

The Deity of Jesus Christ

by R. A. Torrey

"While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Saying, What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?..." Matt. 22:41-42.



The question that our Lord Jesus puts here to the Pharisees is the most fundamental question concerning Christian thought and faith that can be put to anybody in any age. Jesus Christ Himself is the center of Christianity, so the most fundamental questions of faith are those that concern the Person of Christ. If a man really holds to right views concerning the Person of Jesus Christ, he will sooner or later get right views on every other question. If he holds a wrong view concerning the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, he is pretty sure to go wrong on everything else sooner or later. "What think ye of Christ?" That is the great central question; that is the vital question.

And the most fundamental question concerning the Person of Christ is — is Jesus Christ really God? Not merely, is He Divine, but, is He actually God? When I was a boy, to say you believed in the Divinity of Christ meant that you believed in the real Deity of Christ, that you believed that Jesus was actually a Divine Person, that He was God. It no longer means that. The Devil is wise, shrewd, and subtle, and he knows that the most effectual way to instill error into the minds of the inexpert and unwary is to use old and precious words and put a new meaning into them. So when his messengers masquerading as "ministers of righteousness" seek to lead, if possible, the elect astray, they use the old precious words, but with an entirely new and entirely different and entirely false meaning. They talk about the Divinity of Christ, but they do not mean at all what intelligent Christians in former days meant by it. Likewise, they talk of the atonement, but they do not mean at all the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ in our place by which eternal life is secured for us. And oftentimes when they talk about Christ, they do not mean at all our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the actual historic Jesus of the four gospels; they mean an ideal Christ, or a Christ principle.

So our subject is not the Divinity of Christ, but the Deity of Christ; and our question is not, is Jesus Christ Divine, but rather, is Jesus Christ God? Was that Person Who was born in Bethlehem nineteen hundred and twenty-one years ago,

and Who lived thirty-three or thirty-four years here upon earth as recorded in the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Who was crucified on Calvary's cross, Who rose from the dead the third day, and was exalted from earth to heaven to the right hand of the Father — was He God manifest in the flesh, was He God embodied in a human being? Was He, and is He, a Being worthy of our absolute faith and supreme love and our unhesitating obedience and our wholehearted worship, just as God the Father is worthy of our absolute faith and supreme love and unhesitating obedience and our wholehearted worship? Should all men honour Jesus Christ even as they honour God the Father (John 5:23). Not merely is He an example that we can wisely follow, or a Master whom we can wisely serve, but is He a God Whom we can rightly worship? I presume that most of us do believe that He was God manifest in the flesh and that He is God today at the right hand of the Father, but why do you believe so? Are you so intelligent in your faith, and therefore, so well-grounded in your faith that no glib talker or reasoner, no Unitarian or Russellite (JW) or Christian Scientist or Theosophist, or other errorist can confuse you and upset you and lead you astray?

It is important that we be thoroughly sound in our faith at this point and thoroughly well-informed, wherever else we may be in ignorance or error, for we are distinctly told in John 20:31 that "these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." It is evident from these words of the inspired apostle John that this question is not merely a matter of theoretical opinion, but that it is a matter that concerns our salvation. It is to confirm and instruct you in your blessed faith, your saving faith in Jesus Christ as a Divine Person.

When I studied the subject of the Divinity of Christ in the theological seminary, I got the impression that there were a few texts in the Bible that conclusively proved that He was Divine. Years later I found that there were not merely a few proof texts that proved this, but that the Bible in many ways and in countless passages clearly taught that Jesus Christ was God manifest in the flesh. Indeed, I found that the Doctrine of the Deity of Jesus Christ formed the very warp and woof of the Bible.

Divine Names

The first line of proof of the absolute Deity of our Lord Jesus is that many names and titles clearly implying Deity are used of Jesus Christ in the Bible, some of them over and over again, the total number of passages reaching far into the hundreds. Of course, I can only give you a few illustrations at this time. Turn with me first of all to Revelation 1:17, "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.

And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last." The text shows clearly that our Lord Jesus was the speaker, and here our Lord Jesus distinctly calls Himself "The First and the Last." Now this, beyond a question, is a Divine name, for in Isaiah 44:6 we read, "Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God." In Revelation 22:12,13, our Lord Jesus says that He is the Alpha and Omega. His words are, "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last." Now in this same book in the first chapter and the eighth verse the Lord God declared that He is the Alpha and the Omega. His words are, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." In I Corinthians 2:8, the apostle Paul speaks of our crucified Lord Jesus as "The Lord of glory." His exact words are, "Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." There can be no question that "The Lord of glory" is Jehovah God, for we read in Psalm 24:8-10, "Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah." And we are told in the passage already referred to that our crucified Lord Jesus was the King of glory; therefore, He must be Jehovah.

