

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

CHRISTOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ

UNIT 4: THE HYPOSTATIC UNION — TWO NATURES IN ONE PERSON

Lesson 13

The Knowledge and Will of Christ

What Did Jesus Know, and How Did His Two Wills Operate?

The Chalcedonian Framework Applied to the Most Difficult Christological Questions

Key Texts: Luke 2:52; Mark 13:32; John 21:17; Colossians 2:3; Luke 22:42; John 6:38; Hebrews 5:8

“Not My Will, but Yours Be Done”

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SERIES VERSE

*“For we do not preach ourselves
but Christ Jesus as Lord,
and ourselves as your bond-servants
on account of Jesus.”*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:5, NASB 1995

INTRODUCTION

The Chalcedonian definition, two natures in one Person, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, provides the church with the most precise available framework for understanding the Person of Christ. But the framework, however precise, does not resolve every christological question by itself. It establishes the ontological structure; it does not exhaust the theological analysis. The most demanding questions that arise from the Chalcedonian structure, the questions that press hardest on the careful pastor and theologian who is trying to preach Christ faithfully, are precisely the questions addressed in this lesson: What did Jesus know? And how did His two wills operate in relation to each other?

These are not questions of idle speculation. The knowledge of Christ is pressed upon the pastor every time he reads a text in which Jesus claims exhaustive divine knowledge (John 21:17: “You know all things”; Colossians 2:3: “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”) alongside a text in which Jesus apparently operates within genuinely human cognitive limitations (Luke 2:52: “Jesus kept increasing in wisdom”; Mark 13:32: “Nor the Son”, the Son does not know the day or hour of His return). Both sets of texts must be preached faithfully; neither can be explained away. The question is how a coherent, Chalcedonian account of both can be maintained.

The two wills of Christ press upon the pastor with equal urgency every time he reads or preaches the Gethsemane narrative: “Not My will, but Yours be done” (Luke 22:42, NASB 1995). The prayer presupposes two wills, a human will that recoils from the cup of the cross and a divine will (the Father’s) to which it submits. But how do these two wills relate? Is the human will of Christ simply a passive instrument of the divine will? Or is it a genuinely active, genuinely personal will that makes genuine moral choices in genuine dependence on the Father? And how does the relationship of the two wills in Gethsemane illuminate the obedience of Christ throughout His entire incarnate life? This lesson works through each of these questions with the care and the theological precision they deserve, always in the service of the pastoral goal that gives all christological inquiry its proper motivation: knowing Christ and making Him known.

I. THE DIVINE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST

All the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge Are Hidden in Him

A. The Explicit Affirmations of Christ’s Omniscience

The New Testament’s testimony to the divine omniscience of Christ is consistent, multifaceted, and unambiguous. John 21:17 records Peter’s third confession of love to the risen Christ, in which the

pained recognition of being known completely forces from him the acknowledgment: “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You” (NASB 1995). The phrase “You know all things” (σὺ πάντα οἶδας, *sy panta oidas*) is not an expression of spiritual perception or heightened intuition; it is a direct attribution of exhaustive knowledge to the risen Christ.

Colossians 2:3 grounds this omniscience in the Person of Christ comprehensively: in Him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (NASB 1995). The comprehensive scope of “all the treasures” (πάντες οἱ θησαυροί, *pantes hoi thēsauroi*) and the two-dimensional description of wisdom and knowledge together establish that there is no dimension of understanding, no area of reality, no fact or truth that lies outside the knowledge of the incarnate Son. John 2:24–25 provides the narrative confirmation: “Jesus... knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man” (NASB 1995). The knowledge of what is in man, the deepest thoughts, motivations, and conditions of every human heart, is attributed to Jesus without qualification or limitation.

The divine omniscience of Christ is not merely an attribute He exercises as the risen, ascended Lord; it is present throughout the Gospel narrative in the incarnate life. He knew the thoughts of the scribes without being told (Mark 2:8). He knew that Judas would betray Him from the beginning (John 6:64). He knew the history of the Samaritan woman at the well before she spoke it (John 4:17–19). He knew the location of the coin in the fish’s mouth (Matthew 17:27). The pattern is consistent: the incarnate Christ operates with a knowledge that exceeds the capacities of ordinary human cognition, because He is not merely an ordinary human being, but the eternal Son who has “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” hidden in Him.

B. The Claim of Exhaustive Knowledge and Its Significance for the Gospel

The soteriological significance of Christ’s divine omniscience is concentrated in its relation to the priestly and salvific dimensions of His work. The High Priest who intercedes for His people before the Father must know them perfectly, their sins, their weaknesses, their needs, their circumstances, their temptations, and the specific graces that each requires at each moment of their pilgrim journey. The intercession of a High Priest of limited knowledge would be correspondingly limited: he could not petition for what he did not know was needed. The omniscience of Christ ensures that His intercession is not only perpetual (Hebrews 7:25) but perfectly informed: He knows every believer with an exhaustiveness that no created being could achieve, and He intercedes for each with the perfect specificity that exhaustive knowledge alone makes possible.

