

**Evaluate the statement: "Jesus is God's exalted Lord and Christ and should be worshipped just as the Father is worshipped" ( T Schreiner (2001) Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ)**

Introduction

The common perception that Christ was not clearly adored as God our Father in the writings of Paul is thought, by conservative Christians, to be mistaken. They say the mistake is down to the sceptical and liberal prejudice that the closer you get to Christ the less supernatural dogma and philosophical sophistication there is.

Many believing Christians think that Jesus when he was on earth did not give a systematic theology but that he gave enough for his apostles and his Church to create one. Some may claim that Paul did not view Jesus as God and that his view of Christ was developing. They tend to think that the Holy Spirit guided the Church to see clearly that Jesus was God some time after the apostles had departed this earth. This idea is wide open to the suspicion that the Church was making things up as it went along. It is as mad as thinking you cannot know how much your wife loves you until she leaves you. The time to know Jesus as God was when he was on earth and no other time could be anything near as good.

Only a God of absolute love - by implication a loving God is Abba-Father [1] - and who is greater than anything can deserve all our worship or adoration.

Christianity uses Father for God in two different ways. God is being and this being can be called Father [2]. God is Trinity: three persons in one being and one of the persons is called the Father.

Christianity says that if Jesus is God then he is to be worshipped as Father even though he is not God the Father [3].

Does "God's Word", the Bible, teach us to worship Jesus like that? If we look at how it says God raised Jesus to an eternity of glory and majesty and exalted him as Lord and Christ forever to his right hand we will find the answer. We will look at the writings of Paul - his epistle to the Romans in particular.

Worship of the Father

What is the worship of the Father? The Old Testament Scriptures do not emphasise God being Father and never even mention it! The New Testament emphasises the notion that God is indeed Father as in daddy. Abba - the word Jesus used means daddy.

Should Jesus Christ be worshipped as God as he is throughout Christendom? We will look at this issue. But for now we will note that it is odd that God never declared himself Father in the Old Testament. That would have been outstanding preparation for the coming of Jesus. The thought that God is Father was only made up as an afterthought for people liked

God is said to be adored as Father or he is the maker of all things and is our Father in the sense that he has made us. Christians believe that he is Father and Parent in the sense that he has also adopted us as his heirs and children. That is rubbish. A father does not make us out of nothing. And if we are adopted God is not really our Father.

God is Lord and is love according to Christendom. If true, then he deserves or should get all our love. If Jesus is Lord, if he is love then he is God and so he is entitled to be worshipped as God the Father is worshipped. If God made all things and if Jesus made all things then they deserve equal devotion because they are greater than all things.

Prayers are always addressed to the Father through Jesus. The Church today tends to focus on praying to the Father first and foremost, then Jesus. The Holy Spirit is often forgotten. How does this fit the doctrine of the Trinity which is that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are equal in glory and majesty? One answer is that to honour one person of the Trinity is to honour them all for the three persons are one being - one God.

Exaltation of Lord and Christ

For the Jews, the Christ was to be the political king appointed by God to save their nation and reign over it forever. But as God rules, there is ultimately no such thing as a king.

Christ means anointed king. As only God has all power it follows that God alone is the real king. To be a real king, the Christians say Christ would have to be God so God elevated Jesus as Christ thus showing that Jesus is divine. But that is far-fetched logic. You could use it to prove that the king appointed by God, Saul, is God.

I find support for the idea that only God is a true king in Paul's declaration that Jesus will hand over the kingdom to the Father so that God may be all in all. This is incompatible with the above logic.

Schreiner observes that Paul constantly treats the titles of Jesus, Lord and Christ, as if they are inseparable and concludes: "the lordship of Jesus was closely associated with his messianic status" [4]. Romans supports that in saying that Jesus "was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord" [5]. According to Paul, Jesus was always Lord and Christ but after his resurrection he ascended to God and was exalted by him to practice these roles fully.

Christ and Lord and Jesus (yes it is a title though it can be a name too) do not mean the same thing. But Paul treats them as if they are thus proving that calling Jesus Lord does not mean he is literally God. Jesus could even be called God without being God.

