ref: Earle Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*; Tim Dowley, *History of Christianity*.