

IS JESUS REALLY GOD?

The issue of the deity of Jesus Christ has been hotly debated for centuries. It was an Alexandrian theologian named Arius who popularized the view that the preincarnate Christ was a created-being who was, both in Essence and in Person, distinct from God. His view came to be called “Arianism,” and was condemned by early church councils. It is one of the Christological positions that fall under the label of “unitarianism.” The orthodox position regarding the deity of Christ has prevailed through the history of Christendom, but unitarianism has never gone away. Today, the most successful unitarian

(Arian) group in the world of professing Christianity is the Watch Tower Society (Jehovah's Witnesses). Several smaller groups, such as the Assemblies of Yahweh and the Concordant Publishing Concern, also hold this form of unitarianism.

In this study, the terms unitarian and unitarianism refer primarily to Arianism, though we are aware that there are other forms of unitarian belief. Let's begin our study with a scripture that is often overlooked by both sides of this issue.

PRAYING TO JESUS

In Acts 7:59, Stephen prays, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” If the name Jesus were not there, undoubtedly some ingenious unitarian would say that the term Lord refers to the Father. But the name is there, proving that the “Lord” to whom Stephen prayed was Jesus.

How could Stephen have prayed to Jesus if Jesus were not Deity? The Bible nowhere approves of prayers directed to created beings, no matter how majestic or powerful. Stephen’s prayer was remarkably similar to Jesus’s own prayer as He was dying: “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Luke 23:46). The spirit goes back to God who gave it, according

to Ecclesiastes 12:7, and clearly Stephen is acknowledging Jesus as God by his prayer request.

While we pray to the Father through Jesus, the Acts 7:59 text shows it is no sin to pray directly to Jesus. Jesus always directs us to the Father, for it is clear in Scripture that there is a hierarchy in the Godhead, and that while Jesus and the Father are equal in nature, Jesus is functionally subordinate; hence, we as a general rule pray to the Father through Jesus. But if Jesus were not of the same nature as the Father, Stephen's prayer would be blasphemous. Romans 10:5–17 encourages believers to call upon the Lord

(Jesus), quoting the Old Testament promise that “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (cf. Joel 2:32). Jesus is thereby equated with Yahweh (the Lord) and is shown as worthy of prayer. The honor that is due to Jesus is no less than the honor that is due to the Father. Listen to John 5:23: “that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father.” Such a statement would be blasphemous if the Son were a created being.

John, whom even liberal scholars agree made it his task to reinforce the status of Christ among early Christians, shows that the Son deserves the same level of honor as

the Father. Can any mere “agent” of God have that status? Does not God reserve all honor, praise, and glory to Himself? Indeed, He does. Since Jesus clearly deserves the same honor, we must conclude that the one Deity (Godhead) of Scripture includes the “Word” (John 1:1).

DIVINE TITLES

Another problem for unitarians is the New Testament’s application of divine titles to Jesus. Yet, the New Testament repeatedly applies titles denoting divinity to Jesus Christ. The use of such titles by men reared in a purely monotheistic culture shows that the earliest disciples perceived

that Jesus shared Yahweh's divinity.

THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA

Revelation 1:8 states, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, says the Lord, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." Notice that "the Alpha and the Omega" is clearly identified as "the Lord...the Almighty." Some ancient manuscripts read "Lord God" (rather than "Lord") and omit "the Beginning and the End."

Nevertheless, the addition of the word God and the omission of the phrase the Beginning and the End do not change the meaning of the text. Alpha and Omega are the first and

last letters of the alphabet—hence, “the Beginning and the End.” The use of the title the Almighty makes it clear that the speaker is Deity.

The question is: Does this verse speak of the Father or the Son? No one denies that the titles used here denote divinity, and can therefore rightly refer to the Father; but do such titles also belong to the Son?

Verse 7 states, “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him.” There is no question that this verse is speaking of Jesus Christ. It is quite possible, then, that verse 8, which follows immediately, also refers to

Christ. This view is strengthened by verses 11 through 18, which definitely describe Christ.

