

# **The Deity of Jesus Christ**

*By Doy Moyer*

## **Introduction**

The question of the identity of Jesus has long been a debated issue. Since the time Jesus lived on the earth, people have taken various views concerning him. Some called him a deceiver (Matt. 27:63). Some said that he led the multitudes astray; others said he was a good man (John 7:12). Some claimed that he was one of the prophets, such as Elijah or Jeremiah (Matt. 16:14). His disciples confessed their faith that he was the Christ, the Son of God (Matt. 16:16). After the first century there were continued debates about the nature and identity of Jesus. “The Christological controversies of the late second and early third century were thus a part of the internal dialectic of the Christian faith” (Ferguson 18). To avoid the extremes of adoptionism (Jesus was a good man whom God adopted as his Son) and modalism (Jesus was the same person as the Father who manifested himself in different modes), “the orthodox solution was to affirm at the same time the oneness of God, the deity of Christ, and the distinction of the Son from the Father” (Ferguson 18). Due to the efforts to try to explain all of this, the “Trinitarian” controversies of the fourth century were born. Though there have always been dissenters, the orthodox position defined by the several councils that convened over the next few centuries was that Jesus was indeed God, and that the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct personalities. Those who denied this were considered “anathema” (Hardy 379). In modern times, the debate has not lessened. Liberal theology of the last couple of hundred years has questioned the “orthodox” view, and has tried to rediscover the historical Jesus. The result has been a denial of the deity of Jesus in this modern era of skepticism.

The purpose of this study is to consider what the Bible teaches about the identity of Jesus. The Bible contains historical truth about Jesus, and we are seeking to understand many biblical passages relating to the question of his identity. Even within modern religious circles, among those who claim to accept the Bible as true, there has been widespread disagreement as to whether or not Jesus was God. There is also the biblical question concerning what Jesus gave up when he came to earth. Some teach that Jesus was God while in heaven, but when he came to the earth he divested his Godhood and became nothing more than a human. These theological questions have great practical implications. If Jesus really was God, then he deserves full commitment and submission. If

he was not who he claimed to be, then he was a fraud and deserves to be relegated to the status of a charlatan or a madman.

In this paper, the focus will be upon what the Bible itself says concerning Jesus Christ. Mention will be made of modern trends away from the acceptance of Jesus as God, but primary attention will be given to biblical texts. The intention is to show that the Bible does teach the Godhood of Jesus Christ. Special consideration will be devoted to what specific verses teach about Jesus.

### **The Modern Trend Away From the Deity Of Jesus**

One who wrote on this question noted the following:

Today, one can find evidence virtually everywhere — on every continent, in both Protestant and Roman Catholic circles — that the theologically “in thing” is to contend for a Jesus who was only a man by nature and for a Bible that is virtually silent regarding the classical incarnational Christology of a two-natured Christ — true God and true man in the one person of Jesus Christ. It is very much in vogue to believe that the better case can be made for understanding Jesus as only a man — a very unusual man, of course, with a special mission from God — and to explain the biblical ascriptions of divine qualities to Him in other than ontological terms.  
(Reymond 2-3)

This quote accurately describes the modern religious mind-set of those who are professed believers in God. Both Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars are teaching that Jesus was not really God. They are saying that he never even claimed to be God, but that later disciples attributed Deity to him. Part of the reason why the modern trend has been away from belief in the Deity of Jesus is due to the question of the historical reliability of the gospel accounts. The general question has been raised as to whether or not the gospels, as we have them, are true representations of the life and claims of Jesus Christ.

Rudolph Bultmann was a leading liberal scholar who questioned belief in the historicity of the gospel accounts. Bultmann's theology was based upon the concept that one must “demythologize” the accounts. This means one must get behind what is said to try to find out what the real truth is, which must be somewhere hidden in the depths of mythical teaching. Bultmann questioned the idea that Jesus had a Messianic consciousness (Bultmann 26). He supported the concept that views like these about Jesus were superimposed upon Jesus by later disciples. This basic approach is now taken by a larger number of scholars. He assumed that the gospel accounts are second-hand information,

and that they contain human traditions about Jesus. Bultmann's "form criticism" took the theological world by storm in the twentieth century (Praamsma 61).

Perhaps the most significant development in the modern era of biblical understanding is the popularization of a "new" historical Jesus by the "Jesus Seminar." The Jesus Seminar, first convened in 1985 under the leadership of Robert Funk, has met on various occasions to come to conclusions regarding who Jesus really was and what, of the gospel accounts, are his actual words and claims. "Might faith have caused the writers of all four Gospels to embellish on actual fact? Did the politics of the early church cause them to edit or add to Jesus' story? Which parts of the New Testament were likely to be straight reportage rather than pious mythmaking?" (Ostling and Towle 54-55). They decided, through a process of voting with colored beads, that less than one fifth of the traditional sayings of Jesus are authentic. Their conclusions are published in a work called The Five Gospels. Their conclusions have received much media attention, and the popularization of their ideas is likely to have a strong impact on public opinion for years to come. Though it is not within the scope of this paper to review the Jesus Seminar, one must question the process of voting on the words of Jesus by people who are nearly two thousand years removed from the events. The point is that there is a continued effort to redefine the Jesus of the gospel accounts. All of this seems highlighted by an anti-supernatural bias and the refusal to consider the gospel accounts as historical documents because of the type of material it contains. They assume that it cannot contain contemporaneous material, and that any record of remarkable events or claims are automatically unreliable. "And then they take leaps of faith, often of their own creation" (Woodward 62).

One conservative writer, who has devoted work to the critique of modern revisionism, shows that there are still good reasons to accept the historical gospel accounts. After reviewing evidence for the reliability of the gospel of Mark, he notes the following:

The supernatural Jesus of Mark's Gospel, of course, is difficult for many twentieth-century people to accept. It is not the kind of portrait a modern could be expected accept were there not good evidence in its favor. But the evidence is there. And, rather than adjusting the evidence to make this Jesus more palatable to twentieth-century sensibilities, it seems more reasonable to leave it intact and to simply allow the enigma of this first-century Jew to confront our twentieth-century sensibilities. It just may be that history is, after all, not a closed continuum! (Boyd 243)

As is the case in many fields, bias is often the determining factor in whether or not one accepts Jesus as the gospel accounts put him forth. There is always another side to the stories that are popularized in the media. In either case, faith is involved in the process of acceptance. "Thus,

whether one holds that Jesus was the Son of God and was raised from the dead, or whether one believes that Jesus was a Cynic sage whose body was eventually devoured by wild beasts, faith is necessarily involved” (Boyd 293). There is much speculation, and little objective evidence that exists on the part of many revisionists. Instead, “the Gospels’ narrative is discarded and the pieces of Scripture are reshuffled to reveal the scholar’s own ‘historical’ Jesus” (Woodward 65). It seems more reasonable to consider the gospels in their historical light. They claim to be written and confirmed by eyewitnesses (1 John 1:1-3; Luke 1:1-4; 2 Pet. 1:16). Jesus was seen, heard, and followed. Only by demonstrating that these writers were liars, deluded, or somehow otherwise to be discredited can we assume that the gospel accounts are not intended to be understood historically.

