

**Church History**  
**Lesson 17 - Christological Controversies to Chalcedon (451)**

**1. Introduction - The Great Christological Controversies**

- 1.1. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries the church had struggled and overcome Gnosticism, including its false doctrine of Christ. In particular, the church rejected the Gnostic idea that Jesus only “appeared” to be human. The church rightly recognized the biblical teaching that Jesus was truly human.
- 1.2. In 325 the church had declared its orthodox faith in the words of the Nicene Creed, declaring that Jesus was truly and fully God. However, as we have seen Arianism continued to rage within the church for over 50 more years. However, by 381 the church had fully rejected Arianism, rightly embracing the full Deity of Christ.
- 1.3. We have also seen the great teachers and leaders of the late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> century - Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers, Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Jerome. These men furthered the thought and work of the church, and in the process refined the churches understanding of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity.
- 1.4. However, a great question continued to consume the attention of the church: the relationship between the full humanity and the full Deity of Christ. Granted, the church had rejected the false Christology of Gnosticism, declaring that Jesus was really and fully human, and that it had also rejected the false Christology of Arianism, declaring that Jesus was truly and fully God - but how was He both God and Man and the same time? What did this mean? And what was the relationship between His human and Divine natures? These questions were the next momentous chapter in the history of the church.
  - 1.4.1. Foremost among these was the question of how divinity and humanity are joined in Jesus Christ. This is the fundamental Christological question. - Gonzales, location 5088
  - 1.4.2. If Jesus Christ is fully and completely God, what is the relation of the deity to the humanity of Jesus? - Ferguson, location 4933
  - 1.4.3. We call this area of theology Christology because it raises the question, “Who was Jesus Christ?” What was the relation of the divine life and the human life in this unique person, the Christian Savior?- Shelley, location 2064
  - 1.4.4. The Imperial Age did not create the question of the Incarnation; it simply debated it. The mystery of the God-man was central to Christian worship long before it became central to Christian thinking. - Shelley, location 2068
  - 1.4.5. The fourth-and fifth-century debates about the meaning of the Incarnation were not aimed at an “explanation” of Christ. These Christians knew that Jesus Christ defies explanation because he fits no class. He is unique. The great merit of the creeds is that they left the mystery intact. - Shelley, location 2077
- 1.5. Today we will take a brief look at these controversies.

**2. Background to the Christological controversies**

**2.1. Theological background**

- 2.1.1. As noted above, this controversy arose because of critical questions regarding the relationship between the Deity and humanity of Christ. This was a critical theological question, and it also was surrounded by a number of other important questions:

- 2.1.1.1. What does it mean to say that the immutable (unchangeable) God has united Himself to a human? How can this be?
- 2.1.1.2. What does it mean to say Jesus is truly, fully human? What does this necessitate we say regarding His human nature and person?
- 2.1.1.3. Does Jesus have one or two natures? If it is one, which one? If it is two, how are they related to one another? Do they remain distinct, or is one absorbed by the other?
- 2.1.1.4. Does Jesus have two wills or just one?
- 2.1.1.5. What is the best title to give to Mary, who bore the God-Man? What title best conveys the nature of the Son born to her?
- 2.1.2. These and other questions would lead to great discussions and controversies that would only be finally settled at further great councils.
  - 2.1.2.1. Both sides were agreed that the divine was immutable and eternal. The question then was, how can the immutable, eternal God be joined to a mutable, historical man?- Gonzales, location 5092
  - 2.1.2.2. In this climate the Christological debate stretched over a century and was the primary passion in the churches of the east. Between 350 and 450 “heresies” arose, each of them forcing the churches to greater clarity in their answer to the question, “Who is Jesus Christ?- Shelley, location 2115
- 2.2. Geographic background
  - 2.2.1. These controversies embroiled the East to a much greater degree than the West. Rome did get involved at key moments, but for the most part, the major players were all from the East.
    - 2.2.1.1. The Christological controversies were primarily fought in the eastern half of Christendom. The westerners did not get as heavily involved as the easterners did, although Rome did have a crucial role in the official decisions. - Ferguson, location 4939
    - 2.2.1.2. In the West, such questions did not create the same stir. For one thing, after the barbarian invasions, there were other urgent matters that required attention. For another, the West simply revived Tertullian’s old formula—that in Christ there were two natures united in one person—and was content to affirm this. Thus, the West played a balancing role between the two factions in the East, and for that reason would come out of the controversies with enhanced prestige. - Gonzales, location 5098
  - 2.2.2. For reasons discussed in the next section of the ecclesiological/political background, the major players in this controversy represented two major cities/schools of theology: Antioch and Alexandria.
    - 2.2.2.1. On this question, there were in the East two different currents of thought, which historians have conveniently labeled the “Antiochene” and the “Alexandrine”—although not all those who followed the Alexandrine way of thinking were from Alexandria, nor were all the Antiochenes from Antioch. - Gonzales, location 5090
- 2.3. Ecclesiastical/political background
  - 2.3.1. There is no question that an impure motive of a quest for power intensified this conflict. This was especially true of the leaders at Alexandria and Antioch. This unsavory part of our history must simply be recognized. The

church is not perfect, and it never was perfect. The sins of church leaders and their petty jealousies and rivalries can be seen all too clearly at times in the controversy.