The One who introduces Himself as “the Alpha and the Omega” and “the First and the Last” (verses 11,17) is “like the Son of Man” and has “the keys to Hades and Death” (verse 18). Who is He? His identity is made crystal clear in verse 18: “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.” There can be no mistake about it; the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, is Jesus Christ!

In the last chapter of Revelation, these titles are once again used of

Jesus. He says, “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last...I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches” (Revelation 22:12,13,16).

In both texts—Revelation 1 and 22—Jesus is identified with words used exclusively in the Old Testament to refer to God. (See Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12.)

The Jehovah’s Witnesses sometimes make the point that Jesus is called the “Mighty God” while Jehovah is

called the Almighty God. They believe Jesus is “God,” or “a god” (note the lower-case g) in the sense that He is a mighty being whom God created, and therefore cannot be rightly called “Almighty.” However, in Revelation 1:8 Jesus is called “the Almighty,” and in Isaiah 10:21 Jehovah is called “the Mighty God.” The Witnesses make much of the fact that the often-quoted Isaiah 9:6 text says that the Messiah will be called “the Mighty God,” and claim that this is a title belonging to Christ, not Jehovah. So we see yet another unitarian argument crumble.

One of the most impartial and even-handed scholars on the issue of

Christology is the late, distinguished Roman Catholic theologian Raymond Brown, who before his death in June, 1998, completed another major scholarly work, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, which has won rave reviews from the scholarly world.

In this book, Brown argues that many of the New Testament passages that are normally used to support the deity of Christ are weak as proof texts. As a liberal Catholic, he was not averse to disagreeing with his church and orthodox Christianity on Christology. Yet, in his final analysis, Brown cannot deny that titles of divinity are applied to Jesus in certain New Testament texts.

In the chapter entitled “Did New Testament Christians Call Jesus God?” Brown deals with various passages which seem to imply that the title God was not used for Jesus; passages where the use of the title God for Jesus is dubious; passages where obscurity arises; and passages where Jesus is clearly called “God.”

Hear how he deals with Titus 2:13, which speaks of the “glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

OUR GREAT GOD AND SAVIOR

Brown notes the three main interpretations of the Greek of this passage. The interpretation that clearly separates “the great God” and “our Savior, Jesus Christ” is “not really favored by the Greek which binds together the three words ‘God and Savior.’ Once again it may be argued that ‘our Savior Jesus Christ’ was so common a creedal formula that it would automatically be thought as a separate entity from ‘God.’ However, the argument is less convincing here than [in the interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 1:12], for in 2 Thessalonians 1:12 the placing of ‘of our’ broke up the two nouns. Moreover, the separation proposed in this interpretation of Titus

2:13 means that the author is speaking of the two-fold future appearance, one of God and the other of the Savior Jesus Christ. There is no real evidence in the New Testament for a double epiphany.”

Brown continues, “[T]he glory of our great God-and-Savior Jesus Christ, where the compound title ‘God and Savior’ is attached to ‘Christ,’ is the most obvious meaning in the Greek. It implies that the passage is speaking of one epiphany, namely of Jesus Christ, in harmony with other references to the epiphany in the Pastoral Epistles. The likelihood that ‘Savior’ is applied to Jesus Christ rather than to God the Father is

suggested in the next verse in Titus 2:14 which speaks of the redemption wrought by Jesus.”

Second Peter 1:1 refers to “the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ,” applying the title God to Christ unmistakably. The Granville Sharp Rule requires that only one person be called “our God and Savior.” Robert Morey, in his book, *The Trinity: Evidence and Issues*, notes, “If Peter wanted to indicate that two persons were in view in 2 Peter 1:1 all he had to do was to add the article before the second noun but he did not do this. Instead he wrote a sentence in the Greek language of his day which would

clearly indicate to his readers that Jesus Christ was both God and Savior.”

