

Who Do You Say That He Is? 1 John 2:18-27

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“It really doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you are sincere.” I suspect you have heard that said more than once. I would submit that is obviously false. If you step out on some ice this week, it will not matter if you “really believe” the ice is thick enough to hold you. If the ice is not thick enough, you will fall through. Few would argue that it is fine for people to be Islamic jihadists or white supremacists as long as they are sincere in their belief. Yet many folks say, “When it comes to religion, it doesn’t matter what your religious beliefs are, as long as you are sincere.” Oh, they say it doesn’t matter what your religious beliefs are as long as they help you to be happy, or as long as they help you treat other people better.

Now, I agree, that how we treat other people is probably more important than some of the theology debates in which we engage. For example, whether or not our lives are free from bitterness and greed is probably more significant than what mode of baptism we use. There is one group who insists the only proper way of doing baptism is to dunk the individual three times forward (in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost) in running water, meaning a river or creek. Now if any wish to be baptized that way, I would be happy to accommodate you because I don’t think this is a crucial issue. If it is your sincere belief I am not going to argue with you about it. There are, however, some beliefs which are very important. There are teachings or doctrines of Christianity which really do matter. In fact, whether or not you believe them is more important than we could ever imagine.

Folks, as we have been going through 1 John, I think we are finding it to be a very practical book. The emphasis so far has been forgiveness, obeying God, and loving God instead of the world. In 1 John 2:18-27 the focus switches from practical to belief. Specifically, the question is what do we believe about Jesus? Who is Jesus Christ? In Matthew 16 Jesus asks Peter that question: “Who do you say that I am?” Friends, we are being asked the same question today. Folks, our answer to that question really does matter. Let us pause and pray the Lord will open our minds and hearts to the truth today.

Who is Jesus? The correct answer to that question is found in our text. John does not give us a detailed explanation of who Jesus is, that is why he wrote the fourth gospel, but his view of Jesus is very clear. **1 John 2:22, 23** *Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.* John tells us that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, and that Jesus is the Son, God’s Son. It is impossible to go back in time to know the exact error John is refuting. Many biblical scholars agree there were two different errors being propagated during that time. One group claimed, “Jesus was really just a man.” They denied His deity or ‘godness.’ They said the Spirit of God had come upon Jesus in a very special way, but had left before He died on the cross. The other teaching was that Jesus was not a human being at all, but God the Father disguised as a man. These false teachers denied not the deity of Christ, but His humanity.

John’s teaching, that Jesus is the Messiah and God’s Son, was rejected by both those who denied either Jesus’ deity or humanity. The Bible tells us that Jesus is truly God and truly human. Both natures are contained in one person. One hundred percent God, plus one hundred percent man equals one hundred percent Jesus. Now, even though I was not an all-star math student, I realize those percentages don’t exactly add up. Yet, some things in the universe are beyond the realm of mathematics. Mystery and miracle are how we explain realities which go beyond our experiences. I believe Jesus is both God and man, not because I understand exactly how that works, but because the Bible and Jesus Himself say this is who He is. I agree with Augustine who said, “If you try to understand this mystery, you may lose your mind, but if you deny it, you will lose your soul.”

Now, I am not aware of any groups today who specifically say Jesus was not human. This however, is implied in some New Age teachings which view Christ as an angelic like being. And it also is implied in the teaching of what is called “Oneness Pentecostalism” which denies the Trinity, and believes Father, Son and Spirit are

just different manifestations of God. Yet, I think sometimes we as evangelical Christians, though we believe Jesus was human, are guilty of ignoring this fact. Maybe this is because we don't like to think of Jesus as a baby, not knowing how to talk and needing to wear diapers.

Or maybe it is because we spend a lot of time dealing with folks who deny Jesus is God. Islam, Judaism, and all other non-Christian religions insist that Jesus was something other than God the Son. There are even people who call themselves Christians who reject Jesus' deity or goodness. Liberal Protestants and Catholics usually do that rather subtly. When accused of denying the divinity of Christ, theologian W. Robertson Smith replies, "I have never denied the divinity of Christ. I have never denied the divinity of any man. Jesus Christ is divine, just as all human beings are." This is the attitude which dominates groups like the Jesus seminar. Despite evidence to the contrary, they insist Jesus never really claimed to be God and never actually rose from the dead. Instead they say, He was basically "a social activist," maybe a community organizer, "with a good sense of humor." The folks who say that, certainly don't believe Jesus was the Messiah and Eternal Son of God.

