

John's Christological Conclusion of the Identity of Christ

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John's Gospel paints a portrait of Jesus Christ that is as bold as it is controversial, an image that portrays Jesus as God. The divinity of Jesus Christ in principle is predominately accepted in the theological community, yet the scope of His divinity is a matter of some debate among theologians and Bible scholars who have varying views. Charles Ryrie says in his systematic theology, *Ryrie's Basic Theology*, "many deny that Jesus is God, because, they say, there is no "clear" evidence that He ever claimed to be divine."¹ As we will see in subsequent sections of this work, John's portrayal of Jesus speaks to the contrary. Despite the inability of religious thinkers to reach unanimity in their assessments who Jesus is from a divine perspective, the Gospel of John is unequivocal in its assignment of divinity to Christ and in acknowledging the fact that Jesus is indeed God.

In this brief work of theological analysis of the Gospel work of John, we will explore the identity of Jesus Christ from John's perspective by discussing four categories of the identity of Christ. We will explore the divinity of Christ, how He demonstrated His divinity, His divine work of deliverance, and His parting works and words upon His departure from His earthly ministry.

The Identity of Jesus in Divinity

John opens his Gospel in Chapter 1:1-18 with a prologue that is critical to understanding his perception of who Jesus Christ is – God in human form. Edwin Blum shares his idea of what John's thoughts are concerning the Christ in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*; he believes

¹ Ryrie, Charles C. 1999. *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers. 1999)

John is communicating the fact that, “Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, and His words and deeds are those of the God-Man.”²

The Apostle and author of this fourth Gospel begins with a flurry of theological truths that find their compliments largely in the first book of the Bible. Genesis 1:1 opens the biblical text with the very familiar phrase, “In the beginning God...”, where the Hebrew word for “God” is *Elohim*, which is a masculine plural noun meaning “God” and “deity” and is applicable to God in terms of His work of creation. This is an important distinction of the word because it is inclusive of the Godhead proper, meaning the essence and existence of God the Father, God the Son (The Word), and God the Holy Spirit. Comparatively, John says his opening verse, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1, KJV) Here we see similar text but with a deeper level of detail, as well as some very interesting and powerful assertions. John clearly identifies Jesus Christ is the Word of God and, “The term “Word” is the common Greek word *logos*, which meant “speaking, a message, or words.”³ This is John’s way of informing his readers that he considers Jesus to be the spoken expression of who God is or, in other words, Jesus is the means by which God is revealed and communicated to the world.

John says the Word was in the beginning to emphasize the divine ontology, eternal nature, and preexistence of Jesus Christ. To emphasize that Jesus existed in the same beginning as God is seen in during creation, is to make the bold claim of Jesus’ divinity. John further affirms his perspective that Jesus is divine by also making the point that the Word, meaning

² Blum, Edwin A. 1985. [“John.”](#) In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, edited by J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, 2:271. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books. 1983)

³ Ibid.

Jesus, was also “with” God. Blum suggests that this idea of Jesus being with God is an indication that He was, “in a special relationship of eternal fellowship in the Trinity. The word “with” translates the Greek *pros*, which here suggests “in company with””⁴ Here we get a rather blatant reference to Jesus Christ being part of the triune Godhead in the person of God the Son.

John continues his revelatory discourse regarding the identity of Jesus by exponentially increasing the theological tension of his perception of the Christ. The third part of John 1:1 is somewhat audacious in its presentation, in that the theological gloves come completely off as John refuses to hold back his views any further. John plainly states that the Word was God. Once again, Blum is in complete agreement, as am I, that there is no question of the divinity of Jesus Christ when he states, “The Word is eternal; the Word is in relationship to God (the Father); and the Word is God.”⁵ John’s view of Jesus in his Gospel is that Jesus is God.

Up to now, John has propositioned his portrait of Jesus and His divinity within the boundaries of a spiritual context. The Word was in the beginning, which denotes His eternal nature, the Word was with God in fellowship, which asserts His preexistence, and the Word was God, which clearly presents His divine ontology. Now, the mystery begins to show a bit of clarity, as we explore John’s rationale for how God, a divine being with a perfect nature could impact and influence a mortal and imperfect humanity. John’s explanation is this, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14, KJV). John’s Gospel presents Jesus Christ to the world as the God-man, Immanuel, which means in interpretation, God with us. Craig Koester helps us understand why this was necessary in his book, *The Word of Life: A*

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Theology of John's Gospel, when he says, “God sends his Word in the flesh because flesh is what all people share. The flesh is not strange but familiar. This enables God to speak to human beings in genuinely human form.”⁶ John wanted the world to know that a sovereign and infinite God needed a way to relate personally with a finite and fleshly mankind, and that His solution was to reveal Himself in a form that was familiar to man – the human form.

