

The Deity of Christ

Tim Haile

For 2000 years, controversy has surrounded the question of the nature and person of Christ. Writing about Jesus in the first century, John said, “*the people were divided because of Him*” (John 7:43). This same condition remains today – People are still “divided because of Him.” Even many of those who call themselves “Christians” are divided over Christ. This division, like all other religious divisions, is the result of people either *failing to understand* or *refusing to accept* what the Scriptures say.

The most common beliefs about Jesus are as follows:

- *Skeptics* deny that Jesus even existed. Since this position is a matter of *evidences*, it does not lie within the scope of this particular study.
- *Modernists* believe that Jesus was a real historical figure, but they deny that He was *God*. Among these people, some even admit that Jesus was a great man and a great teacher, but they deny His divinity.
- *Muslims* believe that Jesus was a great prophet of God (in succession with other great prophets, like “Mohammed”), but they deny that He was God, or the Son of God.
- *Mormons* believe that Jesus was a man who *became* God.
- *Jehovah’s Witnesses* (like Arians) believe that Jesus was a created being. They classify Jesus as a demigod
- *Docetists* (Gnostics) believed that Jesus was God, but that His body was illusory. They were forced to this conclusion due to their belief that all flesh is inherently corrupt.
- *Nestorians* believe that Jesus was two distinct persons with two loosely joined natures: one human and one divine.
- *Kenoticists* believe that Jesus was God, but that His deity was “emptied” as a result of His coming in the flesh. This position is based upon a misunderstanding of Philippians 2:6.
- *Oneness Pentecostals* deny the eternal personhood of Jesus, claiming that there is only one person of God. According to them, Jesus of Nazareth was just one of the various manifestations of God, similar to His manifestation at other times as the *Father* and the *Spirit*.
- *Unitarians* deny the deity of Christ, claiming that there is only one person of God.

- Some believe that Jesus retained the *essence of God*, but His becoming *man* forced Him to give up the *attributes of God*. A variant of this position says that Jesus retained His divine powers while in the flesh, but that He surrendered the use of those powers. They allege that Jesus performed miracles only by the power of the Holy Spirit, as did the apostles, and not by His own power.
- Others see Jesus as possessing uninterrupted and unabridged deity, even during His days in the flesh, and that He exercised His divine powers insofar as such exercise did not conflict with His role as Savior and Servant. As will be demonstrated through the course of this study, this is the position set forth in the Scriptures, and it is the position that we must take if we wish to be saved.

Does It Matter What We Believe About Jesus?

Yes, it most definitely does. Jesus said, “*I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am you will die in your sins*” (John 8:24). Jesus’ use of the present tense verb, “I am,” is significant. He would later say, “*Before Abraham was, I am*” (John 8:58). This is the same kind of verb that Jehovah used to describe Himself to Moses from the burning bush (“I Am that I Am”). Moses was to tell his brethren that “I Am” had sent Him to deliver them from Egyptian bondage. That is, Moses was sent by an *eternal* and *self-existent* being. By describing Himself as “I am,” Jesus identifies Himself with the God that spoke to Moses from the burning bush.

Like Abraham, John the baptizer was also *older* than Jesus in his *physical* existence, yet he said that Jesus existed *before* him (John 1:30). This affirms the eternity of Jesus. We are reminded of Micah’s prophecy of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Though He would be born in the flesh, yet “*His goings forth have been from of old, even from everlasting*” (Micah 5:2). These passages help to explain Jesus’ words in John 16:8 and 9. The “sin” of which Jesus said the Holy Spirit would convict the world, was the sin of not believing on Him (John 16:8, 9). Jesus claimed identity with the Great “I Am.” He claimed to come “from Heaven” (Jn. 6:38), and He said that His nature was “from above” (Jn. 8:23). Jesus is a person of God. Refusal to accept the truth about Jesus’ divine nature will result in one’s *dying in his sins*.

Peter spoke of certain teachers of his day who *denied the Lord who bought them* (2 Pet. 2:1). Swift destruction was decreed for such heretics, but sadly, they were not the only ones adversely affected by their error: The next verse says, “*And many shall follow their pernicious ways...*” Sadly, numerous errors about the nature and person of Christ are taught and believed today. The souls of men continue to be destroyed by these egregious errors. It matters what we believe about Jesus.

