



# The Apostles' Creed

## Study 4: Jesus Christ The Mediator (John 1:1-18)

o The person and work of Christ constitute the essence of the gospel and, therefore, of the Christian faith.

### **I. A doctrine constantly under attack.**

1. From Luke 24:44-48 we learn that the essential message of OT scriptures is the coming of the God-appointed Saviour who would lay down His life to save His people (cf. Luke 4:17-21).
  - The apostle Paul summarises the gospel as “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). He condemns those who pervert the gospel (Gal. 1:6-9), which may also be summarised as “justification by faith” (Gal. 2:16; Rom. 3:28), and also as “salvation by grace, through faith, in Christ alone” (cf. Eph. 2:8-9). Apart from denial of the Trinity, wrong teachings on the person and work of Christ arose early, many of which were condemned by the early church councils as heresies.
2. Wrong teachings on the person of Christ include Gnosticism, Monophysitism, Nestorianism, and Unitarianism.
  - Gnosticism (from “gnosis”, secret knowledge) teaches that matter is evil while spirit is good. God is wholly transcendent, i.e. above and removed from creation. Jesus Christ is a heavenly messenger, and not God incarnate. Salvation is by having the right “knowledge”. The Freemasons have been referred to as Gnostics. An early form of Gnosticism was Adoptionism which teaches that Jesus was a human being who became divine by adoption, either at his baptism or resurrection.
  - Monophysitism (from “monos”, one and “physis”, nature) claims that Christ has only one nature. There were two versions of Monophysitism. One was Eutychianism (after Eutyches of Constantinople, c. 380- c. 456) claimed that Christ had a nature that was a mixture of the divine and human. Another version was Apollinarianism (after Apollinaris of Laodicea c. 350) which held that Christ had a human body and a human soul, but his mind was taken over by the eternal Logos.
  - Nestorianism (after Nestorius of Constantinople, c.386-451) claimed that Christ existed as two persons, the human Jesus and the divine Son of God.
  - Unitarianism rejects the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity. An early form of this was Arianism (after Arius of Alexandria, AD 250–336) which claimed that Christ is the Son of God who was created by God the Father at a point in time. Arius claimed that the Son is ‘homoiousios’ (of similar substance) as the Father. Athanasius (A.D. 293-373) contended against Arianism, showing that the Son is ‘homoousios’ (of the same substance) as the Father, i.e. of the same being. Socinianism of the 16th & 17th centuries, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses which arose from the late 19th century, similarly deny the deity of Christ.

3. Wrong teachings concerning the work of Christ came in the form of Pelagianism in the 4th century, Arminianism in the 17th century, and Liberalism in the 19th century.
  - Pelagius was a British monk who lived and taught in Rome around AD 380. He denied original sin and taught free will. Pelagius was opposed by Augustine of Hippo, Algeria (AD 354-430), who taught “total depravity” and “salvation by grace, through faith”.
  - Pelagianism was replaced with Semi-Pelagianism which sought a middle ground between Pelagianism and Augustinianism. It emerged again after the Reformation in modified form in Arminianism which was rejected by the Reformed churches at the Synod of Dort in AD 1618-1619.
  - Theological Liberalism began in the early 19th century and is rooted in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schleiermacher in Germany. It spread to Britain and America in the early 20th century, embracing the “higher criticism” of modern biblical scholarship. It spawned other movements such as the Social Gospel, Feminism, and Liberation Theology. It denies the divinity of Christ and the authority of Scripture.

