

**“The Deity of Jesus Christ”**  
**John 10:22-42**  
**Nov. 19, 2000**  
**Rev. Dr. Robert S. Rayburn**

Text Comment

We took vv. 22-33 last Lord’s Day morning, but only with a view to its statement about the Lord giving life to his sheep. I won’t comment on those verses again as we read from v. 22 to the end of the chapter.

- v.34 The “your” is important. The Lord is making the same point the Apostle Paul will often make. The doctrine the Jews are denying is taught in their own Scriptures. Their fault is not that they didn’t embrace truth that was novel; their fault was that they didn’t believe the age-old teaching of their own Bible.
- v.35 An important obiter dictum – “and the Scripture cannot be broken – all the more important for the way its use here suggests that no one could possibly disagree. Of course the Word of God is absolutely reliable and can be counted on down to the very words themselves.
- v.36 The general line of the Lord’s argument is simple enough to follow. In Psalm 82:6 contains a reference to men -- there is an extensive debate (too complicated to go into now) as to which men are being referred to in that verse – but a reference to men as “gods.” The verse reads: “I said, ‘You are gods, you are all sons of the Most High.’ It then goes on in the next verse: “But you will die like mere men...” The Lord makes the obvious point. Here is a case in which the Bible itself uses the term ‘god’ legitimately of other human beings. And if it can be used of others, what fault can be found in Jesus’ use of it for himself, *especially when Jesus, more than any other, can lay claim to having been set apart by the Father as his very own and then sent into the world.*

You see that the argument is *ad hominem*. He is not using Psalm 82:6 to prove that he is God, but only to prove that the charge of his opponents will not stand biblical scrutiny. It is not, in and of itself, blasphemy to claim a likeness of some kind to God. The Bible does that itself regarding some men. He is not, of course, claiming to be *another* God. That would be blasphemy. They do not understand what he is claiming for himself, but their charge of blasphemy because he calls himself God’s son does not stand up under biblical scrutiny. This argument stalls his opponents long enough for him to appeal once more to the witness of his words and his miracles. [Carson, 399]

- v.38 He now puts in another way the statement of v. 30. “The Father is in me and I am in the Father” is another way of saying “I and the Father are one.”
- v.42 The Lord’s removal to the Transjordan was a strategic retreat – his opposition was becoming inflamed in Jerusalem – but proved to be an advance as well. He had returned to the place of John the Baptist’s greatest triumphs and here, among these people, John’s

ministry still bore a rich fruit. Here was Jesus about whom John and preached and they could now see with their own eyes that everything John said about him was true.

The statement that John never performed a miracle reminds us of what is often forgotten: viz. that miracles are not found everywhere in the Bible. They are quite rare in fact and many great men of biblical history never performed one or even saw one, including most of the prophets, of whom John was the greatest of all.

It has long been noticed that John begins his Gospel with an unqualified assertion of the deity of Jesus Christ – “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God” – and ends his Gospel with a similar confession – Thomas on his knees before the Lord Jesus after his resurrection, “My Lord and my God!” – and that right in the middle of the Gospel he places another such assertion of Lord’s divine stature. We have the one in the middle before us this morning: “I and my Father are one.”

The Jews certainly took the Lord Jesus to be making an assertion that was blasphemous for any mere human being to make – unity with the Father. What else was this but a claim to be God, and by a mere man at that! The Jews, of course, would have thought Jesus to be claiming to be *another* God, a competing God, and monotheists as they were, they would regard a claim for there to be another God than the true and living God to be blasphemy in any case.

But the Lord’s claim here is, in fact, a window into the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, the tri-unity of the one true and living God. The Gospel of John, without a doubt, is the first, the principal source for the doctrine of the Trinity. It is found, of course, in many other places in the Bible. There are anticipations in the OT and evidence for the deity of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit and, at the same time, evidence for the unity of God can be found in many places in the New Testament. The other three gospels are full of this evidence and so are the letters of Paul. But, still, the Gospel of John holds pride of place in the foundation of the Christian doctrine of the tri-unity of Almighty God. Clearly the deity of Jesus Christ and, in chapters 14-16, the deity of the Holy Spirit are truths that John intended to assert with full force in his Gospel, and he did, both by his own summations and by the direct speech of the Lord and others that he chose to include in his account. What is more there are any number of other points made in John that confirm the identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and God himself, Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. An example would be the instance in 12:41 where John identifies Jesus with God, Yahweh, whom Isaiah saw in his vision in the temple in Isa. 6.

