

## *Social Life in the Church of Nicea*

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In this lecture we begin our analysis of social life in the Christian church after the time of Nicea. We know that Christianity continued to be a religion of the working class and there was continued admonition in the church for hard work and frugality. Prohibitions against certain forms of labor mentioned earlier now continue.

There is one new addition to the list of forbidden occupations: that being a money lender. One of the canons of the Council of Nicea required any minister who had lent money at interest to be deprived of his office. We see at this time period in terms of the literature of the age many Eastern and Western fathers condemning usury, that is, charging excessive interest for money which is being lent. The idea of usury and lending money at interest is an important question throughout the history of the ancient church, medieval church, and especially into the time period of the Reformation. It's also a matter of discussion today as we think about and its relationship to economic life.

Moving on from that idea, we take a look at food and clothing, where we have some more information concerning this time period. Many of the themes which have been seen from the beginning of the church, especially prior to Nicea, in relationship to food and clothing are continued. Food was continued to be stressed as that which is meant to nourish the body and should not be luxurious. We find in the literature of the time admonitions for Christians to eat only one meal a day, so that only one hour of the twenty-four would be dedicated to satisfying the body.

We also note that there's admonition among the ministers for prayers to be said before meals. It is fascinating to see how much emphasis is placed upon this question in the ancient church period. It's difficult to enter into that culture, but it was, as you think about the Roman society, a gourmet culture—one that put an extremely high premium on living to eat rather than eating

to live. And so the Christian church put a lot of emphasis on the necessity of frugality to stand against the culture of its day.

We'll see the same thing with clothing, and I mention this especially to stir your own interest and reflection upon the church's position toward these issues in the twentieth century. What about clothing? Clothing in the general Christian church, now this is after Nicea, this is after Christianity becomes a state religion, clothing was to be the most simple possible. Women were to wear no make-up of any kind. We also know concerning leisure time and the use of leisure time that Christians were to avoid going to theaters, they were to avoid going to public sports, they were not to make clubs of themselves for the purpose of drinking, and they weren't to enter taverns at all. So what were they supposed to do? They were supposed to stay at home and rest and read the Scriptures. However, there was also to be hospitality in the homes of Christians so that some Christians could come to other Christians' homes and spend time with each other in godly conversation, in reading Scripture together, and doing pleasant, household-type activities.

We also know that good works of a public nature were strongly encouraged. When possible those in the Christian community were to provide food for the very poor, and hospitals were established for the sick. It's very difficult to make bridges between the fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-century church and the twentieth-century church, especially in terms of public good works. We need to be reminded that the church of the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries was fully united with the state, but there was a lot of pressure from the Christian church for the church and state together to establish such things as public hospitals and food for the poor. These types of issues were very important to the church during this time period.

What about social life more particularly in the fifth and sixth centuries? Now that Christianity was the official religion of the whole Roman world, everyone was officially a Christian. Within the Christian community there were, therefore, all the various trades of life. Slaves were in the Christian church, as well as the very wealthy. It was difficult to change perceptions, especially of the poor and the wealthy.

The church continued to stress the value and importance of labor. That's still in contrast with pagan thinking on this issue. Chrysostom is especially famous for his promoting the dignity of

manual labor on the grounds that that which was good enough for the apostles should be sufficient for any Christian, and Chrysostom spent quiet a lot of time analyzing labor and labor theory. And this important practical point is not fully understood in many textbooks on the ancient church but should be clearly presented to you, that the Christian church has thought long and hard on such issues as labor and how men and women are to work in society, what proper roles are in society, and these types of questions and the discussion of these types of questions have historically been part and parcel of advanced Christian discussion and debate. In other words, questions as to proper work roles, proper eating habits, these types of questions have always been discussed in the Christian church, and it would be my opinion that the church in the twentieth century should continue to address questions as to the Christian in the workplace and the marketplace and how we are to handle ourselves as light in the midst of a dark world.

The great luxury of the pagan upper classes was a big problem for the church. Gluttony, which was prevalent among that crowd, was frowned upon and condemned, and there are extensive excerpts on how the Christian should eat. Augustine, for example, ate only vegetables and cereal, with very little wine, and meat was given when he was sick or when special guests were present and it was a festive occasion, and Augustine, like many other church fathers, tells us how we should eat.