In John 20:28 Thomas addressed the Lord Jesus as his Lord and his God: "And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God." Unitarians have endeavored to get around the force of this utterance made by Thomas by saying that Thomas was excited and that he was not addressing the Lord Jesus, but was saying "my Lord and my God" as an ejaculation of astonishment, just the way that profane people sometimes use these exclamations today. But this interpretation is impossible and shows to what desperate straits the Unitarians are driven, for Jesus Himself commended Thomas for seeing it and saying it. Our Lord Jesus' words immediately following those of Thomas are, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

In Titus 2:13 our Lord Jesus is spoken of as our "great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." In Romans 9:5 Paul tells us that "Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever." The Unitarians have made desperate efforts to overcome the force of these words, but the only fair translation and interpretation of these words are found in our Authorized Version. There can be no honest doubt to one who goes to the Bible to find out what it actually teaches, and not to read his own

thought into it, that Jesus is spoken of by various names and titles that beyond a question imply deity, and that He in so many words is called God. In Hebrews 1:8 it is said in so many words, of the Son, "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." If we should go no further it is evidently the clear and often repeated teaching of the Bible that Jesus is really God.

Divine Attributes

But there is a second line of proof that Jesus Christ is God, a proof equally convincing, and that is, all the five distinctively Divine attributes are ascribed to Jesus Christ, and "all the fulness of the Godhead" is said to dwell in Him. There are five distinctively Divine attributes, that is, five attributes that God alone possesses. These are Omnipotence, Omniscience, Omnipresence, Eternity and Immutability. Each one of these distinctively Divine attributes are ascribed to Jesus Christ.

First of all, omnipotence is ascribed to Jesus Christ. Not only are we taught that Jesus had power over diseases and death and winds and sea and demons, that they were all subject to His word, and that He is far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in the world to come (Eph. 1:20-23), but in Hebrews 1:3 it is said in so many words that He "[upholdeth] all things by the word of his power."

Omniscience is also ascribed to Him. We are taught in the Bible that Jesus knew men's lives, even their secret history (John 4:16-19), that He knew the secret thoughts of men, knew all men, knew what was in man (Mark 2:8; Luke 5:22; John 2:24,25), which knowledge we are distinctly told in 2 Chronicles 6:30 and Jeremiah 17:9-10, that God alone possesses. We are told in so many words in John 16:30 that Jesus knew "all things," and in Colossians 2:3 we find that in Him "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Omnipresence is also ascribed to Him. We are told in Matthew 18:20 that where two or three are gathered together in His Name, that He is in the midst of them, and in Matthew 28:20 that wherever His obedient disciples should go, He would be with them, even unto the end of the age, and in John 14:20 and 2 Corinthians 13:5 we are told that He dwells in each believer, in all the millions of believers scattered over the earth. In Ephesians 1:23 we are told that He " filleth all in all."

Eternity is also ascribed to Him. We are told in John 1:1 that "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In John 8:58 Jesus Himself said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am."

Note that the Lord Jesus did not merely say that "before Abraham was I was," but that "before Abraham was, I AM," thus declaring Himself to be the eternal "I AM." Even in the Old Testament we have a declaration of the eternity of the Christ who was to be born in Bethlehem. In Micah 5:2 we read, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." And in Isaiah 9:6 we are told of the child that is to be born, "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, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." And in Hebrews 13:8 we are told, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever."

His immutability is also taught in the passage just quoted from Hebrews, and in the first chapter of the same book, in verses eleven and twelve, we find that while even the heavens change, the Lord Jesus does not change. The exact words are, "They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as cloth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail."

Each one of the five distinctively Divine attributes were ascribed to our Lord Jesus Christ. And in Colossians 2:9 we are told in so many words, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily [in a bodily form]." Here again we might rest our case, for what has been said under this heading, even if taken alone, clearly proves the absolute Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. It shows that He possesses every perfection of nature and character that God the Father possesses.

Divine Offices

But we do not need to rest the case here. There is a third unanswerable line of proof that Jesus Christ is God, namely, all the distinctively Divine offices are predicated of Jesus Christ. There are seven distinctively Divine offices. That is to say, there are seven things that God alone can do, and each one of these seven distinctively Divine offices is ascribed to Jesus Christ. The seven distinctively Divine offices are: Creation, Preservation, Forgiveness of Sin, the Raising of the Dead, the Transformation of Bodies, Judgment and the Bestowal of Eternal Life, and each of these is ascribed to Jesus Christ.

Creation is ascribed to Him. In Hebrews 1:10 these words are spoken of our Lord: "And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands." The context clearly shows that the Lord

addressed is the Lord Jesus. In John 1:3 we are told that "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." Preservation of the universe and of everything is also ascribed to Him in Hebrews 1:3 where it is said of the Lord Jesus, "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person [God's], and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

The forgiveness of sin is ascribed to Him. He Himself says in Mark 2:5-10 when His power to forgive sins was questioned, because that was recognized as a Divine power, "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins."

