

The Deity of Christ and the Personality of the Holy Spirit

In our prior sessions we have explored the nature of the expected Messiah, based on OT prophecies. Then we tackled the reasons why John wrote his gospel and why Paul wrote the hymn to Christ. All of this work points directly to the deity of Christ, but does not explicitly state it unless we accept the proper translation of certain Greek words and phrases. This leaves us open to criticism by JW's who will claim to have a better hold on the Greek than the rest of the Christian world. It certainly leaves the lay Christian at a severe conversational disadvantage. We therefore have no choice but to tackle the problem on the JW's home turf.

For this reason, we need to use the NWT as the basis for our exploration. As always, this leaves us without some of our favorite texts, since the NWT has re-translated them into barely recognizable form. For this session, one of the keys is worship. The NWT takes many places where Jesus is worshiped and changes them to "obedience." But, even with this radical surgery, the NWT has not been able to eliminate the deity of Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit. They are equal parts of the Trinity, and too much has been written about them in scripture to allow the NWT to expunge this aspect of their being from the text.

Our trip begins with the deity of Christ in explicit statements. The NWT leaves intact the statements of Isaiah that Jehovah is not only the Savior, he is the only Savior (Q1). Then when we visit the NT, we find it replete with statements that Jesus is the Savior (Q2). Not only that, Titus 2:13 calls Jesus both God and Savior. While the JW will argue that the grammar refers to two separate persons, to the Trinitarian this presents a straightforward statement that Jesus is God. Of course, if Jesus is the Savior, and Jehovah is the only Savior, then Jesus must be Jehovah. To the JW this is impossible, but there is no way around the texts. We must be careful, however, not to fall into Modalism, since that belief has the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as a single person. The Trinity is clear. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all Jehovah, and Jehovah is one being. But there are three persons who make up that unity, and as we will see, there are relationships between the three. Jehovah is the Savior, but Jesus is one of the persons who make up Jehovah, so he is specifically the Savior (Q3).

The next point of identity comes when we see the title "the first and the last," or its Greek equivalent, "the Alpha and the Omega." In Isaiah, Jehovah claims this title, which He reiterates in Revelation (Q4). But also in Revelation, Jesus claims the title (Q5). We must necessarily reach the same conclusion in this title as we did before. Jesus is Jehovah, truly divine (Q6).

When we examine the attributes of Jesus, we find this divinity restated (Q7). John tells us that Jesus is to receive exactly the same honor as the Father. This requires that we worship Jesus in contravention of JW doctrine. Next we find Paul tells us that Jesus was given the name above every name. The NWT masks this by inserting the word "other." They are honest about the insertion by placing the word in brackets, but even with this word, Jesus receives the highest name. That places him equal with the Father, which, of course is his proper place. Paul then tells us that Jesus is to be worshiped. In Revelation John tells us that the prayers of the saints are presented to Christ, and the elders worshiped him. Of course, only God is to be worshiped (second commandment), so this means that Jesus is God.

Finally, we move to the issue of prayer (Q8). In Acts 7 we find Stephen praying to Jesus. Paul describes a prayer to the Lord where the Lord's power is described as the power of Jesus. Thus, Paul is praying to Jesus. Finally, the elders present the prayers of the saints to Jesus. We cannot avoid, even in the NWT, the fact that Jesus is called God, is worshiped, and is prayed to. He is fully God.

The Holy Spirit is presented in JW theology as a "force" emanating from the Father rather than a part of the Godhead. Unfortunately for JW theology, the Holy Spirit has feelings (Q9) and does things which only a person can do (Q10). And again, even in the NWT (Q11), the Holy Spirit is described as "he." With this evidence, there is no basis for rejecting the fact that the Spirit is a person, rather than an impersonal force. When Paul describes the Spirit as being sent from the Father and from the Son (Q12), we find the JW in another impossible quandary which is no difficulty at all for the Trinitarian. Since all three are co-equal parts of the Godhead, their infinite unity allows both the Father and the Son to be sending the third member, the Holy Spirit. But this requires that Jesus be God. Once again, we must be careful not to fall into Modalism by making the Father and Son into a single person.

Our final point on this issue is the question of whether this third person is God (Q13). This is answered again in the affirmative when we find that it is possible to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit.

Since blasphemy cannot occur against anyone less than God, the Holy Spirit is also God. We have identified the Trinity, alive and well, even in the NWT.

The question arises as to why there are three persons who make up God (Q14). Without citing volumes of scripture, we can see that the three persons perform different functions. The Father maintains the heavens. Jesus created the earth and has been the member of the Godhead who visited men, both in theophanies and in the incarnation. He provides our salvation. And the Holy Spirit dwells in us to allow us to live the life God would like us to live. These three persons have relational differences as well as functional differences (Q15). We find them all being referred to repeatedly in relational terms. In particular, Jesus refers to the father in parental terms. At other times, he is speaking as if he and the Father are equal. In understanding these different statements, we must see them as a matter of emphasis. John 17:3 is the best example for understanding this. In this statement, Jesus the man is praying to God the Father. The entire chapter shows this emphasis. Jesus had been made lower than the angels, so in that capacity, he shows the status difference between him and the Father. On other times, he reflects his own divinity, emphasizing that he is God. The key is one of emphasis. Since he is fully God and fully human, at one time one or the other feature will be emphasized.

Key texts from the NWT

Jesus is God: John 5:23; 20:28, Acts 4:12, Col 2:9-10, Phil 2:9, Titus 2:13

Jesus is to be worshiped: Php 2:10-11, Heb 1:6, Rev 5:8, 14

Jesus is prayed to: Acts 7:59, 1 Cor 1:2, 2 Cor 12:8-9

Jehovah is Savior: Isa 43:3; 11; 45:21; 49:26, Hos 13:4, Luke 1:47, 1 Tim 1:1, Titus 1:3, Jude 25

Jesus is Savior: Luke 2:11, Acts 13:23, Php 3:20, 2 Tim 1:10, Titus 2:10, 13; 3:4; 6:1-4, 2 Peter 1:1; 2:20; 3:18, 1 John 4:14

Jehovah is "the first and the last.": Isa 41:4; 44:6; 48:12, Rev 21:6

Jesus is "the first and the last.": Rev 1:17-18; 2:8; 22:10-16

The Holy Spirit has emotions: Is 63:10, Mic 2:7, Gal 4:6, Eph 4:30, Heb 10:29

The Holy Spirit has a voice to speak or cry: Mark 13:11, Acts 10:19-20, 13:2, Gal 4:6, Heb 3:7, Rev 14:13; 22:17

The Holy Spirit teaches: Luke 12:12

The Holy Spirit decides and commands: Acts 15:28; 16:6; 20:28

The Holy Spirit leads: Matt 4:1; John 16:13

The Holy Spirit bears witness: John 15:26, Rom 8:16, Heb 10:15; 1 John 5:6

The Holy Spirit pleads for us: Rom 8:26-27

The Holy Spirit knows the thoughts of God: 1 Cor 2:11

The Holy Spirit can be blasphemed: Matt 12:31-32; Luke 12:10, Mark 3:29