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Does Paul Call Jesus God?

We need not point out at length that among the pillars on which the Christian faith rests the doctrine of the deity of Christ is one of the most important, and that, if this pillar is removed, the whole structure must collapse. What Christ is and what He did, the glory of His person and the glory of His work, are inseparably bound together. We may think of what John says, John 20, 31: "But these [signs] 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." Evidently, according to the Scriptures, there is a close connection between the deity of Christ and the saving work of Christ. The Church has contended for the deity of her Lord from this very point of view. It was that great champion of orthodoxy, Athanasius, who, in the bitter controversy with the Arians, pointed out that, if we refuse to accept Christ as the true God, we lose the assurance and the comfort of the redemption. Half an hour's reading of Luther's writings will suffice to convince any one that the great Reformer recognized how intimately the two doctrines we are speaking of are united. He says, for instance (St. L. Ed., VII, 1557): "We must have a Savior who can rescue us from the power of the god and prince of this world, the devil, likewise from sin and death; that is, we need a Savior who is the true, eternal God, through whom all that believe on Him are justified and saved. For if He is nothing more nor any higher than Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, John the Baptist, etc., He is not our Redeemer. If He sheds His blood for us as the Son of God, to redeem and cleanse us from sin, and we believe this and poke it into the face of the devil (*dem Teufel vor die Nase halten*) whenever he terrifies and torments us on account of our sins, then the devil is soon defeated and has to retreat and to cease molesting us." The Church, then, is not battling for a mere abstract or speculative truth when it defends the doctrine of the deity of

Christ, but is here contending for the foundation of all its peace and hope.

The Arians and their associates, the Unitarians, who, alas! have numerous allies in the so-called evangelical churches, have in their attacks on the deity of Christ not merely relied on rationalistic arguments, but have attempted to show that the New Testament does not teach this conception of the person of Christ and that a careful exegesis does not justify the famous statement of the Nicene Creed that Jesus is "very God of very God." With respect to the epistles of Paul the assertion is made that, while they contain some passages exhibiting a "high Christology," they do not teach the divinity of Christ. With much confidence the statement is made that Paul does not call Jesus God. Is the latter assertion true or not? That is the question we wish to consider.

When this subject is mentioned, the Bible reader at once thinks of Rom. 9, 5: "Whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever! Amen." According to the translation of the Authorized Version, which we have just quoted, there can be no doubt that Paul here designates Jesus as God, blessed forever; hence, that here the name of God is directly ascribed to our Lord Jesus Christ. The Unitarian critics cannot deny that these words are a part of the Epistle to the Romans. The MSS. here present a uniform text and one that has never been in doubt. From the textual point of view, then, these words are unassailable. To escape the overwhelming force of this testimony to the deity of Christ, it has been asserted that the Authorized Version has adopted a wrong punctuation in its rendering. The Greek text reads: *ὄν οἱ πατέρες, καὶ ἐξ ὄν ὁ Χριστός τὸ κατὰ σάρκα, ὃ ὄν ἐπὶ πάντων θεὸς εὐλογητός εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.* Those who oppose the view that Paul is here ascribing deity to Christ maintain that a period ought to be placed either after *σάρκα* (flesh) or after *πάντων* (all). The remaining words are then considered a doxology, exalting God, but not treating of Christ. Lachmann and Tischendorf, those giants in the field of textual criticism, and Meyer, often called the Prince of Exegetes, are among those who place a period after *σάρκα*. Of the men of our generation, Moffat is following in their wake. He translates: "And theirs, too (so far as natural descent goes), is the Christ. (Blessed forever more be the God, who is over all! Amen.)" Goodspeed is another modern scholar who favors this punctuation and interpretation. His version reads: "And from them physically Christ came — God who is over all be blessed forever! Amen."

