

2: Assured

John was the last—the last of the chosen apostles, who *saw* and *heard* and *handled* the risen Christ; the last of those commissioned by Jesus to “*make disciples of the nations*” (Matthew 28:16-20), teaching them to observe His commands. With his Savior’s deity and commands now in question, it was his turn to defend the Truth and to silence the lies that were permeating the church and robbing believers of joy, hope, and assurance.

As a beloved disciple and friend of Jesus, John knew and experienced the Living Christ. While false teachers denied His deity and questioned His claims, John declared with certainty that Jesus was who He claimed—he *saw* His miracles, he *heard* the Gospel preached, he *handled* the Savior. John *witnessed* His death and *looked upon* the Risen Lord.

Redefining Jesus had serious spiritual and ethical implications. If the church denied Jesus was who He professed, His commands held no authority, and His claims were untrue. If the church accepted “*another Jesus*” (2 Corinthians 11:4), “*denying the Lord who bought them*” (2 Peter 2:1), they made God a liar (1 John 5:10) and forfeited life (5:12).

Because of this, the Apostle John sought to correct *this* lie before all others. Jesus of Nazareth *was* God in the flesh. But in the same way Jesus asked His disciples, saying, “*Who do you say that I am*” (Luke 9:20), they must also decide who they believed Jesus to be.

Describe who Jesus is to you. Then, explain how Christians today seek to redefine Jesus to accommodate those around them. _____

Distorted

In Lesson 1, it was noted that false teachers of Gnosticism (*gnosis*, knowledge) had infiltrated the church and influenced its members. Claiming to be *true* Christians and the *elect* of God, these false teachers sought “to make Christianity **understandable, acceptable, and respectable** in a world almost totally permeated by Greek assumptions about the reality of the world”ⁱ (emphasis mine).

In what ways is Christianity compromised by seeking to make it “understandable, acceptable, and respectable” to the world? How do Hebrews 11:1, 6, Romans 12:2, and Matthew 10:34-39, warn against this? _____

Gnosticism was a blend of Christianity and Greek philosophy. Although there were many variations among the Gnostic sects, certain beliefs were common to most of them—1. the supreme god, and the god of creation and redemption, are separate and distinct, 2. all matter (physical and material) is entirely evil, and all spirit is entirely good, and 3. salvation is achieved

by secret knowledge given only to god's elect. From these tenets came serious spiritual and ethical implications.

Perhaps the greatest affront to the church was their insistence that Jesus of Nazareth was *not* God incarnate.

Believing that all matter was evil, the Gnostics reasoned that the true God would not dwell in a sinful habitation among sinful people, nor would He occupy a sinful body. This meant that Jesus did *not* come into the world. If Jesus did come as a human, it meant He was incapable of being sinless, therefore impossible for Him to be God incarnate.

In spite of this, they did not deny His supernatural abilities but accounted for them by asserting that the "spirit of Christ" rested upon Him from baptism to pre-crucifixion, empowering Him to preach and perform miracles. In the end, Jesus died as a human, incapable of resurrection.

Others argued that God would never take on human flesh, therefore, Jesus was only a manifestation of God. The view that Jesus did not have a material body is called Docetism (*dokeo*, "to seem", or "to appear")—it just *seemed* or *appeared* as if He occupied a human body. This belief allowed Him to remain entirely "good."

Clearly, the Gnostics "attacked both [Christ's] full humanity and deity."ⁱⁱ

In 2 Peter 2:1, we read, "*False teachers... will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even **denying the Lord who bought them**, and bring on themselves swift destruction*" (emphasis mine). The verb *denying* (*arnoumai*) means "to refuse to recognize or acknowledge"; "not to know or recognize Him, to reject Him either in the face of a former relationship or better knowledge."ⁱⁱⁱ

According to the latter part of this definition, why will Christ be rejected?^{iv} _____

What will occur if the church denies Jesus is who He professed? _____

While "*denying the Lord*" might not seem to be the primary issue facing the church today, redefining Jesus is often the chief cause of its troubles. Let's consider the implications of questioning Christ's deity and His humanity.

