

The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

I. Existence as the Eternal Son of God

The person of Jesus is the eternal, divine Son of God who has always existed as the 2nd person of the Trinity.

- He is the eternal Word (Greek: Logos) who was with God and is God from the beginning (John 1:1)
- The eternal Son/Word created all things (John 1:3; Col. 1:16-17).

II. Truly and Fully Human

- The eternal Word became flesh (John 1:14), which means that he assumed a fully human nature (Latin: incarnation).
- Jesus was born as a human being from a human mother, although conceived without a human father by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:2-38; Matt. 1:18-25).
- Jesus lived a fully human life: he grew in body and in wisdom (Luke 2:52). He worked as a builder (Mark 6:3; Matt. 13:55). He became hungry, and he ate and drank. He became tired, and he slept. He formed human relationships. He died.
- Jesus was tempted to sin because he experienced the suffering of the world and the weaknesses of having a finite human nature, and thus he can perfectly sympathize with us (Matt. 4:1-11/Luke 4:1-13; Heb. 2:18; 4:15). However, Jesus unique because he had no corrupt, sinful nature (i.e., no original sin) and never committed acts of sin. He always lived in perfect communion with God and perfectly obeyed God's will and word (John 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5).
- Jesus died and thus and experienced the fullness of death with the separation of his soul and body. (The Apostles' Creed affirms this truth with the phrase he "descended into hell," and "hell" in the Creed means merely "the grave, i.e., the realm of the dead" [Hebrew: Sheol; grave; Greek: Hades], not a place of eternal torment and condemnation.)
- Jesus remains fully human today, and he will be fully human eternally.
- Jesus must be fully and perfectly human in order to save us from sin. Sin is a human problem that requires a human solution. Only a fully human being could serve as our representative and substitute in bearing the consequences of human sin in death. Only a perfect human being could provide for us a quality of human life that redeems our corrupted humanity by his life and resurrection.

III. Fully Divine

- When he became incarnate as the historical person Jesus, the eternal Son of God did not cease to be fully God; rather, the eternal Son united himself to a fully human nature.
- The New Testament testifies implicitly to Jesus' full divinity when Jesus assumes divine authority, and performs divine actions. For example:
 - Jesus interprets God's law with divine authority (Matt. 5-7).
 - Jesus calls himself "Lord of Sabbath" (Matt. 12:8).
 - Jesus forgave sins of others as only God could (Luke 5:17-26).
 - Jesus claims that God's angels and kingdom are "his" (Matt. 13:41).
 - Jesus claims to possess absolute power over life & death (John 5:21, 11:25).
- The New Testament testifies explicitly to Jesus' full divinity in the titles and affirmations it makes about him. For example:
 - Jesus names himself with God's personal name I AM (John 8:58 = Exod. 3:14).
 - Jesus names himself as David's Lord (Matt. 22:41-46 = Ps. 110).
 - Jesus accepts the description "my Lord and my God" (John 20:28).
 - John 1:1-18: Jesus is the incarnation of the eternal Word (Logos) of God who "with God" and "was God" (v.1). He is the Creator through whom all things were made (v.3).
 - Colossians 1:15-20: Jesus is the Creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible who is before all things (vv. 16-17). He is the Sustainer in whom all things hold together (v. 17). He is the firstborn of creation, i.e., the supreme authority over all (v. 15), and in him dwells the fullness of God (v. 19; cf. 2:9).
 - Philippians 2:5-11: Jesus is the Lord, before whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess (= Yahweh of Isaiah 45:23).
 - Hebrews 1: Jesus is the exact representation of God's being who created the world (v. 2) and upholds the universe by his power (v. 3). He is superior to everything else including all men and angels (vv. 5-14), and he is called God directly (v. 8)
- Jesus must be fully God to save us from our sin. Only God has the power and life to bear the full consequences of sin and to overcome death and Satan.

IV. Jesus' Saving Work

- Jesus' death was an atonement sacrifice as a substitute for his people (see the prior lesson "The Doctrine of Sin"). It was also a moral example because it was a revelation of true human love for God and people (John 15:9-17; 1 John 4:9-11) and the supreme model of self-denial, of suffering injustice patiently (1 Peter 2:21), and of humble obedience (Philippians 2:5-11). His suffering was thus physical and spiritual (Matt. 27:46, quoting Ps. 22:1), bearing the wrath of God and effects of sin's guilt and alienation.

- Jesus rose bodily from the dead, and his resurrection is the source of salvation and eternal life for his people and the rest of creation.
 - Jesus’ resurrection is a sign that God is fulfilling his Old Testament promises to establish the new covenant by resurrection (Dan. 12:1-2; Ezek. 36-37).
 - Jesus predicted his death and resurrection throughout his ministry (e.g., Matt. 16:31/Mark 8:31/Luke 9:22; Matt. 17:22-23; John 2:19-22) and successful prediction is one mark of a true prophet (Deut. 18:22).
 - Jesus’ resurrection is the source of salvation. It makes his death on the cross effective for redemption. In his resurrection, Jesus experiences deliverance or salvation from the effects of he took upon himself as humanity’s substitute. Thus, it is God’s declaration that Jesus is righteous and his death is accepted as substitutionary sacrifice.
 - Jesus’ resurrection is the beginning of the end of history and the source and hope of our final resurrection. He is the “firstfruits” (= beginning of harvest) of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20-28; cf. Rom. 8:11), i.e., the beginning of the final resurrection of the dead that will occur to every human being.
- The risen Jesus ascended to heaven (Acts 1:6-11), and from heaven he reigns over the church and all of creation as Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:33-36).
 - He sits at the right hand of the God the Father in heaven (Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; 1 Pet 3:22; Heb. 1:3), the place of supreme divine authority and power, to reign as the promised King who fulfills God’s covenant with David (2 Sam 7:12-13) and his promise to send a Son of Man to rule from God’s throne (Dan. 7:13-14).
 - He leads the church as our great High Priest to give us access to God by his sacrifice (Heb. 7-10) and to lead us in worship as preacher (Heb. 2:12; Rom 10:14), singer (Heb 2:12), intercessor (Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34), and table host (Heb. 13:9-10; 1 Cor. 10:16).
- Jesus will serve as creation’s final Judge and King.
 - Jesus will return visibly in glory to judge the living and the dead (Rev. 19:11-21; 2 Thess. 1:5-12; Acts 17:30-31).
 - Jesus will reign forever as the great King over all things (Rev. 11:15; Phil. 2:10-11).

Going Further

J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Tyndale, 2001), pp. 104-137.

Herman Bavinck, *Guidebook for Instruction in the Christian Religion*, chapters 12-13.

Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, chapters 16-18.

Stephen Wellum, *The Person of Christ: An Introduction* (Crossway, 2021).

W. Ross Hastings, *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ: Exploring Its Theological Significance and Ongoing Relevance* (Baker, 2022).

Patrick Schreiner, *The Ascension of Christ: Recovering a Neglected Doctrine* (Lexham, 2020).