In our study of the doctrine of the person of Christ, we’ve come to the Council of Chalcedon which in 451 promulgated a statement aimed at settling the controversy between the Alexandrian and the Antiochean schools of Christology. I want to review with you again this statement before making some comments on it and proceeding.

Here is what the Council declared:

We... confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial [homoousios] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial [homoousios] with us according to the manhood, like us in all things except sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God [theotokos], according to the manhood, one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-Begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the difference of the natures being by no means taken away because of the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person [prosopon] and one Subsistence [hypostasis], not divided or separated into two Persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ. . . .

The Chalcedonian settlement is a ringing endorsement of Dyophysite (or two-natures) Christology. Christ is declared here to exist in two natures whose distinction remains even after their union in Christ in the incarnation. Moreover, Apollinarianism is implicitly rejected in the statement that Christ is not only perfect in his deity and is truly God but is also perfect in his humanity and is truly man, having both a rational soul and body. You remember that Apollinarius denied that Christ’s human nature had a rational soul.

At the same time, however, in agreement with Monophysite Christology (or one-nature Christology), the settlement insists on there being only one person, one Son in Christ. Thus the excesses of Nestorianism are ruled out. You remember Nestorius was accused of having two Sons, two persons, in Christ – one human and one divine.

The words, “person” and “hypostasis” are taken as synonyms in this statement. You notice it says “they concur in one person and one subsistence.” So the incarnation on this view becomes a kind of mirror image of the Trinity. In the Trinity there are multiple persons in one nature. In the incarnation there are multiple natures in one person. You
can see that they are sort of a mirror image of each other. In the Trinity there are multiple persons in one nature, but in the incarnation you have multiple natures in one person.¹

I want to draw attention to the series of four adjectives that the settlement uses: without confusion, without change, without division, without separation. These serve as a reminder that the two natures of Christ must be kept distinct from each other and not blended together or merged. Moreover, the unity of Christ’s person must not in any way be compromised by separating it or dividing it.

The first two adjectives, “without confusion” (that is, without fusing them together into one thing – that’s the literal meaning of “con-fusion” – without fusing them together into one thing) and “without change” are aimed at the Alexandrian tendency to blend the two natures of Christ together as a result of the incarnation.

The last two adjectives – “without division” and “without separation” – are directed at the Antiochean failure to achieve a true union of the two natures so that they are divided or separated into two persons. The Chalcedonian settlement makes it very clear that the person of Christ must not in any way be divided or separated into two persons. As a result of the Council of Chalcedon, it became an imperative of orthodox Christian theology that we must neither confuse the natures nor divide the person of Christ. You mustn't confuse the natures or divide the person.

The Chalcedonian formula doesn’t itself tell us how to do this. It doesn’t seek to explain the incarnation. But what it does do is set up, as it were, channel markers for legitimate Christological speculation. Any theory of Christ’s person must be one in which the distinctness of the two natures is preserved and both meet in one person – one Son in Christ. It sets down safe waters, as it were, for speculation about the person of Christ. So long as you do not confuse the natures on the one hand or divide the persons on the other you can navigate safely within the waters of Christological speculation. I think it admirably fulfilled the purpose for which it was drawn up. It doesn’t explain the incarnation, but it does exclude two possible but unacceptable explanations of the incarnation, namely, Apollinarianism on the one hand and Nestorianism on the other. And it provides a convenient summary of the essential facts which we must all keep in mind when we attempt to penetrate still further into the mystery of the incarnation.

START DISCUSSION

Student: It is Jesus’ own admission when John 10:34-36 says,

Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods’? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came (and scripture cannot be

¹ 5:08
broken), do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’?

Apparently, that was a quote from one of the Psalms – that you are gods. I think to blend all – Jesus’ divine nature and human nature – this is how I see it. We are created in God’s likeness and image. So we have that divine nature if we choose to align ourself to God and so we can live out that likeness and image. But because we have not chosen that route to align ourselves as Jesus has completely aligned with God, so his human nature is submissive to his divine nature where we are the other way around. Does that explain the two-natures and we all have the potential? That is why he’s the first fruit. If we learn to follow Jesus’ example and have our human nature submit to divine nature and we will be as the psalmist says “gods” in a little-g sense?

