

## The Creed

We, then, following the holy fathers, all with one consent, teach men to 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 with the Father according to the Godhead,  
and consubstantial with us according to the manhood;  
in all things like unto us, without 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, according to the manhood;

one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten,  
to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably;  
the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union,  
but rather the property of each nature being preserved,  
and concurring in one person and one subsistence,  
not parted or divided into two persons,  
but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ:

as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him,  
and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us,  
and the creed of the holy fathers has handed down to us.

## History and Background of the Creed

### I. *New Focus on Christ*

- A. **The New Question.** The debates concerning the Trinity that resulted in the councils of Nicaea and Constantinople were ultimately about resolving what relationship Christ had to God. However, coming to a consensus on that question was only half the battle. As the relationship of Christ to God came into focus, the question turned to the relationship of Christ to humanity.
- B. **Alexandria and Antioch.** Two schools of thought developed concerning this question of Christology. In Alexandria, emphasis was given to the unity of the divine and human in Christ. In Antioch, emphasis was given to the distinction between the divine and human in Christ. These perspectives focused on the ideas of person and nature and whether Christ had one or two of each.
- C. **Alexandrian heresies: Apollinarianism and Eutychianism.** Apollinarius was a leader in Alexandria during the time of Athanasius. He believed that the way that the divine and human united in Christ was by the divine taking the place of a human soul in Christ. His position was condemned at the Council of Constantinople in 381. Eutyches was a pastor in Constantinople in the mid 400's. He believed that the human nature of Christ became mixed with or swallowed up by His divine nature so that Christ only had one nature (aka Monophysitism).

- D. **Antiochene heresy: Nestorianism.** Nestorius was the bishop of Constantinople in the early 400's and was bothered by the language that called Mary the "Mother of God." He believed it was more appropriate to call Mary the "Mother of Christ" and emphasized the Antiochene distinction between the divine and human in Christ. His opponents believed that he went so far as to claim that there are two persons in Christ as well. It is doubtful that Nestorius himself truly believed that there were two persons in Christ, but this conception became identified with Nestorianism.

## II. *Three Councils*

- A. **The Council of Ephesus (431).** The Alexandrian party arrived first to the city and convened without the majority of the Antiochene party present. They condemned Nestorianism and excommunicated Nestorius. Four days later, the Antiochene party arrived and held their own council to denounce Cyril, the bishop of Alexandria, and the declarations made four days prior, although they did not explicitly defend Nestorius. The emperor sided with the Alexandrian party, and many Nestorian churches separated from the church; some exist to this day. Despite the rancor and underhanded actions of the council, a compromise position was made between Cyril and leading Antiochenes just two years later. However, some were unhappy with the compromise.
- B. **The Council of Robbers (449).** Eutyches was a prominent member of the Alexandrian party unhappy with the compromise and vocally promoted his beliefs. His view was denounced by the bishop of Rome, Leo I, in a letter outlining the position that Christ is one person in two natures. Eutyches was denounced and deposed in 448 at a regional synod in Constantinople by Flavian, the current bishop of Constantinople. The successor to Cyril in Alexandria, a man named Dioscurus, was also unhappy with the compromise and persuaded the emperor to call a council in Ephesus in 449. Dioscurus used force and intimidation to exonerate Eutyches at the council. The violence was so bad that Flavian died from injuries he received while attending the council. The anti-Eutychian side was not given a voice at the council, not even the letter of Leo. The scandal of the proceedings of the council earned it the name, "Council of Robbers."
- C. **The Council of Chalcedon (451).** After a new emperor rose to power, a council was called in Chalcedon to counteract the decision of the Council of Robbers. At Chalcedon, Dioscurus was excoriated and deposed for his role in the death of Flavian. The council upheld the teachings of Cyril against Nestorianism and the letter of Leo against Eutychianism and produced the Definition of Chalcedon, that espouses the one person and two nature view of Leo. The definition of the council did not immediately end the controversy surrounding Monophysitism. Eventually, the sects of Monophysites also separated from the church, and some of those churches continue to exist today.

## Emphases and Theology of the Creed

### I. *The Humanity of Christ*

- A. **The Scriptural basis for Christ having a human nature.** The Scriptural testimony to the humanity of Christ is voluminous and obvious, yet He is also so unique in that He is God in the flesh, that some have had difficulty confessing that He was truly a man. Christ's humanity is demonstrated by his human descent recorded in the genealogies and that He was born of Mary (**Matt. 1; Luke 3:23-38**), by his exhibition of human qualities (**Luke 2:40, 52; 22:44; Matt. 4:2; John 4:6**), and by the clear testimony and argument of the apostles (**1 Cor. 15:21; Rom. 5:15-17; 1 John 4:2; Heb. 2:5-18**). To confess faith in Christ, we must confess that He is truly a man.