In the Bible, the authority the exalted and glorious Jesus has over us is granted by his perfect goodness. In other words, he has the power to demand obedience and the moral right to do so for as he is perfectly good and we are not and we need this authority for our own sake. Hence "Christ was exalted as Lord because of his obedience" [6]. It was not just a reward for obedience but made practical sense. In Romans we read that we are made alive in a relationship with God by the work of Christ [7].

Paul wrote in Philippians that because Jesus obeyed God, God exalted him and gave him the name above all names so that all may confess Jesus Christ as Lord. Christians say he is not saying that Jesus became Christ and Lord at exaltation but that Jesus received the honours and privileges. But giving the name above all names means more than giving privileges. Jesus really did become Lord and Christ then. For Paul if Jesus was God he was not born God.

The name above all names is not that of God but that of Jesus Christ as Lord. In other words, Paul is saying you have to understand that Jesus is Lord to worship God properly. Jesus' name is better than God's in the sense that God cannot relate to you if you do not understand Jesus as Lord.

Paul spoke of Jesus as being in the form of God [8] or being the image of God just as Schreiner observes [9]. I would see a copy as a lifeless imitation but Schreiner writes "the biblical writers understand the image to partake of the reality and the nature of the original" [10]. This is thought to be natural considering that the scriptures see salvation as a loving union with God that involves deliverance from the power of sin. But in fact Schreiner is exaggerating his case. The image conveys the reality of the original but not necessarily the nature! In other words, Jesus may have expressed God but without having been God.

Schreiner says that Genesis says our first parents were made in the image of God but feels that Genesis was deliberately vague about what this meant because Adam and Eve unlike Jesus became sinners. Some disagree saying it is written that Adam and Eve were made in the image of God - like an imitation - but Jesus is stated to be the image of God - more than an imitation for he is God. Jesus claimed to be the image of God when he was an ordinary man. How much more is he the image of God when he rose from the dead as immortal and glorious and exalted to the right hand of God? To refer to Jesus as the image of God is to honour him as nearly God even if not God.

Schreiner states that there is disagreement over whether the expression form of God "suggests deity in reference to Jesus" [11]. If Paul came so close to calling Jesus God and left it in this ambiguous state then it definitely indicates that Jesus was not God.

Schreiner didn't note that Paul's assertion that Jesus was in the form of God is like a paraphrase of Jesus. Jesus said according to the John gospel that to see him is to see the Father.

Christians say that Jesus said that in case he would be interpreted as saying he was just a reflection of God. They say he said that to know him is to know the Father personally as in Jesus like the Father was God.

If they are right what was stopping Jesus from making it clear? Why all the confusion.

Now he said that when he was a normal man - before he became the allegedly supernatural and resurrected Jesus. If to know him then was to know the Father how much is knowing him now in his exalted state knowing the Father! Even if Jesus was God, knowing him as a man would not be the same as knowing God unless he meant that you see something of God in everything and especially in Jesus. So it is certain that what Jesus said need not mean he was God. Jesus the parable man probably saw himself as a God parable which may or may not mean he was God.

The Christians think that as Jesus shows us the Father in person, Jesus must be worshipped as God. They say Jesus was not

claiming to be the God the Father, the first person of the Trinity but claiming to be God in the sense that the Father and Son and Holy Spirit are one being that is Father. They are not all together God the Father but they are Father in a honorific sense. That interpretation is a big stretch. Would Jesus really use Father of one person and also of three people collectively? So if you think Jesus was God or even if you think he was not, you still do not take his assertion that he shows the Father literally.

I think that as Jesus is called Lord in the Bible, it is because being the image of God he is Lord God in an indirect way. God and he are close but he is not God.

Schreiner notes that Paul wrote that Jesus did not treat equality with God as a thing to be grasped and analyses that in the hope of showing the form of God may mean Jesus was God [12]. He states it could mean that Jesus though God surrendered his position as God or that Jesus was not God and refused to want to be God. The last option might seem strained and unlikely. You would ask why anybody would emphasise a holy man not wanting to be God?