- 2.3.1.1.** Political rivalries, especially between Alexandria and Antioch, became even more prominent than before. - Ferguson, location 4941
  - 2.3.1.2.** If one is distressed by the political machinations in the Arian controversy, there is more to lament in the Christological controversies. - Ferguson, location 4941
  - 2.3.1.3.** The debate over the meaning of the Event raged for generations in part because political influence was at stake. - Shelley, location 2103
  - 2.3.1.4.** Those bishops in the premier cities of the empire—Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch—were considered highest of all and were called patriarchs. Throughout the fourth and fifth centuries these four powerful patriarchs were attempting to extend the prestige and power of their spiritual offices. - Shelley, location 2106
- 2.3.2.** There is no question that the rivalry between Alexandria and Antioch was exacerbated when the Council of Constantinople in 381 elevated the see of Constantinople to the second rank behind the see of Rome. It thus replaced Alexandria in this position. Furthermore, it led to a rivalry between Antioch and Alexandria over whose leaders would occupy the position of Patriarch of Constantinople.
- 2.3.2.1.** The elevation of the see of Constantinople to second rank behind Rome at the Council of Constantinople in 381 was a humiliation of Alexandria and may be a factor in that see's policies against Chrysostom, Nestorius, Flavian, and others. - Ferguson, location 4942
  - 2.3.2.2.** On the other hand, Antioch and Alexandria had long been at loggerheads, as rivals in the east. If Antioch could not gain preeminence, it preferred to see it go to the church in the new capital rather than to its old rival on the Nile. - Shelley, location 2112
- 2.3.3.** The theological schools of Antioch and Alexandria
- 2.3.3.1.** Antioch and Alexandria were the two leading centers of theology, and had been for over two centuries. But they had developed different theological approaches, traditions, and methods of interpreting Scripture, and they tended to stress different aspects of the Deity and humanity of Christ. These differences, which inevitably led to conflict, may be summarized in the following table:

	<b>Antioch</b>	<b>Alexandria</b>
Key teachers/leaders	Palestinian Jewish sources; Chrysostom	Clement, Origen,
Theological approach	More critical, rational, historical approach	More speculative, drawing upon Greek philosophy
Hermeneutical method	Tended towards a more historical, critical approach, stressing the historical events of the Old Testament and how they pointed to Christ.	Tended towards a more allegorizing approach, looking for the deeper spiritual meaning rather than the surface, literal historical events.
Theological orientation	Theology from below	Theology from above
Christological emphasis	Humanity of Christ	Deity of Christ
Christological system	Word-Man - the Divine Logos was joined to a human being	Word-flesh - the Divine Logos became flesh

- 2.3.3.1.1.** In addition to ecclesiastical jealousy, one must note the different cultural and theological traditions influencing the churches of Antioch and Alexandria. - Ferguson, location 4944
- 2.3.3.1.2.** The church in Antioch was in closer touch with Palestinian Jewish sources. It had more of a tradition of critical, rational inquiry. The Antiochene school developed a typological interpretation of the Old Testament that gave full historical reality to the events it recorded and to the setting of its prophecies, while seeing those acts and words as foreshadowing Christian revelation. Church leaders at Antioch gave more emphasis to the humanity of Jesus Christ. - Ferguson, location 4946
- 2.3.3.1.3.** The intellectuals in the church at Alexandria, on the other hand, were more under the influence of the philosophical Judaism represented by Philo and transmitted to later Christian thinkers by Clement of Alexandria and Origen. They had more of a tradition of contemplative piety. In the interpretation of Scripture the school of Alexandria developed the allegorical method that had been employed by Greek philosophers in interpreting Greek mythology and by Philo in interpreting the Bible. This method saw the true meaning of Scripture to be the spiritual realities hidden in its literal, historical words. The leaders of

- thought in Alexandria put more emphasis on the divinity of Jesus Christ. - Ferguson, location 4949
- 2.3.3.1.4.** The differences between the Antiochians and Alexandrians had already surfaced in their different approaches to the refutation of Arianism, differences that set the stage for their Christological conflict. - Ferguson, location 4954
- 2.3.3.1.5.** The Alexandrines, like Clement and Origen centuries earlier, stressed the significance of Jesus as the teacher of divine truth. In order to be this, the Savior had to be a full and clear revelation of the divine. His divinity must be asserted, even if this had to be done at the expense of his humanity. The Antiochenes, on the other hand, felt that for Jesus to be the Savior of human beings he had to be fully human. The Godhead dwelt in him, without any doubt; but this must not be understood in such a way that his humanity was diminished or eclipsed. - Gonzales, location 5093
- 2.3.3.1.6.** The problem in understanding the nature of Jesus Christ has been characterized as the conflict between two Christologies. Alexandria followed a Word-flesh Christology, based on John 1:14, "The Word became flesh." Over against it, Antioch followed a Word-man Christology, speaking of the Word joined to a human being. - Ferguson, location 4988
- 2.3.3.1.7.** In the early church two famous schools of theology offered contrasting interpretations of the important biblical passages. One of these was at Alexandria; the other was at Antioch. The Alexandrians emphasized strongly the divine nature and the Antiochians the human. One began in heaven and moved to earth; the other commenced on earth and looked to heaven. - Shelley, location 2087
- 2.3.3.1.8.** The early, leading voice at Alexandria was Origen, who, in speaking of Jesus Christ, coined the term "God-man. - Shelley, location 2090
- 2.3.3.1.9.** The Antioch school of theologians normally interpreted the Scriptures in a more straightforward historical manner. Major teachers of this position tended to stress the human figure of the Gospels. They found saving virtue in Jesus' example and achievement. In Christ the human will, which in other men turns freely to sin, proved obedient and victorious. - Shelley, location 2096
- 2.4.** With this basic background in mind, we can move on to a chronological account of the Christological controversies and the resulting formulations adopted by the church.

### **3. A Chronological Discussion of the Christological Controversies: Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, and Eutychianism**

#### **3.1. Apollinarianism**

**3.1.1.** Apollinaris of Laodicea lived from 315 to 392 AD. He was more in line with the Alexandrian school, and thus wanted to stress the Deity of Christ, even at the expense of His true humanity.

**3.1.2.** In the teaching of Apollinaris, the Divine Logos took the place of the human soul or spirit, effectively replacing it. In simple terms, this means Jesus had a human body and a Divine Spirit.