The question of whether or not Jesus was the Son of God seems to be more of a philosophical issue in this modern age. Many do not believe in him simply because they think that it is foolish to accept that a man who lived two thousand years ago could be a savior in a modern age. Some will not accept the concept of the resurrection regardless of how much evidence is shown for it. The Bible itself anticipates that many would think this way (1 Cor. 1:18ff). Nevertheless, there have been thousands of Christians who have given their lives for their faith in the resurrection, including those who walked with Jesus. There is “little doubt that God’s raising of Jesus to new life was an early Christian conviction” (Woodward 66). They may have been “fools,” but they were convinced and convicted. Further, it would seem logical that these people who lived with Jesus, and within such a short time after Jesus, would know more about the life, settings, and times of Jesus than any modern person would. They cannot be discredited because they accepted Jesus as the Son of God; their actions based upon their convictions should give them credibility. Of course, they also had a bias as all do; but maybe their bias really was founded on solid ground.

### **What Does the Bible Say About Jesus?**

From this point, the focus will shift to the scriptural texts and ask, does the Bible teach that Jesus was God? There are many who profess to believe that the Bible is historically true, but who do not believe that Jesus was God. It is this problem that will be addressed .

#### **What does “Deity” mean?**

“Deity” is generally a reference to a being who is in the state of being God. By saying that a being is “Deity,” one is saying that this being possesses the nature of God, or is in the state of being God. In the Bible, *theos*, God, refers to “the one supreme supernatural being as creator and sustainer of the universe — ‘God’” (Louw and Nida 137). The Bible refers to God as the one “who made the world and everything in it” (Acts 17:24). Derivatives of *theos*, such as *theotes*, refer to “the nature or state of being God” (Louw and Nida 140). This is the idea as it is found in Colossians 2:9, which

states with reference to Jesus, “in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.” By affirming that Jesus is Deity, one is saying that Jesus possesses Godhood that He is in the state of being God. This is not just affirming that He possesses certain godly characteristics. Rather, it is saying that He Himself is God, the supreme supernatural being who created and sustains the universe.

If it can be shown from the Bible that Jesus possesses the nature of God, then it will be shown that the Bible teaches that He is God. “Nature” refers to the attributes, characteristics, and qualities that make something what it is. It is the essential traits that belong to something. If one is devoid of these essential traits of Deity, then that one is not God. Galatians 4:8 refers to “those which by nature are no gods.” These people had worshiped something that was not God; those idols did not contain the essence of Deity. While it is impossible to define all of the essential attributes of God, and not within the scope of this study, some of the specific characteristics that would fit within this category include omnipotence and eternity. Only God is “all powerful” and eternal, in the sense that he had no beginning and has no end. Any being that possesses these would surely be considered as Deity. The question is, are such attributes ascribed to Jesus Christ in the Bible? This study answers in the affirmative, and will seek to show some of the various biblical proofs for the Deity of Jesus. Evidence from both the Old and New Testaments will be considered.

### **The Old Testament**

To show that Jesus is the Messiah, it is common to go to the Old Testament to consider the many prophecies and allusions (over 300) concerning Messiah. Then one would go to the New Testament to show how Jesus fulfilled these prophecies. Some of these prophecies include references to the Messiah as being Deity.

Isaiah 9:6 refers to the Messiah as “Mighty God” (*El Gibbor*). In Jeremiah 32:18, the name of “Mighty God” is identified as “Yahweh of hosts.” Some have argued that “Mighty God” is not the same as “Almighty God,” and therefore Jesus was not really Yahweh. Jeremiah answers that question. The “Mighty God” is “Yahweh of hosts.”

“Yahweh” is used over 6,800 times in the Old Testament. It is the most precious name for God. “Jesus,” short for Jehoshua, means “Jehovah the Savior.” To His earthly parents, the message was given that their son should be named “Jesus” (Matt. 1:21). This was no accident. The Bible does teach that Jesus was Yahweh come in the flesh (John 1:1, 14). Consider the following biblical connections:

1. Isaiah 8:13-14 refers to Yahweh as the one who would become a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. The New Testament applies this to Jesus in 1 Peter 2:8.

2. Isaiah 40:3 speaks of the one who would come before “Yahweh” in the wilderness. This is applied to John the Immerser as he prepared the way for Jesus the Christ (Matt. 3:3; Luke 1:76; John 3:28).

3. In Isaiah 42:8, Yahweh speaks of glory that belongs only to Himself, and that it would not be given to another. Jesus prayed about the glory that He shared with the Father before the world was (John 17:5). In Isaiah 6, a vision is related in which Isaiah saw Yahweh sitting on his throne. John 12:36-41 records that statements spoken by Isaiah were uttered “because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him.” In context, this is clearly a reference to Jesus. Isaiah saw “His” glory and spoke of “Him” — Jesus. This connects Jesus to Yahweh.

4. Isaiah 44:6 makes a clear statement concerning Yahweh: “I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me.” It would stand to reason that anyone who claimed this would either have to be God, or he would have to be a liar. The New Testament attributes this very phrase, “the first and the last,” to Jesus (Rev. 1:17-18; 2:8; 22:13-16). These references teach that Jesus is Yahweh.

5. Psalm 102 begins a prayer to Yahweh. A section of this very prayer is applied to Jesus in Hebrews 1:10-12. It would be difficult to reconcile how a prayer (or even a part of one) made to Yahweh could be thus applied to one who is not God.

These, and other, references taken together provide a very strong case for the deity of Christ being taught from the Old Testament. It does not appear to be an accident that such connections were made between the Testaments. Jesus was not coming to this earth to be just any other man; He was coming to be the savior of the world. Ultimately, only God Himself could fill this role.

### **What Do the Gospel Accounts Teach?**

The Gospel accounts do not provide complete bibliographies of the life of Jesus. They do, however, give relevant events, actions, statements, and teachings of Jesus while He lived on this earth. Therefore, it is appropriate to consider the testimony of these records. Do they teach that Jesus is Deity? Not every account puts the same stress on actions and teachings of Jesus as others. Each gospel was written for an intended purpose and for a specific audience. Different angles are considered on the teachings of Jesus, and different facts are emphasized.