Now, opponents of the doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ have often labored to show that this statement here in 10:30 – “I and the Father are one” – cannot be pressed into service as a proof text for the trinity. For example, they point out that in 17:22 the Lord Jesus prays to his Father that his disciples “may be one as we are one.” Well, we know very well that “being one” in that case wouldn’t mean that we are identical with one another or that we share the same essential nature, such as Christians confess about the Father and the Son whom they believe to be two persons of the same Godhead. When we speak of Christians being “one” we mean only that they are in agreement, that they love one another, that they are unified, not that they partake of the same being.

On the other hand, the Jews themselves clearly did not think that the Lord was claiming nothing more than that he had the same purpose as God, that he regulated his words and deeds according to the will of God, or that he walked in unity with God. No Jew would have stoned another Jew for saying only that! And, to be sure, Jesus doesn't defend himself here by saying that he meant nothing more than that.

In fact, there is a great deal here in the Lord's statement and in its elaboration in v. 38.

1. Clearly, in the context, he is referring to more than simply an agreement with the Father or a common purpose. He is, at least, claiming a power like that of the Father. No one can snatch his sheep out of his hand and no one can snatch them out of his Father's hand. But infinite power is an essential attribute of God and no Jew would assume that anyone but God possessed such power.
2. Further, throughout the Gospel the Lord has claimed over and again that he came from heaven. He did not begin to be when he was born in this world. He existed before Abraham he says in one instance. Therefore, when the Lord Jesus claims to be the Son of God, he is not saying that he is the son in the same way that God's people are the sons or the children of God. Jesus is the *unique* son. It is for this reason that he is able to show men the Father. He has an intimate knowledge of the Father that no other man has. It is why he will say later that if one knows him he knows the Father as well. That is how close the Father and the Son are. That same point is made here in v. 38.

We can say so much more. Not only is Jesus explicitly identified as God, though, at the same time distinguished from both the Father and the Spirit, not only is he identified with Yahweh, the God revealed in the first 39 books of the Bible – but time and again divine attributes and divine prerogatives are claimed by him or attributed to him. In the Gospel of John and in the other Gospels the Lord Jesus 1) was said to be and claimed to be the creator of the world, which the whole Bible declares to be the work of God alone; 2) claimed the right to judge mankind, which is in the Bible, the work of God; 3) he claimed the right to forgive sins, another divine prerogative; 4) he claimed the right and the power to bestow eternal life; 5) he declared that his presence was God's presence; 6) that the eternal destiny of human beings depended on their response to him; 6) he identified actions taken toward him as taken toward God; 7) he taught truth and revealed truth on his own authority, truth about the unseen realities of the world and the future – truth for which he offers no “proof”, no vision, no communication from heaven; it is true simply because he says it is; 8) he stands above Moses and even goes so far as to repeal some Mosaic regulations; 9) He performed miracles on his own authority – i.e. he doesn't say, as others do in the Bible, in the name of .... I command you, rise and walk!; 10) He received worship. He never says as Paul or Peter would later say to those who fell at *their* feet, “Get up, we are only men like you.” – even demons fall before him and call him Lord; In the NT no one ever successfully falls down or bows down before another human being except before Jesus; 11) he everywhere assumes and teaches that his life is a pattern for all other men; 12) time and again he applied to himself OT texts that refer to God; and, 13) very interestingly, in his parables he is a divine figure.

We could go on at length. The data from which the Christian doctrine of the tri-unity of God is constructed appear in great number everywhere in the New Testament. So the claim the Lord

makes here, both in its immediate context in the Gospel and in its larger context in the New Testament, is rightly taken to be a confession both that Jesus shares a profound, real unity with the Father, such a unity as requires us to honor him as God, and, at the same time, that Jesus is distinct from the Father, as his Son.

