

- ***READ Ephesians 4:1-6*** As the Apostle Paul writes to the disciples in Ephesus, he establishes seven foundational pillars of the Christian faith. While we might have differences here and there in those things that are doubtful or unclear, the Apostle states that there some vital aspects of our faiths that cannot be doubted or disputed. He says that we must agree and understand that there is but one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God the Father. Without agreement and common understanding of these key pillars, there cannot be fellowship.
- As people who are seeking to grow mightily and prevail in our faiths in 2018, it is crucial that we be in agreement and understand the importance of each of these pillars. This month's focus lesson will also serve as the first of a series of lessons that will focus on these seven foundations of the Christian faith. If we want to grow as we ought to grow, then we must be sure that our foundation has been laid correctly so that we might have the ability to build a big and strong house of faith on top.
- Since we have just concluded our daily Bible reading through the Gospel of John, the timing is just right for us to consider the first of these seven pillars by looking at the one Lord who is Jesus Christ, God in the flesh. Without a proper understanding of Jesus as our Lord, Savior, and God we cannot grow as we ought. In fact, a faith that is built upon anything other than that of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God will surely falter and eventually fail all together.
- Now, for us...it might seem strange for us to think about Jesus being anything other than the Christ, the Son of God. It might seem strange for us to imagine that there are some people out there who think of Jesus as being someone other than God, but we must recognize that there is actually much disagreement on Jesus. Therefore, we want to give careful consideration this morning to coming to understand exactly who Jesus is so that our faith might grow and be built up as God intends.

I. **There is much disagreement concerning the nature of Jesus Christ.**

A. **While some still try, it is truly difficult for anyone to argue the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth.**

1. Many skeptics will not entertain proof for Jesus from the Scriptures themselves because of its inherent bias, so we will take just a few moments to consider some extra-biblical writings from secular historians as to whether or not the historical Jesus actually existed.
 - a) In his last major work, *Annals*, Tacitus (Roman senator and historian) speaks of the scapegoat that Neros puts forth to take the heat off of himself for the fire he lit within Rome. He writes, "*[N]either human effort nor the emperor's generosity nor the placating of the gods ended the scandalous belief that the fire had been ordered [by Nero]. Therefore, to put down the rumor, Nero substituted as culprits and punished in the most unusual ways those hated for their shameful acts ... whom the crowd called "Chrestians." The founder of this name, Christ [Christus in Latin], had been executed in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate ... Suppressed for a time, the deadly superstition erupted again not only in Judea, the origin of this evil, but also in the city [Rome], where all things horrible and shameful from everywhere come together and become popular.*"
 - b) Josephus, a Jewish historian, writes incidentally (as if the existence of Jesus is assumed) of Jesus during his recording of the actions of the high priest Ananus as he sought to put James, the brother of Jesus, to death. "*Being therefore this kind of person [i.e., a heartless Sadducee], Ananus, thinking that he had a favorable opportunity because Festus had died and Albinus was still on his way, called a meeting [literally, "sanhedrin"] of judges and brought into it the brother of Jesus-who-is-called-Messiah ... James by name, and some others. He made the accusation that they had transgressed the law, and he handed them over to be stoned.*"
 - c) Other early historians who wrote of Jesus would include Lucian of Samosata, Celsus, Pliny the Younger, and Suetonius. <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/jesus-historical-jesus/did-jesus-exist/#note05>

B. Even if we are able to establish firm proof that Jesus lived, we must still acknowledge that many people disagree on exactly who He was.

