

## **JESUS CLAIMS TO BE GOD**

**John 5:17-23**

**by Andy Manning**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. Some people claim that Jesus is not God. As evidence they argue that Jesus never claimed to be God. But that is not accurate. While Jesus never uttered the words, "I am God," He did claim to be God on many different occasions, in different ways.
2. For example, Christ declared that He was God by claiming to be equal to the Father.
3. Christ claimed to be equal to the Father in many ways:
  - i. Mk 9:37 - To welcome Him was to welcome the Father.
  - ii. John 8:19 – To know Christ is to know the Father.
  - iii. John 10:30 – Christ and the Father are one.
  - iv. John 12:44 – To believe in Christ was to believe in the Father.
  - v. John 12:45 – To see Christ is to see the Father.
  - vi. John 15:23 – To hate Jesus is to hate the Father.
4. By claiming to be equal to the Father, Jesus claimed to be God.
5. In our passage today, Jesus is going to claim to be equal to the Father in seven ways.

### **II. TEXT & INSIGHTS: John 5:17-23**

1. *17 Jesus responded to them, "My Father is still working, and I am working also."  
18 This is why the Jews began trying all the more to kill him: Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God.*
  - i. "This is why the Jews began trying all the more to kill him." Why was Jesus crucified? The Bible says that there were several reasons, and two of them are mentioned here:
    1. John 5:18 - Jesus broke their Sabbath traditions.
    2. John 5:18 - Jesus called God His own Father, making Himself equal to God.
    3. Mt 27:18 – The Jewish leaders envied Him.
    4. John 10:33 – For claiming to be God.
    5. Jn 11:47-50 – The Jewish leaders feared He would incite a rebellion against Rome, leading to the destruction of the Jewish nation.
    6. Jn 19:7 – For claiming to be the Son of God.
2. *19 Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, the Son is not able to do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son likewise does these things. 20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing, and he will show him greater works than these so that you will be amazed. 21 And just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son also gives life to whom he wants. 22 The Father, in fact, judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, 23 so that all people may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.*

### **III. SEVEN WAYS CHRIST IS EQUAL TO THE FATHER**

1. **In His work: As the Father never stops working, so Christ never stops working.**

- i. Context: In the first part of John 5 Jesus healed the lame man at the pool of Bethesda. Jesus told him, "Get up, pick up your mat and walk." It happened to be the Sabbath, and it was against the Jewish law to pick up your mat on the Sabbath. It is not against God's law, but it was against a man-made law. So, the Jews began persecuting Jesus. In response Jesus said, "My Father is still working, and I am working also."
- ii. What did Jesus mean?
  1. God does not actually stop working on the Sabbath; He is working non-stop. God ceased from His work of creation on the seventh day, but He did not stop working. What kind of work does God do on the Sabbath? Saving, convicting, growing, comforting, protecting, sustaining, judging, disciplining, healing, guiding, strengthening, providing, listening, answering, and watching.
    - a. Even the Jews agreed with this. Their own rabbis taught that God working on the Sabbath in giving life (births) and taking life (deaths).
    - b. **Philo** said: "God never ceases doing, but as it is the property of fire to burn and snow to chill, so it is the property of God to do."
    - c. **Another** writer said, "The sun shines; the rivers flow; the processes of birth and death go on the Sabbath as on any other day; and that is the work of God."
  2. Since Jesus is God, He does not stop working on the Sabbath either.
    - a. Jesus doesn't need rest. **Mark 2:27** "The Sabbath was made for man...." The Sabbath was not created for God; God doesn't need rest. It was created to be a blessing to man; to take time out to worship and rest.
    - b. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. **Matthew 12:8** "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." Jesus is God. He created the Sabbath. He has the right to define how it should be observed.
- iii. Isn't it a wonderful truth that our God is always working?
  1. Do you remember the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Ki 18)? Elijah proposed a competition between the 450 prophets of Baal and himself, to prove which God was real. The prophets of Baal made an altar to Baal, and Elijah made an altar to Yahweh. Then they each took turns calling on their deity to miraculously set fire to the altar. The prophets of Baal went first. They prayed from morning until evening. They danced around the altar. They shouted loudly. They cut themselves with knives and spears and until blood gushed out. They kept this up all afternoon until the evening sacrifice, but there was no sound; no answer; no one paid attention. So, Elijah mocked them. He said, "Shout loudly, for he's a god! Maybe he's thinking it

over; maybe he has wandered away; or maybe he's on the road. Perhaps he's sleeping and will wake up (v. 27)!"

