

## **The Deity of Jesus Christ** by Tom O'Neal

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### Introduction:

1. Concerning the nature of Christ on earth, brother Connie W. Adams said, "It is the studied conviction of this writer that no more serious issue has arisen in my life time than this one" (**Searching The Scriptures**, Oct. 1991, page 6).
2. Harmon Black said, "Let me give you clues whereby you may spot a modernist preacher in short order. First, if you hear him play up the humanity of Jesus or if he implies that he was just a man be on your guard" (**Christian Leader**, 1954).
3. **The Deity of Jesus on earth is said to be a "frivolous" matter:** *"One of the most frivolous arguments, in my opinion, of the past several decades has centered upon the deity/humanity of Christ. Another adage comes to mind in this regard: Fools rush in where angels fear to tread. Brethren have debated and argued over the past ten years over the nature of Christ's earthly existence. One side claims he was only a man and divested himself of all power and privilege of deity while upon the earth. The other argues that He retained His deity in all respects and acted from His own resources. While these questions are certainly worthy of thought, study and meditation, they are hardly worth rancorous debates and inflated pontifications as if the nature of the Son of God can be documented in three easy steps. This issue is a prime example of the tendency of conservative brethren to bicker, debate and argue over issues that should have been left alone. This probably would have withered away in short order if editors and debaters hadn't jumped into the fray"* (Jim Jonas, preacher for the Hueytown, Alabama, church at the time this was written in his **History of Churches of Christ Since World War II**, Lesson 17, page 2).
4. Some among us fellowship John Welch and those false teachers associated with him. On the 2002 High School Road Lectures in Indianapolis, Indiana, where John Welch is the preacher, brother Herschel Patton, who was the preacher for the Jordan Park church in Huntsville, Alabama, and is a current elder, along with his two sons, Gary, who preaches for the Sommerville Road Church in Decatur, Alabama, and Steve, who preaches for the University Church in Tampa, Florida, along with brother Patton's nephew, Don Ross Patton, son of the late Marshall Patton, appeared. On the 2003 High School Road Lecture program appeared brother Dan Petty, head of the Bible Department at Florida College, along with brother Doug Barlar, Dean of students at Florida College.

## I. **Some In The Denominational World Have Always Denied The Deity of Jesus Christ.**

1. The Jehovah Witnesses have denied the Deity of Jesus.
  - a. J. F. Rutherford said “In Truth, when Jesus was on earth, he was a perfect man, **nothing more and nothing less...**Jesus was not God the Son” (**Reconciliation**, page 113) and “God’s justice would not let Jesus, as a ransom be **more than a perfect man.** So he could not be the Supreme God Almighty in the flesh” (**Let God Be True**, page 106)
2. Tim Rice in his October, 1970, British Rock Opra “Jesus Christ Superstar” said, “He’s a man, he’s **just a man...**”
3. Sun Myung Moon said, “Jesus on earth, **was a man no different from us** except for the fact that he was without original sin” (**The Divine Principle**, page 212).

## II. **The Denial of the Deity of Jesus In Theological Circles Is “The Latest New Car”**

1. “A fundamental tenet of process theology is that the classical two-nature doctrine of Christ presupposes concepts that are out-dated, absurd, and irrelevant to modern minds” ( **Process Theology** by Bruce Demarest, page 67).
2. “Today, one can find evidence virtually everywhere – on every continent, in both Protestant and Roman Catholic circles – that the theologically ‘in thing’ is to contend for a Jesus who was only man by nature and for a Bible that is virtually silent regarding the classical incarnational Christology of a two-natured Christ – true God and true man in one person of Jesus [of Nazareth]” (**Jesus: Divine Messiah** by Dr. Robert L. Reymond, page 2).
3. Ferrell Jenkins said, “We have become accustomed to the assertion, in more recent theological thought, that Jesus is not divine” (1998 Florida College Lectures, **Christ and the Church**, page 5).

