



THE DEITY OF JESUS CHRIST

RONALD GORDON

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One of the great questions of orthodox Christianity revolves around the Divine nature of Jesus. Was God and Jesus the same person? Or, was Jesus nothing more than a great prophet? Many Christians seem to have a greater problem with this question than non-believers, which may come as a surprise. I have also noticed with surprise that many non-believers seem to have little difficulty with this tenet since many believe everyone possesses a spark of divinity to some small degree. They believe that everyone could reach their greatest human potential when this fact is realized and aggressively pursued. A very well-known Hollywood actress climaxed her movie by dancing on a beach and brazenly proclaiming *"I am god!"* So, Jesus having this same divine attribute poses no large threat to them.

More than just a few modern believers have suggested that the earliest Christians did not embrace this view of Jesus, that any divine nature was a later addition. Some recent movies have attempted to sustain this idea. Why then is it so important for people to dismiss the Divinity of Jesus? Among the many answers to that question is certainly the comfort, for some, of knowing that Jesus is no longer a threat to their life-style. For if He was just a man, inspired, yet just a man, then He is also not a Divine Judge that would object to their behavior, in whatever lifestyle.

If it can be firmly established that early Christians regarded Jesus as Divine, this would be joyous for authentic Christianity, yet it does not prove that they are right. Those early disciples might have been mistaken or even deluded. But if it can be genuinely demonstrated that history substantiates that these disciples actually did believe in the Deity of Jesus, then this modern suggestion that it was a later addition can be safely dismissed. Let us investigate church history and especially the biblical scriptures themselves in order to discover what early Christians genuinely stated and published for others to also believe.

COUNCIL OF NICAEA 325 AD

Arius (250-336 AD), a priest of Alexandria, Egypt, taught that God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son were not of the same equal substance. He was countered by Athanasius (296-373 AD), another priest of Alexandria who taught that God and Jesus are of the same eternal nature. In order to eliminate the confusion, the Roman Emperor Caesar Flavius Constantine ordered a meeting of bishops to finalize the issue. The Council overwhelmingly affirmed: *the deity and eternity of Jesus, defined the relationship between the Father and the Son as "of one substance," "affirmed the Trinity being the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three co-equal Persons."* The bishops also declared Arius to be a heretic after he obstinately refused to sign a statement acknowledging their final decision.



When more than 1,200 people gather in one place it is no small meeting. There were between 300-350 bishops from around the Roman Empire accompanied by many of their own priests and support staff. Emperor Constantine was naturally there along with his attendants, plus servants and soldiers. And of course there was Athanasius the priest of Alexandria who originally argued for the divine nature in both the Father and the Son. Twenty canonical statements from this body exist. Sadly, no actual minutes have survived. However, much can be learned from the letters of those bishops reporting to the people of their own Diocese, such as Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea: *"In the same way we also admitted "begotten, not made;" since the Council alleged that "made" was an appellative common to the other creatures which came to be through the Son, to whom the Son had no likeness. Wherefore, say they, He was not a work resembling the things which through Him came to be, but was of an essence which is too high for the level of any work; and which the Divine oracles teach to have been generated from the Father, the mode of generation being inscrutable and incalculable to every originated nature."*

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Nicaea did not invent a doctrine concerning the Deity of Christ but rather affirmed what they believed were the apostles' teachings. For centuries, the "*one substance*" decision of Nicaea would hold Christendom in check from both heresy and the subtler apostasy. History speaks to the question, yes, early Christians believed in the full Deity of Jesus, and it was later confirmed by this first Church Council that the Son and the Father are of the same substance.

The Centurion at the Crucifixion

Here is a radical question to ponder, is it possible that non-Christians also believed in the Deity of Christ? When segments of modern Christianity no longer accept the divine nature of Jesus, would it not be sensational to discover that a non-Christian acknowledged the divine connection between Jesus and the Father? This might very well be the case of the Roman Centurion supervising his soldiers at the crucifixion of Jesus. What exactly is a Centurion? He was more than just a rank – he was a concept. The Centurion was the motivating force of a Legion. He trained "Legionaries" (Infantry) and preserved loyalty among them. He stood at the front right of a marching formation, easily identified by the horse-hair crest atop his helmet.



As true officers, they led and inspired their men by example, often charging into breaches or being first over the enemy's wall. Upon termination of service they held important social status and were given powerful positions in society because of their enviable career. In almost every modern business there is a person who is an outstanding example of loyalty and devotion. They are often referred to as the *Company Man*, and most times in a complementary way. In a similar fashion, such was the trusted Centurion. He was the embodiment of Rome itself. He represented its glory. He was the *Company Man* of the Roman Empire.

Several are mentioned in the New Testament accounts. One desired healing from Jesus for a dying cherished servant, Matthew 8:5. Before the astonished Jewish faces of Apostle Peter and friends, another was gloriously baptized by the Holy Spirit, Acts 10:44-45. Still another was especially determined to save the life of Apostle Paul against the advice of fellow guards who wanted to kill all prisoners lest some might escape, Acts 27:43.

There was a Centurion supervising the execution squad that crucified Jesus and two thieves. Was he puzzled to hear Jesus forgive his men as they pounded nails into His body? "*Father, forgive them, for they don't know (or comprehend) what they are doing,*" Luke 23:34. Did these first words from the cross not also apply to the crowd?

