

The Augsburg Confession

Article 3

The Son of God

In Article 3 the reformers begin to set the foundation for what would be the pivotal articles in the Augsburg Confession. This article discusses the person and the work of Jesus, the Christ. A proper understanding of this article is vital for a correct understanding what follows in articles XXI (The invocation of the saints) and IV (Justification).

The Roman Catholics and the Lutherans did not disagree on the doctrine discussed in this article, but we will see from following articles that the Roman Catholic Church's incorrect teachings in other doctrines served to undermine what they confessed here.

The confession divides the doctrine of the Son of God into two parts commonly used in theology: His person (nature) and His work. When we consider the person and work of Jesus, we must begin with the understanding that Jesus was a real person. He really lived and walked on this earth, just like the rest of us. Very few people deny the fact that Jesus of Nazareth ever existed, but many deny the Scriptural teaching of who Jesus is and what he came to do. In doing this they reject one of the fundamental teachings of Christianity, and place themselves outside of the true Christian Church.

For this reason we consider what Scripture teaches about Jesus Christ - His person and His work.

The Person of Jesus Christ

The reformers began this article with a confession on the person of Jesus Christ: *It is also taught among us that God the Son became man, born of the virgin Mary, and that the two natures, divine and human, are so inseparably united in one person that there is one Christ, true God and true man....*

We can divide the Scriptural teaching on the person of Jesus Christ into two parts as well: His deity (true God) and His humanity (true man).

- According to His divine nature, Christ has existed from eternity:

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting” (Micah 5:2; cf Isaiah 9:6);

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:1-3).

- At the right time Jesus also became man through his conception in the womb of the virgin Mary:

“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS” (Luke 1:31);

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

The Bible clearly describes the divine nature of Jesus, describing Him as true God:

“For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen” (Romans 9:5);

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).

In addition there are a number of passages that clearly describe Jesus as God through a special sentence structure in the Greek language. Among these would be Ephesians 5:5; 2 Thessalonians 1:12; and 2 Peter 1:1.

Among the modern-day groups that deny the divinity of Jesus are the Unitarians, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Deists in general (for example: Lodges and Boy/Girl Scouts).

The Bible also clearly describes the human nature of Jesus, describing Him as true man:

“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).

Jesus had a human body (Luke 24:39) a human soul (Matthew 26:38-39) and a human will (Luke 22:42). He hungered and ate, thirsted and drank, became tired and slept, became sorrowful and wept.

These two natures of the Son of God were joined into one person through the incarnation of Jesus. The union of Jesus’ divine and human natures is unique and one of the greatest of all miracles: ***“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory” (1 Timothy 3:16).***

The Work of Jesus Christ

The second part of this article describes the work of the Son of God as true God and true man. The reformers continued ...*who was truly born, suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried in*

order to be a sacrifice not only for original sin but also for all other sins and to propitiate God's wrath. The same Christ also descended into hell, truly rose from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God, that he may eternally rule and have dominion over all creatures, that through the Holy Spirit he may sanctify, purify, strengthen, and comfort all who believe in him, that he may bestow on them life and every grace and blessing, and that he may protect and defend them against the devil and against sin. The same Lord Christ will return openly to judge the living and the dead, as stated in the Apostles' Creed.

The work of Christ can also be divided into two parts: His humiliation and His exaltation.

In His state of humiliation willingly gave up the full use of His power as God and humbled Himself in the form of a servant in the interest of our salvation:

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-8).

But Paul continues to describe Jesus' exaltation also:

“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11).

The state of exaltation describes the work of Jesus when He began once again to fully and continuously use His divine attributes for the ongoing benefit of His church on earth: ***“And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:22-23).*** Let us give glory to God the Father for sending His Son as our Savior. Let us praise God the Son for humbling Himself and taking on our human nature in order to redeem us from our sin. And let us thank God the Holy Spirit for bringing us to believe such a miracle!