## III. **Why Is There A Problem Among Us Over The Deity of Jesus On Earth?**

1. On September 19, 1989, John Welch preached a sermon in Ontario, Canada in which he taught that Jesus on earth was only a man.
2. On March 13, 1990, he preached a sermon in Louisville, Ky. in which he taught that Jesus “was just like you and me”
3. After his Louisville sermon, several brethren met in Beaver Dam, Ky., on September 18, 1990 to discuss the matter with John Welch and see if they could clarify what he was teaching. Instead of clarifying matters, he dug deeper into his error.
4. In April, 1992, he preached a sermon in Russellville, Ark. in which he taught the same error.
5. He put out a special issue of **Faith and Facts** quarterly in October, 1990 in which this issue was discussed and he taught further error.

6. He then published **The Word Became Flesh** which was a compilation of the articles he had written in **Faith and Facts**.

#### IV. **The Error Taught By John Welch.**

1. “He must be, as the Scriptures teach, a man as I am, yet without sin...” (**The Word Became Flesh**, page 4).
2. “He surrendered all the power and prerogatives of divinity to become a man” (page 5).
3. “What Jesus knew, he had learned as a result of reading and inspiration. These are both means available to other humans” (page 12 ).
4. “We know that he pre-existed his birth as God, the Son of God” (page 13).
5. “Jesus, prior to his birth could adequately be described as equal with God. He divested himself of the glory, honor, privileges of divinity and rights of godhood and became subject to the Father as a man. Whatever privileges and powers there might have been were stripped from him. He was a man” (page 14).
6. “He was given blessings and power on this earth, but it was only those which other men had. He had given up all the power and privilege of the son of God. Because he was the son of his Father he could still be described as the Son of God and Emmanuel (God with us), but he had become in full point of fact a man” (pages 14-15).
7. “Thus, even though Jesus has powers, they are the same powers given to other mortals. They were not an innate part of his divinity” (page 15).
8. “I think that most of us have assumed that Jesus became a man only temporarily: for a 33 year period here on earth. I am not aware of the passage that teaches this” (page 19).
9. “Jesus, mankind’s advocate and priest, remains a man” (page 20).
10. “He divested himself of the glory, honor, privileges of divinity, and rights of Godhood and became subject to the Father as a man” (**Faith and Facts**, Oct. 1990, page 37).
11. “If this passage [Phil. 2:5-8, TGO] does not teach that Jesus gave up at least some of the powers, privileges and prerogatives of deity in some fashion, then I don’t know what it is teaching” (page 52).
12. Jeff Asher said, “Central to this discussion is Philippians 2:5-11. Brother Welch made it clear that this verse teaches that Jesus emptied himself of the powers, privileges, prerogatives and position of Deity, but did not divest Himself of divinity of godhood” (page 32).
13. In **With All Boldness**, January, 2000, page 4, brother Robert Welch, father of John, had an article, “The Mind of Christ,” in which he discussed Philippians 2:5-7 in which he illustrated what “empty” in this passage means. He said, “ Some years ago my wife and I were driving 40 miles up a canyon from Uvalde, Texas to preach, a thing which I did every Tuesday evening. I had failed to look at my gasoline gauge before leaving home. On the way home at 9:30 the engine stopped. I know that the tank was empty. We had to walk nearly a mile to a ranch house off the road to beg for enough fuel to get us home. That is what empty means. They tank was

not half filled with rocks, or anything else. It was empty. That is what the Lord did in order to come to earth to redeem us.”

