

## Chapter #13

### The Deity of Christ Defended by Reason

In the last chapter we examined the deity of Christ in Scripture. We concluded that Jesus claimed, in no uncertain terms, to be the Son of God, which He defined as being coequal with God. His adversaries had no trouble understanding His claims; they were deeply offended that a mere man would claim to be God, the one and only Jehovah (YHWH) of the Old Testament. Jesus claimed to have the power to forgive sins and to give life, attributes that belonged to God alone. He also claimed authority to judge the world and to be the Lord of the Sabbath, God's holy day. As impossible as it might seem, Jesus's disciples, predisposed *not* to believe, testified that He was indeed who He claimed to be. His resurrection from the dead was proof of that.

The deity of Christ is crucial to our study in apologetics. If Jesus is God incarnate, He is the ultimate tangible proof that God does indeed exist. If He is God, then our sins really were forgiven through His atoning work on the cross. If He is God, everything He said about our eventual fate is true: there is a real heaven and a real hell, and what we do with Jesus determines where we will spend eternity. If Jesus is God, every other religion is false and useless. And if Jesus is God, He is worthy of our worship and obedience. The deity of Christ is not peripheral to our study; it is of major importance and consequence.

#### *What if Jesus Christ wasn't really God?*

By using inductive reasoning (based on the accumulation of empirical evidence), we've concluded that Jesus is who He claimed to be. But let's suppose for a moment that Jesus wasn't really God. Using deductive reasoning (reasoning from what we assume to be general, analytic truth), what logical corollaries are the result?

#### 1. Jesus was delusional.

If Jesus wasn't really God and He claimed to be God, He must have been delusional. Think about it. If a man walked the streets in your hometown making grandiose statements to those he met, claiming to have come down from heaven and to do only what his unseen "father" inaudibly told him to do and also claiming to be the almighty God Himself, he would be institutionalized in short order. Most skeptics would have to agree that any person who sincerely thinks he or she is God, and isn't, is mentally unstable.

But we must remember that for someone to think that He is God, especially in a culture that is fiercely monotheistic, and then to tell others that their eternal destiny depends on believing in Him is no slight flight of fantasy but the thoughts of a lunatic in the fullest sense. Was Jesus Christ such a person?

How interesting that even though men have tried to crush Christianity and trample the Word of God for thousands of years, no one has ever dared to accuse Jesus of being insane. People with mental deficiencies tend to be self-centered and to exhibit strange personality quirks and inconsistencies. They also often tend to emotional excesses. None of these characteristics are even remotely seen in the person of Jesus. The historian Philip Schaff wrote:

The charge of an extravagant, self-deluding enthusiasm is the last to be fastened on Jesus. Where can we find the traces of it in His history? Do we detect them in the calm authority of His precepts? in the mild, practical and beneficent spirit of His religion; in the unlabored simplicity of the language with which He unfolds His high powers and the sublime truths of

religion; or in the good sense, the knowledge of human nature, which He always discovers in His estimate and treatment of the different classes of men with whom He acted?... Is such an intellect ô clear as the sky, bracing as the mountain air, sharp and penetrating as a sword, thoroughly healthy and vigorous, always ready and always self-possessed ô liable to a radical and most serious delusion concerning His own character and mission? Preposterous imagination!ô

## 2. Jesus was a deceiver.

Since it appears unreasonable to assume Jesus was somehow mentally deficient, there must be another explanation for His claims to deity. Some have argued that Jesus never did claim to be God; the words were put in His mouth after His death by His followers. We've already noted the impossibility of this alternative. Historical evidence proves there wasn't time for a myth to develop regarding Jesus's claims and character. If the claims to deity were fabrications by Jesus's followers, they were made by the original disciples themselves ô men who had nothing to gain and everything to lose by propagating a lie. The only other alternative is that Jesus deceived the disciples. He wanted them to think He was God and put together an elaborate scheme to fulfill the prophecies of Scripture, to perform magic tricks ôprovingö His claims to deity, and staging what would appear to be a resurrection. Is this a plausible explanation?

