

# The Divinity of Christ.

by Edward Payson

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of believing in Christ's divinity, citing evidence from the Bible and the consequences of denying it.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 9:6, Isaiah 43:10, Zechariah 12:10, John 1:1, John 20:28, Philippians 2:10, Colossians 2:9, 1 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 1:8, 1 John 4:1, Revelation 5:12

**Topics:** "Christology", "Divine Nature"

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## Description

Edward Payson preaches about the importance of acknowledging and believing in Jesus Christ as truly Lord and God, emphasizing the significance of understanding and accepting the divinity and atonement of our Savior. He highlights the essential nature of Christ's divinity in the gospel scheme of salvation, stressing that the character of our Savior is a crucial aspect that cannot be overlooked. Payson urges believers to have a clear and explicit answer to the question of what they think of Christ, as differing opinions on Christ's nature can lead to dangerous heresies and misunderstandings.

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## Transcript

"Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God"

John 20:28

think ye of Christ? is a question, which ought to be proposed to all who bear the Christian name, and to which every one should be ready to give a clear and explicit answer; especially at the present day, when so many seem disposed to thinly wrong, or not to think at all, on this interesting subject. Whether the perilous times, foretold by the apostle, have arrived, when men shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, I shall not undertake to determine; but it must be evident to every one, that professed Christians entertain not only different, but contrary opinions, respecting the character of our blessed Saviour, and the object of his mission; and it is equally evident that; while we thus think differently on these subjects we cannot all think right.

Some represent the Saviour as truly and essentially God; others consider him only as a creature, more or less highly exalted; while not a few reduce him to a mere weak and helpless mortal, whose death was intended, not to make an atonement for the sins of the world, but to attest the truth of his instructions, and afford an example of patience and resignation. Now it is, I think, abundantly evident, that of these opinions some must be essentially and fatally wrong. I am aware, indeed, that some deny this, and contend that all

may be essentially right, though they differ in some points of little consequence; and that it is no matter what a man believes, provided he be sincere in his belief, and his external conduct be good.

But the character of our Saviour is not one of these points of little consequence, concerning which men may differ in opinion, and yet be right in the main. On the contrary, it is the very sum and essence of the gospel scheme of salvation, and if we are not right on this point, we are right in nothing. The divinity and atonement of our Saviour, are truths of such momentous importance, that either they who assert, or those who deny them must be guilty of a damnable heresy, if there be any such thing.

This will, I trust, appear evident, from a moment's consideration. If Christ be not truly and essentially God, then they who worship him as such, are guilty of gross and abominable idolatry, in giving that glory and honor to a creature, which is due to the Creator alone; and how a gross idolater can be a good Christian, it is difficult to conceive. On the contrary, we are told that he who denieth the Son, denieth the Father also; that he who believeth not the record which God gave of his Son, hath made him a liar; and that he who doth not honor the Son, honoreth not the Father.

Now if Christ be God, then those who deny it, deny God the Father; they make him a liar, and they do not honor him as God; and how they can do all this, and yet be Christians, it is not so easy to determine. You see, therefore, that the doctrine of our Saviour's divinity is not a mere speculative or metaphysical doctrine, which may be admitted or rejected without any ill consequences; but it is a doctrine which involves consequences of the utmost importance, and of which either the opposers or the favorers must be essentially in the wrong.

Nor is it any breach of charity to say this. Charity has nothing to do with doctrines. It does not require us to represent truth and falsehood as equally right, or to suppose that every road will conduct men to heaven, as well as the strait and narrow path pointed out by our Saviour. But it requires us to love and pity and pray for those whom we think to be wrong, that God may bring them to the acknowledgement of the truth. It does not require us to think, that the hearts of all men are naturally good, when the word of God plainly asserts the contrary.