THE TRUE GOD AND ETERNAL LIFE

First John 5:20 is another interesting passage. “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.”

Is Jesus not being called the “true God and eternal life”? It is interesting that unitarians always quote John 17:3, which refers to the Father as

the “only true God,” and yet cannot see that Jesus is also referred to as “the true God.” This is due to their inability to see that God is one in terms of composite unity. (One interesting question, as an aside: If Jesus is “a god” as the Witnesses assert, and the Father is the only true God, then isn’t Jesus a false god by that logic?)

Raymond Brown asks the logical question: To whom does the “this” refer when it says, “this is the true god and eternal life”? Listen to this most erudite scholar: “Grammar favors the nearest antecedent which here is Jesus Christ who thus would be called ‘true God’...Can we learn

something from the other predicate in this second sentence of 1 John 5:20, i.e., 'eternal life'? Twice in the Fourth Gospel Jesus speaks of himself as 'the life' (11:25; 14:6), while the Father is never so called. Yet John 6:57 speaks of 'the Living Father.' Thus it seems probable that in Johannine terminology either the Father or the Son could be designated as life even as both are designated as light (1 John 1:5; John 8:12). It may be, however, that the predicate 'eternal life' does favor making Jesus Christ the subject of the sentence we are discussing, for only eight verses earlier (5:12) the author of the Epistle stated 'the person who has the Son has life.'

Moreover since the first sentence of 1 John 5:20 ends with Christians dwelling in God the Father, tautology is avoided if the second sentence ends by relating Christians to Jesus. When all the factors are added, probability seems to favor the thesis that John calls Jesus God—a usage not unusual in Johannine literature.”

When an impartial and even-handed scholar like Raymond Brown speaks definitively about “the passages where Jesus is clearly called God,” those seriously engaged in studies in Christology should take careful note.

**‘YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS
FOREVER’**

The first passage, says Brown, where “Jesus is clearly called God” is Hebrews 1:8,9: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever...” Rendering “God” (ho theos) as a vocative rather than a nominative is preferred by the majority of scholars, and this should be noted. On this point, Brown states, “V. Taylor admits that in verse 8 the expression ‘O God’ is a vocative spoken of Jesus but he says that the author of Hebrews was merely citing the Psalm and using its terminology without any deliberate intention of suggesting that Jesus is God. It is true that the main point of citing the Psalm was to contrast the Son to show that the Son enjoys eternal

dominion while the angels are but servants. Yet we cannot presume that the author did not notice that his citation had this effect (of making Jesus God) and surely at least he saw nothing wrong in this address.

“Indeed, calling Jesus God reinforces His greatness over the angels. The picture is complemented by the similar situation in Hebrews 1:10 where the application to the Son of Psalm 102:26–28 has the effect of addressing Jesus as Lord.”

‘MY LORD AND MY GOD’

John 20:28 is another text that is not easily countered by unitarians.

Thomas's exclamation, "My Lord and my God," is too emphatic to be read as merely a title of honor. Says Brown of this text, "Here Jesus is addressed as God (a nominative form with definite article, which functions as a vocative). The scene is designated to serve as a climax to the Gospel: As the resurrected Jesus stands before his disciples, one of their number at last gives expression to an adequate faith in Jesus. He does this by applying to Jesus the Greek (Septuagint) equivalent of two terms applied to the God of the Old Testament (Kyrios, 'Lord,' rendering Yahweh, and Theos, 'God,' rendering Elohim). The best example of the Old Testament usage is in Psalm 35:23

where the Psalmist cries out, ‘My God and my Lord.’”

In his evaluation of the evidence, Brown says while the Synoptics do not clearly call Jesus God, Johannine literature as well as Hebrews and other New Testament texts do. The truth is, if there is even one text that proclaims Jesus as God, the unitarian position crumbles. Despite the number of unitarian “proof texts” used, one text decisively proving that Jesus is God is sufficient to destroy their case, for all texts are inspired of God.