The Incarnation

Certain men of the first century denied that Jesus had come in the flesh. This denial earned these men the distinction of being “antichrist” (1 Jn. 2:22; 2 Jn. 7). John said this doctrine would cause men to lose their reward (salvation) and their fellowship with

God (2 Jn. 8, 9). He went on to point out that those who fellowship such people are guilty of their “evil deeds” (vs. 10, 11).

The word “incarnation” is from a Latin word meaning “in flesh.” While the actual word is not used in the Bible, the thought of it is certainly there. John wrote:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14).

Some conclude from this passage that Jesus ceased to be the person of “*the Word*” (God) when He “became flesh.” This position, however, cannot be reconciled with other passages. Referencing Psalm 40, the Hebrew writer said, “*Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me’*” (Hebrews 10:5). The “Me” is Christ; the eternal person of “the Word.” A (human) “body” was all that Jesus required in order to accomplish His mission on the earth. Paul wrote to the Philippians about what Christ “took” or *added* in the incarnation: “*taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men*” (Phil. 2:7). The incarnation added flesh to deity; it did not withhold or subtract deity from flesh.

Though miracles are to be believed, not explained, the gospels of Matthew and Luke do provide some brief description of the incarnation process. We learn that:

- Mary, the mother of Jesus, “conceived” without having sexual relations with Joseph or any other man (Matt. 1:18-20).
- Her conception was the result of direct action of the Holy Spirit by which the spiritual person of “God, the Word” was fused with human flesh in the womb of the virgin Mary (Luke 1:31-35).
- The embryo that was produced in Mary was “the Holy One” (Luke 1:35 – that is, the sinless One – 1 Jn. 3:5; 1 Pet. 2:22; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; Jn. 8:46).
- The child that Mary delivered was the “Son of God” (Luke 1:35).
- Through the incarnation, the eternal person of God, the Word “dwelled” in a human body: a divine spirit in a human body (John 1:14) – “God with us.”

A Subject Worthy of Our Consideration

Some people refuse to even consider the question of the nature of Christ. They consider it too controversial. However, Jesus invited thought on this question. He asked the Pharisees, “*But what do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?*” When the Pharisees answered that He was “the son of David,” Jesus responded, “*How then did David call Him Lord?*” These Pharisees failed to answer Jesus’ question fully and accurately (Matthew 22:42-46). Honest Bible students can confidently do what these biased,

tradition-oriented, cowardly Pharisees refused to do: We can answer this question *fully*. Of course, as with all Bible subjects we must limit our answer to what is plainly revealed in Scripture. We must *speak as the oracles of God* (1 Peter 4:11). We must refrain from injecting our own theories and opinions (Prov. 3:5).

The writer of the book of Hebrews described Jesus as being “*the same yesterday, today and forever*” (Heb. 13:8). One is reminded of Malachi 3:6: “*I am the Lord, I change not.*” Jesus Christ *was, is, and forever shall be, God*. He possesses uninterrupted deity. He was the same person during His days in the flesh that he was before coming in the flesh, and he is that same person in heaven today. This fact is plainly demonstrated by John’s use of the term “logos” to describe Jesus in all of these phases of His existence:

- John’s gospel describes Jesus as “the **Word**” who was with God “*in the beginning*” (**John 1:1**). This described Christ’s *pre-incarnate* state.
- John’s first epistle says that he and others had “*seen, looked upon, and touched the Word of life*” (**1 John 1:1**). He later describes the “word of life” as being the person of Jesus. This described Christ’s *incarnate* state.
- John’s *Revelation* describes Jesus as the conquering commander “*whose name is the Word of God*” (**Revelation 19:13**). This describes Christ’s *post-incarnate* state.

It is significant that John described Jesus as the person of “the Word” in all of these circumstances, both *prior* to the flesh, *in* the flesh, and *after* the flesh. This emphasizes the continuity of Jesus’ nature from everlasting to everlasting (cp. the *Father* in Psalm 90:2). Christ is the “*everlasting Father,*” or, more precisely, the *father of eternity* (Isaiah 9:6). He is thus, the *progenitor* of eternity.

