

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Deity of Christ		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	10		Gary L.W. Johnson
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THE GOD-MAN

Fearing God is not a popular topic in much that passes for evangelicalism today. God is conceived as simply a really nice, big person who is non-judgmental and unconditionally accepts us as we are. In the words of William Kilpatrick, “the secular mind does not always find it necessary to deny God, but it must always reduce Him to a comfortable size. Above all else He must be a manageable God who does not watch or judge.”¹ The word *secular* is often thrown about rather carelessly by many Christians to refer to that mindset that is hostile or antithetical to Biblical Christianity. Granted that is frequently a trait of the openly-secular person, but the term, surprisingly, can be attached to Christians who see themselves as anything but *secular*. Simply defined, the word describes the mental framework and value structure of our culture. “To think secularly,” says Harry Blamires, “is to think within a frame of reference bounded by the limits of our life on earth; it is to keep one’s calculations rooted in this worldly criteria.”² Another word for secularism is *worldliness*, and in the assessment of James Davison Hunter, “Many of the distinctions separating Christian conduct from ‘worldly conduct’ have been challenged, if not altogether undermined. Even words *worldly* and *worldliness* have, within a generation, lost most of their traditional meaning. When asked, What does it mean for a Christian to be different from the ‘world’?, most did not invoke traditional understandings at all. ... The traditional meaning of worldliness has indeed lost its relevance for the coming generation of Evangelicals.”³ David Wells perceptively points out that our modern world creates an atmosphere that is not always easy to recognize, much less escape from. “Modernity is hostile to the moral world in which the biblical discussion about sin takes place. It is hostile to the idea that God is other than our sense of ourselves in our innermost feelings, that He is objective to us, that He addresses us by the Word, that He summons us to accounting guilt into shame, and shame, our inner embarrassment about ourselves, can then be resolved simply through counseling. Thus has our moral life become secularized. This rearrangement of meaning around the self, around its moods, needs, intuitions, aches, and ambiguities, has entered the church. Its presence is signaled wherever there are those who think, or act, as if the purpose of life is to find ways actualizing the self, realizing it, and crafting it through technique or purchase, instead of restraining it out of moral considerations and in the sense putting it to death. Where the Christian faith is offered as a means of finding personal wholeness rather than holiness, the church has become worldly. There are many other forms of worldliness that are comfortably at home in the evangelical church today. Where it substitutes intuition and feeling for biblical truth, it is being worldly. Where its appetite for the Word has been lost in favor of light discourses and entertainment, it is being worldly. Where it has restructured what it is and what it offers around the rhythms of consumption, it is being worldly, for customers are actually sinners whose place in the church is not to be explained by a quest for self-satisfaction but by a need for repentance. Where it cares more about success than about faithfulness, more about size than spiritual health, it is being worldly. Where the centrality of God to worship is lost amidst the need to be distracted and to have fun, the church is being worldly because it is simply accommodating itself to the preeminent services each Sunday, services that are ostensibly about worshipping *God*, those in attendance may not be obliged to think even once about His greatness, grace, and commands. Worship in such contexts often has little or nothing to do with God. In these and many

other ways, the church today is being worldly precisely because it is also modern. And it is its modernity that conceals from its view its worldliness?”⁴