How could they? The crowd *knew* what they were doing (v.35). They had yearned for the death of Jesus. They had conspired for His death. They strategized for His death, John 11:47-53. They arranged for His betrayal, John 11:57. They rewarded Judas with money when the betrayal was conceived, Matthew 26:15. They arrested Jesus by stealth, John 18:3. They followed the scripted talking points of the Chief Priests during the trial before Pilate, the governor, Matthew 27:20; Luke 23:18. If there was anyone at the crucifixion of Jesus who knew exactly what they were doing, it was the crowd. From them came mocking voices, wagging heads, and grievous insults! They knew.

Did Jesus die for the sins of those in the crowd? Yes, of course. Jesus came into this world to remove the penalty of sin for everyone, John 1:29. He was made sinful for us, that we might attain the righteousness of God through Him. But, these first words from the cross were directed only to those who *did not know* what they were doing. These words are noticeably enveloped within the very midst of the soldier's activity.

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In Luke 23:33-34 there is no mention of the crowd because the primary focus of activity is the soldiers. Not until the next verse (35) does this Gospel writer make any reference to the crowd, although they most certainly observed from a distance. Four third-person plurals (they) surround Jesus' statement of forgiveness.

They (**soldiers**) brought Jesus to the place called Calvary.

They (**soldiers**) nailed Jesus to the cross.

JESUS asks the Father to forgive them.

They (**soldiers**) divided the garments.

They (**soldiers**) cast dice for the garments.

As these first words of forgiveness were uttered by Jesus, did they somehow minister to the Centurion? Was his assessment of the man before him altered in any way? How can we truly know since these men were so familiar with the many sceneries of death? On the battlefield these men killed those who did not want to die, begged not to die, and resisted every effort to keep from dying. Execution squads most certainly had to be callous to the prolonged screams of their victims, and the incessant wailing of family and relatives. These were the hardest of men. They had to be.

But something different occurred this day. Something this Centurion had never witnessed because it never happened at any previous moment in all of history. It was the salient impact of Jesus' seventh and very last words from the cross: *"Father, into your hands I place my spirit."* Jesus gave one last breath and died. No one at any time ever witnessed such powerful authority over life and death, for normally the body dies first and then the spirit returns to God, Ecclesiastes 12:7. This was in reverse. Jesus directed the spirit to leave first and then His body died. Of all the many deaths witnessed by this Centurion, his eyes never beheld anyone exercise such Divine authority.

Here is a pagan, a soldier, and a non-believer. His words demand our full attention for he recognized the Divine connection between Jesus and God. *"And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God,"* Mark 15:39, Matthew 27:54. Yes, even battle hardened veterans of war commanding public executions can recognize a Divine Connection.

This Centurion witnessed more than just history in the making, his eyes beheld the miracles of all miracles; the supernatural transference of life from earth to heaven by the power of mere words. It was Words that Jesus spoke for the wind to be still, and it obeyed Him, Luke 8:24. It was Words that Jesus spoke and the little daughter of Jarius arose from her bed of death to life again, Mark 5:41. It was Words that Jesus spoke and thousands were fed from only a few loaves and fishes, Matthew 15:36. It was Words that Jesus spoke and fishermen toiling all night without success immediately had enough fish to fill two ships until each was borderline sinking, Luke 5:4-7. It was Words that Jesus spoke and violent demons raced for cover, Mark 5:13. It was Words that Jesus spoke and Lazarus arose after four days of death, John 11:43. It is the power of His word whereby Jesus holds the entire universe together, Hebrews 1:3. Now it was the moment for Jesus to utter the most powerful Words of His earthly life, for this time it would involve His own body. It was the seventh Words from the cross. In John 10:18, Jesus states that no one can take His life from Him, meaning that it is impossible to kill God. Only Jesus can bring His earthly life to a close.

No person – at any time – has demonstrated such Divine Authority over life and death as did Jesus hanging on the cross of Calvary when He personally directed his spirit back into the hands of God the Father, before He lapsed into death in front of many reliable witnesses who knew Him and the circumstances – including His mother.

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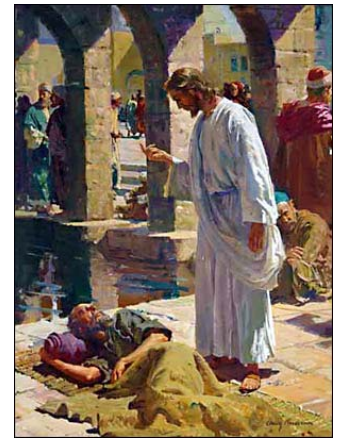
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DECLARATIONS OF DIVINITY

As compelling as should be the testimony of 300+ bishops at Nicaea plus an on-the-spot Centurion eye witness, not to mention the Apostles and over five hundred additional witnesses, 1 Corinthians 15:6, there will still be those individuals, generally with good intentions, who will continue to dispute the Deity of Christ unless they read such a declaration from the very lips of Jesus Himself. Therefore, did Jesus actually declare Himself equal with God? Yes, in fact this equality with God is Jesus' *primary defense for performing acts of labor on the Sabbath*.

JOHN 5:1-24 ~ Healing and Working on the Sabbath

On a Sabbath, Jesus heals a lame man at the pool of Bethesda, the one having five porches. Jesus heals him, instructs him to get up, carry his bed or mat, and leave the area since he can now walk. Authorities see the healed man carrying his bed and charge him with breaking the Sabbath, because transporting personal belongings was considered physical labor. After learning that a healing had also taken place, they went looking for Jesus because healing was also considered to be work. They are determined to persecute Jesus (v.16) for this double infraction: a healing which breaks the Sabbath and then forces someone else to break the Sabbath. It would appear from the inference in verse 18 (*"the more"*) that they may have been at least contemplating the death of Jesus as well.



