The Biblical Unitarian Podcast - by Dustin Smith, PhD

Episode 375–"The Problems with the Phrase 'Jesus is God'"

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Introduction

Do you believe that Jesus is God? This question gets asked a lot in Christian circles, but it is never asked in the Bible. Why has this slogan "Jesus is God" continued to be circulated as if it is the inspired litmus test for authentic Christianity?

In this week's episode, I am going to demonstrate why all Christians need to immediately abandon the phrase "Jesus is God," offering instead another proposition to consider that is thoroughly biblical and less problematic. I will also go through many of the common Jesus-is-God proof texts to show that the evidence for such a high christology is not as strong as some might have thought.

Is it a correct biblical statement to state "Jesus is God"?

1. **Does the Bible Claim that "Jesus is God"?**

a. This is easy, just do a search and you will find this phrase exactly zero times in the Bible.
b. Does Jesus ever say, “I am God (or Lord God, Almighty, Yahweh, God the Son, the second member of the Trinity)?
    i. No
c. This is the problem. Despite the fact that the phrase “Jesus is God” is nowhere to be found in Scripture and the fact that Jesus never said he was God, the Lord God, the Almighty, Yahweh, God the son, or the second member of the Trinity, many interpreters have been told that they must continue repeating the mantra “Jesus is God.”
d. In fact, for many, whether you agree with the phrase “Jesus is God” becomes the litmus test for whether you are a real Christian in some ultra-conservative circles. Even though the Bible never says Jesus is God, people are pressured into affirming it.
    i. You see the problem?
    ii. I’ve been asked hundreds of times whether I believe that Jesus is God, and my response is
        1. That is not a biblical phrase, so I have a hard time affirming a phrase that I cannot find in the Bible.
            a. Then the goal posts get moved to lower the bar on what qualifies as a biblical affirmation of Jesus being God

2. Problems with 13 Texts that Allegedly Call Jesus “God”

a. The verses that allegedly refer to Jesus as God are plagued with difficulties. Let’s briefly look at them and point them out.
    i. *For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace*. (Isa 9:6)
        1. Not referring to Jesus at all (Hezekiah)
    ii. *"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, with us is God).* (Matt 1:23)
        1. Symbolic name, with us is God, God has not abandoned us, in fact, here is his human son who is living proof that God still loves his people.
    iii. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)
        1. Personified word, not Jesus

iv. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. (John 1:18)
    1. Textual variant, *monogenes uios* or *monogenesis theos*
    2. Every other occurrence of *monogenes* in John is paired with son, not God.
v. Before Abraham was, I am he. (John 8:58)
    1. Not a claim to be God, he is saying “I am he”
        a. John 4:25-26 = Messiah
vi. Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28)
    1. Finally, we have a passage where Jesus is called God. But, it is qualified by the statement made by Jesus himself in 20:17
        a. “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." (John 20:17)
        b. And the key christological feature in the Gospel of John that depicts Jesus as the only true God’s agent.
vii. shepherd the church of God which He purchased with the blood of his own. (Acts 20:28)
    1. “His own dear one”
        a. NRSV has “blood of his own son”
viii. and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (Rom 9:5)
    1. This verse is ambiguous based on punctuation
        a. Most scholars have not concluded that Paul is calling Jesus God here because the benediction “God blessed forever” is a common Pauline benediction, appearing even later in Romans.
ix. though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited (Phil 2:6)
    1. Jesus is distinguished from God in this passage
    2. Form of God is contrasted with form of a servant, the suffering servant, suggesting that “form” is not essence or mode of being, but rather, an attitude and posture
x. according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thes 1:12)
    1. Ambiguous, but Paul regularly distinguishes God and Jesus, so it is highly unlikely that he will here collapse the two persons into one.
xi. waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13)
    1. Ambigious, likely referring to Jesus as the glory that will appear, the glory of our great God and savior.

xii. But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions. (Heb 1:8-9)