In the coming sections of this paper, we will see for ourselves in Scripture how John substantiates his claim of Jesus' divine identity. John does this by walking his readers through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, so that they can make their own determination as to whether or not they will accept Jesus as Lord based on his rendition of the Gospel story.

The Identity of Jesus in Demonstration

John writes his Gospel in a way that one will be able to logically deduce his assertion that Jesus is God. In Chapter 1:19 through Chapter 12:50, John's Gospel provides empirical evidence of who Jesus is by sharing a host of signs and wonders that serves as concrete examples of who He really is. These chapters and verses detail several occasions of Jesus demonstrating His authority and dominion as the Son of Man, by engaging His divine abilities to effect physical and spiritual impacts upon the lives common people.

The first demonstration of the identity of Jesus comes in the form of an acknowledgement of who He is from the prophesied forerunner of the Messiah, John the Baptist. John the Baptist laid the ministerial foundation for the Kingdom work Jesus was assigned to do. When it was time for Jesus to assume His role and ministry, it was John the Baptist who endorsed Jesus as the

⁶ Koester, Craig R. 2008. *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel*. (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 2008), 29

Christ, “the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29, KJV) John the Baptist’s responsibility was to take a backseat to the ministry of Jesus, as is also expressed by Gary Burge in the *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, “The chief announcement of John the Baptist centers on the eminence of Jesus. Jesus is superior to John inasmuch as he “was before [him]”⁷ The Apostle John provides a biblical reference for this idea when giving an answer to the Pharisees as to his own identity, “Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.” (John 1:22-23, KJV) This answer did not suffice to satisfy the question for the Pharisees, but it does offer the necessary insight for the readers of the Gospel understand why John the Baptist willingly accepted his diminishing role in public ministry.

The identity of Jesus is also seen in the administration of the miracles he performed. Some of the amazing works He did demonstrates His sovereignty over human religious institutions. Jesus purposely performed miracles that stood as an affront to the established tenants of Judaism. For example, in John Chapter 5, Jesus went to Jerusalem on the Sabbath and healed a man who was lame from birth, an act that infuriated the religious leaders because such a thing was done on a religiously established day of rest. The fact that Jesus disregarded religious orthodoxy, and operated under His divine authority to make such changes is evidence that He had the right to do so. Burge writes about Jesus exercising His authority to challenge religious rituals in the Gospel of John, “In chapters 2–4 Jesus is compared with important institutions, and,

⁷ Burge, Gary M. 1995. “[John](#).” In *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, Baker Reference Library. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House. 1995), 3:848–49.

in each instance, his presence makes them obsolete. (The same will be true of 5:1–10:42. There Jesus will appear during the major Jewish festivals and demonstrate his authority.)⁸

John also writes of Jesus' divine authority over life and death in the story of Lazarus in Chapters 11 and 12, where He provides a foreshadowing of death and resurrection. The *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* says, "John has chosen a miracle story that epitomizes Christ's mission and fate. With superb dramatic form the Lazarus story sums up Jesus' career."⁹ This is more evidential demonstration given to us by John that Jesus is, in fact, divine as the power of life and death is controlled and governed by the God-man, Jesus Christ.

John shows us in this section that Jesus demonstrated his divine authority over the course of His earthly ministry. Jesus turned water into wine, He healed the sick and the lame, He superseded religious tradition and orthodoxy, and he brought the dead back to life. John wants his readers to know that this kind of power and authority can only be manifested by God Himself, and in these cases it was done by God in the flesh – Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Identity of Jesus in Deliverance

The greatest evidence of the divine identity of Jesus Christ is found Chapters 18-29 where we see the sacrificial deliverance He provided through His death, burial, and resurrection from the dead. Throughout his Gospel story, John has given his readers an epic depiction of who he believes Jesus to be. In the beginning of the Gospel book, John makes bold assertions about the person and nature of Jesus Christ and concludes with the idea that Jesus is indeed God. The Gospel then moves into the physical, yet supernatural evidence that proves that Jesus is God because He wields the power of God to effect change in the lives of people everywhere. Now,

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

John has his readers exactly where he wants them – at the doorstep of promise, and on the precipice of personal deliverance and eternal salvation.

John first gives his readers some historical insight into the deliverance God promised that He would provide, and this is found in Chapter 13 during the Passover meal with Jesus and His disciples. The significance of the Passover has always been that death will pass over those who are protected by the spilled blood of a lamb. In this Gospel story, John has brought Jesus (the Lamb of God) together with His disciples to celebrate the passing over of death because of the covering of lamb's blood on the posts of the house. The projection that John is making in this story is that Jesus is Himself the Passover Lamb, whose blood will soon be spilled and spread upon the spiritual doorposts of the hearts of all who will believe in His name.