*Dr. Craig:* I would really resist that kind of reading of that. If we literally share in the divine nature in the way we are talking about here, that would mean that each of us is omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect, omnipresent, and all the rest. Because those are essential properties of God. That is the divine nature. Remember when we talked about the attributes of God we saw that God possesses all of those superlative attributes.

*Student:* Not the little-g god, no. But the big-G God.

*Dr. Craig:* But then we shouldn’t say of the little-g god that it has the divine nature or possesses the divine nature because it doesn’t. It’s a creature. It is created, whereas God is uncreated, exists necessarily, is self-existent. None of those things is true of the little-g god.

*Student:* Then how do you explain this passage?

*Dr. Craig:* I take it that Jesus is reasoning from sort of the lesser to the greater. If these human beings can be called “gods” why should they be offended that Jesus calls himself “God.” But he is more truly God than these persons who are addressed by the psalmist. In the Old Testament, Hebrew kings and holy men could be called God’s sons, but they weren’t literally thought to be God in the way the New Testament thinks that Jesus is fully God, fully divine. I wouldn’t take, as you say, that passage to mean God with a capital-G. We are clearly creatures who don’t share in the divine nature. Otherwise we would have two natures, and we would be like Christ who has two natures (a divine nature and a human nature). We have only a human nature. We want that human nature to be perfected and sanctified and to become Christ-like in its moral properties. That will happen over time as we submit to him. I affirm what you say about submitting to Christ, submitting to the Holy Spirit, and then as he does his sanctifying work in him we will become more Christ-like in our character. But we would never become necessary, self-existent, omnipotent beings.

\[2 \text{ 10:13}\]
Student: No, but do you say that we will live up to the image and likeness he creates us to be?

Dr. Craig: Yes, I think that is right in the final state. We may not arrive there in this life, but in the afterlife we will. But we will still be creatures. We still won’t have a divine nature.

Student: Is Apollinarianism and Nestorianism heresy? Is that heretical?

Dr. Craig: They are heresies because they were condemned. Yes, each one was condemned by the church so they are literally counted by the church as heresies.³

Student: I think we have to be very careful on how we limit what the Scripture says. It says to whom the Scripture the Spirit comes, there God says truly God comes into us. So be careful because it says we will be changed as we see him. Exactly when that happens so we will be in the same image as him. Also it says we will come and actually rule with him. So we need to be careful we don’t exclude ourselves from the salvation he is delivering to all of us.

Dr. Craig: Fair enough. When we talk about the doctrine of man later on we will talk about what it means to be in the image of God and for us to be increasingly conformed to Christ’s image through God’s sanctifying work in our lives. But I think that we need to insist very, very strongly that that dividing line between Creator and creature is never erased. We are not going to be deified in the sense that we become God. In a literal sense that is nonsense because to be God you’d have to be eternally God. You have to be necessarily God. For a human being to be deified would be incoherent because if you are God you are always God. You can’t become God.

Student: There are modern-day churches like the Coptic Church that are non-Chalcedonian. Can you say anything about what part of it they reject and how that affects their Christology?

Dr. Craig: The Coptic Church is primarily to be found in Egypt. This is a very, very ancient Christian confession. It reflects the Alexandrian school of theology and therefore tends to be more Monophysite. As you say, they don’t agree with this. This is a settlement that was agreed to by Catholics and then later Orthodox and Protestants adhered to it, but not Coptics. I have to say that Coptic Christians have written to me personally chastising me for saying they don’t agree to two-nature Christology. But so far as I understand this tradition, it does reject the Chalcedonian statement and would say that even if Christ had two distinct natures that in the incarnation somehow these are blended into one divine-human nature. So they tend to be in the Alexandrian strain of Christianity.

³ 15:12
Student: We had touched on this before you left. As being a trichotomist, I see body, soul, and spirit as being human, and in Christ the spiritual essence is the Son. That is what makes him distinct. He is both fully divine and fully human.

