

## CHAPTER 1.

# CHRIST: ONE MEDIATOR WITH TWO NATURES

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Since this is the second volume of *Growing in the Gospel*, it is good to look back and briefly review some highlights from the first volume. We began by learning that studying doctrine involves looking at what the Bible teaches on certain topics. In other words, sound doctrine cannot be a combination of divine revelation and human opinion. Rather, doctrine's one source is the inspired Word of God. This, then, is the privilege and the challenge: to explore these various topics in a way that is concise, understandable, relevant, and scriptural.

As we aim to do this, let us also be honest. It is hard for all of us to avoid consistently the temptation to add little things here and there in order to make God's Word teach something that is more in line with our own personal opinion or advantage. We need to pray frequently that the very same Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures (2 Pet 1:21) would also guide our hearts into all truth (John 16:13). For this reason, it is good that we do not scurry off and study doctrine all by ourselves in a solitary corner. Instead, we should study doctrine within the blessed communion of Christ's church, both as she exists today and as she has existed throughout the ages. In this respect, the officially adopted confessions of the church are an important part of studying doctrine. They are a crucial aid in keeping our doctrine scripturally sound.

In the first volume we covered topics relating to God himself. This area of study is also called theology proper. Sometimes the word *theology*

refers generally to the study of all religious beliefs, but on other occasions we use this word in a narrower sense to describe the study of God's nature (e.g., his Triune essence), his attributes (e.g., holiness, justice, grace and wisdom) and his work (e.g., creation and providence). In the previous volume we also explored the doctrine of man, which can be called anthropology, as well. Once again, the word *anthropology* can be used in a general sense to refer to the study of human beings, including their cultures and historical developments. However, anthropology can also be used in the narrower sense of what the Bible says about human beings, as they were created and after they fell into sin.

The study of theology proper and anthropology flow together into Scripture's teaching about the covenant. The covenant is that blessed and solemn relationship which God has established with believers and their descendants. Yet precisely here we run into a crisis. *Crisis* is a strong word, but without a doubt this is a serious situation! From theology we know that God is perfectly holy and just. He will not, indeed he cannot, change that (Exod 3:14; Mal 3:6). From anthropology we know that, after the fall into sin, man is thoroughly unholy and sinful. Relying on his own abilities, man will not, indeed he cannot, change that (Rom 8:7). So, it would seem we have reached an impasse. How can a perfectly holy God live in a covenant relationship with thoroughly sinful human beings? Won't the LORD'S holiness consume any sinner who dares to stand before him? (Deut 4:24)

Thankfully, there is a way, but only one way, out of this crisis. The solution is to rely on a mediator (1 Tim 2:5, 6). A holy God and sinful people can live together if someone is willing to stand between them, remove the offence of sin, and work reconciliation. That someone is Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Mediator. The area of doctrinal study, which focuses on him and his atoning work, is called Christology. This volume of *Growing in the Gospel* will begin by paying attention to Christology, then turn to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and finally focus on how we are saved, which is also called soteriology.

## THE CRUCIAL CORE OF CHRISTOLOGY

For a few centuries after our Lord ascended into heaven, his church struggled intensely to confess faithfully who he is. At first glance, this may seem surprising. Why would the church have difficulty explaining who Christ, the head of the church, is? Yet there is a good explanation for all those debates in the early church. Christ is the one-and-only mediator. The apostle Paul emphasizes this when he writes, “For there is *one* God, and there is *one* mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). So, just as surely as there is one, and only one, true God, so there is also one, and only one, true Mediator. Since he is so unique, there is literally no other person who is fully comparable to him. As the early church discovered, faithfully confessing a unique mediator is an enormous challenge.

The Athanasian Creed includes the church’s tested and refined answer to our core question: who is Jesus Christ? This creed was named after one of the church fathers, Athanasius (A.D. 293–373), but it was not written by him. It first came into use around the turn of the sixth century. After outlining the church’s teaching concerning our Triune God, the Athanasian Creed turns its attention to the Mediator. It says:

It is necessary, however, to eternal salvation that he [who desires to be saved] should also believe in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now the right faith is that we should believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is equally both God and man (29–30).

