

Sermon 97: Romans 9:5: The Deity of Christ

OUTLINE

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Evidence from Paul

INTRODUCTION

C.S. Lewis writes, "People often say... 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I won't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a good moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us." (Peter Lewis, *The glory of Christ*, p4).

Today as we continue with our look at Romans we are zooming in on Romans 9:5 which teaches us that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. 'To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.' We have spent some time looking at the humanity of Christ when we examined Romans 8:3 so I will refrain from going over that ground again, instead we will take all of our time looking at the NT evidence of the deity of Christ.

Let me start us off with a scenario. A JW comes to your door telling you that God is not a Trinity and that Jesus is merely the archangel Michael, now without using any of John's writings can you prove that Jesus is God? This is what we want to address this morning. Islam denies the Jesus is God secular atheism denies Jesus is God, the various cults deny that Jesus is God are you able as a Christian to articulate and defend the biblical teaching that Jesus is God? You are a Christian who believes the orthodox faith that Jesus is fully God and man but can you defend it, are you merely embracing it out of tradition? Are you convinced of His identity that it feeds into your worship, your adoration, your holiness and your happy wonder over who has died for your sins? This truth is not merely academic but fundamental to all we do as believers. We will look first at the Gospels and then at Paul.

Evidence from Jesus

John's gospel is the best place to begin, it opens with a declaration that Jesus is God, 1:1, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' You will of course know that the JWs have their own translation called the New World Translation and they add a single letter to make Jesus less than God, 1 "In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the word was a god." (NWT). And they quote several Greek experts in support of their translation. They are basically dishonest because the scholars they quote do not support their view. Dr Julius R Mantey was

interviewed regarding the Watchtower translation. And when questioned regarding the translation of John 1:1 he says: "The Jehovah's Witnesses have forgotten entirely what the order of the sentence indicates - that the 'Logos' [or Word] has the same substance, nature, or essence as the Father. To indicate that Jesus was just 'a god,' the Jehovah's Witnesses would have to use a completely different construction in the Greek." (Rhodes pg 103).

And when questioned about the fact that he had been quoted to support the translation, he says,

"Well...I was disturbed because they had misquoted me in support of their translation. I called their attention to the fact that the whole body of the New Testament was against their view. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is glorified and magnified - yet here they were denigrating Him and making Him into a little god of a pagan concept." (Rhodes pg 103-104).

And when asked whether the Jehovah's Witnesses quote other scholars in context he replied:

"No. They use this device to fool people into thinking that scholars agree with the Jehovah's Witnesses. Out of all the Greek professors, grammarians, and commentators they have quoted, only one (a Unitarian) agreed that 'the word was a god.'" (Rhodes pg 104).

In the interview Mantey went on to say,

"Ninety-nine percent of the scholars of the world who know Greek and who have helped translate the Bible are in disagreement with the Jehovah's Witnesses. People who are looking for the truth ought to know what the majority of the scholars really believe. They should not allow themselves to be misled by the Jehovah's Witnesses and end up in hell." (Rhodes pg 104).

Other verses in John include John 8:58, 'Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." You will recognise the odd phrasing, 'I am' as being a reference to the OT name of God. When God appeared to Moses at the burning bush this is the name that God used, 'Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Ex. 3:13-14). We see that the Jews understood this because they sought to stone Jesus for blasphemy (John 8:59).

Likewise we Jesus showing Himself to be equal to the Father in John 5:17-29, Jesus has just healed the man who had been an invalid for 38 years by the Pool of Siloam. He did it on the Sabbath Day. The Jews persecuted Him so he responded by justifying His actions, not on the grounds of a work of mercy or necessity, but by making Himself equal to God in His always working (v17). This was not lost on the Jews, and as a result we are told that they tried all the harder to kill Him as He was making Himself equal with God (v18). What is interesting about why they tried to kill Him was His reference to God as His Father. They would have been accustomed to the idea of God as Father from Malachi 1:6, but they saw that Christ meant more than God's fatherly way with Israel, but that Christ was claiming a likeness of nature, as families share, and for this they sought to kill Him. *Secondly*, the Son is said to 'see' all that the Father is doing (v19), and that the Father shows Him all that He

