



*“College Life Class”*

***Christology:  
Jesus’ Self-Understanding***

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Donald Dicks, M.A., Th.M., F-ABFT (ret.)

Chapter Director, Ratio Christi at Colorado School of Mines


## Bart Ehrman interview 2014

**IDEAS:** So Jesus was a rabble-rousing apocalyptic prophet who preached about the coming kingdom of God, but did not understand himself to be divine.

**EHRMAN:** I'm not sure he meant to be rabble-rousing, although he ended up rousing a rabble. But you're absolutely right: He did not go around calling himself God, and his disciples did not think he was God.

**IDEAS:** Is it widely accepted among scholars that Jesus did not claim divinity?





## Bart Ehrman interview 2014

**EHRMAN:** That has been a widely held scholarly view for about 300 years among critical scholars. Among scholars who are evangelical Christians who are committed to the idea that Jesus is God and knew he was God, they maintain that Jesus did say that he was God.

The problem is that Jesus only makes claims for himself as being divine in the Gospel of John....

But what scholars have long noted is that Jesus doesn't say any of those things in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and that Matthew, Mark, and Luke are [written] much earlier than John....

What I argue in the book is that it's virtually inconceivable that if it was known Jesus called himself God, that Matthew, Mark, and Luke would just leave that part out.



# HOW JESUS BECAME GOD

*The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee*



**BART D. EHRMAN**

*New York Times* Bestselling Author of *Misquoting Jesus*

A RESPONSE TO BART D. EHRMAN  
MICHAEL F. BIRD + CRAIG A. EVANS + SIMON J. GATHERCOLE  
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# HOW GOD BECAME JESUS

THE REAL ORIGINS OF BELIEF IN JESUS' DIVINE NATURE

## Jesus' Self-understanding

- A. The worship of Jesus by monotheistic Jews as God incarnate within 20 years of His death requires an adequate cause to be found in Jesus' own claims. Jesus produced two unique, unexpected beliefs about His person in His Jewish followers. (1) They accepted Jesus as Messiah. (2) They worshipped Jesus as God incarnate.

### Explicit claims

#### 1. Messiah

a. The belief in the early church that Jesus was the Messiah requires an adequate cause. The Greek word for Messiah is "Christos" or Christ. Jesus' early followers became known as "Christians" (Acts 11:26)

b. Peter's confession (Mark 8:27-30)

"But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "Thou art the Christ."

John 6:69: "We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

## Explicit claims

### 1. Messiah

c. Jesus' answer to John the Baptist (Mt. 11:2-6; Lk 7:19-23)

Lk. 7:22 "And He answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT (Isa. 35:5), the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM (Isa. 61:1)"

d. Jesus' triumphal entry (Mk. 11:1-11; Jn. 12:12-19)

"...Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is He, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zech. 9:9)

".....And they brought the colt to Jesus and put their garments on it. And many spread their garments in the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. And those who went before, and those who followed after, were crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!" (Mk. 11:7-11)

## Explicit claims

### 1. Messiah

#### e. Jesus' action in the temple (Mk. 11:15-17)

“And they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to cast out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who were selling doves; and He would not permit anyone to carry goods through the temple. And He began to teach and say to them, “Is it not written, ‘MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS’? But you have made it a ROBBERS’ DEN.”

The last sentence of Zechariah's prophecy is “And there shall no longer be traders in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day” (Zech. 14:21)

#### f. Jesus' condemnation by the Sanhedrin (Mk. 14:61-65)

Mk. 14:58 “We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.’” ...[then the high priest stands and starts quizzing Him...]  
<sup>61</sup>“...’ Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?’ And Jesus said, ‘I am; and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.’ (Dan. 7:13)

## Explicit claims

### 1. Messiah

g. Jesus' crucifixion as "King of the Jews" (Mk. 15:26)

**"And the inscription of the charge against Him read, "THE KING OF THE JEWS."**

## What did Jesus mean by claiming to be the Messiah?

In Isaiah 9:6 the title "mighty God" is given to the Messiah, whose reign will be without end.

In Matthew 11:10 and Luke 7:27 Jesus Himself identifies John the Baptist as the messenger of Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. So who is to come after the messenger, according to these prophecies? It is the Lord, God Himself! Jesus goes on to speak of Himself as the Son of Man who has come after John the Baptist (Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:34).



## Explicit claims

### 2. The Son of God

#### a. Parable of the vineyard (Mk. 12:1-9)

“.....And they took him and killed him, and will give the vineyard to others. “Have you not even read this Scripture: ‘THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES’?”

And they were seeking to seize Him, and yet they feared the multitude; for they understood that He spoke the parable against them.”

Significance: It tells us that Jesus thought of Himself as God’s only Son, distinct from all the prophets, God’s final messenger, and even the heir of Israel itself.

