

JUST WHO IS CHRIST? What does the Bible really say?

Part Two - Christ: God in the New Testament

In the last message, we saw that Christ's eternal pre-existence and his pivotal role in creation both stamp him undeniably as being part of the Godhead (Elohim).

But the Bible gives many more proofs that attest to the Deity of our beloved Lord.

Let's pursue this by exploring just how Christ is portrayed in the New Testament. The third message will explain how it all fits together when we explore the 'Trinity' as it's presented to us in the Bible.

CHRIST: THE IMAGE OF GOD

In addition to what we can conclude from Christ's timelessness and his role in creation, the Bible tells us very directly that he is in God's image:

Colossians 1:15 “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.”

Now an image (‘eikòn’) is something (or someone) in whom the likeness of anything is seen. We’re told here that Christ is the ‘image’ of the invisible God. But remember what God said in **Isaiah 40:25**:

“To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?”

(And in that same chapter, God goes on to stress His uniqueness as the great Creator).

The point here is that only God can be in the image of God! Yahweh confirmed this when He said: “I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols.” (**Isaiah 42:8**)

Yet Christ is in God’s image! When he was pressed by Philip to reveal the Father, his reply was revealing:

“Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have

been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:9)

It's easy to dismiss this statement as meaning something like: 'Anyone who has seen my character has seen the Father because in some respects I'm like Him (as we would say: like a 'chip off the old block').

But Christ then goes on immediately to indicate that his relationship with the Father is far more real, intimate and complex than this:

"Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work." (John 14:10)

On another occasion, Christ made the profound declaration:

"I and the Father are one." (John 10:30)

That was too much for the scribes and they prepared to stone the Lord. Their reason?

“We are not stoning you for any good work.....but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.” (v33)

They couldn't see what was staring them in the face - that they were in the presence of God Himself!

Now by itself, it's true that Christ being in the 'image' of God may not (for some) be conclusive proof of his deity. An argument could be made that the 'image' of God - like an 'image' of an idol is not actually the real thing. Also, Christ and the Father being 'one' (and the Father living in Christ) could be simply indicating a unity of the two in thought and purpose (although the Jews certainly didn't interpret Christ's words in this way)!

But now we come to passages that are much harder to explain away:

Look at the description of Christ as given in **Hebrews 1:3**, **“The Son is the radiance of**

God's glory and the exact representation of his being.”

The term “**radiance** (ἀπαύγασμα) **of God's glory**” is a very telling one. There is a glory that is reflected in the way that the moon reflects the glory of the sun. We also see this in the way that the face of Moses reflected God's glory (**Exodus 34:29**) and the way the believer reflects the glory of Christ (**2 Corinthians 3:18**). And if Christ simply represented ‘aspects’ or ‘characteristics’ of God, this ‘glory’ seen in him would be this kind of glory - roughly analogous to the virtues of an earthly father manifested in his son!

But ‘ἀπαύγασμα’ is different: the word describes a literal ‘out-shining from within’ / an ‘out-pouring’. Vine defines it as light coming from a luminous body. Christ's glory wasn't a reflected glory (as it would have been had he been simply an instrument in creation - or someone merely representing God): it was an essential, personal glory of an eternal existence. Certainly Christ, as a man, brought glory to the Father but this expression goes far beyond that: in fact, he actually shared

God's glory. Listen to what the Lord says in the wonderful high-priestly prayer of **John 17**:

“ I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. [5] And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”
(**John 17:4-5**)

No merely reflected glory here! Christ wasn't simply God's instrument! He enjoyed glory with the Father even before creation itself! And the expression 'with you' is the Greek phrase: 'para soi' which literally means 'alongside of you'. Christ wasn't 'before God' or 'around the throne' (as is said of all other dwellers in heaven) but he was 'alongside' of God (i.e. sharing the throne and the glory)!

On one occasion, in the year 740 BC, the prophet Isaiah was given a vision of God **“..high and exalted, seated on a throne”** and above him flew seraphim who were calling to one another: **“Holy, holy , holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”**
(**Isaiah 6:1-3**).

Because the prophet had seen such a glorious vision of the holiness and majesty of the Lord, his reaction was to bemoan his own unclean state and that of the people. Now when we turn to [John 12:41](#), we're told that:

“Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.”

