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WHO IS THIS MAN WHO SAYS HE'S GOD?

No one would argue the identity of people like Lincoln, Michelangelo, or Aristotle. They wear history-book labels that are indisputable. But the man called Jesus is different. If you were to run a man-on-the-street survey about Him, you would likely get as many different responses as you would get odd looks. Jesus isn't known for the things that usually make people famous. He wasn't into politics, business, or publishing. His expertise was in what we normally call religion—He knew a lot about God. In fact, He claimed to *be* God. But who is He? This booklet by Dave Branon has been written to help you discover who the Bible says Jesus is.

Martin R. De Haan II

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WHO DOESN'T BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS GOD?

Many people peer back through the darkened pages of history and see a rather obscure picture of Jesus. They have heard of His 2,000-year-old claim that He was God, but they don't quite believe it. They find it hard to accept the idea that a small-town Jewish carpenter could have been the creator of the world. They prefer to believe other, less sensational theories about Him. Here are some of those beliefs.

Jesus is a man who achieved great things.

Among the groups who hold to this view is the Church Of Jesus Christ Of Latter Day Saints—the Mormons. They teach that Jesus was a preexistent spirit—but they believe that about everyone. They say that

Jesus' distinctiveness is not that He was God, but that He was God's firstborn spirit-child. "His humanity is to be recognized as real and ordinary—whatever happened to Him may happen to any of us" (Elder B. H. Roberts citing Sir Oliver Lodge in *Joseph Smith, King Follett Discourse*, p.11 note).

Jesus is a created being who was given the status of second-in-command. According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus is "a god, but not the Almighty God, who is Jehovah" (*Let God Be True*, p.33). Instead, they say that Jesus is "a created individual" who "is the second greatest personage of the universe" (*Make Sure Of All Things*, p.207).

Jesus is a man no better than we are. "It is plain that Jesus is not God Himself" (*Divine Principle*, p.255). These

words of Sun Myung Moon clearly spell out the view of his Unification Church. Its teaching is that Jesus' value is no greater than that of any other man. Those who follow Moon's theology say that Jesus' work was a failure.

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Jesus' existence began at His conception. One group that teaches this idea is The Way International. In their reinterpretation of biblical instruction, they hold that "Jesus Christ's existence began when he was

conceived by God's creating the soul-life of Jesus in Mary" (Victor Wierwille, *The Word's Way*, Vol. 3, pp.26-27).

Jesus is a prophet and messenger of God. According to the tenets of Islam, "Jesus . . . was only a messenger of Allah" (Surah 4:171 from the *Koran*). They also say He was a sinless prophet who never achieved the greatness of the prophet Muhammad.

Jesus is less than most people think He is. Those who embrace atheism have a low view of Jesus. Some cannot find it in themselves to place Jesus on as high a plane as such past notables as Buddha or Socrates. Bertrand Russell, a famous apologist of the atheistic viewpoint, said, "I cannot myself feel that either in the matter of wisdom or in the matter of virtue Christ stands quite as

high as some other people known to history” (*Why I Am Not A Christian*, p.19).

Jesus is a great moral teacher. Some people don't reject all of Jesus' work on earth, though they do reject His claims to deity. William Channing of the Unitarian church said, “Christ was sent to earth as a great moral teacher rather than as a mediator.”

Jesus is a mystic medium. New Age thinkers consider Jesus to be a guide to self-actualization. In this regard, Jesus would be seen as a channel—one of many ancients who give New Age adherents a “glimpse” at the past. Through previous incarnations, they contend, He attained a level of purity that is achievable by all.

Jesus is a projection of our needs. Some feel that the only reason Jesus has reached great heights of

importance is that humans need someone like Him to fall back on. Carl Jung, a famous Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist, said that Jesus is “our culture hero who, regardless of His historical existence, embodies the myth of the divine man.”

One thing is for sure. Somebody is wrong! These people can't all be right about Jesus. He cannot be exactly who all these people say He is. Many who think they know, don't know. If He is only a prophet or a medium, then those who insist He is God are wrong. If on the other hand He is God, then those who insist that He is only an exceptional man are wrong. Some might wish to have it both ways. In science and investigative journalism, we pursue truth passionately. Why should it be any different in this important realm?

WHY IS THIS SO IMPORTANT?