When Christians start looking to the world for solutions to their personal problems, be they emotional, psychological, or relational, the process of secularization is well underway. (Note how this same kind of thing occurred with the people of God in the Old Testament. The Israelites naively and uncritically looked to the Philistines to sharpen their axes and hoes – 1 Sam. 13:20.) Look at the growth of so-called Christian “self-help” literature and inspirational devotion guides that mimic their secular counterparts. This type of “worldliness” reflects our preoccupation with securing a sense of well-being in life as an end in itself rather than as the by-product of living a life pleasing to God. This has, as David Wells observes, “succeeded in minimizing the complexities of life and reduced its remedies to techniques. The self-help literature assumes that healing is possible because the self carries within it the means of its own healing. What is needed is simply the right technique to tap into this potential. It therefore offers a secularized form of salvation.”⁵ What happened is that Christians fall prey to being reduced (conformed to the present age) by the world’s agenda. Again, Wells comments, “The problem is our secularization. This has decimated any moral consensus that once was present. Today, not only is the public square stripped of divine meaning but so, too, is human consciousness. Amidst all of the abundance and the technological marvels of our time, what is true and what is right have lost their hold upon our society. They have lost their saliency, their capacity to shape life. Today, our moral center is gone. It is not merely that secularization has marginalized God, relegated him to the outer edges of our public life from whence he becomes entirely irrelevant, but we have also lost our understanding of ourselves as moral beings. In our *private* universe, as in that which is public, there is no center.”⁶ What does all this have to do with the subject matter of this message? Simply this: As more and more of what passes for “Evangelicalism” today moves away from the doctrinal distinctives that have for centuries defined the Christian Faith (especially as set forth in the great orthodox creeds and Protestant confessions) the more susceptible we become to imbibing the “secular” outlook of the world around us. As noted last week, the desire to make Jesus more appealing to the society at large by stressing His humanity, ends up in the process of not only de-emphasising His deity, but obscuring it, until finally, it all but disappears.

I. THE TESTIMONY OF PAUL. Daniel Waterland (1683-1740) who wrote extensively on the deity of Christ, noted the “*Texts proving an unity of divine attributes in Father and Son; applied:*

“To the one God.

Thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all children of men, 1 Kings viii. 39.

I the Lord search the hearts, I try the reins, Jer. xvii. 10.

I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God, Isa. xlv. 6.

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, Rev. i. 8.

King of kings, and Lord of lords, 1 Tim. vi. 15.

The mighty God, Isa. x. 21.

Lord over all, Rom. x. 12.

To the Son.

He knew all men, &c. John ii. 24. Thou knowest all things, John xvi. 30. Which knowest the hearts of all men, Acts i. 24.

I am he that searcheth the reins and the heart, Rev. ii. 23.

I am the first, and I am the last, Rev. i. 17.

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, Rev. xxii, 13.

Lord of lords, and King of kings, Rev. xvii. 14, xix. 16.

The mighty God. Isa. ix. 6.

He is Lord of all, Acts. X. 36. Over all, God Blessed &c. Rom. ix. 9.”⁷

Note the following.

- A. **First**, there is the statement in the great “Kenosis” passage, which gives important insight into the union of the two natures in the one person, or the hypostatic union, to use the common theological term. There Paul says that Jesus was “in the form of God” (Phil. 2:6). The term *form* refers to the unchangeable essential nature of a thing. If one says that a person is in the form of man, then what is meant is that he has the essential nature of manhood. A robin, a sparrow, a mockingbird, and a woodpecker have the same form; they are all birds. They have different outward characteristics (the Greeks had another word to express these things), but they each have the same form. Thus, if Jesus is “in the form of God,” then He has all the essential attributes of deity, or all those characterizing qualities that make God -- well, God. He who is “in the form of God” is God. What Paul says in the paragraph is that Jesus did not surrender His divine attributes, but the voluntary use of them. He surrendered the glories of deity, the prerogatives of deity, but not the deity itself. The reasons for the laying aside of what Milton called, “the blaze of majesty,” lie in the necessity of performing the Messianic mediatorial work in the power of the Holy Spirit as the God-man. It was a necessary part of His humiliation.
- B. **Second**, another of Paul’s tests that indicate that he thought of Christ as God is Titus 2:13, where we read of the believer’s hope, and “the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” The rendering of the KJV obscures the sense of the Greek text, but it is caught clearly in the New International Version, “while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.” “In the Greek text, there is only one article before ‘the glorious appearing [or, the appearing of the glory] of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ.’ This one definite article indicates that ‘God and Saviour’ is referring only to one person: the Lord Jesus Christ. It is Christ who will come on the last day, not the Father. Thus, while maintaining a distinction between God the Father and Christ, Paul is denominating Christ, the Father’s Son, as God.”⁸ That is as clear and definite as it can be put. There are other passages to which we might turn, such as Hebrews 1:8 and 2 Peter 1:1, in both of which the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ is plainly affirmed. Nathaniel Micklem, in a book called *Ultimate Questions*, made the astonishing claim that the assertion, “Jesus is God,” is a shocking heresy. On the contrary, it is shocking heresy to deny it, and it is shocking to read such things from professing Christians. In the Nicene Creed, accepted as Christian doctrine by Christian churches, the church has confessed its faith “in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father only-begotten, that is, *from the substance of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father*, through whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth, who because of our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, will come to judge the living and dead.”⁹

