

# 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 10

## The Chalcedonian Definition

### Two Natures, One Person

*The Most Precise Christological Formulation in the History of the Church*

*Key Texts: John 1:14; Colossians 2:9; 1 Timothy 2:5; Romans 1:3–4; The Chalcedonian Definition (451 AD)*

*“Truly God and Truly Man, Without Confusion, Without Change, Without Division, Without Separation”*

**Dr. Joshua Nichols**

*Pastor, Theologian, Author*  
faithfultotheword.com

#### 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

---

We have arrived, after nine lessons of foundational christological labor, at the doctrine that gathers up everything we have established about the Person of Christ and gives it its most precise and most defensible formulation. Unit 3 established the three great building blocks: the miracle of the incarnation (Lesson 6), the virgin birth as its historical mode of entry (Lesson 7), the genuine completeness of Christ's human nature (Lesson 8), and the full, undiminished deity of the Son (Lesson 9). The question that remains, the question that Christology must answer if it is to be both scripturally faithful and intellectually coherent, is the question of relationship: how do these two natures, so apparently different in their properties and so apparently incompatible in their demands, coexist in the one Person of Jesus Christ?

The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) is the church's most authoritative, most carefully wrought, and most universally received answer to that question. It is not the only christological council, and it did not settle every christological question; the debates continued long after 451, most notably in the Monothelite controversy of the seventh century. But Chalcedon represents the high-water mark of patristic christological precision, and the definition it produced has stood for fifteen centuries as the ecumenical boundary of orthodox Christology across Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant traditions. The pastor who has internalized the Chalcedonian definition has in his possession the most refined christological tool available for both the exposition of the New Testament's christological witness and the refutation of every ancient and modern distortion of that witness.

This lesson works through the Chalcedonian Definition phrase by phrase, examining the heretical pressures that produced each element of the definition and the biblical and theological convictions that each element is designed to protect. It then introduces the hypostatic union, the technical term for the christological reality the definition describes, and the *communicatio idiomatum* (communication of attributes) that flows from it. It engages the question of what the Council of Chalcedon is and is not claiming: it is not a philosophical system, not a speculative metaphysics, not an imposition of Greek categories on a Semitic Gospel; it is the church's most precise attempt to say, in the face of specific heretical distortions, what the apostolic testimony to Jesus Christ actually means.

## I. THE ROAD TO CHALCEDON: THE COUNCILS AND CONTROVERSIES THAT SHAPED THE DEFINITION

---

*Understanding Why the Church Needed This Precision and What It Cost to Achieve It*

## **A. Nicaea (325 AD): Establishing the Deity of the Son**

The Council of Chalcedon did not arise in a theological vacuum; it was the culmination of more than a century of increasingly intense christological controversy. The story begins at Nicaea in 325 AD, where the church confronted and condemned Arianism, the claim that the Son is a created being, however exalted, rather than the co-eternal, consubstantial God. Nicaea established the Trinitarian foundation on which all subsequent Christology would rest: the Son is homoousios (of the same substance) with the Father, begotten not made, very God of very God. Without Nicaea's establishment of the Son's full, unqualified deity, Chalcedon's definition of the hypostatic union would have been impossible: you cannot define the union of two natures in one Person unless you have first established that the Person is genuinely and fully divine.

The Constantinople I (381 AD) extended and clarified the Nicene settlement, condemning Apollinarianism (which denied Christ a complete human nature by replacing the human rational soul with the Logos) and affirming the full humanity of Christ against this truncation. Constantinople I also completed the Nicene Trinitarian theology by affirming the full deity of the Holy Spirit alongside the Father and the Son, a completion that provided the pneumatological context within which the incarnation (the Spirit's creative work in the virginal conception, the Spirit's anointing of the Son at baptism, the Spirit's sustaining of the incarnate life) could be properly understood.

## **B. Ephesus (431 AD): The Controversy Over Nestorianism**

The immediate antecedent of Chalcedon was the controversy that erupted in the early fifth century over the title Theotokos ("God-bearer" or "Mother of God") applied to the Virgin Mary. Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, objected to the title on the grounds that Mary was the mother of the human Christ, not of the divine Logos; he proposed Christotokos ("Christ-bearer") as a safer alternative. The debate quickly revealed that Nestorius held a Christology in which the divine and human natures of Christ were so sharply distinguished as to threaten the unity of the Person: his Christ appeared to be two persons, the divine Logos and the human Jesus, dwelling in moral and functional unity rather than a single hypostatic Person.

The Council of Ephesus (431 AD), under the leadership of Cyril of Alexandria, condemned Nestorianism and affirmed the Theotokos as the correct title for Mary, not primarily for Mariological reasons, but for Christological ones. The person born of Mary is the eternal Son of God; therefore Mary is rightly called the Mother of God (the bearer of the one who is God). The Theotokos affirmation protects the unity of the Person: there are not two Christs (one divine, one human) but one Christ who is both fully divine and fully human, so that what can be said of His humanity (He was born of Mary) can be predicated of the whole Person (God was born of Mary in the human nature of the Son).

## **C. Chalcedon (451 AD): The Definitive Settlement**

The Council of Chalcedon was convened in 451 AD under the Emperor Marcian to resolve a renewed Christological controversy in the wake of Ephesus. Eutyches, an elderly Alexandrian monk, had pushed Cyril's emphasis on the unity of Christ's Person to an extreme that effectively denied the integrity of the two natures: after the incarnation, he argued, Christ has only one nature, the human nature having been absorbed into the divine, like a drop of water in the ocean. This position, later called Monophysitism (from the Greek *monos*, one, and *physis*, nature) or Eutychianism, effectively denied the genuine humanity of Christ by dissolving it into the divine nature. A Christ with one post-incarnation nature that is predominantly divine is not genuinely human, and therefore cannot genuinely represent humanity, genuinely die the human death, or genuinely sympathize with human weakness.