II. THE HUMAN KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST

Jesus Kept Increasing in Wisdom, The Genuine Development of the Incarnate Mind

A. Luke 2:52 and the Growth of Christ's Human Knowledge

The most direct and the most theologically consequential statement about Christ's human knowledge is Luke 2:52: "And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (NASB 1995). The imperfect tense of *προέκοπτεν* (*proekopten*, "kept increasing") indicates a continuous, progressive, ongoing development, not a single event but a sustained trajectory of intellectual, physical, spiritual, and social growth. The growth is four-dimensional and comprehensive: intellectual (wisdom), physical (stature), spiritual (in favor with God), and relational (in favor with men). The growing twelve-year-old of Luke 2:40–52 is not a divine being performing the appearance of intellectual growth; He is genuinely growing, genuinely developing, genuinely learning.

Hebrews 5:8 extends the affirmation of genuine human learning into the moral and spiritual dimension: "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered" (NASB 1995). The phrase "learned obedience" (*ἐμαθεν ἀφ' ὧν ἔπαθεν τὴν ὑπακοήν*, *emathen aph' hōn epathen tēn hypakoēn*) is one of the most theologically precise statements about the human development of Christ in all of Scripture. He "learned" (*ἐμαθεν*, *emathen*), the same Greek word used for the acquisition of knowledge through experience. He learned obedience, not from prior theoretical knowledge of what obedience requires, but from the actual experience of obeying in costly circumstances, "from the things which He suffered". The obedience of the incarnate Son was not a pre-formed virtue downloaded from His divine nature into His human consciousness; it was a genuinely earned, experientially acquired virtue that grew through the discipleship of suffering.

B. Mark 13:32 and the Limits of Christ's Human Knowledge

The most exegetically difficult statement about the knowledge of Christ in all of the New Testament is Mark 13:32: "But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone" (NASB 1995). The declaration that "the Son" does not know the day or hour of the eschaton has generated a long history of theological discussion and a range of interpretive proposals. For those committed to the full deity of Christ, who affirm that the divine nature of the Son is omniscient, the statement creates an apparent contradiction with Colossians 2:3 ("all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge") and John 21:17 ("You know all things").

Several interpretive responses have been proposed. The most historically significant is the two-natures interpretation: the statement refers to the limited knowledge of Christ's human nature, not to the omniscience of His divine nature. On this account, the divine nature of the Son knew the day and hour exhaustively; but in His human nature, He did not have access to that specific piece of knowledge, because the Father had not given it to Him for the purposes of His incarnational mission. This is not a contradiction with the omniscience of the divine nature; it is an expression of the genuine limitations of the human nature in the state of humiliation, in which the Son chose not to exercise His divine omniscience through His human nature in a way that bypassed the genuine processes of human cognition and divine-human relationship.

A complementary interpretation, not incompatible with the two-natures account, reads the “Nor the Son” as referring not to the Son’s knowledge in His divine nature but to the Son’s communicative mandate: He has not been commissioned to reveal that information, even if He knows it. On this reading, the statement is similar to Acts 1:7 (“It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority”, NASB 1995), not a denial of omniscience but a declaration about what has been disclosed and what has been reserved for the Father’s own timing. Whether one prefers the first or the second interpretation, both are consistent with the full deity of the Son and with the Chalcedonian framework.

“And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” | “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.”

LUKE 2:52; HEBREWS 5:8, NASB 1995

III. RECONCILING THE TWO: THE CHALCEDONIAN FRAMEWORK APPLIED TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST

How Two Complete and Distinct Natures Account for Both the Omniscient and the Growing Christ

A. The Two-Natures Framework as the Key

The Chalcedonian framework, two complete and distinct natures united in one Person without confusion or mixture, provides the conceptual tools for holding the divine omniscience and the genuine human cognitive development of Christ together without contradiction. The key is the principle that each nature retains its own properties: the divine nature is omniscient; the human nature grows in knowledge through the ordinary processes of human intellectual development. These two sets of properties are not contradictory; they belong to different natures, and the Chalcedonian “without confusion” protects their distinction.

The question of how the divine omniscience and the human cognitive growth are related in the one Person of the Son is a question that the Chalcedonian definition does not fully resolve, it establishes the framework within which the question must be answered, but it does not provide a mechanical account of the relationship between the two modes of knowing. Various proposals have been made across the tradition. Some have proposed a “superconsciousness” model in which the divine knowledge is always present in the Son’s Person but is not always accessible to the human consciousness. Others have proposed an “intuitive knowledge” model in which the human nature of Christ has a unique and elevated cognitive relationship with the divine that exceeds ordinary human cognition without being identical to divine omniscience. The tradition has not settled on a single account, and wise theological humility is appropriate at this point.

B. What Is Clear and What Must Be Held in Tension

What is clear from the biblical testimony and the Chalcedonian framework is this: (1) the divine nature of Christ is omniscient; (2) the human nature of Christ genuinely grew in knowledge through the ordinary processes of human cognitive development; (3) these two modes of knowing belong to different natures and are united in the one Person of the Son without mixture or confusion; (4) the omniscience of the divine nature did not automatically supply the human nature with exhaustive knowledge in a way that bypassed genuine human intellectual development; and (5) the human cognitive limitations of Christ were real in His human nature and were the expression of the genuine humanity of the Son rather than a deficiency in the divine nature.

