

# THE DEITY OF CHRIST

## “the Word was God”

### Key question

In what sense does the Bible present Jesus as God?

### Key text

## John 1:1

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

### Key Definition

## Deity of Christ

Christ is fully God being equated with the Creator and the Jehovah of the Old Testament.

### Introduction

1. Does the Bible really support the deity of Jesus.
  - a. When Jesus was on earth he was not equal with the Father.
    - Mk.13:32 Only the Father knows some things.
    - Lk.22:41-42 Jesus prays to the Father.
    - Jn.14:28 “the Father is greater than I”
    - Jn.20:17 “My God”
    - I Cor.11:3 God is still the head of Christ.
    - I Cor.15:28 The Son is still subject to God.
  - b. Answers to texts that seem to support the deity of Jesus.
    - Jn.10:30 “I and My Father are one” (In Jn.17:22 “... that they may all be one just as we are one.”)
    - Jn.1:1 “The Word was God” (“with God”, “no one has seen God” vs.18)
    - I Jn.5:6-8 “There are three that bear witness, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit.” (these words are found in texts only after the 16th century).
    - Matt.28:19 “in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (all records of baptisms in the early church are in the name of “Jesus” - Acts 2:38, 8:15, 10:48, 19:5)
2. The nature of Christ has been debated more than any other Christian doctrine with the possible exception of “salvation by grace.”

- a. Who was Jesus?
  - b. Did he claim to be God?
  - c. Was he the Messiah?
3. Jesus did not understand himself to be a mere representative, ambassador, or agent of God, but one in whom the fullness of God is personally present (Col.1:15-20).
    - a. Jesus did not speak as the Prophets saying, “Thus says the Lord.” He spoke as one who had authority in himself.
    - b. Jesus’ identity with God the Father appears in the earliest identifiable oral sources that antedate the written sources.
    - c. He aroused indignation among his adversaries precisely because he claimed to be the Son of God.
    - d. The motivation for his followers to make up such an accounting seems wholly lacking and implausible.
    - e. The notion that Jesus was a good moral teacher will not stand up against the backdrop of such claims to equality with God unless they were true. If he is crazy (and there is no indication that he is anything but crazy) he does not deserve to be respected or trusted in any of his teachings.
  4. The deity of Jesus is significant in that it is connected to his authority.
    - a. His moral authority to define good and evil.
    - b. His philosophical authority (Logos) to define truth and error.
  5. The greatest support for the deity of Jesus is seen in what he did not what he said. It is easy to make a claim about being divine. The real proof is in what a person is able to do.
    - Resurrection from the dead.
    - Attesting miracles before credible witnesses.
    - Fulfilled prophecy.

#### A. Jesus bears witness to his own deity.

1. It is characteristic of great religious teachers that they are self-effacing.
  - a. Jesus seems quite different. Compounding the irony, all of this was said by one who most earnestly taught humility.
  - b. Either Jesus did not follow his own teaching at all, or there must have been something utterly unique about him that enabled him to teach from a very different premise of authority than anyone else.
  - c. It is highly unlikely that the disciples projected upon him a messianic identity in that such an idea was so hostile to their cultural expectations.
2. Jesus rarely made explicit, overt claims to deity but after listening and watching Him it was difficult to escape the fact that he considered himself as one with the Father in a special way.
  - a. In **Matt.26:63-64** (Mk.14:61-62) Jesus identifies himself with Christ, the Son of God. “But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus said to him, “**You have said it yourself**; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

