

# Christianity and Hot Button Issues

Biblical and Cultural Challenges Christians Must Face

## #6 – WASN'T JESUS JUST A MAN?

Best-selling author Bart Ehrman argues in his book *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* that Jesus was an ordinary Jewish preacher that over time, Christians exalted into a divine figure. Ehrman holds that early Christians were influenced by the idea that humans could share certain divine traits (semi-divine) along a continuum where some figures were regarded as more divine than others. But this rejects strict monotheism of Judaism and Christianity. Ehrman denies Jesus saw himself as God and none of his disciples did either.

### The Historical and Biblical Question

- 1) When Did Christians first conceive of Jesus as God? Historical Question
- 2) Does the New Testament teach that Jesus was God? Biblical Question.

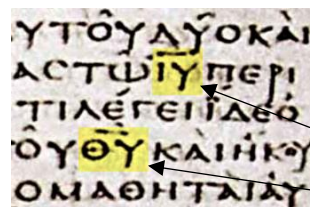
### The Historical Facts

First century Judaism was strictly and staunchly monotheistic and unitarian (this doesn't mean that the OT didn't have hints of the Trinity, but Jews have never seen this). The *Shema* (Deut. 6:4) was recited twice daily (morning and evening) by observant Jews. There was a clear distinction between God alone and the creation (i.e., all other reality). In Jewish monotheism, God alone is (1) Creator, (2) Ruler of all things, and (3) the object of worship. There was no conception of lesser deities deserving a lesser degree of worship. God was exclusive. Nor was there some semi-divine, intermediate kinds of God-like creatures.

Christianity came in and understood Jesus as identifying himself with the one true God of the OT. In other words, there was no distinction between Yahweh and Jesus, the Son of God. So, while on the one hand Jesus did not violate any of the uniqueness of God as presented in the OT, nonetheless, he identified himself with that unique understanding of God. Thus, there is no notion of polytheism. Christianity remains strictly monotheistic but Trinitarian. Since the identity of Jesus with Yahweh occurs in all of the NT books, this belief predates the writing of those books. The NT writers saw no tension with this supposed conflict. However, Jewish monotheism left room for this identification even though it was unprecedented. One of the key texts in this regard is Psa. 110:1 which the NT quotes or alludes to more than any other OT text (22x): "The LORD [Yahweh] says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet'" (Ps. 110:1).

### Nomina Sacra (Sacred Name)

Most manuscript copies of the NT dating early in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century on (50 yrs after NT written) contain contracted abbreviations (first and last letter) of 4 common words: GOD, LORD, JESUS, and CHRIST with a line drawn over both letters. This indicates Christians regarded Christ as God.



GOD JESUS  
John 1:36 in Codex Vaticanus (4<sup>th</sup> century)

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### Liar, Lunatic, or Lord.

C. S. Lewis: "Jesus...told people that their sins were forgiven.... This makes sense only if He really was the God whose laws are broken and whose love is wounded in every sin.... I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don'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 great 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 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. He did not intend to." (*Mere Christianity*)

### The Biblical Facts

Some Key Passages on the Deity of Christ:

- 1) **John 1:1-5.** John is clearly alluding to Gen. 1:1. "The Word was God" is a predicate nominative which means that the verb "was" is an equating verb. Thus, "the Word" is equated to "God." See also Heb. 1:1-4.
- 2) **1 Corinthians 8:6** is a reformulation of the *Shema* in Deut. 6:4. Note similarity to Rom. 11:36. "Yet for us there is but **one God**, the Father, **from** whom are **all things** and we *exist for* Him; and **one Lord**, Jesus Christ, **by** whom are **all things**, and we *exist through* Him. The Father is the efficient cause (*from*) of the creation, Jesus is the instrumental cause (*by*). The Father is the goal (*for*) of creation, Jesus is the instrumental agent (*through*) for that goal. See also Col. 1:15-20; 2:9-10 and Eph. 1:8b-14 (note the "all things" phrasing in these passages).
- 3) **Philippians 2:6-11.** "Form" = outward manifestation of inward essence. Note verse 10 quotes Isa. 45:23 which is a clear reference to Yahweh that is now attributed to Jesus.
- 4) **Mark 2:1-12; 14:61-63.** Note that Jesus draws from Dan. 7:13-14 for "Son of Man" title 79 times. He uses "Son of God" title only 5 times. See Isa. 43:25 for God's prerogative to forgive.
- 5) **John 12:38-41.** Jesus quotes from both Isaiah 6 (in vs. 40) and 53 (in vs. 38). Jesus is identified with the subject of Isaiah's vision in Isaiah 6. Also note the phrase "high and lifted up" in Isa. 6:1 (referring to Yahweh) and Isa. 52:13 (referring to the messianic Servant).
- 6) **The "I AM" sayings:** John 4:26; 6:20, 35, 48; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8. Normally, the Greek first person "be" verb *eimi* means "I am." Adding *ego* ("I") to *eimi* is emphatic and not normal. Jesus is drawing from Exodus 3:14 and the giving of the sacred name of God—*Yahweh*.
- 7) The titles "**Alpha and Omega**"/ "**First and Last**"/ "**Beginning and End**" in Revelation: (1) Rev. 1:8 (God/ Jesus); (2) Rev. 1:17 (Jesus); (3) Rev. 21:6 (God); (4) Rev. 22:13 (Jesus). These draw from Isa. 44:6; 48:12 (*Yahweh*).