So the vision Isaiah saw was that of Christ himself, seated on the throne in all his glory!

This means that when Christ came down from heaven ([John 6:38](#)) it was directly from the glory of God's throne. He laid aside the trappings of heavenly majesty and the glory to which he was entitled and descended into humanity ([Philippians 2:6-7](#)).

But though becoming part of his own creation, our Lord never ceased to be that which he eternally was - the Almighty God. As only the priests could see the inner curtains of blue, purple and scarlet on finely twined linen in the Tabernacle, so only the disciples saw, by faith,

the glory of that sublime and eternal being in their midst ([John 1:14](#)).

Another example of this essential aspect of Christ's Deity is found in [Philippians 2:6](#) (referred to earlier), where Christ is described as being in the **‘μορφή’** (‘morphē’) of God.

Now the Greek word ‘morphē’ literally means ‘form’, ‘nature’, ‘substance’. As FF Bruce points out: ‘one cannot be in the ‘morphē’ of something without being the thing itself.’ It's like a teapot, a cup and a jug made from the same lump of clay; each possessing a different shape and function but sharing the same substance (essence).

Now examine the passage in which we find this word:

[Philippians 2:6-7](#) **“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage [‘something to be held onto’]; [7] rather, he made himself nothing [‘emptied himself’] by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”**

The word 'nature' here is a translation of this word 'morphē'. Having the nature of God meant that Christ enjoyed all the benefits of his exalted station but he didn't hang onto these. Instead, he 'emptied himself' by laying aside the trappings of heavenly glory that he shared and took the 'morphē' of a servant, being made in human likeness.

Now did this mean that he became a servant or merely resembled one? The answer is critical to our understanding of this passage! Because it's here that we find one of those parallelisms so evident in the Old Testament. We discover that the one who took the 'morphē' of a servant was the same one who was in the 'morphē' of God! His Divine 'morphē' is here presented in parallel and in contrast to his human 'morphē'.

So what does this tell us? Surely that His Godhead was as real as his humanity and his humanity was as real as his Divinity! If he was truly man then he was just as truly God!

And then **Hebrews 1:3** tells us that the Son is “**the exact representation of his [God’s] being**”

The word ‘representation’ is the Greek word ‘**χαρακτήρ**’ (‘charactēr’). We of course get our word ‘character’ from this but the word literally denotes an ‘engraving’ or an ‘exact copy’ or ‘facsimile’, much as would be made by a signet ring impressing its mark on a seal or parchment.

Eternally pre-existent, creator and up-holder of all things, found in the exact image of God with a claim to a glory that belongs only to God! Either Christ is God Himself or the Scriptures are - at best - misleading!

Two more compelling truths remain for us to briefly explore: the fact that Christ accepted worship and the fact that Christ forgave sins - two prerogatives that belong to God alone!

CHRIST: THE OBJECT OF WORSHIP

Christ both enjoyed glory alongside of the Father (**John 17:5**) and, when nearing the end

of his earthly journey, he laid claim to that glory he had laid aside in order to die for our sins as the “**Lamb of God**” (**John 17:5; 1:36; Luke 19:10**). His disciples, who recognised who he truly was (**John 1:12**), saw that glory (**John 1:14**) and amazingly, even his own brother, James, who had grown up with Jesus, described him as “**the glory**” (**James 2:1**).

The customary translation of this latter verse is interesting. In the Greek, the word for ‘glory’ (‘δόξα’) is in the genitive case and therefore placed in apposition to the name “**Lord Jesus Christ**”. Literally, James is saying “of the Lord Jesus Christ (who is) the glory”. But most translators shy away from this rendering of the word ‘glory’ - apparently (according to Sir Robert Anderson) on the grounds that it lends too heavy a weight to the meaning. Instead, they paraphrase in terms such as: “**our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory**” (K.J.V.) and “**our glorious Lord Jesus Christ**” (N.I.V.).

But this lacks consistency. Christ is called “....**the way and the truth and the life**” in **John 14:6**, so why not ‘**the glory**’? It’s certainly the

term used by James and it immediately transports us back to the Ark of the Covenant where the 'Shekinah' glory of God dwelt on the mercy seat between the two cherubim ([Exodus 25:22](#)).

