

# Theological Equipping Class

## *Christological Heresies*

May 4, 2025

*What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 1:9)*

### On Heterodoxy and Heresy

αἵρεσις: haireisis – factions, schism, division

heresy is “a doctrine that ultimately destroys, destabilizes, or distorts a mystery rather than preserving it.” (Alister McGrath)

### State vs. national borders

- State borders: paedobaptism vs. credobaptism, premill vs. amill vs. postmill, etc.
- National borders: trinitarianism, Christology, justification by grace, resurrection, etc.

### Theological Tension and Oversimplification

- *Si comprehendus, non est Deus*: “If you understand, it is not God.” (Augustine)
- Good creeds and theology put grammar to our groanings.

### Why is this important? Pulling the thread of Christology

Why is humanity necessary?

- Christ could only redeem what He assumed.
- To attain representative obedience.
- To be a substitute and sacrifice.
  - *Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. (Hebrews 2:17)*
- To be the only mediator between God and man
  - *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus... (1 Timothy 2:5)*
- To fulfill the original mandate for man to reign over creation

A denial of humanity is explicitly connected to false teaching

- *By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. (1 John 4:2–3)*

Why is His deity necessary?

- Only God could pay penalty.
- If He is not, then He is not worthy of worship and thus a blasphemer for receiving it.
- If Christ is not divine, then the Scriptures that speak of His deity are not true.
- If Christ is not divine, then His sacrifice was not sufficient to save us from our sin.
- If Christ is not divine, then He could not represent God to man and man to God as a mediator.
- If Christ is not divine, then He could not reveal the image of the Father nor restore to us the image of God.

John 1:14 the word became (ἐγένετο) flesh.

- What does it mean that He became flesh?
- Did He become sinful since that is how Paul uses the word flesh?
- Does it mean that He took on a human body, but not a human soul or mind?
- Did He relinquish His deity as kenoticists believe.

“Every sectarian and heretical school of thought initially begins with an appeal Scripture against the confession and would have us believe that its deviation from the doctrine of the church is required by Scripture.” (Herman Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics)

- *for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. (1 Corinthians 11:19)*

## **Ebionitism**

- Adoptionism: Jesus was merely a superior man who was adopted by God at His baptism and not the co-equal, co-eternal Son of God.
- Where do we see this today? Liberal theology

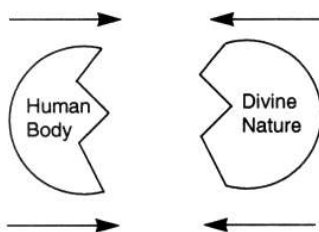
## Docetism and Gnosticism

- Only seemed or appeared to be human (from the Greek dokeo), but was really only spiritual and divine.
  - "when Jesus walked on the beach, He left no footprints"
  - *By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.* (1 John 4:2–3)
  - Where do you see this today? So-called Gnostic gospels: DaVinci Code, Elaine Pagels, etc.

## Arianism

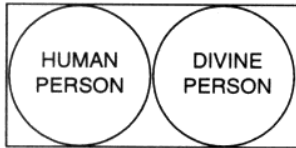
- "there was a time when the Son was not" or "there was when the Son was not."
- the Son wasn't eternal. the Son was created.
- homoousia, of the SAME substance as the Father, not homoiousia, of a similar substance as the Father.
- Where do we see this today? The major modern cults like JWs and Mormons are Arian.

## Apollinarianism



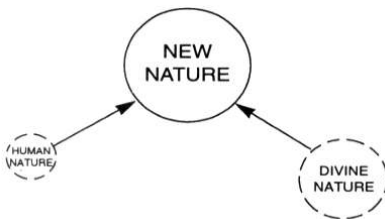
- the immaterial logos ("the Word") was simply clothed ("became") with physicality ("flesh").
- "That which he has not assumed, he has not healed." (4<sup>th</sup> century father Gregory of Nazianzus)
- Christ only redeems what He assumes.
- but He didn't assume femininity so can females not be fully saved? Discussion of essential properties vs. individual attributes.

## Nestorianism



- Nestorianism affirms the complete deity and complete humanity found in Jesus, but there is a huge line of differentiation between the natures.
- In fact, it is almost like there are two separate persons, one divine & the other human.
- Is Mary theotokos, the mother of God?
- “the two natures being brought together in a true union, there is of both one Christ and one Son” (5<sup>th</sup> century Cyril of Alexandria)

## Eutychianism



- This avoided the error of Nestorianism. But it so emphasized the unity that any distinction was compromised and the properties of each nature were lost.

### Summary:

- Ebionism: denies deity
- Arianism: denies fullness of deity
- Docetism or gnosticism: denies humanity
- Apollinarianism: denies fullness of humanity
- Nestorianism: denies unity of natures
- Eutychianism: denies distinction of natures

How did the church deal with these errors?

On the use of extrabiblical language to describe biblical truth.

“The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture...” (Westminster Confession of Faith)

The creeds and confessions are trying to outline biblical boundaries for belief.

### **Chalcedonian Confession/Definition of 451:**

*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 [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, 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 been handed down to us.*

- What phrases defended against Apollinarianism, which denied the fullness of humanity?
  - *perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood*
  - *truly God and truly man*
  - *of a reasonable soul and body*
  - *consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood*
  - *in all things like unto us...*
- What phrases defended against Nestorianism which denies the unity of natures?
  - *one and the same Son*
  - *one and the same Christ, Son, Lord...*
  - *indivisibly*
  - *inseparably*
  - *not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son...*
- What phrases defended against Eutychianism which blended and merged the natures?
  - *two natures*
  - *inconfusedly*
  - *unchangeably*
  - *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*
- Christian Christology confesses 4 truths.
  - Jesus Christ is truly divine.
  - Jesus Christ is truly human.
  - The divine and human natures of Christ are distinct.
  - The divine and human natures of Christ are completely united in one person.
- "It is necessary that the self-same Person who is to make this satisfaction [for sin] be perfect God and perfect man, since He cannot make it unless He be really God, and He ought not to make it unless He be really man." (*Cur Deus Homo* "Why God Became Man" - Anselm of Canterbury)