

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Lesson # 8a Discussion Questions Re: The Person of Christ Lesson
10/30/16

These are questions that people have asked me, and a few I have asked myself.

1. Does this thesis destroy the proofs of Christ's deity that we have long cherished?

Although we have acquired a different vantage point regarding the power source of Jesus' miracles, exorcisms, knowledge of people's unexpressed thoughts, which we see now (I hope) centers on His authority from the Father, and especially from the Holy Spirit working in Him, we must not discount His deity. He was, and is, still God. We may now have to scratch or dig deeper to locate "proof passages" or verses which we can use apologetically as we evangelise the lost, the skeptic or the cultist.

There are 3 very strong passages which leave no doubt as to who Jesus is in His deity: John 1:1-3,14; Col. 1:15-19, and Heb. 1:1-3.

Beyond these, we have numerous passages about His pre-existence – His being 'sent' which more than infers that He existed prior to Bethlehem in 4 BC [cf. Micah 5:2]. He spoke of His Father who sent Him over 100 times in John's Gospel [i.e., 3:34; 5:36,38; 7:29; 8:42; 11:42]. His argument in John 8:58, "*before Abraham was, I am...*", is, on its own a reference to pre-existence as God., and the Pharisees got that, because they sought to kill Him over it, thinking it to be blasphemy.

John 17:24 talks about His being loved by His Father "*before time began*", and in that chapter He speaks of a glory He had shared with the Father prior to being sent – v. 5,24. Paul claims equality for Him with the Father – Phil. 2:5-11; and John 5:23; 10:30; 17:5,10,11,24 also concur. Thomas's declaration in JN 10:28 leaves nothing to be imagined – He is "*My Lord and my God!*".

The OT was about Him – JN 5:39,46; LK 24:27,44; Heb. 10:5-9 [citing Psalm 40:6-8].

He was God's Son before He was sent – Gal. 4:4; Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 8:9.

In Rev. 17:14, He is given the same title as Yahweh in the OT – cf. Deut.10:17.

In both Psalm 45:6-7 and Ps. 102:25-27 (of Yahweh), the author of Hebrews quotes these verses, saying, "Of the Son [God] he says" – Heb. 1:8-10.; attributing those OT passages to Christ. Certainly, diligent study will uncover numerous other passages and connections between OT & NT which will support the fact that Jesus is God!

2. How did Jesus maintain perfect obedience as a child...as a teenager?

Although the ‘proof’ for this answer is mostly speculative, because we are not given the lion’s share of Jesus’ childhood, and are left with the Bible’s interpretation of Him being sinless, we can presume that since He was sinless as an adult, and any sin would destroy that status, including sins committed as a child who knew wrong from right, then He did not sin. But to us, who recognise the reality of our own lives, and the lives of our siblings, parents, babies and grandchildren, that seems almost preposterous.

However, He was born (unlike us) without a sin nature, and furthermore, the Holy Spirit, so instrumental in His ministry years, as we have seen, is also the power that infused Him at His birth – cf. Matt. 1:20-21 – and it is unlikely that the Holy Spirit would have left Him alone for 30 years to work it all out Himself. H.D. McDonald makes some sense of this below:

“What is true of Him according to the epistle to the Hebrews, we are to see in the Gospel’s presentation of Jesus on the human level: a personality creating its own form by a series of acts accomplishing required duty, renouncing evil’s allurements and surmounting moral crises. What we see is an enlarging life of One developing full manhood. True He became neither Son nor the sinless One, and His growth was in His vocation more properly than in His position, or even in His character; nevertheless there was a real growth in insight, in grasp of the work He had come to do. His was not the increase of moral nature but the progressive mastery of His moral vocation, in the developing matching of Himself to the growing awareness of His purpose as incarnated Saviour.

This picture of Jesus is the way the silent years spent in Galilee must be interpreted. Galilee provided Him with a home wherein to develop; Judaea with a Cross upon which to die. Thirty years passed in comparative obscurity in the carpenter’s home in Nazareth, there increasing in learning, living and loving. The period has been described as that of His true and full human development. This involved outward submission to man and inward submission to God, with the attendant results of wisdom, grace and favour. The quiet years were for Him more than the time of preparation for His work, they were in a deeper sense the commencement of it. Needed for us were these thirty years of human life, that the overpowering of His divinity might not overshadow His humanity.”¹

This brings up a secondary question, not wholly unrelated to our primary question – at what point did Jesus’ understanding of the Scriptures He was diligently learning lead Him to the conclusion that He was ‘the Messiah’ promised in the OT? Peter Lewis is helpful on this point:

“I find it impossible not to suppose that Jesus was fully aware of His ultimate messianic significance and destiny from the start of His ministry – and before. His birth had been