It does not require us to think those to be right, who differ from its in opinion, for this would imply a belief that we are wrong; but it requires that we should by no means revile, despise, or persecute them on account of their erroneous opinions, but be equally ready to do kind offices to them, as to those who adopt our own sentiments. In a word, it requires us to separate the person from the fault, to hate the sin, while we love and pity the sinner; to shun and condemn the ways of error, but be kind and friendly to those who stray therein.

He who does this, and he alone, possesses that charity which the gospel requires. In the passage which has now been read, as the subject of this discourse, we find Thomas, one of the apostles, addressing our blessed Saviour as his Lord and his God. To justify those who follow his example in this respect, and to enable them to give a reason of the hope that is in them with meekness and fear, I shall endeavor to show, in the following discourse, that Jesus Christ is truly Lord and God, as well as man; or, in other words, that he possessed a truly divine, as well as human nature.

Since this is a subject altogether beyond the limited sphere of our rational powers, it would never have been discovered, nor can it now be proved, but by a revelation from God to man. To the revelation, therefore, which God has given us, must we resort for arguments, to prove the proposition we are considering; and if we find it there revealed, we are bound to receive it, though it may be involved in

mysteries which we cannot comprehend. Our first argument in favor of our Saviour's proper divinity, will be drawn from those passages which intimate or assert a plurality of persons in the Godhead; of which there are several in the Old Testament.

When God was about to create man we find him saying, Let us make man in our own image. When man fell, God said, The man is become as one of us. When he resolved to confound the builders of Babel, he said, Let us go down, etc. Now it is impossible satisfactorily to account for this mode of expression, without supposing that there are more persons than one in the Godhead, and this supposition is rendered highly probable by various other passages, which plainly imply the same thing.

In a great variety of instances throughout the Old Testament, the word which we render God in the singular, in the original is Gods. Thus, in Deuteronomy it is said, in the original, the Lord our Gods is one Lord. In Kings, we find the people exclaiming, the Lord, he is Gods, the Lord, he is Gods. And so likewise in Job, Where is God my Makers, who giveth songs in the night. To mention only two other instances of the many which might be adduced, we find it written in the original, Isaiah 54, Thy Makers is thine husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name, and thy Redeemers the Holy One of Israel, the Gods of the whole earth shall He be called.

So, in like manner, in Ecclesiastes it is written, Remember thy Creators in the days of thy youth. This doctrine of a plurality of persons in the Godhead, being thus intimated in the Old Testament, is openly and clearly taught in the New. Among other proofs of this, we find the apostles commanded to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. But surely, our Saviour never would have thus joined his own name with that of the Father, in this solemn manner, had he not himself been God.

To which we may add, that had the Apostle considered Christ as a mere creature, he would not have united his name with that of God the Father, in the benediction with which he concludes some of his epistles. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen. To place this point beyond all doubt or controversy, however, the beloved disciple informs us, that there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and that these three are one; and though the opposers of our Saviour's divinity have endeavored to prove that this text is an interpolation, yet they have never succeeded; and any one may perceive, by reading the chapter, that the sense would be incomplete without it.

Our second argument in support of the doctrine of our Saviour's proper divinity, is drawn front his own conduct and declarations while here on earth. Those were such, that unless he was essentially God, he must be considered as an impostor and blasphemer, as the Jews represented him. Though he knew how exceedingly prone the Jews were to idolatry, and how many reasons they had for worshipping him as God, yet he took no pains to prevent it, but on the contrary, seemed to encourage it by every means in his power.

Instead of saying like the ancient prophets, Thus saith the Lord, he ever says, Thus I say, and hence he was said to teach as one leaving authority. When the prophets performed miracles, they always did it in the name of God; the apostles wrought them in the name of Christ, but our Saviour always wrought them in his own name, and by his own power. Whether he raised the dead, or cast out a devil, or calmed the tempestuous waves, it was always done in the same Godlike manner. The prophets, the apostles, and even angels, never allowed themselves to be worshipped on any pretence whatever; but he not only allowed it once and again, but expressly taught, that all men ought to honor the Son, even as they honor

the Father, that he was the Son of God, and that he and his Father were one.

