

Answering Objections to the Divinity of Christ

1. Jesus never said “I Am God”

He did not explicitly use those words, but He did refer to Himself as the “Son of Man” which most people take to mean: “just an ordinary human being, one of a kind, albeit an especially important human being.” However, in the Bible, Son of Man (capitalised) is a title, and does not mean this. It occurs first in the Old Testament with a very important reference in Daniel 7:13-14 (although there are 37 occurrences of the title in total ... see here ... <https://bible.knowing-jesus.com/topics/Son-Of-Man>)

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, [Christ] coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days [the Father] and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. [bracketed – author’s commentary]

Only God is worshipped. Christ the Son of Man is, therefore, God, from His own lips.

2. Jesus said, “The Father is greater than I” so how is he God?

The Father is greater than Jesus in his office, position and role. For example, Jesus always seeks to do the Father’s will, not the other way around. However, when Orthodox Christians say that Jesus is equal to the Father as God, this is an equality of **nature**, not office, position or role. In human relations there is an analogy. Every human, high or low, child or parent, employer or employee, is equal to any other **in nature**. However, they are not clearly all equal on the level of office, position or role.

This was the fundamental mistake of the heretic Arius who took the role difference between Jesus and the Father to mean that they did not share the same nature. Although Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christadelphians, Oneness Pentecostals and sects have different ways of expressing it, they all share the same basic error. Equality in nature does not necessitate equality in roles. 1 Corinthians 11:3 (“*the head of Christ is God*”) and 1 Corinthians 15:28 (“*then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him [the Father] that put all things under him*”) both have the same understanding.

3. Jesus prays to God for example in the Garden of Gethsemane, so why would God pray to Himself?

The word “God” is a rather empty word. Is “God” Allah in Islam, Vishnu, an avatar of the divine in Hinduism, the Great Spirit in indigenous American religions, Ahura Mazda in Zoroastrianism, Jahbulon in some masonic traditions or maybe something

else? In Christianity, God is indeed merely a three-letter word until it is shown to embrace the fullness of the revelation of God the Father in Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Within the richness of that revelation there is much to be said of how Christ relates to the Father, specifically here in prayer. The apostolic faith makes a crucial distinction between “nature” and “person” in the Godhead, and this is the case also with human beings. All share the same human nature but individually there are persons, connected but distinct. So it is with the Trinity, one God by nature and three hypostases (Greek) or persons, connected but distinct. So, when Jesus prays, the Word connects to the Father in the Spirit. In his personhood Jesus is not the Father, so He is definitely not praying to Himself! Only a unitarian (a denier of the Trinity) would have a problem with this. God is not simply “God”, He is Trinity, three distinct but connected persons). Jesus is not deluded when he prays to the Father; nor is He even praying to an inner part of Himself (as Swedenborgians suppose). In all this God is not divided because He is always One in nature ... but NOT in personhood! In personhood, in the hypostases, He is always Three.

4. If Jesus is God, how could he have died? Who would have been running the world while he was dead?

This is often the characteristic objection of Islam. If He is God, then He cannot die because God cannot die. Only those who are not God can die. According to Orthodox Christianity, what then is happening to Christ the God-Man when He dies?

In Orthodox Christian theology Word, the Logos, the “second” Person of the Holy Trinity cannot and did not die. When Christ died, the Logos, His single personhood was still with the Father and the Spirit, always the living and trinitarian God. Who or what then died in the crucifixion?

The heretical Nestorians, the followers of Nestorius, had a ready answer to this question and Nestorianism arguably played a significant role in the rise of Islam - if only to support its Christology, its doctrine of Christ. Nestorius supposed **two** persons in Jesus Christ! - the human person Jesus and the divine Person or Logos/Word to whom the human Jesus was only loosely connected. So, in the Nestorian view, the human Jesus dies but the divine Christ is untouched by death. Jesus Christ becomes a schizoid dual entity. However, nothing in the life and work of Christ including his death, resurrection and ascension remotely justifies this teaching. Jesus Christ is not a duality, sometimes acting as man, sometimes as God. In the resurrection appearance to St Thomas, the apostle receives him as God because he can touch his human and bodily crucifixion scars (John 20:28). Only one Person is in the room when this happens, true God and true Man. Nestorius is a false teacher and his apparent solution to this question is not according to the Apostolic Tradition.

So, what did happen when Jesus died?

a. *To his body?*

It becomes a lifeless corpse, incorrupt for sure (cf. Psalm 16:10) but inert and dead, nonetheless.

b. *Does Jesus cease to exist in every sense?*

No, no more than any human ceases to exist in every sense after death. The soul, or as I prefer to refer to this, the spirit of the man, is separated from the body and is with God the Father. Also, Christ's continued existence is also predicated on Him being God the Word, the Logos, who endures with neither beginning nor end, whether embodied or not.

c. *In Christ's case, what can we say about his spirit?*

Well, we know that in the 3 days between his crucifixion and resurrection he descended into Hades to preach to the spirits in prison in order to liberate them (1 Peter 3:19). These were the righteous of every age who were waiting for His coming. The traditional icon of the resurrection in Orthodoxy is this Descent into Hades.

d. *How was Christ changed on the third day, Pascha, Easter*

The Word, the Logos, was not changed at all. However, the Logos was once again embodied as a living, yet now resurrected man, with a resurrection body having a physicality both continuous (the wounds) and discontinuous (the ability to appear, disappear and effortlessly translocate).

