

“He is True, Eternal God, the Almighty”

An Exposition of the Belgic Confession – Article Ten

Article 10: The Deity of Christ

We believe that Jesus Christ, according to his divine nature, is the only Son of God¹—eternally begotten, not made nor created, for then he would be a creature. He is one in essence with the Father; coeternal; the exact image of the person of the Father and the “reflection of his glory” (Col. 1:15, Heb 1:3), being in all things like him.² He is the Son of God not only from the time he assumed our nature but from all eternity,³ as the following testimonies teach us when they are taken together. Moses says that God “created the world”;⁴ and John says that “all things were created by the Word,” which he calls God.⁵ The letter to the Hebrews says that “God made the world by his Son.”⁶ Paul says that “God created all things by Jesus Christ.”⁷ And so it must follow that he who is called God, the Word, the Son, and Jesus Christ already existed when all things were created by him. Therefore the prophet Micah says that his origin is “from ancient times, from eternity” (Micah 5:2) And Hebrews says that he has “neither beginning of days nor end of life” (Heb 7:3). So then, he is the true eternal God, the Almighty, whom we invoke, worship, and serve.

¹ Mt 17:5; Jn 1:14, 18, 3:16, 14:1-14, 20:17, 31; Rom 1:4; Gal 4:4; Heb 1:2 ² Jn 5:18, 23, 10:30, 14:9, 20:28; Rom 9:5; Php 2:6; Col 1:15; Tit 2:13 ³ Jn 8:58, 17:5; Heb 13:8 ⁴ Gen 1:1 ⁵ Jn 1:1-3 ⁶ Heb 1:2-3 ⁷ 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16

While a truism in modern American—“Jews, Muslims and Christians, all worship the same God”—the deity of Jesus Christ is the most obvious reason why this is not the case. Like Jews and Muslims, Christians are monotheists. But unlike Jews and Muslims, Christians are also Trinitarians. We believe that the one God is triune and is revealed as three distinct and divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If Jesus Christ is fully God, and if Jews and Muslims reject his deity, then Jews and Muslims do not worship the same God that Christians worship.

Christians embrace the New Testament as part of God’s self-revelation (unlike the Jews). Since Christians believe that the New Testament’s teaching regarding the deity of Jesus Christ supercedes all subsequent supposed revelation from God (i.e. the Koran—the holy book of Islam), then the person and work of Jesus Christ will necessarily define the Christian view of God. However, Jews, Muslims, and many indigenous American cults (i.e. Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons) do not accept the deity of Jesus Christ. It is especially important that we believe the doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ in order to be saved, since salvation is found in no other name than the name of Jesus (cf. Acts 4:12). It is also vital to confess this doctrine before the watching world so that people might come to a saving knowledge of God, through the saving work of Jesus Christ, who is the true and eternal God, the Almighty.

We must also confess this doctrine because so many mistakenly think that Jews, Christians and Muslims all worship the same God. No, we do not worship the same God and we cannot allow this mistaken but popular assumption to go unchallenged. This is why we must believe and confess the deity of Jesus.

No one wants to say anything bad about Jesus. This is why so many non-Christian religions attempt to co-opt Jesus and make him one of their own. But this is not easy to do since the doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ differentiates Christianity from all other religions. If Jesus is true and eternal God who has taken to himself a true human nature, then the Christian doctrine of God is absolutely unique.

Christianity is not one religion among many. Rather, Christianity is the only true religion. If Christians are correct about Jesus, then all those who reject the deity of Jesus are wrong about their view of God—plain and simple. It is this claim to exclusive truth, which is an offense to our culture, as well as an embarrassment to many Christians who now seek ways to remove differences among religions so as to find common cause in the culture wars, or to soften the offense of the gospel so all religions can pretend to be one, the goal of ecumenism.

Muslims view Jesus as a prophet on par with Moses and Abraham, but the doctrine of his deity is completely inconsistent with the Koran's teaching that God is one. Muslims believe that the doctrine of the deity of Christ is a perversion of true biblical teaching, which must be properly understood through the lens of the teachings of the prophet Mohammed. In other words, the Koran corrects the erroneous assumptions of Christians who supposedly misread the Bible. Jews, on the other hand, at least historically, have viewed Jesus as a blasphemer who was the supreme threat to the true religion of Israel. Although many Jews now grant that Jesus may have been a Messiah of sorts to the Gentiles, if not to Israel, others worry that any discussion of the deity of Jesus and his claim to be the only Savior will lend credence to the rising tide of anti-Semitism. When Christians speak of the deity of Jesus in this culture, many Jews cry foul and call us anti-Semites.