1. *The claims of Jesus.* While Jesus did not make many explicit claims to be God, He did make claims that uniquely identified Himself with God. Taken together, they support a case for Jesus’ understanding that He is God.

a. *He claimed a unique relationship with the Father.* He did not claim just to believe in or love God; He claimed to be one with God (John 10:30). He did not refer to Himself as a son of God, but as *the* Son of God. John 5:17-18 records an occasion when Jesus had just worked a miracle on the Sabbath. He told the Jews, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.” This angered the Jews, so they “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.” They understood that Jesus was claiming the Father in a unique sense, and they believed that this was blasphemous, for He was “making Himself equal with God.”

b. *He claimed to have authority to forgive sins.* Mark 2 records where Jesus, confronted with a paralyzed man, simply said, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” The Jews thought this was wrong, for none “can forgive sins but God alone.” In order to prove that He had the authority to forgive, Jesus healed the man. The claim to forgive sins is a divine claim.

c. *He claimed sinlessness* (John 8:29, 46; 18:23). Other biblical passages support this claim (Heb. 4:15), which puts Jesus in sharp contrast to all others who have sinned (Rom. 3:23).

d. *He claimed to have authority to judge the world* (John 5:25-27). He said that His words would judge in the last day (John 12:48). Either He understood Himself to be God, or else He was the most conceited and arrogant man who ever lived.

e. *He claimed to speak the very words of God.* He said, “My words shall not pass away” (Matt. 24:35). He put his own words on par with the words of God.

f. *He claimed to be the only way to salvation.* He said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me” (John 14:6). One cannot be neutral about a statement like this. It is narrow and exclusive. Later, the apostles testified that there is no other name given by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). If not God, then the Bible is affirming salvation through one who does not have the right to claim to be the only way to God.

g. *He claimed to be the Author and Giver of life.* “The Son of Man gives life to whom He will” (John 5:21). He called himself the “bread of life” (John 6:48), and the “resurrection and the life” (John 11:25).

h. *Jesus claimed the highest loyalty from mankind.* He said that His followers must deny themselves to follow Him (Luke 9:23). He told His followers that they must love Him above all else, including family members (Luke 14:26; Matt. 10:34-39). If Jesus did not think He was God, what else could He have been possibly thinking?

i. *He claimed to fulfill all of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah* (Luke 24:44). Considering how many prophecies there are about Messiah, this is an amazing claim. Since, as already shown, the Old Testament connects the Messiah to Yahweh, then Jesus' claim to Messiahship was also a claim to Godhood.

j. *Jesus claimed to be God.* When speaking to the Jews about Abraham, Jesus said, "before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). This would take the Jews back to the time when Yahweh spoke to Moses in the burning bush, claiming to be "I AM THAT I AM" (Exod. 3:14). Because of this claim, the Jews took up stones to throw at Jesus, for they knew its implications. In this statement, Jesus was claiming eternal existence and self-sufficiency. If He was not God, then this really was blasphemy.

These claims demonstrate the biblical teaching that Jesus had a Messianic and divine consciousness. To dismiss all of these as being superimposed upon Jesus by later disciples is not consistent with the evidence, and portrays later disciples as being more clever and deceitful than would be difficult to imagine. These claims are subtle, yet strong. Taken together, they argue that Jesus claimed to be God.

2. *The works of Jesus.* It was not enough for Jesus to make spectacular claims. He needed to back up what He said. This was the purpose for the works of Jesus. In John 5, Jesus stated that His own testimony, all by itself, would not be valid. He defended Himself by appealing to other witnesses. One of these witnesses is the works he performed: "the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me" (vs. 36). Nicodemus had come to Jesus earlier and said, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (John 3:2). Later, Jesus told the Jews: "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father." John 20:30-31 states that the works Jesus did were intended to spark faith in those who know of them. Peter told some Jews on Pentecost that Jesus was "attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:22). It is impossible to separate Jesus from His activities. The miracles and works Jesus did are inseparably connected to His life on earth; and they cannot be dismissed just because they are miraculous.

Jesus performed different kinds of miracles, but they can all be classed under three categories: miracles over nature (e.g., calming the storm), miracles of physical healing (e.g., healing the paralyzed man), and miracles of resurrection (e.g., Lazarus). There were many witnesses to most

of these miracles. Even the enemies of Jesus admitted them. The point here is that the Bible teaches that Jesus worked miracles in order to back up His claims. Therefore, whatever Jesus claimed, according to the Bible, was proved by His works. Since His claims imply, directly and indirectly, that He is God, then the works He performed verify this and the proposition of this study is true: the Bible teaches the Deity of Jesus Christ.

3. *The acceptance of worship.* Another important biblical proof of the deity of Jesus is His acceptance of worship. The Bible teaches that the only one who is to be worshiped is God. Jesus recognized this Himself (Matt. 4:10). While it is possible for someone to accept worship who is not God, Jesus' acceptance of worship shows, at the least, that He thought He was divine. Several examples of this are given in the gospel accounts (e.g., Matt. 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 28:9, 17). Of special note are three New Testament passages in this connection:

a. **John 5:23.** Jesus stated that all should honor the Son (Jesus) just as they honor the Father. If He did not think that He was God, then He was guilty of blasphemy. This statement alone demonstrates the biblical teaching of the Deity of Jesus. For one to claim that he deserves the same honor as the Father, he would either have to be God, or he would have to be a liar.

b. **John 20:28.** After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples. Thomas was not present at the first appearance, and he doubted whether Jesus had really been seen. When Jesus appeared again, Thomas saw and made the following statement to Jesus: "My Lord and my God." There is no indication that Jesus tried to correct this. Jesus accepted this worship, as well as the reference to his Godhood. In fact, He responded to Thomas, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed?" (vs. 29)

c. **Hebrews 1:6.** Referring to Jesus, the text says, "Let all the angels of God worship Him." This statement is attributed to the Father. The Bible shows that the angels knew that the only one they could properly worship was God (Rev. 19:10). If they are told, by God to worship Jesus, then this is a clear implication of the teaching that Jesus is God.

4. *The Resurrection.* If there is one event on which all of the biblical teaching about Jesus rests, it is the resurrection. By the resurrection, Jesus was "declared with power to be the Son of God" (Rom. 1:4). This is the one miracle in the Bible which, if historically true, validates the possibility of every other miracle, and story as recorded in the Bible. For this reason, it is one of the most hotly debated questions. Revisionists have sought for various explanations for the body of Christ missing from the tomb. "Resurrection is ruled *a priori* out of court because it transcends time and space. Historians then have to find another reason to explain the origins of Christianity" (Woodward 65). One New Testament scholar argued that the resurrection is an "empty formula" that

must be rejected by anyone holding a “scientific world view” (Woodward 62). Thus, some, such as Crossan, argue that Jesus’ body was devoured by wild dogs. Some say He only appeared to be dead. Others argue that His body rotted away in the tomb, and that the disciples went to the wrong tomb. It is then argued by some that the appearances of Jesus were only psychological experiences, a “mass ecstasy.” It is interesting that in the search for the “historical” Jesus, scholars will speculate about these things for which they have no concrete, objective historical evidence. Even so, we are expected to forget the biblical evidence and accept the speculations.