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### Why We Need a Savior Who is Both Fully God and Fully Man (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 1:15)

1) We need a <b>man</b> to suffer the pains of the curse (Heb. 2:9)	But <b>God</b> to overcome its power (Heb. 2:10)
2) We need a <b>man</b> as an acceptable atoning sacrifice for sin (Heb. 10:9)	But <b>God</b> to ensure it was unblemished, free of the curse of sin (Heb. 2:17; 1 Pet. 1:18-19)
3) We need a <b>man</b> to suffer and bear our punishment for sin (Isa. 53:3-5)	But <b>God</b> to endure the full weight of it and crush it to pieces (Matt. 26:39; Heb. 12:2)
4) We need a <b>man</b> to represent us and be tested with obedience (Matt. 5:17) as Adam was	But <b>God</b> to facilitate impeccable adherence to the moral demands of the divine will (Rom. 5:18-19)
5) We need a <b>man</b> to be tempted as we are (Heb. 2:18)	But <b>God</b> , who is free of sin, to overcome all temptation (Heb. 4:15)
6) We need a <b>man</b> to die a brutal death of retribution (Isa. 53:4-9)	But <b>God</b> to destroy death by the Son's dying and rising again (1 Cor. 15:20-26)
7) We need a <b>man</b> to become like us—to assume our flesh and blood (John 1:14)	But <b>God</b> to make us like himself by uniting us to his Son (Rom. 6:1-11)

#### Resources on Deity of Christ:

Book: John MacArthur, *The Deity of Christ*

Book: Robert M. Bowman Jr. & J. Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus into His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ*

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## HANDS – The Deity of Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup>

### H - Jesus shares the Honors due to God

	Lord GOD	Lord Jesus
1) He is the object of honor & glory due to God	Exod. 20:2-3; 34:14; Psa. 29:1-3; Rev. 4:11	John 5:23; Heb. 3:3-4; Jude 1:25; Rev. 5:9-10, 12-13
2) He is the object of worship due to God	Deut. 6:13; Matt. 4:9-10; Isa. 45:23; Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9	Matt. 2:2, 11; 9:18; Phil 2:10-11; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 1:7
3) He is the object of prayer due to God	Gen. 4:26; 1 Chron. 16:8; Psa. 97:7; Isa. 44:17; 45:20-22	John 14:14; Acts 1:24-25; 7:59-60; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 12:8-9
4) He is the object of hymns written to Him as God	Exod. 15:21; Judg. 5:3; Pss. 7:17; 9:11; 95:1; Isa. 42:10	Eph. 5:19; Rev. 5:9-10
5) He is the object of faith that is due to God	Gen. 15:6; Isa. 28:16; 43:10; Mark 11:22; Heb. 6:1	Matt. 9:28; John 3:15-18; Rom. 9:33; Gal. 3:26; 1 Pet. 2:6
6) He is object of reverential fear due to God	Deut. 6:13; 10:20; Prov. 1:7; 2:5; 9:10; Isa. 8:12-13	2 Cor. 5:10-11; Eph. 5:21; 6:7-8; Col. 3:22-25; 1 Pet. 3:14-16
7) He is the object of a unique love, obedience & service due to God	Exod. 20:6; Deut. 6:4-5; Josh. 22:5; Neh. 1:5; Dan. 9:4; Matt. 22:37	Matt. 10:37; 26:2; Luke 14:26; John 14:15; 1 Cor. 10:16-22; Eph. 6:24

