

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY
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<i>"DEFENDING THE FAITH" (Apologetics - 8)</i>

"Who is Jesus?"

I. Life's Most Important Question

Regardless of what one believes about the "man" named Jesus Christ, the truth is that He has influenced our world unlike any other person in human history. In fact, the case could easily be made that no one person has impacted and changed our world more significantly than Jesus. Entire nations have been transformed, and kingdoms have risen and fallen because of His life and teachings. Billions have followed Him as their God. In other words, His example and word has convinced a good portion of our world to believe that He is God in the flesh. The question that remains however is who really is this man or even on a deeper level, what is this man?

Anyone who comes in contact with the story, the teachings, and the miracles of Jesus cannot escape answering that most important question of all – *who do you say that Jesus is?* In fact, it's the most important question one can ask in life. For if Christ is indeed God, it would mean that everything He did and said carries eternal weight. However, if Christ is not God, then He is the source of the greatest fraud in human history!

Most recognize (those who are aware of history and culture) that Jesus was a man of great influence, of profound wisdom, a good teacher, a great prophet, and a miracle worker (if you believe in miracles). But was He the Son of God? And even more astounding was He God in human flesh? This latter question is a question of faith. But is it a question of blind faith or something much deeper? A faith that is not merely a faith in a simple belief but one that is the result of both profound and persuasive evidence. As Christians, we are called to give a defense for what we believe. There is no greater issue for the human race. Either Jesus is God or He isn't.

In this study we will look at core arguments that demonstrate the strong feasibility that Christ indeed is God in human form and nature. We will look at the Biblical testimony as well as the logical rationale for concluding that Jesus is who He says He is.

II. The Gospel Witness

- A. The Question Posed** - in three (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) of the four gospels the question of Jesus' true identity is addressed by Jesus Himself. We read that Jesus while with His disciples in Caesarea Philippi asks, ***"Who do people say that I am?"*** The disciples respond, ***"Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."*** But then Jesus asked the most important question of all, ***He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"*** We read in ***Mt. 16:16 "that Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*** Jesus affirmed Peter's confession of faith in the next verse when He ***"said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."*** The apostle John doesn't include this event but still addresses the question of who Jesus really is when he wrote the purpose of his gospel in ***John 21:31: "but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."*** Thus, what is most important knowing who Jesus is and then following Him accordingly.

Everyone is going to have an opinion concerning the true identity of Christ but what matters is accepting and then trusting Christ based on who He really is. Many opinions will often be based

on pre-conceived bias or simple ignorance. The way we can come to an informed understanding of Jesus' true identity is by first studying the witness of God's Word and also evaluating the motivation of those who witnessed Jesus, believed Jesus, and then testified about Jesus both in the spoken and written word. Only then can we refute the erroneous claims that the divinity of Christ is a misinterpretation and/or misrepresentation of the facts or that it was made up by His followers.

We will now see that the New Testament witness is clear – the evidence of Christ as God is overwhelming. Here are the majority of examples:

B. Three Foundational Scriptures that Reveal the Divinity of Christ

1. John 1:1-18: *In the beginning was the Word, and **the Word was with God, and the Word was God.** 2He was in the beginning with God. 3**All things came into being through Him**, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. 4**In Him was life**, and the life was the Light of men. 5**The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.***

6There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. 8He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light.

*9**There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.** 10He was in the world, and **the world was made through Him**, and the world did not know Him. 11He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. 12**But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God**, even to those who believe in His name, 13who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, **but of God.***

*14**And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.** 15John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, **for He existed before me.**'" 16For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. 17For the Law was given through Moses; **grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.** 18**No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.***

2. Colossians 1:15-19: *"He is **the image** (exact visible representation like an image in a mirror) **of the invisible God**, the firstborn of all creation (not that Jesus created but that He has preeminence over all creation like a firstborn son has preeminence over every one of his siblings). 16**For by Him all things were created**, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—**all things have been created through Him and for Him.** 17**He is before all things**, and **in Him all things hold together.** 18He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven."*

3. Hebrews 1:1-13: *"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2**but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son**, whom he appointed the heir of all things, **through whom also he created the world.** 3He is the **radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature**, and **he upholds the universe by the word of his power.** After making purification for sins, **He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high**, 4having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. 5For to which of the angels did God ever say, "**You are my Son, today I have begotten you**"? Or again, "**I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son**"? 6And again, when He brings the firstborn into the world, He says, "**Let all God's angels worship him.**" 7Of the angels He says, "He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of*

fire.” **8But of the Son He says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. 9You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.” 10And, “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; 11they will perish, but You remain; they will all wear out like a garment, 12like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But You are the same, and your years will have no end.” 13And to which of the angels has he ever said, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?** Note that much of Hebrews chapter one consists of quotes from the Psalms that speak of the coming Messiah’s divine nature and are thus fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. We can see the relationship between the Father and the Son in this passage and how the Son is described as having the same eternal omnipotent attributes as the Father.