## Explicit claims

### 2. The Son of God

b. “No one knows the Father but the Son” (Mt. 11:27)

“All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”

Significance: This statement tells us that Jesus thought of Himself as the exclusive Son of God and the *only* revelation of God the Father to mankind.

He views Himself as God’s Son in an absolute and unique sense and as having the exclusive authority to reveal His Father God to men.

## Explicit claims

### 3. The Son of Man

a. Jesus' favorite title. Used >80 times in Gospels. Only Jesus refers to Himself this way. Always **“the Son of Man”**, not **“a son of Man”**, was directing attention to the divine eschatological figure of Dan. 7:13-14.

b. Reference to the divine-human figure of Daniel 7:13-14

“I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming. And He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him.

And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.” (Dan. 7:13-14)

The understanding of Daniel's “Son of Man” as a divine-human figure fits with the first-century Jewish ideas and therefore could have been in Jesus' mind.

By using the indirect expression “the Son of Man” to refer to Himself, Jesus prevented a premature revelation of His superhuman and messianic status.

## Explicit claims

### 3. The Son of Man

#### c. Jesus' trial confession (Mark 14:60-64)

And the high priest stood up and came forward and questioned Jesus, saying, "Do You make no answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?" But He kept silent, and made no answer. Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" And Jesus said, "I am; and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN." And tearing his clothes, the high priest said, "What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.

In one response Jesus affirms that He is the messiah, the Son of God, and the coming Son of Man.

He compounds His crime by adding that He is to be seated at God's right hand, a claim that is truly blasphemous in Jewish ears.

## B. Implicit claims (claims seen in His teaching and behavior)

### 1. Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God (Matt. 19:28)

And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

### 2. Jesus' authority

#### a. The content and style of Jesus' teaching (Matt. 5:31-32)

"And it was said, 'WHOEVER DIVORCES HIS WIFE, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DISMISSAL'; **but I say to you** that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

Jesus equated His own authority with that of divinely given law. He adjusted the law on His own authority.

In Mark 10:2-12, He cites Deut. 24:1-4 and declares that Moses does not represent the perfect will of God on this matter and continues to correct the law on His own authority.

But no human being, no prophet or teacher or charismatic, has that kind of authority.

## B. Implicit claims

### 2. Jesus' authority

b. **“Truly, I say to you”** (Mk. 8:12, 9:1; etc.) expresses His authority. He does not appeal to any other authority.

c. Jesus' role as an exorcist (Lk 11:20)

**“But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”**

Here, Jesus claims divine authority over the spiritual forces of evil and that in Himself the kingdom of God had come.

In claiming that in Himself the kingdom of God had already arrived, as visibly demonstrated by His exorcisms, Jesus was, in effect, putting Himself in God's place.

## B. Implicit claims

### 2. Jesus' authority

#### d. Jesus' claim to forgive sins (Mark 2:1-12)

And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven." But there were some of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak this way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?"

And immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, "Why are you reasoning this way about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Arise, and take up your pallet and walk'?"

But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" –He said to the paralytic— "I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home."

No one but God has the authority to forgive sins and welcome the lost back into the fold.

## B. Implicit claims

### 3. Jesus' miracles (Matthew 11:4-5)

And Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM.

Jesus never prays/asks for a miracle, He just performs them.

### 4. Jesus' role as a Judge (Luke 12:8-9)

And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man shall confess also before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.

Think of it: People's eternal destiny is fixed by how they respond to Jesus!

Make no mistake: If Jesus were not divine, then this claim could only be regarded as the most narrow and objectionable dogmatism. For Jesus is saying that people's salvation depends on their confession to Jesus Himself.



## ***Gospel of John***

Jn. 1:51 [Dan. 7:9-13] “You shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

2:19 “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

5:5-18 Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath-“making Himself equal with God.” \*\*

5:21-23 “honor the Son as you honor the Father”

5:39 the Scriptures speak of Him

6:30-51 [Ex. 16:4] He is the bread of life that came down from heaven

8:23-24 “unless you believe that I am (εγω ειμι), you will die in your sins.”

## ***Gospel of John***

8:56-59 “before Abraham was born, I am.” \*\*

10:11 [Ezek. 34:11-16] “I am the good shepherd...”

10:17-18 “I lay down My life that I may take it up again...”

10:30-33 “I and the Father are (εσμεν, we are) one.” \*\*

12:12-19 [Zech. 9:9] raised Lazarus and fulfilled Zech. 9:9

19:7 [Lev. 24:16] “made Himself out to be the Son of God”

20:28 Thomas: “My lord and my God.” Jesus accepts this.

\*\* “they picked up stones to stone Him