Eastern religions re-define Jesus as a great teacher who was somehow privy to ancient Eastern thinking which was misunderstood by those in the West. When viewed through this lens, Jesus is an enlightened teacher of wisdom, like the Buddha, or some other ancient sage. Protestant Liberals have generally viewed Jesus as the world's greatest ethicist, the supreme model life for all of us to emulate. It was the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher who taught that Jesus was the ideal man (really the ideal *German* man), who demonstrated more than anyone else who ever lived what it meant to be absolutely dependant upon God. This means that while Christianity might be the best religion, it is not the only true religion. There's a huge difference between being the best and the only true religion.

The great irony is that virtually all religions want to say nice things about Jesus, they all reject (implicitly or explicitly) the main point the New Testament makes about Jesus, that he is God in human flesh, which is something Jesus clearly believed and proclaimed about himself (i.e., John 8:58). Christianity stands or falls based upon our conception of Jesus Christ. Is Jesus fully God? Or is he a mere man with an extraordinary consciousness of God? This is why even though Christians are monotheists, we cannot talk about the one true God with Jews or Muslims without addressing the subject of the deity of the Son. It is our confession of Jesus Christ as true and eternal God which divides us as Christians from everyone else. This is an extremely unpopular position to take in modern America. But if we are to be faithful to Holy Scripture this is one truth we must confess, perhaps louder than all others!

Having devoted two articles to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity—Article Eight set forth a basic explanation that God is one in essence while revealed as three distinct persons, while Article Nine summarizes the biblical evidence for the Trinity and affirms that Reformed Christians are also “catholic” Christians—our confession now moves on to Article Ten, which deals with the deity of Jesus Christ. If each of the three persons of the Trinity fully participate in the one divine essence, then it is important to turn to the rather voluminous biblical data which affirms the deity of the Son (Jesus Christ), the second person of the Holy Trinity. Likewise, we will do the same when we consider the biblical evidence for the deity of the Holy

Spirit, which is summarized for us in Article Eleven.

There is no question that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is difficult to understand. Indeed, the doctrine is a mystery beyond our comprehension and while we cannot define the Trinity, we can offer some basic definitions which help us understand who God is, while at the same time, help us ward off common errors that people often make when discussing this doctrine. That there is one God is easy to understand. But that the one God exists in three distinct persons, each of whom are fully God and possess distinct personal properties unique to each of their persons is much more difficult to grasp. How can three persons be one God? Yet this is precisely how God is revealed to us in his word.

Furthermore, as Christians, each one of us personally encounters each of the three persons of the Godhead who act according to their own distinct personal properties to save us from our sins. God the Father is often spoken of as our creator, God the Son is often spoken of as our redeemer, and the blessed Holy Spirit is often spoken of as our sanctifier. Our Confession points out that we can reason backwards from our experience of God's gracious working in our lives to each of the three distinct persons of the Godhead, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As our confession puts it in the opening words of Article nine: "All these things we know from the testimonies of Holy Scripture as well as from the effects of the persons, especially from those we feel within ourselves."

While fully comprehending the doctrine of the Trinity is impossible, and defining the doctrine in such a way as to be clear while warding off errors is admittedly difficult, one way in which this whole subject becomes a bit easier to understand is simply to consider the deity of the second and third persons of the Trinity, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. While there are several biblical passages which speak of the Deity of the Holy Spirit, the Bible is full of passages which speak of the deity of Jesus Christ. If we can prove from the Scriptures that Jesus is fully God, then we have gone a long way towards establishing the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the Christian doctrine of God. Therefore, when those who belong to other monotheistic religions tell us that Jews, Muslims and Christians all worship the same God, or when Eastern Religions tell us Jesus was one of their own, or when theologically liberal Protestants tell us that Jesus was a peasant or a revolutionary who, in the words of Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, liked to help little old ladies across the Sea of Galilee, the best line of defense is to turn to the biblical evidence for the deity of Jesus Christ. Much of it is summarized in Article Ten of our confession. This is why it is a good thing to keep handy so that you are prepared when those pesky JW's show up at your front door!