¹ HD McDonald; Jesus: Human and Divine; Zondervan, 1968; p. 26-27

surrounded by such announcements (Luke 1:32-33, 43; 2:11, 26), and no doubt, His 'silent years' at Nazareth had included a good deal of reflection upon both Mary's account of His birth and upon the OT Scriptures, which were so full of Him. His messianic self-understanding surely grew with His general self-awareness in a complex of growth and influences that are hidden from us. The first we know about it is that at twelve years of age He gave voice to an already well developed inner awareness of a unique relationship with God; "And he said to them, "How is it that you have sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49)."²

Undoubtedly, His love for the Scriptures, His desire to please God above all, His sinless brain, the Holy Spirit working in Him from the beginning, all conspired to produce a sinless youngster and teenager. God has left the details in mystery to us.

3. Where does Jesus' 'Godness' enter the picture?

This is a question we answered in our lesson notes on pp. 12-13, with a Richard D. Phillips quote which I have also shared here, but I also read a couple of other quotes, not typed into the notes, so they are below – first, Richard Phillips;

"How can God's Son represent and identify with us? The first answer is the incarnation, when the second person of the Trinity took up human flesh to undertake our cause. Hebrews 2:14 says, "*Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.*" As we saw when studying that text, Jesus' death on the cross counted for men because it was men who owed God the debt, and in Christ it was a man who paid it. It was his divine nature that made Christ's blood valuable and able to propitiate God's wrath, but it was his human nature that he offered for us. If it had been angels he had come to save, then he would have come as an angel; since he came to be the Savior of men, it was a man that he came. Hebrews 2:17 sums it up this way, "*Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*" The incarnation stands behind the atonement. It was because Jesus became man that he represented men while dying on the cross."³

Next, P.T. Forsyth;

"Christ's earthly humiliation had to have its foundation laid in heaven, and to be viewed but as the working out of a renunciation before the world was. The awful volume and power of the will-warfare in which He here redeemed the world, and turned for Eternity the history of the race, was but the exercise of in historic conditions of an eternal resolve taken in heavenly places. He could never be king of the eternal future if he was not also king from the eternal past. No human being was capable of such will. It was Godhead that willed and won that

² Peter Lewis, *The Glory of Christ*, Moody Press, 1997, p. 168

³ Richard D. Phillips, *Hebrews*, P & R Publishing, 1025, Kindle LOC 2010

victory in Him. If it was God loving when he loved it was God willing as he overcame. The cross was the reflection (or say rather the historic pole) of an act within Godhead. The historic victory was the index and the correlate of a choice and a conquest in Godhead itself.”⁴

Francis Goode;

re: the qualifications of a Mediator

“He must be of a dignity suitable to treat with God on man’s behalf. He must have some right to be accepted as the representative of men. He must be sufficient surety for both parties: for men, to satisfy all demands of God’s righteousness, which on his part, preclude reconciliation; and for God, to quiet effectually all guilty fears and doubts on man’s part, of his perfect willingness to receive, pardon, and bless him. In a word, he must be such as both can fully rest on, for the removal of every bar to peace, and the procuring of perfect good-will between them.

Where shall such a mediator be found? The highest archangel is still a creature: has no dignity but what God has put upon him; moreover, if he were able to satisfy for man, he is not of man’s nature, and therefore, cannot represent him; his satisfaction would have no connexion with those for whom he offered it; and being, as a creature, infinitely inferior to him for whom he acted, he could give no pledge for God sufficient to re-assure the conscience of the sinner. Who shall give security for God, but one equal with himself? Clearly, he that is to be a mediator between God and man must have the nature of both.

Blessed be God, such a mediator is found in the person of Jesus, the incarnate Word. The double nature of the God-man gives security, to both parties, for the fulfillment of all that is necessary, on either side, for peace. While, as man, he can give security to God on our behalf – as the eternal Word, equal with the Father, he gives security to us for God...

O the wondrous depths of divine love, that are treasured up in the person of Christ!”⁵

James P. Boyce, as cited by Rob Lister⁶

“We may note that since Jesus came as the Second Adam (Rom. 5:12-19) to atone for human sin, it was his death as a human that mattered...Of course, that atonement could not have been made by just any man. Jesus’s divine value must be emphasized as well. But the obedience had to be accomplished as a man, just as the suffering and ultimately the death had to endure as a man. James P. Boyce gets the balance right” “This one person was, therefore, able to suffer and bear the penalty of man’s transgression, because, being of man’s nature, he could become man’s representative, and could also endure such suffering as could be inflicted upon man; yet, being God, he could give value to such suffering, which would make its equivalent, not to one man’s penalty, but to that of the whole race.” From Boyce’s “Abstract of Systematic Theology”, Founder’s Press, 2006, p. 291.