- b. At his trial others understood him to make a claim to deity. **Jn.19:7**  
 “The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because **He made Himself out to be the Son of God.**”
3. Many of Jesus’ claims would be inappropriate if made by someone who is less than God.
- Matt.13:41 “his angels” and “his kingdom” (Lk.12:8-9, 15:10 “angels of God”)
  - Mk.2:5-7 “My son, your sins are forgiven” “who can forgive sins but God alone?”
  - Matt.25:31-46 Jesus judges the world.
  - Mk.2:27-28 “so the Son of man is lord even of the Sabbath”
  - Jn.10:30 “I and the Father are one”
  - Jn.14:7-9 “he who has seen me has seen the father”
  - Jn.8:58 “before Abraham was, I am”
  - Jn.3:13 “he who descended from heaven, the Son of man”
  - Jn.14:23 “we (Father and Son) will come to him and make our home with him”
  - Jn.20:28 “My Lord and my God”
  - Matt.5:21-22, 27-28 “You have heard that it was said, ... but I say to you ...”
  - The resurrection from the dead.
4. To what extent did Jesus know who he was?
- a. Jesus thought of himself as the Son of God in a unique way, that he was set apart from all other men in that he shared a oneness with God impossible to ordinary men.
1. **Matt.11:27** “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”
  2. **Mk.13:32** “But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father”
- b. Jesus had a messianic consciousness.
1. He accepted the designation “Messiah” when it was applied to him. Lk.9:19-27
  2. He affirmed his messiahship when challenged by the Sanhedrin. Mk.14:61-62

### **B. Paul’s teaching concerning the deity of Christ.**

1. **I Cor.8:1-6** “<sup>1</sup> Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. <sup>2</sup> If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; <sup>3</sup> but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him. <sup>4</sup> Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. <sup>5</sup> For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, <sup>6</sup> yet for us there is {but} one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we {exist} for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we {exist} through Him.”
2. **Phil.2:5-11** “<sup>5</sup> Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, {and} being made in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at

the name of Jesus *every knee should bow*, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

3. **Col.1:15-20** “<sup>15</sup> And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by Him all things were created, {both} in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created by Him and for Him. <sup>17</sup> And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. <sup>19</sup> For it was the {Father’s} good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, <sup>20</sup> and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, {I say}, whether things on earth or things in heaven.”

4. **Other Scriptures that bear witness to the deity of Christ.**

Jn.1:1 “and the Word was God”

Jn.1:18 “the only begotten God”

Jn.20:28 “my Lord and my God”

Titus 2:13 “of our God and Savior Jesus Christ”

Heb.1:4-9 “the Son is superior to angels”

Heb.1:8 “Thy throne O God is forever”

II Pet.1:1 “of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”

I Jn.5:20 “in His Son Jesus Christ, this is the true God”

I Tim.3:16 “God was manifest in the flesh”

Col.1:15 “the visible form of the invisible God”

Phil.2:5-11 “existing in the form of God”

Rom.1:4 “declared to be the son of God by the resurrection from the dead.”

**C. There are other powerful testimonies to Jesus’ divine character.**

1. **NAMES:**

- a. **God** Heb.1:8 “But about the Son he (king David) says, ‘Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever,’”

b. **Son of Man**

1. This is the most common phrase used by Jesus of himself and probably is to be equated with his messianic ministry as one who takes on the form of man and yet is a superhuman figure. (Matt.10:32 with Mk.8:28)
2. The phrase is used to describe one who is the link between God and man.
  - a. Jn.1:51 “You shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”
  - b. Jn.3:13 “No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man.”
3. This name is found in Dan.7:13-14 where it refers to a human figure in contrast to animal figures in Daniel’s vision of the future.
4. In the synoptic gospels this term refers to three aspects of Jesus life.
  - a. The earthly person - Matt.11:19 “has come eating and drinking.”
  - b. The suffering servant - Mk.10:45 “came to serve and give his life.”