Now, suppose all this done by a mere man, or by any created being; suppose such a being teaching with authority; working miracles in his own name, forgiving sins whenever he pleased, suffering himself to be worshipped and addressed by the titles Lord and God; nay more, claiming to be one with the Father, and to be honored as he was honored; and then say, whether he could be considered as a very meek, humble, and submissive being; say whether you should not consider him an impostor and blasphemer?

It is evident that the Jews who heard him call himself the Son of God, supposed that he meant to claim divine honors, and for this very reason they were about once and again to stone him, because, as they said, he was guilty of blasphemy, and though he was only a man, made himself God. Now here was a fair opportunity to rectify their mistake, if such it was, and had he not meant to be understood as claiming divine honors, he would most certainly, have immediately undeceived them.

He would have shrunk with horror from the idea of making himself God; and have told the Jews plainly and instantly, that he was not God, but only a man, or at most, a created being. But instead of this, we find him still claiming equality with God, and at length suffering himself to be crucified for this very thing, for this very charge of blasphemy, founded on his calling himself the Son of God, which he might so easily have explained to their satisfaction. We might insist longer on this part of our subject, did our time permit; but we can only request any unprejudiced person, to read the history of our Saviour's life, and if he does not feel an irresistible conviction, that he meant to be considered as something more than a creature, we know not the meaning either of his words or actions.

A third argument, in favor of our Saviour's divinity, may be drawn from those passages in which all the attributes and perfections of Deity are ascribed to Christ. Thus for instance, is God eternal; so is Christ. I, says he, am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last; the beginning and the ending, Who was, and is, and is to come. He has neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but his throne is forever and ever, and his years shall not fail. Is God self-existent? So is Christ.

He, we are told, has life in himself, so that no one has power to take his life from him; but he laid it down of himself. I, says he, have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again. Is God unchangeable? So is Christ. Jesus Christ, says the apostle, is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Is God omnipresent? So is Christ. Wheresoever, says he, two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them; Lo, I am with you always, says he to his apostles, to the end of the world.

Is God omniscient? So is Christ. Lord, says Peter, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee. Before Philip called thee, said he to Nathaniel, while thou wert under the fig tree, I saw thee. Does God search the heart? So does Christ. He knew, we are told, what was in man; and once and again he perceived the thoughts, both of his enemies and friends. Is God omnipotent? So is Christ; for I, says he, am the Almighty. Is God infinite in wisdom? Christ is the only wise God our Saviour.

In a word, there is no attribute or perfection ascribed to God, which is not in like manner ascribed to Christ. Fourthly: The works and offices of Christ prove his divinity, since none but God, could do what he has done and must do. As he himself declares, whatsoever things the Father doth, these doeth the Son likewise. Did God make all things for himself? The apostle informs us, that by Christ the world was made; that he in the beginning laid the foundations of the earth, and that the heavens are the work of his hands.

By him, we are also told, were all things created that are in heaven and in the earth, whether visible or invisible, all things were created, not only by him but for him; so that without him there was not any thing made which was made. Does God preserve and overrule the world he has made? Christ, we are told, upholds all things by the word of his power; and in him all things subsist. Is it the prerogative of God alone to forgive sins? Christ forgave sins not only once, but often in his own name.

Does God raise up and quicken the dead; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. Does God act the part of a father, a lawgiver, a shepherd, and a protector to his people? Christ is all this to his church. Does God reveal himself as the only Saviour? Christ is the Saviour of lost men. Is God the judge of the whole earth? Christ is the judge of quick and dead, who will one day judge the world. In a word, Christ is the Creator, Upholder, Governor, Saviour, and Judge of the world, and consequently he must be God.

