

CHRISTOLOGY

“the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith”

Key question

Who is Jesus from a Biblical perspective?

Key text

Colossians 2:9-15

“9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; 11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us {and} which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.”

Key Definition

Christology

The systematic study of the Biblical material concerning the person and work of the second person of the trinity - Jesus Christ.

A Fundamental of the faith

The Nature of Christ

Christ is one eternal person who is fully God and fully human.

Introduction

1. **Lk.9:18-27** “But who do you say that I am?” . . . “The Christ of God.” Who do people today say that Jesus was? **John 8:53** “Who do you think you are?” they asked of him.
 - a. A great Jewish teacher -
 - b. A mythical creation of the early church -

- c. A God like person -
 - d. A chaplain for my dreams of who I want God to be -
2. There are powerful temptations to distort the nature of Christ because the historic orthodox view of his identity demands a submissive response.

A. We are tempted to create Jesus after our own image and thus worship ourselves.

1. The tendency to create Jesus in our own image is a natural defense of our fallen nature.
 - a. If one looks at the long history of Christian art one can see in successive portraits of Jesus that self-portrait of the age – the Byzantine picture of Jesus as the supreme Emperor; the medieval picture of the pain-drenched figure on the cross, the blond, faith-haired boy of the Anglo-Saxon Protestant ideal, and the Liberator Christ modeled on the Guevara.
 - b. Emile Derkhime, one of the founders of modern sociology, believed that the idea of God was nothing more than a symbolic representation of the collective energy and dominant values of the society that worships him or it. Religion is nothing more than a process whereby a group ends up worshiping itself.
2. The Pharisee’s view of God.
 - a. It was said that God “studied Torah by day and Mishna by night.” In other words, God was a servant of the Law which really was the focal point of religion.
 - b. He ceremonially washed and wore the vestments of a Pharisee.
 - c. He was the epitome of what the Pharisees grew to expect of themselves.
3. Modern images of Jesus follow the same pattern. Our Jesus tends to be transformed by American preaching into a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant Republican who promotes laissez-faire democratic capitalism.
4. In America, in the late 1800’s a number of books were written in an attempt to explain what Jesus was like.
 - **Bruce Barton (a businessman)** - Jesus was an early advertising genius & his disciples a group of marketing executives.
 - **Eugene Debs (an American socialist party leader)** – “Comrade Jesus” was a hardworking carpenter who came to the rescue of the Galilean working class.
 - **Robert Ingersoll (atheist)** - Jesus, like himself had come to save the world from the tyranny of organized religion.
 - **Henry Ward Beecher (evolutionist)** - Jesus is pictured as an evolutionary theorist bringing to view the yet higher truths of the spiritual realm.
 - **Lew Wallace’s (major general) BEN HUR** - He-man Jesus.

B. We are tempted to divorce the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith.

1. **History and faith - how are they related?**
 - a. Assumptions of Adolph von Harnack (classic liberal)
 1. In Jesus’ pre scientific era people felt that miracles were common and much of what is not understood as natural was then believed to be supernatural.
 2. Miracles were ascribed to famous persons almost immediately after their death.
 3. Today we know that miracles do not take place.
 4. There are marvelous and presently inexplicable events in our day. They are not interruptions of the order of nature but simply waiting a naturalistic explanation.

