

Is Jesus "Deity" or "Human"?

PART 1 - Dealing with the possible viewpoints

1. There are four possible assertions (whether true or false) about the relationship of Jesus to deity and humanity:

- #1 Jesus is deity
- #2 Jesus is *not* deity
- #3 Jesus is human
- #4 Jesus is *not* human

We will work with these four assertions in the following analysis:

2. If we start out by *assuming* that Jesus *cannot* be both deity and human, there are two possible views:
 - a. One view will tend to emphasize assertions #1 and #4. [Jesus "is deity" and "is not human."]
 - b. The other view will tend to emphasize assertions #2 and #3. [Jesus "is not deity" and "is human."]

But does the Bible make such an assumption? Let's find out...

3. Which of the above assertions are claimed by the Bible?

- #1 is mentioned (John 1:1 - "the Word was God/deity" - and many more verses).
- #2 is never mentioned.
- #3 is mentioned (1 Timothy 2:5 - "the man Christ Jesus" - and many more verses).
- #4 is never mentioned.

Apparently the Bible *doesn't* make such an assumption.

4. What is necessary for a *genuine* contradiction?
 - a. If we state #1 and #2 together, *or* if we state #3 and #4 together, we have a genuine contradiction. This is because, in either case, the *same* truth concept is being *both* affirmed and denied. (Example: "Jesus *is* and *is not* human.")
 - b. If we combine assertion #1 with either assertion #3 or #4, or assertion #2 with either assertion #3 or #4, *no* contradiction is formed. This is because, in either case, two *different* issues or truth concepts are being mentioned.
 - c. The Bible combines assertion #1 (a statement about Jesus' *deity*) with assertion #3 (a statement about Jesus' *humanity*). Since two *different* issues or truth concepts are being mentioned, there is no *genuine* contradiction.

5. The Bible affirms *both* that Jesus is deity and Jesus is human. If we are not familiar with these concepts, or if past influences have led us to believe that these two statements "contradict" (rather than "complement") each other, we can ask the question, "How can both be true?" However, our attitude toward the Bible, and the extent that we are willing to learn, will determine the outcome of our question.

We can ask "How" with an attitude of *belief (trust)* and *acceptance* of what has been recorded in the Bible, or we can ask with an attitude of *disbelief (distrust)* and *a desire to get rid of* one of the two statements.

- a. *If we ask in disbelief (distrust):* We can look at all the evidence that supports whichever assertion we prefer, and assume that it negates the other group of evidence. Having made this assumption, we can deny or "reinterpret" any passages which seem to support the other assertion.
 - b. *If we ask in belief (trust):* We can look at all the evidence that supports *both* statements. We can look at any explanations of *how* the statements fit together (if we discover that such explanations exist). Then we can accept it all and leave it there, without adding to or subtracting from it.
6. These are the *real* issues. This is the reason for the many conflicts and differences in views that have been present - both now and in the past - over the nature of Jesus Christ. Below is an example from the past, which illustrates a major controversy that originated because of people who focused so much on one truth statement, that they neglected of the other. Many of these people had good intentions, but they still went astray. We can study what happened and (hopefully) learn how to avoid such errors.

We can also learn that there is no "middle ground" between these two foundational perspectives - a perspective that allows us to accept "both" truth statements, and one that forces us to accept "either/or" but not "both" truth statements. No compromise is possible between them.

PART 2 - A look into history

A brief glance at a major historic controversy that focused on these issues:

The Development of and Response to "Arianism"

It has been said that "nature abhors a vacuum." Complementary dimensions of truth act like "boundaries" that keep a person from wandering into error. Any time one dimension of truth is neglected, error creeps in. This results in a false perspective or "thought system."

A century before the "Arian" heresy came into existence, there were some people who were already over-emphasizing one truth, to the neglect of the other. In some respects, "Arianism" was a reaction (actually, an *over*-reaction) to previous errors. Its proponents might have had good intentions, but their over-reaction led them to doing the same thing, but in the "opposite direction."

1. Two groups of verses can be found in Scripture:
 - a. Those which emphasize *unity* - which point to the two (Father and Son) as being the *same* deity.
 - b. Those which emphasize *plurality* - which point out the differences between Father and Son, *or* which describe Jesus as human (sometimes associated with a statement that the Father is God).