Who but God could call all things out of nothing by the breath of his mouth, and uphold them by the mere word of his power? Who but God is capable of undertaking the great work of man's redemption? A creature, be he ever so exalted, owes all that he is to his Maker, and when he has done and suffered all in his power, he is still an unprofitable servant, and has done no more than it was his duty to do. Consequently he can perform no works of supererogation. He can do nothing to save others.

The most he can hope for, is to save himself. Who but God is capable of acting the part of head to his church, and a shepherd to his people, scattered as they are over so many different parts of the world? Who but he could listen to so many different prayers, as are daily and hourly offered up before him, and send to each an answer of peace, --succoring the tempted, comforting the distressed, supporting the weak, reclaiming the backslider, enlightening the benighted mind, and causing all things to work together for the good of his people?

Who but God is capable of sustaining the character, and performing the office of the Judge of quick and dead? Who but the only wise and omniscient Jehovah, who sees the end from the beginning, could justly and accurately sum up the guilt of each individual, in such a manner as to assign to all their just recompense of reward? The being who could do this, must be intimately acquainted with the character, life and disposition of every one of the human race; he must know precisely what advantage were enjoyed; what helps and what hindrances, what warnings and what temptations, fell to the lot of each one before him.

He must know, not only every thought, word and action, but the principles from which they proceeded, the motives which induced them, the time, manner and other circumstances by which they were attended, and the effects which they sooner or later produced. Let any one pursue this chain of thought in his mind, and consider what is required to constitute a suitable judge of an assembled world, and instead of thinking that any being, less than divine, could sustain this office, he will wonder how even God himself can perform what it requires.

Again: Another argument in favor of the divinity of Christ, may be drawn from the worship which was, is, and will be paid him. In our text, and in various other instances, we find him worshipped by men, and we have already observed that God requires all men to honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. We find the devils also worshipping him, and deprecating his wrath in the humblest manner: Jesus, thou Son of God, Most High, we beseech thee that thou torment us not. Nor is this confined to men and devils; for even the blessed angels themselves, not only did, but do, and will continue to worship him.

When God bringeth his first begotten into the world, he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him. The apostle tells us, that to Him every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess him Lord, unto the praise and glory of the Father. In the vision, with which the beloved disciple was favored, of the heavenly world, he saw in the midst of the throne of God, and of the four living creatures, and of the elders, a Lamb as it had been slain, and this Lamb was equally with God the object of their worship and adoration.

The four living creatures, and the four and twenty elders, we are told, fell down before the Lamb, casting their crowns at his feet; and the apostle beheld and heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the living creatures and the elders, crying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and wisdom, and riches, and glory, and honor, and blessing; and every creature which is in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and in the sea, heard I, saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto Him who sitteth on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever.

Now, who is this, that thus sits in the midst of the throne of God, and is worshipped equally with him by all the holy armies of heaven? If you remember the solemn declaration of God, I am the Lord, that is my name, and my praise will I not give to another, you must suppose that he to whom the Father thus commits the glory of creating, governing, redeeming and judging the world, and of sharing with him the throne and the praises of heaven, must be God himself; he must be coequal and coeternal with the Father.

Meanwhile, if there be any who are condemned, as guilty of idolatry, for worshipping and honoring the Son even as they honor the Father, let them comfort themselves with the reflection, that they are doing no more than is daily and hourly done in heaven, and no more than the rest of the children of God will do to all eternity. Lastly: That Christ is God; is implicitly and expressly asserted in very many passages, both in the Old and New Testament. The Psalmist informs us, that the Israelites tempted the Most High God in the wilderness; but St.

Paul, treating of the same subject, says, they tempted Christ. Christ, therefore, is the most high God. In our text, we find Thomas calling him, My Lord and my God; and the elders of Ephesus are charged to feed the flock of God, which he purchased with his own blood. St. Paul speaks of Christ, as God manifest in the flesh; as God over all, blessed forever, and as the only wise God our Saviour. In the epistle to the Hebrews, as if he foresaw that the time would come, when Christ would be considered as chief of the angels, he asks, To which of the angels said God at any time, thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee?

