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## False Ideas About Jesus Christ (part two)

By Wayne Jackson

Without question, Jesus of Nazareth is the most dominating figure in human history. Who was he? Alternatively, in the words of the Teacher himself in a question to the leaders of the Jewish community, “What do you think of the Christ?” Every intellectually reflective person must come to grips with this engaging question.

The available data regarding the identity of Jesus are definitive. He is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:30-31). Regrettably, however, there are numerous erroneous opinions regarding him in the marketplace of religious ideas.

### **Same Person As The Father**

Those who are affiliated with the United Pentecostal Church contend that “Jesus” is merely the earthly name of God, the Father. They allege there is but one person who is God, but that “God” is represented in three manifestations — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Scripture, however, reveals a clear distinction between the Father and the Son, and between the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The Jews had never seen the father nor heard his voice (John 1:18; 5:37), but they had both seen and heard Christ. Hence, Christ was not the same as the Father. The person who abides in the Lord’s doctrine has both the Father and the Son (2 John 9) — both implies a plurality. One could sin against Christ and be forgiven, but not the Spirit (Matthew 12:32). Therefore, Christ and the Spirit were not the same person. This topic is discussed more fully in the author’s tract, *The Biblical Doctrine Of The Godhead* (1994).

### **Jesus, A Messianic Manipulator**

Though it is a rare and clearly incredible viewpoint, there are those who contend that Jesus was a first-century huckster who manipulated people into believing he was the Messiah. Hugh J. Schonfield, in his infamous volume *The Passover Plot*, argued this very point. He asserted that Christ “plotted and schemed with utmost skill” to feign his death and resurrection (1965, 155).

Schonfield contended that Jesus labored under the illusion that he was the Messiah and so contrived to bring the “greatest conspiracy in the history of mankind” to fruition. He alleged that Christ actually did not die upon the cross at all; rather, he merely received a powerful narcotic that made him appear as dead. Then, by a prearranged plan, he was removed unconscious from the cross by his disciples. Unfortunately, Schonfield supposed, Jesus did not anticipate that a Roman soldier would plunge a spear into his side: and so, after being taken from the cross on Saturday, “he regained consciousness temporarily, but finally succumbed” (1965, 165).

Is there any evidential basis at all for this bizarre theory? Not a shred. It is inconceivable that hardened and experienced Roman soldiers would have allowed the Lord's disciples to remove his body without carefully examining it to determine whether the victim was really dead. Schonfield's contention does not pass the commonsense test.

Then there is this curious fact. In 1959, just six years before *The Passover Plot* was published, Schonfield wrote a book titled, *The Bible Was Right*. In that production, the author contended that Jesus collapsed and "expired" after six hours on the cross. He stated that the soldiers broke the legs of the two thieves crucified on either side of the Lord, but that this was not done in the case of Christ because "he was found to be dead already" (1959, 74). Now here is an intriguing question. What great historical discovery was brought to light between 1959 and 1965, which led Schonfield to reverse his view of the Lord's death, and to argue the "Passover plot" theory? None at all. It is perfectly clear that the real "plot" was Hugh J. Schonfield's — and that was powered by monetary motives.

## **A Good Man — Nothing More**

A very common view regarding Christ is that he was merely a good man, perhaps a wise philosopher, but certainly not the Son of God. Modernists claim Jesus differed from ordinary men in degree, but not in kind.

For example, the late Steve Allen, the entertainer, wrote two vicious diatribes against the Bible. Though he utterly repudiated the proposition that Jesus of Nazareth was a divine being, he nonetheless had high praise for the Lord. "Among human heroes, Jesus is supreme. For he not only preached but apparently demonstrated the virtues of compassion, charity, love, courage, faith, and intelligence." Allen said Christ "approaches the ideal of perfection more closely than anyone else who has ever lived" (1990, 229). However, this position is illogical, and for the following reasons.

No one knows anything at all about the nature of Christ except what he learns from the New Testament. As previously indicated, though one can establish the historical existence of Jesus from secular sources, there is no antique literary document, aside from the biblical record, regarding Christ's personal character. One is thus dependent upon New Testament information — if he says anything at all concerning Jesus.

However, there is ample scriptural evidence that Christ claimed that he was more than a mere good person. He argued that he came from heaven (John 6:48-51), that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16-17), who shared the same nature as the Father (John 10:30).

If the Lord was not the Son of God, then he lied about that matter. He lied consistently and continuously. He deceived multitudes. He led many to sacrifice their very lives for the belief that he is divine. How, in the name of common sense, can one argue that anyone who acted in such a fashion was a "good man"?

## **One Prophet Among Many**

Some accept Christ as a prophet of God (Acts 3:22), but contend that he was merely one figure in a long line of divine spokesmen. According to them, he was not the greatest one, and most certainly not the last. For example, the religion of Islam speaks very highly of Jesus as a prophet, but alleges that Christ disclaimed being deity (his followers deified him), and that he never died upon the cross (Anderson, 1950, 62-63). To those of the Islamic persuasion, Mohammed was the last and greatest of the prophets.

Similarly, there is the Baha'i movement, founded by Mirza 'Mohammed in Iran (c. 1844). This apostate form of Islam proclaimed the coming a great World Teacher. In 1863 Mirza Husayn ' Ali announced that he was that Teacher. He adopted the name Baha'u'llah (from which Baha'i is derived). Baha'i teaching asserts there has been a series of prophets, beginning with Adam. Adam's successors were Moses, Krishna, Buddha, Zarathushtra, Christ, Mohammed, and finally Baha'i — the most important of all. However, the fact is, Christ was not just one figure in a series of prophets. He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6), and apart from him there is no salvation (Acts 4:12).

## **The Strictly Benevolent Christ**

There are those who sincerely believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but they have a warped view of his nature. They entertain the notion that Jesus was a loving, compassionate character, who went about doing good, and who would never be able to bring himself to punish human beings eternally (see Smith, 2003, 165ff). These folks simply cannot fathom the fact that there is a wrathful side to Jesus.

Such a concept is purely subjective and totally at variance with New Testament data. The Lord spoke clearly of the lost who are in danger of judgment and hell (Matthew 5:22). To those who attempt to plead their case after it is too late, Christ will declare, "I never knew you: depart from me" (Matthew 7:23; cf. 25:12). Jesus taught that the wicked, both body and soul, will be destroyed in hell (Matthew 10:28).

The Lord described his role as the king who judges (Matthew 25:31-46). Indeed, the wicked will not be able to stand in the day of the Lamb's wrath (Revelation 6:16,17; cf. 14:10). While one must never in any way minimize the tender, loving nature of the Son of God, it is a gross perversion of Bible doctrine to deny that he will judge his enemies (Luke 19:14, 27).

## **Conclusion**

Jesus himself taught that a correct belief concerning his identity is crucial. "Except you believe that I am he, you shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). One cannot repudiate the existence of Christ, pervert the truth regarding his nature, and reject the exclusiveness of his mission without suffering an eternal consequence for such folly.

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