## **II. The teaching of the Apostles’ Creed.**

1. His person: Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God who took upon Himself perfect human nature by being born of the virgin Mary. He is, therefore, one person with two natures: the divine nature from eternity, and the sinless human nature from the incarnation.
  - His divinity is indicated by His titles “Christ” (“the Anointed”) and the Son of God (Matt. 1:23; Luke 1:35).
    - : He is God’s only Son (John 1:18; 3:16; etc.), while those who are saved by faith in Him are adopted children (John 20:17; Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 3:26). The term “begotten” does not mean creation but describes the relationship between the Father and the Son. (“Begotten from the Father before all ages”, Nicene Creed).
    - : He is also known as the Word, who existed eternally with the Father and the Spirit. Through Him all things were made (Gen. 1:1-2; John 1:1-3).
  - The humanity of Christ is indicated by His titles “Jesus” (“Saviour”) and “the Son of David” (e.g. Matt. 22:41-45; Luke 1:31-33). His title “Son of Man” is messianic, from Psalm 8:4; Dan. 7:13, and the book of Ezekiel. It reflects His human nature (Mark 2:27-28; John 5:27; 6:27, 51, 62) as well as His divine nature (John 1:51; 3:13-14; 6:27, 51, 62).
    - : His humanity was derived from Mary, but without her sin (Rom. 1:3; Gal. 4:4). Mary was never sinless, as claimed by the Roman Catholics, and expressed her need of salvation (Luke 1:47). Jesus Christ was conceived by Holy Spirit and sheltered from the sin of Mary (Luke 1:35; Heb. 4:15).
    - : He grew and developed as a true human being (Luke 2:52). He was capable of human feelings (John 11:35; Luke 22:41-44; Mark 11:12; John 19:28).
2. His work: Jesus Christ is the Mediator who performs the twofold work of representing God to man, and man to God. It is necessary, therefore, that He is both human and divine.
  - “He suffered under Pontius Pilate” shows that: (i) it was a historical and factual event; (ii) Christ died under judgement, and not from sickness or accident; (iii) He died as an offering for the sin of His people (cf. John 18:38; 19:4; 1 Pet. 2:22).
  - “He descended to hell” meaning He suffered the torments of hell: (i) the wrath of God fell on Him who acted as substitute for His people; (ii) the sins of His people are fully atoned for; (iii) the guilt of His people is cancelled (Isa. 53:5, 10-11; 2 Cor. 5:21)

- “He rose again from the dead”: (i) His righteousness is imputed to His people for acceptance before God (Rom 4:25; 2 Cor. 5:21); (ii) The power of death is destroyed (1 Cor. 15:54-57); (iii) He gives power for living a sanctified life (Rom. 8:12-14).

3. His ongoing work: Ascension to heaven, future judgement.

- As God and Man in one person, in His glorified body, Jesus Christ has “ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty”. To be seated at the right hand of God is to be given the position of highest authority over all creation (Mark 16:19; Eph. 1:20-23).

: He continues His work as Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5), interceding for His people (Heb. 4:16) and empowering them in His service (2 Cor. 5:20).

- Christ will return “to judge the living and the dead” (cf. Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:1). The dead will be raised (1 Thess. 4:16). There will be the separation of the elect from the reprobate (Matt. 25:33).

: The reprobate will face “the second death”, when body and soul are cast into eternal suffering in hell. The elect will dwell with the Lord in eternal blessedness (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:22 - 22:5).

= “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58).”

### **Review Questions**

1. State the three ways Paul summarises the gospel.
2. State four wrong teachings on the person of Christ.
3. Name an early form of Gnosticism and a modern form of it.
4. What does Monophysitism teach concerning Christ?
5. What does Nestorianism teach concerning Christ?
6. What does Unitarianism teach concerning Christ?
7. Who opposed the teaching Pelagius?
8. What two teachings emerged to replace Pelagianism after it was condemned?
9. Where did Theological Liberalism begin and what are its characteristics?
10. Why are the two natures of Christ necessary to His work of salvation?

### **Assignment/Discussion**

The objection is often raised by unbelievers that if Jesus Christ is the Son of God, then God must have married and have a wife. Things become more confused because the Roman Catholic Church refer to Mary as the Mother of God. Should we refer to Mary as the Mother of God? How would you explain the use of the title “Son of God” in the Bible to unbelievers?

### **Memory Passage (John 1:1-5)**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

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