- b. Later refinements of classic liberal assumptions.
 1. The historical Jesus we know little about. He was probably an insignificant prophet type.
 2. The historic Christ (the mythical character preached by the apostles) is the person we know. Geschichte = significant history, the impact Jesus made upon the disciples.
 3. There are two popular views of Jesus presented by modern historical critics.
 - a. Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet who focused attention on the coming Kingdom of God.
 - b. Jesus was a social revolutionary who was concerned about changing the present social political order.
- c. **Christology from above** - starting with an assumption of faith. (This is the Neo orthodox approach.) – an existential view which renders the historical facts as irrelevant.
 1. Kerygma (the church’s proclamation regarding the Christ is the basis of our understanding of Jesus).
 2. John and Paul are the main source of our understanding of Jesus in that they interpret the significance of His person and work.
 3. Faith in Christ is not based on rational historical proofs but on personal spiritual encounter.
 4. There is a “Christ in the flesh” (incarnation) which grounds faith in time and history. There is also “Christ after the flesh” (historiographer’s redaction).
 5. NOTE: This approach respects the importance of personal encounter and affirms the supernatural but it removes the apologetic of history and eschews objective content to faith.
- d. **Christology from below** - starting with an assumption of sight (historical fact). (Wolfhart Pannenberg took this approach.) - rationalistic historical critical view.
 1. We cannot presuppose that Jesus was divine.
 2. We must understand Jesus in the context of the Judaism of his day.
 3. Only God is qualified to assess Jesus as “divine”, we are limited to an earth-bound perspective.
 4. It is possible and necessary to make historical inquiry behind the kerygma.
 5. History as it applies to Jesus is the same kind of history that bears witness to any other event. It is not a special kind of history that is not open to challenge.
 6. The resurrection is the proof and sign of Jesus deity.
 7. NOTE: This approach respects the objective historical nature of the gospel but it demands that faith be a function of a common rationalism. Can there be objective certainty?
- e. **The Augustinian approach.** (This is the orthodox approach.)
 1. Faith precedes reason but does not remain independent of reason.
 2. Faith is not based on reason alone.
 - a. Many who saw Jesus’ miracles did not believe. Matt.12:22-32; Mk.3:20-30; Lk.11:14-23
 - b. “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” Matt.16:15-17
 3. Faith is witnessed to by reason.

- a. “The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them” Lk.7:22
- b. In I Cor.15 Paul argues that eyewitnesses to the resurrected Christ are important and that if Christ is not raised then our faith has no foundation.
- c. John begins his first epistle with reference to “what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled.” I Jn.1:1-4.

2. **Incarnation and mythology** - what is the real point of Christ?

- a. The impact of Jesus on people rather than the historical events are often the point of the gospel stories. Is it therefore possible that the events were not historical?
- b. General points of those who believe the incarnation is a non historical myth.
 1. It seems incredible that God could become man.
 2. The NT reflects the faith of the disciples more than the events and teachings of Jesus.
 3. Christian doctrine of Christ stems not from the NT but from church history.
 4. The idea of incarnation is not unique to Christianity.
 5. Incarnation can be equated with God’s immanence in the world. The world is a carrier of spiritual values. Jesus was a unique expression of God’s immanence.
- c. A response to these points.
 1. Although we cannot fully explain or understand the incarnation it does not stand as a clear contradiction.
 2. There is historical evidence that the Christology of the NT goes back to Jesus himself.
 3. The incarnation of Jesus does not have parallels in other religions.

C. **There is a temptation to ignore the incarnation and the passion of Jesus in defining his unique significance.**

1. The great focus of the New Testament (including the Gospels) is the incarnation and death / resurrection of Jesus.
 - a. The events in between are largely significant as they relate to one or the other.
 - b. Much of Jesus moral teaching and miraculous works were not as unique as some think.
 - c. The liberal emphasis is on selective parts of his ethical teaching, not on his incarnation and death / resurrection.
2. The person and work of Christ is summarized in Col.1:19-20
 - a. His nature - “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,”
 - b. His work – “and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”
3. **Christ’s person and work** - where do we start in our investigation of Christ?
 - a. If we start with His person we run the risk of not seeing its relevance for it is in His work that He is significant to us.
 - b. If we start with His work we may fail to see beyond our own needs for it is in His person that He is worshiped.
4. **The Four Gospels compared and contrasted.**

	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
Portraits of Jesus	The Prophesied King	The Obedient Servant	The Perfect Man	The Divine Son
Prominent words	"fulfilled"	"straightway"	"Son of man"	"believe"
Cultures of the original readers	Jews (Jesus, Son of Abraham)	Romans (Action: no genealogy)	Greeks (Jesus, Son of Adam)	Church (Jesus, Son of God)
Outlook and style of the writers	Teacher The Rabbi's story	Preacher The Rebel's story	Litterateur The Chronicler's story	Theologian The Mystic's story
Outstanding sections	Sermons	Miracles	Parables	Doctrines
Prominent ideas	Law	Power	Grace	Glory

