

# Non-Negotiable: The Divinity of Jesus

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The belief that Jesus Christ is a divine being is a foundational doctrine in Christianity. It is a non-negotiable tenet of the faith. Even so, the idea of Christ's divinity is rejected, belittled, and explained away by many.

According to the Quran, the one who believes that Christ is God “has certainly gone far astray.”<sup>1</sup> For many modern skeptics, if Jesus existed, He might have been a good teacher but was in no way divine. There are even groups that claim to be following the God of the Bible while claiming that Christ's divinity is not taught in the Scriptures. For example, the Watchtower Society (Jehovah's Witness) claims that Jesus is not God but “God's first creation,”<sup>2</sup> and the Mormon church teaches that Jesus is the created “spirit brother” of Satan.<sup>3</sup>

With all of the different opinions on who Jesus is, it might be tempting to shy away from such a controversial subject. However, Jesus does not afford us that option. As Jesus explained to a crowd of Jewish contemporaries, “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am He you will die in your sins” (John 8:24, ESV). For Jesus, our

belief regarding His identity is a matter of life and death. To determine Jesus's identity, we will examine His claims and actions, along with what the New Testament writers taught about Him.

## Jesus as God in the Gospels

Before we determine who somebody is, we ought to investigate what they said about themselves. While this discussion could (and possibly should) begin with arguments for the existence of God and the inspiration of the Bible, I am going to assume these things as we discuss what the New Testament has to say about Jesus and what Jesus has to say about Himself. If God exists and the Bible is His inspired word, and if the Bible teaches that Jesus is God, then we can know that Jesus is indeed God.

We find Jesus's most explicit claims to deity in the Gospel of John. John's Gospel masterfully traces the rising tension between Jesus and the Jewish leaders of His day. This tension is mostly due to the fact that they understood Jesus' claims to be blasphemous because Jesus was continually "making Himself equal with God" (John 5:18). By calling God His own Father (John 5:17), Jesus was claiming a unique connection to and equality with God.

Later in the narrative, while discussing how the Jewish leaders would not be trying to kill Him if they were Abraham's children, Jesus made this claim: "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). This quote is noteworthy because Jesus is saying more than "I am older than Abraham." Jesus could have said, "before Abraham was, I was" or, "before Abraham existed, I existed." Instead, Jesus employed the present tense of the verb meaning "to be."

Jesus was claiming a "kind of transcendence over time that could only be true of God."<sup>4</sup> With this statement, Jesus did not only claim to transcend time, but identified Himself with the same God who spoke to Moses in Exodus 3:14. The Jews understood that Jesus was claiming to be the eternal God of their fathers. Thus, they picked up stones to execute Him (John 8:59).

Likewise, Jesus echoed the sacred Shema (Deut. 6:4), the common prayer of the Jews, when He claimed, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). Here we are given some insight regarding the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. "I and the Father" (two persons) "are one" (one in essence). His Jewish audience understood His claim for what it was and again sought to stone Jesus (John 10:31). It is worth noting that Jesus echoed two of the central Scriptures regarding the identity of God in the Old Testament (Ex. 3:14; Deut. 6:4) as He applied them to Himself. Jesus claimed to be God.

## Jesus Acted Like God

Jesus also implied His deity by His actions or more indirect claims. There are several examples of this including Jesus forgiving sins (Mark 2:5-7), implying to be David's Lord (Mark 12:35-37), and displaying His divine authority over disease, physical creation, and the evil spiritual realm (Matt. 4:23-25; 8:16, 24-27).