What must be held in tension without premature resolution is the precise mechanism by which the divine omniscience and the human cognitive development relate in the one Person. Chalcedonian Christology establishes that both are real, that neither overrides the other, and that the two-natures framework is the space within which the tension must be held. It does not provide a philosophical system that eliminates the mystery, and the mystery is appropriate, because the incarnation itself is the most astonishing reality in the history of the universe, and the expectation that it should be fully comprehensible by creaturely minds is itself theologically presumptuous. The pastor who holds the tension faithfully, affirming both the omniscience and the genuine growth, both Colossians 2:3 and Luke 2:52, both John 21:17 and Mark 13:32, is the pastor who is being most faithful to the full range of the New Testament's christological testimony.

IV. THE TWO WILLS OF CHRIST: DYOTHELITISM AND ITS BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

The Third Council of Constantinople (681 AD) and the Completion of the Chalcedonian Settlement

A. The Dyothelite Doctrine Defined

The doctrine of Dyothelitism (from the Greek *dyo*, "two," and *thēlema*, "will") holds that Christ possesses two complete, distinct wills, a divine will and a human will, corresponding to the two natures that the Council of Chalcedon defined. The doctrine was formally defined at the Third Council of Constantinople (681 AD), in direct response to the Monothelite heresy (the claim that Christ has only one will) examined in Lesson 11. Dyothelitism is not an optional refinement of Chalcedonian Christology; it is the necessary completion of the Chalcedonian settlement, because the claim that Christ has only one nature (Monophysitism) and the claim that Christ has only one will (Monothelitism) stand or fall together: if two complete natures entail two complete wills, then one will implies one nature, and the Chalcedonian two-natures definition requires the Dyothelite two-wills conclusion.

The Dyothelite doctrine is grounded in the Chalcedonian principle that each nature retains its own properties. Will (θέλημα, *thēlema*) is a natural faculty, a property of nature rather than of person. The divine nature has a divine will; the human nature has a human will. Since the Chalcedonian definition affirms two complete, unconfused natures in Christ, it entails two complete, unconfused natural wills. Maximus the Confessor’s argument, examined in Lesson 11, establishes this with decisive force: “Will is a faculty of nature, not of person.” If will were a faculty of person, Monothelitism would be correct, because there is only one Person in Christ. But since will is a faculty of nature, and there are two complete natures in Christ, there are two wills.

B. The Biblical Foundation: The Gethsemane Prayer

The primary biblical text for the Dyothelite doctrine is the Gethsemane prayer of Luke 22:42: “Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done” (NASB 1995). The prayer is structurally a two-will statement: there is “My will” (the human will of Christ, which recoils from the cup of the cross) and “Yours” (the divine will of the Father, to which the human will submits). The two wills are genuinely distinct, they are not identical, because if they were, the prayer would be vacuous (“Not what I will, which is exactly what You will, but what You will”). They are genuinely distinct, and the human will genuinely recoils from what the divine will has purposed.

The prayer also establishes the proper relationship between the two wills: not conflict, not confusion, but perfect voluntary submission. The human will of Christ does not silently comply with the divine will as a passive instrument; it actively, personally, and freely submits (“yet not My will, but Yours be done”). The submission is costly, the cup from which the human will recoils is the cup of the full weight of divine wrath against the sin of the elect, the most extreme experience of human anguish conceivable, and it is chosen. The human will of Christ in Gethsemane is not coerced into submission by the divine will; it freely and deliberately chooses submission in the most difficult moment of the entire incarnate life. This is the most morally significant act in the history of the universe: the human will of the Son of God, freely and fully choosing to submit to the Father’s will in the face of the most extreme human suffering imaginable.

C. John 6:38 and the Pattern of the Two Wills Throughout the Incarnate Life

The Gethsemane prayer is the most dramatic expression of the two-will relationship, but it is not an isolated occurrence. John 6:38 provides the programmatic statement of the pattern that governs the entire incarnate life: “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (NASB 1995). The statement presupposes the existence of a “My own will” (τὸ θέλημα τὸ ἐμὸν, *to thēlema to emon*) that is distinct from the will of the Father, if there were only one will, the statement would be meaningless. But it also declares the permanent, governing orientation of the human will of Christ throughout the incarnation: not to do His own will, but the Father’s. The submission of the human will to the divine will is not merely a crisis-moment response in Gethsemane; it is the defining posture of the entire incarnate life, from the first moment of self-conscious obedience to the last breath on the cross.

This programmatic submission of the human will to the divine will is the christological ground of the active obedience. Every act of obedience in the incarnate life, every moment of submission to the Mosaic law, every encounter with temptation, every act of prayer and dependence on the Father, every instance of perfect love for neighbor, is the free, deliberate, costly choice of the human will of Christ to do the Father's will rather than its own. The active obedience is not the automatic expression of the divine nature operating through a passive human instrument; it is the genuine human obedience of a genuinely human will that freely and consistently chooses the Father's will. This is what makes the obedience of Christ genuinely representative: it is genuinely human obedience, performed by a genuinely human will, on behalf of genuinely human sinners who have consistently failed to render the same obedience.

"Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."

LUKE 22:42, NASB 1995

V. THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE TWO WILLS: NOT CONFLICT BUT PERFECTED SUBMISSION

Gethsemane as the Paradigm and the Theological Logic of the Human Will's Submission

A. The Wills Are Genuinely Distinct but Never in Ultimate Conflict

The Dyothelite doctrine, properly understood, does not posit two wills in Christ that are in permanent tension or unresolved conflict. The two wills are genuinely distinct, they are the wills of two different natures, each complete and each possessing its own natural appetites and orientations. But the human will of Christ, while genuinely distinct from the divine will and genuinely possessing the natural human recoiling from suffering and death that the Gethsemane prayer expresses, is always and perfectly aligned with the divine will in the deepest dimension of its personal orientation. The two wills do not conflict in the sense of producing two competing volitional outcomes; they are always, in the end, united in the one decision of the one Person.

The distinction is subtle but important. In Gethsemane, the human will of Christ genuinely recoils from the cup, this is not a performance, not a theatrical expression of what a human being would feel in the circumstances. The genuine human aversion to suffering and death that every human being possesses, and that Christ's perfectly human nature possessed fully, expresses itself in the first clause of the prayer: "Remove this cup from Me." This is the genuinely human will speaking genuinely. But the human will of the one who is also the eternal Son of God immediately orients itself back toward the Father's will in the second clause: "yet not My will, but Yours be done." The submission is free, deliberate, and final. The two clauses do not describe two alternating volitional outcomes; they

describe one act of willing that is genuinely human (acknowledging what the human nature recoils from) and genuinely obedient (submitting the human will to the divine will in the deepest personal commitment of the Son).

B. Hebrews 5:8 and Learning Obedience

Hebrews 5:8 provides an additional dimension of the Dyothelite picture: “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered” (NASB 1995). The obedience that Christ “learned” through suffering is not information that He lacked about the content of obedience; it is the habituated, experientially formed virtue of obedience that develops through the sustained practice of choosing the Father’s will over the cost of submission. In the long discipline of the incarnate life, through hunger, weariness, rejection, betrayal, and the increasing intensity of the suffering that culminates in the cross, the human will of Christ was formed in the virtue of obedience through the sustained experience of choosing it at cost.

This is not a description of moral improvement in the sense of moving from a state of disobedience toward a state of obedience; Christ was never disobedient. It is a description of the deepening and strengthening of the obedience virtue through experience, the way in which any virtue is formed not merely by knowing it abstractly but by practicing it concretely. The obedience of the garden of Gethsemane is the culmination of a lifetime of learned obedience: the human will that chose the Father’s will in the most extreme circumstance imaginable had been choosing it consistently through every lesser circumstance of the entire incarnate life. The virtue that expressed itself in the “yet not My will, but Yours be done” of Luke 22:42 was not spontaneously acquired in Gethsemane; it was the fruit of three decades of learned obedience.

C. The Soteriological Significance: Representative Human Obedience

The Dyothelite account of the two wills has direct and profound soteriological implications, because the active obedience that grounds the imputed righteousness of the believer in justification must be genuinely human obedience. The law that Christ obeyed on behalf of His people is the law given to human beings, it requires human obedience, rendered by a human will, in genuine human circumstances of moral responsibility. If the active obedience of Christ were the automatic expression of the divine nature operating through a passive human instrument rather than the free choice of a genuine human will, it would not be the kind of obedience that can be imputed to genuinely human sinners. The imputed righteousness would be the expression of divine omnipotence rather than the fruit of human obedience, and the righteousness required for justification is specifically human righteousness, not divine omnipotence.

The Dyothelite doctrine ensures that the active obedience of Christ is genuinely human: it is the obedience of a genuinely human will, freely and deliberately choosing the Father’s will in genuinely human circumstances, through the entire span of the incarnate life. The righteousness that is imputed to the believer in justification is therefore the righteousness of a genuine human being who kept the

law perfectly, not merely the righteousness of the divine nature that was incapable of violating it. This makes the imputed righteousness maximally representative: it is the righteousness of a human will, the same kind of will that every human being possesses, that obeyed with the perfection that every human being was created to render and that no sinful human being has ever achieved.

VI. DOXOLOGICAL CONCLUSION: THE OBEDIENT SON AND THE GROUND OF OUR CONFIDENCE

The knowledge and will of Christ, examined in the light of the Chalcedonian framework, reveal a Person of inexhaustible theological depth and inexhaustible pastoral richness. The omniscience that knows all things and the genuine human growth that learned wisdom through the experience of the incarnate life are both real, both valuable, and both necessary for the gospel to be what the New Testament declares it is. The divine omniscience ensures that the intercession is perfectly informed; the genuine human cognitive growth ensures that the sympathetic High Priest has learned from the inside what it costs to grow in faithfulness through the discipline of suffering.