Of his angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But, mark the difference; unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. To the same purpose the beloved disciple declares, that Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life; and that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And lest we should have any doubt who was intended by the Word, he adds, and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

These high characters and titles of our Saviour, are perfectly agreeable to the prophecies which foretold his coming into the world. He shall be called, says one of the prophets, Immanuel, which is to say, God with us. Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace; and of the increase of his government, there shall be no end.

But perhaps some will pretend, that the word God is here used in an inferior sense, and that Jehovah, which the Jews called the incommunicable name of God, is never applied to our Saviour. In answer to this, it may be said, that the prophet, speaking of Christ, says, and His name shall be called Jehovah, our Righteousness. In the prophecy of Zechariah, Jehovah is introduced as saying, They shall look on me whom they have pierced, and mourn. If it be Jehovah who was pierced, then, beyond all controversy, Christ is Jehovah.

So, in the same prophecy, Awake O sword, against the man who is my fellow, saith Jehovah. Now who is the man, where is the man, who can be the fellow, or as it might be rendered, the equal of Jehovah? Surely, it can be none but He, who was God and man united, even the man Christ Jesus. Once more; the prophet Isaiah tells us, that he saw in vision Jehovah, sitting on a throne high and lifted up, and surrounded by seraphim, who cried, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, and the whole earth is full of his glory.

Yet St. John expressly assures us that it was Christ whom Isaiah then saw; consequently, Christ must be Jehovah sabaoth, or the Lord of Hosts. Now, collect together what has been said, and say whether the doctrine of our Saviour's proper divinity, could possibly have been more clearly taught in the word of God, than it is; whether it can now be expressed, in more full, forcible, intelligible terms, than it is expressed by the inspired writers. We may challenge any person who denies this doctrine, to tell how it could be asserted in plainer terms, or to find language more definite than has now been quoted from the sacred volume.

But perhaps you will be ready to ask; Since this great truth is so plainly taught in the word of God, how is it possible that it should ever be called in question? and how do those who oppose it support their cause? This is a very natural question, and to it we reply, that our Saviour's divinity never was called in question, for want of sufficient proof, but, for want of a disposition to submit to sufficient proof. It was called in question, because we ignorant worms of the dust cannot understand it, and because our proud reason will not submit to believe God himself, unless what he reveals is perfectly intelligible to our comprehension.

It was called in question, because it is a maxim with the self-styled philosophers of the present day, that there should be no mysteries in religion, though the Apostle himself tells us, that, beyond all controversy, great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh. If you ask what arguments can be brought against it by its opposers, I answer, they object, 1. That if Christ be God, there will be more than one supreme being, which is absurd; and that we make three Gods, to be one God, which is a contradiction.

But this objection is founded upon a mistake. It supposes that we make three Gods, instead of three persons in one God. No one ever pretended that three persons were one person, or that three Gods were one God, but that three persons are one God. This is indeed above reason, but it is not contrary to reason; and if any one wishes to have it explained and understood, his wishes shall be gratified, when he will explain and understand God's eternity, his omniscience, his omnipresence, and his creative power; or even when he can explain how his own soul acts upon, and moves his body.

If any one will meditate on these subjects, he will soon find they are as mysterious and unintelligible as the doctrine of three persons in one God. The truth is, every thing that respects God's existence, is and must be mysterious to finite creatures, because he is an infinite being, and as well might an insect hope to take in the universe at one glance of his eye, as we to comprehend the manner of God's existence; and should any one pretend to give us a revelation of God, which contained no mysteries, but was perfectly plain to

our limited capacities, it would be a sufficient reason for rejecting it; for if we cannot comprehend ourselves, much less can we hope to comprehend God.