Dr. Craig: OK, now that is very, very like what Apollinarius said. So the question will be (and we’ll take this up) whether or not this viewpoint can be formulated in such a way as to avoid the errors of Apollinarianism.

Student: That’s good to put on the table. I think it answers the question where in John he says, *I have a body. I can take it up and lay it down.* That satisfies where in Timothy it says *we have this salvation the Gospel in Christ before the foundation of the world.* Well, he’s got this body parked somewhere before and after (or can park it).

Dr. Craig: Well, now, wait a minute. Before? Before what? Not before his birth. You don’t mean that, do you?

Student: It says before the foundation of the world he has established this.

Dr. Craig: Don’t you think that the body of Jesus was conceived in Mary’s womb and it didn’t exist prior to that?

Student: No, but, there were theophanies prior to that.

Dr. Craig: OK.

Student: He identified with a specific body in the incarnation, in a specific person in Christ. But he says in John 10, which is after the crucifixion and resurrection, *I have a body, I can take it up and lay it down.* For our purposes we see God through Christ eternally, but as far as the Son is concerned, he doesn’t necessarily have to stay embodied as I read John. This is for our benefit and how he reflects himself to us but not that he has to exist that way.\(^4\)

Dr. Craig: OK. Well, you are raising additional issues that are of interest like the resurrection and the role that that plays in Christ’s permanent possession of a human nature – permanently being incarnate. We’ll talk about that later on, but with regard to your trichotomist view of human nature, the question will be: can that be formulated in such a way that it doesn’t fall into the errors of Apollinarianism that were condemned?

Student: Could you explain what Paul means by “we are partakers of the divine nature?” I know we are not deified.

Dr. Craig: Exactly. It doesn’t mean that we become God and that we become, as I say, literally necessary, self-existent, eternal, omnipotent, and so forth. I think it means that we come to share in immortality and Christlikeness in our characters so that we do

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\(^4\) 20:04
become God-like in some ways. But we mustn’t blur the distinction between Creator and creature. That surely is not Paul’s meaning.

**Student:** I studied this little passage recently. Psalm 82 gives the image... if you look at 82:1 it says, “God presides in great assembly. He gives judgment among the gods.” The commentaries that I saw, and it seems to fit with the word study... *elohim* is the word that is used there. But when it is used in the plurals it refers to rulers. So the images... he is kind of talking to the rulers, and he is not satisfied with their rulers, with their judgments. If you go subsequently, Psalm 82:6, “I said, ‘You are gods [*elohim*], And you are all sons of the Most High. But you will die like mere men. You will fall like [and here’s the key] every other ruler.” So I think it makes no sense to say they... first of all it is in the multiple. We have one God. So when it is used multiple... in the lexicon I use, the most common usage by far is for human rulers.

**Dr. Craig:** Yes. And, as I say, Hebrew kings were not infrequently referred to as “sons of God” and here as “gods.” I think you are quite right that this is talking about mere mortal creatures that, as you say, will die like the other rulers.

**END DISCUSSION**

Let’s proceed. I am going to skip over the Protestant Reformation. During the Reformation the old debate between Antioch and Alexandria replayed itself in debates between the Reformed theologians following John Calvin and the Lutheran theologians following Martin Luther. The Lutheran theologians tended to be more Alexandrian. They tended to think of the divine attributes as being communicated over to the human nature and so fell into danger of blurring or confusing the natures. The Reformed thinkers, on the other hand, were more like Antioch. They insisted very strongly on the distinctness and separation of the two natures so that there wasn’t any kind of communication of attributes between the divine and human natures.

I want to jump to the 19th century where we do confront a radical new school of Christology. This is known as Kenotic Christology. It comes from the Greek word *kenosis* which means “an emptying.” It is used in Philippians 2:5-7 to characterize Christ’s incarnation. There you will remember Paul says that Christ did not consider equality with God, a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself taking the form of a servant. Kenotic theology attempted to exploit this idea of Christ’s emptying himself in taking on human nature.5

We can define Kenoticism as the view according to which Christ, in the incarnation, ceased to possess certain attributes of deity in order that he could become truly human. He literally gave up some of the divine attributes in order to become a human being. This raises all sorts of questions about the extent of the *kenosis* – how far did this emptying...
go? It raises questions about the relationship between the *Logos* – the second person of the Trinity – and the man Jesus. It also raises questions about the status of the divine attributes as to which could be given up and which could not be surrendered. Kenotic theologians answered these questions in various ways.