Christians say, "But why not? It speaks of humility. Adam and Eve wanted to be virtually Gods when Satan tempted them to become like God knowing evil and good."

Schreiner says the text makes most sense if it is understood as saying that Jesus did not treat equality with God as a thing to be taken advantage of. In other words, if Jesus was God or equal to God he did not abuse his position. Again that seems a bit of a stretched opinion. God by definition is good so you would not remark God or anybody like him abusing their position. If Jesus could abuse his position and deserves praise for not doing so then he was NOT GOD!

Romans seems unclear and hard to interpret. Romans can be matched up to Philippians which helps us to clarify Paul's meaning. One helps us work out the meaning of the other. Both were written by Paul and cover his great themes and one complements the other.

Philippians says that Jesus became a man like a slave. Similarly, in Romans we read that Jesus was a servant of the Jews for the sake of fulfilling divine prophecy [13].

Philippians says Jesus obeyed God even to the degradation of the cross and Romans says that by one act of obedience in dying Jesus undid the damage done by the disobedience of human sin [14].

Like Philippians, Romans says that Jesus was exalted as Lord for his obedience. Now we have to confess Jesus as Lord to be saved for that is confessing his loving obedience and letting him make us obedient too [15].

To honour the obedience of Christ is to honour his devotion to the Father and to honour the Father. If Christ is God, that obedience is divine. Nobody can honour God as well as God in human form. If he was God then Jesus could.

Romans is far clearer than Philippians that Jesus now has the name above all names signifying that Jesus is equal to God but is not God. "Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord [Jesus]...Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living" [16]. If Jesus is God he is God of all whether he dies or not. He does not need to rise again to be God of the living. He does not need to die to be God of the dead. The verse only makes sense if Jesus if Jesus became Lord at the resurrection. The verse says he had to die and rise to be Lord not that he was always Lord. The gospels are lying that Jesus was Lord before his cross. Paul is indicating that Jesus had to do something to become Lord. He was not intrinsically Lord and therefore he was not God.

Schreiner understands scripture's statement that the fullness of God dwells bodily in Christ [17] as follows, "God...chose to have all his fullness reside in Jesus, thus the supremacy of Jesus does not threaten the greatness of God since God himself has exalted Jesus" [18]. But if Jesus is God then how could Jesus' supremacy possibly be a threat? Saying God exalted Jesus thus there is no threat to God's greatness makes no sense if Jesus is God in the first place!

Romans says the same thing in a different way for if God is Lord of the dead and alive and he makes Jesus Lord of the dead and alive then God must do this for his own glory. God cannot violate his own right to honour for he is perfect goodness and deserves it.

Paul reveals that God has done all things for the honour of Jesus. This supports Schreiner's interpretation of Colossians [19] that all creation was made for Jesus.

Schreiner does not tease out the implication that if creation was made for Jesus it was an act of worship by the Father for Jesus and shows that we too must worship Jesus as nearly God if not God. It means nothing unless Jesus is exalted as Lord and Christ to enjoy and reign over what he has made forever.

Schreiner reasons, "The supremacy of the Father indicates that the lordship of Christ does not diminish the Father's glory" [20]. Is this like the Catholic Church saying of Mary that the more she is glorified by the Church the more God's glory is enhanced for he has made her what she is, though she is not God? Yes.

Some hold though that it is more natural to suggest that the reason Jesus' glory isn't detrimental to God's is that he is God. They think that the Bible assertion of God being all in all means Jesus is being exalted even more than before and the creation unites with Jesus in an act of worship to see him as the God all in all that he is.

It is only natural if you suppose the New Testament teaches the Christian doctrine in the first place!!

### The Spirit of Jesus

Schreiner says "Jesus poured out the life-giving Spirit when he was exalted to the right hand of God" [21].

The Bible says the Holy Spirit is the ultimate cause of our prayers [22]. They, in a sense, are his prayers. Jesus and the Spirit work together to worship the Father through us [23]. As Jesus is now at the right hand of God, he administers the Holy Spirit to us and the Spirit's function is only service to God [24].