Unlike today when civility would restrain us from arguments and hurt feelings, Jesus escalates this discussion, turns up the heat, applies the pressure, and intensifies each argument without relenting. His declarations may easily be considered blasphemous, egregious, and sententious bordering on pomposity. Later in Chapter Ten of the gospel of John, they reference Jesus as though He was crazy, *"Why bother listening to Him?"* (10:20).

VERSE 17 ~ *"My Father worketh hitherto (continuing until now), and I work."*

In order to defend His activity on the Sabbath, Jesus calls God, *"My Father"* thus placing Himself on an equal level with God. No ordinary Jew would dare make such a presumptuous statement as to call God his father. But Jesus isn't an ordinary Jew. It's an ontological point. Jesus is declaring that His existence or His nature is the very same as that of God. God does not stop working for the Sabbath; therefore, Jesus does not stop working for the Sabbath. It's not a discussion centering on the finer points of Sabbath keeping, such as, what is and what is not permissible labor. Jesus is escalating the discussion above what Moses has written and how it should be interpreted. Jesus has shifted the entire premise so that equality with God is His primary defense for working on the Sabbath. God doesn't need to answer to these Authorities concerning the Sabbath, and Jesus insists, by their mutual similarity, neither does He.

In other words, God does not suspend the laws of physics on every Sabbath. Gravity, electro-magnetism, weather, plant growth, and molecular interactions continue on the Sabbath as on every other day. On every Sabbath, God makes: the sun to rise and set, rains to fall and cease, floods to rise and subside, tornados to begin and stop, flowers to bloom and wither, rivers to expand and contract, tides to rise and fall, earthquakes to begin and stop, volcanos to erupt and spew, climates to grow warm or cold, planets to revolve, meteors to collide, people to be born and die, ocean currents to persist, and cloud types to explain Highs and Lows to average people who never studied meteorology. As if this short list of God's activity has not already made the point – *God works on every Sabbath!*

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The words of Isaiah resound in our ears: *“Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?”* (40:28). But doesn't the Genesis record state that God rested on the Sabbath? God indeed rested, but from *creating* – not from, *maintaining*.

During the six days of creation God put Jupiter in the correct orbit but on the seventh day God continued to govern Jupiter's orbital velocity. God rested from creating on the seventh day but continued to maintain what was then created. If God stopped maintaining things for an instant, electrons and neutrons would fly apart and the entire universe would cease to exist in its present state. Jesus declares that there are no Sabbath restrictions on God. God created the Sabbath for man, not for Himself. Since Jesus considers Himself to be equal with God, Sabbath restrictions will not apply to Him as well.

Understanding this point is very important. Jesus is defending His healing activity of the lame man on the Sabbath by correlating it to the same activity as that of God on any given Sabbath. This assertion enraged the Authorities who knew exactly what He meant! (v.18) He was not misunderstood on this point. Jesus stated with absolute clarity that He and God are equals, share the same nature, and continue to work on every Sabbath. Responding in this manner highly provoked them because they esteemed themselves solely responsible for interpreting the Scriptures and former rabbinical decisions. It would have been a personal insult for them to be told how to properly interpret the Scriptures.

VERSE 18 ~ “Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.”

The Authorities correctly understood what Jesus meant by the words **“My Father.”** By saying *My Father*, Jesus was constructing a personal relationship with God, instead of reiterating a corporate reference to God as the Father of the nation since God was indeed the father of the nation Israel.

Now they wanted to kill Him all *the more*, which infers that death was part of their original intent. It is not important what these words mean to each of us today. It is important to understand what it meant to them! They fully comprehended that Jesus was placing Himself on an equal status with God. Jesus' entire defense of His Sabbath activity is based on equality with God. Sabbath restrictions do not apply to the Father and, therefore, do not apply to the Son. Equality is not just an argumentative point. It is the primary point of the argument.

When people say that Jesus never actually claimed to be God, they have not fully understood this passage nor others having the same premise. They fail to comprehend what was clearly understood by the Authorities who were there, and heard the tonal inflections of His voice, witnessed the body language, and gazed directly into the eyes of Jesus when He unabashedly claimed equality with God as His primary defense for the Sabbath healing of a lame man.

It was on another Sabbath that Jesus entered a synagogue and found a man having a withered hand. Predictably, the Authorities watched carefully so that they might accuse Him. Mark 3:1-6. Jesus knew what they were thinking and challenged them first with a question: *“Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace,”* verse 4. They held their peace, indeed, but what follows exposes the depravity of their motives. *“The Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him,”* verse 6. Two things should grasp our attention. First they wanted to kill Jesus. This is how people act when they assume self-justification for their actions. Second, they conspired with the Herodians. Normally these two groups were adversaries. How sinister is this fact alone, that religious leaders would feel sufficiently comfortably in conspiring with an enemy for the destruction of any one or any thing?!