Kenoticism represents a non-Chalcedonian approach to Christology. Why? Because it holds that the *Logos*, in becoming incarnate, changed in his nature where as you will remember the Council of Chalcedon says this is without change. Yet, according to the Kenotic theologians, the *Logos* did change in becoming incarnate. This raises the question as to whether or not Kenoticism didn’t in fact imply a denial of the deity of the incarnate Christ. If he gave up divine attributes then even if he were the same person after the incarnation, had he thereby ceased to be God? D. M. Baillie, in his book, *God Was In Christ*, asks,

> Does Christianity, then, teach that God changed into a Man? . . . That at a certain point of time, God . . . was transformed into a human being for a period of about thirty years? It is hardly necessary to say that the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation means nothing like that. . . . it would be grotesque to suggest that the Incarnation has anything in common with the metamorphoses of ancient pagan mythology . . .

In these metamorphoses remember Zeus could turn into a swan or he could turn himself into a bull or other sorts of embodied forms. Baillie protests that this would be grotesque to think of the incarnation as being like these metamorphoses in ancient pagan mythology. He says, “the deity and humanity of Christ are not merely successive stages . . . as if He had first been God, then Man, then after the days of His flesh were past, God again, with manhood left behind.” No! The doctrine of the incarnation is the doctrine that Christ was God and man simultaneously. Baillie therefore charges that *kenosis*, while affirming that the Son of God keeps his personal identity in becoming human, nevertheless he has divested himself of the distinctly divine attributes so that in becoming human he ceased to be divine. If Jesus is in every sense human then the Kenotic theologian is in the position of saying that God has turned himself into a human being which seems absurd.

I think the deeper question raised by Kenotic Christology is the content of the divine nature. That is to say, the question is to which properties are essential to deity, to divinity. Baillie holds that any change in God is an essential change from deity. But it is exactly at this point that the Kenotic theologians question the traditional doctrine. They argue that many of God’s most prominent attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience,

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6 D. M. Baillie, *God Was In Christ* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1948), p. 82
omnipresence are merely contingent properties of God, not essential properties. Therefore he could give up these properties and still remain God.

The decisive question that we will face in trying to assess Kenotic Christology is going to be whether or not so radical a change as they envision (divesting oneself of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence) is merely an accidental change in God that is compatible with his divine nature, or whether or not Baillie is correct – that this would be an essential change in God and therefore Christ would cease to be God in undergoing such a change.\(^7\)

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* That has not been my understanding of what people who hold to the *kenosis* mean by the *kenosis*. My understanding is they don’t believe that Christ gave up those omni-attributes (like omniscience, omnipotence, and so forth) but rather he simply willed not to use them. It would be like a person who is seeing not making themselves blind but instead simply choosing to close their eyes for a while.

*Dr. Craig:* I mentioned that Kenotic theologians had a variety of views. There were moderate Kenoticists who would say that in the incarnation Christ still had the properties of omniscience, omnipotence, and all the rest, but he simply didn’t use them. That really was a position that many of the Reformed theologians held as well who were not Kenoticists. Sometimes they would talk about an *ocultatsio* – a sort of masking of the divine attributes so that Christ appeared to be weak, mortal, and all the rest of it, but in fact he was eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent God. But on the other hand it simply is true, and I can give you references that many of the Kenoticists did say, that in becoming incarnate Christ didn’t just relinquish the use of his attributes, he gave up these attributes. He divested himself of these divine attributes in order to become incarnate. I am talking about this more radical type of Kenoticism than the view that would simply say he refrained from using them.

*Student:* The more moderate view that I am describing – is that OK and in accord with Chalcedon?

