

# The deity of Christ specific responses to the Watchtower Movement (JW)

There are few doctrines of the Christian faith more important, more rigorously denied or more easily proved from the Scriptures. The full and true deity of Christ rests upon such a firm biblical basis that in dealing with the modern cults and religions we need never avoid this subject.

## An historical background— The Council of Nicea AD 325

Early in the 4th century **Arius**, a leader from Alexandria, argued that the Son's inferiority to the Father meant that the Son was the first of the Father's creations; then, the Son and the Father created all other things. The Father alone was truly God—eternal and uncreated. Arius's bishop, **Alexander**, argued that Christ was truly God. This divided the Eastern Greek-speaking churches.

By AD 325 the Roman Emperor, Constantine, acknowledged Christianity as the true faith. He ordered the leaders of all the churches (both East and West) to meet in Nicaea (now Iznik in Turkey). Around 318 leaders (bishops) met. Arius and **Athanasius**, Alexander's secretary, each presented their case. The final document was agreed by all except Arius and two other leaders.

*We believe in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of all things, seen and unseen; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only-begotten, **that is, from the essence of the Father, God of God, Light from light, True God from true God, begotten, not created, of the same essence as the Father**, through whom [the Son] all things were created, both in heaven and on earth; who for us humans and for our salvation came down and was incarnate, became man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven, and will come again to judge the living and the dead; and we believe in the Holy Spirit.*

Two similar Greek words highlighted the two sides: was Christ *homoousios* (of the same essence) or was he simply *homoiousios* (of similar essence). The word *ousia* referred to the essential reality of something. The Arians were finally defeated at the Council of Constantinople in AD 381.

Note: the word *homoousios* is not used in the New Testament. But in Hebrews 1:3 (see below) the word *χαρακτήρ* (character) is used of the precise representation of an engraver and it is followed by *ὑποστάσεως* (hupostaseos) which refers to the essence or exact nature of something.

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Be aware of those who will call Jesus 'the Son of God', 'a god', 'divine', or speak of his 'divinity' or simply dismiss him as 'a prophet'— yet do not hold to his full deity.

NB The translation of the Watchtower Movement *New World Translation* (NWT 1955) is quoted here. The identity of the translators was never revealed so we cannot assess their competence. For JW, the name 'Jehovah' translates the Hebrew word for the covenant name of Israel's God (*Yahweh*).

## 1. Evidence from a few of many Bible references

Compare **Isaiah 6:1–3** 'I got to see Jehovah sitting on a throne...' and **John 12:41** (referring to Christ): 'Isaiah saw his glory and spoke about him...'

JW response: The glory of Christ that John saw was only a reflected glory.

Note: The text says it was 'His' glory, not reflected.

**Isaiah 9:6** The phrase 'Mighty God' (*El'Gibor*) describes the Messiah and is identical with 10:21 which clearly refers to 'Jehovah'.. (See also Nehemiah 9:32; Jeremiah 32:18). Note also 'eternal Father' is a description of the Messiah

JW response: 10:21 refers to Jehovah but not 9:6.

They do not deny that the Hebrew *El Gibor* means 'God the mighty one' but have no explanation what it can mean if not full deity.

JW response for 'eternal Father'. They quote from the Roman Catholic Douay-Rheims version (1582 rarely used today): 'The Father of the world to come.' ie The Messiah will become the Father of all who believe since life is found only in him.

Note: No other known translation renders it like this, not even the NWT.

**John 1:1** 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god.'

JW reason is because in Greek the word 'god' does not have a definite article here.

Note: In Greek grammar a proper noun or name (eg 'Word' or 'God') does not require a definite article. The NWT is inconsistent; for example 'God' (*theos*) has no definite article in John 1:6, 12, 13; Matthew 6:24; 2 Corinthians 5:19 etc, yet NWT does not translate 'a god'.

JW response: a frank admission that their translation of John 1:1 'is interpretation'

**John 20:28** "Thomas said to him "My Lord and my God"

Note: both statements are 'to him'. Evidently Thomas acknowledged Jesus as both Lord and God.