1. **The Atheist:** Jesus was simply a good, moral teacher. He was not resurrected from the dead. They might acknowledge His existence, but they would never claim that He in any way, shape, or form is God.
2. **The Jehovah's Witness:** Jesus was a created by God prior to creation. He is not equal to God the Father, but He is a lesser being since He is not eternal. They would acknowledge that He did have a hand in creation, but that this only happened after His own creation.
3. **The Mormon:** Jesus was once a man just like us. He was created by God the Father on a different planet and progressed to be equal to God. We, here on earth, are His spirit children whom He has brought into existence through reproducing us with His many wives.
4. **The Muslim:** Jesus was just a great messenger of God. He is viewed similarly to the great Islamic prophet Muhammed. They don't believe He was actually killed on a cross, but that God had someone else made to look like Him, and that person was killed.
5. **The Jew:** Jesus was a well known Jewish teacher. They do not believe that He was raised from the dead or that He was the Messiah. They still await a messianic age in which God will vindicate them from the wrong done to them, in their estimation.
6. From what we can see, we have five different groups of individuals who

II. Our beliefs concerning the nature of Jesus will define our faiths.

A. As we just saw, these differences in beliefs of Jesus have led these different groups to very different places in regards to their faiths and practices.

1. **The Atheist:** Denies not just the deity of Jesus but all deity, and has no faith at all in the supernatural. Without this faith, they have no chance of pleasing God. (**Hebrews 11:6**)
2. **The Jehovah's Witness:** Considering Jesus as a created and lesser being than God can't allow for **Colossians 1:15-20** to be true. They would try to skirt around this by inserting a few missing words in their english translations, but the reality is that a lesser Jesus has no right to be first place in everything.
3. **The Mormon:** Their belief that Jesus was able to progress Himself to God status leads the Mormon to believe that he or she can too progress to the place of being a god.
4. **The Muslim:** Their belief in Jesus simply being a prophet like Muhammed doesn't allow for them to submit to the Lordship or Kingship of Jesus. He was not deity, but just a man.
5. **The Jew:** Their belief in Jesus not being the Messiah leads them to still be waiting on the Messiah or the messianic age that will finally deliver them from oppression.

B. John wrote his Gospel and letters to emphasize the necessity of believing that Jesus was the Messiah and Lord.

1. We can see this clear intention in his Gospel account when John writes in **John 20:30,31**, *"Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."* John begins his Gospel account describing the deity of Jesus and continues the letter giving continual supporting evidence for such a strong claim.
2. Furthermore, in his shorter letters, John writes giving great emphasis to the necessity of testing the teachings of others to determine whether or not they are truly from God. His ultimate litmus test at the moment of the writing seems to center around the deity of Jesus. *"By this we know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come into the flesh is from God."* (**1 John 4:2**) Only those believing in Jesus as the Christ could be born of God. (**1 John 5:1**)

3. He even goes so far as to refer to *“those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh”* and *“does not confess Jesus is not from God”* as *“having the spirit of the antichrist.”* (**I John 4:3**) Those who would deny Jesus as God, those who would deny His deity would place themselves in direction opposition to God. As was stated earlier in the letter, those who refused to walk in the light of the truth of Jesus would not be able to have fellowship with God. (**I John 1:5-7**) Obviously, we want to have fellowship with God and that means that we must have confidence in the deity of Jesus.

III. We can have confidence in the deity of Jesus based upon Biblical evidence.

A. The Power Of Jesus (Mark 2:5-7 & John 10:37,38)

1. All throughout the Gospels, we see the works of Jesus testifying to the fact of His deity. One of the first examples of such in the Gospel of Mark takes place in **Mark 2:1-7**. As Jesus comes into Capernaum, a great crowd gathers and a paralytic is brought by him. Because of their great faith and desire to get to Jesus, they removed the roof and lowered him in to the house. Jesus is impressed with their faith, and says to the paralytic, *“Son, your sins are forgiven.”* (**Mark 2:5**) Notice the response of the scribes to called blasphemy on Jesus saying that only God could forgive sins. The conclusion had to be that Jesus was deity and God.
2. As Jesus is teaching in **John 10:37,38**, He Himself emphasizes the role of His works and their need to believe in His works. His claim was that His works gave credence to the Father being in Him and He being in the Father. As others saw His works, the hope was that they would be led to believe in God. He didn't even have to say much, they just had to look at what He did.