Other groups who claim to be Christian, such as Unitarians or Jehovah Witnesses, or "The Way International" explicitly deny that Jesus was God. "The Way" had a chapter on campus back when I was in college. One time they sponsored a seminar entitled, "Why Jesus is not God." They were not into being subtle. Friends, this is such an important issue. It is crucial that we be clear what separates us from these types of groups. For example, my problem with Jehovah Witnesses is not that they go door to door with their literature. I kind of admire their persistence. My problem with them is not that they refuse to say the "Pledge of Allegiance" or celebrate birthdays. It is not that they have their own Bible or don't believe in the immortality of the soul. My problem, the problem I hope is your problem, with Jehovah Witnesses is that they deny Jesus is the Christ and that He is God's Son. Though the terminology they use can be somewhat confusing, Jehovah Witnesses deny Jesus Christ is God. The fact they may be nice, loving people, committed to good family values, is irrelevant, because they are wrong about who Jesus is, and that is a really big deal.

Now, I suspect some of you are feeling a bit uncomfortable. "Pastor Dan, you seem like a nice guy, but you are so narrow minded on this issue. Isn't it okay for people to disagree about Jesus?" Well, yes and no. I don't want to beat up people because they don't believe Jesus is God. I don't think anyone should be put in jail for denying this. But, this is essential theological truth. And it is important not because I say it is, but because Jesus and His apostles say it is. Let's look at three characteristics, according to John, of those who are wrong about Jesus.

Number one, John calls them "antichrist." *1 John 2:22 Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.* Earlier in his paragraph he writes *2:18 Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so even now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.* Now, this confuses some Christians because they have heard the anti-Christ is an individual who will rule the world during the Great Tribulation. Barak Obama and Donald Trump have both been nominated for that role by some folks, though I am almost certain neither of them fit that role. The Apostle John agrees there will be this false Christ. In the book of Revelation, he calls him "The Beast." The Apostle Paul refers to him as the man of sin (2 Thessalonians 2). However, John says that even now, even in the first century, there were anti-Christ's around. These were people who denied that Jesus Christ was God the Son. The prefix "anti" means false or again. Some day one false, capital A, Antichrist will appear. But in every day, including our own, many anti-Christ's already exist. If someone denies Jesus' divinity or humanity, is someone teaches those things, that person is an anti-Christ. I didn't choose those words, God inspired the Apostle John to do so.

Number two, to deny Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God is a sign one has never been born of God and has never been a genuine Christian. *2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.* Let me read that from the NLT. *2:19 These people left our churches, but they never really belonged with us; otherwise they would have stayed with us. When they left, it proved that they did not belong with us.* Some people in the early church

started claiming Jesus was not God's Son. These folks left the fellowship and formed their own group. This still happens today. Almost all cult leaders were once part of a Christian church, often a Baptist church. John implies, "Anyone who now denies Jesus Christ was never a genuine Christian, no matter what he or she may have said or done in the past."

Many of us are troubled because we know people who at one time professed to be Christians, but now say they no longer believe in Jesus. We wonder, "What happened?" Are they still saved? Or did they somehow lose their salvation? John says, neither. The fact these people have "left" is a sign they were never really believers in Jesus. Now, I don't think John rejects the possibility that a genuine Christian might for some reason temporarily deny Christ. After all, that is essentially what the Apostle Peter did the night Jesus was arrested. God is certainly willing to forgive those who temporarily deny the Lord Jesus and then repent. However, John clearly believes people can make enthusiastic professions of faith on the outside without having any real faith on the inside. I had a friend in college who appeared to be very much "on fire" for the Lord and was very active in our Christian group. However, she later got involved in drugs, became a lesbian, and now claims she is an atheist. She told a friend that Jesus must have been deluded or crazy to think He was God. What went wrong with her? I don't know, and it is not up to me to judge, but this appears to be an example of 1 John 2:19.

Number three, someone who denies Jesus is the Messiah and God's Son is not a child of God. *2:23 No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.* Throughout the Bible, God makes it clear: The only way to have a relationship with God is through trusting in Jesus Christ. He is the only way to God. In **John 14:6** Jesus says, "*I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" Now, we need to remember it is not enough to just "believe about Jesus," to believe that certain facts about Him are true. The Apostle James tells us even the demons believe the right things, including probably that Jesus is both 100% God and 100% human in the same person. To become a Christian means not only believing right things, but also involves turning away from trusting in ourselves, turning away from our rebellion against God, and instead

placing our trust in Jesus Christ and in what He has accomplished for us through His death and resurrection. Being a Christian is not just believing the truth about Jesus, but it does include that. Someone cannot become a Christian or be a Christian unless he or she acknowledges Jesus as the Eternal Son of God. Again, this is not my idea, but the clear teaching of the Bible, especially in 1 John.