Three things are important here. First, Christ is *both* God and man. That means he is divine and human at the same time. He does not go back and forth between being God and being man. On the contrary, ever since his incarnation, he remains what he always was, that is, true God, yet now he is also, and forever will remain, true man. Second, Christ is both God and man *equally*. This teaches us that we need to be careful about maintaining a balance in emphasis. We must confess from the heart that Christ is God, but we must not emphasize his divine nature so much that his human nature slowly fades into the shadows. Similarly, we must confess with conviction that Christ is man, but we must not emphasize his

human nature so strongly that his divine nature is obscured or ignored. Rather we aim for equal emphasis on both natures. Finally, all of this is “necessary to eternal salvation.” Believing that Christ is both God and man is not something about which sincere Christians can agree to disagree. The Athanasian Creed is quite straightforward on this matter: if anyone wants to be eternally saved, then he must believe correctly that Christ is “equally both God and man.”

The Athanasian Creed continues with more detail on this doctrine. The next few sentences read as follows:

He is God from the Father’s substance, begotten before time; and he is man from his mother’s substance, born in time. Perfect God, perfect man composed of a human soul and human flesh, equal to the Father in respect of his divinity, less than the Father in respect of his humanity. Who, although he is God and man, is nevertheless not two, but one Christ. He is one, however, not by the transformation of his divinity into flesh, but by the taking up of his humanity into God; one certainly not by confusion of substance, but by oneness of person. For just as soul and flesh are one man, so God and man are one Christ (31–37).

Some of the language in these sentences is challenging. You may need to go over it twice. However, let us remember: describing a unique person is not easy. Nevertheless, the key point in this section of the creed is that each nature of Christ retains its particular qualities. We will look at this more closely later on in this lesson. At this point, suffice it to say that when the Son of God became incarnate and took upon himself a human nature, this miraculous event did not alter or diminish his divine nature in any way. In short, by becoming human, he did not become any less divine. By the same token his divinity does not reduce or modify his human nature.

So why does the Athanasian Creed go into such precise detail about the two natures of Christ? Simply put, it is all with a view to “our salvation” (38). Confessing the two natures of Christ correctly is not a matter of theological curiosity. It is a matter of life and death, yes, eternal life and eternal death! The Athanasian Creed underlines this with its last state-

ment: “This is the catholic faith. Unless a man believes it faithfully and steadfastly, he cannot be saved” (42).

The Heidelberg Catechism makes the same point when it teaches that “our mediator and deliverer” must be “one who is a true and righteous man, and yet more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is at the same time true God” (LD 5, Q&A 15). Shortly thereafter, this unique mediator is identified as “our Lord Jesus Christ” (LD 6, Q&A 18). Again, by discussing the two natures of Christ within the context of seeking a deliverer from sin, the Catechism makes clear that who Christ is (Christology) has everything to do with how we are saved (soteriology). That is why it is so crucial that we confess Christ correctly.

It is worth keeping this in mind as we move ahead and explore the two natures of Christ, which are united in one person. At times this doctrine is complex. Ultimately, it exceeds our understanding. However, we should not become frustrated or disillusioned with confessing it. Our very salvation is at stake, and that makes all the effort to understand it, as much as we can, more than worthwhile.

#### CHRIST’S TWO NATURES: PROPHESED IN THE OLD, FULFILLED IN THE NEW

The people living in Palestine who saw, and listened to, Jesus of Nazareth had no doubt that he was a real human being. At one point they said, “Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” (Matt 13:55–56). In many respects, Jesus was just like every other human being. He had a mother, as well as brothers and sisters. He ate normal meals (Matt 9:10). He drank (Luke 5:30). He became tired and fell asleep (Matt 8:24). He also became emotional (John 11:33) and even cried (John 11:35).

Yet, at the same time, the crowds who came to listen to Jesus recognized that somehow he was more than an ordinary man. They wondered aloud, “Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?” (Matt

13:54). However, this is precisely where the difficulty arose. If Jesus was more than merely an ordinary man, what precisely was this “more”? Was he simply the greatest, wisest, and kindest man who ever lived? Or was he even more than that? Was this man also God? To answer this question we should begin in the Old Testament with various prophecies about the Messiah.

Psalm 2 is a messianic psalm, which is explicitly connected to Jesus Christ in Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5. It is also a psalm that clearly echoes the words of the LORD to David in 2 Samuel 7. At that time, the LORD promised King David that his descendants, coming from his very own body (2 Sam 7:12), would rule on his throne forever (2 Sam 7:16). Already this is remarkable. Which other royal family has held on to its throne for that long? All dynasties dwindle and disappear eventually. However, the LORD promises that it will be different for David’s dynasty.

