

Lesson 62: Chapter 8: Paragraph 2: Chalcedonian Christology

OUTLINE

Apollinarianism
Nestorianism
Eutychianism

INTRODUCTION

As a Christian I have heard some crazy beliefs about Christ, and even believed some crazy things about Jesus the God-man. It seems that before the great mystery of the Incarnation the human mind is able to come up with a numberless amount of innovations and errors. This is where we thank God for His word, where He has infallibly and sufficiently revealed all that we need to know to have a true and saving faith and an informed not a blasphemous worship. But even with a bible in hand many Christians have held to dangerous errors. This is where we need to thank God for teachers in the church. This is where we need to look over the rich history of the church and be grateful for those high points where various Creeds and Confessions were put together to make the teaching of the Bible clear. This is the 1700 year anniversary of the Nicene Creed; this was a creed that was tackling the error of Arianism who denied that Jesus co-equal with the Father, but was rather created. The 1689 in chapter 8 paragraph 2 is very clear in showing it is deliberately lining itself up with the Nicene Creed. The 1689 along with the Savoy and the WCF is showing its agreement with the long confessed faith of the early church when it came to their doctrine of Christ and the Trinity. We have been spending a bit of time looking at the teachings on the person of Christ from paragraph 2. We have covered the fact that Jesus is God; that Jesus is man; that Jesus was miraculously born of a virgin, sinless in order to be our Savior. We took a little detour to look at some of the Marian Dogmas. Last time Thomas gave us some background on the Nicene Creed. Well today as we bring paragraph 2 to a close we are confronted with the 1689 drawing deeply on another Creed the Chalcedonian Creed of 451.

Paragraph 2: 'The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her: and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; *so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.*'

Where Nicaea had been concerned to show how the Son is God with the Father; Chalcedon is concerned to show the Jesus is 100% God and 100% man, and how these two natures stand in relation to one another in one person. The 1689 shows that it endorses Chalcedonian Christology. As we wrap up this paragraph focusing on the traditional view of Christ's person we will look at three errors that led to the Chalcedonian Creed being put together.

Apollinarianism

The 4th century was a turbulent time for Christology. The attack of Arianism upon the deity of the Son led to the Nicene Creed of 325, and the Constantinopolitan Creed in 381. A staunch defender against Arianism was the bishop of Laodicea, Apollinaris. Now in these Christological debates we often feel a bit like Luther's drunken rider. Luther said that the world is like a drunken peasant that you help onto a horse only for him to fall on the other side. If you help him again he will tip the other way. We find ourselves reacting to error like this drunken rider where we tend to overreact and by so doing fall off the horse into another error, this is what happened with Apollinaris. He was a stout defender of Nicaea against Arianism, his impulse was to emphasize the deity of Christ but as so often happens he was fighting a good cause in a bad way and fell off the horse. He claimed that Jesus had a human body; and a human sensitive soul, but in the place where you would expect to find a human rationale, there you find the divine Logos. In other words Jesus is not completely human; He has a truncated human soul and not a full human soul to make room for His divinity. Many find themselves sympathetic to this way of thinking because they would rather sacrifice something of His humanity than His deity, but both errors are errors. Apollinaris was answered by the Bishop of Mopsuestia, Theodore of Mopsuestia. He responded by insisting that Jesus had two full natures. He said that to say any less would result in the divine nature being subject to human conditions.

Nestorianism

The early fifth century was afire from this controversy. There were those who defended Apollinaris and those who defended Theodore. Nestorius was a monk who supported Theodore who became the bishop of Constantinople; he fell off the horse by so stressing the two full natures that he essentially affirmed 2 persons. He upheld the two full natures but did not uphold the unity of these natures in the one person. Nestorius is famous for denying Mary the title Theotokos, Godbearer. As we have said before Nestorius wrongly taught that Jesus Christ was a human person inhabited by the divine Logos, and so instead of two natures united in one person, what we call a hypostatic union, he taught two natures in two persons who co-inhabited the same space. The divine Logos dwelt in the human Christ like a man living in a temple. Nestorius so divided the two natures so as to create two persons. For Nestorius these two persons were so divided that Mary could be called the bearer of the human Christ without attributing this is the person of the Divine Son. Nestorius had a good intention trying to protect the divine Son from being seen as a creature and denied Mary the ability to give birth to the divine person. The problem is that scripture speaks in such a way that only two natures united in one person can properly account for. For example, Paul talks about crucifying the Lord of glory, this is technically impossible. But by virtue of the natures united in the one person, and the attributes of the other nature properly attributed to the person and not the other nature, this way of speaking becomes possible. Statements like God having blood, Acts 20:28; the fullness of the Godhead dwelling bodily in Christ Col. 2:9; and crucifying the Lord of glory 1 Cor. 2:8, are possible because we see Christ's two natures united in one person and can properly attribute properties of one nature of the person without communicating them to the other nature. By the same token we can affirm that Mary was the mother of God insofar as the