**3.1.2.1.** An extreme representative of the former approach was Apollinaris of Laodicea (c. 315–92), one of the defenders of the Nicene creed. He explained that the divine Logos took the place of (replaced) the human soul or spirit in Jesus Christ. In other words, Jesus had a human body in which dwelled a divine spirit. - Ferguson, location 4990

**3.1.2.2.** Apollinaris of Laodicea, thought that he could help that cause by explaining how the eternal Word of God could be incarnate in Jesus. This he attempted to do by claiming that in Jesus the Word of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, took the place of the rational soul. Like all human beings, Jesus had a physical body, and this was activated by the same principle that gives life to all human beings. But he did not have a human intellect. The Word of God played in him the role that the intellect or “rational soul” plays in the rest of us. - Gonzales, location 5103

**3.1.2.3.** The first position advanced and rejected was associated with a pastor of Laodicea named Apollinarius, a younger friend of Athanasius. Reacting to the teaching from Antioch, Apollinarius struck upon the idea of approaching the question from the view of what we would call psychology. He felt that human nature embraced the body and the soul. At the Incarnation, however, the divine Word (Logos), according to Apollinarius, displaced the animating and rational soul in a human body, creating a “unity of nature” between the Word and his body. Humanity, he felt, was the sphere, not the instrument of salvation,- Shelley, location 2117

**3.1.3.** The Antiochenes rejected this idea. They said Jesus must be truly human, and this would not be the case if He did not have a human soul. As Gregory of Nazianzus put it “What was not assumed was not healed.” If Jesus did not have a human soul, then His work would not be effective for human souls.

**3.1.3.1.** But the Antiochenes insisted that this was not enough. Jesus must be truly human. This was especially important, since Jesus took up humanity so that humankind could be saved. Only if he really became human did he really save us. If any part of what constitutes a human being was not taken up by him, that was not saved by him. Gregory of Nazianzus (one of the Great Cappadocians) put it this way:- Gonzales, location 5109

**3.1.3.2.** For that which he has not taken up he has not saved. He saved that which he joined to his divinity. If only half of Adam had fallen, then it would be possible for Christ to take up and save only half. But if the

- entire human nature fell, all of it must be united to the Word in order to be saved as a whole.\*- Gonzales, location 5113
- 3.1.3.3.** Gregory of Nazianzus supplied the decisive argument against Apollinarianism with his aphorism, “What was not assumed was not healed” (Epistle 101). That means, for the entirety of human nature (body, soul, and spirit) to be saved, Jesus Christ must have taken on a complete human person. - Ferguson, location 4995
- 3.1.3.4.** And if the Word displaced the rational soul of human nature, with its powers of choice and sin, how can man be fully redeemed? If the Word did not unite such a soul with himself, the salvation of mankind could not be secured. As Gregory of Nazianzus put it, “What has not been assumed cannot be restored. - Shelley, location 2125
- 3.1.4.** The teaching of Apollinaris was rejected at a number of local councils and synods, and then at the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD.
- 3.1.4.1.** After some debate, the theories of Apollinaris were rejected, first by a number of leading bishops and local synods called by them, and eventually by the Council of Constantinople in 381—the same council that reaffirmed the decisions of Nicea against Arianism. - Gonzales, location 5117
- 3.1.4.2.** In this atmosphere of criticism, the second General Council of the church, meeting at Constantinople in 381, effectively silenced the Apollinarian teaching. It simply was not an adequate description of the Incarnation. - Shelley, location 2128
- 3.2. Nestorianism**
- 3.2.1.** Cyril of Alexandria was convinced that the entire Antiochene school was faulty. He believed that the roots of the problem lay in Diodore, and was then passed on to his students, including John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia - who taught Nestorius. Cyril was convinced that the whole theological system growing from the root of Diodore was suspect and should be rejected. This led him into sharp conflict with the leaders of Antioch - including Nestorius.
- 3.2.1.1.** Cyril of Alexandria said that Nestorianism had its roots in Diodore. Diodore was a teacher in Antioch and later bishop of Tarsus (378–c. 390). His students included John Chrysostom, later bishop of Constantinople (chapter 11), and Theodore of Mopsuestia. He was an opponent of Arianism and of Apollinarianism. - Ferguson, location 4999
- 3.2.1.2.** The principal opponent of Nestorius was Cyril of Alexandria (bishop 412- Ferguson, location 5037
- 3.2.2.** Diodore was a staunch opponent of the ideas of Apollinaris - Diodore wanted to protect the true and fully humanity of Christ. However, he also wanted to make sure to distinguish the human and Divine natures in Christ. He said one should never think of the Divine Logos/Word as Mary’s son. Consequently, he was open to the charge of “dividing” the Divine and human Christ. It was such a division that was anathema to Cyril and the leaders in Alexandria.

- 3.2.2.1.** In his Christology, Diodore distinguished the Son of God from the Son of David. “Never let the Word be thought of as Mary’s son,” he declared. The indwelling of the Logos in the human nature is like a person in a temple or a person in his garments. There are two sons of God—one by nature and one by grace. Verbally, Diodore maintained the unity of the Savior, but he insisted on the completeness of Jesus Christ’s human nature, which the Apollinarians denied. - Ferguson, location 5001
- 3.2.3.** Theodore also maintained these ideas and tendencies. He wanted to guard the real humanity of Jesus. To do this he liked to speak of the indwelling of the Logos within the man Jesus. He said although the human and Divine natures were distinct, there was such a unity of will and operation that there was still only one person. But many felt this was still too weak and reduced the Deity of Christ.
- 3.2.3.1.** Theodore wanted a real humanity of the Lord. In describing the union of the divine and human he favored the language of indwelling. The Logos lived in the man Jesus. While there is a complete distinctness between the human and the divine in Jesus, yet there is also such a unity of will and operation that the result is one person. Since the union is not in essence, nor by activity, however, this union was understood by his critics as no more than a moral union. - Ferguson, location 5010
- 3.2.4.** Nestorius was a student of Theodore who became a presbyter, famous preacher, and head of a monastery in Antioch. As such, he became a leader within the Antiochene school, which was still in a major, heated rivalry with Alexandria. In 428 he became the Patriarch of Constantinople. This displeased the leaders of Alexandria, for both political & theological reasons.
- 3.2.4.1.** The next episode of the Christological controversies was precipitated by Nestorius, a representative of the Antiochene school who became patriarch of Constantinople in 428. There were always political intrigues surrounding that office, for the patriarchate of Constantinople had become a point of discord between the patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria. - Gonzales, location 5119
- 3.2.4.2.** Nestorius was a presbyter and head of a monastery in Antioch when the emperor Theodosius II chose him to be the bishop of Constantinople, a position to which he was consecrated in 428. He soon started a harsh campaign against heretics, but became himself accused of heresy, charges prompted in part by jealousy and in part by his own aggressive personality. - Ferguson, loc. 5018
- 3.2.4.3.** They responded, among other things, by turning the bishopric of Constantinople into a prize to be captured for their own supporters. Since Antioch was more successful at this game than Alexandria, most of the patriarchs of Constantinople were Antiochenes, and therefore the patriarchs of Alexandria regarded them as their enemies—a process we have already seen when dealing with the life of John Chrysostom. For these reasons, Nestorius’ position was not secure, and the Alexandrines were looking to catch him at his first mistake. - Gonzales, location 5124