14. “But here on this earth he lived as man without the benefits of any of the attributes of deity. He lived as other men lived” (Russellville, Ark. sermon, Apr. 1992).
15. “Jesus gave up everything that made Him different, special and better than men” (Oct. 16, 1992 sermon, quoted in **Gospel Truths**, Apr. 1993, page 4).
16. “Why did he [the devil, TGO] tempt Jesus? Ladies and gentlemen, it is simple, it is plain, the honest answer to that is Jesus was a man. He certainly hadn’t tried to tempt him while he was divine. He hadn’t tried to go up to heaven and tempt God. He tried to tempt Jesus because Jesus was a man” (Ontario, Canada sermon, Sept. 19, 1989).
17. “Jesus was tempted and yet divinity can’t be tempted”
18. “Jesus didn’t have a divine half and a human half. He was human, just like you and me.”
19. “He was empowered just as other men were empowered from heaven. He was a man, ladies and gentlemen, just like Peter, Paul and the others were men.”
20. “1 Corinthians 15 indicated that he will never, never, be equal with God again. Do you know that?”
21. “Ladies and gentlemen, Jesus Christ did not give up divinity for just 33 years. He gave it up for all time. All time. It wasn’t just temporarily as Superman stepped out of the phone booth. He gave it up for all time. He became one of us, ladies and gentlemen. He has been raised by the right hand of God. He has been given a name that is above every name, but he is not equal with God again where he was before.” (# 16-21 from Canadian sermon.)
22. John Welch teaches Jesus was **created** by God just like the Jehovah Witnesses do.
  - a. John asked, “Was the imperfection in the way **God made Jesus** or the way he made me?” (on the first night of my debate with him in Bowling Green, Ky., Aug. 1, 1994, **O’Neal-Welch Debate**, page 18).
  - b. John asked, “Now is that because of the way God created me, or the way **he created Jesus?**” (the second night of the debate with Gene Frost in Louisville, Ky., **Frost-Welch Debate**, page 49).
  - c. John asked, “Did Jesus make a choice or **was he created with a different spirit than me** when he came to this earth? **Was he created with a different spirit** than I am when he came to this earth?” (on the third night of his debate with Gene Frost, page 67).
23. John Welch teaches Jesus died in his spirit as well as his body.
  - a. In my debate with John he asked if I really believed Jesus died. I wondered why he would ask such a question. What gospel preacher does not believe Jesus died on the cross and has not

preached many times on the death of Jesus. It was not until he debated Gene Frost that I learned what he had in mind.

- b. John said, “**Jesus suffered death in his spirit as well as his body**” (**Frost-Welch Debate**, page 82).
  - c. John introduced three different charts that stated that Jesus’ spirit died. Chart # 422 was titled “Jesus Experienced Death Fully in Body” followed by chart #450 which said “Jesus Suffered Death In His Spirit” and then followed with chart #392 which said, “The Change ‘in Jesus’ Spirit in Death” and went on to say that the spirit of Jesus went “from ‘immortal’ (not subject to death) to ‘mortal’ (subject to death).”
24. John Welch has been all over the place depending upon what he thought was to his advantage.
- a. **Before** any of his debates, he taught Jesus **gave up and surrendered** the powers, privileges, prerogatives of deity.
    - (1) “Jesus surrendered the powers, privileges, and prerogative of divinity and became a man.”
    - (2) “Here on earth he lived as a man without the benefits of any of the attributes of deity. He lived as other men lived.”
    - (3) “Jesus gave up everything that made Him different, special, better than men.”
    - (4) “Jesus gave up at least some of the powers, privileges and prerogatives of deity.”
  - b. **During** his debates, John changed his position to Jesus **had** but did not **use** the attributes of deity.
    - (1) “He had the attributes of deity but he didn’t use them” (**O’Neal-Welch Debate**, page 17)
    - (2) “I just believe he limited himself” (page 37).
    - (3) “I believe Jesus limited his use of those attributes” (page 8).
    - (4) “He gave up the use of the attributes of deity and he is still deity” (page 26).
  - C. **After** his debates, John Welch changed his position again to Jesus was unlimited in his attributes.
    - (1) “Jesus was unlimited in the attributes of his deity and did not limit them himself” (**Faith and Facts**, July 1998, page 51).

## What Does John Welch Really Believe?

<b>Before</b>	<b>During</b>	<b>After</b>
Christ	Christ	Christ
Surrendered	Had, didn't use	Didn't limit them
Divested	Limited his use	Unlimited in use
Was Stripped	Gave use up	
Gave Up		
Emptied		

## New Testament Teaching On The Deity of Jesus On Earth Tom O'Neal

### I. Isaiah 9:6

1. “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”
2. The child will be called by five names:
  - a. Wonderful,
  - b. Counselor,
  - c. The mighty God,
  - d. The everlasting Father,
  - e. The Prince of Peace.
3. Isaiah said the “Prince of Peace” would be called “the **mighty God**” and “the **everlasting Father**.”
4. Psalms 90:2 – “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from **everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.**”