C. Christ’s Direct Claims

1. at His trial - **Mark 14:61-64:** “Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, and they were not finding any. 56For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent. 57Some stood up and began to give false testimony against Him, saying, 58“We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.’” 59Not even in this respect was their testimony consistent. 60The high priest stood up and came forward and questioned Jesus, saying, “Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?” 61But He kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, **“Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?”** 62And Jesus said, **“I am; and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.”** 63Tearing his clothes, the high priest said, **“What further need do we have of witnesses? 64“You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?” And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.** 65Some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with their fists, and to say to Him, “Prophesy!” And the officers received Him with slaps in the face.” **Why did the Jewish leadership condemn Jesus?** His blasphemy of equating Himself as one with God both by affirming that He is ***the Son of the Blessed One*** (i.e. God) and that He is the Son of Man – by quoting the book of the prophet **Daniel (7:13)** and identifying Himself as the one who comes in the power of the Almighty and who is on His throne. Thus, Jesus admits His divine nature.

2. His personal claims

a. equality with the Father – **John 10:30-33:** “At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; 23it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. 24The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, “How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.” 25Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father’s name, these testify of Me. 26“But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. 27“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29“My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. 30“I and the Father are one.” 31The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. 32Jesus answered them, “I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?” **33The Jews answered Him, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.”**

Jn. 5:17-18: But He answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.” 18For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also **was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.**

Other important verses include:

John 3:35-36; 5:23,24; 8:19;14:1-9;

Mt. 5:20-28 - “You’ve heard it said, but I say to you...”

Mk.13:31 - “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

3. His acceptance of worship as God – Mt. 14:33 (And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, “You are certainly God’s Son!”); Mt. 28:17; Jn. 20:28

4. His claims confirmed by others

a) Paul - Philippians 2:9-11, Titus 2:13 (“looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus...”)

b) John the Baptist - Luke 3:22

c) Peter - Mt. 16:15-17; Acts 2:36 - “For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand,³⁵until I make your enemies your footstool. ³⁶Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” – note that Peter quotes Ps.110:1 to highlight the divine relationship between the Father and the Son – **the Lord (Yahweh) **said to my Lord** (Messiah, the Son of David)**

d) Thomas - Jn. 20:26-29 (“My Lord and my God!”)

e) the writer of Hebrews quoting Psalm 45:6-7 - Heb.1:8 (But of the Son He says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.”

f) Stephen - Acts 7:59 (“They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!”)

D. His Indirect Claims

1. authority to forgive sins - Lk.7:48, Mk. 2:5; Mt. 9:5-6

2. authority to execute judgment - Mt. 24:29-31; 25:31-46 (the Son of Man will judge the nations (i.e. separating the sheep from the goats); Jn. 5:26-27: “For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.”

3. giver and sustainer of life - see Jn. 10:7-10; 14:6 (“I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but by Me.”)

4. revealer of truth - Jn. 14:6; 18: Jesus answered (to Pilate), “You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”

E. His Titles

1. YHWH - commonly called a tetragrammen, and commonly pronounced “Yahweh,” in the English it is translated as LORD. Jn. 8:58 – “I AM” Adonai – “Lord”

2. “Jesus is Lord” –served as the first creedal statement for believers. This identifies Jesus ultimately with Yahweh for there can only be one Lord of heaven and earth. 1 Cor. 12:3; Philp. 2:11

3. Son of God (“son of” implies “of the same nature of”) – Jesus is THE Son of God

thereby implying He alone is God's Son unlike a human being who can only become a son of God through faith in Him - Christ. **Mt. 16:16; Mt. 17:5; Jn. 15-17**

4. Son of Man - Jesus used this title nearly two dozen times to describe Himself. He did this to confirm that He was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of the *Messiah*. See **Daniel 7:13-14 & Mk. 14:61-64/Psalm 101:1**.

5. Abba, ("Daddy") - the Aramaic word for "Father." Jesus alone used this word to describe His relationship with His Father. It is a familiar word of close intimacy and never before had the Jews used this term in addressing God as "Father." The Jews did pray to God as "*Father*", but they used *Abhinu*, which is used to show humility and respect, as well as an appeal for mercy and forgiveness. In **Jn. 5:18** (see above) we see that the Pharisees regarded Jesus calling God His Father as blasphemy.

