

WHY I BELIEVE

The Deity of Christ

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. All scholars, religious and secular, would agree that Jesus Christ was a unique person. No one person has made such an impact on history as has Christ. Every intelligent person must reckon with the claims of Christ and not to do so is intellectual dishonesty.

Here is a man who was born in a lowly manger, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in an obscure village. He worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty, and then for three years he was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never went to college. He never owned a house. He never had a family. He never traveled over two hundred miles from the place where he was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself. He had nothing to do with this world except the power of his divine manhood. While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied him. He was turned over to his enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. His executioners gambled for the only piece of property he had on earth while he was dying – his coat. When he was dead, he was taken down and laid in a borrowed tomb through the pity of a friend. Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone. Today he is the centerpiece of the human race and the leader of the column of progress. I am within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched and all the navies that were ever built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life. (Phillips Brooks)

- B. Christianity makes the claim that Jesus Christ was not only a great man but that He was and is God incarnate. Only God could do and say the things that Christ claimed for Himself. Christianity is inseparably bound up with the person of Christ, and one's viewpoint on the person of Christ determines the reality of one's salvation. W.H. Griffith Thomas says,

Christianity is the only religion in the world which rests on the person of its founder. A man can be a faithful Muhammadan without in the least concerning himself with the person of Muhammad. So also a man can be a true and faithful Buddhist without knowing anything about Buddha. It is quite different with Christianity. Christianity is so inextricably bound up with Christ that our view of the Person of Christ involves and determines our view of Christianity (Christianity is Christ).

- C. The Christian Faith stands or falls on the deity of Jesus Christ. The fact of Christ's deity has always been the focal point of all orthodox Christianity, and, without this doctrine, there is no Christianity. While a firm belief in the deity of Christ has always been the position of the historic church, there has always been a few heretical groups who have denied this teaching. The problem arises out of the fact that Jesus Christ Himself never comes out directly and states that He is God. However the Bible evidence that Christ is God is overwhelming. NOTE: To deny the deity of Christ is to deny the clear teaching of the Bible.

II. CHRIST'S PERSONAL CLAIMS TO DEITY

A. Direct Claims

1. Christ claimed to be one in essence, substance or nature with the Father (John 10:30). The reaction of the Jews, who were monotheistic (one God), was to accuse him of blasphemy and stone Him because He was claiming to be God (John 10:31-39 cf. John 5:18).
2. Christ claimed to be pre-existent to all things (John 8:58). Only God could be pre-existent. Angels were in existence before the creation of the world; yet Christ was pre-existent before all created things; thus He was eternal and if eternal He is God.
3. Christ claimed to see Him was to see God (John 12:45; 14:9). This is a rather bold statement to make if He were not God.
4. Christ claimed that He alone knew the Father (Matt. 11:27), and to know Him was to know God (John 8:19, 14:7).
5. Christ claimed to receive Him was to receive God (Mark 9:37). He was stating equal authority with the Father.
6. Christ claimed to hate Him was to hate God (John 15:23).
7. Christ claimed to honor Him was to honor God (John 5:23).
8. Christ claimed to be able to save men from their sins (Matt. 10:32-33). Only God can save men.

9. Christ claimed equality with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the baptismal formula (Matt. 28:19).
10. Christ said that He was Lord (John 13:13 cf. Mark 2:28).
11. Christ claimed to forgive sins (Luke 2:7-11; 5:24). Only God has the power to forgive sins.
12. Christ claimed to be the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6).
13. Christ claimed to be an equal object of eternal life (John 17:3).
14. Christ claimed He was the Christ, the Son of God (Mark 14:61-62 cf. Matt. 26:63). Christ answered with a resounding "I am," when asked if He was the Son of God. He claimed He would come again to earth after His death and the high priest accused Him of blasphemy (Mark 14:61-64).

B. Indirect Claims

1. He claimed to be the Bread of Life (John 6:35).
2. He claimed to be the Light of the World (John 8:12).
3. He claimed to be the Door of the Sheepfold (John 10:7).
4. He claimed to be the Good Shepherd (John 10:11).
5. He claimed to be the Resurrection (John 11:25).
6. He claimed to be the True Vine (John 15:1).
7. NOTE: One of the major titles for God in the Old Testament is "I AM" (Exodus 3:14) and Jesus Christ constantly uses the title "I am." The intellectually honest man would have to admit that Christ is making the claim of deity.

C. The Claims of Liberals and Infidels

1. Men who deny the deity of Christ must supply an explanation for these fantastic claims and they do it by saying that Christ was either a liar, a lunatic or a legend. The burden of proof is on the scoffers and they must supply adequate answers for their claims.

