

Lesson 6

“Jesus Christ: Entire God”

Rom. 14:6-12

Purpose:

Your students will understand that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, the second Person of the Trinity.

In a Nutshell:

The day I met my first team of Jehovah’s Witnesses was a very special day in my life. I was a junior or senior in high school, I believe. One Saturday morning I was home alone, when the doorbell rang. I answered the door to embark on my first defense of the deity of Jesus Christ, a doctrine my visitors denied. They were more prepared than I was, and by the time I closed the door on that conversation, my heart was greatly troubled about what I had been taught all my life. Could it be that I had been wrong believing that Jesus is God? Those years were a period of rapid spiritual growth in my life. Each day it was my practice to study in some depth a single Bible verse for my devotions. I had made my way through Philippians doing that, and now I was in Romans. With troubled heart I sat at my desk and opened my Bible to the next verse in that study, asking the Lord for help to understand. The verse for that morning happened to be Rom. 14:11. The deity of Christ could not be clearer than Paul makes it in this passage (vv. 8-12). Over three decades later, I still have my notes from that morning’s study. Here is part of what I jotted down then:

“Paul knew his Bible and could therefore use it as an effective weapon. The Sword of the Spirit is useless unless one knows it and how to use it. The passage Paul is referring to is found in Isaiah 45.” Clearly, the Lord had used my visitors that day to teach me a lesson about my need to know my Bible better. Then I wrote: “In this chapter, the Lord rebukes senseless idol worship, declaring His power as He asks all to come unto Him and be saved. There is no other God, and all must bow their knees one day and confess this fact.” At the end of Rom. 14:11’s phrase, “every tongue shall confess to God,” in the New Scofield Reference Bible I used in those days, I wrote in parenthesis “(to Christ) - Phil. 2:10.” I noted: “Many religious cults as well as just plain atheists of our day deny the deity of Jesus Christ. They do not believe that Jesus Christ was the same God who, in Isa. 45:23, says that every knee will bow unto Him. In Phil. 2:10, however, it is evident that Jesus Christ is the One to whom all will bow, the same One who made that claim in Isa. 45:23.”

By God’s grace I have never doubted the teaching of Scripture on the deity of Christ since that day. Like Paul, we need the ability to show from our Bibles the wonderful truth that Jesus Christ is entire God. Any “Jesus” of lesser stature is powerless to save from sin.

To the Testimony!

Biblical Evidence for the Deity of Jesus Christ

Isa. 45:20-25 1. *Deity* means *Godhood*, and the *deity of Jesus Christ* means that Jesus Christ is the true God. Rom. 14:11 is a quotation from Isa. 45:23. What indications do we

Rom. 14:6-12 have from Rom. 14:6-12 that Paul had Jesus in mind as the subject of verse 11? How does Phil. 2:10-11 reinforce this conclusion? Understanding that Isa. 45:23 is applicable to Jesus Christ, what divine attributes mentioned in the Isaiah passage can be applied to Jesus Christ only if Jesus is God?

Answer: Rom. 14:9 declares explicitly that Jesus died and arose again so that He might be the Lord of the dead and of the living, the Lord of whom this passage speaks. He is the Lord of verses 6-8 and the Judge of verses 10-12. The following attributes mentioned in Isaiah can belong to Jesus Christ only if He is God: (1) exclusive deity (Isa. 45:21, *there is no God else beside me*); (2) exclusive justice and exclusive ability to save sinners as the Savior (vv. 21-22; cp. Acts 4:12); (3) exclusive right to have every knee bow to Him (v. 23; cp. Rom. 14:11, Phil. 2:10-11); (4) exclusive source of justification for His people (vv. 24-25; cp. Gal. 2:17).

Application: A great tragedy is described by the Isaiah passage, “they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save” (45:20b). This is the tragedy of those who deny the deity of Jesus Christ. The “Jesus” they imagine and make for themselves is a Jesus that cannot save them. The deity of Jesus Christ is a doctrine that is very important to our witness for Him. He is the only God who can save.

