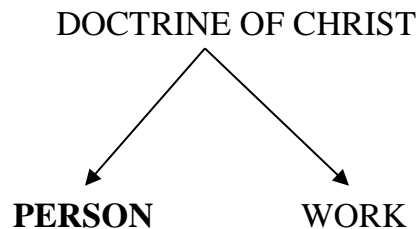


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B0436 -- Sept. 5, 2004 -- 2 John -- Appendix A: The Person of Christ

As an appendix to our study of 2nd John we're going to look at some of the historic explanations of the Person of Christ. We're doing this because the essence of John's 2nd epistle is the Person of Christ. John wrote this short letter to warn this local church against those who carried a false Doctrine of Christ. In particular they held to a false Doctrine of the Person of Christ. Whenever we approach a study of the Doctrine of Christ, we divide the study into two aspects; the Person of Christ and the Work of Christ.



These two aspects are logically related as you will see. John was concerned with a heresy regarding the Person of Christ and John realized that if the Person of Christ is distorted then the Work of Christ is destroyed (REPEAT). That's why John was so antagonistic to the antichrists in 2 John 7 (also cf. 1 John 2:22). A wrong Doctrine of the Person of Christ destroys the plan of salvation and undermines assurance of salvation. So, there is a logical relationship between the Person and Work of Christ. If His Person is not what the Bible declares it to be then His Work is seriously distorted, there is no salvation. So, we've got to have these two aspects. Our study will be largely historical but it is important to note from the outset that all of these heresies regarding the Person of Christ were held by Christians demonstrating that a true Christian can *go aside from and not abide in the doctrine of Christ* (2 John 9). We will have to ask the questions "what is the relationship of the Son to the Father? and how do we explain the incarnate person of Christ in human language when we have only an incomplete revelation of Him?"

Dr. John Hannah tells the story of his favorite Christmas card. He says it “lacks the red, green, and white colors traditionally associated with the season. It does not depict the warmth of a Normal Rockwell painting or some wintry scene. As a matter of fact, it appears rather plain in black and white. On the front of the card are several of the great conquerors and despots of world history—Adolf Hitler, Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, Napoleon, to name a few. Below their pictures is this statement: “Many men have sought to be God.” Opening the card, one finds an impressionistic picture of the manger with the Christ child. The caption on the opposite side is stunning: “But only one God sought to be man.””ⁱ Hannah has captured the essence of the Christian message. It’s not about men striving to become God, it’s about God becoming a man. As John 1:14 says, “*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.*” It’s critical that we explain carefully the Person of Christ. Why?

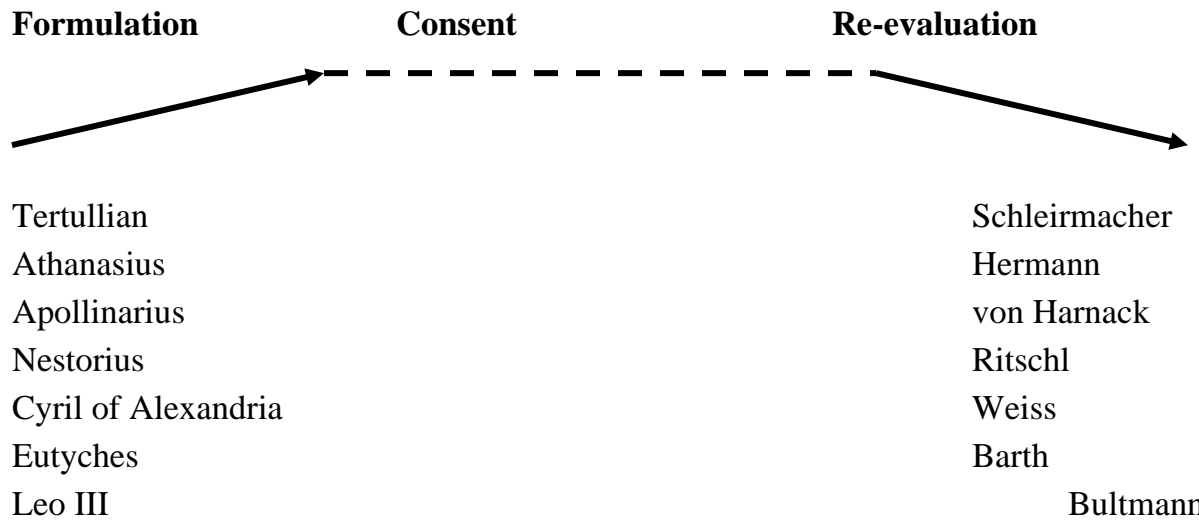
In the early church there were opponents to Christianity. One of the common charges was what unbelievers conceived to be a contradiction in the Trinity. How can God be 1 and 3 at the same time? Isn’t that a logical contradiction? Others made a similar attack on the Person of Christ. They asked how can Jesus Christ be both God and man? How can He be 1 and 2 at the same time? The essence of these two charges against the Trinity and the Person of Christ is the same; $1 = 1$, $1 \neq 2$ or 3 . “You’ve got a contradiction at the heart of Christianity, you’ve got a contradiction in Christ Himself”, they said. Well, first of all, what is a contradiction? How do we define a contradiction?

