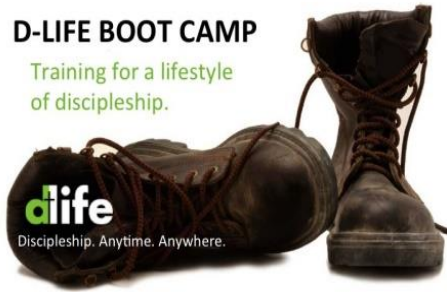


## D-LIFE BOOT CAMP

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*Keeping it Real*  
CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Pastor Dale L. Crawley Sr.

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20*

Rev. Dr. Deborah Crawley, Teacher  
Sis. Tammi Crummy, Asst. Teacher

## THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHRIST (CHRISTOLOGY)

### An Examination of Some Alleged Counterclaims to Christ's Deity – Part 3

In spite of the numerous passages in which Christ claimed deity (above) and the many in which his immediate disciples claimed deity for him, some critics have still appealed to select texts (out of their proper context) to show Jesus and his followers disclaimed deity. These will be examined briefly and explained in their proper context. First, a brief description of the alternative view of Christ:

**Adoptionism**— claimed that Jesus was only a man adopted (at his baptism) by God as his "Son" because of Jesus's divine powers.

**Subordinationism**— affirmed that the Son is subordinate in nature to the Father. He is less than fully God.

**Arianism**— held that the Son is not God but the first created being. He is not the same as God but only like God.

**Nestorianism**— claimed there were two persons, one divine and one human, and only the human person (Jesus) died for our sins, so the person who died for us was not the divine Son of God. Hence, his death had no divine significance and cannot save us. All these views deny the deity of Jesus of Nazareth, who made numerous claims to be fully God in human flesh.

Let's look at some of the texts used to support these views.

### Jesus Claimed to Be God Only in a Derivative Sense.

Since Jesus acknowledged that his authority came from God (John 10: 18; Matt. 28: 18), some have argued that Jesus was God only in a derivative sense. That is, he derived his divine authority from God and was God's representative on earth, but he

was not God himself. Thus only the Father was God in an ultimate and essential sense; the Son (Jesus) was God only in a derivative or lesser sense.

**In response**, we may note, first, that when Jesus claimed to be the “I AM” of Exodus 3: 14 (John 8: 58), this was not God in a derivative sense. This was the very God of the universe, Yahweh, who said to Moses, “**I am who I am.**” And he said, “**Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ . . . ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations**” (Exod. 3: 14– 15). Jesus did not claim here to be from the I AM; rather, he claimed to be the I AM.

**Second**, Jesus claimed to be Yahweh, and in Isaiah Yahweh declared, “**I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other**” (Isa. 42: 8). Yet Jesus claimed to have this glory in John 17: 5, saying, “**Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.**”

**Third**, no created derivative of God commands worship. Jesus declared, “**You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve**” (Matt. 4: 10; emphasis added). Yet, as noted in previous class, Jesus accepted worship on at least ten occasions without ever once rebuking the worshipers. Indeed, he even gave praise for it (Matt. 16: 16– 18).

**Fourth**, when Jesus claimed to be speaking with authority he received from God (e.g., John 10: 18; Matt. 28: 18), he was merely referring to his role in the Triune Godhead as a Son, who submits to the Father, **not as an inferior or created being who is sent from the Father** (cf. Phil. 2: 5– 8; 1 Cor. 15: 28). But **as** a human son of a human father is of the same human essence as his father, so also as the Son of God, Jesus is equal to God in his essence, and is subordinate only in his role or function as a Son. Hence, Jesus on earth did speak of derivative authority from the Father, but never of a derivative deity or of being of a lesser *nature*.

**Finally**, a derivative deity is a contradiction in terms. One is either the Creator or a creature. There is nothing in between. And Jesus was repeatedly proclaimed as Creator in Scripture. Jesus’s close and eyewitness disciple John said, “**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made**” (John 1: 1– 3). The apostle Paul wrote, “**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**” (Col. 1: 16). But the Creator cannot make another Creator; he can make only a creature. The uncreated cannot create another uncreated Being. Hence, either Jesus was a creature, which the Bible clearly says he was not, or else he is the uncreated Creator.

## Jesus Said the Father Was Greater Than He Was.

Jesus said, **“My Father is greater than I”** (John 14: 28). But the Father is clearly not greater in his nature. Nothing can be greater than God. The Father was only greater in office, **not in nature**. He was not greater in essence, but in function. As the Son, Jesus was equal in nature to the Father, *for both Father and Son share the same nature*. But as the Son, Jesus had a different role than the Father. As for his essential attributes, Jesus said, **“I and the Father are one”** (John 10: 30). The audience to whom Jesus spoke obviously understood it this way, for **“the Jews picked up stones again to stone him**. Jesus answered them, **‘I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?’** The Jews answered him, **‘It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God’**” (John 10: 31– 33).

## Jesus Denied Knowing Everything as God Does.

The Bible tells us that Jesus “increased in wisdom” (Luke 2: 52). He was also ignorant of the time of his second coming, for he confessed, **“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father”** (Mark 13: 32). But God knows everything; he is omniscient. Therefore, Jesus could not be God. So say the critics of Christ’s deity.

However, Jesus has two natures: one divine and one human. He is both God and human; he is the God-Human. It depends on which nature in Christ we are speaking about. As God, he knew everything. As a human, he did not know everything, but only what he could know by his finite nature or what the Father revealed to him. And God had not revealed to him the time of his second coming. Jesus said, **“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority”** (Acts 1: 7); **“what I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me”** (John 12: 50); **“all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you”** (John 15: 15).

