

# In the Steps of the Savior: The Person of Christ

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## *“Form of God” and “Form of a Servant”*

The New Testament begins in Matthew with the introduction to Jesus Christ as He came in His humanity and ends in Revelation with the declaration of the eternal power which is His as deity. The two views are not contradictory, nor did the one develop over time out of the other. The same Gospel of Matthew that declares the humanity of Jesus in His birth also announces Him as Immanuel, “*God with us*” (**Matt. 1:18-24**). The same book of Revelation that portrays the deity of Christ also proclaims Him as the “*offspring of David*” (**Rev. 22:16**). Throughout the word of God, the humanity and deity of Jesus are presented as co-equal facts. Both elements are seen to exist in unity in the person of Christ. While one may be given emphasis in a particular passage to stress a point under consideration, no writer denies or seeks to lessen either the divine or human nature of Christ while on earth.

Despite the clear teaching of God’s Word in revealing the twofold nature of Christ, men have compiled various man-made doctrines regarding the person of Christ. Colin Brown has an excellent synopsis of such doctrinal conflicts throughout history in his article on the “Person of Christ” in the new ISBE. Some have totally or partially denied the deity of Jesus while others have totally or partially denied His humanity. It is interesting to note that the first dispute in the early church arose over the fact of Jesus’ humanity. Those closest to the eyewitnesses and other pertinent evidence about the life of Christ had no question about His deity. Almost twenty centuries later, the modernists of our time readily accept Jesus’ humanity, but concoct increasingly absurd theories of interpreting the New Testament aimed at denying His deity. In this article, we will concentrate on the plain teaching of the Bible regarding the twofold nature of Christ in the unity of His person.

## **The Deity of Christ - In Prophecy**

In the Messianic prophecies, the Old Testament presents the coming Christ as partaking of the one divine nature. Concerning the coming of Christ, Isaiah said:

*“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”* (**Isaiah 9:6**).

Earlier in the same book, the prophet had identified this “*Child*” or “*Son*” to be born who would be called “*Mighty God*” and “*Everlasting Father*.” He said, “*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel*” (**Isaiah 7:14**). The Child born by the virgin birth was called “*Immanuel*” to denote who He was, “*God with us*” (**cf. Matthew 1:18-23**).

Another prophet spoke further about the birth and identification of the coming Christ. He said:

*“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, . . . out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting“*  
**(Micah 5:2).**

The New Testament records the fulfillment of this prophecy in the birth of Christ (**Matthew 2:1-6**). Thus, Christ is *“from of old, from everlasting,”* not a created being of solely human nature.

### **The Deity of Christ - His Claims and Proofs**

While on earth, Jesus claimed to be of the one divine nature the Old Testament revealed. After Jesus declared to the Jews that Abraham looked forward to His coming, the Jews asked how He could act as if He knew Abraham though He was not yet 50 years old. Jesus answered, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM”* (**John 8:58**). The claim was an unmistakable identification with the I AM (God) of the Old Testament (cf. **Exodus 3:14**). The Gospel of John records four times that Jesus uses the term *“Son of God”* to refer unto Himself (**5:25; 9:35; 10:36; 11:4**). The term is used not to suggest that Jesus was created by God, but to declare His unique claim of partaking in the divine nature while dwelling in the flesh. While on earth, Jesus was still *the* Son of God in that He possessed the nature of deity. He was not only a member of the human family, but also of the Godhead. On one occasion, four men brought a man that was paralyzed to Jesus for healing. Jesus said to the sick man, *“Man, your sins are forgiven you”* (**Luke 5:20**). Those present understood the implication. Notice the record of what follows:

*“And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, “Why are you reasoning in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise up and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins” - He said to the man who was paralyzed, “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God”* (**Luke 5:21-25**).

Thus, Jesus proved through the miracle that He, while on earth, had the same power to forgive sins as the God they had read about in the Old Testament. What was the necessary conclusion? Jesus the Christ while on earth must be of that one divine nature declared in the Old Testament.

Jesus’ life on earth was filled with clear proofs of His deity. Some of the miracles done demonstrated His own divine attributes while others demonstrated the Father’s witness to Jesus’ claim as the Divine Christ. Jesus claimed that His resurrection was a result of inherent power, a distinctively divine power over life (**John 10:18; 2:19; Romans 1:3-4**). He possessed power over the forces of nature (**Matthew 8:27; Mark 6:45-51**). Such

immanent power could only come from the Creator and Sustainer of the universe (**Colossians 1:16-17**). Christ's inherent omniscience was another mark of His divine nature (**John 1:43-51; 6:64; 13:1-11; Luke 9:21-22**; et al). Besides the miraculous proofs of His deity, the authority of Jesus' teaching in the sermon on the mount (**Matthew 5-7**) and on the night of His betrayal (**John 14-16**) is not the action of a mere man.