There were also great complaints from the ministers concerning the luxury of dress and the desire to wear either seductive or ostentatious clothes. During this time period the theaters were still scorned, yet I hasten to add that the theaters continued; that is, the Christian church was not able, although it was condemned by many clergymen, to stop the common person's desire to go to theaters and be entertained. The only pagan luxury, the only pagan entertainment which was abolished by the church was the gladiatorial show itself, but the church was relatively ineffective in producing a tremendous change in the culture around it, and I mentioned this so that we in the twentieth-century church can be somewhat encouraged knowing that the failures that we have experienced in attempting to be salt in the earth, in attempting to be changers of our own culture, this type of change has never been extremely granted to the church. In the sixteenth century there are some exceptions, and in the medieval period there are some exceptions as well, but when there is a large portion of the society that is Christian in name only, it's very difficult for

the Christian church to exercise the type of restraint, a moral restraint, which the church would think would be proper given a Christian community. So in a sense, be encouraged as you meet with failure in terms of attempting to produce social changes in America knowing that unfortunately the history of the church does not demonstrate tremendous success for the church in this one important battlefield.

Having had a few lectures of the more relaxing nature, looking at social life and worship, I would like to turn as we begin to end our course with a last look at Christology in the ancient church as we begin to summarize the theological developments that we've seen over the last few centuries. What I'll be doing in this part of the lecture is focusing in on the doctrine of Christ and seeing what has happened from the time of 325 up until the end of our course. So come with me as I begin to recount the story that we've heard in the past and then expand our understanding of the development of the doctrine of Christ in the ancient church period.

325—that year should be in your memory banks. What happened in 325? That's right, the Council of Nicea. What did that council establish? It established (it didn't establish; it was already long established by God Himself), but the church confessed the eternal, preexistent Godhead of Christ. The Creed of Nicea, the Nicene Creed, which takes a long time before it is fully adopted, excludes Arianism from the church. What did Arius do? Arius and Arianism denied the full eternal deity of the Son and the Spirit to the Father. That's the fourth century, 325 to 381. That's the important doctrinal controversy, that's the important advance that the church makes in understanding the Scriptures.

In the fifth century, we move on to Christological discussion, and the year is 451 for the next important council. And the issue, the person is not Arius but Nestorius. Nestorius could subscribe to the theology of Nicea. He was fully in accord with the teaching that had been developed in the fourth century. He believed that Jesus was fully divine, that Jesus had no beginning in time, and he believed that the Son was of the substance of the father. So what's wrong with Nestorius?

Nestorius did not understand the nature of the incarnate Christ, and his teaching produced another crisis in the church which demanded great deliberation on the part of the theologians.

A question which is often asked in course concerning these doctrinal discussions is how important was this to the person in the pew, especially as we as a class or as those of you taking this course wrestle with these difficult theological issues. Sometimes we notice our patience growing thin as the church seems to wrestle with hundreds of details, and it seems to be that they're fighting over insignificant things. But hopefully the one thing that I've communicated with you concerning the development of doctrine in the time period of the ancient church is that these issues particularly are not insignificant.

Did the common person in the pew understand all the complexities of the arguments of the theologians? Of course not. The common person couldn't read at all. The common person was informed by the preacher, and so the discussion is only among that class of people, that small class of people, who could read and write, who could understand these complex theological questions. And so the person in the pew was not so concerned, but this was of extreme importance to the person in the pew because in the discussion of the Nicene Creed and the events between Nicea and Constantinople and the Chalcedonian crisis of 451, we are talking about issues that are matters of life and death. Who is this Jesus is the issue of 451.

The issue concerns the incarnate Logos. Nestorius put the Godhead of Christ in a false relation to His humanity. Let's confess that we know that there is no creed on earth which can exhaustively set forth in formulas of human logic the person of Jesus Christ in what we call His theanthropic life. Write that word down, theanthropic. That word *theanthropic* is a combination of the Greek word God, *Theos*, and the Greek word for human being or man, *anthropos*. So we talk about God or Jesus in his theanthropic life. No creed can fully expound the mystery and the beauty of the incarnation, and the Creed of Chalcedon doesn't attempt to fully comprehend this Christological mystery, but the creed itself is content with setting forth the truth and establishing the boundaries of what we would consider to be orthodox teaching. It does not mean to preclude further theological discussion. What it wants to do is guard against erroneous conceptions.

