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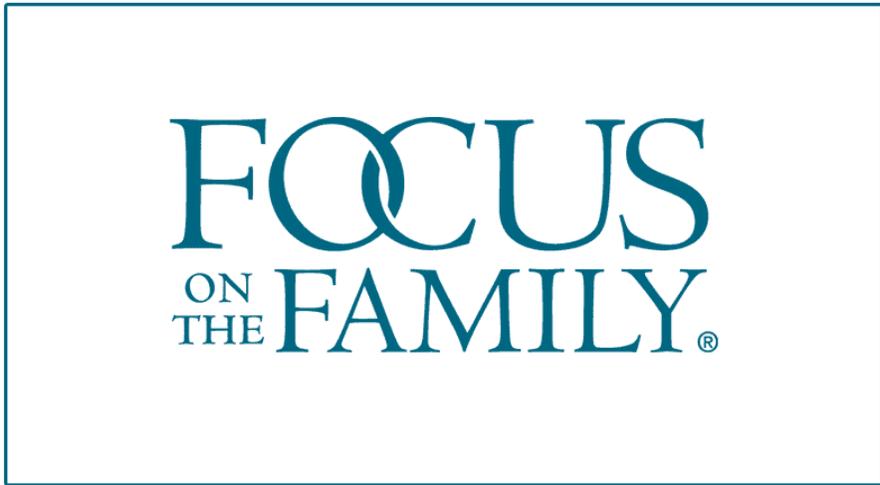
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## WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?

BY ROBERT VELARDE 📅 JANUARY 1, 2009



*Without Christology, there is no Christianity. Jesus is at the center of the Christian faith. Knowing about Christ is essential, as well as personal.*

During a discussion with his disciples, Jesus asked them, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" (Matthew 16:15, NIV). The answer to this important question is related to a critical area of theology known as Christology. As its name indicates, Christology is about the study of Christ – His nature, his purpose, and more.

Theology lays the foundation for God, His nature, and His plan involving redemption for human beings and restoration of a fallen creation. It also tells us some important things about God such as that He is personal, loving, transcendent, active in [His creation](#), all-powerful, ever-present, and all-knowing.

But without Christology, there is no Christianity. Jesus is at the center of the Christian faith. As a result, knowing about Christ is essential, as well as personal. Our relationship to Christ, for instance, is tied to our human condition, redemption, and salvation.

## Christ and His Claims

Despite isolated criticism to the contrary, one key aspect of Christ that we must agree on is that he actually existed as a historical person. This means he was not a legend, myth, or fictional hero. He really lived in the first century and the New Testament contains the fullest, most reliable record of his life and ministry.

It's also important that we understand his nature. Christ claimed divinity. There are many passages that support his claims to deity. Two such passages include passages in the Gospels wherein Jesus forgives sin, receiving the response, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Matthew 9; Mark 2; Luke 5). In John 8, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:58). In the next verse, the individuals he was interacting with "picked up stones to stone him." Why? The options are limited, with the best explanation being for supposed blasphemy. John 10:33 underscores some of the reasoning behind wanting to put Jesus to death: "We are not stoning you for any of these ... but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."

## Human and Divine

But Jesus also has a human nature, which leads to another important part of Christology. Jesus is fully God and fully man. He is not fifty percent God and fifty percent man or some other strange hybrid. But attempting to fully understand Christ's divine and human natures is challenging. A challenge, however, is not a contradiction. Seeking to understand the relationship between Christ's divine and human natures is part of what is called the hypostatic union. There is not button or switch on the back of Jesus that one could push or flip in order to put him into God-mode or Man-mode.

As one scholar put it, "In the incarnation of the Son of God, a human nature was inseparably united forever with the divine nature in the one person of Jesus Christ, yet with the two natures remaining distinct, whole, and unchanged, without mixture or confusion so that the one person, Jesus Christ, is truly God and truly man."<sup>[1]</sup>

This may seem like some nitpicking is going on, but when it comes to Christology, it is far too easy to deviate into error. If in fact the nature of Christ and what he did for us is key to our salvation and redemption, we'd better make sure we are correct in what we believe about Jesus.

## Purpose and Proof

But what did Jesus come to do? He had a specific mission, established by God. Jesus came to die for the sins of humanity. This is known as the atonement and will be addressed in more detail in another article in this series ("What must I do to be saved?").

Not only was Christ's birth miraculous, born to the Virgin Mary, but also his life was also full of miracles. From walking on water to giving sight to the blind and allowing the lame to walk, Jesus filled his ministry with the miraculous. These signs were meant to confirm his divine origin. Christ's greatest miracle was his own bodily resurrection following his death on the cross. Related to this is his ascension to heaven and his promised return.

## Who is Jesus?

If some aspects of Christology seem impersonal, irrelevant, or distant, it's important to keep in mind that what we know about Jesus is highly relevant and, more importantly, distinctly personal. John 3:16 is often quoted, but its richness is worth quoting again here: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Jesus claimed to be the only way for individuals to be redeemed, when he said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Jesus did not come to preach a "feel good" message, but the reality of human sin and the radical measures God takes on behalf of our redemption. Jesus is indeed a great moral teacher, but he is much more as well. He calls us to repent and follow him.

The early church encapsulated their belief by saying merely, "Jesus is Lord." This statement, however, and commitment to it could have resulted in severe persecution (and often it did). But either Jesus is Lord or he is not. Christians believe that indeed he is who he claimed to be, which brings us back to the opening questions Jesus asked, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" (Matthew 16:15) Our individual answer is of eternal importance.

## Christ, the Son of the Living God

All of the evidence for Christianity presents a solid cumulative case argument for the truth of Jesus and his claims. Far from being judgmental and narrow-minded with regards to the exclusive claims of Jesus, Christians are merely seeking to share the truth. The claims of Christ are not a matter of taste and are not meant to make individuals comfortable. Instead, they are matters of truth, designed to make us uncomfortable in the realization that we are fallen beings in need of serious redemption.

Who do you say Jesus is? Christology helps us find the right answer and, by doing so, changes our lives for the better and, in turn, allows us to change the world for the glory of God. What was Peter's answer to the question? "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Did Jesus rebuke Peter or correct him? No, instead Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven" (Matthew 16:17).

Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God. As Jude wrote, "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen" (Jude 24-25).

[1] Walter Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker Books, 1984), under "Hypostatic Union" by C.A. Blasing.

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Robert Velarde is author of "Conversations with C.S. Lewis" (InterVarsity Press), "The Heart of Narnia" (NavPress), and "Inside The Screwtape Letters" (Baker Books). He studied philosophy of religion and apologetics at Denver Seminary and is pursuing graduate studies in philosophy at Southern Evangelical Seminary.

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