

Was Jesus more than a man?

APOLOGETICS

The Impact of Christ being Divine

The Divinity of Christ lies at the very heart of Christianity, serving as a foundational pillar upon which the entire faith rests. It is the pivotal truth that unlocks the deeper understanding of every other Christian belief. As followers of Christ, we embrace these beliefs as a unified whole, trusting in His authority without meticulously analyzing each aspect. The reason behind this unwavering trust is the profound recognition that if Christ is truly God, as we profess, then everything He uttered must possess both veracity and authority.

This divinity of Christ has a far-reaching impact on various core Christian teachings. For instance, the forgiveness of sins, a concept central to Christianity, is inextricably linked to the divinity of Christ. It is through His sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection that our sins are atoned for, granting us the opportunity for reconciliation with God. Similarly, the reality of hell, a place of eternal punishment for those who reject Christ's salvation, is grounded in His divine nature. It is because Christ is God that His words carry the weight of truth and authority, making His teachings about hell a matter of utmost significance.

Furthermore, the sacrament of communion, also known as the Eucharist, derives its profound meaning from the divinity of Christ. In this sacred act, we partake in the symbolic consumption of bread and wine, representing the body and blood of Christ. Through this act, we experience a deep spiritual connection with Christ and are reminded of His ultimate sacrifice. These are just a few examples of how the Divinity of Christ permeates the fabric of Christian beliefs, shaping our understanding of salvation, forgiveness, and the ultimate destiny of humanity.

To non-Christians, particularly those unfamiliar with Orthodox Christianity, the tenets of our faith may indeed seem challenging to comprehend. However, it is precisely the foundation of Christ's divinity that provides the necessary context and justification for these beliefs. It is through the lens of Christ's divinity that the intricate tapestry of Christianity unfolds, revealing its profound wisdom and transformative power.

Bare Bones Argument

When Christianity emerged, the divinity of Christ became the primary target of skepticism and opposition. Both Jews and Gentiles struggled to comprehend the notion that someone could be both fully human and fully divine.

For Jews, who had been taught since childhood that there was only one God, the idea of a human claiming to be God or even equal to God was seen as blasphemous. They questioned how Jesus, the

son of Joseph, a man known to them, could claim to have come down from heaven. “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, ‘I have come down from heaven’?” – John 6:42

This tenet of Christ's divinity serves as a cornerstone of the Christian faith. Once an individual accepts this fundamental belief, it becomes the foundation for understanding the rest of the Christian doctrine. Intellectually, it establishes the truthfulness of all of Christ's teachings, while personally, it recognizes Him as both the Creator and Savior.

The significance of this belief lies in the dichotomy it presents: either Christ was truly divine, or he was a deceptive and wicked person. The implications of this choice shape the entire Christian theological framework and influence the way believers perceive and relate to God, themselves, and the world around them.

**“Most
assuredly, I say
to you, before
Abraham was,
I AM.”**

Did Jesus Say He Was God?

The question of whether Jesus claimed to be God has been debated for centuries. All people who read about Christ come to the same conclusion: He was a good person. Even Pilate saw nothing worth crucifying Him over, He came across as a wise good person.

There are many passages in the Bible that show clear support for the idea that Jesus claimed to be God. For example, in John 8:58, Jesus says, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." This statement is a direct reference to the name of God as revealed to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). By claiming to be "I AM," Jesus was essentially saying that he was God.

In another passage, March 2, Jesus heals the paralytic. This passage illustrates the confusion of the Jews, and how Christ proclaims His divine authority:

And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’?”

But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins—*He said to the paralytic—“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!” - Mark 2-10-12*

Jesus was not a mere simple miracle worker. He went far beyond that - he claimed to forgive sins. He does this also in Luke 7 with the sinful woman - forgiving her sins. In this passage, the scribes asked a clear rhetorical question, “who can forgive sins but God alone?”. It’s a great question, and they knew the answer. They were the theologians of the time, and understood the implications. No one can forgive sins but God alone - this was precisely what Christ was proclaiming. No other man or prophet in history ever made such a claim. The implications are too great and clear.

