Lesson 2 Terms and Definitions

The Nature of the Son Who Is Jesus Christ

Key terms in the debates over Christ's deity, humanity, and personhood, and the related doctrine of the Holy Spirit and Trinity.

Essential Terms

Christology	The study of who Jesus Christ is and how he is both divine and human.
Incarnation	The eternal Son became human without ceasing to be God.
Deity of Christ	Jesus fully possesses the divine nature; he is neither created nor a lesser god.
Humanity of Christ	Jesus has a complete human nature: body, mind, will, emotions, and the capacity to suffer and die.
Preexistence of Christ	The Son existed before his birth; Nicene Christianity teaches that he is eternal.
Logos	Greek for Word; John 1 calls the eternal, divine Son the Logos who became flesh.
Docetism	The teaching that Jesus only appeared to have a body or to suffer, denying his real humanity.
Gnosticism	Ancient movements stressing secret knowledge for salvation and often viewing matter as inferior; some taught Docetism.
Arianism	Arius's teaching that the Father brought the Son into existence before creation, so the Son was not eternally divine.
Creator-creature distinction	The absolute distinction between uncreated God and creation; the Arian dispute asked where the Son belongs.
Eternal generation	The Son's timeless origin from the Father; begotten does not mean created.
Begotten not made	Nicene phrase distinguishing the Son's eternal relationship to the Father from creation.
Homoousios	Greek for same essence; Nicaea affirmed that the Son fully shares the Father's divine being.
Homoiousios	Greek for similar essence; it could leave the Son's full deity uncertain.
Nicene Creed	Confession begun at Nicaea (325) and expanded in the form associated with Constantinople (381), affirming the Son and Spirit as fully divine.
Trinity	One God eternally exists as three distinct, fully divine persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Ousia	Greek for essence, being, or substance; pro-Nicene theology speaks of one divine ousia.
Hypostasis	Greek term eventually used for person; pro-Nicene theology speaks of three hypostases.
One essence three persons	The Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct persons who share one undivided divine nature.
Pro-Nicene	Defending and clarifying Nicaea's confession that the Son shares the Father's divine essence.

The Holy Spirit and Later Controversies

Pneumatomachians	Fourth-century opponents of the Spirit's full deity, also called Macedonians; literally fighters against the Spirit.
Cappadocian Fathers	Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa, who defended the Spirit's deity and clarified Trinitarian language.
Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed	The 381 form of the creed: the Spirit is Lord and giver of life, worshiped and glorified with Father and Son.
Procession of the Spirit	The Spirit's eternal relationship of origin; the creed says he proceeds from the Father.
Temporal mission	The Spirit's being sent into the world in salvation history, distinct from eternal procession.
Filioque	Latin for and the Son (fee-lee-OH-kway); the West added it to the creed's procession clause, while Eastern Orthodoxy rejects the addition.
Apollinarianism	The divine Word replaces a complete human rational mind or soul in Jesus, compromising his humanity.
Nestorianism	A label for dividing Christ so sharply that his natures seem to become two persons; Nestorius's own views were more complex.
Theotokos	Greek for God-bearer or Mother of God; Mary's child is the divine Son incarnate, though she did not originate his deity.
Eutychianism	A label for confusing Christ's two natures or absorbing his humanity into his deity after the incarnation.
Nature	What someone is; Jesus has complete divine and human natures.
Person	Who someone is; Jesus is one person, the eternal Son, with two complete natures.
Hypostatic union	The permanent union of Christ's complete divine and human natures in the one person of the Son.
Chalcedonian Definition	The 451 confession that Christ is truly God and truly human, one person in two natures.
Without confusion change division or separation	Chalcedon's four boundaries: Christ's natures are neither blended nor altered, and he is not two persons.
Subordinationism	Making Son or Spirit inferior in divine nature to the Father; distinct from Christ's willing obedience in his human mission.
Modalism	The view that Father, Son, and Spirit are roles or manifestations of one divine person, not distinct persons.