

The Deity of Christ

Introduction

There is probably not a more controversial topic in Christian theology than the Deity of Christ. However it is also one of the most crucial topics of Christian theology. It lies at the heart of our faith. It takes center stage. The doctrine of the Deity of Christ is of infinite importance. A central test of Christian Orthodoxy is the affirmation that Jesus Christ is truly God.

Our faith rests on the fact that Jesus is actually God in human flesh. Therefore an attack on the Deity of Christ is an attack on Christianity as a whole. If Jesus was only a man He could not have died to save us from sin, but because of His Deity, His death has infinite value.

Only someone who is infinitely God could bear the penalty for all of the sins of those who believe in Him. A mere man would be completely incapable of such an act since salvation is from the Lord (Jonah 2:9). Only someone who is truly and fully God could be the one mediator between God and man.

C. S. Lewis suggested that there are only three options available when we examine the person of Christ. He was either a liar, a lunatic or Lord. No other question is so far reaching or important. Who was Jesus? Is He God or is He not God?

Theories Opposed to the Deity of Christ

Before examining the Scriptural teaching regarding the Deity of Christ, it is necessary to briefly examine some of the heresies that have sprung up over the years, which blatantly deny the Deity of Christ.

1. **Arianism:** Christ was a created being, exalted, himself the creator of the universe, but he was not God. Christ in relation to the Father was of similar essence not of the same essence. (Alive today in the form of the Jehovah Witnesses)
2. **Socianism:** Christ was the best of men...thus a created being...exalted to share the Divine nature because of His perfect obedience, and therefore He is worthy of worship.
3. **Unitarianism:** Christ was a great, good man who lived in close communion with God. He is to be honored and imitated but not worshiped. (A popular world view today)
4. **Ebionism:** An early Jewish/Christian heretical sect of an ascetic nature, which believed that the Christian life consists of strict obedience to a moral code and understood Jesus as one who was anointed by God at his baptism because of His perfect obedience to the Mosaic law. However they denied His Deity.

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Evidence for the Deity of Christ

Christ's Deity is affirmed by Jesus, Himself as well as by the testimony of others. In fact, the Deity of Christ is ably supported by the teaching of the Scripture. The doctrine of Christ's Deity is not based on a few proof texts, rather it is woven into the very fabric of the Scripture. The following is the scriptural line of evidence supporting the Deity of Christ:

1. Divine Names and Titles are Applied to Christ

There are many divine names and titles applied to Christ. The following titles and names can only properly be applied to one who is God. What is interesting is that those who addressed Jesus in this manner understood full well the significance of the use of such names. In addition, Jesus allowed them to acknowledge Him with the names and titles of Deity. If He were not, God, then He surely would have distinguished Himself as merely a man as Peter did in Acts 10:25-26.

Lord: The New Testament term Lord (KURIOS) is significant in that it can be used to translate the divine name Yahweh. In fact it is used over 6,000 times in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament around 250 BC) to translate the Hebrew term Yahweh, which we know to be the very name of God (Exodus 3:14). This term is often used of Christ:

- It is used of Christ in an announcement of His birth to the shepherds in the fields around Bethlehem in Luke 2:11, "*for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the **Lord**.*"
- It is used in reference to Christ in Romans 10:13, "*for **WHOEVER WILL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD** will be saved.*"
- Peter calls Christ Lord as he is preaching to Cornelius' household in Acts 10:36, "*The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (**He is Lord of all**).*"
- It is used of Christ by Paul and Silas to the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:31, "*Believe in the **Lord Jesus**, and you shall be saved, you and your household.*"
- Paul once again uses this term of Christ in his letter to the Philippians in Philippians 2:10-11, "*that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is **Lord**, to the glory of God the Father.*"
- Paul also called Christ **the Lord of Glory** in 1 Corinthians 2:8, "*{the wisdom} which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the **Lord of glory**.*"
- Lastly, Peter referred to Christ as Lord and Savior in 2 Peter 3:18, "*but grow in the grace and knowledge of our **Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**.*"

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Son of God: This term was widely used of Jesus to identify Him as God very God. It is interesting that this title in Christ's day meant, "**equal with God.**" In other words it identified one as God and was understood as a Messianic term. In the following verses Jesus claimed to be the Son of God and the Jews properly understood that He was making a claim of Deity. They understood that to be called the Son of God was to be called God very God.