John continues to promote the identity of Jesus being God by painting another portrait within this same Gospel, but this portrait would be one pain and sacrifice – the sacrifice of the Lamb of God by crucifixion. John relates details of the entire passion of Christ, from the scrutiny of the trials to the brutality of the cross. John wants his readers to know that no man would have been able to endure the suffering that Jesus did. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue gives the reason Jesus was able to accomplish the cruelty of crucifixion, “The Holy Spirit enabled Jesus to endure the hours of trial before and during the crucifixion—the inner agonies of Gethsemane, the humiliation before Pilate and Herod, the scourging and crown of thorns, the road to Golgotha, and the crucifixion.”¹⁰ John wants there to be no question, no proud audacity from those who would dare falsely claim to possess the mental, physical, and spiritual fortitude to endure the agonies of crucifixion. John wants his readers to know and believe that no one but Jesus Christ,

¹⁰ MacArthur, John, and Richard Mayhue, eds. 2017. [*Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*](#). (Wheaton, IL: Crossway. 2017)

God in the flesh could satisfy the divine requirement of being a perfect sacrifice to take away the sin of the world.

To further expound on the idea that Jesus is divine and indeed God, John in Chapter 20 revisits the most powerful indicator of the divinity of Jesus – the resurrection. I classify this as a revisit because the most impactful concept of the resurrection was introduced by John in Chapter 11 in the account of Lazarus being raised from the dead. Lazarus’ resurrection was truly miraculous, but it pales in comparison to the efficacy of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, because Lazarus was raised by Jesus, but Jesus raised Himself.

John ventures into the resurrection story by first presenting an empty tomb. This scene is intentionally designed for the readers of this Gospel to recall the words of Jesus when He said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” (John 2:19, KJV) The empty tomb not only demonstrates the power of Jesus to raise Himself from the dead, but it is also a fulfillment of His own prophecy.

The Identity of Jesus in Departure

John’s final step in communicating his own perspective of who Jesus is focuses on the His last recorded days on earth post-resurrection. John apparently thought it was important to capture some of the things Jesus did, and some of the interactions He had as the resurrected Christ. Perhaps John felt that a good way persuade readers of the divine identity of Jesus was to document the actions of the living Christ during a time when most people thought Him to be dead. As the Gospel records, Jesus was not dead – at least not any longer, and now He is present and interactive in the lives of His disciples and others.

John attempts to persuade his readers to consider his view of the identity of Jesus Christ, by offering them a reminder of the miraculous abilities of Christ. In Chapter 21, John takes

advantage of recording one last miracle of Jesus as a parting shot of divine power to demonstrate who Jesus is. John writes about the miracle of the one hundred and fifty-three fish, which is almost a repeat of one Jesus' earlier miracles at the scene of a fishing situation. Burge also agree with this assessment, "The story of the miraculous catch of fish has close parallels with another miracle (Luke 5:1–11).¹¹ John seems to want to use the power of repetition to ensure his readers remember that the Jesus who about to exit the earthly stage is the same Jesus who entered demonstrating the same level of authority and power.

Lastly in the sphere of demonstration, John shows his readers that Jesus has command authority over those whom He calls in the work of the ministry. Jesus has a most memorable dialogue with Peter regarding his love for Christ and his commitment to the assignment he has been given. Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him three separate times, and each time, Peter answers indicating that he indeed does love Jesus. In response, Jesus instructs Peter to feed His sheep, in essence, Jesus wants Peter and all the disciples to faithfully engage in the work of the ministry, preaching the Gospel, teaching the Word of God, and edifying the body of Christ. As Lord and master of those whom He called, Jesus demonstrate His authority to demand excellence in ministry from the individuals He has charged with such a great responsibility.

Conclusion

John's Gospel has the distinction of painting a portrait of Jesus Christ that goes differs greatly from that of the other Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, in that He wants to establish and present Jesus as divine and even more specifically, God in the flesh. This Gospel rendition teaches deep spiritual and theological lessons and lays a foundation of knowledge

¹¹ Burge, Gary M. 1995. "[John.](#)" In *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, Baker Reference Library. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House. 1995), 3:848–49.

about who Jesus is that is sure spark sharp debate and critical theological thinking. There is already plenty of those intellectual exchanges taking place today, but if those discussion lead to more people finally seeing Jesus Christ from John's point of view, then I think John's purpose for writing the Gospel will be much the more appreciated.

John accomplishes his goal of informing his readers of who Jesus Christ is from his own perspective, and he does not do it without reliable references to the Old Testament and verifiable conclusions drawn from historical accounts and facts. John wanted his readers to know without a doubt that Jesus is God, eternal in His nature, preexistent in His presence, and divine in His ontology. John makes these three elements of Jesus' identity clear in his Gospel, and in my opinion, dissenters would be hard-pressed to try and prove otherwise.

As we continue to read and study the Gospel of John, lets us remember theological context in which he wrote his Gospel, which is from the perspective that Jesus Christ is indeed divine and by extension and fact, is indeed God. Let us also appreciate the historical context within which he wrote, and let us certainly appreciate the inspirational, the doctrinal, and the salvific value this Gospel brings to the theological table.

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