



Foundations of

FAITH

The Deity of Christ

Lesson 11

Some questions are so vital that we dare not ignore them. The answers which we give to them will determine the whole course of our lives. No question is more important to us than that which Jesus asked the Pharisees. "What think you of Christ? Whose son is he?" (Matt. 22:42) If we grant that he is the Son of God, then we must also accept the testimony relating to his virgin birth, his miracles, and his bodily resurrection. We will obey his commands, live the life that he dictates, and expect the eternal home that he has promised. On the other hand, if we deny his deity we must consider him the grossest imposter of all time. We must likewise renounce his way of life and his promises of life after death.

PROOF THAT JESUS LIVED. That a man named Jesus did live about the time ascribed to him in the Bible is too well established to be seriously disputed even by an atheist. We do not need the Bible for this evidence. The Jewish historian Josephus says of Christ, "Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold, and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day." (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 18, Chapter 3).

It is only fair to state that the authenticity of this remarkable testimony by one who was not a Christian and who was a contemporary of the apostles has been questioned by some since the historian makes so many surprising admissions regarding Jesus. However, whether or not we have the exact form of the statement of Josephus, it does seem likely that Josephus testified that Jesus lived.

The Roman historian Tacitus, who was born only twenty-five years after the crucifixion, tells us that there was a person named Jesus who was executed by Pilate as a malefactor, and that the people known as Christians derived their name from him. Other non-Christians who confirmed the existence of Christ were Pliny, a contemporary of Tacitus and governor of Pontus and Bithynia, and the Roman historian Suetonius who was born about 70 A.D.

THE CLAIMS MADE ABOUT JESUS. Our problem is to determine who this man Jesus was. Let us consider the claims which he made personally and those which were made by his friends concerning him. Jesus affirmed that he was both the Messiah promised to the Jews by the Old Testament prophets and the Son of God. In John 4:25-26 we have an account of part of a conversation which he had with a woman at Jacob's well in Samaria. "The woman said unto him, I know that Messiah comes, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus said unto her, I that speak unto you am he." When Jesus stood on trial at the court of the Jews the high priest said, "I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us whether you be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus said unto him, you have said." (Matt. 26:63-64)

Furthermore, when Peter acknowledged the deity of Christ by saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," (Matt. 16:16) Jesus placed his stamp of approval on his testimony by saying, "Flesh and blood has not revealed it unto you, but my Father which is in heaven." (Matt.16:17)

The writers of the four biographies of Jesus clearly considered him to be the Messiah, the Son of God. Of his gospel John says, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book; but these are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through his name." (John 20:30-31)

The disciples of Jesus, the men who best knew him, taught that he was the Son of God. Peter declares, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Peter 1:3) John asserts, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." (I John 1:3) Again, he says, "Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love." (II John 3)

THE BASIS OF THESE CLAIMS. Upon what do the claims for the deity of Jesus rest? In John 5:33-39 Jesus himself bases them upon four things. They are – (1) the testimony of John the Baptist; (2) the testimony of the works Jesus performed; (3) the testimony of the heavenly Father; (4) the testimony of the scriptures.

The testimony of John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Saviour, is to the point. He says "And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God." (John 1:34) To those who knew John and had heard him preach, this testimony was of great importance.

The works that Jesus performed were his next source of evidence. To the modern day man this is one of the strongest proofs of the deity of Jesus. On one occasion the disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus to ask him who he was. Jesus in that hour performed many miracles and then said to them, "Go your way and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached." (Luke 7:22) Certainly, no ordinary human being could do these things. If Jesus performed these miracles including the raising of the dead, it is evidence that his claim to deity is true. Four biographers of Jesus have unequivocally declared that Jesus did perform these miracles. Is their testimony

credible? Space forbids more than a bare mention of the reasons for accepting their affirmations. First, being contemporaries of Jesus and in some cases his apostles **they had the means of knowing**. Next, their credibility is established by **the large number of witnesses**. Not only the writers of the four gospels, but also the other four New Testament authors bear either direct or indirect testimony to the claims made for Jesus. The number of witnesses is so great as to preclude collusion. Third, **the honesty of these witnesses** is established by the great candour of their writings and the extreme sufferings which they endured for what they believed. No man will give up his life as did these early Christians just to perpetuate a fraud. For these reasons, the testimony of the New Testament writers must be accepted.

Furthermore, the Jewish Talmuds, a compilation of traditions begun in the second century, admit that Jesus did perform many and great miracles. They claim that he derived his power from having learned the right pronunciation of the name of God, or from magic arts learned in Egypt. The important thing is that the Talmuds, written by bitter enemies of Jesus, do not deny his miracles. Had there been grounds for denial the Talmuds would certainly have discovered them.

Jesus' third claim to deity was the testimony of the Father. We have three accounts in the gospels of heavenly acknowledgement of Christ. The first was at his baptism when God declared, "You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Mark 1:11) Then on the Mount of Transfiguration the Father spoke, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." (Matt. 17:5) The third instance is found in John 12:28.

Lastly, Jesus called the scriptures to testify on his behalf. This involves his fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies relating to the coming of the Messiah. This has been discussed in a previous lesson and will not be dealt with here except to point out that the dozens of prophecies which Jesus fulfilled constitute one of the strongest proofs of his deity.

Another great proof of the deity of Jesus is his resurrection from the grave. No fact of ancient history is better confirmed than this. It is mentioned over one hundred times in the New Testament alone. Were there only one or two alleged appearances of Jesus after his resurrection we might suppose that the witnesses were deceived. But eleven appearances are recorded in the New Testament. Usually Jesus appears

to a number of people. This is too much testimony to explain away.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE MEANS. What conclusions are we to draw from the foregoing? One of three things must be true. Either he was an imposter, or he was the Son of God as he claimed, or he must occupy a position somewhere between the two extremes. We cannot assign him any middle rank because if he could not perform miracles, raise the dead, and forgive sins as he claimed, he must have been a deceiver of the highest order. Then, was he an imposter? If he was, he was evil instead of good, he was dishonest instead of honest. But this is completely at variance with everything that we know about him. One writer has said of him, "The most lasting impression made upon the reader of the Gospels is the superlative goodness and moral purity of Jesus. This moral purity shines upon us from every page like the sun in heaven, and is the chief means which gives to the common reader, the child, or the uncultured man, the unwavering belief that Jesus was divine. If the source of this impression is analysed his moral uprightness is still more apparent. The benevolent and pure teachings of Christ could not have flowed from an impure heart and a guilty conscience. If corrupt at heart, some exigency of suffering, of studied affront, or of cold neglect would have revealed, by word or deed, his true character. Whether in public or private,

entering Jerusalem in triumph or bending beneath the imprecations of the Jews, he is the same patient, perfect one ... It cannot be that that heart was corrupt and dark with guilt." (Everest, **The Divine Demonstration**, p. 99) While many have attacked the claims of Christ, his character has seldom been questioned. Many who deny his deity are the first to admit his moral goodness. Some will go so far as to say that he was the best man who ever lived. If so, he could not have been an impostor, and if he was not an impostor, his claims of deity must stand unchallenged.

A word of warning is in order. Many modernists will state that they believe in the divinity of Christ. By his divinity they do not mean his deity, that he was and is God. They mean that divinity is the spark of the divine that is in each of us, and since Jesus had more of it than others, he was more divine, but still just a human being, not God's Son. But Christ is more than a superman. He is the Son of God sent to this earth to redeem man.

The implications of Christ's deity are overwhelming. If he is the Son of God, his words are authoritative and must be accepted without question. The church for which he died is perfectly founded, and although made of human stones is divine. His promises are certain and through him we may attain salvation from sin and life everlasting.

TEST ON LESSON 11

Write true or false after the following statements:

1. The strongest attack on the deity of Jesus has been the denial that he ever lived.
2. Several non-Christians who were in a position to know have testified that Jesus lived.
3. Jesus himself never claimed to be the Son of God.
4. One of the evidences of his deity which Jesus showed to the disciples of John the Baptist was his preaching the gospel to the poor.
5. The Jewish Talmuds deny that Jesus performed miracles.
6. The biographers of Jesus were not in a position to have first-hand information about Jesus.
7. Some present-day modernists claim to believe in the divinity of Christ while actually denying his deity.

Some of the following statements help prove the deity of Jesus. Some do not. Place an **X** after those which do:

1. The mother of Jesus was named Mary.
2. In accordance with Micah 5:2 Jesus was born in Bethlehem.
3. John the Baptist testified to the identity of Jesus.
4. When Jesus was baptised a voice came out of heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."
5. The personal ministry of Jesus lasted about three and a half years.
6. The superlative moral purity of the life and teachings of Jesus cannot be questioned.
7. After his arrest, Jesus was tried before Pontius Pilate.
8. According to the testimony of many, Jesus arose from the grave.
9. The honesty of the biographers of Jesus is demonstrated by their willingness to die for what they believed.

In the blanks after each scripture reference write the person or persons who in that passage declare the deity of Jesus:

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| 1. Matthew 3:17 | | 8. John 1:34 | |
| 2. Matthew 8:29 | | 9. John 1:49 | |
| 3. Matthew 14:33 | | 10. John 9:35-38 | |
| 4. Matthew 16:16 | | 11. John 20:28 | |
| 5. Mark 1:1 | | 12. Acts 9:20 | |
| 6. Mark 15:39 | | 13. I John 4:9 | |
| 7. Luke 1:35 | | | |

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Answers

These lessons are based on the King James Version, so if you are using another translation the words employed may vary slightly. Sometimes an alternative answer is possible. The following is a useful guide.

Section 1 – F, T, F, T, F, F, T.

Section 2 – X after 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9.

Section 3 –

1. The father
2. Devils
3. Disciples or those in the ship.
4. Simon Peter
5. Mark
6. Centurion
7. Angel
8. John
9. Nathaniel
10. Man born blind
11. Thomas
12. Saul (or Paul)
13. John.

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