2. Then it was Elijah's turn. He called everyone to come near. He took twelve stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel and built an altar. Then he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold about four gallons. Then he arranged the wood, cut up the bull, and placed it on the wood. Then he had them pour eight pots of water on the offering and on the wood. Water was everywhere and even filled the trench. Then he called on God, and "the Lord's fire fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench (v. 38)."
3. Isn't it wonderful that our God doesn't need to rest? He doesn't need power naps. He doesn't need sleep. He is always available. Always accessible. Always working. Jesus is that God.
4. **Isaiah 40:28** "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the whole earth. He never becomes faint or weary; there is no limit to his understanding."

- iv. **John MacArthur** "Jesus' statement that He worked on the Sabbath just like the Father was nothing less than a claim to full deity and equality with God."

## **2. In His nature: He called God His own Father, making Himself equal to God.**

- i. **John 5:17-18** 17 Jesus responded to them, "My Father is still working, and I am working also." 18 This is why the Jews began trying all the more to kill him: Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God.
- ii. The second way that Christ is equal to the Father is in His nature. His essence. He made this claim when He called God His own father, making Himself equal to God.
- iii. The Jews regarded God as "our Father." The Father of their nation. But Jesus called God, "My Father." This was a claim of deity.
- iv. God is our Father (Mt 6:9), but not in the same way that He is Christ's Father. We are His children by adoption when we put our faith in Christ. God is Christ's Father in that they share the same divine nature. This is why the Bible calls Jesus God's only begotten Son – His unique, one of a kind Son.
- v. Father and son share the same nature. My dad and I share the same nature – human nature. A dog father and son share the same canine nature. The way that Jesus referred to God as "My Father" was a declaration of shared nature with the Father.
- vi. As proof, the Jews knew this is what He was saying, and that's why they decided to kill Him.
- vii. **John MacArthur** "In contrast to the Jews' collective reference to God as "our Father," Jesus called God His own Father. The clear implication, which His opponents readily understood, was that He was claiming to be fully equal with God in nature."

- viii. **Hebrews 1:3** “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact expression of his nature”

**3. In His morality: He only does what the Father does.**

- i. **John 5:19** Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, the Son is not able to do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son likewise does these things.”
- ii. “Truly I tell you.” As you read the gospels you will notice this phrase over and over again. The KJV translates it, “Verily, verily, I say unto you.” Jesus is the only one who uses this phrase in the Bible, and it is used to testify to the certainty and importance of His words (HCSB Bullet Note). It is like saying, “I can guarantee this truth (GW)”; “I assure you, most solemnly I tell you (AMP)”; “I tell you for certain (CEV).”
- iii. “The Son is not able to do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing.” This statement means that Jesus and the Father act in perfect union and harmony. They are on the same page. They have the same mission; the same purpose; the same values; the same focus; the same passion; the same priorities; the same goals.
- iv. “For whatever the Father does, the Son likewise does these things.” Jesus is defending His morality against the Jews’ claim that He was a sinner for violating the Sabbath. He is saying that He perfectly and completely follows the Father’s moral example. Just as God is perfectly holy and sinless, so is the Son.
- v. The Bible testifies to this:
  - 1. **2 Corinthians 5:21** “He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”
  - 2. **Hebrews 4:15** Jesus “has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin.”
  - 3. 1 Peter 2:22 – He did not commit sin; no deceit was in His mouth.
  - 4. 1 John 3:5 – There is no sin in Him.