Chalcedon gathered more than five hundred bishops from across the Christian world and, after extensive deliberation, produced a definition that steered between the Nestorian excess (dividing the Person) and the Eutychian excess (confusing the natures), affirming with maximum precision the orthodox christological conviction: two complete, unconfused, unchanging, undivided, inseparable natures in one undivided, indivisible Person. The definition is not a speculative philosophical system; it is a set of carefully constructed negatives that exclude the errors on both sides while preserving the full reality of both natures and the genuine unity of the Person.

## II. THE CHALCEDONIAN DEFINITION: TEXT AND ANALYSIS

---

*Reading the Most Important Christological Document in the History of the Church*

The Chalcedonian Definition is best understood by reading it in its own words and then examining its key phrases. The essential christological section of the definition reads as follows:

*Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and*

*subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ.*

### **A. “Complete in Godhead and Complete in Manhood”**

The definition begins with the most fundamental affirmation: the completeness of both natures. “Complete in Godhead” (τέλειον εἰς θεότητα, *teleion eis theotēta*), the Son’s divine nature is not diminished, modified, or partially retained at the incarnation; it is complete and entire. Against every kenotic theology that posited a reduction of the divine nature in the incarnation, Chalcedon insists that the Son brought the whole of His divine nature into the hypostatic union. “Complete in manhood” (τέλειον εἰς ἀνθρωπότητα, *teleion eis anthrōpōtēta*), the human nature is equally complete and entire. Against Apollinarianism (which denied the human rational soul) and Docetism (which denied the genuine physicality of Christ’s body), Chalcedon insists that everything that constitutes genuine human nature was assumed by the Son.

The specification “consisting also of a reasonable soul and body” is the direct anti-Apollinarian provision: the human nature of Christ includes both the material dimension (body) and the immaterial rational dimension (soul, the seat of intellect, emotion, and will). This provision is the direct application of Gregory of Nazianzus’s principle (“what has not been assumed has not been healed”) to the formal definition: the completeness of the assumption is stated explicitly in the definition so that no subsequent theology can claim the authority of Chalcedon for a partial or truncated account of Christ’s humanity.

### **B. “Truly God and Truly Man”: The Dual Homoousios**

The twin affirmations of the definition, “of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead” and “of one substance with us as regards his manhood”, represent a brilliant extension of the Nicene homoousios in two directions. Against Arianism, Nicaea had established that the Son is homoousios with the Father, of the same divine substance. Chalcedon now adds the second homoousios: the Son is also homoousios with us, of the same human substance. He is fully consubstantial with the Father in His divine nature, and fully consubstantial with us in His human nature.

The force of this dual consubstantiality is immense. The Son’s divine nature is not a divine-like approximation or a reduced form of deity; it is the same divine substance (οὐσία, *ousia*) as the Father. And the Son’s human nature is not a human-like approximation or a divine simulacrum of humanity; it is the same human substance as ours. He is genuinely divine in precisely the way the Father is divine, and He is genuinely human in precisely the way we are human. The Chalcedonian formula thus provides the ontological grounding for everything the New Testament says about Christ’s relation to both God and humanity: His capacity to reveal the Father (because He shares the divine substance), His capacity to represent and redeem humanity (because He shares the human substance), and His unique mediatorial position (because He and He alone shares both).

### C. “Like Us in All Respects, Apart from Sin”

The qualification “like us in all respects, apart from sin” (κατὰ πάντα ὡμοιον ἡμῖν χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας) is drawn directly from Hebrews 4:15 (“tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin”) and represents the Chalcedonian resolution of the question of how Christ can be genuinely human without being sinful. The human nature of Christ is genuinely, completely, identically human in every respect, with the single exception of sin. Sin is not a constitutive element of human nature as God created it; it is a corruption of human nature introduced by the fall. The unfallen human nature of Adam before the fall was genuinely human without being sinful; the human nature of Christ is the same, genuinely, completely human, but preserved by the sanctifying work of the Spirit from the corruption that sin has introduced into every other human being since Adam.

## III. THE FOUR CHALCEDONIAN NEGATIVES: THE BOUNDARIES OF ORTHODOX CHRISTOLOGY

---

*Without Confusion, Without Change, Without Division, Without Separation*

The most celebrated and most theologically precise element of the Chalcedonian Definition is the fourfold negative that describes the manner in which the two natures are united in the one Person of Christ. The definition declares that the two natures are recognized “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation” (ἀσυγχύτως, ἀτρέπτως, ἀδιαίρετως, ἀχωρίστως, asynchytōs, atreptōs, adiairetōs, achōristōs). The four adverbs function as a coordinate set of boundaries that together define the space within which orthodox Christology must operate.

### A. Without Confusion (ἀσυγχύτως, asynchytōs)

The first negative, “without confusion”, excludes the Eutychian and Monophysite error of blending the two natures into a single, composite nature that is neither purely divine nor purely human. If the two natures are confused, mixed together like two different paints that produce a third color, the result is a Christ who is neither genuinely God nor genuinely man but a third thing: a hybrid being whose divine nature has been modified by contact with humanity and whose human nature has been elevated by contact with divinity. Such a Christ cannot save, because the divine nature required for an atoning sacrifice of infinite value has been diluted, and the human nature required for genuine human representation has been transmuted into something no longer genuinely human.