And the big issue, the erroneous conception would be to mutilate either the divine or the human in Christ or to place the two in a false relation. In other words, those who were living in the fifth century, those who were wrestling with this important theological truth knew that what they were doing in Chalcedon did not

present the full-blown doctrine of Christ. I would be quick to add that to present a fully developed doctrine of Christ would take a full volume, not just a creed—would maybe take many volumes. But what they wanted to do was say to the church, and this way they speak to us today, that there are certain boundaries, certain limits against which the church must move. They can't go beyond these boundaries. They cannot go beyond these limits as the church continues to wrestle with Christological teaching, and the issues are keeping the humanity and divinity of Christ, full and complete, separate and yet unified.

Now let's examine the main ideas of this very important Creed of Chalcedon, and I'll have a number of points that you should write down. First of all, the Creed of Chalcedon tells us that there is a true incarnation of the Logos. That Logos is the second person of the Godhead. What is the motive for that incarnation? The motive for that incarnation is the deep, deep love of God. What is the end of that incarnation, the goal to which that incarnation is placed? The goal is the redemption of the fallen race of humanity, and the reconciliation of this race with God. The incarnation is neither a conversion of God into man nor a conversion of man into God. Neither is it a humanizing of the divine, nor is it a deification of the human. Nor, on the other hand, is it a mere outward transitory connection of the two factors, but it is an abiding union of humanity and deity in one personal life.

As a side light, I would remind you of the teaching of Arius on this point. Arius saw in the incarnation a conversion of a man into God; that is, that there was this Jesus of Nazareth, a very good fellow, who by human effort in being aided with the Spirit began to become sinless and so this one man in a sense becomes God. And in salvation, in the salvation or soteriology of Arius, we see him propounding a human works righteousness, using a lot of the terminology of the book of Hebrews, that Jesus is the pioneer of our salvation, He is the first human being to become deified, and so that by your will power, by your attempts in combination with the activity of the Spirit, you too can become sinless and by becoming sinless so be saved. Of course, Arianism itself was excluded in Nicea, especially in terms of the expressions of the eternal relationship between the Son and the Father, but as Arianism progressed and this rival soteriology was also propounded, we see the Council of Chalcedon speaking eloquently against this type of a deification or conversion of a man into God. That's the first point.



The second point that the Council of Chalcedon presents is the precise distinction between nature and person—between nature and person. The teaching of Chalcedon distinguishes in the Trinity three persons in one divine nature or substance which they have in common. In its Christology the Chalcedonian Creed teaches conversely two natures in one person, which pervades both in Christ. Remember now, in the Trinity we got three persons in one nature; in Chalcedon, you've got two natures in one person in Christ, in the incarnate Christ. So it cannot be said that the Logos, the second person of the Trinity, assumed a human person (again, we're relating this to the first point) or united himself with a definite human individual like this Jesus of Nazareth. For then the God-man would consist of two persons, but He took upon Himself the human nature which is common to all human beings and, therefore, he redeemed not one particular man, Jesus of Nazareth, but all human beings as partakers of the same nature and substance. Of course, now as I say that, I'm also opening up discussions concerning the nature of the atonement, which was not addressed at this time period; that is, when we say that He takes on human nature which is common to all human beings and did not redeem a particular man but all men or all human beings, we are not discussing questions of limited or unlimited atonement at this point. That's a later historical discussion.

Point number three concerning the teaching of Chalcedon. As a result of the incarnation, that infinite act of divine love, we have the God-man. This is not some type of double being as Nestorius probably taught with two curses, nor do we have in the God-man a compound middle being, something which is neither divine nor human, but what we have is one person who is both human and divine. Christ had a rational, human soul. And according to a definition then later added, a human will and is therefore in the fullest sense of the word the Son of Man. Yet at the same time, he is the eternal Son of God in one person with one undivided self-consciousness.

Is that complex? Not really, as we reflect upon the nature of what it is to be a human being. What do we have within ourselves? Do we have human wills? Do we will certain things? Of course. Do we have a human soul? Of course. Is our person a unified being? Assuming that we are psychologically healthy, there is only one of us—a united, willing, soul-filled person. And so Jesus was truly a human being in that fullest sense of the word, and yet (and this is the great distinction between the Son of God who is also man and us) He's fully divine and so these two distinct natures are also

completely unified in one self-consciousness. I have to mention as an aside, in the nineteenth century especially there was great discussion as to the self-consciousness of Jesus Christ in terms of his messianic identity, and again this is for another course, not even a course in church history or maybe modern church history, but it was propounded in the nineteenth century that Jesus did not have consciousness of His messianic role. And once again, if these nineteenth-century theologians would have read their church history, they would have been saved from this error.