Most people are rather free with their complimentary descriptions and names for Jesus. He has been given such noble titles as “the second greatest person of the universe,” “a prophet from God,” “a great moral teacher,” “a holy man,” “touched by God more than anyone else.” Who wouldn’t be thrilled to have their leader thought of in such lofty terms? What group would be dissatisfied with this kind of respect and praise for their founder?

Christians, for one. Followers of Jesus are not satisfied with those terms. To them, it is not enough that He is considered one of history’s greatest figures. Christians feel that there is more to Jesus than to be thought of by millions as an exemplary human—even

the greatest man who ever lived. They think the names “moral teacher” and “prophet” don’t go far enough. No, Christians insist on one more designation for Jesus—one on which the whole of Christianity rests, yet one that throws a roadblock in the way of many who might otherwise consider following Him.

Jesus’ followers insist not only on calling Him Messiah and Savior but Lord and God as well. But why? What is so important about this designation for Jesus? Can’t we just learn from His wise sayings and admire His good life and leave it at that? Is it all that vital that we make such an issue about whether or not He is God?

Interestingly, Jesus’ deity is perhaps the most important question to answer about Christianity. Why? Because Jesus said

He was God. As we will see, He proclaimed His deity on many occasions while living among His fellow Israeli citizens. Without fear of the ramifications and without regard to the skepticism of His audience, Jesus left no doubt in His listeners' minds that He was claiming to be God.

So that leaves us with a dilemma. We can't possibly trust the word of someone who said he is the Almighty God, no matter what good works he did or what wisdom he expounded—unless he really is God. Otherwise this person would only merit our pity, our concern, and our sympathy. A man who would call himself God without being God would certainly not merit our worship, our admiration, and our emulation.

So what's the big deal? The big deal is that if Jesus isn't God, then He can't be

an example, a wise teacher, a moral leader, or even an important historical person. Providing the evidence that He is God is the biggest issue in the world. And that's what this booklet will set out to do.

What is so important about this designation for Jesus? Can't we just learn from His wise sayings and admire His good life and leave it at that?

We can't afford our own customized ideas of who Jesus is. We can't afford anything less than the truth. As we'll see, our eternal destiny hangs on how we answer the question, "Who is this man who says He's God?"

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT ALL THIS?

Prove it. These two words can block the path of anyone who tries to support the truth of a statement. If a concept cannot be backed up by the evidence, it is not worth the time it takes to state it. The key to finding the necessary evidence is in finding a reliable, credible source. Without a solid source, the inquirer is left with nothing but opinions.

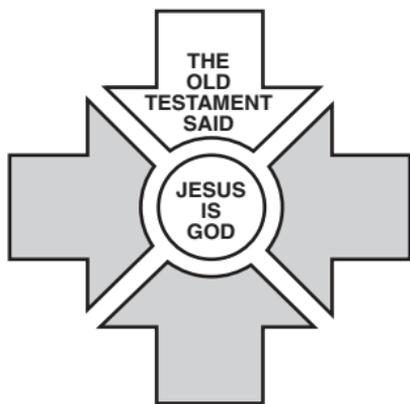
That's where the belief that Jesus is God finds strength. The source for this idea is a book that can be trusted—the Bible. Intense archaeological research has shown the Bible to be trustworthy in historical and geographical matters. The Scriptures have been scrutinized by scholars for nearly 2,000 years and have

been found reliable. They are backed up by more manuscript findings than any other ancient document. All of these external evidences give us additional confidence in this book in which God has given His divine revelation to the human race. The deity of Christ is a concept that can be trusted because it comes from a credible source.

In that light, it makes sense for us to see what the Bible says about the identity of its central figure. It makes sense for us to follow that evidence all the way to its own conclusion. It doesn't make sense, however, to trust the Bible's description of Jesus as a teacher sent from God if we are not willing to accept what Jesus said about Himself.

If the Bible is a book to be trusted, and if its message has been miraculously preserved for us across the centuries,

then we can trust it to be a valuable source for finding out about the One who preserved it. Let's look at what the Bible says about the idea that Jesus is God.



THE CLAIMS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Bible does not sneak up on its New Testament readers and spring a new message on them. No, the idea that a Messiah would visit the earth is not a surprise to anyone who is familiar with the Old Testament. There were plenty of signals from the prophets that this would

happen. In fact, there are many specific facts about the Messiah's life predicted in the Old Testament that were fulfilled by Jesus. The chart on the following page gives just a sampling.