- B. **The extent of Christ's human nature.** One of the rallying cries of theologians in arguing for the true humanity of Christ was "that which He does not assume, He does not redeem," which means that if Jesus did not possess everything that makes one a human being, then He could not redeem human beings (**Heb. 2:17**). In particular, this was used against Apollinarianism to prove that Jesus must have a human soul. Part of the way Chalcedon emphasizes this is by confessing that Christ has a reasonable soul and is consubstantial with us. Christ's reasonable soul consists in Him having true human rationality and will. He is consubstantial with us in that, everything that we possess that makes us human, He possesses as well. The difference between the consubstantiality He has with God and with us is that there is only one instance of the nature of God and so makes Him one with the Father and Spirit, whereas there are many instances of the nature of man and He merely becomes one more instance among many.
- C. **Safeguarding Christ's human nature.** There is, however, an additional aspect of confessing Christ's true human nature that is necessary. Eutyches believed that Christ took to Himself a true human nature in every respect, but he also believed that the union of the human nature with the divine caused the human nature to be changed into something greater. Though this pays lip service to the idea of Christ's humanity, it falsifies His human characteristics. It also invalidates the vicariousness of Christ's work on our behalf. It is impossible for Christ to keep the law and suffer in our place if He does so as one who is completely different from us as humans. It is not enough for Christ to have taken what was once a human nature and then elevate it, it must continue to be a true human nature at every point.
- D. **Distinguishing Christ's human nature from His divine nature.** The Antiochene conception of two natures in Christ that must be distinguished is essential to a proper understanding of the incarnation. If there is a mixing or confusion of the natures, it creates problems in our theology. We must either conclude that the divine nature, which cannot change or suffer, does undergo change and suffering as it is mixed with the human nature or we must conclude that any talk of human qualities in Christ is an anthropomorphism that is not actually true. Distinguishing between the natures allows us to acknowledge that it is true that Christ could be hungry or tired according to His human nature while also confessing that the divine nature in no way becomes less than what it is by becoming changeable. In the incarnation, the union of the two natures does not mean that the human nature becomes divinized or that the divine nature becomes humanized, but both retain what properly belongs to each.

## II. *The Person of Christ*

- A. **One person.** Contrasted to the two natures in Christ, He is only one person. There are not two different people inside of Christ, one acting at some times and the other acting at other times or one dominant person and the other passive. Against the language of some Nestorians, there is nothing to indicate that there is the Son of God on the one hand and a distinct Son of Mary on the other. The Scripture uniformly testifies that Christ is one person.
- B. **The origin of the person.** Having established that Christ is one person in two natures, a further question is raised about the relation of this person to the natures. Is the person of Christ human, divine, or a mix of the two? Claiming that the person of Christ is divine and human creates a similar problem to this idea regarding the natures, in that rather than having a person that is both divine and human, you have one that is neither. It is also clear that we cannot confess that the person of Christ is human because that would mean that His person did not exist prior to His

human birth. The testimony of Scripture is that the person of Christ is the same as the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God (**John 1:14; 8:58; 17:5; 1 Cor. 15:47; Phil. 2:6-8**). Therefore, we confess that the one person of Christ is an eternal, divine person.

### III. *Relating the Person of Christ to His Natures*

- A. **Attributing to the person what is true of the natures.** It is in the one person that there is a unity between the two natures. Because of the union in the divine person, attributes of the human nature can be attributed to the divine. For example, **Acts 20:28** states that the church was purchased by the blood of God. God does not have blood, but by the unity of the divine and human natures in the person of the Son, the divine person possessed blood in His human nature. Similarly, **1 Cor. 2:8** states that the Lord of Glory was crucified, but God cannot suffer, be crucified, or die. Yet, the divine person of Christ died according to His human nature. This also helps explain when Jesus states that He does not know the time of His coming (**Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32**). We have trouble with this because God is all-knowing, but a human cannot be. So, while it is true that Christ, according to His divine nature must have the knowledge of the time of His coming, according to His human nature, He must be ignorant of some things, and the time of His coming is one of those things. The incarnation does not cause a change or a muting of the divine nature in Christ, but neither does the truth of His divinity overshadow the truth of His humanity.
- B. **The impeccability of Christ.** Although there is agreement among theologians about the sinlessness of Christ, there is disagreement, even among the Reformed, as to whether He was able to sin. Many argue that there must have been a possibility for Christ to sin for His temptations to have meaning, for Him to be tempted as we are (**Heb. 4:15**), and for Him to be truly human. It is true that this issue is difficult to resolve from explicit declarations of Scripture, but from what we have already observed, we can see that the testimony of Scripture is that Christ could not have sinned. Sin requires a corruption of the will or nature. There can be no corruption of nature because Christ was born without the taint of original sin, so, like for Adam, any corruption must come from willing to sin. Although there are two wills in Christ, both are exercised by the divine person, who cannot desire and choose to sin.

### Applying the Creed

- I. **Proper Conduct in the Church.** The history of this dispute is scandalous. Church leaders became involved in underhanded and murderous actions. We must not allow ourselves to compromise Christian conduct and charity in theological disputes. While we must stridently oppose sin and error in the church, we must do so in the right way and never believe that the ends justify the means.
- II. **The Seed of Heresy.** Heresy almost always comes from a desire to emphasize something that is true. Apollinarianism came from wanting to emphasize the divinity and sinlessness of Christ. Nestorianism came from wanting to safeguard the eternal existence of the divine person of Christ. However, an overemphasis of the truth that tramples on other aspects of the truth leads to error. We must be careful not to allow logical deductions from one aspect of the truth overshadow what else the Scriptures have to say. We should also be able to have more sympathy for why some fall into error.
- III. **Worshiping the God-Man.** Understanding the union of the human and divine in Christ should aid us in our worship and comfort us in the Christian life. Christ was not above the frailties and difficulties of human life. He is able to sympathize with us and He has undergone the trials of this life yet, He has been exalted in our nature, guaranteeing that we who have faith will be glorified as well.