does (v20). *Thirdly*, the Son is able to do everything that the Father does, in other words there is nothing He can do that I cant, '...whatever the Father does the Son also does' (v19). *Fourthly*, the Father is said to love the Son (v20). Now to you and I this is not strange, but we need to add the other references to God's loving the Son here and appreciate the depth of the love indicated, it is a unique love, that none of us share in. *Fifthly*, in v21 we see the Son gives life just as the Father does. *Sixthly*, in v22 Christ is given the work of all judgement. *Seventhly*, and probably most importantly, Christ shares in the Father's honour, 'that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father...' (v23). *Eighthly*, Christ gives spiritual life and will resurrect all from the dead by the power of His voice (v25,28). So, what is the conclusion? The Jews are trying to kill Jesus for making Himself equal with God, has He cleared up the confusion or given them more reason to worry about His claims? Christ is equal to the Father in nature, authority, knowledge, actions, salvation, and honour. What else can we conclude but that Christ is fully God. This was the conclusion that the Jews reached, John 10:33 (ESV) "The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God." This charge of claiming to be the Son of God in an ontological sense was the charge that followed Him to the cross, when Pilate wanted to release Jesus we see the following response, John 19:7 (ESV) "The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God." It was when He claimed to be the Son of Man who will share God's throne that the high priest tore his clothes and charged Him with blasphemy (Matthew 26:63-66). Christ took a very familiar phrase 'Son of God', and he made it mean more than Davidic King, or Messiah, but filled it with divine meaning. For this He was killed. Other would be messiahs would be killed for insurrection not blasphemy, but He claimed to be more than they thought the messiah could be.

Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV) "And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Firstly, notice again the 'All authority' language with all its inferences of Christ's ability to do the job. Secondly, notice Christ calling His disciples to teach and observe His teachings. This stresses His authority not only over the heavens and the earth, but in the area of religion and worship as well. Thirdly, we should gasp at the thought that people are called to be Christ's disciples, that He is our object of faith. Fourthly, we should note the reference to omnipresence, that Christ is with His Church always. This is an attribute that only God has. Even the devil can only be in one place at one time. And finally, God's new covenant name is no longer YHWH, but the single name of The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit. Notice that it does not say that we are baptised into the 'names' plural, but the 'name' singular. This accounts for why the name of God YHWH which occurs over 6000 times in the OT only occurs once in abbreviated form in the word 'Hallelujah' in the NT. If this does not speak of Christ's deity then nothing does. Anyone who has even a little knowledge of the OT usage of 'The Name' will know the import of this baptismal formula. Christ is God.

Christ's divine identity is confirmed by His actions. We see in Mark 2:1-11, that He has the authority to forgive sins. Sin is against God, and only He has the authority to forgive sins,

yet Christ is seen to do it. *Secondly*, Jesus receives worship. Not only in His earthly ministry, where some of His disciples could have been mistaken, but in heaven as well. John 20:28 (ESV) "Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Rev. 5:12-14 (ESV) saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped." *Thirdly*, we see that He hears prayer, John 14:14 (ESV) "If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it." And is prayed to, 2 Cor. 12:8-9 (ESV) "Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Acts 7:59 (ESV) "And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Acts 9:10-17 (ESV) Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 1 Cor. 16:22 (ESV) If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come.'

The truth of Jesus being God was not a new teaching that originated with Christianity, but something that was hinted at and revealed in the OT as well. Besides the references to Trinity in the OT, the 'us' passages (Genesis 1:26-27, 3:11, 11:7, Is 6:8), there are also references to Christ being divine. The first is the recurring appearance of The Angel of the Lord. This is not merely a Theophany, but a pre-incarnate appearance of the 2nd person of the Trinity. Firstly, in Genesis 16 when He appears to Hagar, we see the Angel is called God, and given a new name, El-Roi by Hagar (11-13). Secondly, both in Ex 3:1-6, and Josh 5:13-15 we see the place where the Angel is as Holy ground, as if it were the LORD Himself. Joshua falls down in reverence before the Captain but is not rebuked like John in Revelation 19:22, 22:8-9. Thirdly, this Angel speaks for God in the first person. Turn to Judges 6, here we see The Angel of the Lord appearing to Gideon in v12, but in v14 he is the LORD, and in v16, 18 as well. And so here we see a figure distinct from God but identified with him.

Then there are the various references found in the Messianic prophecies. Isaiah 7:14 (ESV) "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." Immanuel means God with us. Isaiah 9:6 (ESV) "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his

shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” A Child who will be called God. Micah 5:2 (ESV) “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.” Here we see that the promised Messiah from Bethlehem will be from ancient times, from everlasting. Jeremiah 23:5-6, “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 6 In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’ Here we see God being our righteousness but it is Christ who is our righteousness.

Evidence from Paul

As we look now at Romans 9:5 we see another verse where the NT speaks of Christ’s deity, ‘To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.’ Here we have one of the traditional proof texts for Christ’s deity. This is a wonderful verse because Paul affirms Christ’s full humanity and deity in one verse. This is further enhanced by the fact that Paul praises Christ as ‘God over all, blessed forever. Amen.’ This also amplifies the pain of the unbelief of the Jews because the Messiah they had been prepared for was also the God they claimed to worship so that they not only rejected their expected Messiah but God Himself.