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VERSE 19 ~ “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.*”

First, Jesus declared to possess the same Nature as God. Now, He declares that they both use the same Process. Jesus doesn't back down from His initial declaration, but reaffirms His Deity by announcing that He possesses still greater attributes of Divinity. Jesus cannot act independently of the Father. Whatever the Father does, the Son does. They do not work in opposition to one another. It is impossible for Jesus to do anything other than what the Father does. It's a team effort. Nowhere in the Bible can it be found that Jesus is doing something against the will of the Father. *“Thy will be done,”* Matthew 6:10, Luke 11:2, is the admonition of importance when teaching His disciples how to pray. Sinning is transgressing against the Father's will.

This declaration reveals the absolute impeccability of Christ. It cannot be dismissed. Jesus cannot sin because He shares the same nature as God who also cannot sin, for sinning is going against God. God cannot act against His own nature, therefore Jesus having this same nature, also, cannot act against God. This concept highlights the meaning behind one of Jesus' titles, Immanuel, Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23 (also Emmanuel from the Greek Ἐμμανουήλ).

“Emmanuel” or *“God is with us.”* The Father dwells on the earth through the Son. The Father speaks to us through His Son. The Father explains Himself through the Son. Jesus declared, *“I and my Father are one,”* John 10:30), one in the same Nature and one in the same Process. Many of Jesus' parables are really opportunities that God has used to tell us about Himself. For example, in the Parable of the Talents (Luke 19:11-26) Jesus relates a story about a nobleman going into a far country and giving the same amount of money to ten servants. Each was instructed to invest his money through business transactions until he returns. Sometime later when the nobleman returned, each servant gave a report of his success. One servant increased the nobleman's money ten-fold for which he received ten cities to govern. Another increased the nobleman's money five-fold and was given five cities to govern. But there was one servant who made no investments and was punished, *for not being productive.*

Most biblical students would have little difficulty recognizing Jesus as the nobleman and that we are the servants. Jesus has gone to heaven to receive a kingdom and upon His return will reward or reprimand each of us according to our productivity, or lack thereof. *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad,”* 2 Corinthians 5:10. What is the Father saying to us through this story which is primarily focused on the nobleman's response? God wants us to be faithful and productive towards advancing the kingdom of His Son, which is bringing the Father's will to earth.

VERSE 20 ~ “*For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.*”

Jesus continues to escalate the discussion now by declaring that He knows everything that God knows. They share the same Nature, they share the same Process, and now they share the same Knowledge. Whatever the Father knows, the Son knows. We may have difficulty trying to understand this point because it is, in essence, transcendent truth. Jesus rises above the frail nature of human existence. It is hard for us to grasp how a person can have all the knowledge of God residing within their own self. We might attempt to draw parallels with those whose mind is the level of genius or above, but Jesus is far above all that we can ever know or imagine. Apostle Paul states: *“For in him (Jesus) dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,”* Colossians 2:9. Restricted only by three dimensions.

Everything about God dwells or resides in Jesus. He is not diminished from God in any manner. The two are on the same level. During His earthly ministry Jesus was fully omniscient even though He had humbled Himself to be a

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servant. *“Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men,”* Philippians 2:6-7.

A great example of Jesus demonstrating His godly omniscience was the episode with Nathaniel sitting under a fig tree before Philip arrived to tell him some good news, John 1:45. From some unknown distance Jesus was watching him. Jesus could see that Nathaniel was sitting under a fig tree, and heard the entire conversation after Philip arrived. Nathaniel’s demeaning statement about the town of Nazareth gave Jesus an opportunity to reveal His omniscient attribute. Jesus immediately acted like He had known Nathaniel and much about him for some extended period of time. Space and time have no restrictions on Jesus.



When Philip and Nathaniel arrived, Jesus speaks to him directly in order to reveal both His divinity and also vindicate the reputation of Nazareth, *“Now there’s a true Israelite (patriot)! There’s nothing deceitful about this guy!”* John 1:47. Nathaniel must have been thinking, *“How does this man know so much about me?”*

“We’ve never met!” Jesus then relates everything about him while under the fig tree, and the subsequent conversation with Philip. Nathaniel was immediately convinced that Jesus was exactly who Philip said He was, *“Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.”* There could have been no collusion between Jesus and Philip.

Jesus knew of events when He was not there, and knew what people were thinking. *“And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?”* Matthew 9:4. *“But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst,”* Luke 6:8. He knew that the Woman at the well had five husbands, John 4:18. He knew the contemplative thoughts of the Pharisees without any opportunity to discover, Matthew 12:25. If Jesus could walk on water then why is it so difficult to believe that He could read minds?

Jesus knew pertinent facts without being there. *“Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead,”* John 11:14. He said this when they weren’t even in the country of Judea! (v.7) let alone anywhere near the town of Bethany where Lazarus had lived. If divine omniscience was not in play, then how did Jesus know what could not possibly have been known to humankind? They had just been informed that Lazarus was sick, (v.3). If these messengers had just arrived with information of the illness after perhaps a 3 to 4 hour journey, then they could not also have known that Lazarus had died. If the messengers knew of his death, then why deliver a message of sickness only? There is no reasonable way to make sense of Jesus’ intimate knowledge of Lazarus’ condition apart from divine omniscience.

In the interest of balance and the pursuit of genuine truth, we are advised not to lump every apparent mind reading Scripture into the category of divine omniscience, for Jesus’ reaction in at least a few instances could have been assumed by mere human intuition. In Mark 2, four men transported a paralyzed friend to Jesus, by lowering him through an opening in the roof. When Jesus forgave the man of his sins, (instead of the expected rise and walk) the obvious disgust among the Scribes should have been easy to anticipate and logically understand. Their belief that only God can forgive sins would have evoked a predictable reaction. But, this also does not rule out omniscience.