The positive affirmation corresponding to the negative is the integrity of both natures: the divine nature retains all its divine properties (omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, immutability, eternity, impassibility in its divine mode) and the human nature retains all its human properties (genuine embodiment, genuine intellectual development, genuine emotional life, genuine susceptibility to suffering and death) without either set of properties being modified by contact with

the other. This is not a separation but a genuine union that nevertheless leaves both natures fully what they are.

### **B. Without Change (ἀτρέπτως, *atreptōs*)**

The second negative, “without change”, is closely related to the first and addresses the same Eutychian error from a slightly different angle. The two natures are united without either one being changed or transformed into the other or into something new. The divine nature is not changed by the incarnation into a human nature; the human nature is not changed by the union with the divine nature into a divine nature. Each nature remains what it is. The Word who was God (John 1:1) remains God in the incarnation (Colossians 2:9: “all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form”). The human nature assumed in the incarnation remains genuinely human throughout the incarnate life, the death, the resurrection, the ascension, and the eternal state. The union is permanent but the natures remain distinct.

The second negative also protects against a subtler error: the notion that the human nature of Christ was, so to speak, deified by its union with the divine, transformed into something more than human, elevated above ordinary human capacities by the contact with divinity. The Chalcedonian definition insists that the human nature of Christ is not a super-human or a deified human; it is a genuinely human nature, with all the properties of genuine humanity, that has been united to the divine Person without those properties being altered. The glorified human nature of the risen Christ is still genuinely human, it is human nature in its perfected, eschatological form, but it is human nature, not something different.

### **C. Without Division (ἀδιαιρέτως, *adiaretōs*)**

The third negative, “without division”, addresses the Nestorian error of dividing the one Person of Christ into two persons, each corresponding to one of the natures. On the Nestorian account, there is a divine person (the Logos) and a human person (Jesus of Nazareth), united in a moral and functional partnership rather than in a genuine hypostatic union. The “without division” excludes this: the two natures, however distinct and however fully themselves, are united in a single, undivided Person. There is one Christ, not two. The divine nature and the human nature belong to the same Person, the same subject of predication, the same “I” who speaks throughout the Gospel narratives.

The pastoral and soteriological importance of this negative is immense. If Christ were divided into two persons, the person who died on the cross would be the human Jesus, not the divine Logos, and the death of the human Jesus, however righteous, would not have the infinite value that the atonement requires. The atonement requires that the one who dies is genuinely God, not that the divine nature literally dies (the divine nature is not subject to death), but that the Person who dies in His human nature is the divine Person of the eternal Son. The “without division” protects this: the Person who died is not a separate human person but the one, undivided Person of the Son, dying in His human nature.

## D. Without Separation (ἀχωρίστως, achōristōs)

The fourth negative, “without separation”, complements the third and addresses the question of permanence: the hypostatic union is not a temporary arrangement, not a provisional divine condescension that will be reversed when the redemptive mission is accomplished. The union of the two natures in the one Person is permanent and irreversible. The risen, ascended, glorified Christ retains His human nature forever. He did not shed it at the resurrection; He retains it in its glorified form at the right hand of the Father. He will return in His human body. He will reign forever as the God-man, not as the pre-incarnate Logos divested of the human nature He temporarily wore.

The theological and pastoral significance of the permanence of the union cannot be overstated. The eternal intercession of Christ (Hebrews 7:25) is the intercession of the God-man, not of the pre-incarnate Logos. The beatific vision will be the vision of the God-man (John 17:24: “that they may see My glory”). The new creation will be the home of the God-man dwelling with His redeemed people (Revelation 21:3). The fact that the eternal Son has permanently assumed human nature means that human nature has been permanently elevated into the closest possible relationship with the divine, not by being divinized, but by being united, in the Person of the Son, to the divine nature that upholds all things.

*“Without confusion, without change, without division, without separation — | the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, | but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person.”*

**THE CHALCEDONIAN DEFINITION, 451 AD**

## IV. THE HYPOSTATIC UNION: WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT MEANS

*The Technical Term for the Most Astonishing Reality in the History of the Universe*

### A. Defining the Hypostatic Union

The phrase “hypostatic union” (ἐνωσις καθ’ ὑπόστασιν, henōsis kath’ hypostasin) is the classical theological term for the reality that the Chalcedonian Definition describes: two complete, distinct natures, fully divine and fully human, united in the one Person (hypostasis) of the eternal Son of God. The Greek word hypostasis (ὑπόστασις) means “underlying reality,” “substance,” or “person”, in the Trinitarian theology developed at Nicaea and Constantinople, it became the technical term for the individual, distinct Persons of the Trinity. The Father, Son, and Spirit are three hypostases (persons) in one ousia (essence/substance).

In the Chalcedonian christological context, hypostasis refers to the singular personal subject of the incarnate Son: the one “I” who is the subject of everything that can be said of Christ, whether said of

His divine nature or His human nature. The hypostatic union means that there is only one such personal subject in Christ, not two persons who cooperate, not a divine person alongside a human person, but a single, undivided, personal subject who subsists in two natures simultaneously. The human nature of Christ does not constitute a separate human person (hypostasis); it subsists in the Person of the eternal Son. This is what the Chalcedonian tradition calls enhypostasia: the human nature of Christ has its personal existence in the hypostasis of the Son, not in a hypostasis of its own.