The belief that two ideas cannot have the same relationship at the same time.

In our case they were saying that Jesus Christ cannot be both God and man at the same time. He has to be either God or man but He can’t be both. So, Christians had to deal with explaining what they meant by saying that Jesus Christ was both God and man. From the earliest times in Church History Christ was considered God. Christ shared all the attributes with the Father. Titles such as “the Son of God” were descriptive of His functions, not of His essence. So, it’s imperative that we understand that the early “church never evidenced a disbelief in the deity of the Savior until recent centuries. While church leaders could not explain the relationship of the two natures of Christ, nearly every one of them nonetheless held firmly to both natures.” Contrary to this many modern scholars have elevated the humanity of Christ and virtually denied His deity. Another thing that is important to realize is that the early church did not invent the doctrine of the incarnate Christ in the 4th and 5th century. What they did in the 4th and 5th centuries was merely explain the incarnate Christ to answer their opponents.

History of the Doctrine of the Person of Christ

The Ancient <u>Church</u>	The Medieval <u>Church</u>	The Reformation <u>Church</u>	The Modern <u>Church</u>
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Several heresies have arisen as to the person of the incarnate Christ. Each of the following heresies were tried during the period of the early church. Each heresy was also condemned at different Councils or Synod's during the churches attempt to systematize the Biblical doctrine of Christ. It took the church 400 years to meander their way to the proper understanding of Christ. Though many men attempted to put all the Scriptural data together into a coherent whole, it did not happen until the Council of Chalcedon in 451AD. The time and difficulty required by previous men's attempts at understanding the God-Man should alert the student to remain cautious when undertaking such a study. With this brief introduction, we will embark on the early heretical views only to realize that they have often been resurrected later in history under different names. The primary views to be presented are; Docetism, Ebionism, Arianism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, and Eutychianism (i.e., Monophysitism). Docetism was the first heresy to come on the scene. Even though John warned against it in 2 John 7 some Christians were deceived by it (e.g., Origen).

Docetism (Phantom View) denied the humanity of Christ. Docetism comes from the Greek word *dokeo* which means "to imagine, to appear". It might best be understood as "phantom". Jesus Christ only appeared to be man, but it was really just a phantom appearance. Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh, he only appeared to have come in the flesh. They reasoned to this conclusion from a false axiom: namely that material was evil and immaterial was good. If material was evil then God could not materialize. Thus, they affirmed the deity of Christ but denied the humanity of Christ. This had one major problem:

1) If God didn't really come in the flesh then He can't redeem our flesh. We're left with a partial redemption.

They viewed physical history and the true humanity of Christ as mere illusions. In our modern day many Extreme Calvinists tend to downplay the importance of physical history, thus leaning toward a modern form of this ancient heresy. (Docetism is very Platonic, emphasizing the Ideal at the expense of the Real).

Ebionism denied the deity of Christ. They taught that Jesus was the natural son of Joseph and Mary who realized his Messianic calling at His baptism by John when a divine spirit came on Him. Ebionism therefore denied the deity of Christ.

The issue of the God-man in Jesus Christ took a back seat from the 2nd to the 4th century while the controversy over the Trinity was resolved. Then in the 4th century Christology once again became the major area of discussion. When Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire it made discussions among theologians much easier. They could now convene and discuss this important theological question. "That people would be so consumed with questions of theology may seem strange to us only because the interests that consume our conversations are frequently on more temporary subjects!"ⁱⁱ At this point the church certainly grasped the idea that Jesus was both truly human and divine but the task was still how to explain that relationship.

Arianism denied the eternality and deity of Christ. Arius taught that Christ must have been created and used phrases such as "Son of God"ⁱⁱⁱ "first born of all creation" and "only begotten" to support his view. Christ was the first creation and He was created out of nothing. Arius argued therefore that Christ was similar to God but not the same as God. The Arian heresy taught that Christ had an essence similar to the Father but different from the Father. Arius' problem was that he transferred the Greek philosophy of the Ideal to Christ. By doing so he logically concluded that nothing truly perfect could enter into the physical realm. Thus, Christ could not have been undiminished deity (he had to be diminished deity). This teaching was very popular in its day but was condemned at Nicea in 325AD. It is taught today by the modern Jehovah's Witness cult. The next man to take a stab at it was the bishop of Laodicea, Apollinarius.