It's clear that the Messiah's coming was an expected event on the religious calendar of pre-Christian days. But there's more. Not only did the holy writings of the Old Testament era tell of a coming Messiah, but they also told us that He would have a quality known to no other man. He would be God. Three Old Testament verses stand out as proof that Jesus—the divinely pre-announced Messiah—was to be God in the flesh. A close look at these passages will introduce us clearly to this essential truth.

Isaiah 7:14. *"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."* The

Prophecy	Reference	Fulfillment
Born of a virgin	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:23
Born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:5
Found in Egypt	Numbers 24:8	Matthew 2:15
To heal many	Isaiah 53:4	Matthew 8:16
Crucified	Isaiah 53:12	Matthew 27:38
No bones broken	Psalms 34:20	John 19:33-36

key to seeing this verse as a prediction of Jesus' coming as God in the flesh is found in the title *Immanuel*. The word literally means "God with us." Surely this must have been a mystery to those who heard this prophecy. In what sense would the child bear the presence of God?

Because of the additional revelation of the New Testament (Mt. 1:21-23), we can understand what they could not. We can see a pre-indicator of God's plan to visit the earth, not merely through a spokesman and savior, but through One who would literally be "God with us." But what about the Old Testament's point of

view? What other evidence can we find?

Isaiah 9:6. *"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* Looking back, we can once again see an amazing prophecy in perspective. All who recognize Jesus as this Messiah are told by the Old Testament prophet that He would not only be a ruler but would also be "Mighty God."

This is the same term and the same grammatical construction the prophet used in Isaiah 10:21 in

saying that “the remnant of Jacob” shall return to “the Mighty God.” This leaves us with only two possibilities. First, the prophet could be telling us that another “Mighty God” would be coming—giving the world two Gods. Yet that would contradict other verses such as Isaiah 45:22,

**“A divine Messiah
is as much at
home in the
Old Testament
as He is in
the New.”**
Buell & Hyder

which says, “Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.” That refutation of a two-God system leaves us with one other conclusion. The

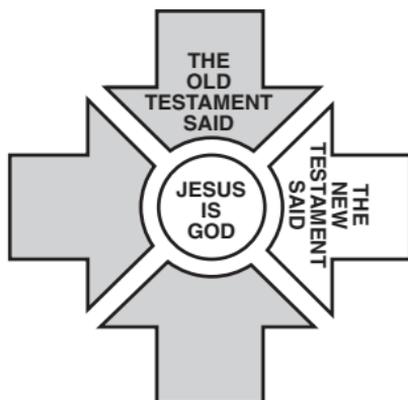
Jehovah whom Isaiah and his people worshiped and the Son-Child who would be born and called “Mighty God” had to be the same.

Micah 5:2. *“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 have been from of old, from everlasting.”*

To live forever. It’s an idea that intrigues us all but is impossible to achieve. While it’s true that our souls will live forever, no one can claim to have been present with God before the world began. No one but Jesus, that is. Not only did Micah predict that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem, but he also revealed that this “ruler in Israel” has shared the counsels of God from eternity past. How does this prove Jesus’ deity? If

only God has existed from eternity past, and Jesus existed with Him, then He has to be God.

Clearly, all who recognize Jesus as Messiah recognize that something amazing happened when Jesus appeared on the scene. At the very least, He fulfilled prophecies in a miraculous way. One researcher who analyzed only eight of the Old Testament predictions about Jesus came to this conclusion: "The chance that any man might have . . . fulfilled all eight prophecies is 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000." If we can trust the prophecies in their accuracy of factual information about Jesus' arrival on this planet, we can surely trust those prophecies when they use titles and designations to indicate that Jesus the Messiah is God.



THE CLAIMS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament is Jesus' book. It begins with His family tree and ends with His future triumph. In between are amazing accounts of His life, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, and His acclaim. But who is this man? Does His book really tell us? Can we trust the record? Sure He healed the sick, but was He just a first-century snake oil salesman with good connections? Sure He fed the hungry, but could He just have been a sleight-of-hand magician? Sure He

wowed the masses, but could He have been no more than an ancient superstar?

To find out, we have to go behind the stories of what Jesus did. We have to find out what those people who observed Him said about Him. A biographer who writes about someone who is no longer on the scene talks to those who either knew the subject or at least knew about him from those who knew him. We too can “interview” Jesus’ contemporaries to clarify our view of Jesus. Let’s turn first to a man who knew Jesus well, the apostle John.