- c. The apocalyptic figure - Mk.8:38 “when he comes in the glory of his Father”
  - c. **Son of God** Matt. 16:16-17 “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.”
    - 1. A distinction must be made between the one son (by nature) and the many (by grace).
    - 2. All believers are adopted sons and daughters.
    - 3. The sonship of Jesus is eternal. Rom.8:3; Jn 1:1-10; I Jn.4:9-14
    - 4. The divine sonship theme appeared prominently at the most crucial moments of Jesus’ ministry: his baptism, temptation, transfiguration, crucifixion, and resurrection (Mk.1:11; 9:2-8; Matt.3:13-17; 17:1-8; 27:40).
    - 5. It should be noted that this expression is used in many different ways in the Bible.
      - Of Israel – Ex.4:22, Hos.11:1
      - Of Kings – II Sam.7:14
      - Of Messiah – Ps.2:7, Matt.16:16, Mk.14:61
    - 6. The Jews understood Jesus’ use of this title as a blasphemous claim to deity. – Jn.10:33,36
  - d. **Lord** Matt. 22:43-45 NOTE: In the Septuagint this word is the usual translation of the name “Jehovah.” In the NT the word is used of both the Father (Matt.1:20, 9:38,11:25, Acts 17:24, Rev.4:11) and the Son. It is also a general designation for gods (I Cor.8:5).
    - 1. Jesus is Lord over the universe – Rom.10:9
    - 2. Jesus is Lord of lords – I Tim.6:15
  - e. **Kings of Kings and Lord of Lords** Rev. 19:16
2. **The Jehovah of the OT = Jesus** (This is one of the most powerful witnesses to the deity of Jesus in that it repeatedly equates the Jehovah of the Old Testament with Jesus.)

References to Jehovah	NT References to Jesus
Ps. 45:6	Heb. 1:8 “Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever.”
Isa. 40:3	Matt. 3:3 “Make ready the way of the Lord.”
Joel 2:32	Acts 2:21 “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”
Isa. 8:13-14	I Pet. 2:6-8; Rom. 9:33 “The Lord of hosts is “a rock to stumble over”
Isa. 44:6, 48:12	Rev. 1:17-18, 22:12-13 “the first and the last”
Ps. 97:9	Jn. 3:31 “He is above all”
Ps. 24:7, 29:3	Jas. 2:1; I Cor. 2:8 “Lord of glory”
Isa. 8:13	I Pet. 3:15 The Lord of hosts is sacred.
Deut. 10:17	I Tim. 6:15-16 “the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of Kings ...”
Isa. 45:22-23	Phil. 2:10-11 “at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.”
II Chron. 7:14	Mk. 2:5-7 forgiving sins as only God can.
Isa. 49:26	Jn. 4:24 Jehovah is Savior and Redeemer
Isa. 45:18	Rev. 4:11; Jn. 1:3 Creator
Isa. 45:22; Ps. 83:18	Heb. 10:7; Jn. 5:39 “In the roll of the Book it is written of Me”

3. **ATTRIBUTES:**

- a. **Omnipotence Matt.28:18** “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth;”
- b. **Omniscience Jn.1:48** “Before Philip called you, whine you were under the fig tree. I saw you.”
- c. **Life Jn.14:6** “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.”
- d. **Immutability Heb.13:8** “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever.”
- e. **Sinlessness I Pet.2:22** “who **did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth**”  
**Isa.53:9 (LXX)** “for he practised no iniquity, nor craft with his mouth” (MT)  
 “although he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth”  
**Comments:** The NT and the LXX agree, though the NT author has replaced the LXX’s “lawlessness” with the synonymous concept, “sin.” The MT employs “violence” instead. Since this is in Isaiah’s description of the suffering servant, ascribing sinlessness to him is significant theologically. The fact that the Septuagint translators translated the passage in this way indicates that, in their time, the suffering servant was *not* identified with the nation of Israel, which all would agree was not sinless.

#### 4. ACTIONS

- a. **Creation Jn.1:3** “All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.”
- b. **Sustains Col.1:17** “And He is before all thing, and in Him all things hold together.”
- c. **Forgives Lk.7:48** “Your sins have been forgiven.”
- d. **Raises from the dead Jn.5:25** “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”
- e. **Judges Souls Jn.5:27** “and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.”
- f. **Sends Spirit Jn.15:26** “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me.”

