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Christ in the Patristic Era, AD 100-500

Who is Jesus Christ?

Peter's confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16)

Words have Meaning: What do we mean when we say, "Jesus is the Son of God?"

Suggested Answers Found In The Early Second Century

- Docetism
- Ebionism
- Gnosticism
- Marcionism

Suggested Answers Found In The Late Second/Early Third Century

- Celsus (Hellenistic Jewish Philosopher)
- Paul of Samosata (200-275)

Suggested Answers Found in the Late Third/Fourth Century

- Arius of Alexandria (256-336)
- Alexander of Alexandria (250-326)
- Athanasius of Alexandria (296-373)
- Apollinaris of Laodicea (310-390)

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- Gregory of Nazianzus (329-390)

Suggested Answers in the Fifth Century

- Cyril of Alexandria (376-444)
- Nestorius of Constantinople (386-450)
- Eutyches of Constantinople (380-456)

The First Four Ecumenical Councils of Church History

1. Council of Nicaea, 325

- Denies Arianism and drafts the Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; By whom all things were made; Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; He suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost.

2. Council of Constantinople, 381

- Denies Apollinarianism and added to the Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost and of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; from thence he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

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3. Council of Ephesus, 431
 - Denies Nestorianism and reaffirms the Nicene Creed
4. Council of Chalcedon, 451 (Summarized well in this one paragraph)
 - Denies Eutychianism and drafts the Chalcedonian Definition

Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all unite in teaching that we should confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. This same one is perfect in deity, and the same one is perfect in humanity; the same one is true God and true man, comprising a rational soul and a body. He is of the same essence as the Father according to his deity, and the same one is of the same essence with us according to his humanity, like us in all things except sin. He was begotten before the ages from the Father according to his deity, but in the last days for us and our salvation, the same one was born of the Virgin Mary, the bearer of God, according to his humanity. He is one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, and Only Begotten, who is made known in two natures united unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably. The distinction between the natures is not at all destroyed because of the union, but rather the property of each nature is preserved and concurs together into one person and subsistence (*hypostasis*). He is not separated or divided into two persons, but he is one and the same Son, the Only Begotten, God the Logos, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the way the prophets spoke of him from the beginning, and Jesus Christ himself instructed us, and the Council of the fathers has handed the faith down to us.

Key Terms

1. Docetism – a system of belief that claimed Jesus only *seemed* to have a human body like ours.
2. Ebionism – a system of belief that denies Jesus' divinity and believed that Jesus was the Son of God only by virtue of His being "adopted" by God.
3. Gnosticism – a complicated religious movement which claimed a secret knowledge (gnosis) revealed to the Apostles capable of freeing the spiritual element in humans from the evil of the body.
4. Marcionism – a system of belief led by Marcion that believed God clothed himself in the form of a human being. He also believed the God of the Old Testament was a different than the God of the New.
5. Arianism – a system of belief led by Arius of Alexandria who proposed that the Son of God was created by the Father from nothing as an instrument for the creation and

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salvation of the universe; not God by nature this highest of creatures received the title Son of God on account of his foreseen righteousness.

6. Apollinarianism – a system of belief led by Apollinaris of Laodicea who taught that the Divine Logos functioned as the mind of Christ who possessed a sentient human body.
7. Nestorianism – a system of belief led by Nestorius of Constantinople who insisted that in Christ there were two objectively real persons – one divine and one human – being joined Christ Jesus.
8. Eutychianism – a system of belief that Christ's divine and human nature are mixed into one nature.
9. Hypostatic Union – the substantial union of the divine and human natures in the one divine person of Jesus Christ.

Preparation For Next Week:

Read article - <https://jgduesing.com/theology-in-the-patristic-era-r-lucas-stamps-on-the-trinity/> (Also attached to this document.)

Further Resources:

Duesing, Jason and Nathan Finn. *Historical Theology For The Church*. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2021.

Duesing, Jason. *Seven Summits in Church History*. Nashville, TN: Rainer Publishing, 2016.

Ferguson, Everett. *Church History, Volume One: From Christ to the Pre-Reformation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013.

Litfin, Bryan. *Getting to Know The Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016.