The Viewpoint Of The Apostle John. Did the apostle John actually set out to show that Jesus was God? To begin answering that question, let’s turn first to the opening words of John’s gospel.

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 nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men (1:1-4).

Once we understand what John meant by the term *Word*, it becomes difficult to read anything into this passage other than the deity of Jesus. Here, as in three other passages in the New Testament (Jn. 1:14; 1 Jn. 1:1; Rev. 19:13), the designation *Word* or *Logos* refers specifically to Jesus. That John is referring to Jesus becomes clear when we look at verse 14, where he said, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Notice in John 1:1-4 that the following characteristics of Jesus are traits that can belong only to God.

“In the beginning.”

Anyone in John’s day who

was familiar with the sacred Scriptures would have recognized his allusion to the book we now call Genesis. In that era, Genesis was commonly referred to as “In the beginning,” so the

“There exists no documentation from the ancient world witnessed by so excellent a set of textual and historical testimonies [as the Bible].”
Clark Pinnock

reader of John’s gospel would automatically think of the creation record and its assumption of God’s eternity. John boldly declared that Jesus was with God before the worlds began.

“The Word was with God.” This clause indicates that although Jesus was God, He was a distinct entity who had, as the preposition *with* implies, communion and fellowship with God the Father.

“The Word was God.” Here it is: a definitive statement of Jesus’ deity. This does not say that He was “a God,” as some suggest. That rendering of this clause results from an unscholarly interpretation of the fact that the Greek word *theos* (God) appears here without the definite article *the*. Those who do this fail to recognize that John omitted the article to point out that Jesus is God, just like the Father is God. Had he used it, he would have implied that Jesus alone is *the* God. Yet those who deny the deity of Christ continue to insist on interpreting this phrase “a god.”

There are two problems

with this. First, the New Testament is filled with references to God without the use of a definite article in the Greek (282 times). In fact, even the translators who render John 1:1 to read “a god” translate the exact same phrase as “God” in 94 percent of the other 281 instances. To be consistent, these should say “a god.” This construction occurs 20 times in the gospel of John alone. Should John 1:18, then, be translated, “No one has seen *a god* at any time”?

Besides the problems with the grammar, there is another difficulty posed by this mistranslation. If indeed the verse were to be translated “a god,” then we would be faced with a concept of polytheism that is totally foreign to anything in the Christian faith. If Jesus is “a god,” then there must be others. Yet Scripture is clear in this matter: There is only one God. Calling Jesus “a

god” among other gods would have been as unacceptable to the first-century reader as it is to the 21st-century theist. John’s contemporaries were thoroughly schooled in monotheism, and any departure from that well-established doctrine would have been rejected.

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

John 1:1

“All things were made through Him.” Who but God can be credited with creation? Referring again to the first verse of Genesis, we are reminded that “God created the heavens and the earth.” And now John revealed Jesus as the active

agent in creation. How else can this be reconciled but to conclude that Jesus the Savior is also God the Creator?

The Viewpoint Of The Apostle Paul.

John wasn't alone in saying that Jesus was God. The apostle Paul also made this doctrine a strong part of his writings. Here is a sampling of verses written by Paul that attribute deity to Jesus.

Romans 9:5. *“Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God.”*

No amount of interpretive gymnastics can deny the simple grammar of this verse that Christ is God.

Philippians 2:5-6. *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.”* Here we get a picture of Jesus in both of His essential natures—as God and as man. First, He had always existed as God

in His essential nature.

Second, He voluntarily laid aside the majesty and glory of being God to become the God-man—the humble Servant who was obedient to death. Jesus, then, was God and remained God by nature, even when He became a man on earth.

Philippians 2:10-11.

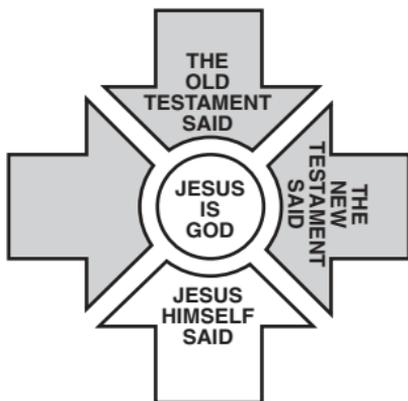
“At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, . . . every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

God would not allow anyone other than Himself to be worshiped. For Him to let people worship one lesser than He would be to violate the first commandment (see also Mt. 4:10).