Yet more than this, David’s son would not only be David’s son, he would be God’s son, too! In 2 Samuel 7 the LORD goes on to say, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son” (v. 14). Psalm 2 echoes this announcement when the LORD says to his Anointed One, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you” (v. 7). This royal Son of David then receives a global kingdom (Ps 2:8). Yet, even more striking than that, at the end of the psalm the kings of the earth are all instructed to “Serve the LORD with fear” and “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry” (vv. 11, 12). Those two commands are clearly parallel to each other. Both require worship and adoration. But why should this “Son” be worshiped, even as the LORD himself is worshiped, unless he, too, is God? Evidently, this son of David, coming from his own body, is much more than a great king. Every indication is that he is no one less than God himself.

Something similar occurs in Psalm 45. The psalm is about a king (v. 1) and his bride, the princess (v. 13) on their wedding day. This king is described as “the most handsome of the sons of men” (v. 2), so clearly he is a human being. He has his sword at his side, and he rides forth in splendour and majesty (vv. 3–4). Yet next we hear something unex-

pected. While still addressing the king, the sons of Korah exclaim, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever” (v. 6). However, back in verse two the king was clearly identified as a man, so why are these inspired musicians referring to him as “O God”? Someone might think that perhaps the sons of Korah have just suddenly switched from speaking to the king to addressing God himself. However, in the next verse they are speaking again about the king when they say, “Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions” (v. 7). So, although it is subtle, it is nonetheless unmistakable. The sons of Korah are suggesting that this royal king is also divine.

Another prophetic and messianic psalm is Psalm 110. Our Lord Jesus Christ linked this psalm to himself in Mark 12:36 when he was debating with the Jewish teachers of the law. As the superscription of the psalm indicates, it is a psalm of David. He is the “I” who speaks in this song. David speaks about the LORD’S promise to conquer all his enemies (Ps 110:1; 2 Sam 7:9, 11) and to extend the scope of his rule beyond Zion and out into the nations of the world (Ps 110:2, 5–6; 2 Sam 7:9). The LORD began to fulfill this promise in David’s own time, but there was more fulfillment to come in David’s descendants, especially the great son of David, the Messiah. Also the Jewish leaders acknowledged this (Mark 12:35). However, as Jesus pointed out, since this is all true, there is one very curious aspect to this psalm. If it speaks about David’s son, in particular the Messiah, why would King David call his own son “my Lord” (Ps 110:1; Mark 12:35). A *lord* is a master, and often in Scripture, Lord refers to God himself. Is it normal for a father (David) to call one of his own sons (Messiah) his master? Not under normal circumstances. Yet this is what David does. The solution to this puzzle is that this son must be a unique son, a son who is truly greater than his father is. Since this son sits on heaven’s throne at God’s right hand (Ps 110:1, 5; Acts 2:33–34), the implication is that this son of David is God, for it is God who sits enthroned in heaven (Ps 2:4).

This combination of a man, especially a royal person, who is at the same time divine, can be found in other prophetic passages in the Old Testament. For example, the well-known verses in Isaiah 7 speak of the birth

of a child, a son (v. 14). Clearly he is human for “he shall eat curds and honey” (Isa 7:15). Yet his name will be Immanuel, which means “God with us.” Of course, in and of itself, this name does not prove that the human child is also divine. Many OT names make reference to God, such as Joshua (“the LORD saves”) and Jehozadak (“the LORD is righteous”). However, clearly there is something different happening in Isaiah 7 because this child is born to a virgin. No other, merely human child can claim that kind of miraculous birth! In addition, only two chapters later, in Isaiah 9, mention is again made of a child, who is a son (v. 6). This time his royal status is declared since “the government shall be upon his shoulder” and he will reign “on the throne of David” (Isa 9:6, 7). His divine dignity is also unambiguously announced for his names include “Mighty God” and “Everlasting Father” (Isa 9:6). Could it be that the human-divine son of Isaiah 7:14 and the human-divine son of Isaiah 9:6 refer to the same person? The prophet Isaiah does not make that connection explicitly, but the NT does. In Matthew 1:23 an angel informs us that the Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah 7 refers to Jesus, and a few chapters later in Matthew 4:14–16 we hear that the Isaiah 9 prophecy also refers to Jesus Christ. So, yes, it is the same person.