However, there are also passages in the Bible that seem to suggest that Jesus did not claim to be God. For example, in Mark 10:18, Jesus says, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." This statement seems to indicate that Jesus did not believe that he was God, but rather that he was simply a good man. This however must be understood in context.

The preceding verses describe the encounter between Jesus and the rich young ruler, who asks how to inherit eternal life. Jesus instructs him to follow the commandments, but the young man claims to have done so since childhood. Recognizing that something more is needed, Jesus then challenges him to sell his possessions, give to the poor, and follow him. This encounter highlights Jesus' focus on helping the rich young ruler understand the true nature of goodness and the importance of a personal relationship with God.

In this light, Jesus' response in Mark 10:18 can be seen as a redirection of the young man's attention away from external religious observances and towards a deeper understanding of God's nature. Rather than establishing his own divinity as a central point of the conversation, Jesus seeks to guide the young man towards a transformative realization of the absolute goodness of God and the potential for a profound relationship with him. Ultimately, Jesus' reply in Mark 10:18 serves as a call to recognize the true source of goodness and to pursue a life rooted in that divine reality.

To the Jews, everything was clear. Christ wanted:

1. Everyone to believe He was God
2. Everyone to worship Him
3. Everyone to know that He could forgive their sins

The Jews lost their minds at these notions. Even today, if we found somebody walking around making these claims what would we say about them?

2 Possibilities

The life of Christ and the events surrounding it present us with two distinct possibilities, each with profound implications. The central question is whether Jesus spoke the truth about His identity and teachings. If He spoke the truth, then He is indeed God, and we are called to believe in Him, worship Him, and follow His teachings. This conclusion would have far-reaching consequences for our understanding of life, morality, and our relationship with the divine.

"If He spoke the truth, then He is indeed God, and we are called to believe in Him, worship Him, and follow His teachings"

On the other hand, if what Jesus said was not true, we must consider the implications. If He was just a man claiming to be God, then His actions would be morally questionable at best. A person who knowingly deceives others into worshiping him, despite knowing that he is not divine, would be considered a deceptive liar and morally corrupt. Such a person would lack integrity, honesty, and compassion, which are essential qualities of a morally sound individual.

Furthermore, if Jesus genuinely believed He was God but was mistaken, then His mental state would come into question. In such a case, it would

be reasonable to consider Him intellectually or mentally unstable or even insane. Insanity is measured by the gap from what you think you are to what you really are. If I think I'm the smartest person in the world then I'm just arrogant but if I think I'm actually Albert Einstein in the flesh then I'm probably insane. Or If I think I'm an eagle I'm even further insane, now I've gone from one type of being to another. But if I think I'm God then I might be even more insane because I've jumped from the finite to the infinite which is an even bigger gap than the one between 2 finite things, even between a man and an eagle.

“Lord, Liar or Lunatic?”

This is called the trilemma by Josh McDowell. Let's say Christ is not actually Lord, then why isn't He a Liar or a Lunatic? Nobody who's read the gospels comes to that conclusion. Christ was too savvy, witty, wise, enchanting unless you are a prejudiced or hardened reader. Jesus has 3 qualities that sets Him apart from liars and lunatics:

1. **Wisdom:** the ability to read human hearts, to understand people and read between the lines of their words, the ability to heal people's spirits as well as their bodies. His wisdom extended beyond mere knowledge to the healing of both spirits and bodies, demonstrating His divine nature.
2. **Unconditional Love:** His winning love and passionate compassion drew people in, making them feel at home and forgiven. His authority, described as being distinct from that of the scribes, further set Him apart.
3. **Ability to astonish:** His unpredictability, his creativity. Liars and lunatics are dull and predictable! No one who knows both the Gospels and human beings can seriously entertain the possibility that Jesus was a liar or a lunatic, a bad man.

For those familiar with both the Gospels and human nature, it would be difficult to entertain the possibility that Jesus was either a liar or a lunatic. His exceptional qualities and the profound impact He has had on millions throughout history point to a divine origin that transcends human understanding.

Just a good man, a prophet, or a wise man?