There were certain liberal theologians in the nineteenth century, especially in Germany, who said that in fact Jesus had such a limited knowledge of His own messianic role, He fully expected to be taken down off the cross by God, and that the cry of Jesus, "My God, My God, why have You forsake Me?" is not the point of excruciating pain as Jesus is bearing the sins of the world, but it's the cry of someone who expected to be saved and was left alone to die. That's a hideous teaching, but once again it went through a fundamental lack of seeing the importance of the church having wrestled through theological issues, and I would dare say this is one of the reasons why this course is being taught, so that we can avoid in the twentieth century many of the important questions which have been wrestled through in the years past.

And if we had a lot of time we could take about twentieth-century Christology as it relates to the creeds of Chalcedon and that fifth century. We talk in twentieth-century modern theology about the suffering and the death of God, and these various Christological discussions which once again I would refer you to other teachers, systematic theologians, those who are more skilled in modern theology. A lot of the discussion that is occurring in twentieth-century Christology is directly related to the debates of the fifth century, and if you know what we're talking about now in this course, as you are confronted with the theologies of Moltmann and Pannenberg and other modern German and modern American and English-speaking theologians, you'll see that many of the issues they're struggling with are old issues, and you'll see whether they are making an improvement on the teachings of Chalcedon or not. That was just an aside.

Let me go on now to the fourth point. Point four concerns the duality of natures which is taught in 451 at the Council of Chalcedon. The Creed of Chalcedon affirmed that even after the incarnation and to all eternity, the distinction of the natures of Christ continues without confusion and without conversion, yet



without separation, without being divided, so that the divine will remains ever divine and the human will of Christ remains ever human, and yet the two have continually one common life and interpenetrate each other like the persons of the Trinity.

Point five, the unity of the person. There's only one and the self-same Christ—one Lord, one Redeemer. There is a unity in the distinction, as well as a distinction in the unity. Leo, the church father during this time period, wrote this truth (now I'm quoting a rather longer quote from Leo): "The same who was true God is also true man and in this unity there is no deceit, for in it the lowliness of man and the majesty of God perfectly pervade one another. Because the two natures make only one person, we read on the one hand from John 3:13, 'The Son of Man came down from heaven, while yet the Son of God took flesh from the virgin,' and on the other hand we read from the hand of Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:8, 'The Son of God was crucified and buried.' While yet He suffered not in His Godhead as coeternal and consubstantial with the Father, but in the weakness of human nature." This beautiful writing by Leo helps to summarize the complex teaching of the Creed of Chalcedon, but the extremely important teaching of the unity and diversity that we have in the incarnate Christ.

And I have to mention as an aside for those of you who want to pursue this, as I read this quotation from Leo, I'm reminded of twentieth-century teaching, and once again the practicality of this course is underlined. Right now it is precisely this area of twentieth-century theology which is the most hotly disputed and debated where it is being asserted today by modern theologians that it is God who dies on the cross. In one sense that is true in that it is a God-man, but in twentieth-century theology, the distinction of Chalcedon has been lost sight of. The beauty of church teaching done fourteen hundred years ago has been lost sight of by the twentieth-century church, and so without again going into any detail, I mention for your very practical information that what we've been learning and the errors which the church is attempting to guard us against are being discussed today, and so be warned and know what has been discussed in the ancient church period.

So the divine and the human are as far from forming a double personality in Christ as the soul and the body and man or as the regenerate and the natural life in the believer form two different persons. We know from the teaching of Paul about the struggle that is inherent in all of our lives as Christians who are redeemed,

and yet Christians who still love to sin. Paul makes this teaching clear in Galatians 5 as he talks about the fruit of the Spirit being love and joy and peace, but in the verses before those verses he talks about the fruit of sinful human nature, and the whole teaching of the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters of Galatians are to teach us about this war inside us as Christians. And yet there aren't two Rick Gambles, there aren't two of you, there is one of you, as you have this struggle within yourself as a Christian who loves Christ and yet also loves the self too much. So there's no double personality in Christ, just as there's no double personality in the life of the believer.

