

### Deity on Trial

1. The question of Jesus' true identity is a subject that has been debated throughout the centuries. What are some reasons why people deny Jesus' deity today?

In the first four chapters of John's gospel he recorded many witnesses to Jesus' identity as He interacted with individuals in Jerusalem, Samaria and Galilee. Up to this point we have seen frequent responses of faith to Jesus' mighty works and "signs." This section of the book makes an important contribution to John's argument and the fulfillment of his purpose in 20:30-31. As we look ahead to chapters 5-10, the scene will change dramatically. These chapters begin to trace the development of open opposition on the part of the Jewish leaders with the eventual consequence of Jesus' death.

**Drawing Near:** Blessed Lord, we come before You to give You the honor and worship that belongs to You as Holy God. May we give You all the time You desire to make known the glories of who You are.

The healing recorded in John 5:1-9 and the following Sabbath controversy (5:10) brought about increased tensions between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders. In our passage this week the *nature* and *identity* of Jesus becomes the central focus of this ongoing conflict.

2. Briefly review **John 5:1-15** to appreciate the setting of the passage. Then **read Jesus' response to the Jews in verses 16-30**. (The "Jews" in this gospel is a term that refers to the Jewish religious leaders.) This section is filled with deep spiritual truths that challenge the heart and mind, so please read thoughtfully and prayerfully. Look especially for the repeated words and phrases. Note them in the space below.
3. Consider why Jesus chose to heal this man on the Sabbath. How would Jesus' Sabbath activities make the Jews consider who Jesus was? (Reflect on verse 17 and Mark 2:27-28.)
4. In Jesus' initial response to the Jews (verse 17) how does He claim equality with God?
5. How is Jesus' claim of equality confirmed in verse 18?

6. What attitude towards Jesus is seen in verses 16-18 that has not been previously recorded in this gospel?

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Jewish faith was belief in One True God. During the time of Moses, God declared, “See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides Me” (Deuteronomy 32:39). Jesus’ claim of a unique relationship with God the Father *appeared* to compromise the belief of only one God. The Jews thus mounted an organized opposition.

*While there are a multitude of verses that clearly state there is one and only one God, as history unfolded God progressively revealed more and more about Himself until man finally came to see that while God is a single infinite being, there are three personal distinctions within the Godhead. Each of the three persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is called God in Scripture. Refer to the handout, The Mystery of God, for a biblical overview of the nature of God.*

Reflect on Jesus’ bold response to the accusations of the Jewish leaders in verses 19-30. Consider **re-reading** this section in several translations. Ponder the meaning of each phrase. Ask the Spirit of God to be your teacher.

7. List briefly the ways in which Jesus claims full equality with the Father in verses 19-30.

8. What do you learn from this passage about the unique relationship or inner life of God the Father and God the Son? Share your insights.

The Greek verb for “loves” in verse 20 is *phileo*, the love of deep feelings and affection. This is the only time *phileo* is used in the New Testament to speak of the Father’s love for the Son. The present tense of the verb indicates an eternally uninterrupted and all-knowing love that leaves no room for ignorance.

9. What do you think Jesus means when He speaks here of the “greater works” He will do? Consider the broad context.
10. According to verse 23, *why* has the Father entrusted all judgment to the Son?
11. What truth is being emphasized in John 5:23b and 1 John 2:23?

In verse 24 Jesus begins to develop more fully an idea from a preceding argument. **Read and compare** verse 21 with verse 24. Notice the verb tenses throughout.

12. a. What reassuring truths do you find in verse 24?
  
- b. Explain what is meant by “hears” and “believes.”
  
- c. Is *eternal life* a present possession, a future possession, or both? Give your reasons.
  
- d. From John 17:3 and 1 John 5:11-13, describe the meaning of eternal life.

We have been brought by Jesus’ words to a holy place. The invitation to “believe” and “receive” eternal life is an invitation to participate in the *inner life* and *love of* the Trinity. Because of the work of the Son on the cross, and because of the re-generating work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, you and I who say “yes” to Jesus as Savior are adopted by the Father into the Trinitarian Family. This is so we can participate in the *Life* within the circle of the Trinity. Can you think of anything more wonderful than that!