Clearly, the life of Christ is the greatest evidence of His divine nature. In summing up that evidence, Benjamin Warfield said:

*“. . . He exercised, so far as that was consistent with the performance of his mission, all the prerogatives of that “transcendent” or divine Messiah which He was. He taught with authority, substituting for every sanction His great “But I say unto you,” and declaring Himself greater than the greatest of God’s representatives whom He had sent in all the past to visit His people. He surrounded Himself as He went about preaching the Gospel of the kingdom with a miraculous nimbus, each and every miracle in which was adapted not merely to manifest the presence of a supernatural person in the midst of the people, but, as a piece of symbolical teaching, to reveal the nature of this supernatural person, and to afford a foretaste of the blessedness of his rule in the kingdom He came to found. He assumed plenary authority over the religious ordinances of the people, divinely established though they were; and exercised absolute control over the laws of nature themselves. The divine prerogative of forgiving sins he claimed for Himself, the divine power of reading the heart He frankly exercised, the divine function of judge of quick and dead he attached to His own person.”* (The Person and Work of Christ, pp.17-18)

### **The Deity of Christ – Testimony**

In the very opening words of his Gospel, John affirms the deity of Christ. The prologue begins with this affirmation:

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made”* (**John 1:1-3**).

The “Jehovah’s Witness” Bible replaces the correct wording by using the phrase “the Word was a god.” The Bible, however, clearly says *who* created the world. **Genesis 1:1** declares, *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* Was there only one person who possessed the divine nature to be God at creation? The same chapter answers that question for us. *“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in **Our** image, according to **Our** likeness . . .’”* (**Genesis 1:26**). John goes on to characterize Jesus' existence upon earth as one radiating *“glory as of the only begotten of the Father”* (**John 1:14**). The language brings the scene of the tabernacle to our minds where the glory of God, the Shekinah, was the evidence of God's presence. John is clearly representing the Christ as deity dwelling with humanity. Throughout his Gospel and his epistles, John continues to affirm the divine nature of Christ.

John is not alone in his teaching, but is joined by others in the New Testament in presenting the same inspired message. Thomas plainly confessed Christ as “*my Lord and my God*” (**John 20:28**). Paul refers to Christ as the one “*who is over all, the eternally blessed God*” (**Romans 9:5**; NKJV). The Hebrew writer describes Jesus as the Son of God “*whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; . . . the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power*” (**Hebrews 1:2-3**). James echoes the expression of John’s prologue by denoting Jesus Christ as “*the Lord of glory*” (**James 2:1**). This list could be multiplied with many other clear passages showing the same.

## **The Humanity of Christ**

In equally unambiguous terms, the New Testament affirms the humanity of Christ. The Holy Spirit through Paul expressed the humanity of Jesus in these terms:

*“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross”* (**Philippians 2:5-8**).

Paul does not say that Christ gave up His deity, but that He took the form of man along side of the form of God which He already possessed. Jesus could not and did not surrender His deity in coming to earth. He did, however, humble Himself to become a man and suffer as a man that He might bring salvation to all men.

After declaring the deity of Christ in the first chapter, the Hebrew writer also affirms the humanity of Christ in the second chapter. He says Jesus was “*made a little lower than the angels*” an expression lifted from Psalm 8 which he had just quoted, to express Christ’s becoming a man (**Hebrews 2:6-9**). Jesus’ identification with humanity is attested to in the following terms:

*“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same. . . Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted”* (**Hebrews 2:14, 17, 18**).

Thus, Jesus allowed Himself to be subjected to the full burdens of humanity with its trials and temptations. Since He became man for us, “*we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin*” (**Hebrews 4:15**). The deity of Christ did not diminish or retard the effects of temptation. It was the will of Jesus which withstood temptation, not His innate divine power. The absolute dominance of God’s will and word over the life of Jesus may be seen in Matthew 4 where Jesus is tempted of the devil. Though the devil sought to use the difficulties of Christ’s earthly circumstance as a means to turn His physical deprivation

into surrender to carnal enticements, Jesus' will remained in subjection to "*that which is written.*" Other passages agree with the facts regarding the humanity of Jesus (**1 John 4:2-3; 2 John 7; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 Corinthians 15:20-21**).

## **Conclusion**

Though we may not be able to answer all of the perceived difficulties which are presented to our finite minds by the nature of Christ's person, let us never deny it as a fact. When men try to go beyond that which is written in formulating various theories to explain that which God has not revealed, trouble is sure to result. We should content ourselves with that which is revealed while leaving the secret things to God (**Deuteronomy 29:29**). If we deny or modify the Bible doctrine regarding the person of Christ, we leave the foundation upon which God's revelation about the plan of salvation is based. Without that foundation, the teaching about our salvation is left to drift in a sea of doubt. In future months, the Lord willing, we will take a closer look in this column at the life of Christ. Each episode of Jesus' life while on this earth gives us a greater insight into the divine will and human responsibility. The perfection of His example in attitude, word, deed and judgment is recorded for us so that we might draw closer to Him.