Finally, in Daniel 7 the prophet receives an inspired vision during the night. This vision contains a number of ferocious beasts (Dan 7:2–8), and we are given a glimpse at the eternal God, the Ancient of Days, sitting on his heavenly throne (Dan 7:9–10). Next, someone else enters the vision. Evidently there is something human about him for he is described as “one like a son of man” (Dan 7:13). By the same token, he is clearly more than merely a human being. In the first place, he receives all authority over all nations (Dan 7:14; Matt 28:18), but secondly, all nations worship him (Dan 7:14; Phil 2:10) and worship is something that is reserved for God alone (Deut 6:13; Luke 4:8; Rev 19:10).

So, what conclusion can we draw after working through these OT prophecies in the Psalms, Isaiah, and Daniel? All these prophecies point in the same direction. One of the royal sons of David would be far more than just one more human king. Although this particular royal son would still be a human being, who is born and who eats like all human beings,



he would also be God, yes even the “Mighty God” himself (Isa 9:6). In other words, God’s covenant people living in Palestine could have known why Jesus of Nazareth seemed so different from any other human being. The OT prophecies had been announcing the answer for centuries already. He was different because he was divine in addition to being human.

This fundamental truth about our Lord Jesus Christ was confirmed throughout his life. Before his birth the angel announced to Mary, his mother-to-be, that the child to be born to her would be “the holy one,” which is often used as a name for God (Ps 22:3; Prov 9:10) and “the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Jesus grew in physical stature and in wisdom (Luke 2:52), just like any other human being, yet even the demons recognized that he was also the “Son of God” (Matt 8:28–29). Jesus was filled with compassion, reached out his hand and touched other people (Mark 1:41), as human beings do from time to time, but he also forgave sins, as only God is authorized to do (Mark 2:5–7). He asked for a drink of water because he was tired and thirsty after a long walk (John 4:6), yet when he spoke about himself his opponents charged him with blasphemy because, in their eyes, he was “making himself equal with God” (John 5:18). Little did these opponents realize how correct they were!

Finally, through his death and resurrection, our Mediator Jesus Christ revealed his two natures most unmistakably. It goes without saying that human beings die. Jesus most certainly “breathed his last” breath (Luke 23:46) and died. He was even buried in a local tomb, thereby confirming that this was not a near-death experience but a real death. However, on the third day, he threw off the shackles of Sheol, that is, the grave, and he arose from the dead. Now, it is true that other human beings have been raised by God from the dead. Think of the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:22) and Lazarus (John 11:43–44). But with Jesus it was different. He raised *himself* from the dead since, as he says, “I have authority to lay it [my life] down, and I have authority to take it up again” (John 10:18). Only God has that kind of authority.

The rest of the New Testament underlines what Christ taught about himself. The prologue to John's gospel indicates that the Word that became flesh was not only "with God" but actually "was God" (John 1:1). The apostle Paul leaves no doubt that Christ was human, he "was descended from David according to the flesh" (Rom 1:3). At the same time, his resurrection declared powerfully that he is "the Son of God" (Rom 1:4). Christ Jesus was the one who was "in the form of God" yet also took upon himself "human form" and this appearance was real, not just visionary, because he became "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:6–8). The author of the letter to the Hebrews also makes it very plain that Christ fully shared in the humanity of those whom he came to save. "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things" (Heb 2:14). Yet he who shared their humanity also shared the "radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Heb 1:3). Finally, in the book of Revelation, the apostle John hears the Lord God saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega . . . who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev 1:8). Then, in the last chapter of the Bible, Jesus himself lays claim to exactly the same title when he says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev 22:12, 16).

Taken together, all of this inspired revelation teaches one central truth: Jesus Christ is equally both God and man. Clearly, this truth is not something that the early church imposed upon the Scripture. As we have just seen, it arises right from within Scripture, starting already in the Old Testament and becoming much fuller and richer in the New Testament. This truth is the mercy-filled mystery of the gospel (Rom 16:25–26) which, as the Athanasian Creed reminds us, we must believe if we are to be eternally saved.

#### CONFESSING THE CHRIST IN THE EARLY CHURCH

As mentioned above, the early church struggled to confess the person of Christ correctly. In sum, this struggle had two sides. On the one hand, there were those, like Arius, who diminished, or even denied, the divine

nature of Christ. On the other hand, there were those, like Apollinarius, who diminished, or even denied, the human nature of Christ. Behind both of these heresies is the same misunderstanding. They assume that someone is either God or man, but never both *equally* at the same time. They suppose that divine nature and human nature are simply too incompatible to co-exist fully in one person. What they forget, though, is that “with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matt 19:26).

