

THE DEITY OF CHRIST

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About the author...

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Introduction

The Bible says, *"...being ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you A reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear"* (1 Peter 3:15), and *"... contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints"* (Jude 3) [All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version of 1901]. One answer that needs to be given concerns the deity of Christ. There are some religious organizations that deny the deity of Christ. Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians, Unitarians, and many New Age religions are among these. However, the Bible clearly teaches, affirms and establishes the fact that Jesus is deity. The Greek word *"theotes"*, which is translated *"deity"* and also *"Godhead"*, means "the Divine essence of Godhood, the Personality of God" (Vine 1:329), or "the state of being God" (Thayer 288). The answer the Bible gives about the deity of Christ is that he is God.

The New Testament Affirms The Deity of Christ in The Four Gospels

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John overwhelmingly demonstrate the fact that Jesus is God. John probably sums up best their purpose in writing, *"...these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye may have life in his name"* (John 20:31). The purpose of their writing was to affirm the deity of Christ.

Matthew's account begins with the events preceding the birth of Jesus when an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and says, *"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for it is he that shall save his people from their sins...Behold, the virgin shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which is, being interpreted, God with us"* (Matthew 1:21-23). There are three major points in this passage affirming the deity of Christ. First, concerning Jesus' work of salvation, *"...it is he that shall save his people from their sins..."* God had said 800 years earlier, *"...before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am Jehovah, and beside me there is no savior"* (Isaiah 43:10-11). God's message is that only God can be the Savior. When the angel says concerning Jesus, *"...it is he that shall save his people from their sins"*, he is saying that Jesus is God. Second, concerning his virgin birth, *"...the virgin shall bring forth a son..."* This was the fulfillment of a prophecy made in the Old Testament

(Isaiah 7:14). Since Jesus had been conceived through miraculous or supernatural means, and not through natural laws, he had to have been God. Third, concerning what Jesus was called, "...they shall call his name Immanuel, which is being translated, God with us", which fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 7:14). Matthew quickly establishes the deity of Christ.

Mark begins his account, *"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"* (Mark 1:1). Right away he uses the phrase *"the Son of God"* which signifies the true nature of Jesus, that he is God. The Psalmist wrote, *"Jehovah said unto me, Thou art my son; this day I have begotten thee"* (Psalms 2:7). Paul said, *"And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers, that God hath fulfilled the same unto our children, in that he raised up Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten thee"* (Acts 13:32-33). Paul's point, citing the Old Testament book of Psalms, is that Jesus' resurrection from the dead is proof that he is the Son of God, the same nature as God, and therefore he is God. The phrase, *"Son of God"*, is defined as *"An eternal relationship subsisting between the Son and the Father in the Godhead is to be understood"* (Vine 4:48). Mark affirms the deity of Christ right away by calling Jesus *"the Son of God."*

Luke proves the deity of Jesus when he writes of Gabriel's announcement unto Mary that she is going to give birth of Jesus.

And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High... and of his kingdom there shall be no end. ...The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:31,32,33,35).

Luke also records the words of the angel on the night of Jesus' birth. *"I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people: for there is born to you this in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord"* (Luke 2:10-11). There are four major points in these passages proving the deity of Christ. First, Jesus would be conceived miraculously. Second, Jesus would be called *"the Son of the Most High"* and *"the Son of God"*, both of which point to his divine nature. Third, Jesus would have an eternal kingdom, one with *"no end."* Fourth, on the night of his birth, Jesus is called *"Savior"* and *"Lord"*, which again is evidence of his deity. These statements are seen as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, such as,

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end... (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Luke affirms the deity of Christ at the very beginning of his account.

John begins his account as he logically sets for the truth that Jesus is God. John writes, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that*

hath been made" (John 1:1-3). John continues to provide more information about the Word when he writes, *"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth. For of his fullness we all received, and grace for grace...grace and truth came through Jesus Christ"* (John 1:14,16-17). John begins his book by referring to Jesus as the "Word". First, John writes that the Word was *"in the beginning..."* John is saying that Jesus was already in existence at the beginning of material things (*Genesis 1:1*). Jesus existed before the creation so that makes him eternal or deity. Second, John writes that the Word *"was with God, and the Word was God."* When the things were being created in the beginning the Word was there in the position and essence of God. Third, John writes that the Word was the agency of the created things. He was not just there for part of the creative process, but was there creating everything. This Word who is God *"became flesh"* and is known to us as Jesus Christ. John affirms that the Word, Jesus, is God.