SUMMARY:

The evidence of the Scriptures is that the Son possesses undiminished deity. Otherwise, we can only conclude with many that He was either deceived, a megalomaniac afflicted with folie de grandeur, as J. B. Phillips put it, or a wicked deceiver. Those who have believed in Him and have come to enjoy the salvation He gives, have never been in doubt over this trilemma. There is a marvelous statement from P.T. Forsyth that bears repeating. “Is it not equally true,” he wrote, “that He thought of Himself as in a category distinct from other men, whether we regard His relation to God or to the world? Where he came salvation came -- as to Zacchaeus by his very presence. He stood between men and God, not with men before God. A word spoken against Him was comparable, however different, to a sin against God’s Holy Spirit. For both were against God. They were not like sins against men. That is to say, He has to make His historic personality parallel with the Holy Spirit before He can set up the contrast, which is only effectual between beings ejusdem generic. He was greater than the temple, He said -- as no prophet could be. In the parable of the vineyard He is the only son, the beloved, distinct from the messengers besides.

He never prays with his disciples, much as He prays for them; and the Lord's prayer was given by Him but not used by Him. There is a line between Him and them, delicate but firm, 'often as fine as a hair but always as hard as a diamond.'"¹⁰

CONCLUSION: Listen to the words of the early Church father, Ignatius of Antioch, who wrote just after the New Testament was concluded and spoke of "one Physician, who is both flesh and spirit, born yet not born, who is God in man." Or again, we have the words of Charles Wesley, who taught us to sing,

"Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, MY GOD, shouldst die for me?"

We preach Him as Thomas confessed Him, "my Lord and my God," unique, supreme and sufficient. Sadly, we are witnessing on a massive scale, a tragic paradigm shift that is currently engulfing what goes by the name "Evangelicalism." One example of this is seen in the widespread popularity of Joel Osteen, Pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, TX, that boasts a weekly attendance of over 47,000, making it the largest church in North America. The mainstream media has dubbed him the heir apparent of Billy Graham. In a recent "sermon," Osteen confidently declared that God does not care about your "mistakes" and "failures." He is only interested in you putting forth your best effort, because the good news is that God loves us despite our many failures! There was no mention of sin in this "sermon," no mention of the cross – in fact, Jesus Christ was never mentioned. Osteen's reference to God was generic. This God was not Trinitarian and could easily have fit nicely into the theological framework of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, et. al. The deity of Christ is altogether unnecessary in Osteen's sermon. So, we close with the challenge, "What think YE of Christ?" And, echoing the words of the Romans procurator, we add, "What shall I do then with Jesus who is called Christ?" The two questions hound and haunt us until we respond. We can follow the lead of Joel Osteen and a growing crowd of others like him and simply omit the Person and Work of Christ from the discussion when it comes to God dealing with our sins, or we can proclaim Him in the language of the New Testament as the only mediator between God and man, outside of whom there is no salvation.

ENDNOTES

¹ W. K. Kilpatrick, *Psychological Seduction: The Failure of Modern Psychology* (Thomas Nelson, 1983), p. 146.

² H. B. Blamires, *The Christian Mind: How Should a Christian Think?* (Servant Books, 1963). To think like a Christian, he adds, "Is to accept all things with the mind elated, directly or indirectly, to man's eternal destiny as the redeemed and chosen child of God." (p. 4).

³ J. D. Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 63.

⁴ D. F. Wells, in *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis*, ed. J. H. Armstrong (Crossway, 1998), p. 31.

⁵ D. F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why The Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Eerdmans, 1998), p. 111.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁷ *The Works of Daniel Waterland I* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1856), p. 326.

⁸ Douglas Kelly, *Systematic Theology II* (Mentor, 2014), p. 89.

⁹ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (David McKay Company, Inc., 1972), pp. 215-16.

¹⁰ P. T. Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (Eerdmans, n.d.), pp. 105-6.