- John 5:18, "*For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was **calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.***"
- John 10:30, "*I and the Father are **one.***"
- John 10:33, "*For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, **make Yourself out {to be} God.***"
- John 10:36, "*do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I **am the Son of God?***"

In addition to Christ applying this title to Himself, many others have recognized Jesus as the Son of God as well:

- The Father, Himself so testified at Jesus' baptism in Mark 1:11, "*and a voice came out of the heavens: "Thou art **My beloved Son,** in Thee I am well-pleased."*
- God the Father also testified to this at the Transfiguration in Mark 9:7, "*Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "**This is My beloved Son,** listen to Him!"*
- Even the demons directly asserted Christ's identity as the Son of God in Mark 3:11, "*And whenever the unclean spirits beheld Him, they would fall down before Him and cry out, saying, "**You are the Son of God.***"
- The angel Gabriel testified so in the birth announcement in Luke 1:35, "*And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called **the Son of God.***"
- John the Baptist testified of Christ in John 1:34, "*And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is **the Son of God.***"
- The Roman Centurion said of Christ in Mark 15:39, "*Truly this man was **the Son of God!***"
- The disciples collectively said of Christ in Matthew 14:33, "*You are certainly **God's Son!***"
- Peter testified of Christ in Matthew 16:16, "*You art the Christ, **the Son of the living God!***"

In addition to the direct affirmations of Christ as God's Son, Satan at the Temptation and the mockers at Calvary indirectly acknowledged His status by their challenge, "*If you are the Son of God, then...*"

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In addition there are many other names or titles applied to Christ:

- He is called **the Word and God** in John 1:1, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" The Word here is later identified in John 1:14ff as Jesus. The Apostle John calls the Word, "God." He says, "*and the Word was God.*" The Greek construction emphasizes that the Word had all the essence or attributes of Deity. The term "was" is in the imperfect tense, which carries the idea of a continuous action like a motion picture. So He was continually with God and He was continually God.
- He is called **God blessed forever** in Romans 9:5, "*whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.*" There is no mistaking the clear statement of Paul to the Romans. Paul clearly identifies Christ as God. Paul emphasizes both His sovereignty, "*who is over all,*" and His Deity, "*God blessed forever.*"
- He is called **our great God and Savior** in Titus 2:13, "*looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.*" This verse along with 2 Peter 1:1 clearly identifies Christ Jesus as God very God and Savior. In both of these instances the Greek construction only has one article, which ties the titles God and Savior together. So that the titles God and Savior refer to the same person and in these instances they refer to Christ.
- He is called **the true God** in 1 John 5:20, "*And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.*" Grammatically the pronoun "*this*" refers back to "*Jesus Christ.*" The term "*true*" carries the force of what is real or genuine as opposed to what is false. The Apostle John is making a clear statement of Christ's Deity. He is the real God. He is the genuine God. He is God very God!

Two titles are applied to Christ that confirm His Deity because the same titles are applied to God in the Old Testament:

- He is called **the Holy One** in Acts 3:14, "*But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you.*" (Cf. with Hosea 11:9, "For I am God and not man, **the Holy One** in your midst.")
- He is called **the First and the Last** in Revelation 1:17, "*And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, "Do not be afraid; **I am the first and the last.**"* (Cf. With Isaiah 44:6, "*Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: **I am the first and I am the last,** And there is no God besides Me.*"

2. Divine Attributes are Ascribed to Christ

There are many divine attributes ascribed to Christ. These include both the incommunicable and communicable attributes of God. By ascribing these attributes to Himself and by allowing these attributes to be ascribed to Himself Jesus equated Himself with God. In other words, the ascribing of these attributes to Christ confirms His Deity.