Notes: Students with newer translations may note that the KJV phrase *judgment seat of Christ* in Rom. 14:10 is *judgment seat of God* in their translation. If this second reading is correct, it is further evidence of the interchangeability in the mind of Paul of *Christ* and *God* (much like *Lord* and *God* in v. 6), for elsewhere he refers to the same judgment seat (βῆμα; *bēma*) as the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).

Isa. 45:24-25 2. Jehovah’s Witnesses deny that Jesus is Jehovah, the God of Israel we read about in the Old Testament. *Jehovah* is a translation of the covenant name of Israel’s God (Heb.: יהוה; *Yahweh*). In most of our English versions, this word is translated as either *LORD* or *GOD* (note the small caps), but it is the personal name of God, distinguishable from the other words for *Lord* and *God* (no small caps). Rom. 14:11 and Isa. 45:23 are one pair of references that tie this Old Testament name of God to Jesus Christ. They show that Jesus is Jehovah or Yahweh. There are many other pairs like this. Find them by matching the New Testament passage about Jesus with the Old Testament passage about Jehovah/Yahweh.

Answer:

NT passages about Jesus:	OT passages about Jehovah/Yahweh:
John 1:23	Isa. 40:3
John 12:37-43	Isa. 6:1-10
Matt. 21:15-17	Psa. 8:1-2
Eph. 4:7-10	Psa. 68:17-19

Heb. 1:10-12	Psa. 102:21-27
Rom. 10:9, 13	Joel 2:32
Rom. 9:32-33, 1 Pet. 2:7-8	Isa. 8:13-14, Isa. 28:16
Rev. 2:8, 22:12-13	Isa. 44:6
Col. 1:15-16	Isa. 44:24
John 19:37	Zech. 12:1-2, 10

Application: Perhaps the most precious of all the passages that teach that Jesus is Jehovah is Matt. 1:21, where Jesus gets His name. Joseph is told directly, “thou shalt call His name Jesus.” *Jesus* means *Jehovah/Yahweh saves*. The reason Mary’s baby would be called this is given next—“for He shall save His people from their sins.” The baby was to be called *Jehovah saves*, because He (the baby who is Jehovah) would save His people from their sins.

Many seek to fix a chasm between the God of the Old Testament and the Jesus of the New Testament. This cannot be done biblically, for the Jesus of the New Testament is the Jehovah/Yahweh of the Old Testament. For many ages He pursued His stubborn people (Matt. 23:27-39), then He came to save them from their sins by His incarnation and death on the cross as they rejected Him, and finally He shall come again a second time. Only then shall they look on Him whom they had pierced and say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Note also that a related line of biblical evidence for identifying Jesus with Jehovah/Yahweh is illustrated by passages like Luke’s Christmas account. The New Testament uses the word *Lord* (κύριος; *kurios*) in contexts in which all see Jehovah/Yahweh while also using the same word for Jesus Christ. In Luke 2:9, “the angel of the *Lord*” and “the glory of the *Lord*” use the same word as in verse 11, “which is Christ the *Lord*.” Jehovah’s Witnesses want to see Jehovah/Yahweh in verse 9, but not in verse 11. This inconsistency is not found in the text itself.

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3. The New Testament apostles and prophets call Jesus *God* (John: John 1:1, 1:18 [newer translations], 1 John 5:20; Paul: Rom. 9:5, Tit. 2:13, Acts 20:28; Peter: 2 Pet. 1:1; Matthew: Matt. 1:23; Thomas: John 20:28; and Luke?: Heb. 1:8). In so doing they follow a precedent laid down by Old Testament prophets before them (Ps. 45:6, Isa. 7:14, 9:6). In addition, just like there are many descriptions of the coming Messiah in the Old Testament that indicate He would be God (Mic. 5:2, for example), so there are many descriptions of Christ in the New Testament that indicate He is God. List some of these from the passages below.