- 3.2.5.** Shortly after becoming Patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius began aggressively working to root out heresy. However, he soon began to be accused of heresy himself. The central issue revolved around the use of the term “theotokos” (God-bearer) to refer to Mary. The term was originally intended to secure the Deity of Christ - the One born to Mary was truly and fully God, so she was the God-bearer. It had become a popular designation for Mary among some. Nestorius rejected theotokos and suggested that she should be called “christotokos” - the Christ bearer.
- 3.2.5.1.** This happened when Nestorius declared that Mary should not be called theotokos—that is, bearer of God—and suggested that she be called Christotokos—bearer of Christ. - Gonzales, location 5128
- 3.2.5.2.** The second “heresy” was associated with the name Nestorius, a famous preacher at Antioch before the emperor, in 428, made him bishop of Constantinople. The imperial capital gave Nestorius a platform. From it he tried to defend the position of his teacher in the faith, Theodore, bishop of Mopsuestia, near Antioch. Like his instructor, Nestorius rejected a popular designation of Mary as the “God-bearer, Mother of God. - Shelley, location 2130
- 3.2.5.3.** He claimed that the Word was associated with the human person at the first moment of life, but he offered Christotokos in place of Theotokos as a more appropriate title for Mary, for she was the mother of the resultant new person. - Ferguson, location 5032
- 3.2.6.** The rejection of theotokos and replacement by christotokos seemed perfectly reasonable to Nestorius and the Antiochene school. It protected the truth about Christ and did not run the risk of making Mary some kind of goddess, and might lead to ideas such as Mary was the mother of God.
- 3.2.7.** However, the Alexandrian's believed that rejecting theotokos undermined the true Deity of Jesus. The Divine Christ took flesh in the womb of Mary - the Word became flesh - and thus the One born to Mary was God, and thus she was the “God-bearer.” Furthermore,, Cyril, the bishop of Alexandria had defended the term theotokos in his Paschal (Easter) letter of 429. To Cyril, to say that the Logos had become flesh was to show that Christ had assumed humanity to Himself. This union was so complete that Cyril even spoke of Jesus as having “one nature” because after the union of the Logos with flesh there was only one acting subject.
- 3.2.7.1.** Cyril was a passionate theologian and determined politician. In his Paschal letter of 429, Cyril defended the term Theotokos. The key text for Cyril’s Christology was John 1:14, “The Word became flesh. - Ferguson, location 5038
- 3.2.7.2.** The sticking point in the controversy about Nestorius was the word Theotokos (“God bearer”) as applied to Mary. The term became the flash point of conflict between the two separate theological traditions that had taken root in Alexandria and Antioch. To supporters of the Alexandrian theology, the term seemed entirely appropriate. The divine Christ in the process of taking flesh was truly in the womb of Mary; to say anything less was to deny the full divinity of Christ and the completeness of his union with the flesh. Nestorius and those of his theological tradition were concerned that

the title made Mary a goddess. She was the mother of the man who was assumed by God, and nothing should be said that might imply she was the “Mother of God. - Ferguson, location 5022

**3.2.7.3.** Hence, the unity of Jesus Christ’s person is maintained, so much so that Cyril could speak of “one nature” because there is only one acting subject. The Logos unites flesh to himself. The one person is not constituted by the union, but the one person of the Logos extends himself so that humanity is included with himself. - Ferguson, location 5044

**3.2.8.** At the heart of this debate was the question of the relationship of the Divine and human natures in the Lord Jesus. The tendency in Antioch was to stress that the divine and human natures must be distinguished from one another. They feared that if this was not done the divine nature would overwhelm the human nature in thought and practice, and thus the true humanity of Jesus would be lost. On the other hand, the main concern in Alexandria was to maintain the real unity of the divine and human natures. They thought this was more in line with the teaching of passages such as John 1:14, and that if this was not done, Jesus would become two persons, not just two natures. Nestorius did not help his own cause because of his use of imprecise language to describe what he was trying to state. As a result, his name became associated with arguing that Jesus was in fact two complete persons. Nestorius denied that Jesus was actually two different persons, but he was never able to shake the idea in the mind of some others that this was what he believed.

**3.2.8.1.** But in truth, the debate was not so much about Mary as about Jesus. The question was not what honors were due to Mary, but how one was to speak of the birth of Jesus. When Nestorius declared that Mary was the bearer of Christ, but not of God, he was affirming that in speaking of the incarnate Lord one may and must distinguish between his humanity and his divinity, and that some of the things said of him are to be applied to the humanity, and others to the divinity. This was a typically Antiochene position, which sought to preserve the full humanity of Jesus by making a very clear distinction between it and his divinity. Nestorius and the rest of the Antiochenes feared that if the two were too closely joined together, the divinity would overwhelm the humanity, and one would no longer be able to speak of a true man Jesus. - Gonzales, location 5131

**3.2.8.2.** Modern efforts to rehabilitate Nestorius find him more of a schismatic in temperament than a heretic, for he denied the teaching for which he was accused, namely that the human Jesus and the divine Christ were two different persons. Nevertheless, he lacked a vocabulary and the theological sophistication to relate the divine and human in a convincing way. - Ferguson, location 5034

**3.2.8.3.** In order to explain this position, Nestorius declared that in Jesus there were “two natures and two persons,” one divine and one human. The human nature and person were born of Mary; the divine were not. - Gonzales, location 5137