"SYNOPTIC GOSPELS" --stressing the humanity of Christ, from the outward, earthly side

"FOURTH GOSPEL" --stressing the deity of Christ, from the inward, heavenly side

D. The Virgin Birth is a Biblical doctrine that is a significant sign of Jesus' unique nature.

1. Scriptural support of the doctrine.

- a. **Lk.1:35** "And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.'"
- b. **Matt.1:16** "and to Jacob was born Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom (feminine singular) was born Jesus, who is called Christ."
- c. **Matt.1:20-23** "for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.' . . . 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which translated means, 'God with us.'"
- d. **Isa.7:14** "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.
- e. **Gal.4:4** "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman," The verb translated "born" is not the regular verb for "be born" but the same verb as in Jn.1:14 which refers to the Incarnation.
- f. **NOTE:** The use of Isa.7:14 in Matt.1 is best understood by J.A. Motyer ("Context and Content in the Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14," *Tyndale Bulletin* 21 [1970]: 118-25). Signs in the OT may function as a present persuader (e.g., Exod 4:8-9) or as "future confirmation" (e.g., Exod 3:12). Isaiah 7:14 falls in the latter case because Immanuel's birth comes too late to be a "present persuader." The "sign" (v.11) points primarily to threat and foreboding. Ahaz has rejected the Lord's gracious offer (vv.10-12), and Isaiah responds in wrath (v.13). The "curds and honey" Immanuel will eat (v.15) represent the only food left in the land on the day of wrath (vv.18-22). Even the promise of Ephraim's destruction (v.8) must be understood to embrace a warning (v.9b; Motyer, "Isaiah 7:14," pp. 121-22). Isaiah sees a threat, not simply to Ahaz, but to the "house of David" (vv.2, 13) caught up in faithlessness. To this

faithless house Isaiah utters his prophecy. Therefore Immanuel's birth follows the coming events (it is a "future confirmation") and will take place when the Davidic dynasty has lost the throne.

Motyer shows the close parallels between the prophetic word to Judah (7:1-9:7) and the prophetic word to Ephraim (9:8-11:16). To both there come the moment of decision as the Lord's word threatens wrath (7:1-17; 9:8-10:4), the time of judgment mediated by the Assyrian invasion (7:18-8:8; 10:5-15), the destruction of God's foes but the salvation of a remnant (8:9-22; 10:16-34), and the promise of a glorious hope as the Davidic monarch reigns and brings prosperity to his people (9:1-7; 11:1-16). The twofold structure argues for the cohesive unity between the prophecy of Judah and that to Ephraim. If this is correct, Isaiah 7:1-9:7 must be read as a unit—i.e., 7:14 must not be treated in isolation. The promised Immanuel (7:14) will possess the land (8:8), thwart all opponents (8:10), appear in Galilee of the Gentiles (9:1) as a great light to those in the land of the shadow of death (9:2). He is the Child and Son called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" in 9:6, whose government and peace will never end as he reigns on David's throne forever (9:7).

Much of Motyer's work is confirmed by a recent article by Joseph Jensen ("The Age of Immanuel," *CBQ* 41 [1979]: 220-39; he does not refer to Motyer), who extends the plausibility of this structure by showing that Isaiah 7:15 should be taken in a final sense; i.e., Immanuel will eat the bread of affliction in order to learn (unlike Ahaz!) the lesson of obedience. There is no reference to "age of discretion." Further, Jensen believes that 7:16-25 points to Immanuel's coming only after the destruction of the land (6:9-13 suggests the destruction extends to Judah as well as to Israel); that Immanuel and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, Isaiah's son (8:1), are not the same; and that only Isaiah's son sets a time limit relevant to Ahaz.