13. Being included in the eternal life of God allows Him to heal all wounds and enables us to stop demanding satisfaction. What applications does this truth have for your life right now?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
14. Jesus reinforced His promise of life with yet another solemn announcement (John 5:25-30).
  - a. In 5:25 Jesus speaks of a time that “has now come.” Who are the dead who already hear and live? **Reread** these verses carefully.
  
  
  - b. In John 5:28-29 Jesus speaks of a time that is still future. How will that resurrection be different from the one in John 5:25?
  
  
  - c. Why is Jesus qualified to judge all people (5:26-27, 30)?

In verse 29 it appears that a person's destiny is based on whether they have done good or evil. In verse 25 a person's destiny seems to be determined by their faith in Christ. How do we resolve this paradox? "*Jesus' reference to good works in John 5:28-29 is to that which occurs after saving faith. To be saved, one needs the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). Authentic faith however expresses itself in good works (Ephesians 2:10).*" -Geisler

15. Think about how you are living your life now in relationship to verses 25-29. Are there any changes in your life that you would like to make as you look forward to these promises being fulfilled?
  
16. In the final section of our passage (John 5:31-47), Jesus recognized that His claim to be "equal with God" would be disputed if not authenticated by two or more witnesses in accordance with Jewish law. (See Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 17:6.)
  - a. **Read John 5:31-47** and list the "witnesses" Jesus offers His skeptics as proof of His claims about His relationship with the Father.
  
  - b. How does their testimony validate His claims?
  
17. How did Jesus characterize the Jewish leaders?

It is both sad and ironic that the Jews had the greatest of all God's manifestations standing right before their eyes—Jesus, the Word, the visible expression of God to men, but they would not come to Him that they might have life.

18. As you look back over this passage, consider all the astounding claims that point to the deity of Christ. What truth about Jesus has touched your life most significantly? Why?

*In closing let your mind dwell on the awe-inspiring fact that if you have received the gift of eternal life you can participate in the Life and intimate fellowship within the circle of the Trinity!*

# The Mystery of God

As we seek to explore what Scripture says about the mystery of God, we begin with the recognition that in the course of God's self disclosure to mankind, He revealed His nature to man in progressive stages. First, God revealed His essential unity and uniqueness; that is, He revealed that He is One and that He is the only true God (Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; Isaiah 37:20; 43:10; 44:6-8; 45:5; 46:9). This was the necessary starting point for God's self revelation, for throughout history Israel was surrounded by nations deeply engulfed in polytheism (the belief in many gods).

In the unfolding of God's self revelation it also becomes clear that there are three distinct Persons who are called God in Scripture: the Father (1 Peter 1:2), the Son (John 1:1, 20:28), and the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4). When all that Scripture has to say is put together it presents a unique and mysterious reality: Within the One essential being there are three personal distinctions. The distinction lies in the relations. In the deepest mystery of His being God is an intimate relationship, a fellowship, a community of love where deep abiding, tender, affectionate mutual sharing is continually experienced. The three-ness of God is the basis of the fundamental assertion that God is love (1 John 4:16).

Besides being called God, each of the three Persons on different occasions is seen to possess the attributes of deity. See examples below.

- Eternal: the Father (Psalm 90:2), the Son (Micah 5:2) and the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 9:14).
- Holiness: the Father (Revelation 15:4), the Son (Acts 3:14) and the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-14).
- Omnipresence: the Father (Jeremiah 23:23-24), the Son (Matthew 18:20; 28:20) and the Holy Spirit (Psalm 139:7).

In addition to having the attributes of deity, each of the three Persons is involved in doing the works of deity. All three were involved in the creation of the world: The Father (Genesis 2:7; Psalm 102:25), the Son (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2), and the Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:2; Job 33:4; Psalm 104:30). Further examples include the incarnation, the resurrection, indwelling believers, and comforting Christians. The three Persons always act in harmonious unity in all the mighty works wrought by God throughout the universe.

We also find three-in-oneness emphasized in Scripture. Just prior to His return to heaven, Jesus told His disciples, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the *name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). The word "name" is singular in the Greek, indicating that there is one God, but three distinct Persons within the Godhead. Other examples of three-in-oneness can be found in 2 Corinthians 13:14, Genesis 1:26; 11:7 and Matthew 3:16-17.

Finite minds will never be able to fully grasp how three Persons can subsist in one God. What we can do is to anchor our faith on what Scripture reveals to be true: *God is a Trinity*.

*"How awesome is the LORD most High, The great King over all the earth."*

*Psalm 47:2*