Passages:	Description that indicates that Jesus is God:
Matt. 12:8	He is Lord of the Sabbath.
Matt. 28:17, 4:10	He is worshipped.
Matt. 9:6	He has the power to forgive sins.
Mark 4:41	The winds and the waves obey Him.
John 10:28	He gives eternal life.
John 1:3, Col. 1:16	He is the Creator of all things for Himself.
John 21:17	He knew all things.

Application: What is your answer to the question, “Do you believe in God?” When you say “yes” to that question, what understanding of God do you have in mind? God desires that our understanding of who He is comes from an understanding of who Jesus Christ is (John 1:18, 14:8-9). We come to know Him by knowing Christ. To lose the truth that Jesus Christ is entire God is to lose the ability to know who God is (Matt. 11:27-30). The ubiquitous nature of the doctrine of the deity of Christ in Scripture reminds one of the presence of salt in salt water. It is everywhere present, not dependent upon argumentation from a few proof texts.

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Critical Doctrines Related to the Deity of Jesus Christ

John 1:15 4. The preexistence of Christ means that Jesus Christ existed as the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, prior to Mary’s conception of Him in her womb as a man (see Lesson 4). According to the Revelation passages, what is the complement of the truth that Jesus is the Alpha or the beginning of all things? What does this say about how we should live our lives (1 Cor. 10:31-33)?
 Rev. 1:8, 2:8

Answer: The complement of the truth that Jesus is the Alpha and the beginning, is that He is also the Omega and the last. He is the future. Everything is on a road to ultimately bring Him the glory He once possessed with the Father before the world began (Phil. 2:10-11).

Application: Since the future is defined by the glory of Christ as the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, we should do all we do for the glory of Christ (1 Cor. 10:31). That is the only way to prepare for the future that is coming. Paul elaborates on what it means to live this way by speaking of the importance of edifying Christ’s church and living for the salvation of others (vv. 32-33). This goal affects every detail of life, even what we eat and drink. To do less is not only selfish, it is shortsighted, failing to grasp fully the future that is coming.

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Isa. 7:14 5. The virgin birth of Christ means that Mary conceived Jesus supernaturally,
 Matt. with only the help of the Holy Spirit, not the help of a human father. That this
 1:18-25 critical doctrine is related to the deity of Christ is plain from Isaiah's treatment
 Luke of this miracle. He said it would signify the birth of Emmanuel, "God with us."
 1:26-38 How did some Jews read this sign from heaven, and what did that say about
 them (John 8:12-19, 39-45)?

Answer: Note that in John 8:19, these Pharisees challenge Jesus about where His father is. Then in v. 41, they cuttingly remind Him that they were not born of fornication. Their inference is clear – they believed that Jesus had no legitimate father because He was born of fornication, and that was one of the reasons they were rejecting and challenging His authority over them. What this said about them is that they were liars like their father, the devil (v. 44).

Application: How tragic it is that the sign upon which God wrote the word *Immanuel*, the Jews manage to read the words, *born of fornication*. This is the nature of the devil's lie and of unbelief (2 Cor. 4:4). The doctrine of the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ has been a touchstone of faith, denied and corrupted by unbelief, and embraced with all its life-changing implications by the faithful. Mary, for example, responded to the doctrine, "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word" (Luke 1:38). See also her Magnificat (vv. 46-55).

Notes: It is clear from Mary's magnification of the Lord that she would have been horrified by the similar way Roman Catholicism magnifies her today. Mary is blasphemously exalted to the station of Christ as one conceived in the womb of her mother without original sin (albeit with two parents), the doctrine they call immaculate conception. Catholic dogma teaches that water baptism cleanses a soul from original sin for everyone else (baptismal regeneration), but that Mary was excluded from the need for this from her conception. She did not need what they call the new birth. The biblical doctrine states that only Christ was kept from original sin, for only He is Emmanuel (Rom. 5:12, 2 Cor. 5:21). Roman Catholic Mariolatry includes a false gospel and constitutes a denial of the true Jesus, the One Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). No preacher of the gospel is faithful who is unwilling to call Catholics to turn from the idolatry of Catholicism to serve the true Savior, Christ alone.