The divine will that willed the redemption of the elect from eternity and the human will that freely, deliberately, and at enormous personal cost chose to accomplish it in time are both real, both necessary, and both morally significant. The divine will that ordained the cross and the human will that chose it in Gethsemane are the two dimensions of the most important decision in the history of the universe, and the significance of the decision depends on the genuineness of both. A Christ who had only a divine will would have gone to the cross by divine necessity rather than human choice; the active obedience would not have been genuinely human, and the imputed righteousness would not have been the kind of righteousness that human sinners need. A Christ who had only a human will without a divine would not have had the resources of the eternal divine purpose sustaining the human choice through the most extreme human suffering imaginable.

The pastoral conclusion that the Chalcedonian account of Christ's knowledge and will yields is the same pastoral conclusion to which every dimension of the Chalcedonian Christology leads: the confidence with which Hebrews 4:16 invites the struggling believer to "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace." The omniscient High Priest knows you perfectly, more completely than you know yourself. The one who learned obedience from the things He suffered knows what it costs to be you in your circumstances. And the one who said "Not My will, but Yours be done" in Gethsemane has secured, through the perfect human obedience of His human will, the righteousness that is now credited to your account. This is the gospel in its most fully christological form. This is the reason for the confidence. This is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Key Texts: *Luke 2:52; Mark 13:32; John 21:17; Colossians 2:3; John 2:24–25; John 6:38; Luke 22:42; Hebrews 5:8; Acts 1:7*

THEOLOGICAL TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Dyothelitism	<p>From Greek <i>dyo</i> ('two') and <i>thēlema</i> ('will'). The Christological doctrine, defined at the Third Council of Constantinople (681 AD), that Christ possesses two complete, distinct wills, a divine will and a human will, corresponding to His two natures. Against Monothelitism (one will), Dyothelitism holds that will is a faculty of nature rather than person: since Chalcedon defines two complete natures in Christ, two complete natural wills follow necessarily. The human will is genuinely distinct from the divine will, genuinely experiences the cost of submission, and freely aligns itself with the divine will in every moral act of the incarnate life. The Gethsemane prayer ('not My will, but Yours be done') is the paradigmatic Dyothelite text.</p>
Divine Omniscience of Christ	<p>The attribute of the divine nature of Christ by which the Son knows all things exhaustively, immediately, and infallibly. Established by John 21:17 ('You know all things'), Colossians 2:3 ('all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him'), and John 2:24–25 ('He knew all men... He Himself knew what was in man'). The divine omniscience of Christ is not merely a post-resurrection attribute; it is present throughout the incarnate life as the property of the divine nature. In the Chalcedonian framework, the omniscience belongs to the divine nature and operates through the one Person of the Son without being automatically transferred to the human nature as a mode of human cognition.</p>
Human Cognitive Development	<p>The genuine intellectual growth of Christ's human nature through the ordinary processes of human learning and experience, established by Luke 2:52 ('Jesus kept increasing in wisdom') and Hebrews 5:8 ('He learned obedience from the things which He suffered'). In the Chalcedonian framework, this genuine human cognitive development belongs to the human nature and does not contradict the omniscience of the divine nature, because the two natures each retain their own properties without confusion. The growth in wisdom is not a performance; it is the genuine intellectual maturation of the human nature of the Son.</p>
Mark 13:32 ("Nor the Son")	<p>The most exegetically difficult statement about Christ's knowledge: 'Of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.' Two orthodox interpretations: (1) The two-natures interpretation: the statement refers to the limited knowledge of the human nature, not the omniscience of the divine nature, the Father had not given the human nature of Christ access to that specific knowledge for the purposes of</p>

Term	Definition
	His incarnational mission. (2) The communicative mandate interpretation: the Son has not been commissioned to reveal that information, even if He knows it in His divine nature. Both interpretations are consistent with the full deity of the Son and the Chalcedonian framework.
Learned Obedience (Hebrews 5:8)	The description of Christ's human moral development in Hebrews 5:8: 'He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.' The obedience Christ 'learned' is not information He lacked about the content of obedience but the habituated, experientially formed virtue of obedience that develops through the sustained practice of choosing the Father's will at cost. Christ was never disobedient; the 'learning' is the deepening and strengthening of obedience virtue through concrete experience. The obedience of Gethsemane is the culmination of three decades of learned obedience, the fruit of a human will consistently choosing the Father's will through increasingly difficult circumstances.
Natural Will vs. Gnostic Will	A distinction developed in Byzantine Dyothelite theology, particularly by Maximus the Confessor: the natural will (θέλημα φυσικόν, <i>thēlema physikon</i>) is the spontaneous inclination of a nature toward its own good and perfection; the gnostic will (θέλημα γνωμικόν, <i>thēlema gnōmikon</i>) is the deliberative, choosing will that operates through practical reasoning in conditions of moral uncertainty. Maximus argued that Christ has two natural wills (divine and human) but no gnostic will, because the gnostic will involves deliberation under conditions of moral uncertainty, and Christ's human will always and immediately aligns with the divine will without deliberative uncertainty. The Gethsemane prayer expresses the natural human recoiling from suffering but not gnostic uncertainty about whether to submit.
Active Obedience	The theological term for Christ's lifelong, perfect obedience to the law of God on behalf of His people, the positive ground of the righteousness imputed to the believer in justification. The Dyothelite doctrine is directly relevant to the active obedience: the obedience must be genuinely human (rendered by a genuinely human will in genuinely human circumstances) to be representatively applicable to human sinners. The active obedience is not the automatic expression of divine omnipotence through a passive human instrument but the free, deliberate, costly choice of the human will of Christ to do the Father's will through the entire span of the incarnate life.
Voluntary Submission	The characterization of the relationship between Christ's human will and the divine will as free and deliberate rather than coerced or automatic. The submission of the human will to the divine will in Gethsemane is not compulsion; it is choice. The human will of Christ genuinely recoils from the cup (the first clause of the prayer), and then genuinely and freely chooses to submit to the Father's will (the second clause). The voluntary character of the submission is what makes it morally significant: an automatic submission

