

The Creeds of the Church

Lesson 5—The Theology of the Definition of Chalcedon

I. Review of the Historical Context

- A. The heresies that led to the calling of the Council of Chalcedon:
1. Nestorianism—that Jesus and the Son of God were separate beings
 2. Apollinarianism—that Jesus had a human body with a divine mind
 3. Eutychianism—that Jesus’ human nature was absorbed by the divine
- B. The Council of Chalcedon was called in 451 AD and issued the Definition of Chalcedon.

II. The Text of the Definition of Chalcedon

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent,

It is important to note that this creed, like the other ecumenical creeds, establishes and codifies the doctrine that had been passed down, rather than seeking to create new doctrine. It is a course correction, back to the original course, not a redirection into a new course.

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 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, 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;

The creed seeks to identify the biblical statements about Jesus as pertaining either to his Godhead or his manhood, since this is the only way we can make sense of the one person, Jesus Christ.

NB: “Virgin Mary, the Mother of God”—Though this phrase calls up images of Roman Catholic Mariolatry, the main purpose of this title for Mary is to emphasize that she actually carried in her womb the incarnate Son of God. This idea was abhorrent to Nestorius. God passed through Mary’s physical body. She literally, “bore God.” It is unfortunate that the term has become the basis for undue veneration of Mary in the time since the creed was first formulated.

one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably;

“Inconfusedly”—The two natures of Jesus are not mixed as Apollinaris and Eutychus both taught, though with different emphases.

“Unchangeably”—The essential humanity of Jesus is unchanged by virtue of the fact the he is also God, contra Eutyches, who believed that his humanity was basically lost in his divinity. By implication also, now that Jesus is risen and glorified, his humanity also has not changed. It is in his perfect humanity that he now sits at the right hand of the Father. He still has not changed in essence.

“Indivisibly”—The different aspects of the personhood of Jesus are not to be divided, some being attributed to the divine and some to the human, as Apollinaris sought to do. He is entirely God and entirely human.

“Inseparably”—The divine nature did not merely unite itself to the human Jesus for a time, as Nestorius seemed to teach. The two natures are perfectly united in one person, from the moment of conception in the womb of Mary, through the crucifixion and death, into the resurrection and even until the present moment.

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;

This doctrine of Christ as being one person with two natures is what is known as the Hypostatic Union of Christ. *Hypostasis* is the Greek word for “person.”

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.

The creed ends with a restatement of the authority from which this definition derives: Firstly, the Scriptures (“the prophets from the beginning . . . and the Lord Jesus Christ himself . . .”) and secondly, the commonly-received doctrines of the church as represented in prior creeds, most notably the Nicene Creed (“the Creed of the holy Fathers”).