### II. Matthew 1:18-25

1. This passage quotes the Isaiah prophecy of the virgin birth of Christ.
2. Isaiah 7:14 – “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”
  - a. Things affirmed in this passage:
    - i. A **virgin** shall conceive,
    - ii. A **virgin** shall bear a **son**
    - iii. **His** name shall be called **Immanuel**
3. Matthew said “that it might be **fulfilled** which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall called his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”
  - a. If this fulfills Isaiah’s prophecy as Matthew says it does, then it was **not** fulfilled until now.
  - b. If it was fulfilled **before** now, then it was **not** fulfilled here.
4. The name “Emmanuel” is interpreted “**God with us**” (v. 23).
  - a. Either God was with us or He was not.
  - b. If he was, then we have God, Deity (Jesus) with us.
  - c. If he was not, then when we have Jesus with us, we do not have **God with us**.
  - d. If Jesus was not **God with us**, then when will this prophecy be fulfilled and who will fulfill it?

### III. Matthew 16:13-19

1. Jesus asked his disciples, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?”
2. The disciples answered by saying, “Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.”

- a. This was the answer of “flesh and blood.”
  - b. Notice that all of these answers were wrong.
3. Jesus then asked the disciples, “But whom say ye that I am?”
4. Their answer expressed by Peter was “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”
  - a. Observe that Jesus did not correct their answer.
  - b. Jesus tells them they did not learn this from “flesh and blood” but rather this was “revealed” from “my Father which is in heaven.”
5. Observe these facts:
  - a. Matthew, by Inspiration, record this.
  - b. Peter, by revelation from heaven, said this.
  - c. Jesus acknowledged the correctness of this.
  - d. God in heaven had revealed this to the apostles.

#### IV. John 1:1-14

1. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God**, The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.”
2. In verse 14, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.”
3. John then says, “we beheld his glory, the glory as the only begotten of the Father.”
4. A man, John the Baptist, said of him, “He that cometh after me is preferred before me; for he was before me” (verse 15).
5. John further said, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”

#### V. John 8:24, 28, 58 – I AM

1. Jesus used the expression to refer to himself that **God** used when the children of Israel asked “What is his name?” **God** told Moses, “**I AM THAT I AM**: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, **I AM** hath sent me unto you” (Ex. 3:14).
2. Jesus said:
  - a. “I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (Jno. 8:24).
  - b. “When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he” (Jno. 8:28).
  - c. Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you. Before Abraham was, I am” ( Jno. 8:58).
3. Jesus was either the Divine Son of God upon this earth or he was an imposter for claiming that which he was not. Which do you believe him to be?

#### VI. John’s Recorded Affirmations Of The Deity Of Jesus.

1. John the Baptist: “And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God” (Jno. 1:34).

2. Nathanael: “Nathanael answered and said unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel” (Jno.1:49).
3. Peter: “And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (Jno. 6:69).
4. Jesus: “I said, I am the Son of God” (Jno. 10:36).
5. Martha: “Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world” (Jno.11:27).
6. Thomas: “Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God” (Jno. 20:28).
7. John: “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name” (Jno. 20:30-31).

## VII. Acts 2

1. Acts 2:30-36, Peter preaches Jesus as being “both Lord [ruler] and Christ [God’s anointed].”
2. David spoke of Christ “that his **soul** was not left in Hell (KJV), hades (ASV), neither his flesh did see corruption” (v. 31).
  - a. The soul or spirit of Jesus did not die, it went to hades.
  - b. John Welch taught, “Jesus suffered death in his spirit as well as his body” (**Frost-Welch Debate**, page 82).
  - c. Hades is a place of disembodied spirits.
  - d. Jesus told the thief, “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Lk. 23:43).
  - e. In hell (KJV) hades (ASV) the rich man saw both Abraham and Lazarus in a place of comfort (Lk. 16:23-35). Their bodies were dead, but their souls or spirits were alive.
  - f. Jesus died, his body was buried (Jno. 19:38-42 ; 1 Cor. 15:4) but his flesh did not see corruption (Acts 2:31). When he was raised from the dead, his soul or spirit rejoined the body and he made appearances after his resurrection. Death is when the spirit and body are separated (Jas. 2:26); life is when both body and spirit are together.