Term	Definition
	would not be the kind of obedience that constitutes a morally representative act on behalf of human sinners who are themselves called to voluntary obedience.
Proekopten	Greek imperfect of prokopto ('to advance,' 'to increase,' 'to make progress'). Used in Luke 2:52 to describe the continuous, progressive development of Jesus in wisdom and stature and favor with God and men. The imperfect tense is theologically significant: not a single event of growth but a continuous, ongoing developmental trajectory. Proekopten is the Lukan description of the genuine human cognitive, physical, spiritual, and relational development of the incarnate Son, a development that is real, not performative, and that belongs to the human nature of Christ as the natural expression of genuine human maturation.
Council of Constantinople III	The Third Ecumenical Council held in Constantinople in 680–681 AD, the sixth and final of the first seven ecumenical councils recognized by both Eastern and Western Christianity. Convened primarily to resolve the Monothelite controversy, Constantinople III defined Dyothelitism, two wills in Christ, as the orthodox position and condemned Monothelitism and its leading exponents (including, posthumously, Pope Honorius I, whose apparent endorsement of Monothelitism during his pontificate was formally censured). The council also vindicated Maximus the Confessor, who had suffered mutilation and exile for his Dyothelite convictions. Constantinople III represents the completion of the Chalcedonian christological settlement.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the tension between the divine omniscience and the genuine human cognitive development of Christ is not a theological problem to be resolved by diminishing one side or the other but a christological mystery to be held with the full weight of both sides maintained. The pastor who explains away Luke 2:52 (“Jesus kept increasing in wisdom”) by saying that the growth was only apparent, a performance for the benefit of observers, has moved toward Docetism and has evacuated the pastoral comfort of the sympathetic High Priest. The pastor who explains away the omniscience of John 21:17 and Colossians 2:3 by saying that Christ’s knowledge was simply human and subject to all human limitations has moved toward Ebionism and has undermined the perfectly informed intercession of Hebrews 7:25. Both sets of texts must be preached faithfully, and the Chalcedonian framework, two natures, each retaining its own properties, is the space within which both can be maintained without contradiction.

We must also believe that the two-wills doctrine is not a theological technicality but a pastoral necessity. The active obedience of Christ, the positive righteousness that grounds the believer's justification, must be genuinely human obedience, rendered by a genuinely human will, to be representatively applicable to human sinners. If the human will of Christ were merely a passive instrument of the divine will rather than a genuine active will that freely and deliberately chose the Father's will through the entire incarnate life, the active obedience would not be the kind of obedience that the doctrine of imputed righteousness requires. The Dyothelite doctrine is the theological foundation of the believer's justified standing before God.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

Let the Gethsemane prayer become the most personally moving christological text in your devotional canon. "Not My will, but Yours be done." This is not a casual expression of pious resignation; it is the most costly moral act in the history of the universe, performed by the human will of the Son of God in the face of the most extreme human suffering imaginable. The human will that said "yet not My will" had a will of its own that genuinely recoiled from the cup. The submission was real because the recoiling was real. And the submission was free because the human will of the Son is not a puppet of the divine will but a genuinely active, genuinely personal will that chose to align itself with the Father's will through the free exercise of its own volitional capacity.

Desire a congregation that understands the active obedience of Christ not merely as a theological doctrine but as the most personal and the most intimate ground of their assurance before God. The righteousness credited to their account in justification is not an abstraction; it is the righteousness of a human will, the same kind of will they possess, that consistently, freely, and at enormous personal cost chose the Father's will throughout the entire incarnate life. Every moment of temptation resisted, every act of costly love rendered, every prayer offered in dependence on the Father, every submission to the Father's will in difficult circumstances, all of it is now theirs by imputation. The active obedience is the most personal gift in the gospel.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Preach Luke 2:52 and Hebrews 5:8 with the full theological and pastoral weight of the genuine human development they describe. These texts are often bypassed in christological preaching in favor of the more dramatic divine-nature texts; but the congregation that has genuinely sat with the growing, learning, obedience-forming human development of Jesus will have a more robustly incarnational and more pastorally comforting Christology than the one that knows only the divine attributes. The one who 'learned obedience from the things which He suffered' is the High Priest who knows the cost of formation in obedience from the inside.
- Engage Mark 13:32 ('nor the Son') directly in your preaching. This text is frequently avoided because it is uncomfortable for those committed to the full deity of Christ; but the congregation that has never heard it addressed will be more vulnerable to the arguments of

those who use it against the orthodox Christology. Preach it with the two-natures framework clearly in view: the divine nature knew the day and hour; the human nature was not given that knowledge for the purposes of the incarnational mission. This is not a concession to the critics; it is the Chalcedonian account, and it is fully consistent with the full deity of the Son.