However, as many others argue, there is strong historical evidence for Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah, and for His bodily resurrection (cf. Ostling and Towle 58). To dismiss the biblical evidence out of hand because of an assumption that miracles such as the resurrection could not have occurred does not bode well for honest investigation of historical matters. Eyewitnesses claim to have seen Jesus alive after He had died. The body was gone from the tomb after the burial, and “no convincing natural explanation is available to account for this fact” (Craig 280). Indeed, any other explanation is one that will necessarily involve unhistorical speculation, for there is no early contemporary, credible evidence that accounts for the facts otherwise. If one is going to search for the historical Jesus, then the gospel records must be brought in for a witness, for there have been “no new data on the person of Jesus since the Gospels were written” (Woodward 70).

The historical evidence is massive enough to convince the open-minded inquirer. By analogy with any other historical event, the resurrection has eminently credible evidence behind it. To disbelieve it, you must deliberately make an exception to the rules you use everywhere else in history. Now why would someone want to do that? (Kreeft and Tacelli 197)

The resurrection attests to the identity of Jesus. It declared with power that Jesus was the Son of God (Rom. 1:4). The Bible uses the resurrection to buttress belief in Jesus as the Son of God. The disciples, who were greatly dismayed at the death of Jesus, were convinced that Jesus arose and were subsequently willing to die in order to preach it. Of all the miracles and remarkable events recorded in the Bible, the resurrection is the most significant. If it did not happen, then those who commit their lives to Jesus do so in vain (1 Cor. 15:12-19). If it did happen, “that validates his claim to be divine and not merely human, for resurrection from death is beyond human power; and his divinity validates the truth of everything else he said, for God cannot lie” (Kreeft and Tacelli 176).

## Appellations of Jesus

Jesus refers to Himself by various titles, and other New Testament writers refer to Him by various appellations. These references to Jesus demonstrate a high Christology in the Bible. They show both Jesus' own conception of Himself, and the views of others toward Him. This section will discuss four of the important and debated titles and descriptions that were used of Jesus, both in the Gospel accounts and the epistles.

1. *Son of God.* The Bible often refers to Jesus as the Son of God. Though Jesus did not often use this to refer to Himself, He did speak in such a way that would support His understanding that He was the Son of God (cf. John 5:17-19). Some have taken the phrase "Son of God" to mean that Jesus was the "offspring" of God. It is then used to say that the Bible teaches that Jesus was a created being. However, the phrase "son of" is open to different meanings in the Bible. It can mean "offspring," but not necessarily in every context. It may also have the meaning of "sameness," one who shares the same nature, or exhibits the same characteristics as another. For example, Jesus referred to James and John as "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). He spoke of "a son of peace" (Luke 10:6). Judas was referred to as the "son of perdition" (John 17:12). Therefore, "son of" does not always carry a literal, physical idea of "offspring."

Concerning Jesus, Son of God means "one who has the essential characteristics and nature of God" (Louw and Nida 141). When Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, He was claiming to have a unique relationship with the Father. The Jews understood Jesus to mean that He was "equal with God" (John 5:17-18; 10:30-38). Thus, in affirming Jesus to be the Son of God, one is affirming that Jesus shared the same nature as the Father. He is, in essence, "God the Son." Jesus is the Son of God in that very unique sense that He is one with the Father. It has nothing to do with his origin.

2. *Son of Man.* Jesus often referred to Himself as the "Son of Man." It is used about 82 times in the Gospels. The first impression one has from the use of this title is that it identifies Jesus with humanity. The Bible teaches that Jesus was a real human. "Son of Man" may certainly imply that Jesus shared in the nature and character of mankind. It seems, however, that this does not adequately explain the phrase. Jesus never had to prove that He was human; it was obvious from looking at Him. His use of the term was a self-designation, but there appears to be more to it than that. The evidence would indicate that the phrase "Son of Man" was also Messianic in nature. The best case for this can be made from the Messianic statements in Daniel 7:13-14, where the Messiah is pictured as a "Son of Man," or man-like figure, who is given "dominion, glory and a kingdom." This sets the background for Jesus' use of the title.

Jesus used the phrase “Son of Man” in different situations. First, He used it to speak of Himself as he carried out his ministry on the earth (e.g., Matt. 8:20; 11:19). Second, He used the phrase to speak of Himself as suffering at the hands of men, who mistreated and executed him (e.g., Mark 9:12, 31; Luke 24:7). Third, He used it to refer to His appearing in glory as the supreme judge (e.g., Matt. 16:27; 25:31; John 5:27). Jesus is both the “suffering Servant” and the judge of all the earth. Reymond noted:

There can be no doubt, then, that all four Evangelists, when interpreted correctly, intend their readers to understand that Jesus is the Son of Man in the roles both of suffering Servant, who came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10) and “not to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45; Matt. 20:28), and of coming judge and eschatological King.” (57)

3. *Firstborn*. The Bible refers to Jesus as the “firstborn” (Col. 1:15-18; Rom. 8:29). This term is also open to a couple of meanings. It could mean firstborn in time (Gen. 27:19; Exod. 11:5; Luke 2:7). In this sense, it refers to the first child born into a family. Some have taken this meaning and concluded that the use of the phrase “firstborn,” with reference to Jesus, means that He was the first created being. However, this does not stand up. The term “firstborn” also is used of superior position. For example, the Bible speaks of the “firstborn of death,” meaning the most fatal and deadly disease (Job 18:13). Isaiah 14:30 speaks of the “firstborn of the helpless,” meaning those who need help the most. Other passages use the term this way (Exod. 4:22; Jer. 31:9; Psa. 89:27). In these cases, it means “preeminence.”

Regarding Jesus, “firstborn” means that He is first and preeminent over all. Jesus existed before creation, and He is superior to creation (Louw and Nida 117). He is called the “firstborn among many brethren,” which refers to position, not time (Rom. 8:29). He is also called the “firstborn of the dead,” meaning that He was first to be raised never to die again (Rev. 1:5). Colossians 1:15 should be understood to mean that Jesus is preeminent over all creation because He Himself is the Creator. “The word emphasizes the preexistence and uniqueness of Christ as well as His superiority over creation. The term does not indicate that Christ was a creation or a created being” (Reinecker 567). Therefore, the title “Firstborn” shows a high Christology; Jesus is superior over all. This further demonstrates the biblical teaching that Jesus is Himself God.

