

Did Jesus Claim to Be God in John 10.30?

by Kermit Zarley

Ask most Christians who know the Bible, “Where does the Bible say Jesus claimed to be God?” and they’ll likely answer, “He said in John 10.30, ‘I and the Father are one.’” But that is a far cry from saying, “I am God,” or the like. One is struck with the thought, “Is that the best evidence Christians can provide that Jesus claimed to be God? If so, perhaps he never made such a claim.”

This is a very important issue for Christians. Most of them assert that a person must believe that Jesus is God in order to be a genuine Christian and thus possess salvation and the hope of eternal life. That’s what the institutional church has always insisted. But interpreting Jesus’ saying in John 10.30 as a claim to be God ignores its context.

Jesus was attending the Feast of Dedication at the temple in Jerusalem. We read, “The Jews therefore gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, ‘How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.’” (John 10.24). Jesus responded by mentioning his marvelous works that he had been doing and how they testify to his intimate relationship with God (vv. 25-29).

So, when Jesus then said that he and God the Father were “one,” he meant that they were unified, being in complete harmony regarding Jesus’ mission of doing good works and drawing disciples to himself. This is confirmed by Jesus’ so-called “high priestly prayer” he made the night he was betrayed and arrested. It, too, is recorded only in the Gospel of John. In anticipation of his crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus prayed to the Father concerning his eleven apostles, “Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are” (John 17.11). And he soon added, “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity” (vv. 22-23). So, Jesus asked the Father for the same oneness for himself and his apostles that he said, in John 10.30, he and the Father had. To say that “one,” there, means Jesus is God requires that it means the same here, which is ludicrous.

Yet Jesus’ antagonistic listeners thought like many Christians later have, that he claimed to be God when he said he and the Father were “one.” When Jesus asked them why they were picking up stones to stone him to death (John 10.31), they replied, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God” (v. 33). That is, they thought Jesus was claiming to be God by declaring that he was “one” with God.

The Roman Catholic Church’s prestigious Pontifical Biblical Commission rejects this common interpretation of John 10.30. In its very important and excellent document on Christology, *Bible et christologie* (1983), this elite group of twenty Catholic scholars allege that those who espouse classical (Nicene-Chalcedonian) Christology tend to be obstinate, “*not being open*” to critical investigation, resulting in their appeal to Scripture only defensively. These scholars chose venerable American Catholic Joseph A. Fitzmyer to produce a commentary on this document. In

it he explains, “the Commission is pointing its critical finger at Catholic fundamentalism, often associated with this approach to Christology. An example of this sort of use of the NT would be the appeal to Jn 10:30, ‘I and the Father are one,’ to establish the divinity of Christ.” Fitzmyer means that he and the commission members do not believe Jesus here claimed to be God.

Jesus then asked his interrogators, “do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’?” (John 10.36). John A.T. Robinson insists that Jesus here made the following important points: (1) he implicitly denies the Jews’ allegation that he said he was God, (2) he distinguishes himself from God, and (3) he affirms his true identity as Son of God.

Now, Jesus never went about declaring publicly that he was the Son of God. But he often implied it by calling God his “Father.” Until then, Jews had recognized their God Yahweh *corporately* as the father of the Jewish nation; yet individual Jews rarely or never had identified God *personally* as their father, as Jesus regularly did.

Then Jesus clarified what he meant by him and the Father being one. He declared, “the Father is in Me, and I in the Father” (John 10.38). Later, Jesus affirmed it again by telling his apostles, “Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me” (14.11).

Scholars call this concept “the Mutual Indwelling.” It clearly represents a disavowal that being one with God means that Jesus claims to be God. Rather, Jesus here affirms God-in-Christology as contrasted with the traditional, incarnational, Christ-is-God Christology that Christians later developed. The Apostle Paul explained half of this concept, “that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Corinthians 5.19).

Jesus’ opponents seem to have accepted this clarification about being one with the Father, in which he denied claiming to be God, because they never brought this charge against him during the interrogation of him by the Jewish Sanhedrin (Council).

In sum, when Jesus said, “I and the Father are one,” he did not mean that he and God the Father were one in essence, making himself God, but one relationally, resulting in a functional unity. If this brief saying of Jesus in John 10.30 is the best that traditionalists can muster to support their assertion that Jesus claimed to God, we can be pretty sure that Jesus never made such a claim.

In my extensive book, *The Restitution of Jesus Christ* (2008), I devote ten pages to explaining what Jesus meant in John 10.30 when he said, “I and the Father are one.” And in doing so, I cite forty-four scholars and four church fathers.

This article is authored by Kermit Zarley (Servetus the Evangelical) . Visit his website--servetustheevangelical.com--to read fifty such articles. They are condensations of his well-researched, biblically in-depth, 600-page book entitled *The Restitution of Jesus Christ* (2008).