THE ETERNALLY BLESSED GOD

Romans 9:5 is said to be the most debated text in Christology. It is a doxology to “Christ...who is over all, the eternally blessed God.”

Unitarians argue that this text refers to Christ and the Father, and that the Father, not Christ, is the “eternally blessed God.” But notice that the Father is not mentioned in this doxology. On this point, Robert Morey’s comment is noteworthy.

Morey states, in his book, *The Trinity: Evidence and Issues*, “Not once in the New Testament did Paul or anyone else ever insert a doxology into a text without first introducing the person who was the object of the doxology. When Paul would break into a doxology to the Father, he

would first introduce the Father into the text before giving the doxology. The Father is nowhere introduced into the text.”

This is a decisive text for the divinity of Jesus Christ. Lenski, in his Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, says of the text, “Christ is over all, i.e., the Supreme Lord. This apposition is complete in itself. If no more were added this apposition makes Christ God, for we have yet to hear of one who is over all who is not God.” A.T. Robertson, in his Word Studies, says of the Romans 9:5 text, “a clear statement of the deity of Christ following the remark about his humanity. This is the natural and

obvious way of punctuating the sentence. To make a full stop after a sarka (or colon) and start a new sentence is very abrupt and awkward.”

THE ‘AGENCY’ CONCEPT

The parallels between Yahweh in the Old Testament and Jesus Christ are too striking to be dismissed (see accompanying box on page 5). But some of the most powerful texts equating Yahweh with Jesus are explained away by unitarians as indicating that Jesus was simply “God’s agent.” They appeal to the Jewish concept of “agency” whereby a person acting as God’s agent was

represented as God Himself.

Now, none of us comes to Scripture with a *tabula rasa* (blank slate). There is no presuppositionless exegesis or hermeneutic. We all come to Scripture with our biases and cultural, psychological, and sociological baggage. As one knowledgeable sociologist once said, “It is the theory that decides what is observed.” Our paradigm often determines what we see.

If we have the bias that Jesus could not possibly be God, then we must find a way to explain away texts that do seem to indicate that He is God. The unitarian applies the agency

concept indiscriminately to the passages equating Yahweh to Christ without justifying that hermeneutical approach. Let us ask a simple question: If Jesus were really God Incarnate—just suppose—and God the Father wanted to communicate that to us, what would it take to convince you? If God tied the clear references to Himself in the Old Testament to Jesus's words and actions, couldn't we gloss over them as just expressions of agency? Genuine worship to Jesus could be explained as mere obeisance. If Jesus proclaims His ability to forgive sins, one can argue that He is merely acting on the Father's behalf so we cannot put anything more to it. If the

disciples use the word God in reference to Jesus, one could simply say that men are called “gods” (meaning “the mighty,” or “mighty ones”), too. How could the Father prove this truth to you?

In John 8:58, Jesus states, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” Can the agency concept really explain away this verse? The implications of the Greek are clear. Unfortunately, unitarians rush to quote scholars to prove their points when they reach such “difficult Scriptures,” yet the names most quoted are liberals who deny the authenticity of Scripture, or cultists with no scholarly background. The “I

AM” is a clear reference to the name of Yahweh in the Old Testament (see Exodus 3:14). Jesus was claiming self-existence.

The reaction of the Jews to Jesus’s “I AM” statement is a major argument against the view that agency explains Jesus’s use of Yahweh’s titles. The Pharisees, as the scholars of the day, would certainly have understood the Jewish agency concept, so why did they not believe, like today’s unitarians, that the “I AM” statement of Jesus was simply an expression of His belief that He was the Messiah, without charging Him with blasphemy? They could have simply disagreed with His belief that He was

the Messiah, rather than resorting to the extreme measure of taking up stones to throw at Him (verse 59). They obviously understood His “I AM” statement as a claim of divinity, not merely a claim of agency. This is a potent argument against the all-encompassing “agency” rejoinder, which seeks to undercut the statements ascribing divinity to our Lord and Savior!