First, we've already proved that Jesus did physically die on a Roman cross. If He had simply lied about who He was or what He offered (eternal life), He was an absolute fool ô He gave His life for a lie. No one gives his life for a lie if he knows it is a lie. Since Jesus wasn't mentally unstable, it is unreasonable to believe an intelligent man would die for absolutely nothing. We also know as a fact that Jesus did rise from the dead. Let's assume that's true. Great trick! But could He still have been lying about His deity?

It doesn't make sense that a Man who preached honesty, righteousness and purity would Himself be lying. Jesus said:

**Matthew 5:6** *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled*

**Matthew 5:37** *Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.*

**Matthew 5:20** *For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

**Matthew 5:48** *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

**Matthew 6:33** *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

If Jesus had been lying, He would have been a hypocrite of the highest rank, and yet He consistently chided the Pharisees for their hypocrisy:

**Matthew 23:15** *Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.*

**Matthew 23:28-29** *In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous.*

**Matthew 7:5** *You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*

These are awfully strong words if Jesus had in fact been lying consistently to His own followers about His identity. His words would have been self-condemning. Philip Schaff asked,

ôHow, in the name of logic, common sense, and experience, could an imposter ô that

is a deceitful, selfish, depraved man who have invented, and consistently maintained from the beginning to end, the purest and noblest character known in history with the most perfect air of truth and reality? How could he have conceived and successfully carried out a plan of unparalleled beneficence, moral magnitude, and sublimity, and sacrificed his own life for it, in the face of the strongest prejudices of his people and ages?<sup>3</sup>

With what conclusion are we left? Jesus claimed to be God. If He wasn't, He must have been either self-deceived or a deceiver. But neither of these conclusions can be valid. Neither fits the evidence. The only logical conclusion is that Jesus was exactly who He claimed to be. He was God. This is the apologetic popularized by C.S. Lewis. He asserted that it would be impossible for the skeptic to believe Jesus was merely a great man...

I am trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: '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 the 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. Either 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.<sup>4</sup>

### *What would we expect if God became a man?*

Let's continue with a little more deductive reasoning and see if our conclusions fit the empirical evidence. Let's assume that God could become a man and walk on the earth. If He did, what logical corollaries could we develop? What would happen? What would this God-man be like? Does Jesus fit the picture of what we would expect?

#### **1. He would come in a miraculous way.**

If God became a man, He would come into the world in a grand, miraculous way. When we read the accounts of Jesus' birth in Matthew 1:18-2:12 and Luke 2:1-20, it seems quite ordinary, except that His birth was more humble than most. But look closer. It was anything but ordinary. Jesus was born of a virgin (Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:31-35). That was certainly extra-ordinary! The early church accepted this teaching without question at a time when it could certainly be disproved. Mary certainly would have set the matter straight if the account of Jesus' birth had been conjured up by some overimaginative disciples.

Not only was Jesus born of a virgin, His birth was heralded by angels. An angel foretold the birth to both Mary and Joseph. After the birth an entire company of angels sounded the news to a band of shepherds tending flocks in their fields. And God placed a star in the sky that was so unusual it caused Gentile astronomers to travel from the East just to see Him (Matthew 2). It was obvious to anyone who was looking that there was something miraculous about this birth.

#### **2. He would be sinless.**

We would certainly expect that if God became a man, He would be perfect in every way. We would expect Him to be completely sinless. Does that describe Jesus? Throughout the Bible the shortcomings of those who followed God (even those most esteemed) are consistently pointed out: Abraham lying about Sarah being his wife, Moses striking the rock in the wilderness, David committing adultery with Bathsheba, Solomon's idolatry, Peter's denial. These men were conscious of their sinfulness and no attempt was made to make them appear sinless. But we are given an altogether different picture of Jesus.