4. *Only Begotten*. The phrase “only begotten” (*monogenes*) appears five times with reference to Jesus (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). Again, this has nothing to do with whether or not Jesus was a created being. It is another statement of the unique position held by Jesus. In every case it means “unique” or “only”: “pertaining to what is unique in the sense of being the only one of the same

kind or class” (Louw and Nida 591). For this reason, the New International Version translates John 3:16 as, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.” The same term is used of Isaac as Abraham’s “only begotten” or “one and only” son (Heb. 11:17). This sheds light on the meaning of the term. Isaac was not Abraham’s “only begotten” son in the strict, literal sense. Neither was Isaac the “firstborn” son in time. However, Isaac occupied a singular and superior position as Abraham’s “unique” son of promise. For this reason, Isaac was the only son of his kind, and the term may be properly used of him. This is what the term means with reference to Jesus. Jesus was the unique Son of God, the only one of His kind. It is a title of position, not origin.

There are other terms applied to Jesus that are significant. For example, Jesus is called the “radiance” of God’s glory and the “exact representation of His nature” (Heb. 1:3). Jesus was not just a reflection of God; the glory of God radiated through Him in such a way that when one saw Jesus, one saw God (cf. John 14:9-11). These terms could not be correctly applied to one who was an ordinary man. If they are properly applied, then they imply that Jesus is Himself God. All such terms taken together demonstrate the high Christology of Scripture. The uniform teaching is that Jesus was God manifested in the flesh.

### **Testimony of the New Testament**

To this point, texts have been considered that have tremendous implications. Now we turn to some more specific texts that refer to Jesus as God, and state that He is, in fact, the Creator. If it can be shown that Jesus is the Creator and sustainer of the world, according to the Bible, then we will have shown that the Bible teaches that Jesus is Deity. Further, if there are specific passages that refer to Jesus in special terms identifying him as God, then the biblical teaching about Jesus will be clear.

#### **Is Jesus the Creator and Sustainer?**

Some believe that the Bible teaches that Jesus is a created being. Some consideration has already been given to this. Other passages verify that Jesus was not created. For example, Micah 5:2 speaks of the Messiah as being “from the days of eternity,” or “from everlasting to everlasting.” Isaiah 9:6 speaks of Messiah as the “everlasting Father.” This does not identify Jesus as being the same person as the Father; it identifies Him as the Creator, the originator. He is said to be “everlasting.” Though the Messiah was born into this world in “time,” His existence as a being did not have a beginning. This was at least a part of the claim Jesus made when He told the Jews, “before Abraham was born, I am” (John 8:58).

The Scriptures refer to Jesus as the Creator. Colossians 1:15-16 speaks of Jesus as the “firstborn over all creation,” which, as earlier considered, means that Jesus is preeminent over creation. Why? “For by Him all things were created, 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.” It stands to reason that if Jesus created “all things,” then He stands outside of the class of created beings. John 1:3 says, “All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” If this statement is true, then Jesus is the Creator, not the created. Therefore, Jesus is God the creator, according to the Bible.

The Scriptures also teach that Jesus is the sustainer of all things. Back in the context of Jesus being the creator, the Bible affirms that “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17). The term for “hold together” (*sunesteken*) here indicates “to bring together or hold together something in its proper or appropriate place or relationship” (Louw and Nida 614). “Upon the Son all things are dependent for their continuance in existence” (Reymond 248). This teaches that Jesus is the sustainer of what He created. Hebrews 1:3 states that Jesus “upholds all things by the word of His power.” Here Jesus is described as the one who causes all things to continue. Thus, these passages teach that Jesus is the One who upholds and sustains all things. They imply that Jesus is God by attributing to Him the divine qualities.

### **Jesus Is Called “God”**

Other Scriptures are even more explicit in their affirmation of the Deity of Jesus. Jesus is referred to as “God” in several specific verses. In this section, some of these passages will be briefly cited.

1. John 1:1-18. John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” There are three points made in this verse. First, the “Word” was already in existence when time and creation began; second, the Word was always in communication with the Father; and third, the Word always partook of deity. “The Word was God” is a statement that affirms the divine nature of the Logos. *Theos*, which here is anarthrous, “describes the nature of the Logos rather than identifying his person. Jesus as the Logos is personally distinct from the Father (v. 1b) yet is one with the Father in nature (v. 1c)” (Harris 93). In this verse, then, is the New Testament teaching concerning the Deity of Jesus. “Here then John identifies the Word as God (*totus deus*) and by so doing attributes to Him the nature or essence of deity” (Reymond 304). This does not mean that it should be translated, “the Word was divine,” as some have done. That “the Word” is a reference to Jesus is easily seen in the context. Verse 14 says, “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.” The further context identifies the “Word” as Jesus (vv. 15-17).

John 1:18 has some difficulty attached to it. The second part of the verse, “the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father,” has some textual variants in the Greek manuscripts. The most notable alternate is “the only begotten Son.” As earlier explained, “only begotten” refers to uniqueness (one and only). The majority of critics, however, “agree that *monogenes theos* was the original reading” (Harris 93). Raymond points out, “The reputable textual critic must admit that the evidence points rather decisively in favor of an original *theos*” (306). It seems that “the one and only God” has the least doubt in terms of manuscript evidence. If this is so, then there is another instance of teaching regarding the Deity of Jesus. However, since this passage has some ambiguity to it, it would be difficult to rest a whole case on it. In either case, it does not contradict the rest of the New Testament witness to the Deity of Jesus.

2. John 20:28. The Bible records that after Jesus arose from the dead and appeared to His disciples the first time, Thomas was not present. When he heard that Jesus was seen, Thomas doubted, and said that he would have to see for himself in order to believe it. Jesus appeared to them again, and when Thomas was convinced, he responded to Jesus, “My Lord and My God.” Some have taken this as an exclamation of praise to God (not Jesus). However, the text states that Thomas said this “to Him.” He was addressing Jesus as both Lord and God. Others have said this was an exclamation in a moment of excitement. However, there is no record of a rebuke from Jesus. Jesus accepted this address and took it a step further: “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed” (vs. 29). This becomes the basis for John’s statement as to why he wrote the book (vv. 30-31). “There can be no doubt that Jesus gives evidence here, by His express acceptance of Thomas’s assessment of Him, that He was in His self-understanding their Lord to be served and their God to be worshiped” (Raymond 213). “Nowhere in the New Testament is Jesus more clearly identified as God” (Erickson 461). This statement by Thomas, as it stands, is itself a tremendous witness to the New Testament teaching of the Deity of Jesus.

3. Romans 9:5. Paul wrote concerning the Israelites, “whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever.” The NIV translates it as “Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!” Though some have tried to make “God blessed forever” separate from the context as a doxology addressed to the Father, “it is much more natural to regard the final words of the verse as a description of or doxology to the Messiah, Jesus Christ” (Harris 95). This passage, in its most natural reading from the Greek text, ascribes full deity to Jesus Christ. He abides as the Lord and master of the universe, and deserves full praise. Paul’s argument in this context is that even though most fellow Israelites have rejected Jesus as Messiah, Jesus is, in reality, supreme over the universe and, as God, deserves to be served and praised. No higher Christology can be found.

4. Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1. These two passages may be considered together because of their identical phrase, “God and Savior” (*theou kai soterou*). In both passages, “Jesus Christ” is the object of the phrase. Some argue that “Savior” applies to Jesus, but “God” is a reference to the Father: “God (the Father) and Savior Jesus Christ.” However, this is not supported by the Greek construction. This phrase is applied to one person — Jesus Christ. First, this is the most natural reading of the text. Second, the two nouns stand under one article, which precedes “God.” This indicates that they are to be construed together, not separately. Further, this phrase was a common formula, and it always denoted one deity, not two separate persons. When Paul and Peter both used the phrase, then, “their readers would always understand it as a reference to a single person, Jesus Christ. It would simply not occur to them that ‘God’ might mean the Father, with Jesus Christ as the ‘Savior’” (Harris 96-97). What this all means is that Peter and Paul understood that Jesus was both “God and Savior.”

5. Hebrews 1:8. In Hebrews 1 there is a contrast between the Son and the angelic beings. It shows the superiority of the Son over the angels. To make this point, the argument is made that Jesus is the unique Son (vs. 5). He is to be worshiped, even by the angels (vs. 6). Then, in verse 8 the Father himself calls Jesus God: “of the Son He says, Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.” Though there is some controversy surrounding whether or not “O God” is to be construed vocatively (as in the majority of translations) or as either a nominative (“God is your throne”) or predicate nominative (“Your throne is God”), the “overwhelming majority of grammarians, commentators, authors of general studies, and English translations” give this vocative force (Reymond 296). In the passage from which this is taken (Psalm 45:6), the vocative is apparent. Verses 10-11 are connected to verses 8-9 by the conjunction *kai*, which indicates that these verses fall under the same introduction as verses 8-9. In verse 10, Jesus is addressed as “Lord,” which also connects him to Yahweh (Psalm 102). This strengthens the case for “O God” to be understood vocatively in verse 8. This means that the Son is addressed as “God” in these verses in an ontological sense.

A consideration of the foregoing passages shows that the New Testament consistently attributes Deity to Jesus Christ. At least four writers — John, Paul, Peter, and the author of Hebrews — use the title “God” with reference to Jesus. The use of this title was early, beginning shortly after the resurrection (Thomas) and continuing into the late first century. The writings, addressed to various people, were spread throughout several regions, including Greece, Judea, and Rome. Between the title of God applied to Jesus, the claims of Jesus, and the rest of the Scriptures which imply His Deity, the New Testament is replete with teaching about Jesus being God. Whether one desires to accept this or not is another issue. If one accepts the Bible as true, then one must also accept that Jesus is God.

There are two passages that have not yet been considered, both of which have significant bearing upon the New Testament teaching regarding the Deity of Jesus. These are Colossians 2:9 and Philippians 2:1-11. They deserve special consideration.

### **Colossians 2:9**

“For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.” This one verse “beyond all others in the New Testament affirms that every divine attribute is found in Jesus” (Harris 66). It does not say that “much” or “some” Deity dwells in Him, but the “fullness of Deity.” Every element that exists as Deity is in Christ, according to this verse.

In this context, Paul speaks of “philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men,” and “the elementary principles of the world” as being contrary to Christ (vs. 8). The statement in verse 9, “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,” was given to counter these vain philosophies and give a foundation upon which one may be complete in Christ. One of the philosophies against which New Testament writers spoke was the Gnostic doctrine, which denied that God could actually come in the flesh. Gnostics believed that matter was inherently evil, and from this reasoned that God could not dwell in a fleshly body. John addressed this same problem (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7). The Gnostics offered an additional philosophy. Paul answers that Christ is sufficient to make one complete because in Him is the fullness of deity; and He is above all because He created all. Thus, Colossians 2:9 affirms that the fullness of deity really was in Christ, regardless of what the Gnostic philosophers, or anyone else, taught. Nothing else was needed. This, in turn, was a basis upon which Christians should act. “Why are his readers to ‘walk’ in Christ in to ‘be on guard’ so that no one should take them captive through the pursuit of knowledge that springs from human philosophy and tradition?” (Reymond 249-250). The answer is verse 9.

The term “fullness” (*pleroma*) means “total quantity, with emphasis upon completeness” (Louw and Nida 597). “Dwells” (*katoikei*) indicates a settling down in a fixed place. It is to be “at home.” Vincent points out that the present tense of “dwells” denotes “an eternal and essential characteristic of Christ’s being. The indwelling of the divine fullness in Him is characteristic of Him as Christ, from all ages and to all ages.” (487) What is permanently “at home” in Christ is the “totality” of deity. The word “Deity” (*theotes*) is the same as “Godhead” in various translations. The term means “the nature or state of being God” (Louw and Nida 140). It is that which is God, the state of Godhood. This statement is not simply saying that Jesus is God in His person, but that He is everything that is God. The complete divine nature is at home in Christ.

There are two compelling alternative meanings of the term “bodily” (*somatikos*) in this context. The first is that it means “corporeally,” a reference to the human, physical body of Christ.

“The word refers to the human body of Christ” (Reinecker 573). Taken in this sense, here is an affirmation of the concept that Jesus was fully God even while a human. The fullness of Deity became incarnate. In coming to this earth, there was no change in His divine nature. All that He is as God continued to dwell in His corporeal body. The second possible meaning of “bodily” is “embodied” or concentrated in a visible, tangible form. In this sense, the idea is that the fullness of deity was given complete expression through Jesus. He was “wholly” and “substantially” God, and therefore fully embodied the divine nature. This would still include the time that Jesus spent on earth, as the word “dwells” indicates. I prefer to take the term at face value to refer to the incarnation of Jesus. In either case, however, this verse shows a high Christology. The passage teaches that Jesus is Deity.

### **Philippians 2**

One of the most controversial passages in the Bible is Philippians 2:5-8. There have been many explanations for the passage; and the differences in the interpretations are significant. How one interprets the passage affects one’s view of Jesus Christ. Was He ever God? If He was God prior to the incarnation, did He retain his divine nature when He came to the earth? If He retained His Deity in coming to the earth, what does it mean when it says He “emptied himself”? Did He give up His deity in order to be just an ordinary man? All such questions have tremendous implications. One needs to be careful in considering a passage like this, avoiding an interpretation that does not fit well with the rest of the New Testament witness concerning Jesus.

It is likely that Philippians 2:6-11 contains, at least in part, an early hymn (Reymond 251). There is disagreement over whether this hymn was of Paul’s own composition, or whether it was written before Paul, who simply used the hymn to fit his purposes in this epistle. In either case, it is difficult to deny that it was an early hymn. In this text are stylistic and hymnal characteristics, such as parallelism of thought, inversions, unusual vocabulary, and elevated style (Reymond 252). Based on Lohmeyer’s earlier studies, it is now generally accepted “that what we here is an early Christian confession which belongs to the literature of liturgy rather than epistolary prose” (Martin 106). If this is true, then it is a strong argument for an early high Christology among first century Christians. Even if it was not a hymn, it is still evidence that early Christians had a strong faith in the Deity of Jesus.