In John 5:23, Jesus says the Son should be honored equally with the Father. The Jews understood exactly what He meant: He was claiming equality with the Father.

HOW GOD WAS ORIGINALLY

REVEALED

How was God first revealed in Scripture? In Genesis 1:26, we read that God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...” God could not have been referring to the angels for they did not participate in His creation. The New Testament will later tell us that God created the world through Christ, which harmonizes perfectly with Genesis 1:26.

But there is a well-known response to this “very difficult passage” which must be dismissed as a hoax. It is the view that the use of “Us” and “Our” is nothing more than the “plural of

majesty,” like the royal “We” used by some rulers in ancient times. This has been exposed as false, for the “plural of majesty” expression was not known when Genesis was written.

Rabbi Tzar Nassi, lecturer in Hebrew at Oxford University, emphasizes the fact that the plural of majesty was unknown to Moses and the prophets. He writes, “Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, David and all other kings throughout the law, the prophets and the hagiographer speak in the singular and not as modern kings in the plural. They did not say ‘We’ but ‘I command’; as in Genesis xli.41; Daniel iii.29; Ezra i.2” (The

Great Mystery). This statement is found early in the first book of the Bible, and one of the major goals of this book is to reveal to its readers who God really is.

In Genesis 3:22, God says, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us...” In Genesis 11:7, He says, “Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language...” In Isaiah 6:8, He says, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?”

A lot is made of the Hebrew Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4,5: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one!” This is commonly thought of in terms of an absolute singularity, but there are two

distinct Hebrew words for “one.”

Yahid denotes singularity or uniqueness. This would be the word of choice if God intended to say that the Divinity is restricted to one and only one Person. The word used in the Shema is echad, which means one in the sense of a composite unity.

The belief that God is a composite unity is on solid linguistic grounds. In Genesis 2:24, Adam and Eve are “one” (echad) as husband and wife. They were “one” in the same way that the Father and the Son are “one.”

Unitarians famously quote the

passages in Isaiah 44–66, commonly referred to by scholars as a polemic against the pagan nations, to stress God’s singularity, but they miss the point of this polemic. The prophet is not so much concerned about ontology as He is about exclusive worship to Yahweh. He is emphasizing that only Yahweh is worthy of worship, and is engaging in a polemic against syncretism.

Read Isaiah 44 and 45, and not particularly 43:12, where God says, “I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and there was no foreign god among you.” God, through the prophet Isaiah, is attacking idolatry. The true God, Yahweh, is being

contrasted with the false gods of the surrounding nations. To use this passage as though Isaiah was dealing with the nature of God is absolutely absurd.

Unitarians have no difficulty countering the modalists when they explain that the Father is distinct from the Son though Jesus said, “The Father and I are one.” They are quick to point out, and rightly so, that Jesus prayed for all His disciples to be “one” (John 17). Yet, they argue against the view that God (consisting of the Father and the Son) is “one” in the same way.

Now we come to a very critical point

that some unitarians have made:
How could the Jews themselves, who speak Hebrew as a first language, not understand the nature of God, and how could early Christians so radically reinterpret God without an equally, if not greater, controversy than the one that came about with the abandonment of circumcision?

The answer is that the early confession of Jesus as Lord and the clear belief in His divinity unified early Christians, unlike the issues concerning the Law. Don't forget that it was largely the early Christians' proclamation of Jesus as God that contributed to most Jews rejecting Christianity! Also, it is important to

realize that certain Jewish scholars from very early fought the early revelation of God in their own Scriptures. The Book of Jubilees (written in the second half of the second century B.C.) gives an account of the Genesis story where the problem words in Genesis 1:26 are simply omitted or altered (see Jubilees 2.14). Philo explained that God used His subordinates to help Him in creation and claimed that this is where the evil in man comes from since God could not have created evil. In the Jerusalem Talmud it is stated, a priori, that since Genesis 1:27 is singular, Genesis 1:26 must be also. So contrary to what we may have thought, many Jewish

interpreters have simply fought the revelation of God, as they have done for millennia.