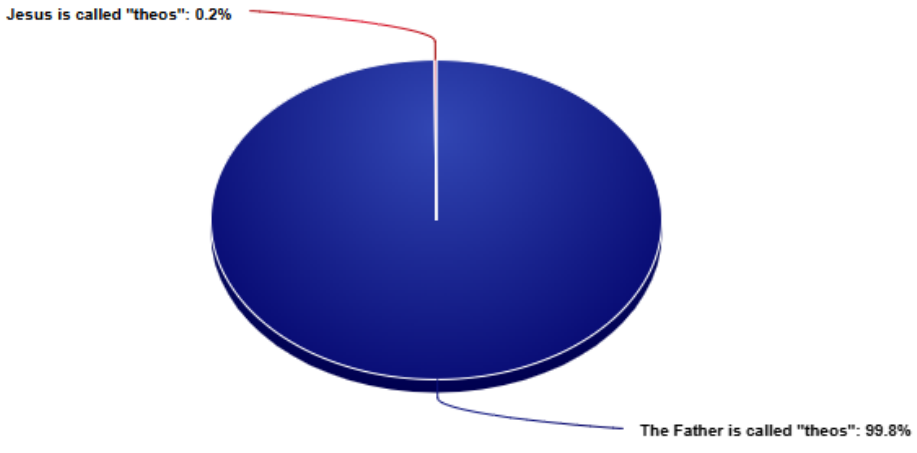
1. Here is the second verse that indicates that Jesus is called God, but it is qualified in two important ways
    a. it quotes Ps 45:6, where the human king is called God as Yahweh's kingly agent
    b. The quotation of Ps 45 in Heb 1:9 goes on to clarify that despite Jesus bearing the title of God, he still has a God above him, "your God," the one who anointed Jesus.
        i. Jesus is called God in Heb 1:8 in his role as the true God's agent.

xiii. by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet 1:1)

1. Ambiguous, and 2 Peter regularly distinguishes God and Jesus Christ, as the following verse clearly indicates

3. So, Is Jesus God Afterall?

a. The evidence for such a suggestion, as we have seen, is razor thin and open to some serious questioning.
b. In the NT, the Father is called God over 1,300x.
c. Jesus is called God, for sure, twice, and in both cases he is called God in his role as the true God's agent.
d. Jesus is not the Father. To call Jesus "God" when the NT uses the noun theos 99.8% of the time to refer to the Father is to implicitly identify the Son with the Father in some sense.
e.



f. Furthermore, if you are a Trinitarian who believes that the one God consists of three coequal, coeternal, and coessential persons, then calling Jesus God is a problem. You can't say that God is a Trinity and also say that Jesus is God, because Jesus is not the triune God.
g. The other issue is that the NT frequently, repeatedly, without qualification refers to Jesus as the son of God.
    i. Jesus never said "I am God"
    ii. But he did say "I am the son of God" in John 10:36
    iii. The demons called Jesus son of God
    iv. The disciples called Jesus son of God
    v. Peter confessed that Jesus was the son of the living God
    vi. At his trial, the high priest asked if Jesus was the son of God, to which Jesus agreed
    vii. The centurion said that this man was the son of God
    viii. The angel Gabriel said Jesus would be the son of God
    ix. John the Baptist bore witness that Jesus was the son of God
    x. The Gospel of John was written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God
    xi. Paul taught that the son of God loved him and gave himself up for Paul
        1. So much clear, plain, straightforward evidence that Jesus is the son of God, but the evidence for Jesus being God is slim, qualified, and problematic
    xii. I propose that Christians abandon the phrase "Jesus is God" and replace it with a more biblical phrase, "Jesus is the son of God."

Thanks for listening to this week's episode!

Join us next week as we examine the results of a new survey on how many Christians believe in the doctrine of the Trinity. I don't want to spoil anything, but the biblical unitarian movement is making an impact of the number of people who believe that God is three persons.

Please look forward to our next episode.

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