This is a text in which the words are very carefully chosen. Each word seems significant. Therefore, in an exegesis of this text, the words must be defined and understood. First, however, a consideration of the overall context is in order. Without contextual considerations, the text may

easily be misunderstood and misapplied. It seems that this has been a part of the problem that has led to some of the controversies.

It does not seem likely that one will understand verse 5-8 without first understanding verses 1-4. Overall, Paul's letter to the Philippians is very positive. The one danger that threatened the church, however, was division. These verses are written to try to safeguard against disunity among the Christians there. In verse 1 Paul appeals to the encouragement in Christ, the power of love, the fact of fellowship, and the need for compassion and affection. If a Christian understands and commits to these things, then unity will prevail. He then appeals to their need to be "of the same mind" and "intent on one purpose" (vs. 2). How can this be done? He answers in verses 3-4. In these verses there are three causes for disunity given (Barclay 31): selfish ambition, personal prestige, and the concentration on self. For the purposes of explaining verses 6-7, one should especially note these verses, for they serve as a foundation for Paul's argument concerning Jesus. Barclay notes:

Paul is pleading with the Philippians to live in harmony, to lay aside their discords, to shed their personal ambitions and their pride and their desire for prominence and prestige, and to have in their hearts that humble, selfless desire to serve, which was the essence of the life of Christ. His final and unanswerable appeal is to point to the example of Jesus Christ. (34-35)

With the preceding thoughts in mind, Paul appeals to Jesus Christ as the ultimate example of One who did nothing from selfishness and empty conceit. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus" (vs. 5). This is the final cap on Paul's points in verses 1-4: "just learn to think and act like Jesus." This also serves to introduce what Paul is about to say concerning Jesus. "Think like Jesus," Paul said. How did Jesus think? What did He do to demonstrate this lowly attitude? He answers in the following verses.

Verse 6 teaches that Jesus "existed in the form of God." The term "existed" (being, *huparchon*) is not the usual term for being (*hon*). As a present participle, it denotes continuance of an antecedent condition. In other words, Jesus is and always has been "in the form of God." "It describes that which a man is in his very essence and which cannot be changed. It describes that part of a man which, in any circumstances, remains the same" (Barclay 35). Paul begins by stating that Jesus is unalterably God. Whatever Jesus emptied, it was not his divine essence. Therefore, any position that teaches that Jesus gave up Deity is not being true to this text.

The meaning of "form of God" has been hotly debated. Martin (96) gives two alternative meanings of the term "form" (*morphe*). The first is the more traditional and philosophical understanding that "form of God" means the essential attributes of God. A second, more recent view

is that the phrase has a strong connection with the “glory” (*doxa*) of God; and thus Jesus gave up the glory of deity, not necessarily the essence of deity, when he came to the earth. This position seems to lack proof, however. Others consider the “form of God” to be a reference to the visible appearance as God. This is another unsatisfactory position, for it can hardly mean the same thing with reference to the “form of a servant.” It seems most likely, however, that the “form of God” is a reference to the divine nature, which includes the attributes and characteristics that make God who he is, “which is inseparable from His person and in which the Divine Being realises Himself in His immanent, inherent, divine glory and godly attributes” (Muller 78-79). Warfield observed that the “form of God” refers to “all those characterizing qualities which make God God, the presence of which constitutes God, and in the absence of which God does not exist. He who is in the form of God is God.” (567) This would also be true of the “form of a servant.” Jesus assumed all of the characterizing qualities of servanthood. To say, then, that Jesus “existed in the form of God” is to say that Jesus has always been God, with all of the qualities that belong to God.

Next, Paul says that Jesus did not “regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.” This, also, has given some difficulty to the overall interpretation of the text. Some take this to mean that Jesus did not regard his Godhood as something to hold onto, and therefore, He gave that up in coming to the earth. This, however, contradicts what Paul had just said regarding Jesus’ unalterable divine nature. First, he states that Jesus did have “equality with God.” This, alone, is evidence of biblical teaching on the Deity of Jesus. Nothing less than God Himself can have “equality with God.” Even while on earth, Jesus claimed equality with the Father (John 5:17-23). This equality is in nature, not necessarily role. In his role, Jesus took on a subordinate position (1 Cor. 11:3). In nature, He is equal to the Father.

Did Jesus consider his equality with God as something not to be “grasped,” or as something not to “hold onto”? Both meanings are possible with the Greek word (*harpogmos*). Which meaning makes the most sense in the context? “However we take this, it once again stresses the essential godhead of Jesus” (Barclay 36). As earlier stated, it does not seem contextually likely that this would mean that Jesus enjoyed equality with God but surrendered it by becoming a man. Many other passages show that Jesus was much more than a man. It seems more probable that the meaning is that Jesus did not grasp at equality with God through some exercise of his own will apart from the Father. Several commentators see in this statement a parallel with the Genesis account of the fall of Adam and Eve. Based upon the serpent’s statement, “You will be like God,” the sin of Adam and Eve was, in essence, a grasp at Godhood. Through an exercise of their own will apart from God, they tried to become their own gods. Jesus did not do this. Rather, He willingly submitted Himself to the will of the Father, even though He might have been tempted to do His own will (cf. John 5:30; Matt. 26:39). Reymond argues that this statement should be interpreted against the background of his temptation

in Matthew 4 (262). He writes, “This ‘thought’ of ‘seizure of equality,’ that is, the temptation to walk no longer in the path of the Servant but rather to achieve ‘lordship’ over ‘all the kingdoms of this world’ (Matt. 4:8) by a route (a ‘self-willed’ act of ‘exaltation’) not charted for the Servant in the economy of salvation, Christ Jesus steadfastly resisted” (263). I believe this is the correct view because it fits the earlier context better. Christ did nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility esteemed others as better than Himself. No act showed this attitude more than his willingness to die.

As opposed to grasping for equality with the Father through an exercise of His own will, Jesus “emptied Himself.” This is at the crux of the discussion regarding the nature of Jesus on this earth. A few observations may be made about this in light of the previous comments and the entire context:

1. Any position that effectively destroys the Deity of Jesus is wrong, because it would contradict not only this passage, but also the host of other passages that affirm his Deity. This is the effect of a position that teaches Jesus gave up his divine attributes and characteristics. The nature of something is the attributes and characteristics that make it what it is. If Jesus did not have the nature of God, He was not God (cf. Gal. 4:8).

2. The text does not say that Jesus emptied Himself “of” anything. Adding “of” to the phrase, and then enumerating upon what all he supposedly gave up to come to earth, is not being faithful to the text. This is reading into the text what it does not say. He “emptied Himself.” He did not empty Himself “of” a bunch of things.