Arius was born sometime around A.D. 250 and he died in 336. He lived most of his life in Alexandria, Egypt. Controversy erupted in the early church because he denied that Jesus Christ was truly God. It took some time to sort out this heresy, though. In one of his writings, a poem called *Thalia* (ca. 320), Arius said that Christ is the “strong God.” That sounds quite orthodox. However, in that same poem he says that the Son of God, who had a beginning, is not eternal and is not equal to God the Father. Thus, even though Arius was willing to call Christ “God” in some sense, it was not in the full sense. In short, he taught that the Son of God was similar to God but not equal to God. Eventually, this debate began to center around two Greek terms that differ by only one letter: *homoiousios* (of similar essence) and *homoousios* (of the same essence). Arius preferred the former term, while the defenders of orthodoxy chose the latter. For this reason, in the Nicene Creed, the church confesses that Jesus Christ is “God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God; begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father.” The last phrase expresses the *homoousios*. Likewise, the Athanasian Creed affirms that “the Godhead of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one” (6) and Christ “is God from the Father’s substance” (31). In short, we disagree with Arius and confess that Christ is God just as much as the Father is God.

Apollinarius was a bishop in Laodicea. He lived from approximately A.D. 310 to 391. Thus, he was only about twenty-five years old when Arius died. He was vigorously opposed to Arius’ teaching, and he was a close friend of Athanasius who is the well-known defender of the truth against the Arian heresy. However, as he was refuting Arianism,

he swung too far in the opposite direction. Apollinarius taught that every human being is made up of three key parts: body, soul, and mind. According to him, though, Christ only had a human body and soul, and Christ's mind was actually divine, to be precise, the divine Logos. That may sound rather complicated, but to put it simply, Apollinarius taught that Christ was two-thirds human not fully human. Other groups also denied the full and real humanity of Christ. The Docetists taught that the Son of God appeared to be a man, but did not really become a flesh-and-blood human being. They felt that the human body, as such, was an inherently evil thing, and surely God would not want to take an evil, fleshy nature upon himself. What the Docetists forgot, though, is that human beings are not sinful because they are human, but because they fell into sin. At creation, Adam was both fully human and perfectly holy. For Adam that changed when he gave into temptation. For Christ it did not change. He was born fully human and perfectly holy, and he remained that way his entire life.

In addition to the Arians who denied Christ's true divinity, and the Apollinarians and Docetists who denied his real humanity, there were also those who put such a large separation between his two natures that, in effect, Christ became two persons instead of one. The name usually associated with this false teaching is Nestorius (ca. 351–451), the archbishop of Constantinople. Sometime later, a monk in the same city, named Eutyches (ca. 378–454), went too far in the other direction. He blended Christ's divine and human natures together, to the point that the two natures blurred together into one. In order to prevent the church from slipping in either direction, the Council of Chalcedon (451) declared that we should confess one Christ, who has two natures, "without confusion, without changing, without division and without separation." The first two prevent slipping toward the error of Eutyches. The last two help us avoid making the mistake of Nestorius. This declaration is also called the Definition of Chalcedon.

Sadly, the heresies refuted by the early church did not disappear after the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds had been written and recognized by the church. On the contrary, these heresies live on today. Groups like

the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons, or the Church of the Latter Day Saints, still deny that Jesus Christ is truly and fully God, even though they may speak of Jesus as divine in some sort of diminished sense. There are also modern, spiritually minded groups who like to speak about the Christ, or the Logos, or even God's Son, but for them he is some kind of divine instructor who is not a real human being. These same groups may also speak about Jesus, but they teach that Jesus, who was human, is a different person than Christ, who is divine. Obviously, confessing Christ correctly was a challenge for the early church, but that challenge still stands for the church today. Therefore, the church today will be one step ahead if it reaches back and makes ample use of the creeds of the early church, especially the Athanasian Creed.

#### WHAT IS REALLY AT STAKE

By now it should be obvious that confessing Christ correctly is challenging but also necessary. As the Heidelberg Catechism explains in Lord's Days 5–6, we need a mediator who is a true and righteous man. The justice of God requires that the same human nature that sinned should pay for sin. At the same time, the holy wrath of God against sin is so great that only someone who is also divine can sustain that wrath and deliver others from it. We need a mediator and only someone who is both God and man can be the mediator that we need.