1 Timothy 3:16. *“Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.”* The God who was

manifested in the flesh was Jesus, for He did all that this verse said He did.

Titus 2:13. “Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” A literal translation of the grammar of this sentence indicates that Paul was referring to only one person here: God the Son.



THE CLAIMS OF JESUS

Could the statements in the New Testament about Jesus' deity have been made by a few misguided followers? Could those writers have misread the signals? Perhaps their desire to worship

someone was so strong that they developed this idea of Jesus' deity on their own. Perhaps they misunderstood Jesus' mission on earth. If they did, they sure had good company! Jesus Himself also claimed that He was God.

Jesus sometimes spoke in terms and phrases that left His listeners unsure as to what He meant. This can be seen in certain dialogues between Jesus and His disciples. You can imagine them walking away from some of these discussions with Jesus, scratching their heads over some hard-to-grasp concept He had just given them.

When Jesus spoke of His deity with those who were not His followers, though, they didn't reach up to scratch their head, they reached down to pick up rocks. They knew exactly what He was claiming to be. And they wanted to stone Him for it.

John 10. A good example of this is found in John 10. As Jesus walked through the temple, some Jews demanded of Him, “If you are the Christ, tell us plainly” (v.24). Jesus’ reply was unmistakable in its clarity, and volatile in its message. He said:

I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one (vv.25-30).

Clearly, the Jews had a

major problem with this statement. They knew that Old Testament law called for the death of anyone claiming deity. And they understood that this was exactly what Jesus was doing. They knew what He meant when He called God “My Father” and not “our” Father (v.25), claimed to be able to bestow eternal life (v.28), and said, “I and My Father are one” (v.30).

“No confirmatory evidence is more convincing than that of hostile witnesses.”

Robert Anderson

These claims of Jesus sent the Jews on a rock hunt. There was no doubt in their minds about Jesus’ words. In fact, they told Jesus they were gathering ammunition because, as they said, “You,

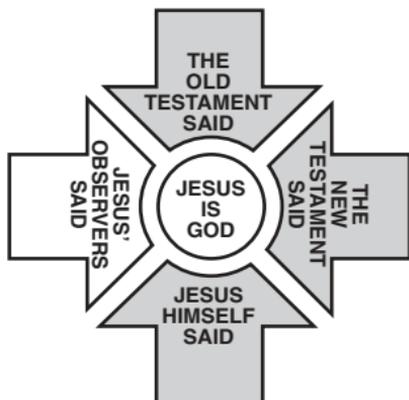
being a Man, make Yourself God” (v.33).

John 8. An earlier exchange between Jesus and a different group led to similar results. In a confrontation that must have created some high-power tension, the Jews accused Jesus of possessing a demon. In the dialogue that followed, Jesus said, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad” (v.56). The Jews couldn’t believe their ears. They wanted to know how a man who wasn’t even 50 years old could have seen Abraham.

Jesus’ reply was even more unsettling for His listeners. He announced, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM” (v.58). The Jews were aghast. Jesus had just told them who He is. In using the term *I AM*, He undoubtedly reminded the Jews of God’s statement to Moses at the burning bush

in Exodus 3:14. Because of their familiarity with the Scriptures, they would have known that Jesus had declared His deity—His timelessness and His identity with Yahweh. We know they understood exactly what Jesus was saying, because He had to hide Himself and make a quick getaway to avoid being a target for their stones.

John 14. On another occasion, Jesus claimed His deity in the presence of a much friendlier crowd. While eating with the disciples, Jesus predicted Peter’s denial and assured Thomas that He was “the way, the truth, and the life” (v.6). Then Philip asked Him to show them the Father. His answer is an unmistakable claim to deity. He said, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (v.9), and “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?” (v.10).



THE RESPONSE OF JESUS' OBSERVERS

We have already seen that the Jews who listened to Jesus knew that He was claiming to be God. They weren't the only ones who got the picture. Others of varying social status and with varying degrees of interest in Jesus' ministry also heard Jesus say He was God. Their reactions, and Jesus' response to them, make an interesting study.

