

Confessing Jesus as the Christ

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Jesus said in John 8:24, "Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." We have explained many times that the "he" to which he referred was the Messiah, the Promised One, or as verse 23 puts it, "the One from above."

All of this is true, but what Jesus actually said has a deeper meaning than most of us realize. The expression he used is "ego eimi." Literally it is, "I, I am," not "I am he." Since "eimi" by itself means, "I am," it has a special meaning and intensity when used with "ego."

In every case where "ego" is used with a verb in the New Testament, it appears that the purpose is to emphasize the personality or authority of the speaker. For example, in Matthew 5:27-28, Jesus said, "Ye heard that it was said, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' but I say unto you (ego de lego humin)." The verb "lego" means "I say," so Jesus would not have needed to say "ego lego" unless he had wanted to emphasize the fact that he is the one who is speaking with authority.

There is great significance in many of the expressions in which "ego eimi" is used. In Matthew 28:20 when Jesus gives the Great Commission, he tells them that when they carry it out, "Lo I am with you (ego meth' humon eimi) always." The approximate meaning is, "I, even I myself, will constantly be with you."

But there is an even more significant implication in the expression when there is no helping verb, as in John 4:26. When the Samaritan woman said to Jesus, "When the Messiah comes he will tell us all things," Jesus replied, "The one speaking to you, I AM (ego eimi)." He did not use a helping verb as, "I am coming" or "I am telling you all things," but "I AM." In John 10:9, when he says, "I am the door," there is an object (a subjective complement) given after "ego eimi." He means, "I, even I myself, am the door." In verse 10 when he is contrasting what he did with what the thief does, he uses "ego elthon" -- "I, myself came" for one purpose, but the thief comes for another.

But in John 8:24, 28, 58 when Jesus said, "I am," he uses the same expression God used in Exodus 3:14 when he tells Moses how to describe him. He did not say, "I am the Powerful One" or "I am good," but "I am." So, Jesus did not say, "Before Abraham existed, I was," but simply, "I am."

This is really the same affirmation made throughout the New Testament about Christ, perhaps expressed most aptly in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God, and the Word was with God." So, when Jesus said in John 8:24, "Except ye believe that I am (he), ye shall die in your sins," he means "the self-existing Eternal One," the One with all authority in heaven and on earth, not merely someone who came from God to be a deliverer or a doer of great deeds. The "he" in which we must believe is "Emmanuel" -- God with us! If we believe anything less about him, we cannot be saved -- we will die in our sins. If, when you made the "Good Confession," you just rattled off a bunch of words and did not really accept Jesus as one who, as

God in the flesh, was to be your authority in all things, it may explain why you have not lived as if he had all authority! This does not imply that you must have a mature grasp of all the implications of what Christianity really involves or you must start again and have a "lordship baptism," but it does mean that if one did not have the proper concept of the Sonship and Lordship of Christ, he cannot be a Christian.

A careful reading of Matthew 10:32 and Luke 12:8 in the original text strengthens the conviction that when Jesus talks of confessing him, he means far more than most of us realize. In those two texts, he does not merely say, "Confess me" but "whosoever confesses in me." Although I have not seen any commentary that dwells on that, I am convinced that the expression suggests far more than simply a verbal acknowledgment that Jesus is the Son of God. I think the devil could do that. If I should say, "I believe you," that would mean that I believed a particular statement you had made. If I said, "I believe in you," it would mean far more. So my judgment is that when Christ said, "Whosoever confesses in me," using both the preposition and the emphatic form of "me" (emoi), he means to suggest that the confession that makes a difference is not merely saying in effect, "Jesus is Lord" (Matthew 7:21), but so confessing that the confession is demonstrated in life. If that is so, then Jesus says, "I will confess in him before my Father." It is the thought suggested in John 17:23, "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one." If you are in Christ, and confess in him, he will be in you and confess in you.