2. Clarification
 - a. As this controversy developed, all sides accepted the fact that the Father and Son had different *functions* or *activities*. The issue here involved questions about their "*beings*" - were they the same, different, or what?
 - b. The issue involved the relationship between the New Testament terms, "Father" and "Son."
 - i. The relationship of the Old Testament term "Jehovah" to these terms was not the main issue, for the answer to the "Father/Son" question would determine the relationship of "Jehovah" to "Father" and to "Son."
 - ii. For example, those who considered the Father and Son to be *different* beings - that is, that the Son was not God - would tend to say that "Jehovah" referred only to the Father.
 - iii. Questions about the Holy Spirit came in *later* centuries, so the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in the following summary.

3. Distortions in the previous century, that led up to the controversy ("Sabellianism")
 - a. Perhaps this all began as a reaction to the multiple "deities" of the pagans, a view that is an obvious error. But some leaders in the church, in their zeal to emphasize the *unity* of God, began to lose sight of the *plurality* aspect.
 - b. Though they may have had good intentions, these leaders over-emphasized the *unity* of Father and Son, and de-emphasized the *plurality* aspect, to the point that it was lost and even rejected by some.
 - c. An underlying *assumption* was increasingly present (perhaps unknowingly), that Jesus could not be *both* deity and human. At the same time, erroneous "human reasoning" was increasingly added (perhaps also unknowingly), and filled the "gaps" of the emerging theological system, until it was complete. This system, once developed, was called "Sabellianism" (named after one of its proponents).
 - d. In the end, this viewpoint nearly died out, because of the reaction (and over-reaction) of those who saw the error of this way.

4. Over-reaction ("Arianism")
 - a. People tend to go to extremes. Because of the over-emphasis on *unity* (and resulting denial of *plurality*) that some leaders had, others began to emphasize the *plurality* aspect - to the point that *unity* became lost and rejected.
 - b. Again, there was the underlying *assumption* that Jesus could not be *both* deity and human. Again, erroneous "human reasoning" filled the void. The final result was a theological system called "Arianism" (named after one of its chief proponents).
 - c. As with the previous error, this view assumed an "either/or" position: they accepted one group of verses and did not accept the other group. They focused on the verses about the *unity* of God and took their eyes off the verses about the deity of Jesus - which imply the

plurality dimension of this one God. (From an "either/or" perspective, such verses would have seemed to imply multiple gods.)

- d. This forced them to "re-interpret" any verse that focused on Jesus as deity, because it didn't fit their system. (Having already made their assumptions and reached a false conclusion, they saw nothing wrong in what they were doing. From their perspective, they were probably just taking "difficult passages" and interpreting them "in the light of" what they claimed was the truth.)

5. Clarification

- a. In this controversy, the question was *not* "How (in what specific way) is Jesus *human*?" Since the "Sabellian" viewpoint was essentially dead, almost everyone involved accepted the fact that Jesus was human. (There were some details and implications of this issue that were not fully explored until later centuries, but the basic concept was readily accepted.)
- b. This controversy didn't debate the fact that the Father is God. (Everyone accepted that fact.) At this point, there were two questions: "Is Jesus *God* (deity)?" and if so, "*How* (in what specific way) is he God?"
- c. Also, this controversy mainly affected the eastern half of Christendom. The churches in the west (for the most part) never considered it an issue, but always accepted *both* the deity and the humanity of Jesus.

6. Misinterpretation of the "Orthodox" view

- a. As used here, the term "Orthodox" does not refer to a specific denomination or group that came into existence centuries later. It is the term that was used to indicate the "right (Greek = *ortho*) viewpoint (Greek = *doxa*)."
- b. This group believed *both* sets of verses to be true (both sets accepted "as is," rather than being re-interpreted).
- c. This view was (unfortunately) misinterpreted by the Arians. In discussions with the Arians, the need to point out the *unity* aspect was often interpreted as a *rejection* of the *plurality* aspect. So the Arians accused them of promoting "Sabellianism." (The Arians interpreted the Orthodox view on the basis of their own "either-or" assumptions, rather than from the Orthodox perspective of "both-and.")

7. Struggles in reaching the "Orthodox" view

- a. This "struggle" affected mainly the *eastern* half of Christendom, where the Arian heresy first originated. (Most of the western half never wavered from the original "Orthodox" view.)
- b. Although they believed Jesus was God, many were uncertain about the answer to the question, "*How* is Jesus God?" They rejected the Arians' view, but had uncertainties about how they should define their own view. (Part of the uncertainty may have been caused by the Arians' accusation that the Orthodox view was actually "Sabellianism.")
- c. Because of this, they wavered for a while, somewhere between the Orthodox and Arian views. (This was called the "Semi-Arian" view.)
- d. After many years of struggle, church councils, politics, attempts to compromise, etc., they became finally convinced that there was *no* middle ground for compromise... and fully adopted the Orthodox view.