Now we saw in our previous message that glory belongs to God alone ([Isaiah 42:8](#)) - and it's this glory of God, whether as the Creator ([Revelation 4:11](#)) or the Redeemer ([Revelation 5:12](#)) that draws forth our praise and worship.

The Glory of God leads to the worship of God! This being so, if God alone is deserving of glory ([Isaiah 42:8](#)), then God alone is to be worshipped. For this reason, both men and angels refused to allow people to worship them. Cornelius tried to worship Peter, but the great apostle made clear that he hadn't the right to accept it:

[Acts 10:25-26](#) As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. [26] But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."

Even the angels cannot be worshipped because they, too, are merely created beings. John tried to do just this on one occasion when an angel had revealed incredible things to him. He recounts what follows:

Revelation 22:8-9 “I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. [9] But he said to me, “Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll. Worship God!”

But what happened when Jesus appeared in the midst of his disciples after his resurrection? Thomas, who had refused to accept the reality of a risen Christ, was forced to exclaim:

“My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28)

Now Jesus didn't say: ‘Don't do that! Worship God!’ Instead, he confirmed exactly what the disciple's words implied, with the following profound statement:

John 20:29 “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

CHRIST FORGAVE SINS

Christ forgave sins and this is a telling proof of his Godhead because only God Himself has the prerogative to do so. This truth of this, hinges on an important principle! Only the person wronged has the right to forgive the wrongdoer! If you punch me on the nose, only I have the right to forgive you. But if you punched someone else on the nose, it would be absurd of me to claim to forgive you! It wouldn't be my place to even try!

This would be particularly so in the case of a stranger's wrong-doing - someone I had never even met before! Would I have to the right, on any level whatsoever, to forgive a complete stranger for their sins - not only their present wrong-doing but also the collective sins of their past? Yet when Jesus met the paralytic, this is precisely what he did! He said to the stricken man: **“Son, your sins are forgiven.”** (**Mark 2:5**)

How could Jesus have known what those sins were? Much less have the authority to forgive them!

The scribes recognised this and protested:
“Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” ([Mark 2:7](#))

And of course they were right! I can wrong somebody and they can forgive me for that wrong action (provided it was against me) but I actually can't forgive the sin in the heart that made them do it. This is because all sin, whatever form it takes and whoever commits it, springs from a rebellion against God! He is the one who is ultimately wronged and so only He has the prerogative (and the power) to forgive.

David recognised this as we hear in his prayer of repentance found in [Psalm 51](#). Remember that he was confessing to a terrible wrong he had done to one of his most faithful followers, Uriah the Hittite. First he had committed adultery with Uriah's wife and then, to

compound his sin, he had covered up the affair by having Uriah effectively murdered. Yet David made this startling confession to God:

“Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight;” (Psalm 51:4)

So when Christ forgave the paralytic’s sins, he was claiming a prerogative that belongs to God alone. And the reality of that forgiveness was evidenced by the fact that the man immediately got up and walked (**Mark 2:12**).

Let's now complete our discussion with one of the simplest and most profound witnesses to Christ’s deity. It's found in the first chapter of John’s gospel:

**“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was with God in the beginning.....
..... [14] *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*” (John 1:1-2,14)**

In my view, the Biblical evidence is overwhelming! If Christ, the One who descended from heaven and became a perfect man, is not also part of a triune God, then the Bible, if not false, is at very least misleading! Christ Himself claimed to be God as well as assuming the powers of Godhead!

And we are therefore left with the 'trilemma' posed by CS Lewis: that Christ is either a liar, a lunatic or Lord!

We can't sit on the fence with the blasé and smugly-dismissive conclusion that Christ was, at very least, a great moral teacher. He presented himself as God and if this were not true, we would have to conclude him to be a lunatic with delusions of grandeur or, at the very least, a morally corrupt liar!

So which is it? Was he a lunatic or a liar? Or was he exactly whom Thomas said that he was:

“My Lord and my God”

- The third message will be a brief discussion of the 'Trinity'.

May God bless His Word to each one of us.

Amen