Other plain passages also describe Jesus as divine:

- Colossians 2:9 says, “*For in him (the person of “Christ” th) dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*” One translation has “in bodily form,” which I think is quite accurate. God’s intrinsic state is *spirit* (Jn. 4:24). The incarnate Christ was the result of a divine *spirit* being fitted with a human *body*.
- 1 Timothy 3:16 identifies one component of the “mystery of godliness” as being the fact that “*God was manifest in the flesh.*” Beside Matthew 1:23, this may be one of the simplest affirmations of the divinity of Christ in the Bible.
- Matthew 1:23 describes Jesus as being “*Immanuel, which being translated is God with us.*”
- Hebrews 1:8, 9, contain a quotation from Psalm 45:6, 7, in which God *the Father* speaks to God *the Son*, saying, “*Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; and the*

scepter of uprightness is the scepter of thy kingdom. Thou has loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." The Father calls Christ "God." This is clear proof of the divine nature of Christ. One cannot *believe God* without believing that Christ is God!

- Matthew 3:16, 17; 17:5 are instances of God the Father bearing audible witness of Christ's true identity. On both occasions the Father identified Jesus as being His "Son." The son bears the essential qualities, attributes and characteristics of the Father. To reject the divinity of Christ is to reject the claims of the Father and to deny the inspiration of the Scriptures.
- Titus 2:13 describes Christ as being "*God our Savior.*"
- Romans 9:5 says, "*Whose {Israelites} are the fathers, and of whom is Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever.*"
- Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Christ so perfectly and completely shares the attributes of the Father that he is identified as the "*exact representation*" of the Father's "*image*" (Heb. 1:3, cp Col. 1:15 & 2 Cor. 4:4).
- Philippians 2:6 says of Christ, "*Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.*" The use of the present tense verb "being" or "existing" means that Christ *has always* possessed, and *will always* possess the qualities and attributes of God. His incarnation and subsequent work as an obedient servant in no way affected His eternal divine nature. He continued to be *God*, though in a body of flesh and bones (Lk. 24:39).
- John 14:9 and 12:45 tell us that *to see Jesus is to see the Father*. Since God is "*a spirit*" (Jn. 4:24), Jesus must have been referring to His/God's *spiritual qualities*. While in the flesh, Jesus possessed every divine attribute. He was called "God," and *God* cannot exist apart from His divine attributes and qualities.
- John 1:18 tells us that while in the flesh, Jesus' actions were a constant "*declaration*" and *exegesis* of the Father. Those wishing to know what God thinks about certain matters, or wishing to know what God would do in certain situations, need only to look at Jesus. He was a walking, talking exposition and demonstration of God.
- John 5:17 says, "*But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh even until now, and I work.*" Christ referred to the Father as "My" Father. The Jewish hearers considered this blasphemous and worked even harder to kill Jesus. They had accurately concluded that Jesus was "*making himself equal with God*" (vs. 18). Their strong reaction is absolute proof that Jesus was claiming an unusual and special relationship with the Father. The reader should recall that Jesus had so referenced the Father in the Temple when He was 12 years old ("*Did you not*

know that I must be about my Father's business?" – Luke 2:49). Mary, His mother, was so intrigued by the remarks that she *"kept all these sayings in her heart"* (v. 51). Mary, of course, knew the special circumstances of Christ's conception and birth.