- 3.2.8.4.** But his enemies immediately saw the danger of “dividing” the Savior into two beings whose unity consisted in agreement rather than in any real joining together. Soon many others were convinced that Nestorius’ doctrines were indeed dangerous. - Gonzales, location 5140
- 3.2.8.5.** in emphasizing the reality and integrity of the Savior’s humanity Nestorius pictured the relation between the two natures in terms of a moral “conjunction” or a merging of wills rather than that of an essential “union.” - Shelley, location 2134
- 3.2.8.6.** Once he said, “I hold the natures apart, but unite the worship.” He insisted that calling Mary “Mother of God” was tantamount to declaring that the divine nature could be born of a woman, or that God could be three days old. - Shelley, location 2137
- 3.2.9.** The controversy began to widen. Cyril reached out to others, including the bishop of Rome and the West. Cyril knew that the West considered the idea of two persons in Christ as anathema, and he carefully represented this as the teaching of Nestorius. Nestorius also angered Rome by receiving some exiles from Rome (and he had also seemed to side with certain clergy in Alexandria who had been disciplined by Cyril.) The bishop of Rome appointed John Cassian (who had close ties with Egypt and greatly admired the desert monks of Egypt) to write a response to Nestorius. Cassian wrote *On the Incarnation* in 430, siding with Cyril. But Cassian hoped to be able to convince Nestorius to change his mind. But this was not to be.
- 3.2.9.1.** As was to be expected, the center of opposition to Nestorius was Alexandria, whose bishop Cyril was a much abler politician and theologian than Nestorius. Cyril made certain that he had the support of the West, for which the doctrine of two persons in Christ was anathema, as well as of emperors Valentinian III and Theodosius II, who then called an ecumenical council to be gathered at Ephesus in June 431. - Gonzales, location 5142
- 3.2.9.2.** When bishop Celestine of Rome heard of the dispute, he selected John Cassian (c. 365–c. 433) to respond to Nestorius, which he did in *On the Incarnation* (430). Celestine determined to side with Cyril and to try to reclaim Nestorius. - Ferguson, location 5054
- 3.2.9.3.** Thus, late in 428, Cyril opened his attack on Nestorius. He stirred up charges against him, and slandered him in Rome where Patriarch (Pope) Celestine was upset about Nestorius’ welcome of certain exiles from Rome. - Shelley, location 2143
- 3.2.10.** The council of Ephesus (431) and the resolution of affair
- 3.2.10.1.** A synod called in Rome condemned Nestorius and his teachings in 430. The bishop of Rome also asked Cyril to hold his own proceedings against Nestorius in Alexandria. Cyril did this and then forwarded the findings to Nestorius: he was condemned, and the acceptable Christology was outlined in 12 points - a pure statement of the Alexandrian position. Cyril then convinced the Emperors Theodosius II and Valentinian III to call a general council in Ephesus. This they did, and the council convened in 431.



- 3.2.10.3.1.** On June 26, John, bishop of Antioch, and the Syrian bishops, who had been delayed, arrived. John held a rival council in his lodgings, consisting of forty-three bishops and a count representing the emperor. They declared Cyril and Memnon deposed. Further sessions of the rival councils extended the number of excommunications. - Ferguson, location 5068
- 3.2.10.3.2.** When the Syrians arrived, under the leadership of John, Patriarch of Antioch, they proceeded to condemn Cyril and his followers. Finally, the Roman legates arrived and approved Cyril's action. The whole affair was disgustingly riddled with power politics. American church historian Williston Walker called it "one of the most repulsive contests in church history." - Shelley, location 2146
- 3.2.10.3.3.** John of Antioch and his party arrived a few days later, and they then convened a rival council, which was much smaller than Cyril's, and which declared that Cyril was a heretic and reinstated Nestorius. In retaliation, Cyril's council reaffirmed its condemnation of Nestorius and added to it the names of John of Antioch and all who had taken part in his council. Finally, Theodosius II intervened, arrested both Cyril and John, and declared that the actions of both councils were void. - Gonzales, location 5145.
- 3.2.10.3.4.** Reports of the activities reached Theodosius II, and representatives of both sides pled their respective cases against their opponents. Theodosius's first instincts, probably correct, were to confirm the depositions of Cyril, Memnon, and Nestorius. Finally, lavish gifts from Cyril and the intercession of his friends carried the day. Theodosius dissolved the council and sent Nestorius into exile, and a new bishop of Constantinople was consecrated. Cyril returned triumphantly to Alexandria. -Ferguson, l5070
- 3.2.10.4.** At this point, the churches that had supported Nestorius and those that had supported Cyril were no longer in union with one another. However, John of Antioch began to reach out to Cyril and sent a representative to Alexandria with a compromise creed. This creed asserted the duality of Christ natures (he had both a human and divine nature - which was contrary to Cyril's original formulation), but accepted the Theotokos formula (in contrast to Nestorius.) Cyril accepted this compromise creed and the churches were reunited, but Nestorius was left deposed. In effect, Nestorius' friends had sacrificed him for the sake of peace and unity within the church at large. However, this formulation anticipated the final resolution of these questions which would be reached at the council of Chalcedon in 451.