F. His Divine Attributes

1. eternal nature

- a. eternally preexistent: Jn. 1:1; Phil. 2:6; Heb. 13:8; Rev. 22:13
- b. omnipresent: Mt. 18:20; 28:20
- c. omnipotent: Mt. 28:18; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 1:8
- d. omniscient/knows the future: Mk. 8:31; Lk. 9:21-22; 12:49-53; Jn. 3:11-14; 6:63-64; 13:1-11; 14:27-29; 18:1-4; 19:26-30; Rev. 1:8
- e. immutable (unchanging): Heb. 1:11-12; 13:8
- f. Creator (recall only God can create out of nothing): Col. 1:16-17; Jn. 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:10

2. holy nature

- a. sinless, perfect: Heb. 7:26; Jn. 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21
- b. authority to forgive sins (see above)
- c. rightly worshiped: Heb. 1:5-9
- d. Lord over the Law and the Sabbath (Lk. 6:1-5)
- e. sends the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:25-26; 16:7-15)

3. loving (life giving, affirming, sustaining, and transformational) power

- a. over the devil - miracles of deliverance
 - a) healing of man with an unclean spirit - Mk. 1:21-28
 - b) healing of the Gadarenes demoniacs - Mt. 8:28-34
 - c) rebuking Satan in the wilderness - Mt. 4:1-11
 - d) "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" - Lk. 10:17-19
- b. over nature - miracles of supernatural power
 - a) turning water into wine - Jn. 2:1-11
 - b) stilling a storm - Mt. 8:23-27
 - c) supernatural catch of fish - Lk. 5:1-11
 - d) multiplying food - over 5000 fed (Jn. 6:1-14); over 4000 fed (Mk. 8:1-9)
 - e) walking on water - Mt. 14:22,23
 - f) money from fish - Mt. 17:24-27
 - g) fig tree dried up - Mk. 11:12-14

c. over sickness - miracles of healing (only a few examples)

- a) a leper - Mt. 8:2-4
- b) a paralytic - Lk. 5:18-26
- c) a withered hand - Lk. 6:6-11
- d) Malchus' severed ear - Lk. 22:47-51
- e) Peter's mother-in-law from fever - Mk. 1:29-31
- f) a blind man named Bartimaeus - Mk. 10:46-52

d. over death - miracles of resurrection

- a) Jairus' daughter (Mt. 9:18-26; Mk. 5:35-43; Lk. 8:41-56)
- b) widow's son (Lk. 7:11-15)
- c) Lazarus of Bethany (Jn. 11:1-44)
- d) His own resurrection!

f. over sin – not only was Jesus sinless but He enabled mankind to be forgiven and reconciled to God and transformed from unrighteousness to righteousness! (Jn. 1:29 *"Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world"*; 2 Cor. 5:17-21)

Clearly, the witness of God's Word is that Jesus is the eternal Son of God who is One with the Father and the Holy Spirit as God but is distinct as the Son. This means that Jesus was not merely a great sage, prophet, teacher, or holy man. So how does one argue from a logical standpoint that Jesus was who He is revealed to be in the Bible? We must look at the other options if Jesus is truly not the Son of God and not divine.

III. What Are the Other Options?

A. Liar?

C.S. Lewis in his book, *Mere Christianity*, rightfully noted that if Jesus is not whom He claimed to be then that would make Him a liar or a lunatic. In other words, if Jesus knew He wasn't God but portrayed Himself so, then He could never be considered God let alone a good man or a great prophet. He would be a liar, guilty of committing the greatest fraud in human history. The problem with this option is that it runs counter to everything Jesus taught and did. There is no sense of deception or dishonesty in Jesus' ministry or words. Moreover, what would be the motivation for Jesus to lie, especially because such a lie led to rejection by the majority of His people, and a horrible death. Why would Jesus lie about being divine? Where there is a crime, there is usually a motive. So, what is the motive? A great following? Prestige? Power? Money? Jesus was on the outside looking in for all His ministry. He was not part of the ruling class, the establishment, or the religious leadership. He preached that His Kingdom was not of this world. He taught the highest of ethical standards. Thus, to be a liar is contrary to everything Jesus and later His followers were all about.

B. Lunatic?

But what if Jesus sincerely believed He was God's Son but really wasn't? That would make Him not a liar but a man who was not in his right mind. Such a person would be considered delusional, a lunatic. However, again what evidence do we have from the Gospels, even the false gospels, as well as the references in Roman and Jewish writings that would suggest that Jesus was a crazy man? There is no evidence to suggest any of the above but rather the evidence is that His teachings were profound, full of wisdom, organized, consistent, and universal. One of the common responses among His contemporaries concerning His teaching and conduct was awe and wonder (**Lk. 9:43**). There is no evidence except pure conjecture that Jesus was delusional.

There are two other options that are the popular ones of our day. The first is that Jesus was some sort of guru or mystic who did not want us to take him literally but rather understand His own inner divine that is not unique to himself but can be shared by everyone. The second is that divine Jesus is a myth made up by His followers. Let's now look at these to evaluate their plausibility.

C. Spiritual Guru or Mystic?

This is a popular view among many who are inclined toward Eastern religion (i.e. Hinduism, Buddhism, the New Age, etc.). The belief is that Jesus was not the unique Son of God, but a rather divine being among many who had attained higher spiritual perfection and become divine-like from within. In other words, He is one of many spiritual gurus who have reached enlightenment (enlightened consciousness). According to Eastern religion and mysticism, all people have the potential to become god-like in their own spiritual journeys. This quest consists of a series of deaths and rebirths where one eventually becomes one with the universe. What is most important is not the material world but the spiritual realities of the higher being "God" who is unknowable but who is one with the material universe even though the material world, time, and history are all illusions! Thus, when it comes to Christ, He is part of this process! He achieved a universal type of "enlightened consciousness."

The problem with this understanding is that it fails to match the historical record. First, if Jesus was truly a guru or mystic then He did a terrible job teaching its beliefs! None of what we have from Jesus' even remotely resembles the teachings of Eastern religion. Jesus was a Jew and as a faithful Jew He understood that God is personal (recall the words, "My Father" and "Our Father") and that life is not an illusion but is a specific journey in time and space through which we will be held accountable at the end of our lives. There are no do overs or second chances! Moreover, the Jewish faith is a public and corporate one. It is not solely about the individual's journey to "oneness" with the universe nor is spiritual enlightenment simply the abandonment of the ego and our individuality. Rather, our ego and individuality can only be transformed through a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We have to give up ourselves for His ways and will (repentance). Sin is not an illusion. It's real and can only be dealt with not through our own will power and actions *but solely in the trust* in God's grace and mercy through the work of Christ on the cross and the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, there are not many gods, gurus, or ways of salvation. There is only one way – because there is only one Lord, one Faith, one God. To say that Jesus is a guru or mystic is to make Jesus conform to the preconceived bias and positions of a totally different worldview and religion. Such an approach is intellectually dishonest.

D. Myth?

This view is most popular in academia and the secular world. It is the view that Jesus as the Son of God and, as a man who was also God, is a myth that the early Church invented and grew to believe. The problem with this view is that the historical evidence does not support it! Now that we know that the New Testament was written within the first and second generations of the birth of the Church (50-90 AD), it's clear that the belief in the deity of Christ was not invented at a later time as was argued by critics in the 19th century and early 20th centuries when they thought the New Testament was written after 150 AD. Rather, the belief in the uniqueness of Jesus, a Jew, to be the Son of God and exhibit all the attributes, qualities, and characteristics of Almighty God of the Old Testament, all lend credence to the reality that something totally transformed the first Jewish believers of Jesus. What was that something? The Resurrection. It confirmed all that Jesus said about Himself. What came after the Resurrection? Pentecost and the release of the power of the Holy Spirit. What came after Pentecost? The growth of the Church throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. What came after the spread of the Christian faith, the Roman Empire becoming Christian. And from that point the Church has not stopped growing and changing lives and culture and society. As noted in our earlier studies, we can see the fruit of that change and growth today in a myriad of ways.

The witness of the four Gospels, the book of Acts, and the letters of the Apostles reflect real life events, and everyday issues that people deal with the world over. They are presented as eyewitness testimonies. The Roman and Jewish critics never claimed that the disciples were *making things* up in terms of the life of and death of Jesus. They knew Jesus was a rabbi of great influence who performed miracles. They disputed the validity of the resurrection, and that Jesus was the unique Son of God and God in the flesh. That was why He was crucified.

And yet, if such things about Jesus were truly myths, who would have made that up? What would be the motivation for the early Jewish believers to change the Sabbath to Sunday, to make their rabbi a God, and to let Gentiles into their faith without all the previous traditional requirements like circumcision? What did they have to gain? Money? Power? Prestige? No, on the contrary, they received the same thing their Lord experienced – rejection, persecution, hardship, and death. First century Jews and Christians despised myths. In fact, the Romans often considered Jews and Christians atheists because they didn't believe in a universe inhabited by many deities. There was no reason for the early believers to make anything up! Their rabbi, their Lord called them to be speakers of truth, men and women of integrity. Their rabbi, their master, showed the wisdom of God by freely entering into debate with one's critics. Their Lord showed the way to the Father and eternal life by how He lived. It is why the great writer Dostoyevsky and great theologian Kierkegaard both said that no mere man could possibly have invented the story of Jesus.

Thus, Jesus could neither be a mere mortal man, good prophet, or great teacher, nor a liar, lunatic, guru, or myth. Simply put, Jesus is who He said He is! LORD and GOD!