

**Unity of the Person
of Jesus Christ as the God-man**

By Corey Keating

Professor Al Glenn
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Introduction

The Christian religion centers on the person of Jesus Christ. Most critical doctrines in the Christian faith revolve around the answer to the question, “Who was Jesus Christ?” It is crucial to know whether he was merely a good man, gifted teacher, and miracle-worker or the very God incarnate. Yet the answer to this question is a very complicated one. The Bible presents Christ as a unique type of person. It will be shown here that he is clearly portrayed as both a perfect man and as co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father. In other words, he is one person with two complete natures, human and divine.

This paper will first show how Jesus Christ was God incarnate and how he also was a complete human being. It will then show how these two natures have come together into the one person of Jesus Christ. In the midst of this discussion, we will mention different heresies that have been propounded over the centuries regarding the person of Christ. Most of these erroneous doctrines have risen from overemphasizing one aspect of Christ and not seeing the complete revelation of the Bible regarding who he was.

Jesus Christ was Fully God

There is much information within the Bible that points to the fact that Jesus Christ himself was divine; he was God. These facts include claims that he made about himself, claims made by others about him, actions that he did, and many other aspects that the Bible portrays about him. In arguing for the fact that Jesus Christ is fully God, we are not saying that he himself is the same person as the Father God. Although it is outside the scope of this paper to explain this point thoroughly, be it sufficient to say that he is co-eternal and co-equal with the Father God, however they still remain two separate persons in the Godhead.

There are a number of direct and indirect claims that Jesus Christ made about himself that point to the fact that he must be God. Jesus claimed to forgive sins. By healing a person from

disease, he proved that he indeed has the authority to forgive sins.¹ Since the sins had been committed against God, the people that heard him asked, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?”² By claiming to have authority to forgive sins, Jesus was indicating that he represented God, that in fact he was God.

Unlike other great religious teachers, Jesus spoke a lot about himself. He did not take on a position of being a humble man pointing the way to God. He claimed to be the only way that a person could get to the living God.³ He claimed to be the very one who could give life to people,⁴ the one that spoke truth,⁵ and the one who came to fulfill the Old Testament law.⁶

Jesus referred to himself by the title the “Son of God”.⁷ By this he was claiming to have a unique relationship with God the Father. For instance, he claimed that just as the Father has life, so also the Son has life and can give life to whomever he wills.⁸ He said that the Father was in him and he was in the Father.⁹ He claimed that he was the only one who knew the Father God and could reveal the Father to whomever he chose.¹⁰ He was surprised when one of his disciples asked to see the Father God. He answered him by saying, “He who has seen me has seen the Father.”¹¹

Various writers of the New Testament assign titles and attributes to Jesus Christ that could only rightly be ascribed to God himself. For instance, the Apostle Paul says that Christ is

¹ Matthew 9:6-7; Mark 2:9-12; Luke 5:24-25

² Mark 2:7; Luke 5:21

³ John 14:6

⁴ John 6:27

⁵ John 8:45

⁶ Matthew 5:17

⁷ Matthew 27:43; John 3:18; 9:35-37

⁸ John 5:25-26

⁹ John 10:38

¹⁰ Matthew 11:27

¹¹ John 14:9

the “image of the invisible God”¹² and both he and James call him the “Lord of Glory”.¹³ The book of Hebrews, in quoting an Old Testament reference referring to the Messiah, shows how the Father God says to Christ, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,”¹⁴ thus calling the son, ‘God’. Matthew also quotes from the prophet Isaiah and applies a prophecy to Jesus Christ that calls him “Immanuel”, which he clearly denotes to mean “God with us”.¹⁵ Two verses in the Old Testament and one verse in the New Testament scriptures refer to the Father God as being the “Lord of Lords.”¹⁶ And yet two other verses in the New Testament refer to Christ as the “Lord of Lords.”¹⁷ Besides this, the Bible speaks of Christ as the one that will judge all human beings at the end of this age, when the world comes to an end.¹⁸ Not only did people claim this about him, he also claimed that he had authority to judge all human beings.¹⁹ And yet other verses speak about the Father God being the judge at the end of the age.²⁰ Surely this final judgment is only reserved for the one with divine status. Furthermore, when he appeared to his disciples after he had been raised from the dead, Thomas addressed him as, “My Lord and my God.”²¹ If his intimate disciple had been mistaken in such a bold address, the Lord would have surely corrected his mistake. By allowing this title to go unchallenged, Jesus was acknowledging that he was indeed God.

One of the strongest arguments for the divinity of Christ is the fact that he received worship from other people. Throughout the Old Testament scriptures, which Jesus had spent his

¹² Colossians 1:15

¹³ 1 Corinthians 2:8; James 2:1

¹⁴ Hebrews 1:8

¹⁵ Matthew 1:23

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 10:17; Psalm 136:3; 1 Timothy 6:15

¹⁷ Revelation 17:14; 19:16

¹⁸ John 5:22; Acts 10:42; 2 Timothy 4:1,8

¹⁹ John 5:27

²⁰ Romans 3:6; Hebrews 12:23

²¹ John 20:28

life learning, it is repeatedly and clearly stated that worship was reserved for the only true God.²² Jesus knew these verses well and even quoted them as he was under great temptation,²³ a time when he could have been tempted to forget such a truth. Jesus' disciples knew this truth and would not allow other people to worship them.²⁴ Even the angels knew this and also did not allow people to worship them.²⁵ In stark contrast to this, and very shocking to anyone that knows the scriptures, is the fact that Jesus received worship from both angels and humans. Hebrews 1:6 records the Father God saying regarding his Son, "Let all the angels of God worship him." The gospels record Jesus receiving worship from many people.²⁶ If he felt that it was inappropriate, he could have stopped them like the angels and apostles did. Obviously he knew better than anyone that the implications of giving him worship was that he was God. This makes a very strong statement that the Bible presents Christ to be worshipped as God.

