

## Christology

*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*  
(Matthew 16:16 – ESV)

In doctrine and practice, it is not merely what you affirm, but also what you deny. For example, a child doesn't need to know all about the Trinity to be saved. However, if a theologian, pastor, or so-called seasoned believer knows about the doctrine of the Trinity and yet denies it, then we have a different situation. Again, does a person need to know all bible doctrine to be saved? No, but if that same person denies essential doctrine, say the gospel of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, and clings to some other way, say salvation by grace plus works, then we do not have a believer but a heretic and/or an apostate.

There are many false Christ's out there and false doctrines about the true Christ. What we want to do here is to explain some of these Christological heresies. For some, this may seem a little too heavy for you at first, but it isn't and you need this information, so stick with it, because you will see these things pop up in your future, and you need to be able to recognize them and run from them.

*Doceticism* – doctrine especially associated with the Gnostics that Jesus had no human body and only appeared to have died on the cross. Jesus only spirit not physical man; also used to describe teaching that focuses on divine to the exclusion of human (Luke 24:36-43 / Acts 10:41 / 1 John 4:1-3).

Other Gnostics admitted the humanity of the man Jesus, but claimed that the Christ was an aeon or power that came on Jesus at His baptism in the form of a dove and left him on the Cross so that only the man Jesus died. This power was not all power, and Jesus was not fully God.

A variation of this is that some Messianic Jews and others believe that Jesus was born fully man and became fully God upon His baptism by the Holy Spirit.

*Cerinthianism* – This flawed notion, separating Jesus from “the Christ”, and saying that Jesus was a man who attained godlike power, or that he simply "realized" the "divine spark" or "the Christ within", and that we can do the same. This fails to give Jesus the glory He is due, and is therefore worshipping man and his potential instead. This goes all the way back to Paul's time: the Son was simply a man filled with the divine power of God and therefore was in no way a divine person. In the book of Colossians, Paul nails the door shut on the “divine principle” nonsense we hear of today. Paul says unequivocally that Jesus was and is God, fully God. He doesn't have the power, He IS the power. Modern day variations include Christian Science, and the New Age Jesus.

*Ebionites* – many believe that some of the Judaizers (see Galatians) were of this sect. This is a belief that Jesus was the entirely human son of Jesus and Mary. This denied preexisting divinity of Jesus, believing He was a mortal man who was adopted by God for perfectly performing the Jewish Law. The Ebionites believed in the necessity of following the Law and observed all the Jewish rites, such as circumcision and the seventh-day Sabbath, while rejecting the writings of Paul as those of an apostate. This leads to a denial or a distortion of the Trinity, the virgin birth, original sin and the death of Jesus as an atonement for sin, or having to reinterpret Paul through some other grid. Modern manifestations include the Seventh Day Adventists (to a degree) and in a sense the Sufi Muslims.

*Arianism* – Jesus was of similar (but not identical) substance as the Father; there was a time when He was not. This denies that Jesus was of the same substance as God and holding instead

that He was only the highest of created beings. Jesus had the divine power but was not a part of it, but created by it. Not quite fully human, not quite fully divine.

Modern manifestations, variations, and theological cousins: Some adherents of Unitarianism fall into this category. Jehovah's Witnesses do have some similar beliefs to Arius, namely, that Jesus had a pre-human existence as the Logos. However, Arius viewed the Holy Spirit as a person, whereas Jehovah's Witnesses do not attribute personality to the spirit. Jehovah's Witnesses also, unlike Arians, deny belief in a disembodied soul after death, and in eternal punishment in hell for the unrepentantly wicked. Christadelphians, along with the Church of the Blessed Hope, believe that Jesus' pre-natal existence was a conceptual *Logos*, rather than a literal *Logos*. Mormons believe in the unity in purpose of the Godhead but that Jesus is a divine being distinct from God the Father, but the same in every other respect.

*Apollinarianism* – Jesus' soul was divine rather than human, only his body was truly human. God was in Jesus' head, in a sense. In this view, Jesus was the man; Christ was the mind.

*Socinianism* – Jesus only the human instrument of divine mercy and the Holy Spirit only the divine activity of God. This leads to a denial of God's omnipotence and of original sin. Modern day manifestations are seen in Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist churches and in what is known as the "Open Theism" view.

*Nestorianism* – this view of Jesus is that the divine, and the man, shared the same body but retained two separate personhoods. This Jesus would be schizophrenic in a sense.

*Eutychianism* – Jesus' two natures were assimilated so that his human nature was deified by its union with his divine nature, and formed a new hybrid (theanthropic) nature. Modern manifestation and variation can be seen in the Eastern Orthodox conception and doctrine of *theosis*.

*Modalism / Sabellianism / Patripassianism* – is the belief that the Father, Son and Spirit are different modes or aspects of one God, rather than three distinct persons. There are subtle differences in these but a modern manifestation / variation is the Oneness Pentecostals.

There are actually more we could mention, but you can begin to see why the Trinity is such an important doctrine because it holds the other important things together (like the Hypostatic Union, or the Atonement) and acts as a bulwark against heresy. John Calvin called the doctrine of the Trinity Christianity's special mark of distinction. Virtually all heresies begin with a misconception the nature of God. Mess with Jesus, and you mess up everything else.