Above all, however, is the record of Jesus receiving worship. As a Jew surrounded by other Jews, the thought of worshiping any being or thing other than God was not only taboo, but also heresy (Ex. 20:1-6; Isa. 44:6-8). Jesus Himself, when ordered by Satan to fall down in worship, responded by quoting Deuteronomy 6:13: "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve'" (Matt. 4:10). Yet, Jesus accepted worship throughout the Gospels and is even said to be worshiped by angels (Matt. 14:33; 28:9, 17; Luke 24:52; John 9:38; Heb. 1:6). Godly men and obedient angels refuse to be worshiped (Acts 10:25-26; Rev. 19:9-10). Therefore, if Jesus was a man, He was a sinner; if He was an angel, He was disobedient; but if He were God, one would expect nothing less.

## The Testimony Regarding Jesus' Divinity in Scripture

There is a robust biblical testimony regarding Jesus' divinity beyond His own claims and actions. Inspired authors from the Prophets of old to the apostle Paul elaborated on the divinity of the Messiah. Starting in the Old Testament, there are several prophecies that point toward Jesus and affirm the divine nature of the Messiah, primarily His eternality and uncreated nature (an attribute exclusive to God). Micah 5:2 foretold where the Messiah would be born and is cited in Matthew 2:6. This prophecy states, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" (NKJV; cf. Isa. 9:6). Likewise, throughout the Old Testament, there is an association of the Messiah with the Lord Himself (Isa. 40:33; Jer. 23:5-6).<sup>5</sup>

In the New Testament, Christ's divinity is at the core of the earliest Christian doctrine. Not only was Jesus perceived and declared as divine in the Gospel accounts, but the apostles and other inspired authors maintained and taught the same. As a prime example, the beginning of John states, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made [...] and the Word became 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 1:1-3, 14).<sup>6</sup>

The doctrine of Jesus being God and directly involved in creating everything continues throughout the epistles and Revelation. Seeking to refute a heresy in first century Colossae, Paul explained by inspiration that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, preeminent over creation, the creator of all things, the head of the church, and is even preeminent over death (Col. 1:15-18). Indeed, in Jesus, “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” and “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col. 1:19; 2:9).

Similarly, the Hebrews author declares that Jesus is the “radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power” (1:3). In Revelation, Jesus presents Himself as the “Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev. 22:13). In other words, there never has been a time when God the Son did not exist, and there never will be.<sup>7</sup> Jesus is God—a distinct personality from God the Father and the Spirit yet unified with them in divine nature and essence.

## Why Does it Matter?

It matters because, biblically speaking, one cannot be a Christian without believing that Jesus is God. The nature of God Himself is at stake here. The very essence of the “founder and perfecter of our faith” is in question. Jesus has always been interested in who people believe He is (Matt. 16:13-15), because it matters (John 8:24). Jesus was able to become “the one mediator between God and man” only because He is both God and man (1 Tim. 2:5).

In fact, the Son’s humility as demonstrated in His willingness to put on the constraints of human flesh is a central element of Christian teaching. Paul commanded Christians to have the same attitude as Jesus, “who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead, He emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity” (Phil. 2:6-7, CSB).

We may not fully comprehend all of the intricacies of the incarnation or the triune nature of God. However, we can echo the Scriptures and declare that Jesus is God. He claimed to be God, He demonstrated that He was God, the witness of the Scriptures declares that He is God, and He took on flesh to bridge the gap between us and our Heavenly Father.

## Footnotes

1. Surah 4:116, *Quran.com*. <https://quran.com/4/116>.
2. *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania. Col. Colveria; D.R. La Torre Del Vigia, 2014), 41.
3. Martin, Walter. *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1985), 216.
4. *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 2041.
5. Jackson, Wayne. "Jesus Christ, the God-Man." *ChristianCourier.com*, <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1290-jesus-christ-the-god-man>.
6. For a discussion on the grammatical construction of John's prologue see Wallace, Daniel B. "Jesus as Θεός (God): A Textual Examination," *Bible.org*, <https://bible.org/article/jesus-θεός-god-textual-examination>.
7. Jackson, Wayne. "Jesus Christ: The First and the Last." *ChristianCourier.com*, <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/347-jesus-christ-the-first-and-the-last>.