However, the Jehovah's Witnesses, in an effort to take away the deity of Christ, have come up with their own unreliable translation of the Bible. In their version, *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, they translate John's words this way, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god" (John 1:1, NWT). Relating to the correct translation of this passage Merrill C. Tenney writes:

The Greek word *theos*, translated God, is employed here without the article...When the article is used, the emphasis of the word is on individuality, God as a person; without the article the emphasis is on quality, God as a kind of being... "Deity" is a better rendering. "The Word was deity" clearly asserts that the LOGOS possessed and eternally manifested the very nature of God. (65)

The four gospels also affirm the deity of Christ by writing of his attributes. Jesus possessed attributes that only belong to God. As God he would have the ability to assume whatever form he desired, something that a mere human being could not do. Being God, Jesus did take on the form of a human being, flesh *"...and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh..."* (John 1:1,14). Mark records that after Jesus' resurrection he appeared in different forms. *"And after these things, he [Jesus] was manifested in another form unto two of them..."* (Mark 16:12). Luke records another incident after Jesus' resurrection, *"...and he [Jesus] vanished out of their sight"* (Luke 24:31). The word *"vanished"* literally means, "became invisible" (Vine 4:182). As a mere man Jesus could not have done this, but because he is God, he could. The gospels show the attributes of Jesus to be in the following categories. First, Jesus could be everywhere, so he is omnipresent. *"...and lo, I am with you always..."* (Matthew 28:20). Second, Jesus has all knowledge, so he is omniscient. *"And Jesus knowing their thoughts said..."* (Matthew 9:4). Third, Jesus has all power, so he is omnipotent. *"Then he [Jesus] arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm"* (Matthew 8:26). *"And when he [Jesus] had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. He that was dead came forth..."* (John 11:43-44). Since these are attributes that only God could have, and Jesus possessed them, the logical conclusion is that Jesus is God. The four gospel writers confidently affirm the deity of Jesus.

The New Testament Affirms the Deity of Jesus Through the Remaining Books

Evidence of the deity of Christ is not only seen in the four gospels, but also throughout the remainder of the New Testament. The book of Acts begins with evidence of Jesus' deity.

To whom he [Jesus] also showed himself alive after his passion by many proofs... And when he [Jesus] said these things, as they were looking, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight...this Jesus who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner... (Acts 1:3,9,11).

Luke begins Acts by affirming the deity of Christ through Jesus' resurrection from the dead and ascension back into heaven. In Acts evidence of Jesus' deity is affirmed through the preaching of men like Peter and Paul. Peter said, *"Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus..." (Acts 2:36)*. Peter provides his own commentary concerning what he means by calling Jesus "Lord." Speaking to Cornelius, Peter said, *"The word which he sent unto the children of Israel, preaching good tidings of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all)" (Acts 10:36)*. To be Lord of all is to be God. Speaking of Jesus, Peter said, *"But ye denied the Holy and Righteous One..." (Acts 3:14)*. Years earlier, Isaiah had said of God, *"Our redeemer, Jehovah (Lord) of hosts is his name, the Holy One..." (Isaiah 47:4)*. The words used by Peter places Jesus on an equality with God the Father. Paul also preached that Jesus is God when he told the Ephesian elders, *"Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28)*. The King James Version says, *"...to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."* The New American Standard Version says, *"...to shepherd the church of God which he purchased with his own blood."* In this passage Jesus is called "Lord" or "God".

Other New Testament books affirm the deity of Jesus just as strongly leaving no doubt that Jesus is God. *"Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:5-8)*. The words, "form" and "equality", affirm Jesus' deity because the word "form" (*morphe*), means "the special or characteristic form or feature of a person or thing" (Vine 2:123), and the word "equality" (*isos*) means "the same in size, number, quality, etc" (Vine 2:38). Jesus existed in the very "form of God" concerning who he was, and concerning his existence in the spiritual realm, for *"God is spirit..." (John 4:24)*. Jesus was *"on an equality with God"* in his divine nature or quality as Paul also writes in Colossians.