It is also important to recognize that confessing Christ incorrectly has a serious effect on the doctrine of salvation, which is also called soteriology. Let us follow this through systematically. If someone diminishes or denies Christ's divine nature, then, in effect, Christ becomes a superb human being, perhaps even the greatest and wisest man who ever walked the face of the earth. But if that were true, then Christ may set a great example for us, but not much more than that. If our Mediator is merely a man, then he is no longer a mediator. Instead, he becomes a hero, one whom we admire and try to imitate. Then salvation becomes a matter of self-elevation. In other words, if Christ is not God, then salvation becomes a call for us to become better and wiser human beings, by following Christ's supreme example.

Turning to the other heresy, if Christ is not truly a man, but only God, then he could not have died for us. God himself is immortal (1 Tim 6:16). Yet as soon as Christ's death on the cross fades away from the center of the preaching, a completely different kind of message emerges. Then all the emphasis starts to fall on being united with Christ through meditation or other spiritual exercises. The end goal of this spiritual fusion with Christ might well be the desire to become little gods ourselves. Once again, salvation becomes a matter of self-elevation instead of a divine rescue from eternal punishment. In sum, whether false teachers deny the divine nature or human nature of Christ, the result is much the same: the gospel becomes a matter of human beings striving to live a spiritually better and higher life. In short, it is a gospel of human religious effort, not of sovereign divine grace. And a grace-less gospel is really no gospel at all.

This all becomes practical in our prayer life as well. Our Mediator who died for us is now the ascended High Priest who continually intercedes for us, bringing all of our requests before the Father in heaven (Heb 7:25). Precisely because he is a real human being, he fully understands what our human trials, temptations, and tears are like. Let us not forget, Jesus himself wept (John 11:35). So, with Christ as our intercessor, we know that our prayers are surely heard and fully understood (Heb 4:15–16). At the same time, since we pray through one who is, at the very same time, God, we can be confident that he has the power and wisdom to act for the good of those who love him. His divine arm is never too short (Isa 59:1). In sum, as the Belgic Confession reminds us in Art. 26, if we had to look for another intercessor who is more compassionate, more qualified, or more powerful than Christ, where would we look? The answer is simple: nowhere. Christ, the God-man, is the best intercessor imaginable. Our prayer life is so much the better for it.

*Suggested Readings: Psalm 110; Romans 1:1–7*

## QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. One of the fascinating things about the gospel is how interconnected different topics are. The introduction to this chapter suggested one way in which the doctrines of God (theology proper), man (anthropology), and Christ (Christology) are woven together. Review those connections and see if you can find some more. For the long term, why is it important to be aware of the interconnectedness of doctrine?
2. Read and compare Zechariah 9:9–10 and Psalm 59:12–13. What aspects in Zechariah 9:9–10 prophesy about Christ’s humanity? Which aspects in the same verses prophesy about Christ’s divinity?
3. Read through the second half of the Athanasian Creed and answer these questions:
  - What does it mean that the Son was “begotten before time” from the Father? Belgic Confession Art. 10 and Lord’s Day 13 in the Catechism may help.
  - Why does it add, “Perfect man *composed of a human soul and human flesh*”?
  - How does the following comparison help us understand our Mediator: “just as soul and flesh are one man, so God and man are one Christ”? Most analogies are limited in some way. What about this one?
4. The difference between *homoiousios* and *homoousios* may seem like splitting doctrinal hairs. After all, there is only one letter that is different. However, why does that one letter have such big implications? How does changing that letter alter our basic understanding of what salvation is?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. After Christ arose from the dead, he was still a human being since, to mention only one thing, the women “took hold of his feet and

worshiped him” (Matt 28:9). At the same time, he could instantly vanish from sight, as he did at the meal with Cleopas and his friend (Luke 24:31). So what changed about Christ’s human nature after his resurrection and what remained the same? In connection with this, what is a “spiritual body” and what will it be like for us when we receive ours (1 Cor 15:44, 49)?

2. This chapter mentioned some modern examples of groups that deny either the divine or human nature of Christ. Can you give some concrete examples, perhaps even from your own personal experience, of groups in your area that speak incorrectly about Christ? Discuss why their teaching is unscriptural. Also propose a wise way to refute their error and lovingly call them to repentance.
3. Since Christ is “very God of very God,” to quote the Nicene Creed, why does he say to his disciples that “the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28)? Is the Son somehow less than the Father, or are they both equal? If you find you are having a hard time answering this question, the Athanasian Creed will likely help you.

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