### A – Jesus shares the Attributes of God

	Lord GOD	Lord Jesus
1) He is God in bodily form		John 1:1-3, 14; Col. 1:15; 2:9; Heb. 1:3
2) He existed eternally before His birth		John 8:42; Rom. 8:3; Phil. 2:6-7; Jude 1:5
3) He is eternal/ uncreated	Gen. 1:1; Pss. 90:2; 102:25-27; Isa. 43:10	John 1:1-3; 8:56-59; Col. 1:15-16; 1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:2
4) He is immutable (He never changes)	Num. 23:19; Psa. 102:26-27; Mal. 3:6; James 1:17	Heb. 1:10-12; 13:8
5) He exhibits divine love	Deut. 7:8; Psa. 146:8; Isa. 63:9; Jer. 31:3; Hos. 3:1	John 13:34; 15:9, 12-13; Rom. 8:35-39; Gal. 2:20; Rev. 1:5
6) He is omnipotent (all-powerful)	Job 42:2; Luke 1:37	Matt. 28:18; John 2:19-22; 1 Cor. 1:23-24; Col. 2:10
7) He is omnipresent (present everywhere)	Gen. 28:15; 1 Kings 8:27; Psa. 139:7-10; John 4:20-24	Matt. 8:5-13; 18:20; 28:20; John 1:47-49; Eph. 4:10-11
8) He is omniscient (all-knowing)	1 Kings 8:39; Psa. 139:1-4; Isa. 46:9-10; Matt. 10:30	Matt. 9:4; 12:25; John 4:16-18; Acts 1:24; 1 Cor. 4:5; Rev. 2:23
9) He is transcendent and incomprehensible	Isa. 40:18	Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Robert M. Bowman Jr. & J. Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus into His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ* (Kregel, 2007).

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### N – Jesus shares the Names of God

	Lord GOD	Lord Jesus
1) "Name above every name"	Exod. 3:15; Isa. 45:21-23	Phil. 2:9-11; Rev. 2:3
2) "God"	Deut. 4:35; Isa. 45:5; 46:9; John 5:44; Rom. 3:30; Eph. 4:6	Isa. 7:14; 9:6; John 1:1, 18; 20:28; Acts 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1
3) "Lord" (i.e., <i>Yahweh</i> (Heb) <i>Adonai</i> (Heb)/ <i>Kurios</i> (Gk)	Gen. 2:4; Exod. 3:15-18; Deut. 3:24; Psa. 34:8; Isa. 40:3, 13	Matt. 3:3; Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:9-13; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Pet. 2:3
4) "Bridegroom/ Husband"	Isa. 54:5; 62:5; Jer. 31:32	John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:7-9; 21:2, 9
5) "King of kings and Lord of lords"	Dan. 4:37; 1 Tim. 6:15	Rev. 17:14; 19:16
6) "Savior"	Deut. 4:37; Pss. 25:5; 27:9; Isa. 12:2; 45:15; Mic. 7:7	Luke 2:11; John 4:42; Phil. 3:20; 2 Tim. 1:10; Tit. 2:13
7) "I AM"	Exod. 3:14; Deut. 32:29; Isa. 41:4; 43:2, 5, 10-11, 25; 46:4	John 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 26, 58; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8
8) "First & Last/ Alpha & Omega/ Beginning & End"	Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12; Rev. 21:6	Rev. 1:7-8, 17-18; 22:12-13

### D – Jesus shares the Deeds of God

	Lord GOD	Lord Jesus
1) He created the universe	Gen. 1:1; 2:7; Pss. 95:5-7; 102:25; Isa. 44:24; Jer. 10:16	John 1:3, 10; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:2-3, 10
2) He providentially sustains all things	Gen. 8:1; Neh. 9:6; Pss. 33:7; 65:7; Prov. 8:22-31; Jer. 5:22	Mark 4:35-41; 6:32-44; Luke 5:1-11; Col. 1:17
3) He exercises power over life, health, death, demons	Deut. 32:9; 2 Kings 5:7; Acts 17:25-28	Matt. 14:22-33; Mark 1:21-28; 2:1-12
4) He exercises power & authority to save fallen humanity	Exod. 15:2; Deut. 32:15; Pss. 3:8; 24:5; Isa. 45:22; 55:6-7; Titus 1:3; 2:10; 3:4	John 4:10, 14; 6:35-40; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 1:15; Titus 1:4; 2:13-14; Heb. 5:9; Rev. 7:10
5) He exercises divine judgment	Gen. 18:25; Deut. 1:17; Isa. 40:9-11; Jer. 25:31; Joel 3:12; Rom. 2:3; 14:10	Matt. 16:27; 25:31-46; John 5:22-23; Acts 10:42; Rom. 2:16; 2 Thess. 1:7-8; Rev. 2:23

### S – Jesus shares the Seat of God's throne

	Lord GOD	Lord Jesus
1) He sits at right hand of God	Dan. 4:34-35; Rom. 14:10; Rev. 4:2; 5:1; 7:15; 20:11	Psa. 110:1; Matt. 22:44; 25:31; 26:64; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 3:21; 7:17; 22:1, 3
2) He is heavenly Son of Man	Dan. 7:13-14	Matt. 9:6; 12:8; 13:41; 16:27- 28; 19:28; 20:28; 24:29-31
3) He is Messianic King	2 Sam. 7:13-16, 19	Luke 1:32-33; Rev. 7:14; 19:16
4) He is Ruler of all forever	Psa. 9:7; Lam. 5:19; Dan. 4:34- 35; Rev. 5:13	Eph. 1:19-21; Heb. 1:8; Rev. 11:15; 22:1, 3