Matthew 21. Let's look at a conversation that occurred shortly after Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus had just

come into the city to the welcome of an admiring crowd. The people continued to cry out, "Hosanna to the Son of David" (v.15). This didn't sit well with the chief priests and scribes. They thought Jesus should know better than to accept this worship. After all, wasn't He familiar with the first commandment?

Notice His response to their indignant question "Do You hear what these are saying?" (v.16). Jesus gave them more to think about than they had bargained for when He countered with this reference to Psalm 8:2, "Yes. Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise?'" (v.16). Unmistakably, Jesus was telling His listeners that these words of worship were prepared by God for worship of God.

By accepting those “Hosannas,” Jesus was declaring His deity.

This wasn't the only time Jesus accepted the worship of others. On at least two other occasions, He allowed His followers to give Him the praise and honor that can only go to God.

*“For it is written,
You shall worship
the Lord your God,
and Him only you
shall serve.’ . . .*

*And when they
saw [Jesus], they
worshiped Him.”*
Matthew 4:10; 28:17

Matthew 16. The first incident occurred after Jesus asked His disciples to respond to a kind of first-century poll. They had been

out talking with the people of Caesarea Philippi, which is north of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus asked, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” (v.13). After hearing a random sampling of responses, He pointed the question directly at the Twelve, “But who do you say that I am?” (v.15).

Simon Peter, in typical boldness, declared, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v.16). Here was a perfect opportunity for Jesus to dispel this growing idea that He was something other than just a great man. But Jesus wouldn't do that. Instead, He commended Peter for his declaration. The terms that Peter used indicate that Jesus was “of the same substance” or “of the same characteristics” as God. Knowing that Peter's confession was a reference to His deity, Jesus said, “Blessed are you, Simon

Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (v.17). Once more, Jesus willingly received the worship of man.

John 20. A second dialogue between Jesus and one of His disciples demonstrates in even more specific terms Jesus’ willingness to consider Himself worthy of worship. It happened more than a week after Jesus had risen from the dead. All of the disciples but one, Thomas, had seen Jesus. All the talk in the world was not going to convince him that Jesus was alive. He had to see the Savior for himself.

As he and the others were assembled together early in the second week after the resurrection, Jesus suddenly appeared among them. He requested that Thomas touch Him so he would know for sure that

this was Jesus in the flesh. Apparently Thomas did so, for he responded, “My Lord and my God!” (v.28). With these words, Thomas summarized the deity of Christ as both Lord and God. And as Jesus did with Peter, He commended Thomas for not doubting that He was God.

Not much has changed in 2,000 years. Those who choose not to accept the claims of Jesus react in rock-hurling rage at the suggestion that Jesus is God. Conversely, those who know Him personally and see Him for who He is react with undivided devotion and praise to the Man who is God.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THESE VERSES?

The various opinions that people hold about Jesus can be put into at least two categories of belief. First, there are those who use no source other than their own imagination to explain who they think Jesus might be. Their opinions can range from the wildly ridiculous (like saying He was from another planet) to the fairly logical (like saying He was just a great moral teacher). But they are never solidly biblical. People in this category seem to be willing to accept the biblical record when it tells us of Jesus' love for people, mercy on the sick, and wisdom for the masses, but they reject the Bible when its message suggests that Jesus was God.

The other group is made

up of "religious" people who claim to use the Bible as their guide, yet have come to a conclusion that is different from that of orthodox Christianity. The various cults are in this category. These people truly feel that they are correct when they conclude that the Bible does not support the contention that Jesus is God. Let's look at some of the verses these people use either to support their case or to try to disprove the doctrine of Christ's deity.

John 14:28. *"If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, I am going to the Father, for My Father is greater than I."* This verse has been used by some groups to "prove" that Jesus was second in command to God. They wonder how Jesus can be God if God is greater than He.

An explanation of this

begins with a look at Paul's teaching in Philippians 2:5-8. Paul said:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Jesus chose to set aside some of His attributes to become the God-man. He chose to subordinate Himself—not only to God the Father but also to man. This is not a commentary on His nature, which of course no one can change, but on His purpose—His office—while on earth. Just as no one could conclude

that Jesus became less than man because He chose to become man's servant (see Mk. 10:45), so no one should conclude that Jesus was less than God because

Just as no one could conclude that Jesus became less than man by choosing to become man's servant, so no one should conclude that Jesus was less than God because He subjected Himself to the Father while on earth.

