



# GOD THE SON INCARNATE: THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

BY STEPHEN J. WELLMUM

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“There is nothing more important in life than to know, trust, love, and obey Jesus Christ our Lord.” So concludes the preface in Steve Wellum’s *God the Son Incarnate* (*GSI*), succinctly summing up the ultimate aim of this book on the doctrine of Christ. Wellum succeeded admirably in this goal, and along the way, accomplished so much more.

There are a number of helpful treatments of Christology, from the expanding array of systematic theologies to individual books on the doctrine of Christ. It is not a weakness that these works cover much similar ground; one would hope for that in books that adhere to historic orthodoxy. Wellum, however, is not content to merely assemble scriptural data or to restate creedal affirmations. For him, theological method is critical to articulating a Christology that is both orthodox and contemporary—in other words, a Christology aimed at sharpening and enriching our grasp of Christ, protecting it from error, and proclaiming it within our secularized cultural moment.

Among its many strengths, three, in particular, distinguish *GSI* from many other treatments and illustrate Wellum’s careful theological method and the fruits it yields.

## **Cultural Awareness**

The church does not testify to Christ in a vacuum but within a culture shaped by numerous intellectual currents and captive to certain presuppositions. Sensitive to this, Wellum begins by laying important epistemological foundations aimed, in essence, at answering the question, “*How can we know anything at all about Jesus?*” After tracing some of the key intellectual shifts over the past few centuries and their effects on doing theology, he

demonstrates the coherence—indeed, the necessity—of a “revelational epistemology” in arriving at true knowledge about Christ. *There is nothing more basic (i.e., foundational) than God’s revelation in Jesus Christ from which to do Christology.* Evangelicals might take this for granted, but such worldview grounding is vital to understanding the futility of autonomous human reason in understanding Christ and securing Scripture’s unrivaled authority in our reflection about him.

### **Biblical-Theological Rigor**

In Part 2 of his book, Wellum proceeds to explore the biblical data concerning Christ, and it is here that *GSI* makes a particularly incisive contribution. Before compiling texts about Jesus, Wellum contends for a Biblical-theological reading of texts, accounting not just for their *content* (what they say about Jesus) but their *structure* (how they present Jesus across the span of redemptive history). In other words, the Christological task involves not only drawing data from Scripture but doing so according to the *pattern* of Scripture—honoring its nature as a unified revelation that progressively unfolds, in eras and epochs, throughout salvation-history. This Biblical-theological method governs Wellum’s treatment of the Bible’s witness concerning Christ, and the resulting portrayal of Christ is at once thorough, textually sensitive, and richly illuminating.

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### **Historical Reverence**

It is a peculiarly modern tendency in theology to pit a “biblical” approach against a “classical” approach. Wellum rightly avoids this false dichotomy and admirably demonstrates the critical interplay between exegesis and church history—and nowhere is this more important than in the area of Christology. Following the book’s exegetical treatment, Part 3 of *GSI* carefully explores the church’s Christological reflection in three stages: pre-Nicene issues and heresies, the foundational formulation from Nicaea to Chalcedon, and post-Chalcedonian reflection and clarifications. The fulcrum of this presentation is the Chalcedonian definition, and Wellum wisely shows how Chalcedon set forth parameters and guardrails for all future formulation,

even as it spurs further reflection within its boundaries.

### **Clarity in Service of Doxology**

These three qualities—cultural awareness, Biblical-theological rigor, and historical reverence—are executed by Wellum with a remarkable blend of sophistication and clarity. The pastor especially will find much help here as Wellum patiently walks the reader through some of the thorniest Christological issues: the person-nature distinction (which has massive implications for current debates); *anhypostasia* vs. *enhypostasia* (yes, it matters!); the relationship between Christ's two natures; the extent of Christ's knowledge on earth; and so much more. But the non-pastor should not be put off by those deep-dive moments, as Wellum never loses sight of the theological and personal import of such issues.

All of these strengths combine to make *GSI* not only an important book but a versatile resource for the church. And so, I conclude with three modest exhortations concerning this book. First, *turn to it for growth*—there is an education contained within these pages, and any reader will find their understanding of Scripture's presentation of Christ deepened and enriched. Second, *turn to it for clarity*—there are few Christological questions not explored here, and all are treated with remarkable accessibility. Third, *turn to it for adoration*—all that is contained in *GSI* is directed to this end. To know and confess Jesus as God the Son Incarnate is truly to behold nothing less than the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Such knowledge of the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he sent, is eternal life (John 17:3).

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