

## THE COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON (A.D. 451)

*"[Creeds] are summaries of doctrines of the Bible, aids to its sound understanding, bonds of union among their professors, public standards and guards against false doctrine and practice."* - Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 1:8.

### I. The Word "Creed"

- A. From Latin *credo*, "I believe". Related to 2 Cor 4:13, Ps 116:10 ("I believe, and so I spoke").
- B. *Credo* is the first word of the Latin text of the *Nicene-Constantinople Creed* (385/381 AD) and the *Apostles' Creed*.
  - 1. Why is "belief" so important from a Christian perspective?

### II. Defense/Usefulness of Creeds

- A. Bible uses creeds! (E.g., Deut 6:4, Rom 10:9, 1 John 4:2, 1 Cor 15:3-4)
- B. Summaries of the doctrines of the Bible; hence, aids to understanding it! (Fantastic for teaching children, too)
- C. Unites believers around truth, the only foundation for true unity.
- D. *Everyone* has a written or unwritten creed.
- E. Preached Word of God is a form of a creed (i.e., human words explaining Scripture).
- F. Translation of Bible is a mini-creed (i.e., it has gone beyond original languages).
- G. Why will "no creed but the Bible" never work until Christ returns?

### III. Things to Keep in Mind With Creeds

- A. The ultimate question is whether the creed is biblical, not what historical event precipitated it.
- B. We should always remember that creeds are "secondary" standards to the Bible
- C. Knowing the historical situation of the creed aids us in understanding the creed itself and alerts us to possible blind spots in the creed's interpretation of the Bible.

### IV. The Creed of Chalcedon (Oct 8-Nov 1, 451 AD) – Two Natures, One Person!

"We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial<sup>2</sup> with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial<sup>3</sup> with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God<sup>4</sup>, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, **without confusion, without change<sup>5</sup>, without division, without separation<sup>6</sup>**, the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us."

<sup>1</sup> Against **Apollinarianism**, which denied that Christ had a human mind; "God in a bod".

<sup>2</sup> I.e., Jesus is one with God; He bears the same divine essence as the Father.

<sup>3</sup> I.e., Jesus is of the same human nature as we human beings (slightly different from fn. 2, though the same word ["consubstantial"] is used).

<sup>4</sup> This does not mean Mary gave birth to divinity, as the following clause makes clear. "Mother of God" is meant to declare that the incarnation was real and Christ is truly divine even after birth.

<sup>5</sup> Against **Eutychianism**, which said the divine nature absorbed and overwhelmed the human nature.

<sup>6</sup> Against **Nestorianism**, which said His two natures (one human and one divine) existed side by side and hence were separable, almost as though Christ were schizophrenic.

*“Theology, if it truly wants to be scriptural and Christian, cannot do better for now than the two natures doctrine. . . . All other attempts undertaken up until now to formulate Christological dogma and to bring it home to us fail to do justice to the richness of Scripture and the honor of Christ. Yet to be on guard for these riches and that honor is theology’s primary task.”*

- Herman Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation*, 304.

**The incarnation of the Son of God is NOT:**

- a *conversion* of God into man, or man into God
- an *absorption* of a man into God
- a *mixing* of the two, as though divinity is humanized or humanity divinized.
- a joining of two persons to create a *third* person
- a joining of two natures to *create* a person

**BUT INSTEAD, an actual and abiding union of the two distinct natures in one personal life, where:**

- each nature retains the properties belonging to it (i.e., Christ did not hunger according to divinity)
- Christ’s human nature did not have “personality” prior to the incarnation. Christ is one person, both divine and human.

**Where “Nature”** = the sum total of all the essential qualities of a thing, that which makes it what it is,  
**and “Person”** = a complete substance endowed with reason and, hence, a responsible subject of its own actions.

1. Explain how Christ’s incarnation was an “emptying by addition”:

*“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing (“emptied himself”; NAS), taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” (Phil 2:5-7)*

[Not that Jesus] “*exchanged* the form of God for the form of a slave, but that He *manifested* the form of God in the form of a slave.” - F.F. Bruce

*“Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail th’incarnate Deity...”* - “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”

2. Explain the following statement: “For the whole Christ assumed the whole me that he might grant salvation to the whole me, for what is unassumable is incurable” (John of Damascus).
3. Many are surprised to learn that Christ’s human nature is forever. See 1 Tim 2:5, Acts 17:31, 1 Cor 15:45-49, Heb 7:17-25. Why is this?

*“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...”* (1 Tim 2:5)

4. How is the incarnation a paradigm for understanding the relationship of God (as God!) to you??

*“For who even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in a measure to “lisp” in speaking to us? . . . To do this he must descend far beneath his loftiness.”* - John Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.1

**“How utterly the mystery of the union of the divine and human nature in Christ exceeds all our speaking and thinking of it. All comparison breaks down, for it is without equal. But it is, accordingly, the mystery of godliness, which angels desire to look into and the church worshipfully adores.”** - H. Bavinck, 308.