#### 5. Messianic Prophecies Fulfilled in Christ

Prophecy	Subject of Prophecy	Fulfillment
Genesis 3:15	Born of the seed of a woman	Galatians 4:4
Genesis 12:2-3	Born of the seed of Abraham	Matthew 1:1
Genesis 17:19	Born of the seed of Isaac	Matthew 1:2
Numbers 24:17	Born of the seed of Jacob	Matthew 1:2
Genesis 49:10	Descended from the tribe of Judah	Luke 3:33
Isaiah 9:7	Heir to the throne of David	Luke 1:32-33
Daniel 9:25	Time for Jesus' birth	Luke 2:1-2
Isaiah 7:14	Born of a virgin	Luke 1:26-27, 30-31
Micah 5:2	Born in Bethlehem	Luke 2:4-7
Jeremiah 31:15	Slaughter of the innocents	Matthew 2:16-18

Hosea 11:1	Flight to Egypt	Matthew 2:14-15
Isaiah 40:3-5; Malachi 3:1	Preceded by a forerunner	Luke 7:24, 27
Psalms 2:7	Declared the Son of God	Matthew 3:16-17
Isaiah 9:1-2	Galilean ministry	Matthew 4:13-17
Deuteronomy 18:15	The prophet to come	Acts 3:20, 22
Isaiah 61:1-2	Came to heal the brokenhearted	Luke 4:18-19
Isaiah 53:3	Rejected by his own (the Jews)	John 1:11
Psalms 110:4	A priest after the order of Melchizedek	Hebrews 5:5-6
Zechariah 9:9	Triumphal entry	Mark 11:7, 9, 11
Psalms 41:9	Betrayed by a friend	Luke 22:47, 48
Zechariah 11:12-13	Sold for thirty pieces of silver	Matt. 26:15; 27:5-7
Psalms 35:11	Accused by false witnesses	Mark 14:57-58
Isaiah 53:7	Silent to accusations	Mark 15:4, 5
Isaiah 50:6	Spat upon and smitten	Matthew 26:67
Psalms 35:19	Hated without reason	John 15:24, 25
Isaiah 53:5	Vicarious sacrifice	Romans 5:6, 8
Isaiah 53:12	Crucified with transgressors	Mark 15:27, 28
Zechariah 12:10	Hands pierced	John 20:27
Psalms 22:7-8	Scorned and mocked	Luke 23:35
Psalms 69:21	Given vinegar and gall	Matthew 27:34
Psalms 109:4	Prayer for his enemies	Luke 23:34
Psalms 22:18	Soldiers gambled for his coat	Matthew 27:35
Psalms 34:20	No bones broken	John 19:32-33, 36
Zechariah 12:10	Side pierced	John 19:34
Isaiah 53:9	Buried with the rich	Matthew 27:57-60
Psalms 16:10; 49:15	Would rise from the dead	Mark 16:6-7
Psalms 68:18	Would ascend to God's right hand	Mark 16:19

## 6. The Virgin birth

- a. The reason the virgin birth is fundamental to the Christian faith is not because it is an emphasis in the Scripture (it is only noted in Matt.1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38) but because it is a sign of the unique nature of Jesus as the Christ. It is interesting to note that neither Mark nor John (two Gospels that we might expect would emphasize the virgin birth) mention it.
- b. The greatest historical controversies concerning Christ's life are centered upon his resurrection and his virgin birth.
- c. **Matthew 1:22-23** "Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet; '*Behold, the virgin (maiden) shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel.*'"