Contrariwise, perhaps Jesus did actually know their thoughts prior to the descending bed. Perhaps He had seen negativity and hostility. Perhaps He “intentionally” used the word forgive to accomplish His own purpose for that occasion, whatever may be the reason. When it comes to biblical interpretation, the door can often swing both ways!

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While observing His last Passover in the Upper Room, “*Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father,*” John 13:1. Only divine omniscience may account for this knowledge. In regard to paying taxes, “*Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee,*” Matthew 17:27.

Some believing Christians, otherwise convinced of His omniscience, might laugh or scorn over this passage, for it is admittedly fanciful. What are the odds of the first catch having a coin in its mouth? And why would a fish swallow any coin in the first place? A true fisherman could tell you why a fish might swallow a coin. Some of the best fishing lures you can buy are “gold” in appearance and “spin” through the water – *just like a falling coin!*



If we accept the orthodox position of divine omniscience, then did Jesus know everything that God knew about the universe at the age of three months, or three years? We need to return to verse 20 and carefully examine what Jesus actually said, “*The Father loveth the Son, and SHEWETH HIM all things.*” The Father showing all things to the Son does not preclude equality but confirms it. Their harmonious nature is a welcome place of comfort and solitude for mutual consultation. Jesus often spent hours in prayer. Occasionally most of the night, Matthew 14:23-26. During those last hours in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus had been praying arduously before the Father concerning the events of the next day. Upon returning to the disciples He was disheartened to find them sleeping. “*What, could ye not watch with me one hour?*” Matthew 26:40. Just one hour! Even serious biblical students can fail to sufficiently appraise the magnitude of importance on what took place between Jesus and God during the many hours and hours of communication between them.

British theologian John Gill attempts to explain this Father and Son communication. “*Not as if he was ignorant of them, since he lies in the bosom of his Father, is the wisdom of God, is the omniscient God, that knows all things; not only all things in men, but all things in God, even the deep things of God: but this is said of the Father, as consulting with him, communicating his designs to him, as his equal; doing nothing without him, as he never did in the works of nature, or of grace: he drew the plan of peace, reconciliation, and salvation in him; he made the worlds by him; and he does nothing in the government of the world without him; and indeed he shows him all things he does, by doing all things; and by him he shows himself, and his works, to men.*”

A popular objection to the divine omniscience of Jesus is the woman having an issue of blood, who secretly touched His garments. “*Who touched my clothes?*” Jesus exclaims, Mark 5:30. A lame argument is suggested that Jesus could not have been all knowing or He would not have asked a question of discovery. This incident is hardly worth the effort to examine, for if Jesus could watch Nathaniel and Philip miles away, it follows sound reasoning that He could also know someone standing *directly behind Him!* It’s a rhetorical question. College professors routinely utilize them in class. They know the answer but want to stimulate critical thinking on the part of the students. It would serve no good purpose for an instructor to divulge a stream of correct answers during the entire semester, only to have the student face this question on the final exam: “*Now, how did you arrive at those correct answers?*”

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This manner of teaching based on asking and answering questions is similar to the Socratic Method, named after Socrates, 470–399 BC, the Greek philosopher who spurned lectures as being ineffective, for he believed students could more quickly reach their greatest potential by improving their own reasoning skills in order to become more rational thinkers. A teacher would challenge students with questions that required generative answers which then served as a beginning to further analysis.

A first cousin of this method is the rhetorical question, a figure of speech in the form of a question which likewise stimulates contemplation without the necessity of an answer, for the question itself serves to illustrate a point. The two methods vary according to the occasion. Jesus used both methods with great effectiveness. Several rhetorical questions are found in the Sermon on the Mount. *“What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?”* (none). *“Do men gather grapes of thorns?”* (no), *“...or figs of thistles?”* (no). *“If salt has lost its taste, how do you restore it?”* (you don’t, you throw it out). The point is that Jesus wasn’t expecting an answer. The rhetorical question is not a pursuit of discovery. He knew these answers. When Jesus asked who had touched His clothes, He knew about this woman’s act of faith but no one else did. If Jesus knew of Lazarus’ death while in a different country, He certainly knew about this woman and her condition who was *immediately behind Him*. The question served as an opportunity to publicly acknowledge her faith, something which could serve a useful purpose for Jarius whose daughter was gravely ill. We are encouraged to remember that they were going to Jarius’ home.

In John 6, the question is presented: *“When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?”* (v.5). Jesus wasn’t asking the question to learn anything. He knew the answer, in fact, the very next verse fully explains just that: *“And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.”* (v.6). Jesus knew all along that He was going to miraculously feed thousands of people, but He asked the question to prove or challenge the faith of Philip.