Many unbelievers believe that Jesus was a good man, a prophet, or a wise man. Yet, if He was wise then would you not also trust and believe the things He said? Christ's core message was that He is the divine Savior of the world - a world in need of His gift of salvation. The reason this logic is airtight is because it's not about concepts but about Jesus Himself. It draws people in to read about Him in the Gospels and get to know Him. The rationale underlying this logic is compelling because it transcends abstract concepts and focuses on the central figure of Jesus Christ Himself. This approach effectively captivates readers, drawing them toward the Gospels to gain a deeper understanding and connection with Him. The basis of the argument is Jesus's character, His human nature. Similar to the ladder of Jacob, it begins on Earth with the humanity of the Son and leads you to His Divinity in Heaven. And He spoke to him, saying, "Verily, verily, I say to you, from now on, you will observe the heavens open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." - John 1:51 If He is a sage, you must accept his essential teaching as true. If his teaching is false, then He is not a sage.

“This is not believable”: What, then do people say when confronted with this argument? Often, they simply confess their prejudices: “Oh, I just can’t believe that!” But if it has been proved to be true, you must believe it if you really seek the truth! The best one can ask for is their openness for discussion for a seed to be planted. Through prayer, it may be that the ground will be softened up and plowed. The seed has been sown. God will give the increase.

Two Scholarly Attacks

Attack of “scholars” on the historical reliability of the Gospels: In that case, who invented traditional Christianity if not Christ? A lie, like a truth, must originate somewhere. Peter? The twelve? The next generation? What was the motive of whoever first invented the myth (euphemism for lie)? What did they get out of this elaborate, blasphemous hoax? For it must have been a deliberate lie, not a sincere confusion. No Jew confuses Creator with creature, God with man. And no man confuses a dead body with a resurrected, living one.

What if Jesus never claimed to be divine. Or all the embarrassing passages were inventions of the early Church? Here is what they got out of their hoax. Their friends and families scorned them. Their social standing, possessions, and political privileges were stolen from them by both Jews and Romans. They were persecuted, imprisoned, whipped, tortured, exiled, crucified, eaten by lions, and cut to pieces by gladiators. So some silly Jews invented the whole elaborate, incredible lie of Christianity for absolutely no reason, and millions of Gentiles believed it, devoted their lives to it, and died for it—for no reason. It was only a fantastic practical joke, a hoax. Yes, there is a hoax indeed, but the perpetrators of it are the twentieth-century theologians, not the Gospel writers.

Aquinas argues that if Christ was a mere man and the entire story was manufactured, then an even more unbelievable event happened: the conversion of the world by the biggest lie in history and the moral transformation of lives into unselfishness, detachment from worldly pleasures and new heights of holiness achieved by a mere myth!

The second is to Orientalize Jesus, describing Him like a Hindu mystic from history. The difference is Jesus said He was God and not that we are all gods. All other religious pioneers after Him claimed to know more about a god and not that they themselves were gods.

To interpret Him not as the unique God-man but as one of many mystics or “adepts” who realized his own inner divinity just as a typical Hindu mystic does. This theory takes the teeth out of his claim to divinity, for he only realized that everyone is divine. The problem with that theory is simply that Jesus was not a Hindu but a Jew! When he said “God”, neither he nor his hearers meant Brahman, the impersonal, pantheistic, immanent all; he meant Yahweh, the personal, theistic, transcendent Creator. It is utterly unhistorical to see Jesus as a mystic, a Jewish guru. He would ultimately also be one of the worst teachers in history as He failed to illustrate this message to anyone in over 2 millennia. He taught prayer, not meditation. His God is a person, not a projection or illusion. He said he was God but not that everyone was. He taught sin and forgiveness, as no guru does. He said nothing about the “illusion” of individuality, as the mystics do.



Review Questions

1. What was the first thing to be attacked when Christianity was first being preached? (A: Christ's divinity)
2. True or false? Christ wanted everyone to believe He was God. (A: True)
3. What are the two natural responses? (A: This is unbelievable, or wondering and shaking their heads and thinking)
4. True or false? The first escape is the attack of "scholars" on the historical reliability of the Gospel. (A: True)
5. What is one difference between Jesus Christ and other religious pioneers? (A: Jesus said He was God and not that we are all gods.)



Books & References

1. Peter Kreeft,  *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* , Chapter 7, Intervarsity Press; 1994, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Handbook_of_Christian_Apologetics/1DH1ZPyTkiC?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover

