

Jesus of Nazareth is the single most influential figure in world history. His influence has toppled kingdoms, though he was never a political ruler, military leader, or even known outside of his own small region during his lifetime. He was born in a rural backwater of an occupied land under the dominating power of one of the most powerful kingdoms in recorded history, the Roman Empire, under the reign of one of its most dominating emperors, Augustus, so named because he was so feared.

The time of Jesus' public life recorded in the gospels was only three years, and he was executed at the age of 33 years old. None of his followers took his place or claimed to take his place. Why not? Because Jesus of Nazareth is absolutely irreplaceable because He is utterly and existentially unique. He is the only God-Man.

This is orthodox Christian tradition, being handed down in the New Testament as the fulfillment of the Old Testament, the only person qualified, capable, and competent to fulfill God's ordered history and be the Hero of the story which God is telling about Himself and His glorious grandeur. The implications of His dual-nature of Godness and Humanness qualified Him uniquely to secure God's redemptive purposes in the heavens and in the earth and to give meaning, significance, order, and hope to our past, our present, and our future, in a way which no mere prophet, priest, or king, could do.

But, why do we believe that this Jesus of Nazareth is, indeed, so utterly unique, not merely in His prophetic power, or His miraculous wonders, or His insightful teachings, but in His very personage, His being, His essential existence? Isn't the case that Jesus never claimed to be God and His immediate followers never did, either? Is the claim

that the deity of Jesus was a later addition, a heterodox fallacy added later under Greek influence?

Is this doctrine some creation of Paul, or is it a consistent teaching throughout the New Testament, including the words of Jesus Himself? What I want to do today is step back from this astounding phrase in Colossians 2:9, that “all the fullness of Godness dwells bodily in Him,” and take a brief excursion through other testimonies of those who knew and followed Jesus as they wrote down His words and deeds and what they meant for all of us. In these witnesses we will see that the claims of both the deity and humanity of Jesus is not a doctrine or teaching of a single proof-text, but a consistent claim of numerous witnesses.

When Paul writes to the Colossians and states such grand claims about this Jesus, such as, “He is the image of the invisible God,” and “by Him all things were created, in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through Him and by Him,” and that “in Him all things hold together” because “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” and that “in Him all the fullness of Godness dwells bodily”, He is simply joining the gospel writers, like John, whose testimony of Jesus as the eternal Word of God, already existing when everything was created, who was both with God and was God made flesh in the prologue to his gospel account, blew the minds of Jewish teachers and Greek philosophers alike.

Charles Williams put it this way, **“He says something that floods the banks and bursts the boundaries of all human categories. He tells Jews that the truth and self-expression of God has become human. He tell Greeks that the meaning of life and all existence has**

become human. Therefore, only if you know this human being will you find what you hoped to find in philosophy or even in the God of the Bible. The difference [between any other great figure and Jesus] is the difference between an example of living and one who is the life itself.”

I do not have the time, in this single sermon, to also examine the precursory manner in which God also revealed such a necessity in the Old Testament, but there are many available works to be recommended for such an examination if you so desire.

So, let us look first at the words and deeds of Jesus to evaluate what he tells us about His own self-identification by examining a few (not all) encounters related to us in the four gospels.

First, in the gospel according to Matthew, chapter 9, we read of Jesus speaking to a paralyzed man whose friends had brought him to Jesus to be healed. **“And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." (Matt. 9:2-3)**

What we learn from this brief encounter is that not only did Jesus believe that He had the prerogative to do things which only God can do, but we also learn that those around Him understood such words were also such a claim to rights and authority which only God has. For when Jesus assumes the authority to forgive sins, the teachers and experts of the Torah, the Old Testament Law, very correctly believed that He was claiming an authority and right which only God has, and that he was not merely announcing a work of God, as if he introduced such a phrase with, “And the Lord has

said...” but rather with simple self-assurance of his own authority, “Your sins are forgiven.”

Jesus, immediately following, shows that he has such authority by healing the man, recreating what was broken, by sheer fiat, the Genesis of the Torah being revealed before their very eyes as a direct expression of the Word who created all things.

The second encounter, a few chapters later, Jesus, having just pronounced judgment upon some cities who were rejecting His claims to such authority makes the staggering claim that **“all things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.”**

When Jesus says, “All things have been handed over to me” he is claiming that He, along with God, whom He calls His unique Father, alone have both the authority and power to control everything that exists. He is claiming authority which only God has as rightfully His.

Not only that, but when He says, “No one knows the Father except the Son,” he is making a remarkable claim to have complete knowledge of the Father in a way which no one else in the Universe does. He is claiming a unique and intimate relationship with the Father that no angel, no human, no created being has with him and that the Son, alone, has.

But where it really gets crazy is in the following phrase, “and no one knows the Son except the Father.” It was common belief in the first century Jewish worldview that the essential being of God was unknowable, as He dwells in unapproachable light and

knowledge of Him, therefore, is a remote mystery. It is quite a different claim here, however, that the essential being of the Son is not known *in the same way*. Just as Jesus claims that “my Father” is not known by anyone but Him, so also He claims that He is not known by anyone but His Father. This is an exclusive claim to equality of both knowledge and authority with the Father, which is then concluded by an equal claim to such authority, “and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.” The Son chooses to reveal the Father, such a divine prerogative is held by none other than God. In fact, when Peter makes his claim of understanding Jesus’ true identity, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus responds by saying, “You are blessed, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” (Matt 16:16,17)

Our last encounter in the gospel according to Matthew is the famous statement Jesus makes when He commands the disciples to go and make disciples. Surrounding the command are three statements in which Jesus assumes attributes which only God has. Let’s read it, **“And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20)**

First, we see that Jesus claims omnipotence: “All authority *in heaven* and on earth is given to me.” If Jesus had only claimed authority upon earth, then one could argue that he was claiming an earthly authority only, a merely representative authority bequeathed by God for an earthly or prophetic ministry. However, He claims that “all”

authority in heaven, too, has been given to Him. This is an express claim to omnipotence over all things, with the Father. Such omnipotence, both the authority and the ability, to command and control nature, both visible and invisible, is intrinsically God's alone. Jesus, being God, the human, claims such omnipotence.

Secondly, the baptismal formula which Jesus commands equates the Father with the Son and with the Holy Spirit *as one God*. It is not in the name of the Father *through* the name of the Son, but rather each is predicated on precisely the same formulation. The Son embodies the fullness of Godness just as the Father does, and just as the Holy Spirit does.

Thirdly, Jesus claims eternity by using the exact same phrase which God gave to Moses, "I am with you," when asked who he should say is sending him to the Israelites in the slavery of Egypt. "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" is a direct claim of the name of God and the eternity of God.

Finally, not only does Jesus claim omnipotent and eternity, but He also claims omnipresence, that all-present attribute of God alone, unlimited by space and time, when He says, "I am always with you."

Moving on to the gospel according to John, excepting the clear expression of John's teaching that Jesus is the eternal Word made flesh in chapter one, we also see Jesus' direct claims written down here in a few places.

First, in John chapter 5, Jesus claims to have equal authority "at His own choosing" as God Himself. He says, **"For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. ²² For the Father judges no one, but has given all**

judgment to the Son,²³ that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.

Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.” (Jn. 5:21-23)

Jesus claims to be the source of life and the final judge of all the earth and everyone in it. Obviously, he is claiming powers and rights which God has, but to top it off he insists that this is so, in order *that* he may receive equal honor (“just as”)with the Father, equal honor with God, and that He is owed it. He is stating that the purpose of His authority is so that He is honored in exactly the same way as the Father is honored. The unity of honor between the Father and Son is so great that He says if you do not honor him, then you have not the Father who sent Him. This is a staggering claim of deity by the human Jesus of Nazareth!

The next encounter by Jesus, according to John, takes place in chapter 8, where Jesus makes the astounding claim that He existed before Abraham:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”⁵² The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.'⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?"⁵⁴ Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.'⁵⁵ But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word.⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad."⁵⁷ So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?"⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you,

before Abraham was, I am." ⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple." (Jn. 8:51-59)

“Before Abraham was, I am!” (v58) Such a claim means that he is, at least, thousands of years old. Not only does He claim to preexist Abraham, but He goes even further by using the divine name of God as His own, “I am!” Those around Him who knew their Torah immediately understood the implications, for they picked up rocks to stone Him for blasphemy, for slandering God by a human being making such a claim.

Our final encounter from the book of John is near the end, in chapter 20, where Thomas refers to Jesus with an astounding title, “My Lord and my God!” Now, in the book of revelation, written by John, John repeatedly falls at the feet of an angel in worship and fear. Each time the angel reprimands John, forbidding such worship, saying that he, too, is simply a fellow created being, a servant not to be worshipped. And, of course, the first of the 10 commandments, and the basis for all the rest, is that we are to worship no being but the uncreated God Himself. Yet, Jesus simply accepts Thomas’s worship. Not only accepts it, but praises it as faith to be replicated by those do not see Jesus personally! This reveals Jesus’ own self-understanding that he is not a created being, but the God who alone is worthy of worship.

All of these encounters show us how Jesus understood Himself to be, who He claimed to be, the authority and honor and worship which is rightfully due only to God and which He accepted or commanded for Himself. This is tell-tale evidence of the consistent teaching of the New Testament that all the fullness of deity dwells in Him bodily.

But not only did Jesus claim such things, evidenced by His own words and deeds, but His followers also understood this to be the truth about Him. So, let's take a few passages regarding who his followers believed Him to be.

First, while John's gospel extrapolates the Godness and Humanness of Jesus, Mark's gospel begins with a brief and simple summary of Mark's same conclusions about Jesus. He begins his account by describing the ministry of John Baptist as foretold by the prophet Isaiah, **"As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" (Mk. 1:2-3).** Mark asserts that John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Jesus, is the "messenger" predicted by Isaiah, but Isaiah said that this messenger is paving the way for "the LORD (YHWH)" of glory! Therefore, Mark is saying, in the most unmistakable terms, that the LORD of glory has come in Jesus, the Son of God.

In the book of Acts, Luke records Paul speaking of the church, which **"God...obtained with his own blood."** But the only person who shed blood, on the cross, by which the Church was obtained, was Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is referred to as "God's own", so that His blood was referred to by Paul as God's the blood which is God's own. Both Luke and Paul clearly understood the full deity to dwell in the human Jesus.

This, of course, doesn't even begin to touch on the expressions of the author of Hebrews' declarations of Jesus as the "radiance of His glory and the representation of His essence" who "sustains all things by his powerful word" and "through whom he created the world."

The belief of the full deity of Jesus is clearly established by the New Testament as foundational understanding of Jesus and His apostles.

But, what difference does it make? Who cares? What's the big deal if all the fullness of deity dwells bodily in Him?

Well, first of all, if Jesus is fully God, then that means that he is not someone simply to be admired and respected and revered, but he is to be worshipped, adored, delighted in, and absolutely obeyed in all things which He has spoken. He is to be given the central priority of our lives around which every goal which we pursue must be shaped, of which every promise of God must be interpreted and find its fulfillment in Him.

Since Jesus is fully God and fully human, then His redemptive work is both eternal and sufficient. There is nothing to be added to His work, because it is already of infinite value. Consider this, and I have heard it questioned, "How could the death of one righteous man pay for the sins of all men?" Underneath this claim is the insipient idea that the life of Jesus is worth the same as only one man. But, if Jesus is God, then His life is infinitely worthy. If He, being both man and God, is an utterly unique man, whose life has the worth of the life of God, and who can put a price on that? You see, the deity of Jesus is a necessary component to the sufficiency and finality of His atonement for sins upon the cross and their universality for anyone who would come to Him by faith. The humanity of Jesus is a necessary component of the sufficiency to take our place as our representative. The entire gospel, so as to be truly good news for anyone, and not just Himself, or at the most one other guy, is the full deity and humanity of Jesus. Anything less and His death becomes a mere example of how bad

our sins are. It cannot be of God's mercy, because it doesn't procure any kind of true mercy, and it cannot be of God's justice, because it doesn't settle any justice.

In fact, some have concluded, and rightly so if you deny the full deity of Christ, that if Jesus is not God, then the cross become an act of divine cruelty rather than self-sacrificial. If it is not the Godness who offered up Himself in our place, then there is a third party being asked to satisfy the offended party. This is not forgiveness. It is justice, but not mercy. It is patently unjust toward the third party, for only the one offended can grant forgiveness and only by paying down the debt himself. Because Jesus is God, then His payment is true forgiveness, the self-sacrificial absorption of injustice done against Him. All sin, then, being done against God, is done against Jesus, and His death offered up by Him is also received by Him in forgiveness.

This sin-bearing and sin-offering God is the only way in which our sins are truly forgiven, and what makes this forgiveness available to ANYONE who entrusts themselves to Jesus of Nazareth as our divine hope.

Therefore, if Jesus is God, then there is endless hope for you and for me, and for anyone in the world, no matter your history, your sins, your former way of life, your lineage, the sins of your family, etc. No race, no class, no sex, no economic condition, no education or lack of it, can keep you from the blessings of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. The duality of the nature of the singular Jesus secures such a promise.

Not only this, but if God truly became human, then we have a remarkable resource to face pain and suffering. He is God-with-us. He is near to us when we grieve, not far away. He gives us His personal presence in the midst of our suffering, not merely as

God, but as man. He shares in our suffering as an experienced veteran of it. The author of Hebrews says it was necessary for the Son to be made like us, to call us brothers in suffering, to make atonement for our sins, to be tempted as we are, yet without sin, so that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest to us when we are tempted. Therefore, he is able to help us when we are tested because He knows what it is like to be tested, and to entrust Himself to His Father through it.

You see, only Christianity adds courage to God's list of attributes. Among all the 'gods' presented by the worlds' 'great' faiths, only God-in-Christ knows what it's like to experience hunger, danger, injustice, rejection, torture, suffering, and death.

This also means that matter matters. If God became truly human, then that means that God assumed a physical body and entered into a material world as something of profound worth. The maker of the earth deems the earth valuable. He created it good and will restore it to its former glory.

Many philosophies of the world see the material world as either an illusion (eastern religions), polluted and intrinsically evil (the Greeks, gnostics), or as the product of random chance and doomed to final extinction in the death of the universe (modern atheistic naturalism). But, the incarnation of God means that the material world is a good thing, and the resurrection of the Son of God shows us that He means to redeem the physical world as well as the spiritual one. He has authority over the heavens and the earth.

Therefore, for the Christian to fight disease, injustice, and hunger is something that is on God's agenda along with His work to save souls and forgive sins and restore our

relationship with Him, from enemies to friends. We are not only being redeemed to Him, but also to His world, in right and proper relationship.

This also means that we should enjoy God's material world as a good thing, not the ultimate thing, never exchanging the glory of the immortal God for it, but as something to be enjoyed in its proper place, as means of delighting in and glorifying its maker.

Charles Spurgeon to his pastoral students, warning them of studying too much inside, which, in his estimation, could cause a form of depression. He wrote, **“Let a man be naturally as blithe as a bird, he will hardly be able to bear up year after year against such a suicidal process; he will make his study a prison and his books the warders of a jail, while nature lies outside his window calling him to health and beckoning him to joy. He who forgets the humming of the bees among the heather, the cooing of the wood pigeons in the forest, the song of birds in the woods, the rippling of rills among the rushes, and the sighing of the wind among the pines, need not wonder if his heart forgets to sing and his soul grows heavy. A day's breathing of fresh air upon the hills, or a few hours' ramble in the beech woods' umbrageous calm, would sweep the cobwebs out of the brain of scores of our toiling ministers who are now but half alive. A mouthful of sea air, or a stiff walk in the wind's face, would not give grace to the soul, but it would yield oxygen to the body, which is next best...The ferns and the rabbits, the streams and the trouts, the fir trees and the squirrels, the primroses and the violets, the farmyard, the new-mown hay, and the fragrant hops – these are the best medicine for hypochondriacs, the surest tonics for the declining, the best refreshments for the weary.”** (Lectures to My Students, p163-64)

God's creation is good, and it is God's will for us to enjoy Him as we enjoy it. Nobody would consider it a virtue, when a friend presents you with a gift which he has made for you to enjoy, if you would turn away from it as something which cannot last and thus should be ignored, or worse, cast aside. Enjoy what God has made, within the framework for which He made it, and you do, then, walk in His will.

Finally, our last implication brings us to the humility of this table before me. It is the reminder of the self-sacrifice of Christ Jesus, in His very incarnation unto death, the God who, in the words of Paul to the Philippians, did not empty Himself of His deity, but of His rightful honor, becoming extremely ordinary in the process, so that He might serve those whose honor was immensely less than his own.

This table, while surely edifying Christ, does so by reminding us of His self-effacing work, His race to the bottom, His taking on the form of a servant. Therefore, let this table remind us of Him and let us heed the warning of the apostle who accused all self-righteousness as drinking death upon oneself when we approach this table with such in our hearts. Rather, the incarnation of the Son of God unto death should give us cause to eschew glitz and glamour, physical beauty, status, and power as those things of which we should empty ourselves for the sake of others. They ought not impress us, and we ought not prefer the privileged and elite circles of our society in deference to the footsteps of the God-Man who laid his honor aside to build others up in the knowledge of truth and the manner of love for the outsiders.

If the uncreated God moved into the slum of our making, associated with the undesirables, and laid down His divine right to honor in order to serve them, then this means the end of snobbery and self-righteousness among His people. This is exactly

what Paul admonished the Corinthians for failing to do through their celebration of this table. You are to love one another as Christ has loved you, and the workbench and the checkout counter and the kitchen shelves all find their purpose from this table and they should be approached with this table in mind.

As the ushers come forward to help us remember, let us listen to the fact of the God who became Man. Let the table speak of this. Let it remind us of Him, the God who became Man while not ceasing to be God, so that we may worship Him as He is worthy and walk in the manner by which we received Him: entrusting ourselves to Christ Jesus the Lord to fulfill us with all which we need to live truly human lives.

For, we who have turned from entrusting ourselves to our own performance and self-determination, and have entrusted ourselves to the performance and authority of Jesus, have been united to Him in the death which this symbolizes. We, too, have been crucified for sins with Him, not because of our performance of this justice, but because of His mercy in bearing our cross. We gain from His activity and we gain His righteousness in His resurrection. Him we proclaim. Of Him we boast. Him we worship and adore and declare to be...God with us, Christ our hope of glory.