## **B. Enhypostasia: The Human Nature Subsists in the Divine Person**

The doctrine of enhypostasia (sometimes rendered “enhypostasis” or “enhypostasism”) is one of the most important and most frequently misunderstood refinements of the Chalcedonian doctrine. It addresses the question of personal existence: if the human nature of Christ is genuinely and completely human, why doesn’t it constitute a separate human person alongside the divine Person of the Son? The answer lies in the distinction between nature (physis) and person (hypostasis): personhood is not simply a property of human nature as such; it is the mode of personal existence in which a nature subsists. In every other human being, the human nature subsists in its own personal subject (its own hypostasis). In Christ, uniquely, the human nature subsists not in a separate human hypostasis but in the already-existing hypostasis of the eternal Son.

This means that the human nature of Christ is genuinely, fully human in every respect, it is not depersonalized or impersonal; it is a nature with all the properties of genuine human nature, including genuine human consciousness, genuine human emotions, genuine human will, and genuine human experience. But the Person in whom this human nature subsists is the divine Person of the eternal Son, not a separate human person. The result is a genuine human being who is personally identical with the eternal Son of God, one Person, two natures, with the human nature finding its personal existence in the divine hypostasis. This is the christological mystery at the heart of the incarnation, and it is the theological precision that makes the Chalcedonian definition not merely an ecclesiastical formula but the most exact available description of the most astonishing reality in the history of the universe.

## **C. The Communicatio Idiomatum: Predication Across the Natures**

The hypostatic union has a crucial implication for the language in which we speak about Christ: the *communicatio idiomatum* (Latin: “communication of attributes”). Because the one Person of Christ subsists in two natures, the properties of both natures may be predicated of the one Person. This means that statements which are true of the divine nature can be made about the whole Person, and statements which are true of the human nature can be made about the whole Person. “The Son of God was born of Mary.” “The one who made all things wept at the tomb of Lazarus.” “God bought the church with His own blood” (Acts 20:28, NASB 1995). “He who is from heaven hungered.”

These statements are not strictly speaking true of either nature in isolation: the divine nature was not born of Mary (the divine nature has no beginning); it is not the divine nature that wept (the divine

nature is impassible). But they are genuinely true of the one Person, who subsists in the human nature through which He was born, wept, suffered, and died. The communicatio idiomatum does not mean that the divine and human properties are exchanged between the natures; it means that they are both truly attributable to the one Person who possesses both natures. The person who was born of Mary is the same Person who, in His divine nature, created all things. The statement “God was born of Mary” is not a category mistake; it is a precise statement about the one Person of the Son, who is fully divine and who, in His human nature, was born of Mary.

## V. CHALCEDON AND THE NEW TESTAMENT: THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION OF THE DEFINITION

---

*Why the Chalcedonian Definition Is Not Greek Philosophy Imposed on a Semitic Gospel*

### A. The New Testament’s Own Christological Tensions

One of the most common objections to the Chalcedonian Definition is that it represents the imposition of Greek philosophical categories (ousia, physis, hypostasis) on a Semitic Gospel that knew nothing of such abstractions and intended no such technical precision. The biblical writers, on this account, were simply narrating the story of Jesus; the Greek philosophical apparatus of Chalcedon is a later, culturally conditioned overlay that distorts the original message.

The objection fails for several reasons, the most fundamental of which is that the New Testament itself generates the tensions that Chalcedon is designed to resolve. The New Testament simultaneously affirms that Jesus is fully divine (John 1:1; 20:28; Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; Colossians 2:9) and genuinely human (Hebrews 2:14; 4:15; Luke 2:52); that He is the Creator of all things (Colossians 1:16) and a creature who was born, grew, and died; that He is omniscient (John 21:17; Colossians 2:3) and genuinely ignorant of the day of His return (Mark 13:32); that He is impassible in His divine nature and genuinely suffering in His humanity. The Chalcedonian Definition does not impose these tensions on the New Testament; it receives them from the New Testament and articulates a framework for holding them together without resolving them by diminishing either side.

### B. Romans 1:3–4 and John 1:14 as Chalcedonian Texts

Several New Testament texts implicitly express the two-natures structure that Chalcedon makes explicit. Romans 1:3–4 is perhaps the most striking: “concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord” (NASB 1995). The parallelism is precise: “according to the flesh” (kata sarka) and “according to the Spirit of holiness” (kata pneuma hagiōsynēs) represent two dimensions of the one Person of Christ. The

“flesh” dimension is the human nature, in which He is the descendant of David; the “Spirit” dimension is the divine nature, in which He is declared (or appointed as designated) Son of God with power by the resurrection. Two natures, one Person, the Chalcedonian structure is already present in Paul’s opening christological statement.

John 1:14 provides the same structure in narrative form: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (NASB 1995). The “full of grace and truth” (πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας, plērēs charitos kai alētheias) recalls the divine self-disclosure of Exodus 34:6, where YHWH proclaims Himself “abounding in lovingkindness and truth.” The glory of the incarnate Word is simultaneously the glory of genuine human embodiment (“flesh”) and the Shekinah glory of YHWH (“glory as of the only begotten from the Father”). The Chalcedonian definition is not a Greek imposition; it is the theological grammar necessary to articulate what John 1:14 is already saying.

### C. Colossians 2:9 and 1 Timothy 2:5 as Chalcedonian Texts

Colossians 2:9 provides the most explicit pre-Chalcedonian affirmation of the two-natures structure: “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (NASB 1995). The “fulness of Deity” (πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος, plērōma tēs theōtētos) is the fullness of the divine nature, not a portion or a representation but the complete divine essence. And it dwells “in bodily form” (σωματικῶς, sōmatikōs), in the embodied, physical, human form of Jesus Christ. The divine fullness and the human bodily form coexist in the one Person of the Son, without the divine fullness being modified by the embodiment, and without the embodiment being transformed by contact with the divine fullness.

