

The Deity of Christ

A belief in the deity of Christ is essential for anyone who desires to be a Christian. According to Romans 10.9, one must confess that Jesus is Lord to be saved. And in that context the word “Lord” refers to God himself, for in the Greek Old Testament the word “Lord” was used to translate the sacred name of Yahweh. So to confess that Jesus is Lord is to confess that he is God. Cults like the Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormonism deny the deity of Christ. Yet, a clear affirmation of Christ’s deity is a non-negotiable for the Christian faith.

The deity of Christ is affirmed throughout the New Testament. The New Testament book that most explicitly affirms Christ’s deity is the Gospel of John. Three times in John the word “God” is used to describe Jesus (1.1, 18; 20.28). This happens at the beginning and the end of John’s Gospel showing that the whole gospel is to be read in light of Christ’s deity. In 8.58, Jesus refers to himself as the “I am” (i.e. Yahweh), and almost gets stoned for doing so. Later Jesus says, “I and the Father are one” (10.30). To see Jesus is to see the Father—this is what Jesus told Philip (see 14.9-11). Yet, it is not only John that affirms Christ’s deity. The rest of the New Testament does so as well (see e.g. Rom 9.5; Tit 2.13; Heb 1.8; 2 Pet 1.1).

The deity of Christ does not undercut the humanity of Christ. There was a heresy in the early church called docetism. This was the belief that Christ only appeared to be human yet he really wasn’t. This heresy was fueled by the erroneous idea that matter is evil while only the spirit is good. Docetism taught that God could not indwell a human body without becoming contaminated with sin; and so Christ was God but not human. Yet, the New Testament teaches that Jesus Christ was both fully divine and fully human though without sin. John 1.14 says, “The word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Jesus was not Superman. Superman looked human but he really wasn’t. He could not bleed or be hurt. Yet, Jesus was truly human—human enough to feel our sorrows and to die on the cross for our sins. Only a divine-human Savior could rescue us from sin.

The deity of Christ is a mystery. Though the early church wrestled to explain how Christ could be both divine and human, it is impossible to understand this mystery fully. Yet, I don’t let the mystery bother me. In fact, the mysterious element of Christ’s deity strengthens my faith. I don’t think anyone would make something like this up. And by the way, if we could fully understand God then he would not be God. God is beyond our comprehension. So even though we cannot fully explain it, we need to affirm that Jesus Christ was God in human flesh. He was the God-man and as such he was our Savior.

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