

CHRISTOLOGY INDEX

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CHRISTOLOGY – THE DOCTRINE OF JESUS CHRIST

There is one person who walked on this earth whose life and influence cannot possibly be fully grasped or understood by any finite mind. That Person is Jesus Christ.

Even when attempting to systematically study this doctrine, we must quickly admit that any study will be far short of perfection when it comes to the subject of Jesus Christ, because He is beyond anything we could grasp.

Dr. John Walvoord wrote: “The poet, biographer, theologian and orator alike confess their inability to delineate the glories and perfections of our blessed Savior.” “Although no other person is the object of more scriptural revelation, human pens falter when attempting to describe Him” (John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, p. 7).

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote: “In attempting to write on His adorable Person and His incomprehensible achievements—which achievements when completed will have perfected redemption, exercised to infinite satisfaction the divine attribute of grace, manifested the invisible God to His creatures, and subdued a rebellious universe in which sin has been permitted to demonstrate its exceeding sinfulness—the limitations of a finite mind which is weakened by a faulty perception are all too apparent” (Vol. 5, p. 3).

Mr. John Miles wrote: “Under the subject of the Trinity we were confronted with truths that go beyond the complete understanding of men. It is understandable that man, small creature that he is, will not always, while in this realm, be able to comprehend all about the great God and infinite Creator. This may again be our experience as we study the person and work of Jesus Christ” (John L. Miles, *Doctrine*, p. 1).

Obviously, one reason for the difficulty in grasping fact and truth about Jesus Christ is that Jesus Christ is like no other person in history. There has never been, nor will there ever be any person who can match Him or measure up to Him. However, even though the task of studying this doctrine is incomprehensible, it is demanded. No other person in the Bible is more important, more honored, or more majestic than Jesus Christ. In Him “dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). In Him is “everlasting life” (John 3:36). In Him is the creation of all things (John 1:3). In Him is God’s complete program of redemption (Rom. 3:21-26). In Him is the entire future (Rev. 19:11-16).

There is no person more worth knowing than Jesus Christ. There is no doctrine more crucial than the doctrine of Jesus Christ. One cannot be saved without knowledge of Him. Even though there are things we will see about Him that will take us far beyond our finite limitations, it is still a great privilege, responsibility and blessing for every believer to study the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

QUESTION #1 – What is Christology?

Christology is the systematic study of Jesus Christ. Primarily, this doctrine falls under two specific areas of study: 1) His Person; 2) His work.

CHRISTOLOGY (2)

Information pertaining to His person is information that focuses on His identity - who Jesus Christ really is. Information pertaining to His work is information that focuses on His activity - all He does, including past, present and future accomplishments.

QUESTION #2 – Why study Christology?

Although this question may seem very insignificant, it is probably one of the most significant questions one can answer. If ever there were a doctrine that needs to be carefully and thoroughly studied and comprehended, it is this doctrine. It is very clear from the infant stages of Christianity that this doctrine was a major issue:

- 1) Luke 5:21 - This doctrinal matter was a major issue to the Scribes and Pharisees.
- 2) Luke 5:24 - This doctrinal matter was a major reason Christ performed miracles.
- 3) Luke 9:18-19 - This was a doctrinal matter of which most were in total ignorance of when Christ, Himself, was here on earth.
- 4) Acts 2:22-36 - This was the central doctrine that was stressed during the early development of the church.
- 5) Romans 3:21-26 - This doctrine became the major issue of Pauline theology and soteriology.
- 6) I Peter 1:1-2 - This doctrine became the central doctrine of Peter's ministry.
- 7) I John 1:1-2 - This doctrine became the central doctrine of John's ministry.
- 8) I John 4:1-3 - This doctrine became a critical church doctrine of the first century.
- 9) Luke 9:20 - Jesus Christ wants His people to know this doctrine.
- 10) John 16:13-14 - The Holy Spirit wants His people to know this doctrine.

It is biblically evident that the matter of Christ's person—"who He is" and His work—"what He accomplished" is crucial to our understanding. To fail to study such a doctrine is to neglect the will of God.

It is well to point out that the first major church council, The Council of Nicea, was called in A.D. 325 to resolve the doctrinal issue as to the identity and accomplishments of Jesus Christ. Over 300 leading bishops of churches assembled in Nicea (modern day Isnik, Turkey) to establish a doctrinal treatise concerning the Person and work of Jesus Christ. This famous doctrinal writing became known as the Nicene Creed, from which the Protestant Reformers used to mature and to restate into the doctrines concerning Christ that we have to this very day.