If Jesus was not fully God...

1. He has no authority.
2. His Word has no authority.
3. His commands are optional.
4. His life is an example, not a standard.
5. His claims have no merit. (Resurrection, eternal life, judgment, etc.)

If Jesus was not fully human...

6. He did not suffer and die, atoning for the sins of the world.
7. He cannot relate to mankind.

Considering each point above, what results in an individuals' life when he begins to question Jesus' deity and humanity? _____

How does redefining Jesus make Christianity more palatable to humanity? _____

As we will see throughout John's first epistle, questioning Christ's deity allowed false teachers to minimize obedience and advocate moral laxity, allowing them to accommodate their society's practices. It also allowed them to emphasize knowledge over faith and adopt alternative methods of salvation. (We will revisit these topics throughout this series.)

Per 2 Peter 2:1 (found above), Matthew 10:33, and 2 Timothy 2:12-13, why was it paramount that John address Christ's deity before all other issues? How could redefining Jesus become the greatest issue facing the church? _____

Read John's words in 1 John 2:23 and 5:10-12. What are the consequences of believing in God while "denying" the Son? _____

In John 14:6, Jesus declares that He is "*the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through [Him].*" (Also read John 8:24.) How is Jesus' statement becoming an affront to many within the church? _____

Warren Wiersbe said, "If a man is wrong about Jesus Christ, he is wrong about God."^v

Heard, Seen, & Handled

The Apostle John knew that if false teachers could convince believers to doubt and then reject Jesus' words, commands, life, and claims, it could lead to their destruction, so he set forth to prove that Jesus was who He claimed.

How is truth determined?^{vi} (Deuteronomy 19:15) _____

Read 1 John 1:1-4. How does John describe the person of Christ in verse 1? How does John know this about Jesus? (vv.1-3) _____

It is thought that John penned his Gospel in part to refute "the gnostic assertion that the true God would not enter our world. John stressed in his [account] that Jesus was God's incarnate Son."^{vii}

Turn to John 1 and read verses 1-15, being mindful of the false teachers' claims that God the Father and the Christ were separate and distinct, that the Christ did not take on human flesh, and that He did not raise to life.

What does John emphasize about Christ in verses 1-3? (Also consider Genesis 1:1-3, Psalm 33:6, 9, John 17:5, Colossians 1:16-17, 2:9.) _____

What evidence does he provide in verses 6-8, 15 of John 1, to substantiate his statements about Christ? (vv.1-3) _____

The people accepted John the Baptist as a true prophet.^{viii} What did he say about Christ? Read verses 29-34. _____

Read John 10:40-42. What did the multitudes say about John's claims? _____

What did Jesus claim about Himself, both directly and indirectly? Read John 5:18-30, 8:51-58 (Exodus 3:14), 10:30, 18:36-37; also Mark 14:61-62. _____

Turn to Luke 5:18-24. What did the religious leaders state only God could do? (v.21) What did Christ say? Also read Luke 7:48-50. _____

Jesus declared He was the only way to heaven, He claimed to be equal with God, He claimed to one day judge all of humanity, He claimed to have the power to raise the dead, He declared that peoples' sins were forgiven. *He claimed* to be the Son of God.

He also claimed to be sinless (John 8:46); His companions attested to this. How do their words refute the gnostic teachers' claims? See 1 Peter 2:22, 1 John 3:5; also 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Now read John 5:31-40. In addition to John the Baptist's testimony, what additional evidences did Christ say attested to His deity? (vv. 36, 37, 39) _____

The Works (v.36)

Jesus performed many miracles among the people. He turned water into wine (John 2:6-9), opened blind eyes (John 9:6-7), healed the sick (John 5:7-9), fed thousands with a few loaves and fish (John 6:11-14), cleansed lepers (Luke 17:11-14), controlled the wind and waves (Luke 8:22-25), walked on water (John 6:19), cast out demons (Matthew 12:22, Luke 8:26-33), and raised the dead to life (Luke 7:11-16, 8:51-54, John 11:38-44).