This is of course not the only verse where Paul affirms the deity of Christ it is also all over his writings. to Philippians 2:6-8 (ESV) “...who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, [8] he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” In these verses we have revealed that Jesus was in very nature God and that he took upon himself humanity; this is another section which clearly teaches that Jesus is 100% God and 100% man.

Verse 6 clearly teaches that Jesus is God and equal to the Father. The words, “who, being in very nature God” describe Jesus nature/being and he has the very nature of God, not an angel or man (at least not yet; see v7). And then in the next part of verse 6 we are told that Jesus is equal to the Father, and yet gave up his rights to assume the role of Saviour; “did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.” In other words, he did not selfishly cling to his rights but willingly denied what was his to become our Saviour.

Verse 7 then teaches us about the humanity he assumed; we are told firstly that in becoming human he took a lower office and secondly, that when he became human, he did not merely appear human or possess a human body, but God the Son became in very nature a human. The first part of verse 7 tells us of his step down in office/station “but made himself nothing”. This is a profound statement, for the one whom angels worship (Heb 1:6, Rev 5:12-14), became a nobody. We need to stress that although he became a

man, he did not cease to be God. He became less by addition, not by subtraction. He became a man without ceasing to be in very nature God. He did not cease to be God but gave up the privileges of his glory and power, and allowed himself to be as weak and dependant as we are. As we study the gospels we will see a man who claims to be God (John 8:58, 10:30) but yet is like any other OT prophet who is dependant upon the Holy Spirit to perform miracles. No doubt we are told He was granted the Spirit without measure (John 3:34), an amount no OT prophet ever had, yet he was still dependant upon the Spirit as any OT prophet would have been for the miraculous element in his ministry.

Then secondly we are told in verse 7 that Jesus took upon Himself the very nature of a human. "Taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness". And so we see that not only is Jesus in very nature God, but He also becomes in very nature human; 100% God and 100% man.

Titus 2:13 is another verse, 'waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.' In this verse God is saviour but in Titus 1:3 and 4 Christ is the saviour just as it is stated here.

Colossians 1:15-20 is another place where Christ is seen as God. 'He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities---all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.' He is the image of the invisible God, like Hebrews 1:3 we see that Christ is the representation of God, 'He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.' The JWs jump on the phrase firstborn over creation as proof that Jesus is not God but created. They believe that "first born over all creation" means 'first created of creation', or the very first thing created. At first the wording of Col 1:15 seems to support their reading, but this is only skin deep for the following reasons.

- First born is a way of indicating rank in ancient culture. We use the word 'Prime' which in Latin means 'first' in the same way. For when we say 'Prime Minister' we do not mean the first minister ever, but rather the highest ranking minister over.
- Psalm 89:27 demonstrates this use, in this Psalm there is a meditation upon the future Messianic King and the Psalmist says of this King, "I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth." We obviously cannot understand it to mean that the future king will be the first king ever, but rather the highest king over.
- If Paul wanted to say Jesus was the first created, there is a perfectly usable, and non-ambiguous term which he could have used. 'Protokisis', but he didn't. This phrase is never used to describe Christ.

The last way I would like us to consider the wonder of the fact that our saviour is fully God is from the way Paul uses the word 'Lord'. Besides the fact that saying Caesar is Lord was a

claim to divinity and this claim was made of Christ. The title Lord is also the word used to translate the OT name for YHWH. There are various verses which would refer to YHWH but in the NT refer to Christ. Romans 10:13 which is a quote of Joel 2:32 is an example. 'And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.' And, 'For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." And just in case you doubt that Paul is referring to Jesus read verse 9, 'because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'

The fact that God Himself in the second person of the Trinity took on flesh to save us was more than the Jews ever could have guessed at. Who could guess that our God whom the angels adore would adorn Himself in frail flesh and live amongst us not as a king but a poor man, not seeking grandeur but to come and serve us with His life and death, so that He could pay the penalty for our sin and by His suffering reconcile sinners to a holy God. It is no wonder that Paul cannot mention the fact that Jesus is God and launch into spontaneous praise.

We do not serve dead statues or angels or anything created. It was not a man or an angel or a phantom that come to earth to save us. You and I have been served and saved by God. He has worn our humanity, He has served sacrificially and He calls us to serve Him, to worship Him, to speak to others of His glory. Knowing that Christ is God is not an abstract mental exercise but necessary for our worship that we might be truly humbled by what God has done for us, that we might see how worthy He is because of what He has done for the undeserving. It is crucial for our obedience for our God does not ask us to walk a path He has not walked Himself or to serve our enemies or the undeserving which He Himself has not done first.