The best reason we have for believing in the sinlessness of Jesus is the fact that He allowed His dearest friends to think that He was. There is in all His talk no trace of regret or hint of compunction or suggestion of sorrow for shortcoming, or slightest vestige of remorse. He taught other men to think of themselves as sinners, He asserted plainly that the human heart is evil, He told His disciples that every time they prayed they were to pray to be forgiven, but He never speaks or acts as though He Himself has the faintest consciousness of having ever done

anything other than what was pleasing to God.<sup>5</sup>

õThe better and holier a man is, the more he feels his need of pardon, and how far he falls short of his own imperfect standard of excellence. But Jesus, with the same nature as ours and tempted as we are, never yielded to temptation; never had cause for regretting any thought, word, or action; He never needed pardon, or conversion, or reform; He never fell out of harmony with His heavenly Father. His whole life was one unbroken act of self-consecration to the glory of God and the eternal welfare of His fellow-men.ö<sup>6</sup>

õOne of the sources of youth's disillusionment is the fading halo around the head of some human hero it has hastily sought to worship. Not so with Christ and His disciples. For three years they trod together the lanes and byways of Galilee and Judea. They climbed together the rough roads up to Jerusalem, sat together in the lush grass above Tabgha. Together they bore the heat of Jericho and the cold winds of the Galilean lake. They shared His chill rest beneath the stars, His breakfast on the beach. Together they bore the storms and tensions in the holy city, together they enjoyed Bethany's hospitable home. Surely, this was test enough if shrewd men were to know Him. What happened? Far from detecting the hidden flaw, the human burst of annoyance at the end of a weary day, personal ambition betrayed by a chance word or unwise confidence, far from finding in Him disappointing blemishes, they found that their sense of wonder and reverence grew.ö<sup>7</sup>

õIn their close contact with Him, they never saw in Him the sins they saw in themselves. They got on one another's nerves, they grumbled and argued, but never did they see this in Jesus. Because of their strict Jewish background, they would be hardset to say that Jesus was without sin unless He really was sinless.ö<sup>8</sup>

**1 Peter 2:21-22** *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."*

**1 John 3:5** *But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.*

**2 Corinthians 5:21** *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

All that is revealed about Jesus Christ points to sinless perfection ò exactly what we would expect if God became man.

### 3. He would perform miracles.

If God created the entire universe, we would expect that, if He became a man, He wouldn't be bound by the laws of nature. He would perform miracles not to amaze those around Him, but purely as an outgrowth of who He was. And isn't that exactly what we saw in Jesus? He performed miracles of healing, casting out demons, walking on water, turning water into wine, calming storms, and raising the dead. He completely superseded the natural realm, and such miracles were ample proof of who He was.

**Luke 7:22** *So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.*

**John 20:30-31** *Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

õIt is noteworthy that one of the words very frequently used of these miracles in the Gospels is the ordinary term, works (*erga*). They were the natural and necessary outcome of His life, the expression in act of what He Himself was.ö<sup>9</sup>

All Jesus' miracles were prompted by the purest motives. They were performed to bring glory to God, to

minister to men, or to authenticate Jesus' message. Jesus never did miracles simply to amaze or to amuse His followers or to bring Himself acclaim or applause. In fact, when He was being pressed to impress the crowd with His power, He refused to perform any miracle:

**Matthew 12:38-39** *Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you." He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah."*

Jesus never resorted to satisfying man's curiosity. His miracles always had a higher purpose. He was God. He didn't need to resort to self-promotion.

Jesus' miracles were never doubted by His adversaries. Even the first-century Jewish historian Josephus reported that this Jesus did "surprising feats" (see chapter 3). After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the primary concern of His adversaries was to kill Him before everyone believed:

**John 11:47-48** *Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."*

The historical record found in the Bible, which we have already proven to be historically reliable, testifies to the miraculous nature of Jesus' ministry. He did exactly what we would expect Him to do if God became a man.

#### 4. He would speak words of unsurpassed wisdom.

If God became a man, we would expect Him not only to be intelligent, but exceptionally wise. His words would express extraordinary truths and answer the deepest and most profound questions of all humankind. Isn't that precisely why the Bible has become the most beloved book of all time?