One of the strongest challenges to the divine omniscience of Jesus is the lack of knowing the time when He shall return from heaven to the earth for His bride the Church. *“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.”* Mark 13:32. Theologians have tormented themselves into exasperating summersaults over this passage. How can Jesus be omniscience if He doesn’t know what God knows? Did it not occur to anyone that Jesus might be referring to a Jewish wedding? Only a Gentile could trip over this one. God is the Father – Jesus is the Groom – Church is the Bride – Angels are the groom’s attendants. It makes perfect sense to the Jewish mind. It was the custom of Jewish fathers to make all the arrangements – *not the sons and daughters involved!* The paternal father would initiate the matching of his son with another father’s daughter. Follow this correlation from Ephesians chapter 1, verses ...

v 3. *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”*

God is the Father

v 5. *“Having predestinated us ... by Jesus Christ to himself”*

Jesus is the Groom of that Father

v 4. *“According as he hath chosen us in him”*

Church is the chosen Bride

v 9. *“Having made known unto us the mystery of his will”*

Father’s reveal according to their own will

Jewish social maneuvering was sort of a village game. Father’s would do the matching and supervise the arrangements according to “their will” and no one else. The father of the groom would advise his son about preparing the new dwelling, while the father of the bride would advise her on consecration and preparation for the arrival of the groom. It was the sole discretion of the groom’s father to pick the moment for his son to go and return with the bride. *“Son, tonight’s the night!”* Jewish fathers looked forward to this traditional moment in the life of their son.

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Not even his own son would know the time when he was to surprise and retrieve his bride. It was part of the culture of the age – the village game which every Jewish family understood. This passage could only be a theological problem for Gentiles, because it is describing a Jewish social event which the entire village understands.

VERSE 21 ~ “For just as the Father awakens the dead and gives them life, so the Son also gives life to whom He wills.”

Jesus declared that He shares the same Nature or Essence as the Father (v.17), works using the same Process as that of the Father (v.19), possesses the same Knowledge of the Father (v.20), and now He declares to have the same Authority over Life as the Father (v.21). Jesus does not pretend to serve as a representative for God. Jesus acts as though He is God. He does not first seek God's permission to raise the dead. He just does it and however He is predisposed to doing it. From the village of Nain went a crowd towards the cemetery to bury the son of a widow. Jesus had the power to give life to the son and He did it just as He stated: *“to whom He wills.”* There were many other sons in that same cemetery that did not come to life. The important element to remember is that Jesus possesses the Authority over Life as He determines. He gave life to Lazarus from another cemetery, but to no one else.

Life is one of the supreme ministries of Jesus. On that appointed day He will give life to millions of believers as the dead in Christ and the Church are taken to heaven. Jesus possesses the authority to give life. To the bereaving Martha He said, *“I am the resurrection, and the LIFE: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he LIVE,”* John 11:25. Everyone that Jesus resurrected from the dead, lived but then died again. The Life that Jesus is referring to here is Eternal Life. Jesus declares His eternality as God is eternal. Jesus has the ability to give Eternal Life. The New Testament writers continually remind us of this incontrovertible fact, that it is Jesus who has the Authority to give Life.

“Whosoever believeth in him (the Son) should not perish, but have everlasting LIFE,” John 3:16.

“I am come that they might have LIFE, and that they might have it more abundantly,” John 10:10.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting LIFE,” John 6:47.

“I am the way, the truth, and the LIFE: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me,” John 14:6.

“That he should give eternal LIFE to as many as thou hast given him,” John 17:2.

“And that believing ye might have LIFE through his name,” John 20:31.

“But the gift of God is eternal LIFE through Jesus Christ our Lord,” Romans 6:23.

“Your LIFE is hid with Christ in God,” Colossians 3:3.

“According to the promise of LIFE which is in Christ Jesus,” 2 Timothy 1:1

“Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought LIFE,” 2 Timothy 1:10

“God hath given to us eternal LIFE, and this LIFE is in his Son,” 1 John 5:11.

Jesus is referring to more than just raising people from the grave to then die once again. He has the power to give eternal life to all those who believe in the work of God's grace. *“Being justified freely by his (the Father) grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (the Son),”* Romans 3:24. Jesus gives eternal life through the grace of God.

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VERSE 22 ~ *“For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.”*

After this length of time, what thoughts or images were in the minds of these Authorities? Standing before them is another Jewish man in sandals and ordinary clothing, having been an ordinary craftsman, from Galilee, not educated to their acceptability, who is claiming to be equal with God. He even addresses God as His own personal Father. His earthly parents and siblings are well known. Yet, this seemingly ordinary fellow states that He shares the same Nature or Essence as God (v.17), works using the same Process as God (v.19), possesses the same Knowledge as God (v.20), declares to have the same Authority as God (v.21), and now declares that God has given Him the right to Judge all humanity. If one could articulate their thoughts, what might they be? Skepticism? Confusion? Audacity? Rage?



Each progressive declaration of Jesus raises the bar to a higher level of disapproval in their minds, and this level must certainly be the most unacceptable yet. This man standing before them claims to possess the authority from God to judge all mankind. In a court of law there is a judge. Judges sit on a higher level from everyone else. Their decisions are final. They are the final arbiters of a situation. Decisions might be appealed but only to be set before another judge. No one else in the courtroom dare sit at a higher level or present a higher opinion. Jesus is claiming the ultimate divine privilege, the supreme and enviable honor of deciding the final destinies of all humankind. Jesus continues to escalate this issue of Deity, level by level.

Before the most esteemed thinkers of Greece, Paul again writes, *“Because he (God) hath appointed a day, in the which he (God) will judge the world in righteousness by that man (Jesus) whom he hath ordained...”* Acts 17:31. How might the biblical record be clearer? Jesus has been “ordained” by God to judge the world in righteousness. That means that Jesus can be trusted. His decisions on the fate of each individual will have the full weight of God’s approval. There will be no higher court. Jesus states again in John 5:30, *“I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.”* God has sanctioned Jesus’ equality. It is not an office or condition that Jesus sought for and achieved. He is eternally equal with the Father because the Father has declared it to be so.