One of the most widespread heresies that denied the completeness of Jesus Christ's deity was called Arianism. It said that Christ was of a similar nature as the Father, but was in subordination to him. It also taught that, unlike the Father, Christ was a created being. The Son was not eternal; there was a time when he did not exist.

Another heresy that denied the genuineness of Christ's deity was called Ebionism. This erroneous teaching failed to recognize that Jesus Christ was born with the divine nature. It taught that Christ was the natural son of Joseph and Mary, but became divine when the Spirit came upon him at his baptism.

²² Exodus 34:14; Deuteronomy 8:19; Psalm 81:9; Jeremiah 25:6

²³ Matthew 4:10

²⁴ Acts 10:26-27

²⁵ Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9

²⁶ Matthew 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 21:8-9, 15-16; 28:9,17; Luke 24:52; John 9:38

Jesus Christ was Truly Human

Although the Bible does portray Christ as having a fully divine nature, thus being God, it equally presents him as having a complete human life. He was born as a baby from out of his mother's womb.²⁷ He grew up through adolescence and learned as a normal human child would learn.²⁸ He lived his life as an ordinary human. As such, he portrayed all the normal physical attributes of a human being. When he got hungry, he ate and drank.²⁹ His body grew tired and he had to rest.³⁰ In fact the Bible clearly states that he was born of woman³¹, and repeatedly refers to him as a human.³²

Not only did he have a normal physical life, he also had the emotions that come from a normal human psychological life. He displayed emotions of love,³³ he wept,³⁴ was tempted,³⁵ was troubled,³⁶ and had a human will.³⁷ All these responses and attributes point to the fact that Jesus was a complete human being.

There were two main heresies that improperly represented Christ's humanity. One erroneous teaching was Docetism, which denied the genuineness of Christ's humanity. It taught that since all created matter was evil, Jesus Christ could not have actually been in the flesh; he only appeared to be a human. The other major heresy, Apollinarianism, denied the completeness of Christ's humanity. It taught that although he had a human body and soul, the divine Logos replaced his spirit.

²⁷ Luke 1:41; 2:21

²⁸ Luke 2:40

²⁹ Mark 11:12; Luke 4:2

³⁰ John 4:6,7

³¹ Galatians 4:4

³² Matthew 4:4; Mark 2:10; Acts 2:22; 1 Timothy 2:5

³³ Mark 10:21; John 11:5

³⁴ Luke 19:41; John 11:35

³⁵ Matthew 4:1; Mark 1:13

³⁶ Matthew 26:37

³⁷ Matthew 26:39

Two Natures in One Person

It may seem to some as a contradiction to present Jesus Christ as having two natures. Yet the Bible openly presents this paradox in many different ways, but never formally defines or explains how it could be. It is difficult, if not impossible, for the human mind to fully comprehend the unique person of Christ, the joining together of two different natures in one person. He was one person and yet had these two natures. He was a complete human and fully God at the same time.

There are numerous verses throughout the Bible that present this paradox as an accepted fact, without any explanation of the details of this union. These verses are not a contradiction when they are seen with the understanding of the permanent divine-human union that has been presented. For instance, 1 Corinthians 2:8 mentions how people “crucified the Lord of Glory.” The title ‘Lord of Glory’ clearly represents one who is divine, and yet he was crucified. Only a human being could be put to death, not one who is deity.

One of the most awe inspiring passages is Philippians 2:4-6. There it mentions that Jesus was in the very form of God, but chose to take on the form of a servant (a human being). Furthermore Colossians 2:9 states that the fullness of the Godhead (deity) lives in Christ in bodily form. One would not expect deity to have a bodily form, yet Jesus Christ, as a human being, is the very embodiment of that deity. The writer of the book of Hebrews calls Jesus the Son of God, and yet says that as a human he was tempted in all respects as other humans; although he never committed any sin.³⁸ These and other verses present the paradox of Jesus Christ truly being God, and yet at the same time being a complete man.³⁹

³⁸ Hebrews 4:14-15

³⁹ Cf. Romans 8:3

Even though an analogy is inadequate to explain such a complete and complex union, it can give some insight into the matter. For instance, each human being is only one person, yet has a soul and a body; in one person there is a complete union of a human soul and a physical body. So also in Jesus Christ existed the union of the human nature and divine nature. Both natures were complete, yet they existed simultaneously in perfect union. The Bible makes no reference to some sort of compound duality or complexity within Christ. Even while having these two natures he functioned as one whole person.

There were a couple of major heresies that arose in the early years of the Christian Church regarding Christ being one complete person. Eutychianism was an erroneous teaching that confused the two natures of Christ. It taught that Christ had a single mixed nature and thus was not fully human; Christ's humanity was absorbed by the divine nature.

Another heresy that failed to recognize that Christ was only one person was Nestorianism. It attempted to divide Christ, and taught that he was two persons. It said that Christ's human nature was born by Mary, but his divine nature always existed as the Logos and was joined to Christ's human spirit. His human and divine sides were joined, but not united in one person.

So, although it is impossible for the finite human mind to fully understand such a joining of two natures in one person, the Bible presents Jesus Christ as one person with two natures. Simultaneously he was both God and man. He was co-eternal and co-equal with God the Father, and yet he humbled himself and became a human being. This proper understanding of who Christ was is one of the central teachings of the Christian faith.