

## The Wednesday Word, June 10, 2009: So, Jesus Never Claimed to Be God? Part 1

Every so often some 'smart alec' gets on TV and claims that the early Christians did not consider Jesus to be God. "This belief", they say, "started some 400 years after the gospel events transpired. "And," they continue, "Jesus himself never once claimed to be God. All he said was that he was the Son of God!"

What are we to say in the face of such onslaughts? Are they true? Did Jesus ever claim to be God? Did the early Church believe that He was God? The answers are in the scriptures. Take the question about whether or not Jesus ever claimed to be God. Did you know that in John's Gospel, chapter five, Jesus makes no less than 7 claims to being God! --- Not one, but seven claims!

For the next few weeks we will consider each of these claims. If ever we are to be strong in the gospel, we need to be established in the grand truth of the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we come to the first claim in John 5, we should note that Jesus has just done the 'inexcusable'; He has healed a man on the Sabbath day. This brings Him into direct conflict with the Jewish authorities, and it is during this confrontation Jesus strongly testifies to His deity.

Claim #1:

*John 5:16-18 "And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the Sabbath day. But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God."*

The Jewish folks were furious because they believed Jesus to be a Sabbath breaker. However, Jesus did not actually break the law of God. The law of God made no specific prohibition against healing sick folk on the Sabbath! But, by healing on the Sabbath, Jesus stepped on ecclesiastical toes and barbequed sacred Jewish cows! The Jews, you see, had gone way beyond Moses and, like all good religionists, had made up their own rules and regulations. They had decided that one couldn't do excessive things like healing on the Sabbath, -----it was wrong simply because they said it was wrong.

I always think the attitude of Christ's enemies was, in one sense, vaguely amusing. Had an angel healed on the Sabbath they would have, no doubt, welcomed him. They would have in no way tried to rebuke or censure him. Angels, of course, would obviously have been exempt from the slavish Jewish adherence to the Sabbath. Sabbath observance was, after all, for men, not angels.

Likewise, God was exempt from Sabbath observance. God can do whatever He pleases, whenever He pleases.... that's one of the advantages of being God! So, what was it exactly that now enraged the Jewish leaders? They were incensed because, not only had Jesus healed on the Sabbath, but He had also had the audacity to claim the same Divine exemption from Sabbath observance as belonged to God. He says, in effect, "My Father can work on the Sabbath and so can I."

God, in actuality, had always been exempt from Sabbath observance in that He had made the Sabbath for man and not for Himself. In fact, He had never stopped working at any time. True, He rested on the first Sabbath, but this rest was only from His works of creation. And ever since that first day of rest, He has been actively involved and working with mankind regardless of what day of the week it is.

This claim to Sabbath exemption was serious enough, but Christ goes even further by referring to God as uniquely being His own Father. To the Jews it was clear that Jesus by this statement had blasphemed for, after all, He was, in their estimation, a mere man and, therefore, in no way equal with God. Think about it, if a man claims equality with the omnipotent Deity then he's claiming to be God.

It would indeed have been a great blasphemy for Jesus Christ to claim to be God ---if he was lying about it! There's no greater blasphemy than that. The Jews said, "You can't claim to be God, that's blasphemy." And of course, they were right, anybody who claims to be God, who isn't God, is blaspheming.

Let's face it, when Jesus Christ stood up and said, "I'm equal with God," He was either God or the greatest blasphemer who ever opened his mouth. And when some person comes along and says, "Well, Jesus was just a wonderful human teacher, but not God" you can reply TWADDLE!

And when somebody comes along and says, "He was an elevated human, a great moral example, but not God" you can say "Double Distilled Twaddle!"

Don't allow any of this patronizing dribble that says He's a good teacher, but not God. Good teachers don't claim to be God. Blasphemers do! And God does! There's no middle ground.

The Jews were enraged. That's why the religious leaders of Christ's day were out to kill Him! At least they clearly understood what today's critics do not: they were very clear on this matter; Jesus had claimed to be God. They had heard Him, there was no mistaking Him, there was no ambiguity. Jesus could easily have backed down and averted the ensuing storm by saying, "That's not what I meant." But He didn't! He stood by His statement. Both He and His audience knew what He had said.

It is only if one dismisses the clear statements of Jesus that one can conclude that He is not God!

Since Jesus was God clothed with humanity, He claimed, therefore, equality with the Father and the divine right to heal and work on the Sabbath.

And that's the Gospel Truth!