



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## **A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)**

### **Lesson 6.1.4 – The Doctrine of Jesus, Son of God, Messiah (Christology)**

#### **Many Reject the Deity of Jesus**

The deity of Jesus of Nazareth has been denied by a large number of false teachers from the early days of the Church even to the present time. The Ebionites claimed that Jesus was the human son of Joseph and Mary, and that the Holy Spirit came on Him for the first time at His baptism. An early teacher, Paul of Samosata, was willing to give Jesus the name of God but he did not understand this to mean that Jesus was God in Himself.

The most influential denier of the full deity of Jesus in the early Church was Arius, who claimed that Jesus, the Son of God, was a created being and not eternal with the Father. In his opinion, Jesus was the first creature that God made, and Jesus then assisted God in making the other creatures. In particular, Arius denied that Jesus is eternal. Instead he claimed: "There was a time when Jesus was not." Athanasius opposed Arius' views vigorously, and the Nicene Council of 325 condemned the views of Arius. Nevertheless, there were many years in which Arianism was the teaching of the majority of "Christian" churches, before the true teaching of Jesus as true God again began to prevail.

At the time of the Reformation there were a few teachers who denied the deity of Jesus. Among them was a heretic named Servetus, who was put to death in Geneva, Switzerland, because of his false teaching. The Socinians believed that Jesus was only a gifted man. Unitarians in the United States, like Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1892), denied the deity of Jesus. Jehovah's Witnesses have always denied the deity of Jesus. They have even produced their own Bible, which changes the passages that most clearly teach that Jesus is God. Many Christians have been deceived by their lies and their aggressive tactics.

The Unitarian Church today is not a large group, but their views about Jesus are taught in many of the Protestant seminaries throughout the world and by many of the Protestant preachers in the world as well. Many religious lodges, such as the Masons, deny the deity of Jesus. Georgia Harkness, a Methodist theologian, affirmed that Jesus is the Son of God, but claimed that this does not mean that Jesus was or is God. G. Curtis Jones of the group known as the Disciples of Christ said: "Disciples in general have never been able to accept the idea of Jesus being God."

There are some who call themselves Lutheran who deny the deity of Jesus also. In fact, a textbook used in many Lutheran seminaries today declares that the deity of Jesus is not taught in the Bible. It claims that it is a teaching that Christians introduced many years after the time of Jesus and His apostles. Paul Jersild, an American Lutheran seminary teacher, wrote: "Theologians today are concerned to interpret the divinity of Jesus in a manner which avoids turning him into a bizarre mythological creature who contains both a divine nature and a human nature." In other words, such teachers want to talk about Jesus as being divine in some way without saying that Jesus is true God in every way.

Popular depictions of Jesus in musicals or movies often do not portray Jesus as God. Some examples of this would be the musical known as "Jesus Christ, Superstar" and the movie known as "The Last Temptation of Christ." No doubt there are many others. We need to be on the alert lest we are influenced by these faulty views and lead others to have these faulty views of who Jesus is.

## Questions

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1. Name some of the individuals and groups who have denied the deity of Jesus.
2. Who was the most influential denier of Jesus' deity in the early Church?
3. Should Servetus have been put to death for denying Jesus' deity? Explain your answer.
4. What is wrong with the views of Paul Jersild?
5. Give some examples of popular movies in your locale that deny Jesus' deity, if you can.
6. Which so-called "Christian" groups in your locale deny that Jesus is God?
7. What evidence from the Bible would you use to discuss Jesus' deity with a Jehovah's Witness?
8. Why is it especially important that Christian seminaries teach the truth that Jesus is true God?