## Jesus Denied That He Was Good like God.

When the rich young ruler called Jesus “good,” Jesus replied: “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone” (Mark 10: 18). This is taken by critics as a denial of Jesus’s deity.

**First of all**, this statement **is not** a denial of anything— let alone Jesus’s deity. It is a question. He is asking the young man if he understands what he is saying. In essence Jesus is saying, **“Do you realize what you are saying? Are you calling me God?”** So rather than denying his deity, Jesus is probing the young man’s glibness, for the young man also said he kept **all** the commandments, and Jesus proved he had not by

asking him to give all his riches to God. **His unwillingness shows that he has not even kept the first and greatest commandment** (Matt. 22: 36– 37).

### **Jesus Called the Father God.**

On the cross Jesus prayed, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** (Mark 15: 34). If Jesus recognized that the Father was his God, then Jesus could not be God himself, the critics reason.

However, this passage is making no denial about the Son; it is making an affirmation about the Father— namely, that he is God. This is true. It is also true that Jesus is God since there is more than one person in God. Further, the Father sometimes calls the Son God. In Hebrews 1: 8 we read: **“But of the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.’”** It is appropriate for either of these two members of the Trinity to call the other God for one simple reason— **they are both God. They both share the same essential nature of deity.**

### **Jesus Called Other Humans “Gods” Too.**

An often-quoted passage is John 10: 35, where Jesus said, **“If he called them gods to whom the word of God came— and Scripture cannot be broken—.”** Clearly, Jesus is referring to humans here (from Ps. 82: 6), so critics argue that Jesus is claiming to be god in a lesser sense— like other humans are gods.

However, when we examine Psalm 82 we see that it is speaking about early judges and that it also insists, in the same verse: **“Like men you shall die.”** They are called “gods” using a term (Heb. *elohim*) that sometimes refers to humans. But he did not call them **“LORD”** (Yahweh)— a term that always refers to deity. In the light of the use of “gods” in Psalm 82, Jesus is using an a **fortiori** (with the greater force) argument that goes something like this: **“If the Scripture calls human judges gods because they stand in the place of God, making life or death decisions, then how much more is it proper for me to call myself God since ‘I and the Father are one’ (John 10: 30) in essence, not one by mere representation, as an earthly judge is?”** To read this passage as an anti-deity text is to take it out of context and as contrary to numerous other texts where Jesus claims to be God in essence (see previous).

### **Jesus Is Called the “Firstborn” of Creation.**

Some Arians (followers of Arius, who denied Christ’s deity) appeal to phrases like “firstborn” (Col. 1: 15) to prove that Jesus was really only a created being, not God. This, they insist, must mean he was the first one “born” or created in the universe. Some, like Jehovah’s Witnesses, believe that Jesus was Michael the archangel, whose name means “who is like God.”

However, nowhere is Jesus called an angel. It says in this very passage that Jesus created all the angels (Col. 1: 17). And Hebrews declares: **“For to which of the angels did God ever say, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you’? Or again, ‘I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son’? And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him’”** (1: 5– 6).

The term “*firstborn*” can mean firstborn in rank or firstborn in chronological order. Obviously, since Jesus is Creator of all angels and even worshiped by them, the term “*firstborn*” in this context must mean firstborn **over all** creation, not the first one born **in** creation.

### **Jesus Is Called the Beginning of God’s Creation.**

Like “*firstborn*,” the term “beginning” (Rev. 3: 14) is misunderstood. It means “*beginning*” in the absolute sense of “*nothing before him*,” not in the relative sense of “the first creature that was created.” “Beginner” in the absolute sense means Beginner over all creation, not the first one born in creation. This meaning is borne out when the same term “beginning” is used of God, the Father who is God (21: 5– 6).

### **Jesus Was Said to Be Begotten by God.**

A number of verses refer to Jesus as “begotten” by God. (e.g., John 1: 14, 18; 3: 16, 18; 1 John 4). Psalm 2 is often quoted in this regard: “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed. . . . I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you’” (Ps. 2: 2, 7); Hebrews 1: 5 cites this very verse. And John 3: 16 speaks of God’s “only begotten Son” (KJV). From these passages the critics often argue that Jesus was not eternal but was begotten with a beginning as are other creatures.

**In response**, first, if this were true then it would contradict a whole host of Scriptures (listed above) that declare Jesus to be eternal (John 1: 1– 2) and the Creator of all other things (John 1: 3; Heb. 1: 3; Col. 1: 16– 17). Further, the word “begotten,” like the word “firstborn” (see Col. 1: 15; Heb. 1: 6), does not necessarily mean something or someone who had a beginning. It is the Greek word **monogenēs**, meaning “**unique**” (in kind) or “only,” as many modern translations render it (see NAB, NIV, and ESV). It is used of Isaac (Heb. 11: 17), though he was literally not Abraham’s only son (he had Ishmael), because he was unique in that he was the son of the promise. It is sometimes used of an only child of a human parent (Luke 7: 12; 8: 42; 9: 38).

Other verses that speak of Christ as being “begotten” use a different Greek word, *gennaō*, which is a normal word for begetting an offspring (cf. Matt. 1: 2, 3, 4, etc.). However, when used of Christ in Hebrews 1: 5 and 5: 5 (from Ps. 2: 4), it means “to be begotten from the dead” (i.e., resurrected), as the context indicates (see Acts 13: 33–

35). It is true that early creeds speak of the Son as being generated or begotten of the Father, but they make it very clear that Christ was “eternally begotten” and that he was “**not made**” but “**of one Being with the Father.**” So this eternal Father-Son relationship in no way diminishes Christ’s deity, for he was “God from God” and “true God from true God.” Likewise, the creed declares that he was not created.