Genesis 3:22 also presented problems for the Jewish interpreters. Professor Millard Erickson, in his 1995 book, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity*, states the following:

“A second significant passage is Genesis 3:22, which reads, ‘And the Lord God said, “The man has now become like one of us.”’ This also presented difficulties for the Jews. In the account of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, the Book of Jubilees includes no

verse corresponding to Genesis 3:22. Pappoas, a Palestinian rabbi who lived at the end of the first century A.D., held that the verse implied that Adam had become like an angel. The Targums also are instructive to us on this passage. Onkelos, the earliest, follows closely the original Hebrew in 1:26 and 11:17, but in 3:22, it says, 'And the Lord God said, "Behold, man is become singular in the word by himself.'" Here is an actual and considerable alteration of the original wording of the passage. The Palestinian Targum explains the plural basis that God was addressing angels: the Jerusalem Targum makes a similar interpretation of 3:22. Another Genesis passage pertinent

to our purposes is 11:7, which reads, '[The Lord God said,] "Come, let us go down and confuse their language."' Here again we have the shift in number of the verb from singular to plural. Philo's explanation was that God is surrounded by potencies. Philo notes: 'In the first place, then, we must say this, that there is no existing being equal in honor to God, but there is only one ruler and king who alone may direct and dispose of all things...God is one, he has about him an unspeakable number of powers, all of which are defenders and preservers of everything that is created.' These powers were the ones who went down and confused the tongues of

the persons who were building the tower of Babel. They had to do this; God himself could not carry out this punishment, which is an evil.”

Jesus’s many statements about how many attempts the Father has made to teach the stubborn Israelites should make us wary of any puzzlement as to why the Jews did not understand God. Not everything was revealed in the Old Testament. The Evangelical dictum that “the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed” is truly biblical. Jewish interpretation—and blindness—should be no guide to the Christian.

SUBMISSION OF THE SON

The Bible speaks frequently about God the Father and Jesus Christ His Son, and tells us that Yahweh is Jesus's God. Always the Son is described as in subordination to the Father. This is intended to at once show Jesus's connection to and respect for the Father as it is to show His submission to Him. These statements do not imply that the Son is inferior to the Father innature, but that the Father is functionally superior to the Son.

The many texts in which the subordination of Jesus is either

implied or explicitly stated, and the many references to “the God of our fathers” as separate from Jesus Christ, can be explained by the simple fact that Yahweh, the Father, has preeminence in the Bible. He is largely the subject and the center of attention, the referential or focal point for all others. Jesus’s Messiahship is bound up with proving God’s approval of Him. These texts can also be explained in terms of the limitation of language; the need to authenticate the ministry of the man Christ Jesus and the functional authority of the Father over the Son.

Much confusion could be avoided if these facts were always kept in mind

when reading the many scriptures that speak of God and His Son.

UNITARIAN ‘PROOF TEXTS’

There are several texts that unitarians frequently point to as “proof” that Jesus is not God. As we shall see, however, these passages are often taken in isolation and interpreted narrowly, without the significant light provided by texts that speak of the divinity of Christ. The following are the texts (and arguments) most commonly used by unitarians:

THE FIRSTBORN OVER ALL CREATION

Colossians 1:15 says Christ is “the firstborn over all creation.” This does not mean, as it sounds in English, that Christ was the first to be created. The term translated “firstborn” has to do with preeminence. In Colossians, Paul is battling the Gnostics, who felt Christians were incomplete in Christ. Paul shows that not only is Jesus superior to the cosmos but He is the “firstborn over all creation” in the sense that He is preeminent over it and, in fact, the Author of it. Even in the Old Testament, “firstborn” is not always the first one to be born, but refers to preeminence.