JW answer: 'My Lord' refers to Jesus. 'My God' refers to Jehovah. Jesus knew Thomas would not refer to him as God and therefore did not need to correct him.

Note: Jesus would not hesitate to correct the possibility of such a grave error.

**Philippians 2:6–7** 'Although he was existing in God's form, gave no consideration to a seizure, namely, that he should be equal with God. He took on a slave's form and came to be in the likeness of men.'

JW response: 'the form of a slave' means subject to the law. 'The form of God' refers to his 'pre-existent Adamic nature'.

Note: the word 'form' and 'likeness' in NWT translated the same Greek word *morphe*. According to all Greek lexicons it means the nature or essence of something or someone. So, even his 'pre-existent Adamic nature' (whatever that means) was the nature of God. God's form and the slave's form must be the same—truly God and truly man.

**Colossians 2:9–10** 'In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form' (NIV).

'Fulness of the divine quality' (NWT) translates *theotetos*. In Romans 1:20 NWT translates the same word accurately: 'his eternal power and Godship'.

JW answer: 'The way these two words [Col 2 and Ro 1] have been rendered in the NWT has given rise to the charge that the *New World Bible* Translation Committee let their religious beliefs influence them. That charge is true, but they did not do so wrongly or unduly. The meaning that is to be given to these two Greek words depends upon what the entire Bible has to say about Jehovah God and Jesus Christ.' (*The Watchtower* August 1962 p.410.)

Note: That, of course, assumes that all the other biblical teaching on the deity of Christ is also turned in another direction from what is plain. On the word *theotetos*, the Greek Lexicon of Liddell & Scott defines it as 'divine nature, divinity'. Vine *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* renders Colossians 2:9 as 'The divine essence of Godhood; the personality of God', and Romans 1:20 'the attributes of God or divine nature'.

**Titus 2:13** '... glorious manifestation of the great God and of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.'

Note: the addition of the genitive 'of' distinguishes between God and Saviour. But no known Greek manuscript includes the genitive.

JW answer: A lengthy statement in the NWT library edition appendix p.3592. An attempt to justify including the genitive but no Greek manuscript evidence is offered and admits that it is added to avoid the deity of Christ.

Incidentally, for JW Jesus was manifested in 1914 and God will be manifested at Armageddon.

**Hebrews 1:3** 'the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being...' (NIV). The single word translated 'exact representation' refers to an impression or a stamp that is an exact and complete likeness.

**Hebrews 1:5–11** 'To the Son he [God] says, 'your throne, O God, is for ever and ever...' It is very clear even from the NWT (vs 8–12) translation that these quotations are from Psalms 45 and 102 and they refer to Christ addressed as 'God' as LORD (JW Jehovah). The Creator God.

JW Answer: There is no answer.

**2 Peter 1:1** 'The righteousness of our God and **(the)** Saviour Jesus Christ'

NWT places in parenthesis the added definite article. Forcing a distinction between 'God' and 'Jesus'.

JW answer: offer no manuscript evidence for the addition of **the**, adds 'to agree with the distinction between God and Jesus in the next verse.' The NWT library edition footnote p.3480.

Note: Again, not honest translation to add words to the Bible to change the meaning. Had Peter intended a distinction, it would be essential for him to add the definite article to avoid confusion.

## **2. Evidence from Jesus' life**

**Jesus accepted worship.** To worship anyone, other than the eternal Creator God, is blasphemy. See Exodus 20:1-7; Matthew 4:10; Romans 1:18–23

Matthew 14:33, 28:9,17; John 9:38. Note especially John 5:23 'that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father.' 'Just as' is a word meaning 'equally, in the same way'.

Note: The Greek verb 'to worship' is *proskunein*; it appears fifty-nine times in the New Testament and with two exceptions it is used only with reference to God, Christ, or the false worship of demons or idols. The two exceptions are in a parable expressing the grovelling of a servant, and Acts 10:25 where Peter quickly corrected Cornelius.

**Jesus' activities belong to God.**

He forgave sin. Mark 2:5–7. The Jews rightly understood that only God can do this.

He raised the dead. John 5:21 'the Son gives life to whom he will.'

