

Lecture 18- Two Whole, Perfect and Distinct Natures: The Council of Chalcedon

Next to God's Word, history is the richest foundation of wisdom, and the surest guide.
Philip Schaff

The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us.
John 1: 14

Assigned Reading

The Story of Christianity—chapter 27, pp. 252-257

Key Terms

Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, Eutychianism, Monophysite

Objectives

- Discuss the three heresies regarding the two natures of Christ
- Evaluate at which point each of the three heresies became heresy

Class Prayer

“Bless all who worship Thee, from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same. Of Thy goodness, give us; with Thy love, inspire us; by Thy Spirit, guide us; by Thy power, protect us; in Thy mercy, receive us now and always. Amen.”

From an ancient collect (c. 440)

Two Whole, Perfect and Distinct Natures: The Council of Chalcedon

I. The Christological debate after Nicea

- A. The Arian ascendancy and gradual eclipse
- B. The Orthodox

1. Christ was fully God
2. But how did the Godhead and manhood combine in the one person of Jesus of Nazareth?

II. The Two Natures Debate

- A. Apollinarianism—Christ's human body was the receptacle for the divine (like a letter in an envelope)

1. Condemned at the Council of Constantinople (381) which stated that Jesus Christ is truly and fully human

- B. Rivalry between Antioch and Alexandria

- C. Nestorianism—the divine and the human exist side by side (like oil and water)

1. Condemned at the Council of Ephesus (431) which stated that Jesus Christ is one real person
2. Three important questions:
 - a. Was Nestorius a Nestorian?
 - b. What about the *theotokos* (Mary, the bearer of God)?
 - c. What about the “Nestorian” church in the Persian Empire?

- D. Eutychianism—the human nature was absorbed into the divine nature (like wine and water)

1. Supported by the Council of Ephesus (449) “the Robber Synod”
2. Condemned by the Council of Chalcedon (451) which stated that Jesus Christ has two distinct natures

III. The Council of Chalcedon

- A. Two natures: perfect and complete (against Apollinarianism)
 - 1. Without confusion or conversion (against Eutychianism)
 - 2. Without division or separation (against Nestorianism)
- B. One person: the union of the two natures was basic and substantial (“hypostatic”)
- C. “A double row of beacon lights” (G. C. Berkouwer)
(For a brief summary, see “Rejected Explanations of the Person of Christ”)

IV. After Chalcedon

- A. Chalcedonians versus Monophysites
- B. Constantinople II (553) and Constantinople III (680) re-affirmed Chalcedon
- C. Separate Monophysite churches primarily in Egypt and Syria, the Coptic Orthodox and the Syrian Orthodox (“Jacobites”)
Pope Shenouda III: “How do the Copts explain the two natures of our Lord? We believe that He is perfect in His divinity, and He is perfect in His humanity, but His divinity and His humanity were united in one nature, which we call ‘the nature of the incarnate word.’”

Questions for Consideration

1. What was the leadership structure of the Coptic church?
2. Are Eutychianism and Monophysitism the same thing?

For Further Study

Is this song orthodox?

“Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity,
In perfect harmony, the man who is God.
Lord of eternity dwells in humanity;
Kneels in humility and washes our feet.”

Study the chart “Shifting Through the Christ Controversies” (you will have to take the pages out of your notebook and place them side by side to best use the chart). This (and the brief outline “Rejected Explanations of the Person of Christ”) will serve as a good review and summary for the mid-term exam.

Carefully read and study “The Defining Moment”—key portions from the Chalcedonian Creed. Identify each heresy that is rejected in the statements of the first section. It would be a good idea to memorize the second sentence of the second section (the very heart of the creed).