two natures are united in one person, but she cannot be the mother of the divine nature of the Son, which no one was affirming. Nestorius fell short denying the union of two natures in one person; and ended up creating a second person in Christ veering into error through good intentions.

Cyril the bishop of Alexandria weighed in criticizing Nestorius of creating two sons. Cyril of Alexandria spoke of 'the one incarnate nature of the divine Logos.' Now at this point there is a lot of political machinations that went on as the school of Alexandria and the school of Antioch clashed, and both hoping to secure Constantinople which was the capital of the Roman Empire at that time. There was an attempted council where both groups excommunicated each other and the Emperor finally got involved and sided with Cyril banishing Nestorius.

Eutychianism

At this point a monk by the name of Eutychus from Constantinople waged in against Nestorianism falling off the other side of the horse. In reaction to Nestorius dividing the persons while stressing two natures, Eutychus tried to overcome the error of Nestorius by combining the natures into a fused nature, it is also known as monophysitism, mono—one; physis—nature. Flavian the Archbishop of Constantinople accused Eutychus of heresy and banished him. Eutychus appealed to Alexandria and Rome. The bishop of Alexandria defended Eutychus and sought to depose Flavian, so Flavian appealed to Leo the Bishop of Rome. Leo weighed in against Eutychus and for Flavian. He wrote a famous reply stressing that there are two natures yet one person, and both natures are essential for the work of our salvation. Dioscorus the Bishop of Alexandria resisted Leo's ideas, but a new Emperor Marcian called for a council to clear these matters up, Chalcedon is the result.

Here it is:

'Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, *without confusion, without change (against Eutychianism), without division, without separation (against Nestorianism)*; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.'

If you look again at the 1689 you will see how they have tried to represent Chalcedonian Christology: '*so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.*' 'Inseparably joined' agrees with 'without separation.' And this is against Nestorius or adoptionist views that see the

natures only temporarily united. 'Without conversion' agrees with 'without change.' This would be against Eutychus or any view that sees either the divine or human nature needing to change to accommodate the Incarnation. 'Without confusion' corresponds to 'without confusion.' This is primarily against Eutychus who created a third thing with the combined natures of Jesus. This would also create a barrier against any view that makes the human nature modify the divine nature of the divine nature modify the human nature. 'Without composition' agrees with 'no division', in other words, only one person not a composition of two persons.

This has become one of the most important creedal statements. We recognize that the Incarnation is a great mystery and you can spend a lifetime marveling at its depths. But this creed helps in providing guard rails. If you go to the Grand Canyon or some other amazing natural site, there will often be rails to stop you from falling over the edge. That is the great value of Nicaea; Constantinople, Chalcedon, the 1689 and others. Like training wheels on a bicycle they prevent us from leaning too far over on either side of stressing the divine nature at the expense of the human or the human at the expense of the divine.

In conclusion then let me outline a few of the heresies that this tremendous paragraph based on the historic creeds protects us from.

Sabellianism/Modalistic Monarchianism : a second century heresy held by people like Sabellius and Praxeas. One God in one person who appears in different modes. This is a unipersonal view of God that confuses the Son with the Father, also called Patripassianism.

Ebionism: an early Jewish heresy that believed that Jesus was a man but who only become the Messiah through his obedience. Upholds His humanity and perfection but denies His divinity.

Docetism: from the Greek word for illusion or appearance, this view claims that Jesus was divine but since the divine nature and human nature are not truly compatible Jesus only appeared human but did not truly have a human nature. An early version of this is rejected by 1 John.

Arianism; Apollinarianism; Nestorianism, and Eutychianism we are familiar with.

All of these heresies and others are avoided by keeping within the bounds of the confessions.