Phil. 2:1-11 6. A third doctrine connected to the deity of Christ has to do with the nature of His incarnation (meaning *in flesh*; John 1:14). It is called the *kenosis* of the Son of God, and the word comes from the Greek word *kenōō*, meaning *to empty*, which our KJV translates as *made himself of no reputation* in Phil. 2:7. It is generally thought that this passage describes the incarnation of Christ. All agree that Paul intends here to highlight an important quality exemplified by Christ. What is that quality, and what must its manifestations be in the local church? (vv. 1-5).

Answer: The quality is humility, and the manifestations of this quality in the local church would be compassionate and sincere encouragement and fellowship (v. 1), unity (vv. 2-3a), lowliness of mind that recognizes the ways in which others are better than self (v. 3b), a concern for the needs of others that is greater than a concern for our own needs. His specific counsel to Euodias and Syntyche shows that the local church's need for this quality is a very practical concern (4:1-3).

Application: While the practical applications of our Savior’s humility from this passage are clear, what to make of the emptying of the Son of God in the incarnation has been less so. Three views have been offered.

First, there is the idea that God the Son emptied Himself of His divine attributes in order to become a man. This idea, barely within the orb of orthodoxy, had been used to explain how it is that Jesus was less than omniscient and could therefore be mistaken about the authorship of the Pentateuch as a work of Moses. Jesus could not have been God without the attributes of God, so this idea is false.

Second, there is the better idea that the Son of God emptied Himself of the independent use of His attributes, subjecting Himself as a man under the will of His Father and the power of His Spirit. But these truths seem to explain more the nature of His humanity than they do the nature of His deity as the God-man, and it is not clear in what sense the Son of God ever exercised His divine attributes independently from the other Persons of the Trinity.

Third, the best idea is that the Son of God emptied Himself of the glory of His attributes. But while this is unquestionably true in some sense (John 17:5), in a larger sense the glory of His deity was always visible during His lifetime (John 1:5, 14). To make visible the glory of His Father was one of the primary purposes of the incarnation (John 14:9).

A better conclusion, I believe, is that of Dr. Robert Reymond, who interprets this passage not as a description of the incarnation of Christ, but as a description of the resistance the incarnate Christ displayed during His temptation. See the *Interesting Insight!* below. Ultimately, it is important to realize that the person Jesus was and is entire God, with nothing missing that belongs to the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity.

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Interesting Insight!

Dr. Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 262-263:

“The key to the solution of both of these difficulties and to the proper interpretation of these verses is to recognize that it is not God the Son in his preincarnate state as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity who is the subject of the first two strophes [vv. 6-8] and to whom reference is made by the ‘him’ in verse 9 of the third strophe, but rather ‘Christ Jesus’ (see 2:5 and references to ‘Jesus’ and ‘Jesus Christ’ in 2:10-11 respectively) – God the Son certainly, for this is the meaning of ‘though in the form of God existing,’ but God the Son *already* incarnately present with men as himself the God-man. . . .

“With respect to the clause, ‘He did not regard equality . . .’ I would urge that it may now be construed *res rapienda*, that is, ‘He did not regard equality with God a thing to be seized,’ and that it should be interpreted against the background of his temptation recorded in Matthew 4. . . .

“Some Old Testament scholars have therefore suggested that the phrase ‘himself he emptied’ is Paul’s Greek dynamic equivalent to the Isaianic expression ‘He poured his soul out unto death’ (which means, ‘He voluntarily died’) in Isaiah 53:12, climactically descriptive of the Suffering Servant’s self-sacrificing work so often referred to elsewhere in the New Testament (see, for example, Matt. 8:17; Luke 22:37; Acts 8:32-35; 1 Pet. 2:21-25). . . .

“The following paraphrase of the first strophe will assist the reader in understanding this suggestion: ‘Though Christ Jesus was and still is God [now, of course, God incarnate], /He did not regard equality with God a thing to be seized [at his temptation by a self-willed exercise of power], /But ‘poured himself out’ [unto death], /Having taken the form of the Servant [of Isaiah 53].”