That Appointed Day of judgement is described by John in Revelation 19 & 20: *“And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.”* (19:11) Jesus will return to earth for the final Judgement of the Human Race. Numerous references to this judgment are found throughout the New Testament:

“And hath given him authority to execute JUDGMENT also, because he is the Son of man,” John 5:27.

“For we must all appear before the JUDGMENT seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad,” 2 Corinthians 5:10.

“But why dost thou JUDGE thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the JUDGMENT seat of Christ,” Romans 14:10.

“In the day when God shall JUDGE the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel,” Romans 2:16.

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“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall JUDGE the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom,” 2 Timothy 4:1

“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing,” 2 Timothy 4:8

“Therefore JUDGE nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God,” 1 Corinthians 4:5.

“The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished,” 2 Peter 2:9.

“The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, a GREATER than Jonah is here,” Matthew 12:41.

“The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a GREATER than Solomon is here,” Luke 11:31.

Christians saved by grace and free from the penalty of sin will be evaluated in regard to their faithfulness and behavior, good or bad. Not every believer will have the same rewards. Jesus makes this very clear in the Parable of the Talents (Luke 19:12-24), each was rewarded differently according to their faithful productivity (ten cities, five cities, no cities). Likewise, in regard to the lack of faithfulness, the servants of Luke 12:45-48 were treated differently because of their varying degrees of faithlessness. Not everyone entering heaven will have the same number or type of crowns. Not everyone will have the same type of mansion. Not everyone enjoying the presence of the Lord will have the same rewards, for we will be judged according to what we have done, the good and the bad – *“according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad,” 2 Corinthians 5:10.*

A much different outcome awaits those who willingly chose to spurn the grace of the Father who so gladly would have given it through the atonement of the Son. *“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation,” John 5:28-29.*

John saw a “Great White Throne” set in heaven and those who have done evil during their lives will be judged by the very deeds that they had committed. Everyone whose name is not written in the Lamb’s Book of Life will be cast into the Lake of Fire, originally created for the Devil and his angels. *“And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire,” Revelation 20:15.*

Here we see the inevitable fate of those who have intentionally rejected the atoning sacrifice of Christ. They have set themselves as the only judge and authority to whom they must answer. Music and movies encourage this lifestyle such as the lyrics of “Let it Go” sung by Elsa in the recent Disney film titled “Frozen:” *“It’s time to see what I can do. To test the limits and break through. No right, no wrong, no rules for me. I’m free!”* Yes, exactly the very theme of those who reject the atoning work of Jesus on the cross. They see no right or wrong! They want no

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rules! They yearn to be free of restraints! Free to do whatever they have determined will reasonably satisfy their reprobate minds, and of course, they desire to be free of consequences.

“And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death,” Revelation 20:11-14.

Jesus is the final judge of all mankind, and one day everyone *SHALL* acknowledge this: *“For we SHALL all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee SHALL bow to me, and every tongue SHALL confess to God,”* Romans 14:10-11.

VERSE 23 ~ “That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.”

We see no timidity on the part of Jesus. He continues to escalate the matter even further by declaring that the Father honors the Son, making Jesus preeminent. Conversely, if the Son is not honored then the Father is not honored. Throughout this exercise we have seen, verse by verse, declaration after declaration, that Jesus has been elevating His arguments to greater and greater heights. Jesus now introduces the word honor. It is a very special word, for honor conveys uniqueness. At testimonial banquets the master of ceremonies may begin his introductory remarks by saying: *“This evening, we are gathered in this place, to honor our dear friend . . .”* Only the Dear Friend will receive that honor. No one else. Only to the Maid of Honor is reserved that position to stand next to the bride herself.

In a similar manner, God introduced Jesus to mankind at His baptism in Matthew 3:17, *“And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my BELOVED Son, in whom I am well pleased.”* Isaiah the prophet spoke these words centuries before, *“Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul DELIGHTETH; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles,”* (42:1). On the Mount of Transfiguration God speaks, *“This is my BELOVED Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him,”* Matthew 17:5. Jesus echoes similar words in the “Lord of the Vineyard” parable, *“Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my BELOVED son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him,”* Luke 20:13.

God the Father loves the Son and bestows eternal honor upon Him. Not just for a time, but eternally. Jesus is not seeking this honor. It is the Father who in honoring the Son, thus demonstrates for us how we may be most pleasing to God, and that is by loving and honoring the one that God honors, the Son. *“If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God,”* John 8:54.

VERSE 24 ~ “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”

“Heareth” translates the Greek word ἀκούω (akouo). It can be translated in various ways, such as to hear in general (*Matthew 2:3, Luke 7:3*), to hear with special attention (*Mark 4:3, 12:29, Luke 15:1, Acts 2:22*), to understand with the mind (*Mark 3:8, 4:9, 6:2, Luke 2:18, 2:47, 5:15, 7:22, John 1:37, 5:30, 6:60, Acts 2:8, 22:9, 1 Corinthians*

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2:9); and to obey or disobey (parakouo), i.e. hearing amiss (*Matthew 13:13, 18:17, Luke 16:29, John 9:31, Acts 4:19, Romans 5:19, 2 Corinthians 10:6, Galatians 4:21, Hebrews 2:2, James 5:11, Revelation 3:3*).