THE BEGINNING OF THE

CREATION OF GOD

Revelation 3:14 is another text that “jumps off the page” in the English translation. It says that Christ is the “Beginning of the creation of God.” The wording of this verse may seem to indicate that Christ was the first thing God created, but that’s not what it says at all. The word arche, translated “Beginning” in this verse, means source, origin, or ruler, which accords with Colossians 1 and John 1, which state that Christ is the Origin and Source of the creation of the world.

In the Old Testament, God is emphatic that He alone created the

world. If we were to take this to mean that God is singular, how could we understand Colossians 1 and John 1, which say that God created the world through Christ? The only solution lies in understanding that Christ is also a member of the Godhead (or “God Family”). Hebrews 1:3 says that Jesus “reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of His nature, upholding the universe by his word of power” (Revised Standard Version). This proves His divinity.

ONE GOD, ONE LORD

First Corinthians 8:6 is a classic text used to deny Jesus’s deity. It says that “there is one God, the Father...

and one Lord Jesus Christ.”

Unitarians conclude, therefore, that Christ is not God. But if we follow this kind of logic we might as well conclude that since Jesus is the one Lord, the Father is not Lord. Yet, this is one of the Father’s titles in both Testaments. In this text, the terms God and Lord denote functional distinctions, but both terms are titles of divinity.

ONE GOD, ONE MEDIATOR

When Paul says, in 1 Timothy 2:5, that “there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,” he does not mean that Christ is not God, as unitarians

claim. Here, Christ's humanity is emphasized, so it is quite natural for Paul to refer to the Father as the "one God." The fact that Christ is contrasted with God proves that the two are functionally distinct, but proves nothing ontologically. Notice that the same verse also contrasts Christ with humans, though He was a man.

NONE GOOD BUT ONE

Mark 10:18 is an interesting text. It is the one where Jesus says, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God." Here, Jesus clearly makes a distinction between Himself and God. By "God" Jesus

clearly refers to the Father. Characteristically, Jesus draws attention away from Himself to the Father whom He came to reveal and on whose mission He was sent. This, however, does not in any way disprove the divinity of Christ.

Jesus could well be leading the man to see the implications of his own statement. If there is none good but God, and you believe that I am good, then I am God! (Of course, His divine prerogatives were veiled during His earthly ministry). If this is not accurate, then are we to assume that Jesus was not really good, that there was some spot or wrinkle in Him? Was He denying His goodness? Or

was He linking His goodness to His divine connectedness to the Father? It is undeniable that the dominant revelation of God is of the Father—in both Testaments. But just as men and women are absolutely equal in nature, yet man is functionally over the woman, so the Head of Christ is God, though Christ and the Father have one nature.

THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON

Some are confused by the references to Jesus as the “only begotten Son” of the Father. Doesn’t this clearly show that He was conceived or created by the Father, that He came into existence at some point in time?

No, it does not! The Greek *monogenes* (“only begotten”) means unique, or only one of a kind. Men and angels are referred to in Scripture as “sons of God,” so to emphasize that Christ’s Sonship is of a special type, qualitatively and quantitatively, the term “only begotten” is used. It simply indicates that Christ’s Sonship is unique. He is the Son of God in a way that no other son of God is.

Another interesting text is 1 Timothy 6:14,15, where God is described as “King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality.” This text is sometimes used by unitarians to exclude Jesus from the Godhead,

since it says that God alone has immortality. If Christ is excluded from immortality, then it naturally follows that He has no right to the title “King of kings and Lord of lords.” But notice the description of Jesus Christ in Revelation 19:16: “And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: King of kings and Lord of lords.” If Christ did not share the Father’s divinity—if He were not truly God—then it would be blasphemous to apply such a title to Him!

HOW COULD JESUS REVEAL THE FATHER?

Consider this question: If Jesus came to reveal the Father—which clearly

means that everything about Him was not known in Old Testament times—then how could that be done?