What did the people recognize about the One who could perform such miracles? Read John 7:31, 9:30-33, 10:21. _____

In John 14:10-11, 15:22-25, what did Jesus say His works attested to? _____

The Father (v.37)

How does the Father affirm Christ's deity in Matthew 3:13-17, 17:1-8, and John 12:27-30?

The Word/ Prophecy (v.39)

In John 5:46-47, what did Jesus say testified about Him? _____

From beginning to end, the Bible testifies of Jesus, the Messiah (Luke 24:27, 44). His lineage (Isaiah 9:7, Matthew 1:1), the place (Micah 5:2, Matthew 2:1), time and manner of His birth (Genesis 3:15, Matthew 1:21; Isaiah 7:14, Luke 1:34-35), His parable-teachings (Psalm 78:2, Matthew 13:34-35), His rejection, His triumphal entry (Zechariah 9:9, John 12:13-14), His betrayal (Psalm 41:9, Mark 14:10), the details of His suffering (Isaiah 53:4-5, Matthew 8:16-17; Psalm 22:18, Mark 15:24; Psalm 34:20, John 19:33), death (Isaiah 53:12, Matthew 27:38), burial (Isaiah 53:9, Matthew 27:57-60), and resurrection (Psalm 16:10, Matthew 16:21, Matthew 28:9) and *many* more prophecies were fulfilled during His tenure.^{ix}

Now consider how Christ's followers identified Him in John 4:42, 20:28. _____

How did they respond in His presence? Matthew 2:11, 8:2, 9:18, 15:25, Luke 17:15-19.

In addition to all this, and most importantly, what did the apostle John witness that attested to Jesus' deity? Read John 2:19-21, 18:15, 19:25-27, 31-37, 20:1-10, 19-20. _____

Alongside many others, John and his fellow apostles *saw, heard, and handled* the Living Christ. "*Life itself*" (1 John 1:2, NLT) was *manifested* to them; they *bore witness* to His claims and His deity. Together with John's, their testimonies attested to the Truth. Whether the people believed their report, or "*denied the Lord who bought them*", was a matter of faith.

In closing, read Matthew 16:13-17. “Who do *you* say that I am?” (emphasis mine).

ⁱ Songer, Harold S., and E. Ray Clendenen. 2003. “Gnosticism.” In *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, edited by Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England, Steve Bond, and Trent C. Butler, 658. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

ⁱⁱ <https://bible.org/seriespage/17-identifying-false-teachers-1-timothy-63-5>

ⁱⁱⁱ Zodhiates, Spiros. 2000. In *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, electronic ed. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

^{iv} After knowing Christ, individuals *refused* the Lord by returning to what they knew (their prior way of thinking and living; 2 Peter 2:18-22), and by esteeming knowledge over faith. The same result is observed in 1 John.

^v Wiersbe, Warren. 2001. *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament, Volume 2.*, 474. Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications.

^{vi} Truth is established through evidence and consistent communication, including others' witness, personal testimony, and experience.

^{vii} Songer, Harold S., and E. Ray Clendenen. 2003. “Gnosticism.” In *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, edited by Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England, Steve Bond, and Trent C. Butler, 656–57. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

^{viii} Matthew 14:5, 21:26, Mark 11:32, Luke 20:6.

^{ix} There are over 300 prophecies about Christ given in the Old Testament. All were given at least 400 years before He was born. Thirty-three of these prophecies were fulfilled on the day of His crucifixion.” (<https://bible.org/seriespage/8-evidence-christ-s-deity-prophecy-and-miracles>)