1 Timothy 2:5 provides the functional summary: “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (NASB 1995). The mediator is identified specifically as “the man Christ Jesus”, a human being who mediates between God and humanity. But for this mediator to have access to both parties in the mediation, He must be more than a man; He must be God. The Chalcedonian structure, genuinely God and genuinely man, in one Person, is the ontological description of the one mediator who is both “man” and capable of representing God to humanity and humanity to God.

## VI. CHALCEDON AS WORSHIP: THE DEFINITION IN THE SERVICE OF DOXOLOGY

---

It would be a serious misunderstanding of the Chalcedonian Definition to read it merely as a piece of technical theology, a set of philosophical distinctions that settled some ancient disputes and that now functions primarily as a boundary for academic theologians. The Definition is, at its heart, a

doxological act: the church's most careful attempt to say, in the face of every reductive distortion, who Jesus Christ actually is, so that He may be worshipped as He actually is. Every one of the four negatives, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, is a defense of the fullness of the Person who is worthy of worship. Confuse the natures and you have something neither fully divine nor fully human to worship. Divide the Person and you have two objects of worship where there should be one. The Chalcedonian Definition is not a philosophical cage for Jesus; it is a theological declaration of His uncontainable glory.

The Chalcedonian Christ is the Christ who is simultaneously too divine and too human to be domesticated by any reductive system. He is too divine to be merely a great teacher, a moral exemplar, a religious innovator, or a divinely elevated human being. He is too human to be a divine apparition, a cosmic symbol, or a spiritual principle untouched by the vulnerability and suffering of genuine creaturely existence. He is the one who is "truly God and truly man", and the "truly" before both "God" and "man" is the Chalcedonian insistence that neither nature is a metaphor, a symbol, or an approximation. He is God, the real God, the God who made the universe. And He is man, a real man, with a real body, a real soul, real emotions, a real will, and a real history in first-century Palestine. The worship that this reality demands is not the worship of an idea or a symbol; it is the worship of a Person who is fully worthy of the adoration of every creature He has made.

The Chalcedonian Definition ends with a confession that is also a doxology: "one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ." Son, the eternal, personally distinct second Person of the Trinity. Only-begotten, the uniquely generated Son of the Father, the monogenēs in whose bosom the Father's love has eternally rested. God the Word, the pre-incarnate Logos who was in the beginning with God and who was God. Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate, crucified, risen, and ascended Savior and King, whose name is above every name. All of these titles belong to the same one Person, and the church confesses them, not as a list of theological propositions, but as the cascading declaration of an inexhaustible glory that will be worshipped by the redeemed throughout all eternity.

**Key Texts:** *John 1:1, 14; Romans 1:3–4; Colossians 2:9; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 2:14–17; 4:15; The Chalcedonian Definition (451 AD)*

## THEOLOGICAL TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
<b>Hypostatic Union</b>	The classical theological term for the central mystery of the incarnation: two complete, distinct natures, fully divine and fully human, united in the one Person (hypostasis) of the eternal Son of God. Formally defined at the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) with four negative boundaries: the two natures exist ‘without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.’ The hypostatic union is permanent and irreversible; the risen, ascended, and glorified Christ retains His human nature forever. The hypostatic union is the ontological ground of the <i>communicatio idiomatum</i> (communication of attributes) and the foundation of every dimension of Christ’s mediatorial work.
<b>Hypostasis</b>	Greek: ‘underlying reality,’ ‘substance,’ ‘person.’ In Trinitarian theology (post-Nicene), the technical term for the individual, distinct Persons of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Spirit are three hypostases (persons) sharing one <i>ousia</i> (essence/substance). In Chalcedonian Christology, hypostasis refers to the one, singular, undivided personal subject of the incarnate Son, the ‘I’ who is the subject of everything that can be said of Christ. The human nature of Christ does not constitute a separate hypostasis; it subsists in the already-existing hypostasis of the eternal Son (see <i>enhypostasia</i> ).
<b>Enhypostasia</b>	The doctrine that the human nature of Christ has its personal existence (its hypostasis) in the already-existing divine Person of the eternal Son, rather than in a separate human hypostasis of its own. <i>Enhypostasia</i> explains how the incarnate Christ can be fully and genuinely human (the human nature possessing all the properties of genuine human nature) without the human nature constituting a separate human person alongside the divine Person of the Son. The human nature of Christ is genuinely personal, it is not impersonal or depersonalized, but its personhood subsists in the divine hypostasis of the Son rather than in a hypostasis of its own.
<b>Ousia</b>	Greek: ‘essence,’ ‘substance,’ ‘being.’ In Nicene Trinitarian theology, the technical term for the one divine essence that the Father, Son, and Spirit share equally and completely ( <i>homoousios</i> : ‘of the same essence’). In Chalcedonian Christology, <i>ousia</i> is the term used for each of the two natures Christ possesses: He is <i>homoousios</i> with the Father in His divine <i>ousia</i> , and <i>homoousios</i> with us in His human <i>ousia</i> . The distinction between <i>ousia</i> (essence, what something is) and hypostasis (person, who someone is) is the fundamental grammatical tool of both Trinitarian and Christological theology in the Nicene-Chalcedonian tradition.