**4. In His knowledge: The Father shows Him everything.**

- i. **John 5:20** “For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing, and he will show him greater works than these so that you will be amazed.”
- ii. This means that Jesus shares the Father’s omniscience. He knows everything. We have already seen several examples of Christ’s omniscience in this gospel:
  - 1. He knew Peter’s name and his father’s name before he met Peter. Jn 1:42 “You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas.”
  - 2. He knew Nathanael’s heart. Jn 1:47 “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”
  - 3. He knew Nathanael’s location before meeting him. Jn 1:50 “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you,”
  - 4. He knew all about the woman at the well before meeting her. Jn 4:30 “He told me everything I ever did.”

**5. In His power: Like the Father, He is the giver of life.**

- i. **John 5:21** "And just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son also gives life to whom he wants."
- ii. God is the creator and giver of all life (Gen 1). God is also in control of death.
  - 1. **1 Samuel 2:6** "The LORD brings death and gives life; he sends some down to Sheol, and he raises others up."
  - 2. There are several instances in the OT when God raised the dead to life, such as when Elijah raised the widow's son to life (1 Ki 17:17-24).
- iii. In the same way, Jesus has the power to give life – physical and spiritual life.
  - 1. John 11 – He raised Lazarus back to life.
  - 2. Mt 9:18-25 – He raised a little girl back to life.
  - 3. Lk 7:11-15 – He raised a widow's only son back to life.
  - 4. **John 10:28** "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand."
- iv. No one can give life but God alone, and yet Jesus claimed to have the power to give life to whom he wants.

**6. In His judgment: Like the Father, He is the judge of all mankind.**

- i. **John 5:22** "The Father, in fact, judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son"
- ii. In the OT, God alone is the judge of the earth.
  - 1. **Psalms 82:8** "Rise up, God, judge the earth, for all the nations belong to you."
  - 2. **Psalms 94:2** "Rise up, Judge of the earth; repay the proud what they deserve."
  - 3. **Psalms 98:8-9** "Let the rivers clap their hands; let the mountains shout together for joy before the Lord, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world righteously and the peoples fairly."
- iii. Here, Jesus says that He is judge. We see this elsewhere in Scripture:
  - 1. **Matthew 25:31-32** "31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels, with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations, will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."
  - 2. **Acts 10:42** "He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead."
  - 3. **Acts 17:31** "because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

**7. In His honor: He is to be honored like the Father.**

- i. **John 5:23** "so that all people may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him."

- ii. The word honor (*timao*) mean esteem, honor, reverence. The English dictionary defines it as high respect; great esteem. It is to treat someone like they are very valuable; very important; very precious.
  - 1. We are commanded to give honor not just to God, but to certain people – our parents (Ex 20:12); fellow believers (Rm 12:10); everyone (1 Pt 2:17); political leaders (1 Pt 2:17).
  - 2. But the way we show honor depends on the object. We honor our parents differently that we honor our political leaders; we honor fellow believers differently than we honor unbelievers. And we should honor God differently than anyone else. We must give God our highest respect, our greatest obedience, our deepest love, our most intense adoration.
  - 3. Jesus claimed that we must honor Him just as we honor God.
- iii. In the OT God made it very clear that He would not share His glory with another. **Isaiah 42:8** “I am the Lord. That is my name, and I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.” God will not allow anyone else to receive the glory and honor that He deserves.
- iv. But Jesus says that He is to be honored by all people just as they honor the Father.
- v. **Philippians 2:9-11** “9 For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—11 and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

#### IV. CONCLUSION

- 1. Jesus never said the words, “I am God.” But He did claim to be God in other ways, such as claiming to be equal to God the Father.
- 2. Let me put it in the form of three-point argument:
  - i. Jesus claimed to be equal to God.
  - ii. And, Jesus affirmed that there is only one God (Mk 12:29).
  - iii. Therefore, Jesus claimed to be God.