5. Jesus Was "Begotten" and/or "created" and therefore is not eternal.

There are a number of texts here that we need to consider:-

- Concerning Arius's heresy that Jesus had a beginning and therefore cannot be God in nature since God has no beginning; what he failed to grasp is that the Scriptures must be understood as a whole and not in part. Each part is illuminated by other connected parts. Disconnect the parts and you disconnect the true meaning of all. A favourite text of those who wish to deny the divinity of Christ is to be found in Revelation 3:14. Here, there are allusions to Christ the "Amen, the faithful and true witness" is also said to be the "arche" of God's creation. Now the Greek word "arche" means both the beginning and the source or origin of something; here the creation itself. Turning to John 1:1-3, "arche" is used again, here to say that the Word (Logos) that became flesh in Jesus Christ (1:14) was "in the arche [beginning]" "with God" [the Father, and of course the Holy Spirit]. St John goes on to state that the Word was the means by which all things were made (verse 3). How then can Christ be part of a creation (that is having a beginning) that both He and the Spirit create?! It is clear then in the light of the faith of the New Testament what Revelation 3:14 means. Christ, before his birth in the divine Person of the Word, the

second of the Holy Trinity, was the beginning of the creation, not created!

- If we keep in mind what we have discovered in the above analysis and we move on to Colossians 1:15, another favourite text of those who would deny the divinity of Christ, we read that Jesus is “*the firstborn of every creature.*” What then does “firstborn” elsewhere in the Scriptures mean? Genesis 48:17-19 is characteristic in understanding “firstborn” as describing the honour, privilege and pre-eminence of a person without any necessary application to their alleged point of origin *in time*. How else could St Paul in Colossians have agreed with St John in his Gospel other than by understanding “firstborn” in the manner taught by the Old Testament itself? Christ then is the firstborn creature not as a creation of God [the Father as per Arius] but as worthy of the honour and glory ascribed to the Father. Words or phrases plucked out of context rarely if ever mean what they might appear to mean in isolation and without an understanding also of the original language of composition.
- In Proverbs 8:22, Wisdom is said to have been brought forth in the beginning. If Jesus is called the “Wisdom of God,” surely, he was “brought forth” as a creation of the Father? The logic here is flawed because the understanding of “wisdom” in relation to God is an attribute, not a person but rather a personification in Proverbs. Certainly, the Jews before Christ always held this to be the case. Moreover “brought forth” is ambiguous. It can mean a beginning, but it can also mean a revelation, a manifestation of something already and always there. It makes no sense at all, negatively speaking, to suggest that there was a time when God was without wisdom! When Christ is identified with the Wisdom of God, through his Incarnation He makes personal (i.e., in his own person as the Logos-made-flesh) the attributes of not only wisdom but also of power (1 Corinthians 1:24). This case against the deity of Christ thus also fails.
- In John 3:16 Christ is referred to as the “*monogene*” (Greek); the “only-begotten” Son. Does this perhaps mean that the Word, the Son of God, had a beginning? This raises similar issues encountered in understanding “firstborn” in the Scriptures. Neither “firstborn” nor, here, “only-begotten” are used literally as indicating a point of origin in time. In Hebrews 11:17 “only-begotten” is also used of Isaac. Was Isaac in history the first or only child of Abraham, only-begotten literally? No, he was not (Genesis 16:15-16; 25:1-2). He was, however, “only-begotten” as *unique* in relation to the Father. Originally, in Judaism before Christ, “son of God” was a title first applied to King David as “A” son of God (lowercase “s”). When the same phrase was later applied to Jesus it was always as *the* Son of God – definitive article, uppercase. Jesus had a unique relationship to the Father as of the “Only-Begotten” Son, the Uncreated Word of God Himself, without beginning, and like the Spirit, from the Father.

6. Jesus had limited knowledge as indicated in Mark 13.32: “But of that day or that hour no man knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father”, so how can he be God?

We need here to consider not only Christ’s limitation in his knowledge but also all other limitations, self-imposed by the Word for the duration of Christ’s lifetime. When Jesus was “in the flesh” the Word or Logos, uniting Himself to our human nature, lay aside some of his divine attributes; omniscience in the first case. If for those thirty plus years he had been “all knowing” his humanity would have been overwhelmed by His divinity. Again, by nature, Christ was equal to the Father as God but by existing in the flesh He had to share our own nature’s ignorance and partial knowledge. Upon his resurrection His humanity was not so limited. This voluntary self-emptying is called in the Greek of the New Testament: *kenosis*. St Paul, probably quoting an early Christian hymn writes of this in his letter to the Church at Philippi:

*... who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but **emptied himself**, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (Philippians 2:6-7)*

Now “God” is used twice there in two different ways, the first God in his nature, the second, the person of God the Father. If we add the commentary, it now reads ...

... who, though he was in the form of God [by nature], did not count equality with God [the Father] a thing to be grasped ... [bracketed – author’s commentary]

The absence of “grasping” in Christ’s extreme humility, leading of course to the Cross as St Paul goes on to state in verse 8, validating his divine nature as no mere display of power ever could. This, therefore, is how and why his disciples came to understand that although this was fully a man indeed, this was no *mere* man, human alone. This extreme humility not only veils His earthly knowledge but also awareness of his own goodness in relation to the Father, which was so patently obvious to everyone else. Luke 18:19 reads, “And Jesus said unto him, ‘Why callest thou me good? None is good, save one, that is, God.’” Jesus here is comparing Himself (and anyone else for that matter!) to the Father. However, this humility is no false thing because elsewhere in the Gospel of St John Christ refers to Himself as the “Good Shepherd.” (John 10:11) He has, therefore, a *measured* knowledge and self-knowledge, as befits Himself as true God and true Man, Perfect Man that He is.

Conclusion

These, therefore, are the responses to the objections commonly stated concerning the divinity of Christ. The endurance of these oft repeated objections partly arises from ignorance of the Scriptures in the Apostolic Tradition and partly from an obdurate blindness occasioned by sin and an unwillingness to be challenged by Christ Himself.

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