- 3.2.10.4.1.** From the standpoint of church history, the post-council activities were more important than the council itself. John of Antioch sent a representative to Alexandria with a compromise creed. This asserted the duality of natures, in contrast to Cyril's formulation, but accepted the Theotokos, in contrast to Nestorius. This compromise creed anticipated decisions to be reached later at Chalcedon. The church at Antioch sacrificed Nestorius for the sake of peace. Cyril assented to the creed and a reunion of the churches occurred in 433. - Ferguson, location 5074
- 3.2.10.4.2.** Then followed a series of negotiations that led to a "formula of union" to which both Cyril and John agreed in 433. It was also decided that the actions of Cyril's council against Nestorius would stand. As to Nestorius, he spent the rest of his life in exile, first in a monastery in Antioch, and then, when he became too embarrassing to his Antiochene friends who had abandoned him, in the remote city of Petra. - Gonzales, location 5145
- 3.2.10.4.3.** Either way, the real loser was Nestorius. Theodosius had his books burned, and many who agreed with Nestorius's theology tacitly dropped their support. - Ferguson, location 5082
- 3.2.10.5.** Obviously, this whole affair is sordid. Although there were real theological questions at play, the real issues were more political and arose from personal ambitions and jealousies. Furthermore, it is highly doubtful that Nestorius actually believed and taught the heresy that has ever since been labeled with his name.
- 3.2.10.5.1.** To this day it remains unclear to what extent Nestorius' teachings were actually heretical and to what extent he suffered as a victim of misunderstanding and misrepresentations. - Shelley, location 2150
- 3.2.10.5.2.** In his autobiography Nestorius insisted that he did not oppose the use of "God-bearer" because he denied the Godhead of Christ but to emphasize that Jesus was born as a genuine human being with body and soul. His concerns were not unfounded. - Shelley, location 2157
- 3.2.10.5.3.** The whole affair was disgustingly riddled with power politics. American church historian Williston Walker called it "one of the most repulsive contests in church history. - Shelley, location 2146

- 3.3. Eutychianism**
- 3.3.1.** Although a compromise had been reached in the aftermath of the council of Ephesus, emotions remain inflamed, and there were still different theological emphases between the two main schools of thought. It was only a matter of time until someone would press the thoughts of one of these schools to lengths that would cause further controversies. The person who did this was Eutyches, a spiritual leader of a monastery near Constantinople.
- 3.3.2.** Eutyches had opposed Nestorius, and wanted to emphasize the unity of the divine and human natures of Jesus. The motto of his party became “Two natures before the union; but after it one.” Furthermore, Eutyches held that the Lord Jesus was of one substance with the Father, but He was NOT of one substance with us. In effect, the humanity of Jesus had been absorbed fully by the divinity of Jesus.
- 3.3.2.1.** Eutyches was condemned for an extreme advocacy of the one nature of Jesus Christ (so-called Monophysitism). As an aged presbyter and monastic leader in Constantinople, he had opposed Nestorius. He adhered to the phrase that came to characterize his party: “Two natures before the union; but after it one.” This formula gave lip-service to the humanity of Christ, but only as an abstraction, for from the moment of the conception of Christ the divinity was the acting subject in the person of Christ. Christ was essentially divine. - Ferguson, location 5090
- 3.3.2.2.** The storm centered on the teachings of Eutyches, a monk in Constantinople who lacked theological subtlety, and who held that, while the Savior was “of one substance with the Father,” he was not “of one substance with us. - Gonzales, location 5157
- 3.3.2.3.** Soon after the Council at Ephesus (431), the third “heresy” arose. Eutyches, the spiritual leader of a monastery near Constantinople, defended the one nature in Christ (monophysitism). He combined the two natures so intimately that the human nature appeared completely absorbed by the divine one. Just “as a drop of honey, which falls into the sea, dissolves in it,” so the human nature in Christ is lost in the divine. - Shelley, location 2161
- 3.3.3.** At the same time, Cyril had been succeeded as Patriarch by his arch-deacon Dioscorus, who was even more pugnacious than Cyril, and who was determined to get the church to adopt an extreme form of the Alexandrine position. Thus, when Patriarch Flavian of Constantinople (who followed the Antiochene school of theology) called a synod the examined and condemned Eutyches, Dioscorus determined this was a chance to push his views. However, Leo I, the powerful bishop of Rome, agreed with the decision of Flavian and the synod. Leo even wrote a treatise to Flavian laying out Christology from a Roman and Western perspective. The stage was set for another major conflict.
- 3.3.3.1.** Patriarch Flavian of Constantinople called Eutyches before a synod and when he refused to recant, Flavian condemned him as a heretic. Eutyches, however, found support in Dioscorus, Patriarch of Alexandria, who followed Cyril’s ideas. - Shelley, location 2165

- 3.3.3.2.** Cyril was succeeded as bishop of Alexandria by his arch-deacon Dioscorus (444–51). He has been described as a brutal, proud, fierce ecclesiastic. Eager to vindicate Eutyches, and seeking to duplicate the success of his predecessor, he planned another general council for Ephesus. - Ferguson, location 5096
- 3.3.3.3.** In 444, when Dioscorus succeeded Cyril as patriarch of Alexandria, the stage was set for a third and even more acrimonious confrontation, for Dioscorus was a convinced defender of the most extreme Alexandrine positions, and a rather unscrupulous maneuverer. - Gonzales, location 5155
- 3.3.3.4.** In any case, Patriarch Flavian of Constantinople, whose theology was of the Antiochene tradition, felt that Eutyches' teachings were close to docetism and condemned him. Through a series of maneuvers, Dioscorus had the affair grow into a conflict that involved the entire church, so that a council was called by Emperor Theodosius II, to meet at Ephesus in 449. - Gonzales, location 5160
- 3.3.3.5.** Both sides of the conflict had their extremists. Nestorius was judged an extreme representative of those who stressed the "twoness" of Jesus Christ, although he later denied that he taught the position he was accused of holding, that Christ represented "two persons." The Cyrillian emphasis on the "oneness" of Christ was continued by Eutyches and Dioscorus, both of whom lacked Cyril's balance and exhibited some of Nestorius's pugnacious personality. - Ferguson, location 5087
- 3.3.3.6.** Meanwhile, the Roman bishop, Leo I (440–61), had confirmed the actions of the synod of 448 and had written Tome, a letter-treatise to Flavian giving an analysis of Christology from a Roman perspective. - Ferguson, location 5098
- 3.3.4.** After the maneuverings of Dioscorus, the emperor Theodosius II called another council to meet in Ephesus in 449 in order to quell the growing controversy. However, by the time the council gathered, it was apparent that Dioscorus and his supporters had taken all the necessary steps to predetermine the outcome. Dioscorus himself had been appointed president of the assembly by the emperor, and given the authority to determine who would be allowed to speak. This council took an extreme Alexandrine stand. Furthermore, when the representatives from Rome tried to present a letter from Leo regarding a proper Christology, Dioscorus prevented them from even speaking. The 135 bishops present stated that Eutyches was orthodox, reinstated the 12 Anathemas of Cyril from two decades before, and condemned those who held that after the incarnation Christ had two natures. This declared the entire Antiochene position, even in its most moderate forms, as heretical, and that any who held to these views could no longer be ordained. Finally, a number of Egyptian monks who had accompanied Dioscorus displayed their anger at Flavian (the Patriarch of Constantinople) by beating him so badly that he eventually died from the wounds they inflicted upon him.