- John 10:30 tells us that Christ claimed oneness with the Father – *"I and my Father are one."* They were not one "person." They were a united "one." They were in perfect agreement with each other (cp. Jn. 17:20-23).
- John 16:30 and 21:17 affirm the *omniscience* of Christ. This is a divine quality.
- Matthew 9:6 and Luke 23:43 show Jesus exercising the divine prerogative to *forgive sins*.
- Matthew 9:4 and 12:25 tell us that Jesus knew human thoughts before they were expressed. He accurately identified the character of Nathanael before having met him (John 1:47). We are told that Jesus *"knew what was in man"* (Jn. 2:25).
- John 5:19 says, *"So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise'."* The actions and conduct of Jesus were perfectly harmonious with the will and character of the Father. Christ, in the flesh, could do only what He saw the Father do.
- Hebrews 1:10-12 (from Psalm 102:25 ff.) and Colossians 1:16 teach that Christ created all things. (*"You Lord" [said the Father to Christ], laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands."* Other passages show that the Father and the Holy Spirit were also involved in the Creation, but it is here attributed to Christ.
- Isaiah 45:23 – The God who says, *"For I am God, and there is no other,"* goes on to say, *"To me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess."* Romans 14:10-12 [KJV] says this bowing and confessing will be done to "Christ." Other manuscripts have "God" in verse 10, but the passage is subject to interpretation. To know the truth one must merely consider the passage alongside Philippians 2:10, 11 and 2 Corinthians 5:10. These passages teach that "Christ" is the One before whom men will bow and confess in the Day of Judgment. Thus, the "Jehovah" of Isaiah 45:22, 23 is Christ.

The Godhead

While it is true that the word "trinity" is not found in Scripture, the *concept* certainly exists. The New Testament thrice references the *Godhead* or *Godhood* (Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:20; Col. 2:9). The word "Godhood" refers to the state of being God. As the contexts of these passages describe, there are certain qualities, characteristics and attributes that define God. Those possessing these qualities are of the *God-kind* or *God-*

class. The Bible recognizes the Father, Son (Jesus) and Holy Spirit as being God (John 1:1-3, 14; Acts 5:3, 4). Thus, there are 3 persons of God: Three distinct, co-equal persons who possess the distinctive qualities that make them *God*.

Jesus Was Worshipped While In The Flesh

Only GOD is worthy of worship (Matt. 4:10; Rev. 19:10; 22:8, 9). The apostle Peter refused to accept worship (Acts 10:25). The apostle Paul refused to accept worship (Acts 14:11-15), and even an angel refused to accept worship (Rev. 19:10). Christ, however, did accept worship:

- The disciples worshipped Christ (Matt. 14:33; 28:9, 17).
- The blind man worshipped Christ (Jn. 9:38).
- The wise men worshipped Christ (Matt. 2:2).
- The leper worshipped Christ (Matt. 8:2).
- The ruler worshipped Christ (Matt. 9:18).
- The Canaanite woman worshipped Christ (Matt. 20:20).
- Zebedee's wife worshipped Christ (Matt. 20:20).

“Alpha and Omega”

The book of Revelation often describes the divine character of Jesus, and it discusses many of his divine activities. The saints that are addressed in the book of Revelation were facing intense and relentless persecution from their government and others in society. Physical life was quite precarious and uncertain. These saints needed reassurance that the faith was worth the fight. John's Revelation (a letter of letters) provided this comforting reassurance. One of the ways that this was done was to show Christians that their Savior-King possessed far more power and exerted far more control than any mere human king. Their king was more than just a man: he is God.

Revelation 1:8 and 21:6 speak of God, the Father as being “*Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end...*” These phrases emphasize the *eternality* of God. Interestingly, these same phrases are used of Christ (Revelation 1:17; 22:13). Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other. We must conclude that Jesus is *God*, and that his intrinsic nature is just as eternal as that of the Father.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ was, is, and forever shall be, *God*. While in the flesh Jesus was fully and functionally God in a human body. He is one of the Godhood, or as I mentioned above, the *God-class*. He shares this kind of existence with the Holy Spirit and the Fa-

ther. Though Jesus assumed a lesser *role* than the Father in the execution of the scheme of redemption (Jn. 14:28), yet He retained constant equality with the Father with respect to His *deity* (Jn. 5:18). To deny the deity of Christ is to deny the plain teaching of the Bible and abandon any hope of salvation. Let no one take solace in the thought that, though he denies the Son, he still believes on the Father: According to the apostle John, to deny the Son is to deny the Father (1 John 2:22, 23). Hence, the words of Jesus, *“Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me”* (John 14:1).

Tim Haile
7693 Russellville Rd.
Bowling Green, KY 42101
timhaile@biblebanner.com