## VIII. Philippians 2:5-8

1. This has been one of the more important passages that has been misunderstood in the discussion of the deity of Jesus on earth. John Welch said of this passage “It is the center of this debate” (**O’Neal-Welch Debate**, page 40).
  - a. John said, “If this passage does not teach that Jesus gave up as least some of the powers, privileges and prerogatives of deity in some fashion, then I don’t know what it is teaching” (**Faith and Facts**, Oct. 1990, page 52) and Jeff Asher said, “Brother Welch made it clear that Phil. 2:5-11 teaches that Jesus emptied himself of the powers, privileges, prerogatives and position of Deity, but did not divest Himself of divinity of godhood” ( **Faith and Facts**, 1990, page 332).

2. The ASV says in verse 7 “but emptied himself” where the KJV says “made himself of no reputation.”
3. The problem John Welch and his brethren are having is they view “emptied himself” like emptying a glass of water by pouring it out. John asked, “Do you empty a water pitcher by pouring more water into it?...Do you empty a water pitcher?” (**O’Neal-Welch Debate**, page 52).
  - a. In **With All Boldness**, January 2000, page 4, Robert Welch had an article “The Mind of Christ” discussing Philippians 2:5-7 and illustrating what “empty” in the passage means. He said, “Some years ago my wife and I were driving 40 miles up a canyon from Uvalde, Texas to preach, a thing which I did every Tuesday evening. I had failed to look at my gasoline gauge before leaving home. On the way home a 9:30 the engine stopped. I know that the tank was empty. We had to walk nearly a mile to a ranch house off the road to beg for enough fuel to get us home. That is what empty means. The tank was not half filled with rocks, or anything else, it was empty. That is what the Lord did in order to come to earth to redeem us.”
  - b. John said, “Christ emptied himself of omnipotence ...omniscience ...omnipresence...equality with God” (**O’Neal-Welch Debate**, page 42).
4. It should be observed that the Sacred Text does **not** say Jesus emptied himself **of** anything. The text says Jesus “**emptied himself**”
  - a. The text does not say Jesus **gave up** anything; it says he “took **upon** him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (v. 7).
5. It is significant that John has Jesus emptying himself of things of which the text does not mention; he has Jesus giving up things when the text does not mention giving up anything. In days past, most brethren called this “adding to the word of God.”

#### **IX. Colossians 1:19 and 2:9**

1. Speaking of Christ, Paul says, “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell” and “For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the God-head bodily.”
  - a. Fullness (**pleroma**) “denotes fullness, that of which a thing is full; it is thus used of...God, in the completeness of His Being, Eph. 3:19; Col. 1:19; 2:9” (**Vine** , vol. 2, page 137).
2. “God in the completeness of His Being” dwelt bodily in Jesus while he was upon this earth. That is why to Thomas, Jesus said, “ye...have seen him” (Jno. 14:7) and “he that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (Jno. 14:9). The Father is Spirit (Jno. 4:24), thus does not have flesh and bones. Jesus said, “for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have” (Lk. 24:39). Therefore, when Thomas saw Jesus and thereby saw the Father, he was not seeing the physical body of the Father, but, rather was seeing the characteristics, the attributes of the Father.
3. Ferrell Jenkins said, “When we look at Jesus, we see God, we know exactly who God is; we know deity. The totality of deity dwells in Jesus.

It is true that Jesus became flesh and was a man, but He also was fully and totally God in every way, in every respect. Paul does not say in Colossians 2:9 that deity **dwelt** in Jesus while He was on earth in fleshly form. He says, rather, that deity **dwells** in Him in bodily form. The **New American Standard Bible** brings this out a little more clearly when it says ‘the fullness of Deity dwells’ in Him. The idea is that Jesus, now, all the time, is deity. He is divine, He is God, not just for a limited period of time but all the time” (1998 Florida College Lectures, **Christ and the Church**, page 7).

#### **X. Hebrews 1:8**

1. In Hebrews 1, it is pointed out that God hath spoken unto man in these last days by his Son. (verses 1-2).
2. Jesus was “so much better than the angels” (verse 4); it was said of Jesus, “Thou art my Son” which was never said of any angel (verse. 5). God said, “when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world” “Let all the angels of God worship him” (verse 6).
3. Unto the Son, which is Jesus, God said, “Thy throne, **O God**, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom” (verse 8).
4. Jehovah God called Jesus “**O God**” “when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world.”

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