Friends, we have been talking about very important truth this morning. I hope you have a clear understanding of who the Bible says Jesus Christ is. Yet, I have a concern. My guess is some of you are thinking, "Yes, Pastor Dan, I agree. Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. But this is not something which really excites me. I have all sorts of things going on in my life and this just doesn't seem to impact me in any practical ways." Well, okay, you are right. This sermon is a little more theological and a little less practical than most of you hear from this pulpit. However, I am convinced that what we have talked about is very relevant to each of us. In our very pragmatic culture, we sometimes forget that biblical truth, Bible doctrine, is the foundation upon which the Christian life must be built. Christianity can be compared to the human body. Theological truth is the skeleton which holds Christianity together and gives it stability. Christian practice, living out the truth, is the flesh which impacts everyday life and gives Christianity its beauty. The Lord does not want us to choose between correct doctrine and right practice. He desires to see both in our lives. Thus, who Jesus Christ really is does matter, in every aspect of life.

How? Number one, **our salvation depends on Jesus being both fully God and fully human.** If Jesus was only a man, even a perfect man, His sacrifice on the cross could not have paid the penalty for our sin. As an innocent man, He could have taken the place of just one other individual. Frankly, the odds are that one individual would not have been anyone in this room. If Jesus was God, but not human, He would have been unable to die, unable to bear the punishment for our sin. This is the wonder of the incarnation which we focus on at Christmas. God became man in order to bring salvation to His people. This is God's marvelous solution to the terrible problem of human rebellion and sin. Thus, to deny either Jesus' deity or humanity is to reject the magnificent salvation God has provided.

Number two, **to deny that Jesus is both divine and human is a terrible insult to the Lord.** That is who He claimed to be. I am Dan Erickson, senior pastor of Chisholm Baptist Church and husband of Nancy Erickson. If you say to me, “Well Dan, I know you are the pastor here, but I don’t believe Nancy is your wife,” I would be insulted. Or, if you say, “Yes, I know you are Nancy’s husband, but I don’t believe you are really the pastor of this church,” I would be insulted. Friends, a person doesn’t really believe in or follow Jesus Christ if he or she refuses to acknowledge either Jesus’ deity or humanity. There is no Christianity without Jesus, a Jesus who is fully God and fully human.

So, what do we need to do today? What is the practical application of this truth?

Number one, each of us needs to make sure we correctly answer the question: Who is Jesus? It is the most important question we will ever answer. Let me read what C. S. Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity*. *Once we recognize Jesus is not a liar, not a lunatic, but is indeed who He claims to be –God come to earth as a human being—the next step, the only logical one, is not to ignore Him, but to turn to Jesus and receive Him as Lord and Savior.* Friend, if you have not done that, as God enables, this is what you need to do today. If you are not sure what that means, please make sure you talk to me later.

Number two, we need to make sure we don’t compromise our belief in who Jesus is. 2:24 (NLT) *So you must remain faithful to what you have been taught from the beginning. If you do, you will remain in fellowship with the Son and with the Father.* In other words, don’t get confused by false teachers. You have been taught that Jesus is the Messiah and the Eternal Son of God. Don’t be led astray. When people come to your door or show up on your television or computer screen claiming to have a better idea, it doesn’t matter how polite, pleasant or articulate they are. If they deny Jesus Christ, they are wrong. If you hear about some scholars claiming that Jesus was a social activist with a good sense of humor who never really rose from the dead, don’t be confused. These folks can believe what they want, but that is not what the Bible teaches. That

is not Christianity, and it is not what the historical evidence indicates. This is one point on which we must not compromise. We need to insist on agreement. We need to say, “Unless you believe Jesus is God’s Son I cannot treat you as a fellow Christian or as a brother or sister in Christ. This doesn’t mean I should be mean to you. God calls us to treat all human beings with love and respect because each of us is made in His image. Yet, this is one issue where there is no room for diversity or pluralism. There should be no compromise.

I always remember a conversation I had with a man who was the president of our student body the first year I was at Bethel Seminary. This fellow was training to be a pastor. We were in a theological discussion and I asked this question: “Tim, what difference would it make in your ministry if you believed, like the Arians and Jehovah Witnesses, that Jesus was a created being and not equal with God?” He responded, “I don’t think it would make any difference at all. The church could still love people if we didn’t believe Jesus was God.” Friends, John says that is the teaching of anti-Christ. I don’t think Tim ever became a pastor, which is good, not because He was a bad person, but because Christian pastors need to understand that it matters a great deal who we believe Jesus is.

Friend, ask yourself this question. Could I be comfortable in a church that doesn’t believe that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human? Suppose that church seems really good, better than many others. The people are very friendly, the children’s program is very high quality, and the worship time is just wonderful. Their choir sounds like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Maybe it is the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Could you be happy in a church like that? If so, maybe you have not been listening very carefully. If a church is wrong about Jesus Christ, it doesn’t matter what they have right. Friend, who do you say Jesus is? My prayer is that each of us would be able to say in our minds and in our hearts, He is the Messiah, He is the Eternal Son of God, He is my Savior and my Lord. Let’s confess that this morning as we sing.