- Use the Gethsemane narrative as the primary preaching text for the Dyothelite doctrine. The most natural and the most pastorally powerful entry point into the two-wills doctrine is not a lecture on the Third Council of Constantinople but a close, meditative exposition of Luke 22:39–46. The two clauses of verse 42 (‘remove this cup from Me’ and ‘not My will, but Yours be done’) are the Dyothelite doctrine in narrative form. Preach them as what they are: the two-will relationship of the Chalcedonian Son in its most dramatic, most costly, and most consequential expression.
- Connect the active obedience explicitly to the Dyothelite account of the two wills in your preaching on justification. The believer whose justification rests on the imputed righteousness of Christ needs to understand that the righteousness being imputed is the righteousness of a genuinely human will, not the automatic expression of divine perfection operating through a passive human instrument. When you preach Romans 5:19 (‘through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous’, NASB 1995), explain that the ‘obedience’ is the obedience of a genuine human will, freely and consistently choosing the Father’s will through the entire incarnate life.
- Pray the Gethsemane prayer as a model of Christian submission to the will of God in your own most difficult circumstances. The prayer is not merely a christological datum; it is the pattern of Christian prayer in the face of what the believer most deeply recoils from. The Christian who has internalized the structure of Gethsemane, honest acknowledgment of what the human will wants (‘remove this cup’), followed by free and deliberate submission to the Father’s will (‘not My will, but Yours be done’), has in this prayer the most profound and the most personally honest form of Christian prayer available.

STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OPENING QUESTION

1. Have you ever been asked by a parishioner, a student, or a skeptic: ‘How could Jesus not know the day of His return (Mark 13:32) if He is God?’ How did you respond? Looking back on your prior response in the light of this lesson, what would you add, correct, or develop? What was the most significant theological resource you lacked before studying this lesson?

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DO THE TEXTS SAY?)

2. Read Luke 2:40–52 carefully. Identify the four dimensions of growth described in verse 52 (wisdom, stature, favor with God, favor with men). What does the imperfect tense of ‘kept increasing’ (proekopten) indicate about the nature of the growth? What does the episode of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple (vv. 41–50) reveal about the relationship between His genuine human development and His unique divine identity as ‘My Father’s business’ (v. 49)?
3. Read Colossians 2:1–3 and John 21:15–17. In Colossians 2:3, what is the specific claim Paul makes about the knowledge hidden in Christ, how comprehensive is the scope (‘all the treasures’)? In John 21:17, in what specific context does Peter make the attribution of exhaustive knowledge to Jesus, and what does the emotional weight of the narrative context suggest about the meaning of his attribution? How do these two texts together establish the divine omniscience of Christ?
4. Read Luke 22:39–46 and John 6:35–40. In Luke 22:42, identify the two distinct clauses of the prayer and explain what each reveals about the relationship between Christ’s human will and the Father’s divine will. In John 6:38, what does the phrase ‘not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me’ establish about the governing orientation of Christ’s human will throughout the incarnate life? How do these two texts together establish the Dyothelite doctrine?
5. Read Hebrews 5:1–10. What specific qualifications does the author identify for a high priest in verses 1–2, and how does Christ meet each of them? How does verse 8 (‘He learned obedience from the things which He suffered’) relate to the high-priestly qualification of verse 2 (‘He can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness’)? What does ‘learned obedience’ mean, is it a moral improvement, or something else?

INTERPRETATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT MEAN?)

6. The lesson presents two orthodox interpretations of Mark 13:32 (‘nor the Son’): (1) the two-natures interpretation (the statement refers to the limited knowledge of the human nature); (2) the communicative mandate interpretation (the Son has not been commissioned to reveal that information). Evaluate each interpretation. Which do you find more exegetically persuasive? Are the two interpretations mutually exclusive, or can they be held in complementary relationship? What would the Arian or peccabilist use this text to argue, and how would you respond?
7. Maximus the Confessor distinguished between the natural will (the spontaneous inclination of a nature toward its own good) and the gnostic will (the deliberative, choosing will that operates through practical reasoning in conditions of moral uncertainty). He argued that Christ has two natural wills but no gnostic will, because the human will of Christ always immediately and without deliberative uncertainty aligns with the divine will. How does this distinction help account for the structure of the Gethsemane prayer, the genuine human recoiling from the cup (natural will) and the

immediate, free submission (perfect alignment without gnomic uncertainty)? Do you find this distinction persuasive?

8. The lesson argues that the Dyothelite account of the two wills is directly relevant to the doctrine of the active obedience and the imputed righteousness: the active obedience must be genuinely human obedience (rendered by a genuinely human will) to be representatively applicable to human sinners. How does this argument work? What would be lost in the doctrine of justification by imputed righteousness if the human will of Christ were merely a passive instrument of the divine will rather than a genuine active will that freely chose the Father's purpose?