He subjected Himself to the Father while on earth. John 14:28 does not disprove Jesus' claim to be God.

Rather, it shows His willing submission to His Father during His 33 years among men.

Revelation 3:14. *“To the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God.’”* The “Amen” of this verse is obviously Jesus Christ. But with that fact established, those who believe in the deity of Christ begin to part ways with those who don’t. Those who don’t think Jesus is God contend that the phrase, “the Beginning of the creation of God” clearly points out that Jesus was the first created being formed by God. That assumption alone would be death for a “Jesus is God” theology, for how could someone who is not eternal be the eternal God? Let’s investigate this theory and see if it holds up.

First, a comment on the translation of the phrase is essential. The Greek literally reads, “the Beginning of the creation of God.” The grammatical construction in the Greek makes it impossible to translate it “by God.”

Second, the Greek word for beginning (*arche*) implies the active role of creating—not the inactive role of being created. Jesus, then, is the Beginner of God’s creation, not the first created being. This proper interpretation of the text harmonizes with other Scripture verses that tell us of Christ’s deity and of His role as Creator.

Colossians 1:15. *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.”* Everybody knows what a firstborn is. He’s the baby born first—the one with the birthrights. Well, sometimes that’s what it means. But like many

words, it can also mean something else. It can also denote rank, position, or privilege. Look for instance at Paul's statement just three verses later: "He is the head of the body, the church, who is the

"All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist."
Colossians 1:16-17

beginning, the firstborn from the dead." Obviously, the word *firstborn* takes on a figurative meaning here. Likewise, in Hebrews 12:23 it is used to speak of something far different from the birth of the first child in a family.

But that would still leave us with only the possibility—not the certainty—that the word *firstborn* means superiority. If all else were equal, either interpretation would be acceptable. But there are other considerations. Notably, there are two verses in the same chapter of Colossians that present a powerful commentary. In Colossians 1:16-17, Paul said in reference to Jesus, "All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist." Here Paul drew a clear line of demarcation between the created and the Creator. Jesus is clearly different from the creation because He was involved in the creation. The Creator cannot create Himself.

John 10:34. "Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law, "I said, "You are gods'?"'" This verse

causes quite a stir from those who don't want to believe that Jesus represented deity. "So what if Jesus said He was God?" they ask. "There are lots of gods. Jesus even called His enemies gods. Therefore, if there is enough room in Jesus' theology for gods who aren't even on His side, being a god isn't so exclusive."

Jesus is clearly different from the creation because He was involved in the creation. The Creator cannot create Himself.

That kind of thinking, though logical on the surface, does not reflect the intent of Jesus' words in John 10. His statement was

a quote of Psalm 82:6, in which God is depicted as entering an assembly of judges to condemn their unfair treatment of others. The word translated "gods" means "mighty ones," or in this case, "judges."

Jesus used this rather unusual quote as part of an argument to reveal the hypocrisy of His enemies. They didn't protest the statement by Asaph that referred to human judges as "gods," yet they denounced this Sinless One when He claimed the title "Son of God."

HELPING YOU HELP OTHERS

The following questions are listed here for you to use in teaching or discipling others. We suggest that these questions be discussed prior to studying the specific section in the booklet—as preview questions.

CLAIMS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. What is the value of Old Testament prophecies that talk of Jesus' deity?
2. What would it do to your view of Christ if there were no Old Testament prophecies about Him?
3. What specific details about Christ do you think would be important in a prophecy to make it useful as proof of His deity?

CLAIMS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. Why would it be important for the people who were Jesus' contemporaries to say that He was God?
2. What does John 1:1-4 tell us about Jesus?
3. What verses in the New Testament besides John 1:1-4 would you use to support Jesus deity?

CLAIMS OF JESUS

1. What is so vital about Jesus' own declarations that He is God?
2. When Jesus made His claims to deity, did the people to whom He spoke know what He was saying?
3. What kinds of things did Jesus do that demonstrated His deity?

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU CALL HIM

Let's suppose you are browsing through a bookstore and you find a book on integrity. You leaf through the table of contents, scan a few pages, peek at the last chapter, and decide that this would be a valuable addition to your library. You pay the \$18.95, take the book home, and begin plowing through it. Fascinated by this author's insights, you begin taking notes, eager to learn all you can about integrity so you can increase your own level of honesty and trustworthiness—something nobody ever has too much of.