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Self-Existent: This is the idea that God is distinctly independent from everything. His being is in no way dependent upon anything outside Himself.

- John 5:26, "*For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself.*"

Source of Life: This is the idea that God created life. All creation...humanity, animals, plants...are alive because they have been infused with life from God.

- John 1:3, "*All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.*"
- John 5:21, "*For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.*"

Eternality: This is the idea that God is infinite in relation to time. He exists outside of time. In fact He is the creator of time.

- John 17:5, "*And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.*"
- Revelation 1:8, "*I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."*

Omnipresent: This is the idea that God is infinite in regard to space. There is no place that we can go from His presence.

- Matthew 18:20, "*For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.*"
- Matthew 28:20, "*teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*"

Omniscient: This is the idea that God is all knowing. God has perfect knowledge. There is nothing that God does not know.

- John 16:30, "*Now we know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God.*"
- John 18:4, "*Jesus therefore, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth, and said to them, "Whom do you seek?"*"

Omnipotent: This is the idea that God is all powerful, and fully able at all times to accomplish His desires. He is sovereign over all.

- Matthew 28:18, "*And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."*
- Revelation 1:8, "*I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."*

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Immutable: God does not change.

- Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ {is} the same yesterday and today, {yes} and forever."

Holiness:

- Acts 3:14, "*But you disowned **the Holy and Righteous One**, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you.*"
- Acts 4:27, "*For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy **holy servant Jesus**, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel.*"

Righteousness:

- 1 John 2:1, "*My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, **Jesus Christ the righteous.***"

Faithfulness:

- Revelation 19:11, "*And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it {is} called **Faithful and True**; and in righteousness He judges and wages war.*"

Merciful:

- Jude 21, "*keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the **mercy** of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.*"

True:

- Revelation 3:7, "*He who is holy, who is **true**, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this.*"

3. Divine Works are Done by Christ

A further evidence of the Deity of Christ is that the Scripture indicates that He does the work of God. The following works are not only attributed to God in the Old Testament, but were considered marks of the one, true God. In the New Testament, these works of God are done by Christ.

He created and sustains all things.

- Colossians 1:16-17, "*For by Him all things were **created**, {both} in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities ...all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things **hold together.***"
- Hebrews 1:2-3, "*in these last days has spoken to us in {His} Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He **made the world**. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and **upholds all things** by the word of His power.*"

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He forgives sin.

- Colossians 3:13, "*bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as **the Lord forgave you**, so also should you.*"
- Mark 2:5, "*And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are **forgiven**."* (Read Mark 2:5-12)

He bestows eternal life.

- John 10:28, "*and **I give eternal life** to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand.*"

He receives and answers prayer.

- John 14:14, "*If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.*"

He will raise the dead in the Resurrection.

- John 5:21, "*For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.*" (Read John 5:21-29).

He is the Final Judge of the world.

- Acts 10:42, "*And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as **Judge** of the living and the dead.*" (Cf. Revelation 20:11-15)
- John 5:22, "*For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son.*"

He will dispatch angels to remove evildoers from the kingdom.

- Matthew 13:41-42, "*The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*"

In addition to the preceding works, Christ is also active in building His church.

- Matthew 16:18, "*And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock **I will build My church**; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.*"

4. Divine Claims are Made by Christ

In addition to His names, attributes and works, Christ made certain claims that only God could make. The following claims made by Christ demonstrate that He truly is God very God. These claims support His Deity.

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He has absolute authority over the laws and institutions of God.

This is demonstrated in His teaching. He taught with much authority and when dealing with the laws and institutions of God, there seems to be quite a bit of emphasis on His authority especially in the phrase, "*But I say to you.*"

- He had authority over the Law (Matthew 5:17-18).
- He had authority over the Temple (Matthew 12:6).
- He had authority over the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8).
- He had authority over the Kingdom (Matthew 16:19).