1. The quotation is from Isaiah 7:14 (taken from the Septuagint or Greek version which uses the word for virgin - *parthanos*) where the Hebrew word *almah* (young woman) not *bethula* (the more common word for virgin) is used.
2. It is clear from the narrative in Isaiah 7, that (vs.14-16) was a prophecy about the unsuccessful siege of Jerusalem by the two armies from the north. The verses Isaiah 7:15-16 state that, by the time this child (whose imminent birth was foretold in Isaiah 7:14) reaches the age of maturity, the kings of the two enemy nations will be gone. Two Biblical passages, 2 Kings 15:29-30 and 2 Kings 16:9, confirm that this prophecy was contemporaneously fulfilled when these two kings were assassinated. With an understanding of the context of Isaiah 7:14 alone, it is evident that the name of the child in Isaiah 7:14, Immanuel, is a sign which points to the divine protection that King Ahaz and his people would enjoy from their otherwise certain demise at the hands of these two enemies. Clearly, Isaiah 7:14 is a near-term prophecy that is part of an historic narrative, and which was fulfilled in the immediate time frame, not some seven-and-a-half centuries in the future.
2. Matthews quotation from Isaiah 7:14 is typical of the way in which the N.T. writers use midrash (an interpretive technique sometimes used in Jewish literature). This technique **minimizes the authority of the wording of the text as communication, normal language**. It places the focus on the reader and the personal struggle of the reader to reach an acceptable moral application of the text. While it is always governed by the wording of the text, **it allows for the reader to project his or her inner struggle into the text**. This allows for some interpretations, which to the ordinary user of language, seem to have very little connection with the text.

#### D. Alternative views to the deity of Christ.

##### 1. Historic heresies.

- a. **Edionism** - meaning “poor” came from a sect of heretical Jewish Christians in the first century who were strongly monotheistic.
  1. They believed that Jesus was an ordinary man with superhuman gifts.
  2. God worked through the man Jesus to reveal Himself.
  3. Paul’s letters were rejected as authoritative.
- b. **Arianism** - came from a church elder named Arius in 4th cent.
  1. The teaching was condemned at Nicea in 325.
  2. This is the view of the Jehovah’s Witnesses of today.
  3. This view sees Jesus as the unique expression and creation of God through whom God is revealed to man.

##### 2. Functional Christology

- a. It places an emphasis upon what Jesus did over who he was.
- b. It takes its cue from the emphasis of the NT gospels.
- c. It suggests that the emphasis on Jesus nature comes from a “Greek” worldview which is not Biblical.
- d. A response.
  1. While it is true that the NT does emphasize Christ’s work, it is not true that his nature is not important to the NT writers. Jn.1:1; I Jn.4:2-3
  2. Much of what Jesus did would not have meaning if he were not who he claimed to be.



3. So much of his works drew attention to questions of his identity.
4. The notion that the Biblical mentality is more “Hebrew” than “Greek” is not true.

### The Point

Jesus’ deity is firmly established in the NT and calls all to respect his authority.

## Response

### Head

#### **I am to understand that:**

The strongest witness to the deity of Jesus is the way the NT uses OT references to Jehovah in speaking of Jesus.

### Heart

#### **I am to believe that:**

Jesus’ deity is firmly established in the NT text.

### Hands

#### **I am to behave by:**

Respecting the ultimate authority of Jesus as Lord.

## Pastoral advice

### **What is the proper way to talk about the deity of Jesus?**

1. The strongest evidence for the deity of Jesus from the Bible comes from the way the OT references to Jehovah are linked in the NT to Jesus.
2. The deity of Jesus is important not only in what it suggests about his authority but also in what it suggests about our nature and God’s ability and willingness to relate to us.

### **Questions that you should be able to answer.**

- 1. Specific facts you should know.**
  - a. What is the strongest Biblical witness to the deity of Jesus?
  - b. Where and how does Jesus claim to be the messiah? The Son of God?
  - c. What is the meaning of “Son of man”?
- 2. Issues that you should be able to discuss.**

- a. Why is the deity of Jesus important?
- b. Why did Jesus not come right out and proclaim his divinity?
- c. Does a person have to believe in the divinity of Jesus to be a Christian?