Romans says that confessing Christ as resurrected Lord is essential for salvation. Anybody can pronounce the words so is it just a matter of saying it and you are magically saved? No - it must come from a heart that is being transformed by the presence of the Spirit of Christ.

Romans implies then that only by the Spirit can you confess Jesus as Christ and this is the Spirit's prayer to Jesus.

If Jesus is God then in his divine nature he is equal to the Father. The Spirit worships when he inspires us to worship. It follows that he worships Jesus when we do meaning that Jesus must be God.

Some reason that Paul did think Jesus was God for he said that nobody calls Jesus Lord except by the prompting of the Holy Spirit. If Jesus must not be adored as God then it seems it would be more natural to say, "Nobody calls God our saviour through Jesus except by the Spirit". But as we have seen how Paul regarded the titles of Christ and Lord as the same. This was a new twist. The title Christ does not imply the Christ is Lord or divine. So Lord is honorific. It does not mean Jesus was God.

Also, it would be wrong to put such a high focus on Jesus then for that means God is being bypassed and forgotten. But Paul may have reasoned that to honour Jesus as God though he is not is fine for God has made him all he is.

### The Body belongs to Jesus?

Schreiner observes that Paul ordered us to respect our bodies sexually because they belong to Christ. He states they have been bought - meaning by the death of Jesus. So it is the risen and exalted Jesus who owns them.

He says they belong for they have been purchased by him - thinking of how Jesus paid for us by his death on the cross. So the payment has been made. Jesus was raised to everlasting exaltation shortly afterwards. It is the exalted Christ our king who owns us.

Paul is acknowledging Christ as Lord. To respect your body for Jesus Christ is in effect to "lordify" him and respect him. We do not respect the body for ourselves but for him. Respecting the body for God and not ourselves is one of the many implications of the divine commandment to love God with all our being. It is more natural for us to honour our bodies more than our minds and souls because our bodies are material entities and demand our care and attention continuously - as scripture says. Self-denial for Jesus is being called for and it clearly shows that he is being honoured as Lord. But that does not make Jesus God. If God manifests through Jesus the man who is not God then because Jesus is man whoever does not respect their own humanity does not respect him.

### Conclusion

There is no evidence that Jesus really was God. Paul clearly taught the heresy of adoptionism that Jesus became Christ at his resurrection. For Paul, Jesus is God by honour not by nature. In reality, only the Father is God. Paul's language needs a lot of interpretation and the Christian search for his texts that make Jesus God is fundamentalist, ignorant, biased and doomed.

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- Bible Quotations from New International Version (2011)

- [1] Rom 8:15
- [2] Schreiner, T. R. *Paul Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (IVP, 2001) p.166, Jesus handing kingdom over to God so that God will be all in all - 1 Cor 15:28
- [3] *ibid.* p. 163 "Believers worship only one God - the Father - and only one Lord - Jesus" 1 Cor 8:5-6"
- [4] *ibid.* p. 162
- [5] Rom 1:4
- [6] Schreiner, T. R. *Paul Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (IVP, 2001) p. 170
- [7] Rom 5:10 "For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"
- [8] Phil 2:6
- [9] Schreiner, T. R. *Paul Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (IVP, 2001) p. 155
- [10] *ibid.* p. 155
- [11] *ibid.* p. 171,
- [12] p. 171
- [13] Rom 15:8
- [14] Rom 5:18
- [15] Rom 8:10 "If Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness". It implies that Christ is obedient for he enables us to be obedient through his spirit living in us.
- [16] Rom 14:8,9
- [17] Col 2:9
- [18] Schreiner, T. R. *Paul Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (IVP, 2001) p. 178
- [19] Col 1:16-[19]
- [20] Schreiner, T. R. *Paul Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (IVP, 2001) p. 166
- [21] *ibid.* p. 153
- [22] Rom 8:15
- [23] *ibid.* p. 153
- [24] Rom 8:4