He is the supreme object of saving faith.

Either equally with God:

- John 14:1, "*Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.*" This command has the force of "*placing your trust in.*" It means continue to place your trust in God and trust also in Me.
- John 17:3, "*And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.*" Here Jesus provides a definition of eternal life. He equates eternal life with an intimate and personal knowledge of God the Father and Christ, His Son. The term "know" speaks of an intimate relationship, not just an awareness of facts.

Or with no mention of the Father:

- John 3:36, "***He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.***"

The closest of human relationships must yield to Him.

- Matthew 10:37, "*He who loves **father or mother** more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves **son or daughter** more than Me is not worthy of Me.*"
- Luke 14:26, "*If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own **father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters**, yes, and even **his own life**, he cannot be My disciple.*"

All spiritual and eternal needs of humanity are satisfied in Him.

This is first of all noted in Christ's "I Am" statements:

- John 6:35, "*Jesus said to them, **"I am the bread of life;** he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.*"
- John 8:12, "*Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, **"I am the light of the world;** he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.*"

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- John 10:9, "***I am the door***; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."
- John 10:11, "***I am the good shepherd***; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."
- John 11:25, "Jesus said to her, "***I am the resurrection and the life***; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies."
- John 14:6, "Jesus said to him, "***I am the way, and the truth, and the life***; no one comes to the Father, but through Me."
- John 15:5, "***I am the vine***, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing."

This is also seen in Christ's provision:

- He provides knowledge of God (Matthew 11:27).
- He provides rest for the soul (Matthew 11:18-29).
- He provides eternal life and security (John 10:28-30).
- He provides fruit bearing energy (John 15:5).
- He provides rivers of living water/Spirit (John 7:37-39).

He is equal or one with the Father.

In John 10:30 Jesus makes the statement, "I and the Father are one." Here Jesus claims to share essential unity with the Father. This unity is in essence not personhood. They are one in essence, yet two persons. This claim alone supports the Deity of Christ, however Christ makes several other statements that reinforce the oneness of Christ with the Father:

- To know Him is to know God (John 8:19; 14:7).
- To see Him is to see God (John 12:45; 14:9).
- To believe in Him is to believe in God (John 12:44; 14:1).
- To hate Him is to hate God (John 15:23).
- To honor Him is to honor God (John 15:25).
- To receive Him is to receive God (Mark 9:37).

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5. Divine Worship is Accepted by Christ

Lastly, Christ's Deity can be affirmed because He accepted and demanded worship as God.

First, note that men and angels refused worship from men, because they were not God.

- The Apostles refused worship (Acts 14:11-15).
- Peter refused worship (Acts 10:25-26).
- Angels refused worship (Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9).

Second, notice that Christ did not refuse worship from men, because He was God.

- The Disciples worshiped Him...Matthew 14:33, "*And those who were in the boat **worshiped Him**, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"*"
- The Syrophenician woman worshiped Him...Matthew 15:25, "*But she came and {began} to **bow down before Him**, saying, "Lord, help me!"*"
- The women worshiped him on resurrection morning...Matthew 28:9, "*And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and **worshiped Him.**"*"
- The blind man worshiped Him...John 9:38, "*And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he **worshiped Him.**"*"

Third, the Scripture records instances where the heavenly host worships the Son.

- The Father commands worship of the Son (Hebrews 1:6).
- The host of heaven worships the Son (Revelation 5:8-14).
- All will someday worship the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:10-11).

Conclusion

What can we say then? Who is Jesus? Is He a liar, a lunatic or our Lord? When all the evidence is examined, there is only one clear conclusion. Jesus Christ is God very God! He is God come in the flesh! In hundreds of verses from the New Testament Jesus Christ is clearly affirmed as the one true God. He possesses full and absolute Deity. As Colossians 2:9 states, "*in Him **all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.**"*"