⁴ P.T. Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*; Hodder & Stoughton, 1909, Reprint Kesinger Legacy, p. 270

⁵ Francis Goode, *The Better Covenant*, Kregel / The Granary, ND, p. 37-38

⁶ Rob Lister, *God is Impassible and Impassioned*, Crossway, 2013, p. 272; Footnote 38

4. Could Jesus have sinned?

This is a long-running theological debate, with many good people on both sides of it. This may never be resolved this side of heaven. Some argue that if He could not have sinned, then the temptations He faced are without substance and illegitimate. The argument most put forth against this view is that to face temptation, and not break, in fact, never to be able to break, is a much more strenuous and real temptation when one does not buckle under to it. This question has everything to do with the real humanity of Christ.

Here is P.T. Forsyth's argument:

“But there are also further answers to be made. The question, remember is, whether a complete kenosis would not involve such a renunciation of divine immunity, such a self-identification with man, as involved a personal experience of man's sin? And the farther answer is two-fold. First, every touch of personal guilt would have impaired the moral power required for such sympathy. That is an axiom of modern experience. The guilty cannot escape from himself, cannot empty himself. And the incarnation was a moral act so supreme and complete so as to be possible only to a conscience at the pitch of the perfectly holy. And the second answer is that which is truly human is not sin. Sin is no factor of the true humanity, but only a feature of empirical humanity which is absolutely fatal to the true. What is truly human is not sin, but the power to be tempted by sin. It is not perdition but freedom. Because Christ was true man he could truly be tempted; because he was true God he could not truly sin; but he was not less than true man for that. Among all his potentialities that of sin was not there; because potentiality is only actually powerfully condensed; and had potential sin been there its actuality would have been but a matter of time and trial. But temptation was potential; and it became actual in due course. He could be tempted because he loved; he could not sin because he loved so deeply, widely, infinitely, holily, because it was God he loved – God more than man. Thus the only temptation with real power for him was a temptation to good – to inferior forms of good.”⁷

Elyse M. Fitzpatrick adds:

“Impeccability is a word that means one is free from sin. In considering Jesus' incarnation, people through the centuries have discussed whether Jesus could have sinned. Because the Bible teaches that the man Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, there has to be the possibility that in his humanity, Jesus could have sinned (although because he was God, he never would). This means that Jesus' temptations were real temptations, not faux temptations; they felt like true temptations to him just as they feel to you. He was truly tempted in his human nature and could have sinned if he had chosen to do so. But Jesus is not merely a man; he is also God, and in his divine nature he would not give in to sin because “God cannot be tempted with evil” (James 1:13).

⁷ Forsyth, *Person & Place*, p. 302-303

Remember, in order for Jesus to be our substitute, he had to experience everything that we do. He refused to rely on his divine nature to make resisting sin and obedience easier for him. He met every temptation not by his divine power but on the strength of his human nature. And that is the crux of the matter. Jesus didn't use his deity to shelter himself from true temptations, and in this we can be so encouraged. When we face temptations of any sort, whether they are temptations to sin blatantly or simply to give in to doubt or unbelief, we can trust, knowing that Jesus knows what this feels like and has walked there before us.”⁸

5. Was it superhuman power that allowed Jesus to survive for 40 days in the wilderness before confronting Satan? (He was in the midst of a fast)

The Holy Spirit must again be called upon to answer this question. He was the source of Jesus' power for all things. Alexander McLaren comments helpfully; “The first assault and repulse, in the desert. Unlike John the Baptist, whose austere spirit was unfolded in the desert, Jesus grew up among men, passing through and sanctifying childhood and youth, home duties, and innocent pleasures. But ere He enters on His work, the need which every soul appointed to high and hard tasks has felt, namely, the need for seclusion and communion with God in solitude, was felt by Him. As it had been for Moses and Elijah, the wilderness was His school; and as the collective Israel, so the personal Son of God may ‘speak to His heart.’ So deep and rapt was the communion, that, for forty days, spirit so mastered flesh that the need and desire for food was suspended. But when He touched earth again, the pinch of hunger began. Analogous cases of the power of high emotion to hold physical wants in abeyance are sufficiently familiar to make so extreme an instance explicable.”⁹

6. Did Jesus know specifically that it was *this* Passover when He would be crucified? If so, when did He know it?

Matthew 26:1-2 indicates that, when the time came, Jesus knew that that it had arrived. Luke 22:53 backs that up, albeit, as the mob was in the very act of capturing Him. His knowledge of the OT would definitely have brought Him to a certainty that He would be “cut off” in the midst of His ministry, and based on Daniel's prophecy of Daniel 9:24ff, which gives a mathematical formula by which people could know the exact time of His arrival / Triumphal entry (to the very day according to Sir Robert Anderson), where the Pharisees were oblivious, He knew the timing of this.