B. The Words Of Jesus (John 8:58 & John 10:30-33)

1. But when Jesus did speak to His deity, He did not mince words at all. In fact, He was, at times, very straight forward as to his identity and that sometimes that almost earned Him a stoning from the Jews. Two instances of this happening can be found in **John 8 & 10**. In **John 8:58**, we find Jesus speaking of Abraham and He states, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.”* To the Jews who were listening, this would've taken their minds straight back to Moses when he asks God who it was that was sending him to the Jews in Egypt. For Jesus to state that *“I am”* was blasphemous which is why they quickly pick up stones to stone Him.
2. Thankfully, Jesus is able to hide Himself, but it isn't very long down the road until they give another effort to kill Him for His “blasphemies.” Later in **John 10:30-33**, we find Jesus stating, *“I and the Father are one.”* Again, we see the Jews picking up stones to kill Jesus, yet notice that Jesus uses His words to draw attention to the signs He had been doing along with what He was teaching. The Jews still were not having any of it, and they make it very well known that they were seeking to kill Jesus for blasphemy by being a man and making Himself out to be God. Where they should've put two and two together, Jesus's words with His signs to show His deity, the Jews instead rejected Him and His testimony about His own deity. Yet, we must be better and willfully acknowledge the reality of who Jesus is based upon His power and words.

C. The Words Of The Apostles (John 1:1 & John 20:28)

1. Jesus's words and power should be convincing enough, but if we really need some testimony besides His alone, we could look to the words of the Apostles. I don't know about you, but the words of John in **John 1:1** seem pretty plain and straight forward to me. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* Who was the Word? We can conclude the Word is Jesus based upon John's words later on in **v.14** when he speaks of the Word becoming flesh and dwelt among us...this is Jesus! John makes the claim that He is God.
2. We have mentioned many times the words written by John in **John 20:30,31**, but notice that these words comes directly on the heels of Thomas's proclamation that Jesus was his Lord and his God. (**John 20:28**) The Apostles were convinced of the deity of Jesus and we can, as well.

D. The Words Of Paul (Colossians 2:9 & Titus 2:13)

1. We have seen the power of Jesus and His words and the words of the Apostles as proof of His deity, so let's finish up by looking at a couple of very simple statements made by Paul, the Apostle born our of due time. (**I Corinthians 15:8**) On two separate occasions, Paul makes very clear claims to establish his belief in Jesus Christ as having been God in the flesh. In **Colossians 2:9**, Paul states that in Jesus "*all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.*" If ever there was a claim to Jesus being God in the flesh, isn't this it?!
2. However, if that isn't enough, consider as well **Titus 2:13** where Paul writes concerning his looking forward to the return of Christ who is "*our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.*" Jesus was God in the flesh on earth, and He continues to be God in heaven as He reigns over His church. Paul, along with the rest of the Apostles, was completely convinced of Jesus's deity and confirmed His claims that He and God were one.

Hopefully it has been fully established from the provided evidence that Jesus truly is God in the flesh, and I hope that it has been equally established the absolute necessity of us accepting and believing in Him as such. There is no room for any other belief than the acknowledgment of Jesus, the Word as God. It is a foundational aspect of our faith, and without this understanding, we will not be built up or have the unity with God's people that we should so greatly desire. Without this understanding and recognition, we will not be able to fully submit to Jesus in all things and have Him first in our lives, but as God, as deity, we find Him as worthy of preeminence. May God help us to grow mightily and prevail based upon our belief in Jesus Christ having come to earth as God in the flesh.

PRAYER *Our loving Father in heaven...we humbly come before you with hearts full of thanksgiving for the fact that Your Son would leave the perfection of heaven and come to this earth and live as a man while still being eternal God. Father, we know that no greater love has been shown than for God to die for man, and we praise Your name and the name of Your Son for that awesome sacrifice. We pray that each person here would be convicted by that love, that we would all pronounce our belief in Jesus as Lord, and that we would all live our lives for you. May all glory and honor be given to You, Your Son, and the Spirit. Bless us as we serve you daily. In Jesus Christ, God in the flesh we pray....amen.*