CHRISTOLOGY (3)

It is interesting that historians believe that the Nicene Creed was developed from doctrinal information that primarily came from the churches of Antioch and Jerusalem. The significant point to us is that our study of Christology obviously has its roots clear back to biblical churches.

We are very privileged to be able to study this doctrine in our day and age:

- 1) We have a completed canon of Scripture—Genesis through Revelation.
- 2) We have an abundance of doctrinal writings concerning Jesus Christ—Nicene Creed (A.D. 325 = Deity of Christ; Athanasian Creed (A.D. 400) = Trinity.
- 3) We have a developed hermeneutic which recognizes the importance of literal interpretation—Early church had a problem, especially in the 3rd century with the Alexandrian philosophy of an Allegorical Interpretation.
- 4) We have many godly theologians who have systematized vast amounts of information concerning Jesus Christ—Lewis Sperry Chafer, Charles Hodge, Augustus Strong, Louis Berkhof, John Calvin and John Miles.

In answering the question of why study the doctrine of Christology, we may sum it up this way—because throughout all of history the doctrine of Jesus Christ was, is and continues to be a most critical doctrine to every human being.

QUESTION #3 – What do we mean by the “pre-existence” of Jesus Christ?

The theological meaning of this very important phrase is that Jesus Christ was/is God from all eternity. He always existed and He had no beginning.

Dr. Chafer writes: “The line of evidence which demonstrates the pre-existence of Christ on the ground of the truth—as stated above—that He is God, is wholly uncomplicated” (Vol. 5, p. 7).

Now some say that technical doctrinal language requires that pre-existence of Jesus Christ means that He existed before His birth and that the eternity of Jesus Christ means that He existed throughout all of time. Even though one term perhaps emphasizes something a little different, it is still legitimate to think of the term “pre-existence of Christ” as meaning that Jesus Christ was God from all eternity. He always existed and He had no beginning.

QUESTION #4 – Why is this doctrine so important?

The central reason why this theological concept (“pre-existence”) is so important is because this point is crucial to establishing the fact that Jesus Christ is God ! Any Christology that is biblically worthy will dogmatically declare that Jesus Christ is God—which truth the Scriptures clearly confirm. Pre-existence is a crucial part of establishing this fact.

CHRISTOLOGY (4)

Obviously, if Jesus Christ came into existence at His birth, He cannot possibly be eternal God.

One of the major attributes of God is the attribute of eternity. Dr. John Walvoord writes: "One of the most crucial problems in approaching the study of the person and work of Jesus Christ is the question of His existence from all eternity past as the second Person of the Trinity. It was this issue which aroused the immediate antagonism of the Jews when Christ said, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). His listeners immediately understood that Christ was claiming to be eternal and thereby was asserting Himself to be God. As Stauffer points out, this "I am" is the climax of a series of affirmations in John 8 beginning with "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). The Jews accordingly took up stones to stone Him, which was the prescribed penalty for blasphemy" (John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, p. 22).

Great harm is done to the Person of Jesus Christ when it is stressed that Christ's birthday was on Christmas. As we shall see from Scripture, His entrance into the world as a human being was certainly a monumental event; however, that was not His birth date of existence. Christ has always existed throughout all of time. He has no birth date. He is God! There were times in history before Christ was born a baby, when He appeared as a human. What we will discover is that Christ's birth in Bethlehem was the moment in time that He decided to take on human form, forever.

There are many passages of Scripture which specifically prove that Jesus Christ always existed and is God:

1. John 1:1-2 - These verses not only declare that Jesus Christ is co-equal with God the Father in time, but that He is God. It is clear that the One who "became flesh" was God from all eternity (John 1:14).
2. Micah 5:2 - The One who would be ruler of Israel would be born in Bethlehem and He eternally existed. His "goings forth from long ago, from the days of eternity." This One is none other than Jesus Christ (Luke 2:4-7).
3. John 8:58 - It is clear that Christ is claiming to be God and from the Jewish response in verse 59, they fully understood His claim.
4. Col. 1:16-17 - Here are two of the most powerful verses about Jesus Christ being God in all of the Bible. It is clearly stated that Jesus Christ created all things and that He is "before" all things. If Jesus Christ existed before all things and created all things, He is not created, but He is the Creator.

It is very important to point out that the relative pronouns "whom" (v. 14), and "He" (v. 15) have as their antecedent the noun "son" of verse 13. Simply stated, this passage presents irrefutable grammatical evidence that Jesus Christ is God from all eternity.