The foregoing discussion was unavoidable. For if Motyer's view fairly represents Isaiah's thought, and if Matthew understood him in this way, then much light is shed on the first Gospel. The Immanuel figure of Isaiah 7:14 is a messianic figure, a point Matthew has rightly grasped. Moreover this interpretation turns on an understanding of the place of the Exile in Isaiah 6-12, and Matthew has divided up his genealogy (1:11-12, 17) precisely in order to draw attention to the Exile. In 2:17-18 the theme of the Exile returns. A little later, as Jesus begins his ministry (4:12-16), Matthew quotes Isaiah 9:1-2, which, if the interpretation adopted here is correct, properly belongs to the Immanuel prophecies of Isaiah 7:14, 9:6. Small wonder that after such comments by Matthew, Jesus' next words announced the kingdom (4:17; cf. Isa 9:7). Isaiah's reference to Immanuel's affliction for the sake of learning obedience (cf. on Isa 7:15 above) anticipates Jesus' humiliation, suffering, and obedient sonship, a recurring theme in this Gospel.

This interpretation also partially explains Matthew's interest in the Davidic lineage; and it strengthens a strong interpretation of "Immanuel." Most scholars (e.g., Bonnard) suppose that this name in Isaiah reflects a hope that God would make himself present with his people ("Immanuel" derives from *immanuel*, "God with us"); and they apply the name to Jesus in a similar way, to mean that God is with us, and for us, because of Jesus. But if Immanuel in Isaiah is a messianic figure whose titles include "Mighty God," there is reason to think that "Immanuel" refers to Jesus himself, that he is "God with us." Matthew's use of the preposition "with" at the end of 1:23 favors this (cf. Fenton, "Matthew 1:20-23," p. 81). Though "Immanuel" is not

a name in the sense that “Jesus” is Messiah’s name (1:21), in the OT Solomon was named “Jedidiah” (“Beloved of Yahweh,” 2Sam 12:25), even though he apparently was not called that. Similarly Immanuel is a “name” in the sense of title or description.

No greater blessing can be conceived than for God to dwell with his people (Isa 60:18-20); Ezek 48:35; Rev 21:23). Jesus is the one called “God with us”: the designation evokes John 1:14, 18. As if that were not enough, Jesus promises just before his ascension to be with us to the end of the age (28:20; cf. also 18:20), when he will return to share his messianic banquet with his people (25:10).

If “Immanuel” is rightly interpreted in this sense, then the question must be raised whether “Jesus” (1:21) should receive the same treatment. Does “Jesus” (“Yahweh saves”) mean Mary’s Son merely brings Yahweh’s salvation, or is he himself in some sense the Yahweh who saves? If “Immanuel” entails the higher christology, it is not implausible that Matthew sees the same in “Jesus.” The least we can say is that Matthew does not hesitate to apply OT passages descriptive of Yahweh directly to Jesus (cf. on 3:3).

Matthew’s quotation of Isaiah 7:14 is very close to the LXX; but he changes “you will call” to “they will call.” This may reflect a rendering of the original Hebrew, if 1QIsaa is pointed appropriately (cf. Gundry, *Use of OT*, p. 90). But there is more here: The people whose sins Jesus forgives (1:21) are the ones who will gladly call him “God with us” (cf. Frankemolle, pp. 17-19).

