

Pre-existence of Christ

The traditional, orthodox view is that Jesus existed and interacted with humanity long before His incarnation. In fact, we are taught that He existed prior to the creation of the universe!

1. Many believe that the teaching of Christ's pre-existence is foundational to the Christian faith. Why would that be so?
 1. *It is foundational because it is the basis of many other doctrines. Without the pre-existence Christ's incarnation, resurrection, and atoning work are in question.*
 2. *Because His pre-existence was taught since the very beginning of the early church and reaffirmed by the authors of the New Covenant, the acceptance or rejection of this doctrine affects the whole of Christology and our overall understanding of Christianity.*
 3. *Furthermore, it is critical because it demonstrates that God loved us and interacted with us long before the crucifixion. He did not wait thousands of years to help us. He's been with us all along, guiding, directing, saving and redeeming.*
 4. *If Christ is not affirmed as the God's pre-existent son, then the central texts of Paul's letter is in jeopardy. Paul's letter to the Rome church is unique among his writings in that he was addressing a church he had not founded or visited. Paul assumed that Christ's preexistence was something his audience had long since come to accept. He wrote to the church on matters of knowledge he believed were common to all believers. Paul declared to the Roman church that God sent His own Son as an offering for our sins (Romans 5:15-17; 8:3). God's love for His creation can be seen in His involvement in the death of Christ. This divine act was part of the early Christian Christological teachings of the pre-existence. Paul outlined Christ's life culminating with His death on the cross and resurrection. Grace, righteousness, and justification are phrases especially attributed to God Himself, but in Paul's writings he used these attributes interchangeably with God and Jesus validating Paul's pre-existence Christology.*

2. What does the Bible have to say about the existence of the Son of God before He came as Jesus of Nazareth?

The scriptures affirm the creation of the universe was by the Son as stated in the following:

1. **Hebrews 1:2 HCSB** In these last days, He has spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things and through whom He made the universe.
2. **John 1:1-3 HCSB** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (2) He was with God in the beginning. (3) All things were created through Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created.
3. **Colossians 1:15-17 HCSB** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation; (16) because by Him everything was created, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him. (17) He is before all things, and by Him all things hold together.

The apostles' doxologies plainly assert Christ's pre-existence in His creation of the world.

- **Philippians 2:5-7 HCSB** Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus, (6) who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage. (7) Instead He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave, taking on the likeness of men. And when He had come as a man in His external form,

Before His incarnation as the Messiah, He existed as God's equal.

3. Where was Jesus Christ before the world begun? (John 17:5)

- **John 17:5 HCSB** Now, Father, glorify Me in Your presence with that glory I had with You before the world existed.

He lived in the presence of God the Father.

- **John 1:2 HCSB** He was with God in the beginning.
- **John 8:38 HCSB** I speak what I have seen in the presence of the Father, and therefore you do what you have heard from your father."
- **John 8:55 HCSB** You've never known Him, but I know Him. If I were to say I don't know Him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know Him, and I keep His word.

4. In the Gospel of John, the Jewish leaders questioned Jesus on who He was. In response He said, "*prin Abraam genesthai ego eimi.*" (John 8:58) Literally, "Before Abraham was existing, I am." "*Ego eimi*" is plainly "I am." Why is that significant?

This is the clearest instance of Jesus claim of divinity and is the equivalent language God spoke to Moses in Exodus 3:14, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" The Jewish leaders would have understood very well that Jesus was claiming his pre-existence and his Godhead. Their actions reflected their understanding his claim as we read in the next verses, "they picked up stones to throw at Him." They viewed Jesus' claim as blasphemy, a claim demanding death by stoning.¹

5. Read Hebrews 1:5-13. Look up the Psalms the author refers to (using your Bible's cross reference tools) and determine what light is shed on Jesus' pre-existence.

Christ is depicted as both the creator of the world and the sustainer of all things. The author argues the superiority of the Son over the angels, and addresses him as Lord and God. (Psalm 1:8)The author uses verses in the Psalms that describe God authority over heaven and earth and connects these verses to Jesus authority. In his writings the author establishes the understanding of the very nature of Jesus and his pre-existence as part of the Godhead.

6. What does Hebrews 5:5-10 teach on the issue of Jesus' pre-existence?

Typology (also called typological symbolism) is a form of biblical interpretation that proceeds on the assumption that transcendent, timeless God placed anticipations of the Messiah in the laws, events and people of the Old Covenant. For example, Joseph is often referred to as a type of Christ. When you hear that, they're not saying that Joseph is a "kind" of Christ but that he can be used as an Old Covenant symbol or allusion to Christ.

***handout "Six Characteristics of Types"**

Christ's pre-existence is also implied through the references in the book of Hebrews of a type of Christ in the Melchizedek priesthood. The priestly order was greater than

¹ Leviticus 24:16

the priesthood of Abraham and all other priesthoods since. Melchizedek was without a father or a mother, had no genealogy, and always existed, having no beginning or ending. His role therefore remained forever.

Only briefly mentioned in Genesis 14, and Psalms 110:4, the author of Hebrews denotes the description of the priesthood to the eternal nature of the Son of God; proclaiming Jesus as the eternal Melchizedek and King of Righteousness and Peace (Hebrews 7:2). Having now proclaimed the superior nature of Jesus' pre-existent priesthood, Christ is able to intercede for us as our greater High Priest.

7. One of the strongest opponents of the pre-existence was John Knox. Knox argued the doctrine of pre-existence made Christ less human. He argued that we can either have the humanity of Christ or the pre-existence, but there is no way of having both.² However, Knox believed in the Trinity. In what way does this demonstrate a breakdown of his logic?

If there is no preexistence, then there is no Trinity at least not until Jesus came along and filled the third slot!

8. In order to understand pre-existence, we need to also examine how Christ viewed His own self-consciousness. What powers of God did Jesus claim in Mark 12:1-12?

Jesus claimed to forgive sin, an act that only God could do. In the account of the paralytic man been lowered through the roof by his friends to be seen by Jesus, He did not respond to this man's need for physical healing, but instead told the man, "Son, your sins are forgiven." The scribes listening to Jesus understood the claim he was making that he was able to forgive sins and they viewed his claim to be blasphemy, as they commented; "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?"

9. How did Jesus view Himself in Matthew 25:31-46?

Jesus also spoke of judging the world and having the authority to judge the spiritual condition of all people, a power only God could exercise. His authority is also seen when he was questioned about picking heads of grain on the Sabbath, an action that was in violation of the Sabbath law. Jesus responded by noting that David had also violated this law He then redefined the Sabbath in Mark 2:27-28; 'Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath;" again a claim that he was Lord and God.

When confronted by the high priest to tell them if he was the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus answers them "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Matthew 26:63) Jesus did not dispute the charge that he claimed to be God and he accepted his disciples' acknowledgment of his deity.

10. How does Jesus' statements concerning the Tanakh support Jesus' argument that He was the Messiah? (John 5:39-40; Luke 24:44)

Jesus instructed the Jews; "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life." Jesus told his disciples pointedly; "all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must

² Knox, John, The Humanity and Divinity of Christ, A study of Patten in Christology, Cambridge Publishing: Cambridge, 1967 p. 10-11

be fulfilled." Jesus saw His life and work as a fulfillment of the Old Testament promises and prophecies.