Apollinarius denied the humanity of Christ. He proposed that that Christ had a human body and a human soul, but that He did not have a human spirit and human mind. He assumed that the human spirit was the seat of sin. He taught that in order for Christ to avoid sin God had to replace the human spirit and mind with the Divine Word. This co-mingled the two natures. The problems with this were three-fold.

- 1) If Jesus Christ did not have a human spirit then what does it mean that He breathed his last and gave up his spirit (Luke 23:46)?
- 2) How can we have the mind of Christ if Christ did not have a mind (1 Cor.2:16)?
- 3) If Christ was only partially human then how could He be a total substitute for humans?

So, Apollinarius failed to explain the relationship because he made Christ out to be less than true humanity. He did affirm His undiminished deity. In 381 at the Council of Constantinople, Apollinarius' view was condemned. This council affirmed that the divine Christ is also human, the two in one. But this was challenged again in the 5th century by a man named Nestorius.

Nestorius denied the singular person of Christ. Mary bore Christ but did not bear God. This caused Nestorius to make the distinction between the two natures so sharp that He ultimately became two separate persons, two Christ's! He began his understanding of Jesus by questioning how the divine nature united with the human nature after His humanity had already come into existence! The two natures could never get together in one person. The problem with this is that the Scriptures are clear that there was only one Christ just like there was only one Adam. Modern day Neo-Orthodox views of Christ are similar to the Nestorian heresy. Nestorius view was condemned in 430 at a regional Synod.

As you can see each of these heresies is bringing us one step closer to the proper biblical explanation of the incarnation. But they are swinging like a pendulum between one extreme and the other. But the pendulum is gradually slowing to a halt. The next year, in 431AD at the Council of Ephesus it became clear that Christ possessed two perfect natures in one person, truly God and truly man.

Eutyches (a.k.a. Monophysitism) denied the two natures of Christ. There swung in the opposite direction of Nestorius claiming that Christ had only "one nature". Their basic view was that prior to the incarnation the Son had two natures but at the incarnation the human nature and divine nature came together forming one new nature. This new nature was neither divine nor human; rather it was a smearing of the two natures into a new third nature. This heresy obviously denied the Creator-creature distinction, the most fundamental truth in the Bible (Gen. 1:1). Modern attempts to claim that pagan oriental incarnations are parallel to the incarnation of Christ are merely new forms of this ancient Monophysitist heresy. This heresy was condemned in 449 at what is called "the Robbers Council". Monotheitism is a heresy similar to Monophysitism, but rather than teaching that Christ had only "one nature" it teaches that Christ had only "one will".