2. Significance of the doctrine.

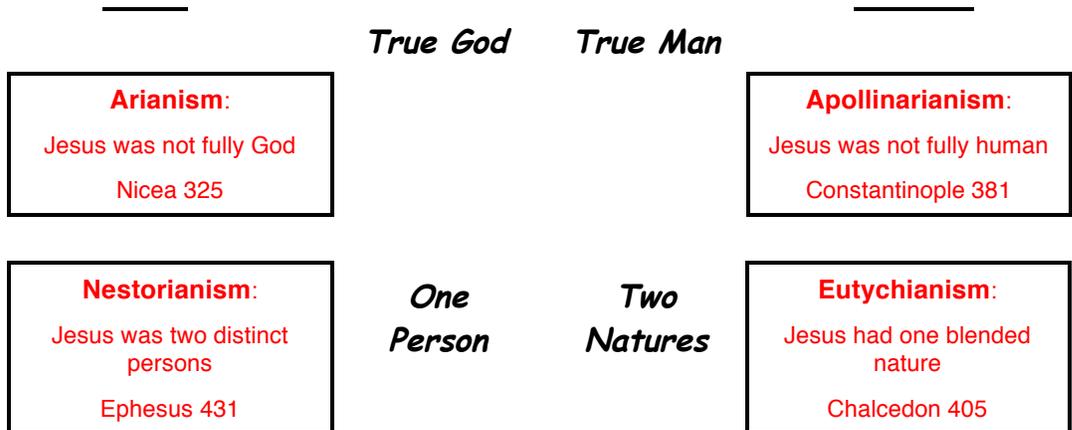
- a. By the late 2nd century the doctrine of the virgin birth was well established.
- b. The Roman doctrine of Mariology is connected with the virgin birth of Jesus.
 1. The **perpetual virginity** of Mary - she was eternally virgin. This was dogma from 649.
 2. The **Immaculate conception** of Mary - from the first moment of Mary’s conception she was preserved from original sin. This became dogma in 1854.
 3. These doctrines are argued from tradition, reason, and also claim Scriptural support.
 - a. **Gen.3:15** “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed” In this passage the woman and Christ (the seed) are seen as parallel combatants with Satan.
 - b. **Lk.1:28** “Hail, favored one! (one full of grace).” This fullness of grace must mean that she is without sin.
 - c. **Lk.1:42** “Most blessed are you among women,” This blessing is seen as parallel to Christ’s blessing in His humanity.
- c. It is important to realize that the virgin birth receives little attention in the apostles writing. This might suggest that it is not in itself a central tenant of the faith.
- d. The virgin birth does appear however to illustrate and thus communicate a number of important characteristics of Jesus. He was human, divine, and supernatural.

E. The Jesus of the cults fits into one of six categories.

Edionism:
Jesus was not God

Orthodoxy

Docetism:
Jesus was not Man



1. There is a simple way to see if someone has the Jesus of the Bible (not the one of Mormonism who is the brother of the devil, nor the Jehovah’s Witness Jesus who is Michael the Archangel, and certainly not the one of the New Age Movement who is simply a man in tune with the divine consciousness).
 - The Jesus of the Bible is prayed to (Acts 7:55-60; and Zech 13:9 with 1 Cor. 1:1-2).
 - The Jesus of the Bible is worshiped (Matt. 2:2,11;14:33;28:9; John 9:35-38; Heb. 1:6)
 - The Jesus of the Bible called God (John 20:28; Heb. 1:8).
2. In cult theologies, Jesus is a creation in one form or another (this is why the Jehovah’s Witnesses add the word ‘other’ four times to Col. 1:16-17). Therefore, He is not to be prayed to, worshiped, or called God. If you are a Christian then you will be able to pray to Jesus, not just through Him. You will be able to worship Jesus equally with the Father. And you will be able to call Jesus your Lord and God. A cultist cannot do this. A cultist has a false Jesus, and, therefore, a false hope of salvation.

F. Conclusion

1. We want to know all the details (even if they are impractical) about those we love thus we study as much as we can about the nature of God.
2. It is important that we have an appreciation for the history of the church and its struggle with issues that provide a foundation for our faith.
3. **If you put your faith in a Jesus that is not true, then your faith is useless.** The power of faith does not rest in the act of believing, but in its object; the greatest faith in someone false is the same as no faith at all. Sincerity and false messiahs do not bridge the chasm of sin between God and man, only the Jesus of the Bible does that.

The Point

Jesus’ unique birth and death reflect the central issue of his person and work.

Response

Head

I am to understand that:

There are many different interpretations of who Jesus really was.

Heart

I am to believe that:

Col.1:19-20 is a summary of Jesus' person and work.

Hands

I am to behave by:

Being careful in how I refer to the unique nature of Jesus.

Questions that you should be able to answer.

1. Specific facts you should know.

- a. What texts in the Bible teach that Jesus was born of a virgin?
- b. How can the two genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke be explained?
- c. What are six errors that Christians should avoid in defining Christ's nature?
- d. What text best summarizes the person and work of Jesus?

2. Issues that you should be able to discuss.

- a. How does the virgin birth signify Jesus' unique nature?
- b. How orthodox does a person's view of Jesus' nature need to be before they are recognized as a Christian?