Jesus has been making declarations that could be understood by the Authorities as blasphemy. Not only is He saying that He is equal with God, Jesus is demanding that He be honored and heard and believed in the same manner as God would be honored and heard and believed. In other words, to hear the voice of Jesus is to hear the voice of God. To believe in Jesus is to believe in God. Subsequent to all the former verse by verse escalations, this verse requires a level of acceptance which is almost beyond their comprehension. Hearing and believing the words of Jesus determines the difference between eternal life and eternal damnation, which is diametrically opposed to everything they have been previously taught. “*We be Abraham's seed,*” John 8:33. For these authorities, eternal acceptance by God is simply being Jewish and living faithfully to the Laws of Moses, and their own interpretations of those Laws. To even suggest eternal damnation as a real possibility for them is more than objectionable, it would have been repugnant.

Understanding these many declarations is paramount to understanding the true nature of Jesus. John 5:24 actually begins with the words Verily, verily, or Truly, Truly. Direct from the manuscripts of the Greek New Testament are the words, ἀμήν ἀμήν (amen). At the beginning of a statement it means “of a certainty” and at the end of a statement “may it be certain, or fulfilled.” Prayers are ended with amen, so as to say, “May my requests be fulfilled.”

For those of us who have read the Bible for many years, it is extremely important to remember that these Authorities were hearing all of this for the very first time. They did not possess the advantage of listening and then contemplating everything for an undetermined amount of time. It was now, and coming at them fast. Jesus, no doubt, uses these words to impress upon them that His words are truth of the highest echelon.

NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS

John the Apostle writes in 20:28: “*Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.*” The most skeptical one of the Twelve clearly states that Jesus is God. Here is the man who insisted on seeing the very marks of crucifixion before he would believe in the resurrection of Christ. What greater proof should be necessary!

What Jesus has just declared, the Apostle Paul affirms (the deity of Jesus) on several occasions and most forcefully in Philippians 2:6, “*Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.*” Equal is translated from the Greek word ἴσος (isos, pronounced EE-sos), an adjective meaning equal, equivalent, or identical. It appears in the English word isosceles, a triangle which has two equal sides and two equal angles. Isos is used by other New Testament writers when describing sameness: Matthew 20:12, Mark 14:59, Luke 6:34, Acts 11:17, and Revelation 21:16. In the mind of Paul, he believes that Jesus is equal to God in quality, quantity, and dignity.

Luke records an indirect reference to the Deity of Jesus through a statement of Paul in Acts 20:28 where he is speaking to the Elders from the Church at Ephesus: “*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*” Of particular notice is the phrase “Church of God” (Greek, ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ Θεοῦ, “assembly of God”). This is a unique substitution of words, for Jesus specifically stated in Matthew 16:18 that it was His Church: “*Upon this rock, I will build my church,*” The Church of Jesus Christ. Paul’s substitution of the word God is paramount because he esteems the words Jesus and God to be interchangeable. This is reinforced with the words, “*purchased with his own blood*” – referring to Jesus. It was not purchased with the blood of God, unless God and Jesus are equal.

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EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS

Polycarp (69-155 AD), bishop of Smyrna, employs this very same phrase in his letter to the Philippians, *“Polycarp and the presbyters with him, to the church of God, the one residing in Philippi. Mercy to you and peace from God the all-powerful and Jesus Christ our Savior be multiplied.”* Polycarp also believed that the words Jesus and God were equally interchangeable. If the word Jesus appears in this text instead of God, then there is no correlation.

Justin Martyr (100-166 AD) was beheaded for defending the Christian faith against paganism. He writes in First Apology, chapter 10: *“For what human laws could not do, that the Word, being divine, would have brought about.”*

Irenaeus (125-203 AD) and pupil of Polycarp, known as “The Gnostic Fighter” states in Against Heresies, Book 1 Chapter 10: *“Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation ... in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Saviour, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father.”*

Tertullian (155-240 AD), a prolific writer and ardent defender of the faith states in Against Praxeas, Chapter 15: *“For although the Word was God, yet was He with God, because He is God of God.”*

Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD) states in Exhortation to the Greeks 1:7:1 (about 190 AD) *“The Word, then, the Christ, is the cause both of our ancient beginning ... for he was in God ... and of our well-being. And now this same Word has appeared as man. He alone is both God and man, and the source of all our good things.”*

Origen (185-254 AD) scholar and theologian of Alexandria states in The Fundamental Doctrines 1:0:4 (about 225 AD) *“He in the last times, divesting Himself (of His glory), became a man, and was incarnate although God, and while made a man remained the God which He was.”*

St. Patrick of Ireland (387?-461?) states in Confession of St. Patrick 4 (about 452 AD) *“Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and God, in whom we believe.”*

MODERN WRITERS

Clive Staples Lewis states in his famous book, Mere Christianity: *“You must take 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 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.”* Patronizing nonsense?! C.S. Lewis has “thrown the Gauntlet” at the feet of the modern Christian. He says we may no longer consign Jesus to the generic category of human teacher, for Lewis’ own conclusion is that Jesus has not left us that option.

CONCLUSION

From each declaration of Jesus in this 5th chapter of John, that we have thus far examined, Jesus has made very clear statements that require us to acknowledge His equality with God in Essence, Process, Omniscience, Authority of Life, Judgement, Honor, and Eternity. Thus, Disciples, Apostles, Church Fathers, and Modern writers agree.

JESUS THE SON, IS EQUAL TO AND SHARES FULL DEITY WITH GOD THE FATHER.