The word God to the average Jew meant a single Person. If Jesus were to be accepted at all, He had to be seen as acting according to the will of Yahweh. This is why Jesus was at pains to point out that He could not do or say anything of His own, that He was working in harmony with Yahweh. His point in these references was to emphasize His connectedness with Yahweh. But these statements are taken by unitarians to mean that Yahweh is qualitatively superior to Him.

Of course, during Christ's earthly life as a man, the Father was both qualitatively and quantitatively superior to Him. Philippians 2:5–8 is clear in stating that Jesus emptied (kenosis) Himself of His divine prerogatives when he became a man. Many of the unitarians' strongest proof texts can be easily understood in this light. God cannot be tempted, yet Jesus was. God cannot die, yet Jesus died. God knows everything, but Christ in the flesh did not know the hour of His return. No man can see God, yet Jesus was seen. These facts do not prove that Jesus is not God; rather, they support the texts which show that God became a man.

God did become man! This is the great message of salvation, which is undercut by unitarians. This is why the denial of the deity of Jesus is gross and fundamental error. It denies that God has come in the flesh.

THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST

As a human being, Jesus was limited. He had to depend upon the Father to exalt Him, to give Him back the glory He had with the Father before the creation of the world (John 17:5). He gave up His glorified state and did not see equality with God a thing to hold on to, but God exalted

Him after His mission was accomplished. As a man, Jesus went the route and blazed the trail for all humans; He learned obedience through suffering, and was glorified with the divine nature, just as man will be deified when he is saved.

As a human being, Jesus was totally, utterly dependent upon the Father—even for His resurrection. There is a clear contrast in the Scriptures between God and Christ. This confuses many sincere people. How can Christ be God when the Bible over and over again talks about God and Jesus Christ and says there is only one God? Those passages seem to suggest that since the one God is

the Father, and since the Son of the one God is Jesus Christ, then Jesus cannot be God.

But remember, we have to take all the revelation we have on a particular subject. The passages that speak of God as being distinct from Christ cannot contradict the equally clear, though numerically fewer, scriptures that refer to Jesus Christ as God and that point to the plurality of the Godhead. Always keep this in mind: “God” usually refers to the Father. There is clear subordination of Jesus to God. However, we cannot automatically assume that this subordination necessarily means inferiority in nature or a definite time

when Christ came into being.

Because humans are dominated by egotistical and self-centered thinking, we cannot possibly imagine Jesus being at once equal in nature to the Father and in subordination to the Father's authority. We are accustomed to Satan's thinking, which is to get more power than one has. This is precisely the lesson Paul draws out in Philippians 2:5: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Jesus was in the very form of God and did not have to seek divinity—in fact, He had it fully—but He did not hold on to it. The context of this passage is that we should esteem others as better than

ourselves. It is not that they are actually better, but in our minds we must be willing to take second place. This is exactly what Jesus did: He was in the form of God but did not seek to hold on to His divine prerogatives. Instead, He gave up His glory and trusted God to give it back to Him at His exaltation. Voluntarily giving up His glory, Jesus received a name above all names and was declared the Son of God at His resurrection.

CRITICAL TO THE SALVATION STORY

Jesus has willingly subordinated Himself and taken second place to

show the way for man and to demonstrate the folly of Satan's way. What a lesson! Unitarians still fail to grasp it! When we read the texts which show Jesus's subordination as meaning actual inferiority (or inferiority of nature), we miss a critical point of the salvation story and the remarkable demonstration of the love of the Father and Son. We miss the real character of Christ. Modalists take away from the Father's love for the Son and unitarians rob us of a true picture of Christ's love for the Father! Though He was rich, He made Himself poor.

It is tragic that the enemy who has for a long time been the adversary of

Christ has managed to deceive millions regarding the full divinity of our Savior. But let's not be ignorant of the devil's devices (2 Corinthians 2:11). Let's accept and believe those texts that state plainly that Jesus Christ is truly God!

Only then will we be able to answer the vital question Jesus Himself asked His first disciples: "But who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15).

All Scriptural quotations taken from NKJV. Author: Ian Boyne.