- 3.3.4.1.** Dioscorus presided over a gathering of 135 bishops at Ephesus in 449. Theodoret was excluded from the gathering. The orthodoxy of Eutyches was affirmed, the Twelve Anathemas of Cyril were approved as correct doctrine, and representatives of a two-nature Christology (Dyophysitism) were condemned. - Ferguson, location 5100
- 3.3.4.2.** The club-wielding Egyptian monks who accompanied Dioscorus showed their anger at Flavian by so beating him up that he died later of the wounds inflicted. The atmosphere of intimidation was so strong that the papal delegates feared to read the Tome of Leo to the assembly. - Ferguson, location 5102
- 3.3.4.3.** When this council gathered, it was clear that Dioscorus and his supporters had taken all the necessary steps to predetermine the outcome. Dioscorus himself had been appointed president of the assembly by the emperor, and given the authority to determine who would be allowed to speak. This council took an extreme Alexandrine stand. When Pope Leo's legates tried to present before the assembly a letter that Leo had written on the subject at hand, they were not allowed to do so. Flavian was manhandled so violently that he died in a few days. The doctrine that there are in Christ "two natures" was declared heretical, as were also all who defended the Antiochene position, even in moderate form. Furthermore, it was decreed that any who disagreed with these decisions could not be ordained. - Gonzales, location 5163
- 3.3.5.** The decisions of this "council" were rejected by much of the church. Leo, the bishop of Rome, called it the "robbers synod." However, Emperor Theodosius (who had received large amounts of gold from Alexandria) considered the matter ended. However, when the emperor suddenly died, his sister Pulcheria and her husband Marcian took the reigns of power. They had misgivings about the synod as well, and accepted Leo's request to call a general council of the entire church. This council was to convene in Chalcedon in 451.
  - 3.3.5.1.** In Rome, Leo fumed, and called the council a "robbers' synod." But his protests were to no avail. Theodosius II and his court, who apparently had received large amounts of gold from Alexandria, considered the matter ended. - Gonzales, location 5169
  - 3.3.5.2.** Leo protested the actions at Ephesus in 449 and called the meeting not an ecumenical council but a "Synod of Robbers." The Alexandrian theology lost its imperial patronage when Theodosius II died in 450. He was succeeded by his sister Pulcheria, who chose the general Marcian as her consort. Pulcheria favored Leo and the Dyophysites. - Ferguson, location 5106
  - 3.3.5.3.** At Dioscorus' request, Emperor Theodosius II once again summoned an "imperial council." It assembled under Dioscorus' leadership in Ephesus (449) and rehabilitated Eutyches, even though it was not recognized by the rest of the church. Pope Leo I (440–461) called it the "Robber Council." He supported the patriarch of Constantinople and asked the emperor for a new

council. The successor of Theodosius, Emperor Marcian (450–457), granted the request and in 451 called the fourth General Council of Chalcedon. - Shelley, location 2167

- 3.3.5.4.** Then the unexpected happened. Theodosius' horse stumbled, and the emperor fell and broke his neck. He was succeeded by his sister Pulcheria and her husband Marcian. Pulcheria had agreed earlier with the western position, that Nestorius should be condemned. But she was not an extreme Alexandrine, and felt that the proceedings at Ephesus in 449 had left much to be desired. For this reason, at the behest of Leo, she called a new council, which met at Chalcedon in 451 and which eventually became known as the Fourth Ecumenical Council. - Gonzales, location 5174.
- 3.3.6.** The council of Chalcedon met in 451. It was the largest of all of the early council of the church, with about 450 bishops present. However, once again the representatives were largely drawn from the Eastern section of the church, with only two bishops from North Africa and a number of delegates from Rome in attendance from the West. The first part of the council concerned a review of the previous synod that had condemned Flavian and the entire Antiochene school. As the minutes from those proceedings were read, it became apparent that sentiments had changed, and Flavian was declared orthodox. Many of the bishops then began to abandon Dioscorus. Then the letter from Leo Bishop of Rome on Christology was read and was greeted with praise. Dioscorus himself was then condemned and deposed, and the condemnation of Eutyches was reinstated.
  - 3.3.6.1.** Approximately 450 bishops assembled, the largest of the ancient councils. They were all easterners except for the Roman delegates and two North African bishops. - Ferguson, location 5111
  - 3.3.6.2.** The first three sessions were concerned with the trial of Dioscorus and related matters. When the minutes of the Robber Synod were read, Theodoret was shown into the assembly at the mention of his name. The minutes of the synod at Constantinople in 448 were read, and Flavian was declared orthodox. It was now clear where majority sentiment lay. As a result, Juvenal of Jerusalem and the bishops of Palestine and Illyricum abandoned Dioscorus and went over to the Dyophysite side. Leo's Tome was read and greeted with the acclamation, "Peter speaks through Leo," although to some it sounded Nestorian. Dioscorus's deposition was pronounced and signed by the bishops. - Ferguson, location 5112
  - 3.3.6.3.** This council condemned Dioscorus and Eutyches, but forgave all others who had participated in the "robbers' synod" of Ephesus two years earlier. Leo's letter was finally read, and many declared that this expressed their own faith. It was a restatement of what Tertullian had declared centuries earlier, that in Christ there are "two natures in one person. - Gonzales, location 5174
  - 3.3.6.4.** At this town not far from Constantinople nearly 400 bishops gathered and quickly indicted Dioscorus for his actions at the "robber council." Then the assembled fathers, despite some

reluctance to supplement Nicea, set forth a new definition:- Shelley, location 2171

### **3.3.7. The Chalcedonian definition of Faith**

**3.3.7.1.** Following, then, the holy Fathers, we all with one voice teach that it is to be confessed that our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same God, perfect in divinity, and perfect in humanity, true God and true human, with a rational soul and a body, of one substance with the Father in his divinity, and of one substance with us in his humanity, in every way like us, with the only exception of sin, begotten of the Father before all time in his divinity, and also begotten in the latter days, in his humanity, of Mary the virgin bearer of God. This is one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, manifested in two natures without any confusion, change, division or separation. The union does not destroy the difference of the two natures, but on the contrary the properties of each are kept, and both are joined in on person and hypostasis. They are not divided into two persons, but belong to the one Only-begotten Son, the Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. All this, as the prophets of old said of him, and as he himself has taught us, and as the Creed of the Fathers has passed on to us.