The future raising of the dead is distinctly ascribed to him in John 6:39,44, "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day."

The transformation of our bodies is ascribed to Him in Philippians 3:21. In 2 Timothy 4:1 judgment is ascribed to Him. We are told that He shall "judge the quick and the dead." Jesus Himself declared that He would be the judge of all mankind and emphasized the fact of the Divine character of that office. In John 5:22,23 He said, "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father." The bestowal of eternal life is ascribed to Him time and time again. In John 10:28 He Himself says, "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand," and in John 17:1,2, He says, "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." Here then, we have the seven distinctively Divine offices all predicated of Jesus Christ. This alone would prove that He is God, and we might rest the case here, but there are still other proofs of His absolute Deity.

Statements Which in the Old Testament Are Made Distinctly of Jehovah, God, Taken in the New Testament to Refer to the Lord Jesus Christ

The fourth line of proof of the absolute Deity of Jesus Christ is found in the fact that over and over again statements which in the Old Testament are made distinctly of Jehovah, God, are taken in the New Testament to refer to Jesus Christ. We have not time to illustrate this at length, but will give but one

illustration where many might be given. In Jeremiah 11:20 the prophet says, "But, O LORD of hosts, that judgest righteously, that triest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I revealed my cause." Here the prophet distinctly says that it is Jehovah of Hosts Who judgest and triest the reins and the heart. And in the 17th chapter and the tenth verse Jeremiah represents Jehovah Himself as saying the same thing in these words, "I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." But in the New Testament in Revelation 2:23 the Lord Jesus says, "...I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works." We are distinctly told in the context that it is "The Son of God" who is speaking here. So Jesus claims for Himself in the New Testament what the Lord in the Old Testament says is true of Himself and of Himself alone. In very many other instances, statements which in the Old Testament are made distinctly of God the Father, are taken to refer to Jesus Christ. That is to say, in New Testament thought and doctrine, Jesus Christ occupies the place that God the Father occupies in Old Testament thought and doctrine.

The Way the Name of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son Are Coupled Together

The fifth line of proof of the absolute Deity of our Lord is found in the way in which the name of Jesus Christ is coupled with that of God the Father. In numerous passages His name is coupled with the name of God the Father in a way in which it would be impossible to couple the name of any finite being with that of the Deity. We have time for but a few of the many illustrations that might be given. A striking instance is in the words of our Lord Himself in John 14:23 where we read, "Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Here our Lord Jesus does not hesitate to couple Himself with the Father in such a way as to say "We," that is, God the Father and I, will come and make our abode with him. In John 14:1 He said, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." If Jesus Christ was not God, this is shocking blasphemy. There is absolutely no middle ground between admitting the Deity of Jesus Christ and charging Christ with the most daring and appalling blasphemy of which any man was ever guilty.

Divine Worship to be Given to Jesus Christ

There is a sixth line of proof of the absolute Deity of our Lord Jesus. Those already given have been decisive, each one of the five have been decisive, but this, if possible, is the most decisive of them all, and that is that we are taught in

so many words that Jesus Christ should be worshipped as God, both by angels and men. In numerous places in the gospels we see Jesus Christ accepting without hesitation a worship which good men and angels declined with fear and which He Himself taught should be rendered only to God (Matt. 28:9; Luke 24:52; Matt.14:33; Acts 10:25,26; Rev. 22:8,9; Matt. 4:9,10). A curious and very misleading comment is made in the margin of the American Standard Revision upon the meaning of the word translated "worship" in these passages, and that is that "the Greek word translated worship denotes an act of reverence, whether paid to a 'creature' or to the 'Creator.'"

Now this is true, but it is utterly misleading; for while this word is used to denote "an act of reverence paid to a creature" by idolaters, our Lord Jesus Himself distinctly says, using exactly the same Greek word, "thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve," and on the other hand he says in John 5:23 that "all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the father."

And in Revelation 5:8-13 the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders are represented as falling down before the Lamb and offering worship to Him just as worship is offered to Him that sitteth upon the throne, that is, God the Father. In Hebrews 1:6 we are told in so many words, "And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him."

One night in the inquiry room in Chicago I stepped up to an intelligent looking man at the back of the room and said to him, "Are you a Christian?" He replied, "I do not suppose you would consider me a Christian." I said, "Why not?" He said, "I am a Unitarian." I said, "What you mean then is that you do not think that Jesus Christ is a person that should be worshipped." He replied, "'That is exactly what I think," and added, "the Bible nowhere says we ought to worship Him." I said, "Who told you that?" He replied, "My pastor," mentioning a prominent Unitarian minister in the city of Boston. I said, "Let me show you something," and I opened my Bible to Hebrews 1:6 and read, "And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." And he said, "Does it say that?" I handed him the Bible and said, "Read it for yourself," and he read it and said, "I did not know that was in the Bible." I said, "Well it is there, isn't it?" "Yes it is there." Language could not make it plainer. The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus, the Son of God, is to be worshipped as God by angels and men, even as God the Father is worshipped.