Augustine famously commented on this text in this way.

“‘I and the Father are one,’ hear both, both the *one, unum* and the *are, sumus*, and you will be delivered from Charybdis and from Scylla. In these two words, in that he said *one* he delivers you from Arius [who denied the full deity of Christ]; in that he said *are*, he delivers you from Sabellius [who denied the distinction of person, the Son simply being the Father in another form]. If *one* therefore not diverse; if *are*, therefore both Father and Son.” [*John*, xxxvi, 9]

The Lord did not hesitate to use the plural form when speaking of himself and his Father and the Holy Spirit. “We will come to him [that is a Christian believer] and dwell with him.” But, as here, he also will say, “I and the Father are one.” All three persons have a single name in the great formula of baptism: “Baptize them in the name [not names] of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.” “You believe in one God? You do well,” writes James, the Lord’s brother. Distinction in unity. That is the conclusion to which the biblical evidence inexorably leads.

This is the doctrine that identifies Christianity and separates it from Judaism and from Islam. They are monotheistic faiths, but they have no tri-unity in the Godhead. And, and this is no accident, they also make very little of what lies at the heart of Christian faith and life, viz. the possibility and the privilege of actually knowing God, of having relationship with him as Father, brother, advocate, friend, Savior. That is what the Trinity means for us, of course, God known to us, loved by us, trusted by us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God in relationship with us for he is in relationship with himself.

But if Jesus is God and equal with the Father as God, then what of all the statements he makes to the effect that he has been sent by the Father, and obeys the Father, and does the Father’s will, or, as in 5:19, the Son can only do what he sees his Father doing, or, as in 5:30, by myself I can do nothing, or, still more, as in 14:26 where he says, “The Father is greater than I”?

It is a very large and difficult question and has provoked a very long debate. Some have argued that we should think of a certain order among the persons of the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and that the Lord, in such statements is telling us that the Father stands first and foremost in the inner life of God. After all, they point out, by referring to the first two persons of the Trinity by the terms Father and Son – terms that suggest an order and an authority to us – the Bible is teaching us to think of such an order in the life of the Trinity.

Others, however, have argued that it is better to take all such statements as these in the Gospels, these statements in which the Son speaks of his inferior place and position in reference to the Father, as relating to his incarnate life as the God-Man. As God the Son there is no subordination to the Father, but as the incarnate Son, the God-Man, he is the servant of the

Father for the sake of our salvation. It is only as now a man that Christ would speak of his being inferior to the Father.

For example, we read of Jesus Christ in the great 4<sup>th</sup> century Athanasian Creed, “Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead: and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood.” [33]

But, however we handle that question, it is clear that in the Gospel of John and in the New Testament as a whole we are taught that Jesus Christ is God, fully God, and yet there are not three gods but one living and true God. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God and these are distinct persons who relate to one another in love, but they together make not three gods but one God. “In this trinity,” runs the ancient creed, “nothing is before or after, nothing is greater or less: but all three Persons co-eternal, together and equal.”

What are we to make of this? We are to *make* nothing of it. It is to make something of us! Once we have gathered what the Scripture is teaching, what it is requiring us to believe, we dare not – as these Jews did – bring the meaning of that teaching to the bar of our reason as if we could pass judgment on it.

More than anything else, this mysterious reality lies at the bottom of our faith as Christians. It is this confession of God as triune, of Christ – the man of Galilee and Judea – who was, at the same time one of the three persons of the Godhead, as equal with the Father, that binds Christians together and separates them from all other men.

The Christian church has never claimed to understand these things, to know how God can be both one and three. She has repeated what Holy Scripture teaches her and she has rested content in the demonstration of this doctrine in the life and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We think more truly of God when we think of him as incomprehensible, far beyond our knowing, than when we think of him in any other way.

Today, even Christians, and certainly many other modern men and women are held captive by a superficial scientism that encourages them to believe that they really understand much more than they do.

