



THE CHRISTOLOGICAL CONTROVERSY

November 5 / 6, 2025

Matthew 17:1-8; Luke 2:52; John 1:1-4, 14;

Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 2:14-18

Gonzalez, chapters 19, 20

I. Who Is Jesus?

- a. Mark 8:27–29: *“Who do people say that I am?... But who do you say that I am?”*
Peter answered Him, *“You are the Christ.”*
- b. Most important question in our lives: *Who is Jesus?*
- c. The Doctrine of the Incarnation—the Church’s answer:
- d. Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly human.
 - i. Not *like* God — truly God.
 - ii. Not partly human — fully human.
 - iii. Not God “lite,” not a demi-god.
 - iv. God the Son, one substance with the Father, fully one of us.

II. John’s Witness: The Word Made Flesh

- a. John 1:1–5,14: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things were made through Him... In Him was life, and the life was the light of men... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us... full of grace and truth.”*
- b. John starts not with Bethlehem—but with eternity.
- c. Why call Jesus “the Word”?
 - i. A word expresses who we are and what we want.
 - ii. Jesus is God’s speech, God’s self-expression.
 - iii. *Jesus is what God wants us to know about Himself.*
- d. The Incarnation: *“The Word became flesh.”*
- e. *Incarnation = enfleshment.*
- f. *Immanuel*, God with us.
- g. Miracle of Christmas.

- III. The Transfiguration: Jesus Only
 - a. Matthew 17:1–8: *His face shone like the sun... they fell on their faces... And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.*
 - b. Question behind the controversy: *How can the One shining with divine glory also dwell in human weakness?*
 - c. Luke 2:52: *Jesus grew in wisdom and stature.* How can the eternal One “grow”?
 - d. This tension launches the Christological debates.

- IV. What Was At Stake?
 - a. Not academic speculation but salvation.
 - b. González: *Only if Christ is truly God can He save us; only if truly human can He represent us.*

- V. Two Early Approaches
 - a. Alexandrian (Word–Flesh)
 - i. Emphasizes unity.
 - ii. Focus: *John 1:14.*
 - iii. Athanasius, later Cyril.
 - iv. Risk: Jesus maybe not fully human in mind/soul.
 - b. Antiochene (Word–Man)
 - i. Emphasizes full humanity.
 - ii. Focus: *Luke 2:52.*
 - iii. Theodore, later Nestorius.
 - iv. Risk: “two Christs” side-by-side.

- VI. Nestorius (Patriarch of Constantinople)
 - a. His concern:
 - i. God cannot suffer or change.
 - ii. Christ’s humanity must be real, not a costume.
 - b. His Model:
 - i. Two natures acting in parallel.
 - ii. No communication of attributes.
 - iii. Jesus *appears* one person but functions like two.
 - c. *Theotokos* Controversy: Who is Mary?
 - i. Rejects *Theotokos* (“God-bearer”)
 - ii. Prefers *Christotokos* (“Christ-bearer”)
 - iii. “God cannot be born or suffer — only the man Jesus can.”
 - d. González: Nestorius divided Christ too sharply — threatening salvation.

- VII. Cyril of Alexandria: Defender of Unity
 - a. *“The Word, having united to Himself flesh endowed with a rational soul, became man.”*
 - i. One person, two natures.
 - ii. Natures united in one hypostasis (personhood).
 - iii. No confusion, no separation.
 - iv. Communication of attributes.

- v. “God suffered in the flesh.”
 - vi. “Mary is Theotokos”.
 - b. Cyril: You can’t divide Jesus without destroying salvation.
- VIII. Council of Ephesus (431)
 - a. Condemns Nestorius.
 - b. Affirms Theotokos.
 - c. Upholds one person, Word-united with humanity.
 - d. *Tension remains—sets stage for next debate.*
- IX. Reaction: Eutyches & Monophysitism
 - a. Eutyches’ Error
 - i. Overcorrects: Says after Incarnation Christ has one nature.
 - ii. Human nature “swallowed up” by divine.
 - b. Robber Synod (449)
 - i. Supports Eutyches.
 - ii. Condemns defenders of two-nature truth.
 - iii. Pope Leo calls it a travesty.
 - c. Council of Chalcedon (451) — The Church’s Answer.
 - d. Leo’s Tome:
 - i. *“Each nature performs its own acts in communion with the other.”*
 - e. Chalcedonian Definition: *One and the same Christ... in two natures; without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.*
 - f. This is the *hypostatic union*:
 - i. Fully God.
 - ii. Fully man.
 - iii. One person.
- X. Aftermath
 - a. West embraces Chalcedon.
 - b. East splits → Coptic, Armenian, Syrian Orthodox.
 - c. Fifth Council (553) clarifies: *Union out of two complete natures, in one hypostasis.*
- XI. Why It Matters
 - a. God Wants Us to Know Him
 - i. *Christmas is God saying: “I refuse to be unknowable.”*
 - ii. God puts His love in terms we understand.
 - b. God Wants Us to Trust Him
 - i. *Incarnation = credibility.*
 - ii. Not myth — not a messenger — God Himself.
 - c. God Knows Human Life
 - i. He did not send a stand-in.
 - ii. He felt it Himself.
 - iii. Hebrews 2:14–18, *He shared in our humanity... He suffered when tempted... He is able to help those who are tempted.*

XII. The Love of God Revealed

- a. *“While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”* — Romans 5:8
- b. *“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us...”* — 2 Cor. 5:21
- c. Athanasius (paraphrase): *“The Holy became human so that humanity might become holy.”*
- d. González’ Summary: *“The church’s struggle was the labor of the mind and spirit to confess faithfully what the heart already knew: in Jesus, God Himself has come to be with us.”*

XIII. Conclusion

- a. As the disciples saw on the mountain: No one but Jesus only.
- b. In Him Heaven and earth meet, Deity and humanity are reconciled, God is with us and for us.