Term	Definition
<b>Physis</b>	Greek: 'nature.' In Chalcedonian Christology, the technical term for each of the two distinct natures Christ possesses: divine physis and human physis. The Chalcedonian definition affirms two physeis (natures) in one hypostasis (person), against both the Nestorian tendency to posit two persons and the Monophysite claim to only one nature after the incarnation. Each physis retains its own distinct properties, operations (energeiai), and will (the Dyothelite doctrine defined at Constantinople III, 681 AD), without either being modified, absorbed, or eliminated by contact with the other.
<b>Communicatio Idiomatum</b>	Latin: 'communication of attributes.' The christological principle that flows directly from the hypostatic union: because the one Person of Christ subsists in two natures, the properties of either nature may be predicated of the one Person. Thus statements true of the divine nature ('He created all things') and statements true of the human nature ('He wept,' 'He was born of Mary') can both be made about the same Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. The communicatio does not mean properties are transferred between the natures (the divine nature does not literally suffer; the human nature does not literally create all things); it means they are both truly attributable to the one Person who possesses both natures.
<b>Monophysitism</b>	From Greek monos (one) and physis (nature). The Christological heresy, associated with Eutyches and condemned at the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD), holding that after the incarnation Christ has only one nature (the human nature having been absorbed into the divine, like a drop of water in the ocean). Monophysitism effectively denies the genuine humanity of Christ by dissolving it into the divine nature, producing a Christ who is neither fully divine nor fully human but a composite third thing. Contemporary expressions of Monophysitism persist in the Oriental Orthodox churches (Coptic, Ethiopian, Armenian, Syriac), which rejected Chalcedon and maintain a 'miaphysite' position.
<b>Nestorianism</b>	The Christological heresy associated with Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople (d. c. 451 AD), and condemned at the Council of Ephesus (431 AD), which so sharply distinguished the divine and human natures in Christ as to effectively posit two persons, the divine Logos and the human Jesus, united in moral and functional cooperation rather than genuine hypostatic union. The Nestorian Christ is divided: what belongs to the human nature cannot be predicated of the divine Person, and vice versa. The council of Ephesus' defense of the Theotokos was the primary expression of the anti-Nestorian affirmation of the unity of the Person.
<b>Theotokos</b>	Greek: 'God-bearer' or 'Mother of God.' The title for the Virgin Mary affirmed at the Council of Ephesus (431 AD) as a christological, not primarily mariological, affirmation. Since the one born of Mary is the eternal Son of God, and since the Son's divine and human natures are united in a single Person,

Term	Definition
	Mary is rightly called the Mother of God: the person she bore is God incarnate. The Theotokos affirmation protects the unity of the Person against the Nestorian tendency to separate a 'divine Christ' from a 'human Jesus,' as if Mary were only the mother of the human Jesus and not of the divine-human Person.
<b>Chalcedonian Definition</b>	The christological definition issued by the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD), attended by more than 500 bishops, defining the Person of Christ as 'truly God and truly man,' His two natures existing 'without confusion, without change, without division, without separation,' united in 'one person and one subsistence.' The definition is the most precise and most universally received christological formulation in the history of the church, maintained as the ecumenical standard of orthodox Christology across Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant traditions. The four negative adverbs function as boundary markers that together define the space of orthodox christological confession.

## PRACTICAL APPLICATION

### A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the Chalcedonian Definition is not a piece of optional theological decoration that can be bypassed by those who prefer a "simpler" or "more biblical" Christology. The Definition is the most faithful available articulation of what the New Testament itself teaches about the Person of Christ, and the theological precision it embodies is not a cultural imposition but a pastoral necessity. Every one of the four negatives excludes a specific error that, if accepted, would destroy the gospel: without confusion (against Eutychianism, which dissolves the genuine humanity), without change (against any kenotic reduction of the divine nature), without division (against Nestorianism, which divides the Person and thereby diminishes the infinite value of the atonement), and without separation (against any suggestion that the incarnation is temporary). The pastor who has internalized these four negatives has at his disposal the most refined theological instrument available for protecting the gospel in the face of its most persistent distortions.

We must also believe that the *communicatio idiomatum*, the principle that the properties of both natures may be predicated of the one Person, is not a philosophical technicality but a pastoral necessity. It is the theological ground on which the pastor can say to the grieving widow: "The God who made the universe wept at Lazarus's tomb." It is the ground on which the preacher can say: "God died for you", not that the divine nature literally died (the divine nature is impassible), but that the Person who died was the divine Person, dying in His human nature. The *communicatio* is not an

abstraction; it is the conceptual tool that makes the deepest pastoral consolations of the gospel both theologically precise and personally true.

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

Let the Chalcedonian Definition produce in you not merely intellectual satisfaction but doxological wonder. The most precise theological formulation ever produced by the Christian church is a description of the most astonishing reality in the history of the universe: two natures, the infinite divine nature and the finite human nature, permanently united in a single Person, without either one losing what it essentially is. This is not a philosophical puzzle; it is the reality that makes possible every act of divine grace, every prayer, every act of pastoral comfort, every moment of worship. Because two natures are united in one Person without confusion, the God you worship is the one who has genuinely suffered. Because they are united without change, the human being who suffered for you is genuinely God. Because they are united without division, the death that redeemed you was the death of a divine Person. And because they are united without separation, the High Priest who intercedes for you now carries your humanity permanently into the divine presence.

Desire a congregation that is catechized in the Chalcedonian Christology, not in the technical vocabulary of the council (though the vocabulary is worth knowing), but in the substantive convictions that the vocabulary expresses. A congregation that knows what it means that Jesus is “truly God and truly man” will be a congregation that is better equipped to resist the christological reductions of popular culture, better prepared to engage the theological challenges of neighboring religions, and more deeply grounded in the gospel that is the only power of God for salvation.