More than a hundred years ago, the British essayist, Thomas Carlyle, taking his cue from Plato, pictured a man, a deep pagan thinker, who had grown up from a child in some hidden cave and had never seen the world outside. Then one day he is brought to the opening of the cave at the very moment of sunrise. “What would his wonder be,” exclaims Carlyle, “his rapt astonishment at the sight we daily witness with indifference! With the free, open sense of a child, yet with the ripe faculty of a man, his whole heart would be kindled by the sight.... This green flowery rock-built earth, the trees, the mountains, rivers, many-sounding seas; that great deep sea of azure that swims overhead; the winds sweeping through it; the black cloud fashioning itself together, now pouring out fire, now hail and rain; what *is* it? Ay, what? At bottom we do not yet know; we can never know at all.” [Cited by Tozer, *The Knowledge of God*, 25-26]

Well so it really is. We understand almost nothing about our own selves: the myriad of forces, factors, of experiences that have shaped our lives and shape them every day. We understand

almost nothing of the world in which we live. We know enough to make it work for us in certain ways, we know enough to marvel at the infinite perfection that is on display in nature, but how and why all of this is as it is, we cannot explain. The world, after all our science, is still a vast mystery, a miracle, magical and more. Who could ever imagine such a place as our world, or this universe, or the human body and soul, or human history, indeed. My point is, there is a great deal more mystery in this world than we admit to ourselves or think about or ponder.

Even the most exalted scientists must admit this when pressed. Listen to Paul Davies, the English physicist.

“Of course, physicists, like everybody else, carry around mental models of atoms, light waves, the expanding universe, electrons, and son on, but the images are often widely inaccurate or misleading. In fact, it may be logically impossible for anyone to be able to accurately visualise certain features that simply do not exist in the world of our experience.” [Cited in MacLeod, *The Person of Christ*, 68]

As A.W. Tozer saw so clearly a generation ago,

“We save face by repeating frivolously the popular jargon of science. We harness the mighty energy that rushes through our world; we subject it to fingertip control in our cars and our kitchens; we make it work for us like Aladdin’s jinn, but still we do not know what it is. Secularism, materialism, and the intrusive presence of *things* have put out the light in our souls and turned us into a generation of zombies. We cover our deep ignorance with words, but we are ashamed to wonder, we are afraid to whisper ‘mystery.’” [26]

Well, we Christians should be the first to get over this fear and the first to glory in the mystery of things, leading right back up to the utter mystery of God, the three in one. We even say *that* so easily: three persons in one essence. But, we don’t really know what we are talking about. Augustine said that he used the word “person” not in order to speak, but in order not to be silent. We have no idea what the Godhead is really like. We have been given words to confess and teaching to believe, but we cannot visualize this. When we do we invariably betray either the threeness or the oneness.

No, here at John 10:30 we stand before a great deep. Our task is not to explain but to believe and to adore. And taking up the greatness and the mystery of God into our hearts, then to believe how magnificent a thing it is that we should be given to know this God, that we should be loved by him, that he should have stooped so low to save us from our sins, and that we should have before us the prospect of living in the visible presence of his glory for ever and ever.

Oh, no, my brethren, there is not nearly enough of God in our minds and hearts, in our thinking and living. The high and great and utterly incomprehensible Almighty. Everything in the world and in our lives is from him and to him and through him and for him. Everything valuable and true and beautiful comes from him and must be given back to him or it will be ruined, spoiled and corrupted. As John Donne put it so beautifully long ago:

“All knowledge that begins not, and ends not with His glory is but a giddy...circle, but an elaborate and exquisite ignorance.”

Our Savior himself thought it his great task not simply to make himself known, but his Father, and later we will read that it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to make Christ known to us. To know the triune God in all his triune mystery and glory is to be the purpose of our lives and sum of all our hopes and desires.

What we learn here is how right it is to look up always to God, to give our lives wholly to him, glorious in mystery and wonder that he is.

Some seek a **Father** in the heavens above:

Some ask a **human image** to adore;

Some crave a **spirit** vast as life and love;

Within thy mansions we have all and more.