But, 2. All the numerous passages, which assert that Christ was a man, are also marshaled in array to prove that he was not God, while in reality they are nothing to the purpose, --for those who assert that he was God, allow that he was also man in the strictest sense of the word. They believe that he was God manifest in the flesh, and that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. The same may be said of those passages which are so triumphantly quoted in opposition to the doctrine of our text, in which Christ declares, that he was inferior to his Father, that he knew not the period fixed for the day of judgment, that without his Father he could do nothing, and many others to the same purpose.

We fully believe all this: We believe that, considered as the Son of man, as Mediator, he was inferior to the Father, and knew not the times appointed; but we also believe, with the apostle, that he thought it no robbery to be equal with God, and that in him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. The truth is, that all the pretended arguments, which are usually alleged to disprove our Saviour's divinity, prove just nothing at all, or at least nothing to the purpose. They only prove, what all allow, that Christ, in one sense, was a man and inferior to the Father.

Indeed, in one sense they rather prove, that he was a divine person; as for instance, where he says, The Father is greater than I. Now suppose any being but God to say this; suppose a man, an angel, or a super-angelic being saying, God is greater than I, --and consider how absurd such a speech would appear. Now of the things we have spoken, this is the sum. There are plain intimations in the Old, and positive assertions in the New Testament, that there is more than one person in the Godhead, coequal and coeternal.

When Christ came on earth, he gave great reason to suppose that he claimed divine honors as one of these persons; and for this claim he was put to death without renouncing it. He was worshipped, both on earth and in heaven, by angels, men and devils, and all the attributes, perfections, names, and works of God, are ascribed to him, at least as often as they are to the Father. If this does not prove him to be truly and essentially God, nothing can prove it. Consider then what has been said, and the Lord give us understanding in all things.

I close with a brief application. Let none imagine that they truly believe in Christ, merely because they profess to believe that Christ is God; for even the devils themselves believed this, and trembled at the belief. It is one thing to assent to this with our understanding, and another to consent to it with our wills, and embrace it in our hearts. The apostle informs us, that no man can say, Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. It is evident he did not mean by this, that none could say these words, --Jesus is Lord, --without divine assistance.

But he meant that no one could cordially consent to, and embrace the proposition contained in these words, without being enlightened by the divine Spirit. He meant that no one could say from the heart, that Jesus is God, without being divinely taught. Consequently it is evident, that those who deny that Jesus is Lord, have not the Holy Ghost. They are not led by the Spirit of God, and therefore are not his children. They have not the spirit of Christ, and therefore are none of his, and the same must be said of those, who have only a speculative belief of this truth.

It is not only a rational, but a cordial conviction, which is necessary; it is not with the head, says the apostle, but with the heart, that man believeth unto righteousness. Now every true Christian has this

cordial belief. He has had such a sight and sense of his own guilty, lost condition, that he sees and feels, that nothing short of an infinite, almighty Saviour will suffice to save him; he feels that he cannot trust to any creature however exalted; he cannot put confidence in an arm of flesh; he cannot trust in any thing less than God.

And by the enlightening influences of the divine Spirit, he is made to see that Christ is God, that he is an almighty and all-sufficient Saviour, just such a Saviour as his perishing soul requires. Then, and not till then, he can say, Jesus is Lord; then he can believe and trust in him for salvation; then he can say with the apostle, I know in whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep what I have committed to him against that day. On the contrary, he who never has been truly convinced of sin, who has never seen the guilt he has contracted, and the depravity of his nature, feels no need of an almighty Saviour; he has never been enabled to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; he has never believed in him so as to rejoice with joy unspeakable; and consequently he cannot say from the heart, that Jesus is Lord.

Not being able to say this, he cannot have that true faith, which works by love. Not having faith, he cannot perform any good works acceptable to God; for without faith it is impossible to please God; and not being able to please God, he cannot be accepted of him. If then, my friends, you would perform truly good works; if you would have true justifying faith, by which you may serve God acceptably; if you would be saved by the Lord Jesus Christ, let it be your chief concern to obtain such conceptions of his character as shall lead you cordially to say with Thomas, My Lord and my God!

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