9. The lesson holds in tension the divine omniscience (John 21:17; Colossians 2:3) and the genuine human cognitive development (Luke 2:52; Hebrews 5:8) of Christ, arguing that the Chalcedonian framework, two natures each retaining its own properties, is the space within which both can be maintained without contradiction. Some theologians argue that this tension is not a mystery to be held but a problem to be resolved, either by positing a reduced human omniscience (Jesus had essentially omniscient human knowledge) or by positing a reduced divine omniscience in the incarnation (a form of kenotic theology). Evaluate these alternative resolutions against the Chalcedonian approach. What is lost in each alternative?

10. The lesson describes the Gethsemane prayer as 'the most costly moral act in the history of the universe' and as the paradigm of the Dyothelite relationship between the two wills. What makes the Gethsemane prayer morally significant rather than merely formally significant? What would be required for the submission in Gethsemane to be a genuine moral act rather than a divine inevitability? How does the Dyothelite account of a genuinely human will that freely chose submission, rather than a single divine will that simply accomplished what it had purposed, preserve the genuine moral significance of the prayer?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT DEMAND OF US?)

11. The lesson recommends preaching Mark 13:32 ('nor the Son') directly, using the two-natures framework to address a text that is frequently avoided in evangelical preaching. Have you preached or taught from this text? If so, what approach did you take? If not, what has prevented you, theological uncertainty, concern about congregational confusion, or something else? Draft a brief outline (three to four points) of a sermon or teaching on Mark 13:32 that addresses the text honestly and explains the Chalcedonian resolution accessibly.

12. The lesson recommends using the Gethsemane narrative as the primary preaching text for the Dyothelite doctrine and as a model for Christian prayer in the face of what the believer most recoils from. Think of a specific difficult circumstance in your own life or ministry in which you have had to pray the equivalent of 'not My will, but Yours be done.' How does the Dyothelite account, the genuine human recoiling and the free, costly submission, illuminate the spiritual dynamics of that

kind of prayer? What would it mean to bring the congregation into that dynamic more explicitly through your preaching?

13. The lesson connects the Dyothelite doctrine to the active obedience and the imputed righteousness, arguing that the righteousness credited to the believer in justification is the righteousness of a genuinely human will that freely chose the Father's will throughout the incarnate life. How does this understanding of the active obedience, as the free choice of a genuinely human will rather than the automatic expression of divine perfection, affect the way you preach on justification? What would you say differently about the imputed righteousness if you incorporated this Dyothelite dimension explicitly?

14. This lesson completes Unit 4 on the Hypostatic Union (Lessons 10–13). Looking back over the four lessons of the unit, the Chalcedonian Definition, the Christological Heresies, the Impeccability of Christ, and the Knowledge and Will of Christ, what is the single most significant theological insight you have gained about the Person of Christ? How has it changed your preaching, your prayer, or your pastoral care? And as you look ahead to Unit 5 on the Sinless Life and Active Obedience of Christ (Lessons 14–15), what connections do you already see between the hypostatic union established in Unit 4 and the active obedience that Unit 5 will address?

PRAYER FOCUS

Open this lesson's prayer time with a meditative reading of Luke 22:39–46, the Gethsemane narrative in its fullness, from the entry into the garden to the departure to face the betrayer. Read it slowly, attending to every specific detail: the disciples who cannot stay awake, the removal to 'a stone's throw' from them, the kneeling, the sweat like drops of blood, the angelic strengthening, the return to find the disciples sleeping. Let the group enter as fully as possible into the scene: this is not a theological problem to be resolved but a historical event to be inhabited. This is the Son of God in the most extreme moment of His human life, bearing with His human will the full weight of what the divine will has purposed for the redemption of the world.

Spend time in adoration of the human will of Christ, the genuinely human, genuinely active, genuinely free will that said "not My will, but Yours be done" in the most costly moment of the most costly life ever lived. Adore the Son for the genuineness of the recoiling in the first clause: He did not go to the cross with grim stoicism or divine detachment; He went with a human will that knew what the cross would cost and asked whether there was another way. And adore Him for the genuineness of the submission in the second clause: He did not go to the cross under compulsion; He went by choice, the free, deliberate, irreversible choice of a human will that had been learning obedience from the things it had suffered for thirty years and was now ready to demonstrate that obedience in its ultimate form.

Pray specifically for the grace to model the structure of the Gethsemane prayer in your own prayer life and in your pastoral guidance of the congregation. Many believers, particularly those shaped by a piety that equates Christian maturity with the absence of honest acknowledgment of what the human will recoils from, have learned to suppress the first clause and offer only the second. But the Gethsemane prayer teaches a different pattern: honest, unashamed acknowledgment of what the human will wants ('remove this cup from Me'), followed by free and deliberate submission to the Father's will ('yet not My will, but Yours be done'). Pray that God would give your congregation this kind of honest, Gethsemane-shaped prayer, not the suppression of human desire but the free submission of human desire to the Father's purpose.

Close with the prayer of Gethsemane itself, spoken together not as a liturgical formula but as a living act of faith and submission, the prayer of the Son offered on behalf of all His people who, in their own lesser Gethsemanes, are learning to say the same:

"Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."

LUKE 22:42, NASB 1995

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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