*Dr. Craig:* Yes, I think it is. As I say, many of the Reformed theologians would say something like that. He freely relinquished use of some of his divine attributes.

*Student:* The thought of these attributes of God being contingent – how does he divest himself of this? What have they put forth that is the way that God can just throw off certain attributes of his own? How is he God? How do they account for that? As you said previously, it just doesn’t make any sense to say that something is God if it doesn’t have these necessary attributes of being God.

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\(^7\) 30:34
Dr. Craig: I am obviously pretty unsympathetic with Kenotic Christology. Let’s take omnipresence perhaps. That might be the easiest one to image divesting oneself of. The Logos without a body is immaterial and therefore omnipresent in the sense that he is knowledgeable of and causally active at every point in space. But now in virtue of taking a human body that had a certain stature and a certain location in time and in history and in geography one could say he is no longer omnipresent. He shrunk down to this location in Galilee. I think that that is not obviously incoherent to say something like that. How you could give up omnipotence is more difficult because if you kept the power to get it back again then you really haven’t given it up because omnipotence is a modal property. It is what you are able to do. So if you are able to get it back, you are still able to do those things and so you are still omnipotent. That is more difficult, I think, a task. These are really good questions.

Student: I would follow that up to them by saying how did he do miracles? If he let go of that, how does an emptied divine nature that is not there anymore – you are just a human – how is he able to pull off turning water into wine, walking on water?

Dr. Craig: Some Kenotic theologians could say is he didn’t do these in virtue of his own divine nature. It was through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. It was other persons of the Trinity who wrought these miracles through Christ rather than drawing on his own power of his divine nature.

Student: I was curious about how a Kenotic theologian would reconcile Colossians 1 with the concept of Christ emptying himself. In Colossians 1 it talks about Christ “is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation.” If you jump down several verses it says in verse 19, “For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness of deity to dwell in him and through him to reconcile all things to himself.”

Dr. Craig: I think Colossians 2:7 says the whole fullness of deity dwells in him bodily. Right? It actually says “bodily.” That is an extraordinary statement to think that the whole fullness of deity is somehow bodily encapsulated in Christ. I think that you are quite right that this is a prooftext that really shipwrecks Kenoticism.

Student: What about Mark 13:32 that says, But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven nor the Son?

Dr. Craig: Right. This is a great example of where it seems Christ has relinquished omniscience. He doesn’t know the date of his second coming. It says the angels don’t know, no humans know, and the Son doesn’t know. This would be a verse to which the Kenotic theologian would appeal to say, Look, he has relinquished omniscience during his incarnation. We’ll have to talk about that when we make a proposed model of the incarnation to see if we can make sense of that.
Student: The question in my mind is the centurion who came to gain healing for his servant. He told Jesus, *No, no, you don’t need to come. Just say the word and he’ll be healed.* That implies to me that Jesus didn’t have to bodily go anywhere to do things. That is not something most people can do.

Dr. Craig: Right. There he does appeal to Christ’s authority, right? Not God or someone else. He said, *I’m a man set under authority. I say to this soldier, ‘Go here’ and he goes. Say the word.* It seems as though Christ in his own authority is able to work a miracle at a distance which would be hard for a Kenotic theologian to explain.

Student: If the Alexandrian is akin to Lutheran and the Antiochean is akin to a Calvinist, where would the Kenotic in a more modern faith be found?

Dr. Craig: I suppose the analogy . . . here I’m speaking off the top of my head . . . the analogy might be to more liberal theologians who would deny the deity of Christ.

Student: Like Religious Science?

Dr. Craig: I’m not familiar by what you mean by that. There are certainly liberal theologians today who would deny that Christ had a divine nature and see him as simply a man. Perhaps that would be the closest analogy to Kenoticism today in that it would seem to imagine Christ didn’t have these attributes of deity. But it would be disanalogous in that they would say he never had them so it wasn’t a matter of divesting himself of anything – just that he didn’t have them.

**END DISCUSSION⁹**

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⁹ Total Running Time: 40:24 (Copyright © 2017 William Lane Craig)