3. To insist that “emptied Himself” should be taken literally to mean that Jesus had to dump something out of Himself before He could take something else on is a misuse of the text. The text says, “He emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant.” That is self-explanatory. His taking on servanthood was a self-emptying act.

4. A good comparison may be made with Isaiah 53, a text describing the suffering Servant. Note in verse 12 the phrase, “He poured out Himself to death.” Does that not have a striking resemblance to “emptied Himself,” and “humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death” (Phil. 2:7-8)? As the suffering Servant, He emptied Himself, poured Himself out even to death.

5. Again, the context of Philippians 2 itself shows what it means by the phrase “emptied Himself.” Paul’s point of the text is to urge the brethren to be of the same mind, to be united and intent on one purpose (vs. 2). To accomplish this, He instructs: “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than

himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (vv. 3-4). To reach the point of selflessness, one must look to Jesus. Why? Because he is the perfect example of these instructions. Though He Himself is God, while on earth he did not grasp after His Godhood by trying to exercise His own independent will apart from the Father. Rather, He “emptied Himself,” which is the perfect phrase to describe the attitude of verses 3-4. So what does it mean that Jesus “emptied Himself”? Jesus Christ, in His role of the Servant, did nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but in lowliness of mind He regarded others as more important than Himself. He looked out for the personal interests of others. How did he do this? Ultimately, by dying on the cross. So, Paul’s point is that, as Jesus emptied himself, so must we all empty ourselves. It is simply another way of saying that we need to deny ourselves (Luke 9:23), for this is what Jesus did when He fulfilled his mission for a lost world. He set Himself aside so that everything He did was selfless. Mark says it this way: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). These passages say the same thing.

6. The idea that Jesus emptied Himself of attributes and characteristics is completely foreign to Paul’s argument. He points to Jesus as our example of self-humiliation. If Jesus emptied out of Himself a bunch of attributes, then how can we follow this example? We can’t divest ourselves of our human nature. The line of reasoning that Paul uses to say that we should be selfless becomes meaningless through such an interpretation.

7. Very simply, then, the text tells us that we should empty ourselves. We should deny ourselves, doing nothing out of selfishness. We do this by taking the attitude of Jesus, the supreme example of self-denial. He emptied Himself. As a servant, He completely submitted to the Father and poured out Himself unto death. Afterwards, He was exalted. If we, too, will humble ourselves in like manner, God promises that we will be exalted (Jas. 4:10). This is the point of the whole passage.

The text teaches the essential Deity of Jesus Christ. It teaches that Jesus did nothing selfishly, and that He is the supreme example of self-denial. It teaches an extremely high Christology; it does not teach that he was ever less than what he had always been: God.

### **Other Considerations**

It is impossible to be neutral about Jesus Christ. One either does or does not accept Jesus as the Son of God. The implications of one’s position on Jesus are life-altering. If one accepts Jesus as the Son of God, then a decision must be made as to whether or not this one will follow Jesus. If one does not accept Jesus as the Son of God, then the Bible is relegated to myth and fable. Consequently, this one will not feel the need to submit to the teachings of the Bible. One’s philosophy about Jesus will determine the course of life.

Some argue that Jesus was a good man, but he was not the Son of God. The problem with this is that if Jesus was not the Son of God, then He was a liar. If He was a liar, then how can one contend that He was a good man? One simply does not have the option of calling Jesus a good man. One may reject him as a fraud, but one may not be neutral about him. C. S. Lewis, at one time an agnostic, superbly stated this problem in the following terms:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (55-56)

Some object to the concept that Jesus could be both God and man. Any ascription of deity to Jesus has never been lightly considered. There have always been theological tensions over the nature of Jesus. The problem, I believe, is that we have trouble reconciling the two-natured Christ due to our own finiteness. I will be first to confess that I do not understand how this could happen, other than through an acceptance of the power and knowledge of a Creator. If we let the biblical documents stand on their own weight, they appear solid and reliable enough. The problem enters when our faith is challenged to accept some things that are not normal, everyday occurrences in this modern scientific era. I do not believe that one can honestly say that it is impossible for God to come in the flesh. Such a statement is tantamount to boasting all knowledge. How can we know that God could not do this unless we first assume that God does not exist, and secondly assume that God cannot "interfere" with his own creation? Obviously, faith plays a major role in this issue; but this is not a blind faith as some allege. If we can accept God based upon the number of evidences He has left for Himself, then we may also accept what God has done for us. Acceptance and full understanding are two different issues.

Some who accept the existence of God deny the deity of Jesus on the grounds that there is one God. They balk at any concept of a "Trinity." I believe that we all have a basic understanding of the possibility that there may be "one" of something, and yet that something may have plural elements. For example, one team may consist of five, nine, or eleven players on a playing field,

depending upon the sport. A single marriage consists of two people, and one family may have many members. Biblically, the concept is born out. Concerning marriage, the Bible says that two “shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Two have become one, yet they remain distinct personalities. No one would argue that they form two marriages. Any comparison of this concept to God is inadequate, but at least the idea is understandable. There is one God, one state of Godhood; but there are three distinct personalities to which Godhood is attributed. This does not make for three gods; rather, there is one God composed of three personalities. Take any of the personalities out of the picture and the unity of God is destroyed.

For the most part, it seems that rejection of Jesus as the Son of God is more upon philosophical grounds than upon historical grounds. It is virtually impossible to disprove the Bible on an historical basis. Rejecting its historicity because of the events or messages it contains is a rejection on philosophical grounds, not historical. Frankly, I have never ultimately seen a rejection of Jesus on any other basis.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study has been to show that the Bible does teach that Jesus is God. This has been demonstrated through a number of biblical passages. The Old Testament supports the teaching of the Deity of Jesus, and the New Testament overwhelmingly teaches that Jesus is God. The Scriptures also bear out that Jesus’ self-understanding is consistent with this teaching. Though He did not “toot his own horn” about his identity, He made many claims that are tantamount to claims to Godhood. Further, His works demonstrated His identity, and His acceptance of worship showed His own understanding. Ultimately, the resurrection is the most significant witness to the deity of Jesus. It powerfully declared Jesus to be the Son of God (Rom. 1:4).

The rest of the New Testament portrays Jesus as divine. Though the Bible teaches that Jesus was a human being, it teaches He was much more than that. It attributes to Him the essential nature and character of deity. It does not teach that He gave up His Deity when He came to the earth. Rather, it teaches that Jesus took on the essential nature of servanthood; His greatest act of service was the giving of his life.

The question over the identity of Jesus will not end soon. Recent questions about Jesus have renewed much of the discussion. Whatever position one ends up with, it will be accepted through some process of “faith.” This is unavoidable. The question remains, however, as to which “faith” is the most reasonable. Based upon biblical, historical, and other considerations, I choose to believe that Jesus was, and still is, God. He can never be less than that.

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