⁸ Elyse M. Fitzpatrick, Found in Him, Crossway, 2013, p. 72

⁹ Alexander MacLaren, Exposition of Holy Scripture; Ezekiel, Daniel & the Minor Prophets, Baker 1978, p. 77-78

Peter Lewis is again most helpful regarding this question;

re: Jesus's knowledge of when He would die

"At least two of His public acts were self-consciously messianic: the cleansing of the Temple near the beginning of His ministry, which was surely a deliberate fulfillment of the prediction in Zechariah 14:21; and, of course, near the close of His public ministry, the entry into Jerusalem on a donkey, in clear fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9...Jesus only chose to make such a "public statement" when his rejection by the Jewish rulers was irreversible and His death very near."¹⁰

7. Is the declaration of John 19:28, "*After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), I thirst.*", necessarily the result of His use of His omniscience?

According to John MacArthur in a recent sermon (Sept. 2016), this verse expresses and proves that Jesus was omniscient when He was a man on earth. Is that the only possible way to explain this verse?

No. Note the phrase in parenthesis, "to fulfill the Scripture." Jesus did not have to be omniscient to know that this was the next step in His crucifixion. He just need to know Scripture. He'd spent 30 years learning it inside and out (probably word for word), so He knew what Psalm 69:21 said and understood the context of it, as well as all the other OT crucifixion prophecies. So that, He knew from Scripture that this was the final step before the "It is finished!" of v. 30.

We must be consistent. Either He was omniscient or He was not. Declarations like that of Matt. 24:36 seem to militate against His omniscience, and I don't think at attribute like that can be observed schizophrenically.

8. In the story of the woman at the well, (1) how did Jesus know all about her past? and (2) Is that same ability of the Holy Spirit available to pastors, evangelists and missionaries today?

John 4:4 indicates that this was an event sovereignly decreed to take place beforehand. In vv. 16 - 18, Jesus tells her everything about her life up to that point.

According to our thesis, Jesus was able to do that by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that does make sense of it – she even perceive that He is a prophet, since prophets were able to discern things they could not possibly know without God' help.

¹⁰ Lewis, The Glory...p. 169

But a more difficult aspect of this is part 2 of the question, which deals with applying this truth to believers today. Although the indwelling Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Christ) certainly gives the believer the ability to discern (Matt. 16:13-20; I Cor. 2:16), there is no evidence that Christians, no matter how mature, can read people's minds or know their past history perfectly, without ever having known them.

Some of these verses (cf. Acts 5:1-9; 18:18-23) prove that the Spirit gives discernment of a sort – at least to the Apostle Peter – but whether this was an apostolic gift that now continues is not simple to assess, but it seems unlikely that it is available now. Is it necessary for Pastors, evangelists and missionaries to know people's specific thoughts or backgrounds, or do they just need enough information to discern enough to biblically counsel them?

9. Is there a conflict with Colossians 1:16ff (& I Cor. 8:6) – where He holds everything together – when He is incarnated / especially as a child?

Here, I would appeal to a passage like John 17:11 as a way of possibly answering this question. We have to recall though, that our God is a Trinity, and such an important task would not have been left out of the plan for the Incarnation. We may not be told how this could still take place when Christ was a human being on earth, but the fact that the created order did not fall apart during that 33 years, is proof that somehow, God took care of it (Rom. 11:33-36).

I would not argue, as does Bishop C. Gore this way, in a kenosis theory called “The Double Life of the Logos”;

“This approach maintains that the incarnate Logos lives a purely human life with a human consciousness, (as with kenoticism) but that he continues to live his divine life separately and without interruption. Thus, the divine Logos simultaneously but separately lives his divine life with his divine consciousness and a human life with human consciousness. The divine consciousness is aware of the human but the human consciousness has no direct access to the divine. Thus, as God he was seated at the right hand of the Father, while at the same time he was a man subject to human limitations.”¹¹

Books I Recommend on this topic for your own personal study.

Bruce Ware

- The Man Christ Jesus
- Father, Son and Holy Spirit

¹¹ A.N.S Lane – citing Bishop Gore in; Christ the Lord, Harold H. Rowdon, editor, IVP, 1982, p. 278. This view has been thoroughly debunked by numerous Councils over the years of Christendom

Don MacCleod

- From Glory to Golgotha
- The Person of Christ
- Behold Your God

Gerald Hawthorne

- The Presence and the Power

R.T. France

- Jesus and the Old Testament

H.D. McDonald

- Jesus: Human and Divine

Elyse Fitzpatrick

- Found in Him

P.T. Forsyth

- The Person and Place of Jesus Christ

John. C. Clark & Marcus Peter Johnson

- The Incarnation of God

Peter Lewis

- The Glory of Christ