## **C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?**

- Memorize the four Chalcedonian negatives and be able to explain what error each one excludes. Without confusion (against Eutychianism/Monophysitism), without change (against kenotic reductions of the divine nature), without division (against Nestorianism), without separation (against any temporalized account of the incarnation). These four negatives function as the permanent christological compass of orthodox theology, orienting every subsequent discussion of the Person of Christ.
- Read the Chalcedonian Definition in full, phrase by phrase, as a devotional exercise, not merely as a historical document but as the church’s most precise act of christological worship. The Definition is available in Jaroslav Pelikan’s *The Christian Tradition* (vol. 1) and in Philip Schaff’s *The Creeds of Christendom*. Read it slowly, attending to what each phrase is protecting and what error it is excluding, and let the precision of the language produce in you not cold academicism but the fire of worship that the reality it describes demands.
- Introduce your congregation to the *communicatio idiomatum* through preaching rather than through technical lecture. The concept is most naturally introduced through the Gospel narratives: the one who said ‘Before Abraham was born, I am’ (John 8:58) also said ‘I am

hungry.’ The one who called forth Lazarus from the tomb also wept outside it. The one who stilled the storm on the Sea of Galilee also fell asleep in the stern of the boat. These juxtapositions are not contradictions; they are the Chalcedonian structure of the Gospel narratives, and preaching them as such will give the congregation a living feel for what the *communicatio idiomatum* actually means.

- Engage the Oriental Orthodox traditions (Coptic, Ethiopian, Armenian, Syriac) with theological charity and historical sensitivity. These traditions rejected Chalcedon not because they denied the genuine humanity or the genuine deity of Christ, but because they were suspicious of the two-natures language as a Nestorian concession. The modern ecumenical dialogue between Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian churches has made significant progress in demonstrating that the substantive christological convictions are largely shared, even where the precise terminological formulations differ. The pastor who understands this history can engage Christians from these traditions with both theological precision and ecumenical charity.
- Use the Chalcedonian structure to enrich your preaching of the Gospel narratives. Every pericope in which Christ does something that can only be explained by His divine nature (forgiving sins, raising the dead, stilling the storm, knowing the thoughts of the scribes), and every pericope in which He does something that can only be explained by His human nature (weeping, sleeping, hungering, praying, dying), is an implicit Chalcedonian text. Preach these texts with the awareness that you are showing your congregation what ‘truly God and truly man’ actually looks like in the historical life of the incarnate Son.

## STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

---

### OPENING QUESTION

1. Before studying this lesson, were you familiar with the Chalcedonian Definition and its four negative adverbs? Had you encountered the terms ‘hypostatic union’ or ‘*communicatio idiomatum*’ in your theological education or reading? What was your prior attitude toward the conciliar tradition of the church, did you view the early councils as authoritative guides for biblical interpretation, as useful historical summaries, or as potentially distorting impositions on the simpler apostolic faith? How has this lesson affected your assessment?

### OBSERVATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DO THE TEXTS SAY?)

2. Read Colossians 2:6–9 carefully. What is the polemical context in which Paul makes his christological affirmation in verse 9? How does the phrase ‘all the fullness of Deity’ (v. 9) relate to

what he says about the ‘fullness’ that believers have received in Christ (v. 10)? How does the statement ‘in bodily form’ (sōmatikōs, v. 9) establish the genuine physicality and humanity of the one in whom the divine fullness dwells?

**3.** Read Romans 1:1–4. Paul describes Jesus in verse 3 as ‘born of a descendant of David according to the flesh’ and in verse 4 as ‘declared the Son of God with power... according to the Spirit of holiness.’ Identify the two parallel prepositional phrases (‘according to the flesh’ and ‘according to the Spirit of holiness’) and explain how they express the two-natures structure of the Chalcedonian Definition. What does the phrase ‘declared the Son of God with power’ mean, does it imply that He became the Son of God at the resurrection, or does it mean something else?

**4.** Read 1 Timothy 2:3–6. How does Paul frame the statement about the mediator in verse 5? What two things does he say about the mediator that together express the Chalcedonian christological structure? What is the connection between the mediator’s identity as ‘the man Christ Jesus’ and the ransom He provides in verse 6? What would be lost soteriologically if the mediator were not genuinely the ‘man’ Paul identifies?

**5.** Read John 1:1’2 and 1:14 together. Identify the grammatical and semantic contrast between ἦν (en, ‘was’) in verses 1–2 and ἐγένετο (egeneto, ‘became’) in verse 14. How does this grammatical contrast implicitly express the Chalcedonian distinction between the eternal existence of the divine nature and the temporal event of the incarnation? How does the identification of the incarnate Word as ‘the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth’ express the dual consubstantiality of the Chalcedonian formula (homoousios with the Father and homoousios with us)?

### INTERPRETATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT MEAN?)

**6.** The Chalcedonian Definition uses the formula ‘one person and one subsistence’ (ἓν πρόσωπον καὶ μίαν ὑπόστασιν) to express the unity of Christ’s Person against Nestorianism. Explain in your own words why Nestorianism’s apparent division of the Person of Christ has devastating soteriological consequences. What specifically would be lost in our understanding of the atonement, the resurrection, and the intercession of Christ if Christ were divided into a divine Person and a human person who merely cooperate?

**7.** The lesson explains enhypostasia as the doctrine that the human nature of Christ subsists in the divine hypostasis of the Son rather than in a separate human hypostasis. How does this doctrine explain why the incarnation does not result in a second divine Person (the Nestorian error) or in the absorption of the human nature into the divine (the Eutychian error)? What does enhypostasia imply about the personal identity of Jesus: when He says ‘I,’ who is speaking, a human person, a divine person, or the single divine-human Person?

**8.** The lesson argues that the four Chalcedonian negatives are not arbitrary philosophical restrictions but precise theological protections of the gospel. For each of the four negatives, identify: (a) the

specific heretical error it excludes, (b) the specific christological truth it protects, and (c) the specific soteriological consequence that would follow if the error it excludes were accepted. Which of the four negatives do you find most pastorally significant, and why?