Obviously the writer knows his subject, so it occurs to you that you should find out a little about him. You turn to the book jacket and begin reading. It

says something like this, "The author, who claims to be the most intelligent person alive, thinks he is the king of the United States. Having come to this planet from a faraway galaxy, the author enjoys painting masterpieces, writing classics, and making billion-dollar real estate deals in his spare time."

Slamming the book shut, you would either rush back to the store for a refund or make a beeline for the nearest trash can. Having discovered what this author thinks about himself, you would no longer trust a word he said. His words about integrity and honesty would be as valuable as a Yogi Berra dissertation on nuclear physics.

What does this fanciful story have to do with Jesus Christ? It illustrates how we would have to react to the Bible if Jesus were not God. It shows the incredulity we

would express toward the story of Jesus if He were not indeed the God-man. It demonstrates mankind's need to verify a person's words by checking them against his character. If we can't trust a person's character, it is impossible to trust his words. Likewise, the truthfulness and integrity of character is verified by trustworthy words.

If we can't trust a person's character, it is impossible to trust his words.

As we apply this test to Jesus, we must review a couple of factors. First, Jesus' life and teachings are models of integrity and goodness. This fact is recognized almost universally. His acts of healing the infirm, raising

the dead, and demonstrating gentle love match His teachings on kindness, compassion, and morality. It can be concluded, then, that Jesus is a moral, trustworthy Person.

The second factor to consider is that Jesus claimed to be equal with God, to be God's Son, to be God. These claims were verified by the words and actions of His followers and contested by the words and actions of His enemies.

These two factors leave us with only three reasonable options about who Jesus is.

I. A Deluded Lunatic. If Jesus is not God, then He could be accused of having delusions of grandeur. Yet those who knew Him best recognized that Jesus' claim to deity was not outlandish. They knew that it corresponded perfectly to who He showed them He was.

2. A Great Liar.

If Jesus is not God, then He could have just been lying. In this case, He would have had to know that He was not who He was claiming to be. This becomes increasingly difficult to accept the more one looks at His life. How could He, in every other instance, convey the essence of honesty and credibility if on this one major point He continued to lie? How could He deceive so many godly people if He were doing such an ungodly thing? How could One so seemingly moral be such a great liar?

3. God. What Jesus said and what He did most closely support this option. Jesus fulfilled the prophecies about the One who would be God on earth. He manifested the attributes of the eternal God. Sinful men found Him to be sinless. He knew the Scriptures as no one else did. He did things only God could do.

A lunatic can claim anything, but he can't deliver on his claims. Jesus did. A liar can play amazing mental games with people, but he can't prove anything he says. Jesus, though, was born where the God-man was to be born, lived as the God-man should live, died as the God-man was to die, and lived again as only the God-man could live again.

What do you call Jesus? You have only the three options. But be careful. Calling Him anything but God will put your eternal soul in serious jeopardy. Only when you recognize that Jesus is God can you see Him as the source of life. Only as you trust all of God's Word—not just in regard to Jesus' life but also in regard to His deity—will you understand the importance of His death. Be careful what you call Jesus. Your eternal life depends on it.

WHAT YOU CAN'T SAY

From *Mere Christianity*
by C. S. Lewis

I am trying here to prevent anyone 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.

We are faced, then, with a frightening alternative. This man we are talking about either was (and is) just what He said or else a lunatic, or something worse.

“Either this man was, and is, the Son of God—or else a madman or something worse.”

C. S. Lewis

Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend; and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

The question you must answer is a simple one.

It's not, "What do you think of a certain religion?"

It's not, "What do you think of Christians?"

It's not, "What good works have you done lately?"

It's not, "What are the traditions of your church?"

The question that stands between every human and God is this: "What are you going to do with Jesus?"

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn. 14:6). Paul and Silas said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). Luke wrote, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among

men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). And Paul said that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19).

The message is clear: Faith in Jesus is the only way to God. So what are you going to do with Him? Will you allow a philosopher's deceiving words to make you mistrust the Savior? Will you permit a translator's trick to cause you to reject Jesus? Will you let the musings of mere humans carry more weight than the message of Almighty God?

Please don't. Take Jesus at His word. Put your faith in His sacrifice for your sins on the cross of Calvary. You'll find the joy that comes from being set free from the penalty of sin. What will you do with Jesus? That's the most important question you will ever answer.

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