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth ,things visible and things invisible...all things have been created through him, and unto him, and he is before all things, and in him all things consist (Colossians 1:15-18).

Aside from explaining that Jesus existed before all things, which would make him God, and that he

is the creator of all things, which would make him God (Genesis 1:1), Paul again uses two words, “image” and “firstborn”, which point to Jesus’ deity. Vine says the word “image” (*eikon*) means

essentially and absolutely the perfect expression and representation of the Archetype, God the Father” and “Christ is the visible representation and manifestation of God to created beings; the likeness expressed in this manifestation is involved in the essential relations in the Godhead, and is therefore unique and perfect. (2:246)

He also says that the word “firstborn” (*prototokos*) “is used of Christ...in his relationship to the Father, expressing his priority to, and preeminence over, creation, not in the sense of being the first to be born” (Vine 2:105). With reference to the word “firstborn” Hugo McCord said,

When one realizes that figuratively a *protokos* is a most important person, a prince, a sovereign, with no genealogy under consideration, then real meaning comes to the expression “firstborn of all creation.” Christ is being placed above and is superior to all things which he has created. Instead of Christ’s being demoted and depreciated to a position limited in time and to a position of being a part of created things, the expression...exalts Christ as the sovereign maker of all things. The phrase reflects not an origin of Christ but the status of Christ: he is chief of all things. (22)

Paul’s point is that Jesus has preeminence over the creation because he is the Creator, and that makes him God.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses have changed the word of God in another place (Colossians 1:16-17) by inserting the word “other” into the text. Their version says, “because by him all [other] things were created...All [other] things have been created through him...he is before all [other] things.” They are taking away the deity of Christ by adding the word other and making him a created thing. The forward of the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* says, “[] Brackets enclose words inserted to complete or clarify the sense in the English text” (NWT 6). The truth is that they have added to God’s word to take away the deity of Christ. They have in effect violated both principles of adding to and taking away from the word of God (Deuteronomy 4:2, Revelation 22:18-19).

Paul again teaches the deity of Christ when he writes, “For in him [Jesus] *dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and in him ye are made full, who is the head of all principality and power*” (Colossians 2:9-10). As has previously been noted the word “Godhead” (*theotes*) “indicates the Divine essence of Godhood, the personality of God” (Vine 1:329). When Paul writes that in Jesus “*dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead*” or the “essence of Godhood” he is affirming that Jesus is God. Paul again speaks of Jesus being God when he writes to Titus, “*Looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ*” (Titus 2:13). Jesus is called “God” and “Savior”. The Hebrew author begins his book by showing that Jesus is God.

God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds, who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance, and

upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:1-3).

The word “*effulgence*” (*apaugasma*) means “radiance” and in this context means “The Son, being one with the Father in Godhood, is in Himself, and ever was, the shining forth of the glory, manifesting in Himself all that God is and does...” (Vine 2:19). The Hebrew writer uses a different Greek word for “*image*” than was used in the Colossian letter. The Hebrew author used the word “*character*.” It is easy to see from the anglicized form that the word has come to the English as “character.” The word means “a stamp or impress, as on a coin or a seal, in which case the seal or die which makes an impression bears the image produced by it... In the New Testament it is used metaphorically ... He is the image or impress of His substance, or essence” (Vine 2:247). The writer does not stop there, but goes on to quote an Old Testament passage, where the author, referring to Jesus. “*But of the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever...*” (Hebrews 1:8). The Hebrew author’s point is that Jesus is God.

Peter begins his second letter by writing, “*Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained a like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 1:1). Later in the same chapter Peter writes “*our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 1:11). Jesus is God, Lord, and Savior. The book of Revelations confirms the deity of Christ, “*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end*” (Revelation 22:13). God said of himself through the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, “*I am the first, and I am the last, beside me there is no God*” (Isaiah 44:6). The message of the book of Revelation is meant to confirm the deity of Christ, as is the whole Bible.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ, who was born of Mary, existed as God, with God, from all eternity (Micah 5:2). Jesus left heaven, according to God’s plan, and took on the form of humanity that he might serve as the sacrifice, “*propitiation*” (1 John 2:2), for our sins. When Jesus lived on this earth he was both God and man. He was the “*Son of God*” and the “*Son of man*”.

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