He judges all people. John 5:22–30; Matthew 25:31–46. Our eternal destiny depends upon a response to him (John 3:36).

Note: Those who oppose the deity of Christ will claim that these were activities God gave him.

**Jesus claimed to be the 'Son of God'.** The Jews asked, 'Are you then the Son of God?' Jesus replied, 'You are right in saying I am' (Luke 22:70). They considered that blasphemy. Seven times in John 5:16–23 Jesus spoke of God as his Father and himself as God's Son, the Jews wanted to stone him because 'He was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.'

John 10:31–33 'We are not stoning you for any good work...but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.' Matthew 14:32, when the disciples 'worshipped him, saying "Truly you are the Son of God"', he made no attempt to correct them.

In the first century the Roman Emperor was believed to become a god when he died; his son was therefore known as 'the son of a god'. It was a well understood claim to deity by Jews and Romans.

**Jesus claimed to be eternal.** Jesus had no beginning and will have no end. He is not merely pre-existent (i.e. existing before his human birth), but eternal (without beginning or end) as the Father is himself.

**John 8:58** 'before Abraham was born, I am' (NIV) came in answer to the question 'who do you claim to be?'. Here Jesus is deliberately taking upon himself the title of Yahweh (Jehovah) revealed

to Moses in Exodus 3 and 6. The Jews understood what he was saying and therefore, 'At this, they picked up stones to stone him.'

NWT translates it 'Jesus said to them "...Before Abraham came into existence I came into being"'

Note: This is an impossible translation. *ego eimi* is a present indicative: 'I am'. If Jesus wanted a past tense he would have said *ego egeuomen* 'I came into being'. The Jews considered it 'blasphemy' when Jesus identified himself with Exodus 3:14. The NWT translates Ex. 3:14 oddly as 'I shall prove to be'. The Hebrew is a single four-letter word rendered 'I am').

JW response: Library ed.p.3108 Because the ref to Abraham is a past tense (aorist), this present tense is 'properly rendered in the perfect' !

**John 1:1-3** the opening phrase must be compared with Genesis 1:1. Christ possesses co-eternity and was co-Creator with the Father. Compare Colossians 1:16-17.

**Revelation 1:8** the reference here is to the Lord God as 'the Alpha and Omega' (the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet) 'who is and who was and who is to come the Almighty.' This same expression is used by Jesus of himself in Revelation 22:13

### **3. Passages that imply subordination?**

Although each Person of the Trinity is equal and possesses full deity, there is an order of activity and authority. In the godhead the Father sends the Son, and the Son sends the Spirit. Similarly, the Father is head of the Son and the Spirit glorifies the Son and not himself

1 Peter 1:2 describes the specific function of each member of the Trinity in our salvation: 'Chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood.'

An analogy: the submission of a wife to her husband implies only a subordination of role; she is not less human in nature, value, and dignity. When the Son left heaven he voluntarily laid aside his glory and emptied himself of his dignity and honour (2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2:7). He remained coequal with the Father yet learned obedience as a Son (Hebrews 5:8). He was made like us (Hebrews 2:17). He therefore accepted limitations as the Son of Man. In this way we can understand:

**John 14:28** 'the Father is greater than I'. Compare 10:29–30 'I and the Father are one.'

**John 12:49** 'I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken.' Compare 14:10–11 'I am in the Father and the Father in me.'

**Matthew 24:36** 'about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.' Compare John 2:25 'He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.'

**Colossians 1:15** 'the firstborn over all creation' means that even in his humanity he was the Sovereign over all creation. This refers to his primacy, not his origin. Nowhere do the Scriptures speak of Christ as part of God's creation

In the same way his resurrection makes him the 'firstborn from among the dead' (Colossians 1:18). He was not the first to rise from the dead, but he is Sovereign over all resurrection.

**Acts 2:36** 'Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah' (NIV) The common Greek word translated 'made' has many meanings according to the context; it can be 'create', 'act', 'appoint' etc. It does not signify that the Father gave his Son a Lordship or Messiahship that he did not possess already. Rather, the Father appointed that by his life, resurrection and ascension God *demonstrated* Jesus as Lord and Christ.