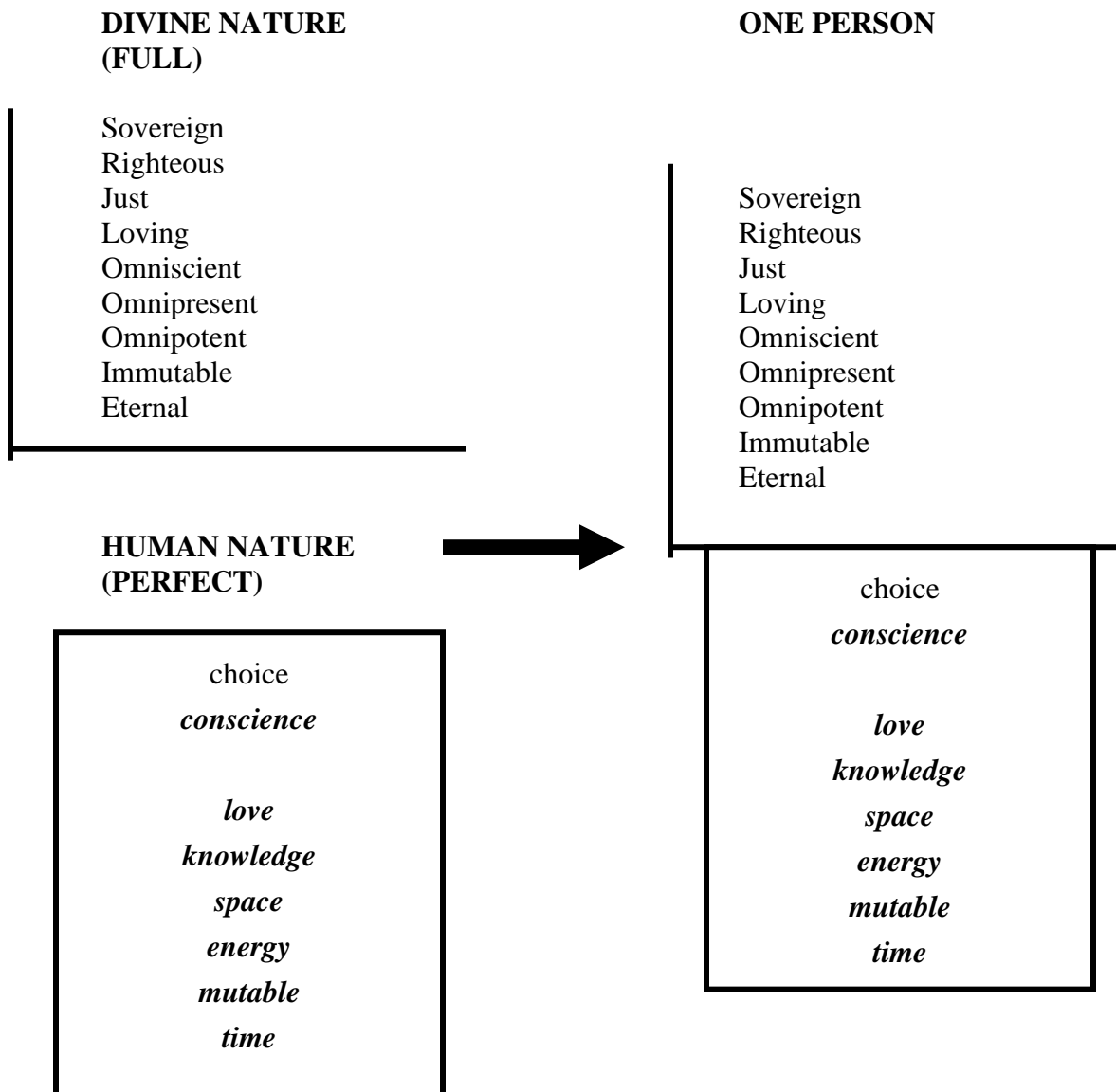
GROUP	TIME	HUMAN NATURE	DIVINE NATURE	CHURCH COUNCIL
DOCETISTS	1 st Century	Denied – only an appearance of humanity	Affirmed	
EBIONITES	2 nd Century	Affirmed	Denied – Jesus was natural son of Joseph and Mary	
ARIANS	4 th century	Affirmed	Denied – Jesus not eternal; similar to, but not same as God	Condemned by Nicea, 325
APOLLINARIANS	4 th century	Divine Logos replaced human spirit and mind	Affirmed	Condemned by Constantinople in 680
NESTORIANS	5 th century	Christ was two Persons		Condemned by Ephesus, 431
EUTYCHIANS	5 th century	Not fully human	Not fully divine	Condemned by Chalcedon, 451
		Christ was a single mixed nature		
ORTHODOXY		Perfect humanity	Full deity	Defined by Chalcedon, 451
		Christ is one Person		

Orthodoxy affirmed both the perfect humanity of Christ, the full deity of Christ, and the single Person of Christ forever. Finally, the church met at the grand Council of Chalcedon in 451AD. Over 520 bishops gathered to condemn Eutyches and to formulate the proper explanation of the relationship of the divine and human natures of the one Christ. The Council stated:

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, without division, without separation; 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.

The Council of Chalcedon succeeded in defining the orthodox view of the Person of Christ. In summary they stated that Christ is “undiminished deity [Ebionites, Arians] and perfect humanity [Docetists, Apollinarians] united without mixture [Eutychians], change [Eutychians], division [Nestorian], or separation [Nestorians] in one person [Nestorians] forever.” As you can see this is a very carefully worded statement. The words were specifically chosen to combat against the various heresies we looked at today.



This brief historical analysis demonstrates that genuine believers can *go aside from* and *not abide in* the true *doctrine of Christ*. However, the result is that our *full reward* will not be realized if we depart. This means we have a high responsibility to protect the proper explanation of the Person of Christ. “A study of errors should help clarify the truth and make us more careful how we express it. Semantics are very important in the statements of theology.”^{iv}

ⁱ Hannah, John D., *Our Legacy: The History of Christian Doctrine*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001), 109.

ⁱⁱ Hannah, John D., *Our Legacy: The History of Christian Doctrine*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001), 116.

ⁱⁱⁱ The title “Son of God” does not mean “offspring of” but rather “of the order of”. So, “Son of God” means that Jesus Christ was of the order of God. It is a clear and strong claim to undiminished deity.

^{iv} Ryrie, Charles, *Basic Theology*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 291.

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