Incidental Proofs of the Deity of Jesus Christ

The six lines of proof of the Deity of Jesus Christ which I have given you leave no possibility of doubting that Jesus Christ is God, that Jesus of Nazareth is God manifest in a human person, that He is a being to be worshipped, even as God the Father is worshipped. But there are also incidental proofs of His absolute Deity which, if possible, are in some ways even more convincing than the direct assertions of His Deity.

1. Our Lord Jesus says in Matthew 11:28, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Now any one that makes a promise like that must either be God, or a lunatic, or an impostor. No one can give rest to all who labor and are heavy laden who come to him unless he is God, and yet Jesus Christ offers to do it. If He offers to do it and fails to do it when men come to Him, then He is either a lunatic or an impostor. If He actually does it, then beyond a question, He is God. And thousands can testify that He really does it. Thousands and tens of thousands who have labored and were heavy laden and crushed, and for whom there was no help in man, have come to Jesus Christ and He actually has given them rest. Surely then He is not merely a great man, but He is in fact God.

2. Again in John 14:1 Jesus Christ demands that we put the same faith in Him that we put in God the Father and promises that in such faith we will find a cure for all trouble and anxiety of heart. His words are, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." It is clear that He demands the same absolute faith to be put in Himself that is to be put in God Almighty. Now in Jeremiah 17:5, Scripture with which our Lord Jesus was perfectly familiar, we read "Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man," and yet with this clear curse pronounced upon all who trust in man, Jesus Christ demands that we put trust in Him just as we put trust in God. It is the strongest possible assertion of Deity on His part. No one but God has a right to make such a demand, and Jesus Christ, when He makes this demand, must either be God or an impostor; but thousands and tens of thousands have found that when they did believe in Him just as they believe in God, their hearts were delivered from trouble no matter what their bereavement or circumstances might be.

3. Again, the Lord Jesus demanded supreme and absolute love for Himself. It is clear as day that no one but God has a right to demand such a love, but there can be no question that Jesus did demand it. In Matthew 10:37 He said to His disciples, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me," and in Luke 14:26,33, he says. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he

cannot be my disciple. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." There can be no question that this is a demand on Jesus' part of supreme and absolute love to Himself, a love that puts even the dearest relations of life in an entirely secondary place. No one but God has a right to make any such demand, but our Lord Jesus made it, and therefore, He must be God.

4. In John 10:30 the Lord Jesus claimed absolute equality with the Father. He said, "I and my Father are one."

5. In John 14:9 our Lord Jesus went so far as to say, "...he that hath seen me hath seen the Father." He claims here to be so absolutely God that to see Him is to see the Father Who dwelleth in Him.

6. In John 17:3 He says, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." In other words, He claims that the knowledge of Himself is as essential a part of eternal life as knowledge of God the Father.

Conclusion

There is no room left to doubt the absolute Deity of Jesus Christ. It is a glorious truth. The Saviour in Whom we believe is God, a Saviour for Whom nothing is too hard, a Saviour Who can save from the uttermost and save to the uttermost. Oh, how we should rejoice that we have no merely human Saviour, but a Saviour Who is absolutely God in all of His fulness and perfection.

On the other hand, how black is the guilt of rejecting such a Saviour as this! Whoever refuses to accept Jesus as his Divine Saviour and Lord is guilty of the enormous sin of rejecting a Saviour Who is God. Many a man thinks he is good because he never stole, or committed murder, or cheated. "Of what great sin am I guilty?" he complacently asks. Have you ever accepted Jesus Christ? "No." Well, then, you are guilty of the awful and damning sin of rejecting a Saviour Who is God.

"But," you answer, "I do not believe that He is God." That does not change the fact nor lessen your guilt before God. Questioning a fact or denying a fact never changes it, regardless of what Mary Baker Eddy may say to the contrary.

Suppose a man had a wife who was one of the noblest, purest, truest women that ever lived, would her husband's questioning her purity and nobility change the fact? It would not. It would simply make that husband guilty of awful slander; it would simply prove that man to be an outrageous scoundrel.

So, denying the Deity of Jesus Christ does not make His Deity any less a fact, but it does make the denier of His Deity guilty of awful, incredible blasphemous slander against the Lord God of Heaven. It also proves that you who deny His Deity to be _____ . I leave your own conscience to finish the sentence thus begun.

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"...to the glory of God."