2. Those who say Christ was a liar say that Christ was really an imposter. He knew He was not God but deliberately deceived his hearers. There is no indication in all of scripture that Christ lied. In fact, the Bible teaches us that He never sinned. If Christ is a liar, then there is no sense in following Him in any way, not even as a good moral teacher because His teachings could not be trusted.
3. Then there are those who say Christ was a lunatic. He was sincere but self-deceived because he was a deranged person, suffering from a severe case of megalomania. However, there is no indication that Christ was mentally or emotionally unbalanced in all of scripture. Even under extreme pressure, such as His trials before Herod and Pilate, He had composure and was of sound mind.
4. The third claim by unbelievers is that Christ is a mere legend. He was never really God but His enthusiastic followers made these fantastic claims to get this new religion "Christianity" off the ground. Archeology has hampered this view, for it is now pretty well agreed among scholars that the four Gospels were written within the lifetime of the contemporaries of Christ. Paul Little comments,

For a mere legend about Christ in the form of the Gospel, to have gained the circulation and to have had the impact it had, without one shred of basis in fact, is incredible. For this to have happened would be as fantastic as for someone in our own time to write a biography of the late Franklin Delano Roosevelt and in it say he claimed to be God, to forgive people's sins, and to have risen from the dead. Such a story is so wild it would never get off the ground because there are still too many people around who knew Roosevelt! (Know Why You Believe)

C. The Claims of Orthodox Christianity

2. The only consistent and logical position and the position that has been held by the historic and orthodox Church is that Christ was speaking the truth and is truly God. The orthodox stand is: Jesus Christ is undiminished deity and perfect humanity united in one person forever.
3. Only one who is God would dare to make the claims that Christ made. C.S. Lewis says,

I am trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him (Christ): "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must

not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice as to whether this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (Mere Christianity)

II. CHRIST POSSESSES ALL THE ATTRIBUTES (CHARACTERISTICS) OF GOD

- C. If it can be shown that the very attributes that make up the person of God the Father are the same as the person of Christ possesses, then we can conclude that Christ is God.
- D. These attributes are: Immutability (Heb. 13:8); Eternal (Mic. 5:2; John 1:1); Omnipotent (Rev. 1:8; Matt. 28:19); Omniscient (John 2:25); Omnipresent (Matt. 18:20); Holiness (John 6:39; Heb. 7:26).

III. CHRIST DOES WORKS THAT ONLY GOD CAN DO

- C. If Christ does the very same work that God does, then we can conclude that Christ is God.
- D. These works are: Creator (John 1:3, 10; Col. 1:16); Sustainer (Heb. 1:3); Raises the dead (John 5:21, 28-29); Rewards the saints (II Cor. 5:10); Judges the world (John 5:22); Imparts life (John 5:21), Performs miracles (Mark 4:35-41; John 2:1-12).

IV. CHRIST IS AN EQUAL OBJECT WITH THE FATHER

- C. Equal object of worship (John 5:23; Luke 24:52; Matt. 28:17).
- D. Equal object of prayer (Acts 7:59; Rev. 22:20 cf. I Thess. 3:11).

V. CHRIST'S ACTS ARE EQUAL WITH THE FATHER'S: Abiding in the Christian (I John 4:13; John 15:4ff); Gospel (Rom. 1:1; 1:16), Church (Gal. 1:13; Rom. 16:16); Holy Spirit (I Cor. 2:11; Rom. 8:9).

VI. CHRIST'S SINLESS LIFE SHOWS THAT HE IS GOD

- C. Christ did no acts of sin (I Pet. 2:22) and knew no sin (II Cor. 5:21). Only God is sinless.
- D. Pilate, His enemy, could find no fault in Him (John 19:6); and Christ challenged His foes to find any fault in Him (John 8:46).

VIII. CHRIST'S CONTEMPORARIES ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE WAS GOD

- C. The Apostle John said He was God (John 1:1; Rev. 1:8; 21:6-7).
- D. The Apostle Paul claimed His deity (I Tim. 3:16; Phil. 2:6).
- E. The Apostle Thomas, the doubter, cried out "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).
- F. The author of Hebrews calls Christ by the title of God (Heb. 1:8).
- G. NOTE: When Christ asked Peter, "Whom do you say that I, the Son of Man, am?" Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:15-16). Notice that Christ was not shocked at being called the Son of God, which is a title for deity, nor did He rebuke Peter. Christ actually commended him for it. All Christ would have had to say was that he was not God and the matter would have been ended, but He never did because He was and is God.

IX. CONCLUSION

- C. The learned and thinking person knows that apart from the deity of Christ there is no Christianity. If Christ is not God, then we cannot trust His teachings nor does He qualify to be our Savior. Jesus Christ challenged men to come to Him to find rest for their burdened souls (Matt. 11:28-30). We cannot imagine anyone else making this claim, not Confucius, nor Muhammad, nor Julius Caesar, nor Francis of Assisi, nor Ghandi, nor the Pope. In fact, not any of the sons of men. But the words sound natural enough as they come from Jesus. Furthermore, through the centuries all sorts of weary and heavy laden people have been coming to Christ and find, as He said they would, "rest unto (their) souls."
- D. Perhaps the testimony of Napoleon Bonaparte sums up the essence of this message:

Everything in Christ astonishes me. His spirit overawes me, and His will confounds me. Between Him and others in the world, there is no term of comparison. He is truly a Being by Himself . . . the truths which He announced, His manner of convincing, are not explained either by human organization or by the nature of things.

His birth and the history of His life, the profundity of His doctrine, which grapples the mightiest difficulties, and which is, of these difficulties, the most admirable solution, His gospel . . . His empire, His march across the ages . . . is for me a prodigy, a mystery insoluble, which I can neither deny nor explain, here I see nothing human.

I know men; and I tell you that Jesus is not a man. Superficial minds see a resemblance between Christ and the founders of empires and the gods of other religions. That resemblance does not exist. There is between Christianity and whatever other religions the distance of infinity . . . I search in vain in history to find the equal of Jesus Christ.