**3.3.7.1.1.** It will be readily seen that this “Definition” does not seek to “define” the union in the sense of explaining how it took place, but rather in the sense of setting the limits beyond which error lies. - Gonzales, location 5193

**3.3.7.1.2.** Finally, the council produced a statement that was not a creed, but rather a “Definition of faith,” or a clarification of what the church held to be true. A careful reading of that “Definition” will show that, while rejecting the extremes of both Alexandrines and Antiochenes, and particularly the doctrine of Eutyches, it reaffirmed what had been done in the three previous great councils (Nicea in 325, Constantinople in 381, and Ephesus in 431):- Gonzales, location 5180

**3.3.7.1.3.** Several efforts to find an acceptable wording failed, but a committee finally produced the Chalcedonian Definition of Faith. The crucial affirmation was that Jesus Christ consisted of two natures (divine and human), but was only one person. - Ferguson, location 5119

**3.3.7.1.4.** So against Arius the church affirmed that Jesus was truly God, and against Apollinarius that he was truly man. Against Eutyches it confessed that Jesus’ deity and humanity were not changed into something else, and against Nestorius that Jesus was not divided but was one person. - Shelley, location 2182

#### **4. The Aftermath of the Christological Controversies**

- 4.1.** This was obviously a long, convoluted, and at times very carnal and political struggle. Nonetheless, at the end of the process an understanding of the Christian faith and especially the nature of Christ had been reached that seemed to best convey the biblical teachings on these topics, and which found acceptance by most Christians.
- 4.2.** Through the controversies surrounding the teaching of Arius, Apollinaris, Nestorius and Cyril, Eutyches and Dioscorus, the church searched the Scriptures and their implications are arrived at the truth that Jesus was fully divine and fully human, and that although the Deity and humanity could be distinguished, they must never be divided from one another so as to make Christ two persons rather than one person.
- 4.3.** It should be noted, however, that Chalcedon did not resolve all of the conflicts. Although most of the church in the East and the West accepted the formula published at Chalcedon, a number of church groups in the East did not. Among these are the Coptic church in Egypt, the Syrian Orthodox Church in Syria and southern India, and a few others. These church bodies continue to this day. They fully affirm all of the earlier councils, and the Deity and humanity of of Christ, but they do not accept this council or its formulation regarding Christ having two natures. In many ways this represented the first long lasting schism in the church.
  - 4.3.1.1.** The “Definition of faith” soon became the standard of Christological orthodoxy in the entire Western church, and in most of the East— although there were some in the East who rejected it, and thus gave rise to the first long-lasting schisms in the history of Christianity. - Gonzales, location 5197
  - 4.3.1.2.** From that date forward most Christians in Catholicism, Protestantism, and Orthodoxy looked to Chalcedon for the foundation of the doctrine of salvation, a unique God-man, Jesus Christ. - Shelley, location 2184
  - 4.3.1.3.** This monophysite (one nature) teaching was an important factor contributing to the breaking away of the Monophysite Churches from the rest of Eastern Orthodoxy. Coupled with the decline of the Byzantine power in the outlying areas of the Eastern Empire, monophysite doctrine led to the Coptic Church, the largest Christian body in Egypt today, with a related church in Ethiopia, and the so-called Jacobite Church of Syria, which has most of its adherents in South India. - Shelley, location 2187
  - 4.3.1.4.** Some, mostly in Syria and Persia, insisted on a clear distinction between the divine and the human in Christ, and were eventually called “Nestorians.” Many others took the opposite tack, rejecting the doctrine of “two natures,” and for that reason were dubbed “monophysites”—from the Greek monos, one, and physis, nature. Very few of these, however, adhered to the teachings of Eutyches. Rather, their concern was that the divine and the human in the Savior not be so divided that the incarnation be rendered meaningless. To this were added political and nationalist considerations which added fire to the theological debates that raged for centuries. - Gonzales, location 5199

## **5. Lessons From This Era**

- 5.1.** The value of Chalcedon lied within the boundaries it established. Although the political machinations were very unseemly, the eventual resolution did a good job of setting good boundaries which protected both the full Deity and the full humanity of Christ. Furthermore, its formulation of “distinguished but not divided” is extremely helpful not only in carefully thinking through Christology but a whole host of biblical issues. For example, the Protestant complaint against the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation was that it did not distinguish justification and sanctification. In effect, justification was absorbed into sanctification. On the other hand, some antinomians have been guilty of completely dividing justification and sanctification. In effect, one can be a justified child of God and continue with a headlong rush into sin, giving no evidence of regeneration or change. The same distinction is fruitful when considering a host of other controversies as well.
- 5.2.** However, we must not lose sight of the dark side of this period. The church had become extremely political, and carnal desires for power often eclipsed a pure love for Christ and others. This danger is ever present for the church. Whenever the church begins to be concerned with power rather than service, she becomes severely compromised. The church is a spiritual entity, and therefore can not adopt the ways of this world - however successful they may be in other realms.
- 5.3.** Furthermore, with this episode we can see how power has often corrupted the church. Many of the church’s darkest hours have been when she was in a favored status within the culture and she wielded the reins of power. Conversely, many of her brightest times have been when she marginalized by the culture, and even persecuted by those in power.

**Next Class: Christianity in the West After the Fall of Rome**

**Date: Saturday, March 19 (the 26<sup>th</sup> is our Easter Egg Hunt and is unavailable).**

**Reading: Chapter 26 - The New Order**