And sixth and finally concerning the teaching of Chalcedon, we note that the whole work of Christ is to be referred to His person and not be attributed to the one or the other nature exclusively. The work of Christ as fully God and fully man, the redemption which is wrought for us by Him, is to be ascribed to His whole person and not His human nature or His divine nature. We must see both the unity and the diversity in Christ.

So concluding this brief summary of Christology at this time period (and hopefully before we finish our lectures we'll be able to take a look at further development in Christology), concluding our analysis of what we've seen in this fifth century, I hope that your response is the same as mine as we reflect upon the beauty of this time period in the church's struggle, the beauty of developing this complex unfolding. It's as if you are looking at a rose. The rose is one solid piece, and yet within the rose you can see the layers of unity, and Christ is like a rose—one human and divine person—and yet within that single personality is both the beauty and the sweet-smelling savor of the marriage of divinity and humanity. It is a beautiful teaching. It should make our hearts sing as we reflect upon the Bible's teaching concerning this very significant part of Christian doctrine.

Turning our attention once again to a more light subject and easier subject, we continue analysis of social life and the life of the Christian church during the same time period that theological discussions are occurring. And I now turn our attention as we come to the end of our course to a development which is inherent in the last part of the ancient church period and which plans an important role through the medieval church period, and that is the development of the idea called monasticism—monasticism.

For twentieth-century evangelical Christians, monasticism is a perplexing and strange type of teaching, but the fact of the matter is that monasticism begins in the ancient church period. What I'd like to do for you in the remaining minutes of this lecture and perhaps to begin with this topic in our next lecture is outline how monasticism developed, whether it's all good or all bad, to understand an important part of the Christian church for many centuries. And we as evangelicals who don't believe in monasticism, Protestantism itself is the death blow to monasticism, we who don't believe in monasticism must still understand this important part of church history. Of course, monasticism comes into full bloom in the time of the medieval church, but it's helpful for us to understand both our own past and extremely helpful for us as we understand ecumenical relations as we have contacts especially with those in the Roman Catholic Church.

During the time period of persecution, there was no great push within the church toward monasticism. As you remember from our lectures concerning social life during this time, the Christian church had always stood against the ways of the world. That's relatively easy to do when you're living in a time of persecution. How about when that persecution is lifted and suddenly Christianity is the state religion? Once again, I remind you of the earlier lectures on social life. I read a few excerpts of the complaints which theologians made concerning dress, food, and lifestyle in general. It's with the rise of Christianity as the state religion that there is a rise in the desire for the monastic life. Let me say that again. It's important that you remember. Concomitant with the rise of Christianity as the state religion, so there is immediately the desire for a monastic life.

Beginning primarily in the fourth century, and of course, it's in the fourth century that Christianity becomes the state religion, by the end of that century, beginning in the fourth, but by the end of that century there are literally thousands of monks in the church. We know that in one brand of being monks, they numbered over seven thousand just of this one type. How did this come to be? Monasteries began in the land of Egypt and spread both east and west from that home base. Until the time of the Reformation, we note that it is the place that continued literacy and much of Christian life. Yes, it's the monastery that was used in the providence of God to continue intellectual life and continued doctrinal development within the church during the time period that we would call the Dark Ages, which are sometimes

mislabeled the Dark Ages. The Dark Ages weren't so dark after all. But it was the monastery that provided much vitality for the Christian church, and it lasted for a thousand years and so is an important part of Christian history. And I remind you that there are still monasteries in the Roman Catholic Church and in the Greek Orthodox Church as well.

What would be the motivation for someone to go to a monastery? During the earliest development in the fourth century, monasteries afforded, and this will sound a little radical, but monasteries afforded another type of martyrdom. This was a voluntary martyrdom, a gradual self-destruction, a sort of religious suicide. We find in the burning deserts and the awful caves of Egypt and Syria, amid the pains of self-torture, the destruction of natural desires and the relentless battles that the monks participated in with themselves. These ascetics attempted to gain for themselves that crown of heavenly victory which their predecessors had obtained through bloody and quick death. So this is the first motivation in the early development of monasteries. The Christian church had in a sense even developed a call to the martyrs. The martyrs were looked upon nearly with veneration, and there was a zeal in the church for martyrdom seen still in the fourth century; you're reminded that in the beginning of the fourth century there were still Christians being killed for their faith. Twenty-five years later Christianity is the state religion, but that same zeal for professing Christ is there.

In our next lecture, we'll see the further discussion of monasticism and how it developed through the centuries.