Statistically speaking, the Gospels are the greatest literature ever written. They are read by more people, quoted by more authors, translated into more tongues, represented in more art, set to more music, than any other book or books written by any man in any century in any land. But the words of Christ are not great on the grounds that they have such a statistical edge over anybody else's words. They are read more, quoted more, loved more, believed more, and translated more because they are the greatest words ever spoken. And where is their greatness? Their greatness lies in the pure, lucid spirituality in dealing clearly, definitively, and *authoritatively* with the greatest problems that throb in the human breast; namely, Who is God? Does He love Me? What should I do to please Him? How does He look at my sin? How can I be forgiven? Where will I go when I die? How must I treat others? No other man's words have the appeal of Jesus' words because no other man can answer these fundamental human questions as Jesus answered them. They are the kind of words and the kind of answers we would expect God to give, and we who believe in Jesus' deity have no problem as to why these words came

from His mouth." <sup>10</sup>

**Matthew 7:28-29** *When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.*

**Matthew 13:54** *Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked.*

**Luke 2:47** *Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.*

#### 5. He would tell us He was God.

If God came in the flesh, He would certainly tell us who He was. In the last chapter we discovered that Jesus did exactly that. He claimed to be God. He also told His followers that He had come down from heaven:

**John 3:13** *No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.*

**John 6:32-33** *Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”*

**John 6:38** *For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.*

**John 6:51** *I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”*

## 6. He would conquer death.

The one problem that has plagued mankind from the beginning has been death. We can sometimes delay it, but we can never conquer it. If God came in human flesh, we would expect Him to conquer death. We would expect Him to live forever. Notice that when Jesus of Nazareth died, He willingly gave up His own life:

**John 10:18** *No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”*

**Matthew 26:53** *Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?*

**Luke 23:46** *Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.*

Jesus had the authority to willingly give up His life. But the grave could not hold Him; on the third day, He rose from the dead just as He had predicted beforehand. Who else but God Himself could determine how and when He would experience physical death, and when He would rise? We've already proven that Jesus rose from the dead. There is no record that He ever died again. He simply ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9) where He now sits at the right hand of the Father (Acts 7:56). Not only did He conquer death for Himself, but He offers victory over death for all those who believe in Him:

**Romans 6:9** *For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.*

**Hebrews 7:24-25** *but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.*

**Romans 8:11** *And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.*

**1 Corinthians 6:14** *By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.*

**2 Corinthians 4:14** *because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.*

**1 Corinthians 15:51-55** *Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then*

*the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."  
"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"*

In previous chapters we proved that Jesus was God using inductive reasoning: looking at verifiable evidence from the real world. Everything about who Jesus was and what He did proves that He was God. Now, using deductive logic (hypothetically), we've come to the same conclusion. Anyone looking objectively at all the evidence would have to come to the conclusion that Jesus lived, died and rose again, that He was God, and that the only way to eternal life is through belief in Jesus Christ.

## ***End Notes***

- <sup>1</sup> Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Hereø Life Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 106.
- <sup>2</sup> Quoted in *Evidence*, p. 106-107.
- <sup>3</sup> Quoted in *Evidence*, p. 106.
- <sup>4</sup> C.S. Lewis quoted by Steven Collins, *Championing the Faith: A Layman's Guide to Proving Christianity's Claims* (Tulsa: Virgil Hensley Publishing Co., 1991), p. 198.
- <sup>5</sup> C.E. Jefferson quoted in *Evidence*, p. 121.
- <sup>6</sup> Philip Schaff quoted in *Evidence*, p. 122.
- <sup>7</sup> E.M. Blaiklock quoted by Josh McDowell and Bill Wilson, *He Walked Among Us: Evidence for the Historical Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988, 1993), p. 317.
- <sup>8</sup> *Evidence*, p. 119.
- <sup>9</sup> Griffith Thomas quoted in *Evidence*, p. 124.
- <sup>10</sup> Bernard Ramm quoted in *Evidence*, p. 130.