Our Confession divides its discussion of the Deity of Jesus Christ into two parts. The first part entails a discussion of the eternal sonship of Jesus Christ—Jesus is truly and eternally God, while the second part speaks of the fact that Jesus does the works of God. We should point out that this discussion is set forth against the backdrop of those heresies and heretics mentioned at the end of Article Nine. While we touched on these heresies briefly in the exposition of Article Nine, for our purposes when considering Article Ten, we simply need to recall that the most famous of these heretics was Arius, who believed and taught that Jesus was the first creation of God, and that Jesus, in turn, created everything else. If Arius is correct—and his view nearly prevailed in the church, were it not for the heroic efforts of St. Athanasius—it means that Jesus is a creature, that he is not eternal, nor is he fully God. Lest you think this view is a relic of the past, this is the view of Jesus Christ taught by the Jehovah's Witnesses. The serious nature of this error is why our confession begins with the assertion, that according to his divine nature, Jesus is fully and eternally God, not created nor made, but eternally begotten.

Ancient errors continue to resurface in modern times as seen in the fact that a number of well-known evangelicals openly teach that Jesus, while eternally God, is at the same time eternally subordinate to the

Father. According to this view (which comes close to semi-Arianism), what distinguishes Jesus from the Father is not the fact he is eternally generated as the only begotten by the Father (i.e., John 1:14), but his unique role or place within the Trinity (so-called “social Trinitarianism”).¹

The doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ is not the invention of the early church as is evident by simply scanning the pages of Holy Scripture, which are replete with teaching regarding the deity of Jesus in both testaments. One of the most powerful lines of evidence are those verses in the Old Testament, such as the famous messianic prophecy in Isaiah 7:14. The coming Messiah is to be given a very specific title: “*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*” The messiah will be miraculously conceived and given the title “God with us.” Then, in Isaiah 9:6-7, the prophet goes on to speak of this coming Messiah using some very amazing language:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

This is an amazing prophecy when you consider it was given some seven hundred years before the coming of Jesus Christ.

In addition to these messianic prophecies in Isaiah, we have a number of messianic Psalms (8, 89, 110, 118), in which the Father speaks of the Son as highly exalted and equal in majesty and glory. We also have passages such as Proverbs 8:22-31, which depict wisdom personified (which seen through the lens of New Testament fulfillment, is clearly a reference to the eternal Son, who is wisdom from God). In Micah 5:2, the prophet speaks of the one to be born in Bethlehem as eternal. There can be no doubt that the coming Messiah is repeatedly identified as the almighty God and eternal father, the wisdom of God, righteous, highly exalted, yet to be born of a lowly virgin and who, according to Isaiah 53, will also suffer as a lowly servant. These prophetic verses can only be speaking of one person: Israel’s coming Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who is the God of Abraham.

It was to verses such as these that the apostles and early Christian apologists appealed when preaching the gospel to Jews, as we see in the pages of the New Testament and read about in the writings of the church fathers (e.g. Acts 2:16-36; 3:11-26; 4:8-11; 5:29-32; 7:2-53). This is why we speak of Jews as holding an inaccurate or even heretical view of the true God (they worship the right God, but deny his Tri-unity). Muslims worship a false God, Allah, who is utterly impersonal and bears no resemblance whatsoever to the God of the Bible. The fact is that Old Testament revelation of the God of Abraham to the people of Israel points us to the messianic expectation which was fulfilled by Jesus Christ—that God himself would come to visit his people to bring them salvation when the messianic age would dawn. In all our evangelistic and apologetic endeavors with Jews, the key question is the identity of Jesus. This is why we need to be conversant with messianic prophecies and why we should be able to demonstrate how Jesus was spoken of in the Old Testament so that we might see Jews come to faith in Jesus Christ, Israel’s own savior.

¹ Matthew Barrett, Simply Trinity: The Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2020), 213-217.

Yet, we must not forget that as Gentiles, it is we who have been grafted into Israel's redemptive story—we were the strangers and foreigners to Israel's covenant of promise (Ephesians 2:11-22) and as Paul warns us in Romans 11, if we become proud and arrogant, and forget that we have been justified by Israel's God based upon his mercy (not upon the fact that we are somehow better than the Jews), then we too risk suffering the fate of those unbelieving Jews who trusted in their own righteousness, rather than receive the righteousness of Jesus Christ through faith. Belief in Jesus provides no justification whatsoever for anti-Semitism. But given the history of how Jews were treated across Europe by people who were supposedly Christians, we ought to be very careful to point out whenever we say Jews have a heretical view of the God of Abraham and that Jesus Christ is God in human flesh, that we are in no way condoning nor supporting hatred of the Jewish people. We should have the same attitude toward the Jews that the apostle Paul did: "*Brothers, my heart's desire for Israel is that they might be saved*" (Romans 10:1)