**9.** The lesson addresses the objection that the Chalcedonian Definition represents the imposition of Greek philosophical categories on a Semitic Gospel. It responds by arguing that the New Testament itself generates the tensions (divine and human, omniscient and growing in wisdom, impassible and weeping) that Chalcedon is designed to resolve. Do you find this response persuasive? Is there a sense in which the technical Greek vocabulary of Chalcedon (hypostasis, ousia, physis) goes beyond what the New Testament texts themselves require, and if so, is that a problem?

**10.** The *communicatio idiomatum* allows the pastor to make statements that seem paradoxical: ‘God died for you,’ ‘the Creator wept at Lazarus’s tomb.’ How does the *communicatio idiomatum* make these statements theologically precise rather than simply paradoxical or confused? What is the precise sense in which these statements are true, and what would need to be said to prevent them from being misunderstood as implying that the divine nature literally died or literally wept?

### **APPLICATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT DEMAND OF US?)**

**11.** The lesson argues that the Chalcedonian Definition is “not a philosophical cage for Jesus but a theological declaration of His uncontainable glory.” How would you use this framing to introduce the Chalcedonian definition to a congregation that is suspicious of creeds and councils? What specific christological errors, encountered in popular culture, in the theology of neighboring churches, or in the questions of your own parishioners, would you use as concrete illustrations of why the precision of the Definition matters?

**12.** The lesson recommends introducing the *communicatio idiomatum* through preaching the Gospel narratives rather than through technical lecture, by juxtaposing the divine acts (‘Before Abraham was born, I am’) and the human experiences (‘I am thirsty’) of the one Person. Choose a specific Gospel pericope that you have preached or plan to preach. How would the Chalcedonian framework, the two natures in one Person, change the way you preach that pericope? What dimensions of the text would become more accessible or more powerful through the Chalcedonian lens?

**13.** The lesson notes that the Oriental Orthodox churches (Coptic, Ethiopian, Armenian, Syriac) rejected Chalcedon not because they denied the genuine humanity or deity of Christ but because they were suspicious of the two-natures language as a Nestorian concession. In your ministry context, do you have contact with believers from these traditions? How would you engage them charitably and theologically, acknowledging the areas of genuine christological agreement while also explaining why the Chalcedonian precision matters for the gospel?

**14.** This lesson opens Unit 4 on the Hypostatic Union. Looking ahead to Lessons 11–13 (the Christological Heresies, the Impeccability of Christ, and the Knowledge and Will of Christ), how does the Chalcedonian Definition established in this lesson provide the framework for each of those subsequent topics? Specifically: how does ‘without confusion’ and ‘without change’ set up the discussion of the heresies (Lesson 11)? How does the dual consubstantiality (‘truly God and truly man’) set up the discussion of impeccability (Lesson 12)? How does the two-natures structure set up the discussion of Christ’s knowledge and will (Lesson 13)?

## PRAYER FOCUS

---

Open this lesson’s prayer time with a reading of Colossians 1:15–20 and Colossians 2:9–10, Paul’s most concentrated christological statement, which in its own apostolic idiom expresses the same reality that the Chalcedonian Definition will later articulate in technical theological language. Read slowly: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation”, the divine nature, in its eternal, Creator-God dignity. “For by Him all things were created”, the omnipotent divine work. “He is also head of the body, the church”, the Lord of the redeemed community in His incarnate and glorified humanity. “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form”, the Chalcedonian reality in Pauline language: the complete divine nature, bodily present. Let the group sit with the wonder of this: the one who created the universe and holds it together by the word of His power is also the one who tabernacled in flesh, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and now reigns at the right hand of the Father in a glorified human body.

Spend time in adoration of the incarnate Son in the fullness of His two-natured reality, worshipping Him not merely as a divine being who temporarily wore human flesh, nor as a supremely exalted human being who was uniquely indwelt by God, but as the Chalcedonian Christ: truly God and truly man, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation. Adore Him for the completeness of the divine nature He brought into the incarnation, that the God you worship has truly, unreservedly, completely come to you in Jesus. Adore Him for the completeness of the human nature He assumed, that the human being you encounter in the Gospel narratives is genuinely, vulnerably, completely human, like you in all things apart from sin. Adore Him for the unity of the Person, that there is one Christ, not two; one Lord, not a committee of divine and human representatives; one ‘I’ at the center of every Gospel narrative, one Person who died, rose, and intercedes.

Pray with theological intentionality, using the *communicatio idiomatum* as the grammar of your prayer. Address yourself to the God who was born of a woman, who was hungry in the wilderness, who wept at Lazarus’s tomb, who sweat blood in Gethsemane, who died outside Jerusalem, and who rose on the third day. Let the two-natured reality of the one you are praying to shape the confidence

with which you approach the throne of grace: you are approaching the God who knows what it is to be you, not from the distance of omniscience alone but from the intimacy of shared human experience. And you are approaching Him with the boldness that belongs to those who approach through the one who is co-equal in divine nature with the Father to whom you pray.

Close with the Chalcedonian Definition's own concluding confession, spoken together as the church's most precise and most doxological answer to the most important question that has ever been asked about any human being who ever lived:

*"One and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence."*

#### THE CHALCEDONIAN DEFINITION (451 AD)

---

## *Soli Deo Gloria*

*To God Alone Be the Glory*

---

## FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

**Dr. Joshua Nichols**

[josh@faithfultotheword.com](mailto:josh@faithfultotheword.com) | [faithfultotheword.com](http://faithfultotheword.com)