

KYRIOS - WAS JESUS CALLED LORD GOD BY THE FIRST CHRISTIANS?

Christians worship Jesus as God himself. They say Jesus was claimed to be God and to be entitled to full worship from the time he was on earth. Scholars choose to differ on that.

James Dunn - Did the First Christians Worship Jesus? "In no case in the New Testament is there talk of offering cultic worship (latreuein) to Jesus" (page 13). "In earliest Christianity, Christ was never understood as the one to whom sacrifice was offered, even when the imagery of sacrifice was used symbolically for Christian service" (page 56). "The kyrios title is not so much a way of identifying Jesus with God, as a way of distinguishing Jesus from God" (page 110).

"So our central question can indeed be answered negatively, and perhaps it should be. But not if the result is a far less adequate worship of God. For the worship that really constitutes Christianity and forms its distinctive contribution to the dialogue of the religions, is the worship of God as enabled by Jesus, the worship of God as revealed in and through Jesus. Christianity remains a monotheistic faith. The only one to be worshipped is the one God. But how can Christians fail to honor the one through whom it believes the only God has most fully revealed himself, the one through whom the only God has come closest to the condition of humankind? Jesus cannot fail to feature in their worship, their hymns of praise, their petitions to God. But such worship is always, should always be offered to the glory of God the Father. Such worship is always, should always be offered in the recognition that God is all in all, and that the majesty of the Lord Jesus in the end of the day expresses and affirms the majesty of the one God more clearly than anything else in the world" (page 151).

Read this site for a Christian refutation of the idea that the Bible holds that Jesus is God
<http://www.christadelphia.org/wrested1.htm>

Paul the first Christian writer is on record as saying that soon after Jesus's appearances the people and the Church including him saw Jesus as Lord or Kyrios. Kyrios is God's name and many say its simple - Jesus was God. Sceptics and liberal Christians feel Jesus did not become God until some time later. Even some orthodox believers who say Jesus is God think it took time for the Church to see him as God. The Church came to say that God is a relationship of three persons. There is only one God but God is three persons who are so united in love that they are the reason we can call God love.

Many who called Jesus Lord did not mean he was literally God. Arians. Then there was the earlier group the Jewish Christian Ebionites. The fake Clementine homilies which pretended to be written by Clement of Rome soon after the apostle Peter died claim "our Lord neither asserted that there were gods except the Creator of all, nor did He proclaim Himself to be God, but He with reason pronounced blessed him who called Him the Son of that God who has arranged the universe." One wonders if Clement thought the same thing when they tried to use his name! The homilies though spurious still tell us something about what kind of traditions about Jesus that were going around in the first centuries.

In God and the Human Condition we read, "What was in his [Paul's] mind when he called the First Person God and the Second Lord, Kyrios? What was the force of Kyrios? To begin with, it is a common noun in Greek, meaning Master, a courtesy term to be used of anyone having authority – as we find it used of Christ in the Gospel by those who were not his disciples. But it has a religious use as well. When a century before Christ, the Jews translated the Old Testament into Greek, they translated the divine Name, Yahweh, as Kyrios, Lord, which was what the pagans would have used for one of their own gods. To a Greek-speaking Jew, Kyrios was the God of the Old Testament. It seems that in the century before Christ and the century after, the rabbis used the word Adonai, Lord, for God. In the Acts of the Apostles, by Dr Arendzen's count, Kyrios is used 110 times, one third of them in speaking of God, one third of Christ" (page 259).

It looks as if you are called Kyrios in a religious sense then it invariably means you are called God. But think again. Kyrios was used a third of the times in reference to beings who were not God.

The Christians did some bold things. They used the name of God in worship and they called him Abba - Daddy. They broke away from some Jewish prejudices that considered these things to be very irreverent. Thus even if Kyrios was the title for God they could have used it for Jesus. And why not for it only meant Lord. The meanings of words change easily.

Some Jews and the Christians who ignored superstitious Jewish tradition would have called Jesus Kyrios in the religious sense without meaning that he is God. The restriction of Kyrios to God in the religious understanding could have been scrapped. The reason was that Jesus habitually called Lord or Master in Aramaic and it translated into Greek as Kyrios for it was the word for a religious master.

Nobody is able to give us a Bible text saying that only God can be called Kyrios.

Acts gives us an important clue regarding whether or not Jesus being Kyrios must mean that Jesus is God. When Paul had his vision on the way to Damascus and the voice spoke to him he said, "Tell me who you are, Lord".

If he thought it was God then Acts us only telling us that he called the entity Lord and does not say that he was right to. The episode does not prove Paul called Jesus God's name.

If, which is more likely, he knew it was not God but Jesus then his use of the word Kyrios does not mean that he believed Jesus to be divine. Paul knew the vision could be of an evil spirit for it had not even spoken much to him and still he called it Kyrios meaning that Kyrios is not God. Paul must have known it was Jesus because the vision told him he was persecuting him. Paul was setting out to destroy the name of Jesus of Nazareth - Acts 9:1, 22:4, 26:9. Strangely he was not worried about the Church calling Jesus Lord. It is like it was just a title and not a declaration that Jesus was God.

Jesus told Paul then he was kicking against the goad. That is a way of saying Paul was already drawn to Jesus but was resisting it by persecuting Jesus' followers. This conversion was not the sudden conversion it is made out to be.

Jesus proclaimed that the world would see no sign from him but the sign of Jonah - the resurrection. The gospels say he did other signs. Theologians say that everything Jesus did was a sign but the essential sign was his resurrection from the dead which proved that he was sent by God and was the saviour. That is how they sort out the conflict. Jesus warned of false miracles and would have said that his miracles though signs were not enough. Jesus was called Lord by his disciples several times before he died and rose again. Since he hadn't yet proven that he was Lord, this title does not mean he was being called God in the literal sense. Jesus once said that the law called the hearers of God's word gods. So he could have been called Lord or even God meaning only that he was very close to God and the mouthpiece of God.

Jesus is the go-between between man and God and gave the law (Galatians 3:19-20). Paul says that Jesus being the go-between implies that there is more than one party and God is one. He implies that as God is one the other party must be man. This does not fit the notion of God being more than one person. It speaks of God as being one person.

PHILIPPIANS

Here Jesus is rewarded with the name Lord for his obedience in chapter 2. There is no hint that it means Lord as in the one to be worshipped. It reads more like it was a honorific title. The text says that at the name all would bow but to God the Father. It is all about God.

FINALLY

Why is Jesus Kyrios and never called God? Kyrios is Lord. It is God's name but that does not mean it can't be given in honour to a person who is not God but who represents God and has God's authority.

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Kevin Quick discusses the Jehovah's Witnesses claim that the Bible never says that Jesus is God

www.gospelassemblyfree.com/facts/fathersonwayne.htm

Father and/or Son by H Wayne Hamburger