If the Old Testament contains a number of assertions of the deity of Jesus Christ (albeit in pre-messianic terms), then the problem with the New Testament is that there is so much evidence that it is difficult to know where to begin. There are so many lines of evidence it is impossible to consider them all in our brief time this morning. From Jesus' personal claims to be God or equal with God, to his claims to possess the authority of God, to the fact that Jesus accepted prayer, praise and worship (things reserved only for God alone), to his claims to be able to deliver from sin and death, to the fact he was given divine titles and described as possessing divine attributes, to the fact he does the work of God in redemption, to the fact that he is paralleled with God throughout the New Testament (that is, what God did in the Old Testament, Jesus is said to do in the New), to the fact that Jesus is sinless, possesses God's glory, and is raised from the dead and then exalted on high—the fact of the matter is that there is so much evidence for the deity of Christ, it is virtually impossible to summarize it all. So, we will simply follow the pattern set forth in our confession and use those specific proof-texts which have been listed for us in article ten.

We begin with the assertion that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. The biblical evidence for this is impressive. In Matthew 17:5, we read that Jesus "*was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."* Israel's God directly addresses Jesus as his Son and pronounces a divine benediction upon him.

Then, we have the prologue to John's Gospel. John writes in verses 1-2, "*in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.*" When John says Jesus *was*, he means Jesus always *was*. This directly contradicts the praise chorus sung by the Arians to attack the orthodox teaching regarding the deity of Christ: "there was a time when the Son was not." According to John, Jesus is the Word, the Word is God, the Word always was God. There never was a time when the Son was not!

Notice, too, that John's language here not only echoes Genesis 1:1, "*in the beginning, God*" but that in verse 3, John goes on to assign to Jesus the task of creation, something which the Old Testament assigned to YHWH. "*All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*" Jesus is not some kind of a "lesser" God as Arius taught, nor a second God associated with matter (the *demiurge*—an intermediate god) as taught by Marcion. In fact, we can put John's argument in the form of a basic syllogism. Jesus created all things. The Old Testament teaches that God created all things. Therefore, Jesus is God.

Notice, too, that in verse 4 of John chapter one, John asserts yet another divine attribute of the Word: "*In*

him was life, and the life was the light of men.” Jesus is the source and origin of human life, a point reiterated in John 5:24-26:

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.

Not only does Jesus speak words which bring the dead to life (that is, he has the ability to give the new birth), but just as God has, Jesus has the power of life in himself. This is tantamount to a claim to deity.

As John opens his gospel, it is important for him to connect Jesus to the Word who always was God, who is without beginning nor end. In John 1:14, John identifies this Word for us. *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* Not only is Jesus the word made flesh, but as he does in verse 14, John speaks of Jesus in verse 18 as follows: *“No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”* John uses a compound Greek word *monogeneis* here, which means Jesus is eternally begotten. He is God’s eternal Word made flesh who is eternally begotten by the Father—his personal distinction.² God has only one eternally begotten son, although we become God’s adopted children through faith in Jesus.

Seeing a way to prove that Jesus had a beginning, Arius attacked the deity of Jesus at this very point, writing in a letter to the famous church historian Eusebius: *“And before [the Son] was begotten or created or defined or established, he was not, for he was not unbegotten. But we are persecuted because we say, ‘the Son as a beginning, but God is without beginning.’”*³ But John’s whole point is that Jesus is without beginning—he was eternally begotten. He always was the Word. And the Word is God.

If you look at the proof texts listed in our confession, you’ll find that most of them come from John’s gospel. It is the apostle John who records Jesus saying to the Jews, *“I and the Father are one”* (John 10:30), a remarkable statement for a Jew to make about himself. In John 20:17, Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, *“do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”* Furthermore, Jesus provoked the Jews to anger in a number of instances. In John 5:18, we read that because Jesus had healed a man on the Sabbath, *“this was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”* While Protestant liberals may not get Jesus’ point, the Jews sure did! They clearly understood that Jesus was claiming to be God! Hence, they tried to kill him, the penalty for blasphemy.

Perhaps the most amazing assertion made by Jesus is his claim to be the one who spoke to Moses from the burning bush—the I AM. In John 8:58, Jesus is recorded as saying, *“before Abraham was, I am.”* The

² See John 1:14, 18, where John uses the term [*monogenes theos*], usually translated “the one and only God,” (i.e., the ESV, NIV). But as Charles Lee Irons has compellingly argued, “only begotten” is the proper translation of *monogenes*. See, Charles Lee Irons, “A Lexical Defense of the Johannine ‘Only Begotten’” in Fred Sanders and Scott R. Swain, Retrieving Eternal Generation (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 98-116.

³ Arius, *Letter to Eusebius*.

Jews knew exactly what Jesus was claiming, because as soon as he uttered these words, they picked up stones to kill him. Many scholars believe that the literary high point of John's gospel comes in the twentieth chapter when Jesus appears before his disciples after his crucifixion. When Jesus appears in the midst of his disciples, all believe except one, Thomas. But having felt the wounds in Jesus' hands and side, Thomas falls at Jesus' feet and proclaims "*My Lord and my God!*" (John 20:28). We should not miss the fact that does Jesus not correct Thomas, he receives worship from Thomas.

And then we have the remarkable exchange recorded in John 14. In verse 8, we read of Philip's question to Jesus. "*Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.*" But it is Jesus' answer which takes us back. In verses 9-14, Jesus says to Philip,

Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

If Jesus is not fully God, then his words are not those of a good teacher, but those of a liar and a deceiver (the so-called tri-lemma). Only God in human flesh would dare claim that to see him is to see God and that the Father is working in him and through him.

As John brings his gospel to an end, he once again appeals to the fact that God is working through Jesus. While Jesus did many more miracles than those recorded in John's gospel, nevertheless, John says, "*now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.*" From beginning to end, John portrays Jesus as God in human flesh.

Our confession also mentions a number of verses from the apostle Paul, which underlie the assertion that Jesus is explicitly called "God," that he possesses divine attributes, and that he performs works assigned to God in the Old Testament. In Romans 9:5, Paul speaks of Jesus in doxological terms, "*the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever.*" Not only does Paul call Jesus "God, over all," Paul praises Jesus just as he would praise YHWH. In Philippians 2:6, Paul states that Jesus is "*in very nature God,*" while in Colossians 1:15, Paul says of Jesus, "*he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*" In verse 16, Paul goes on to state of Jesus, "*for by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.*" Jesus is not only the very image of God, he is the creator of all things, which exist for him. And then in Titus 2:13, Paul speaks of "*the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.*" The apostle Paul clearly believed that Jesus is God.

We could go on and on with more texts from Paul (his repeated use of the title *Kurios* for Jesus), texts from the Book of Revelation (Jesus is the Alpha and Omega), from the Book of Acts (God purchased the church with his own blood—Acts 20:28), from the gospels (the "Son of Man" language), but following the lead of our confession, we need only use those primary verses necessary to prove the point, that the Scriptures teach that Jesus is the eternally begotten God, that he is without beginning or end, and that he not only creates all things, but has the power of life in himself. As Christians, we cannot talk about God

without talking about the deity of Jesus Christ.

Finally, our confession goes on to speak as the apostles do, of the honor due to Jesus Christ, because he is truly God, the Almighty. After briefly summarizing the doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ, and then laying out some of the biblical data supporting it, our confession comes to this brief conclusion. “So then, he is the true eternal God, the Almighty, whom we invoke, worship, and serve.” Perhaps one of the most overlooked lines of evidence for the deity of Jesus Christ is found in the fact that as Christians, we not only believe and confess that Jesus is true and eternal God, the Almighty, but we put that confession of Christ’s deity into practice when we invoke Jesus’ name when we pray, when we worship him just as we worship the Father, and when we serve him, just as we do the Father.

Think about this for a moment. To invoke, worship, and serve a creature would violate the first three commandments! And yet in John 5:23, Jesus himself states the Father has entrusted judgment to the Son, *“so that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.”* To honor Jesus is to honor God. To invoke Jesus’s name and presence, to worship him, to pray to him is not idolatry! This is what is commanded of us because he is God! In fact, this point is one of the great weaknesses of Arianism. If Arius is correct, that Jesus is but a mere creature and not fully God, then to worship Jesus would be a horrible sin, since Jesus is not fully God, and only God deserves our worship. When we invoke Jesus Christ to come into our midst, when we worship him, when we serve him, we are giving him his due, because he is true and eternal God, the Almighty. For Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the God of Abraham, the God of Moses, and he is that one before whom Mohammed, the Buddha and all others must bow. Amen!