Erasmus was willing to concede that *ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων* was spoken with respect to Christ. He placed the period after *πάντων* and made the doxology very brief, consisting of the few words: "God (be) blessed forever! Amen." In scrutinizing this view, we note that it certainly is not the one which presents itself most naturally when one reads Rom. 9, 1—5. The reader who peruses the section without critical bias of this or that sort will inevitably see in the closing words of v. 5 a characterization of Jesus. It is a good exegetical canon that the first meaning which a text suggests to the reader is usually the right one and should be retained, unless there are weighty considerations demanding that this meaning be discarded. Again, we note that the context demands that the words in question be applied to Christ. The apostle, in thinking with grief of the rejection of his nation, is recalling the eminent advantages and prerogatives which this people possessed. Vv. 3—5: His kinsmen bore the honored name Israel; God had adopted them as His children; they beheld in their midst the glory by means of which God manifested His presence; they possessed precious covenants which God had made with the patriarchs and with the whole nation; they had the true worship prescribed by God in His Law. And the climax of it all was that from this nation sprang the Christ, who is none other than the great God, blessed forever. It will be seen that if these last words are referred to Christ, they fit the context beautifully, serving to enhance the outward greatness which Israel could claim as its own. On the other hand, if they are merely regarded as a doxology, praising God in general, they appear with an abruptness which is difficult to understand. The sequence of thought decidedly militates against the assumption that a "Praise the Lord!" was strewn in here. An examination of the way in which Paul elsewhere introduces doxologies shows that he did not make use of them in a haphazard fashion, after the manner of certain revivalists, but that there was a special reason for their utterance whenever he voiced them. (Cf. Rom. 1, 25.) Closely connected with this consideration is the fact that the assertion "from whom Christ came after the flesh" calls for a further statement on the person of Christ. According to the flesh, that is, according to physical descent, our Lord sprang from Israel, but this very reference to natural, physical descent suggests that something else can and should be predicated of Him: that He was more than a human being. Evidently, if Paul had merely said that, "so far as natural descent goes," Christ came from Israel, and if he had

failed to add something as to the divine nature of Christ, his words would have struck his readers as strangely incomplete. We may assume that if Paul had not intended to refer to the divine nature of Christ, he would not have added the phrase "according to the flesh," but would have considered it sufficient to say that Christ came from Israel. Furthermore, commentators, among them Stoeckhardt, whose treatment of this passage is very exhaustive and excellent, point out that the position of the Greek words in the passage under consideration opposes the view that Paul here penned a mere doxology. If these words were to convey the meaning, God be blessed forever, the *εὐλογητός* (blessed), according to the *usus loquendi*, would have to stand at the beginning of the sentence. Cf. Eph. 1, 3. In addition, let it be noted, that the participle *ὁ ὢν* would be a disturbing element if the reference were not to *ὁ Χριστός* preceding it. In view of the above cogent arguments, it is not surprising to find that the majority of commentators look upon Rom. 9, 5 as ascribing the great name of God to our Lord and Savior.

The objections to the interpretation just given are not based on the text, but on the preconceived notion of certain exegetes as to what terminology Paul would employ in speaking of Christ. These men say that Paul does not call Christ God elsewhere and that hence it is not likely that he does it here. We immediately interpose a *non sequitur*. Even if we should grant, for the sake of argument, that Paul in other passages refrains from investing Jesus with the title God, that would not compel us to assume that he here too fails to apply this name to Christ. We should point to the clearness of the text and to the many passages in the writings of Paul where he, without using the name God with reference to Christ, accords Him divine honor and glory or attributes divine works to Him. Compare, for instance, Col. 1, 16. 17. But the whole argument of these critics is resting on a false premise, since there are other passages in the Pauline epistles in which Christ is termed God. We shall now proceed to consider them.

Tit. 2, 13 is one of these passages. It is true that the extreme critics will refuse to allow this text as evidence, because it is found in one of the pastoral epistles which by these critics are not considered as coming from the hand of Paul. But we need not be influenced by their impious radicalism. The pastoral epistles are well entrenched in the *corpus Paulinum* and will remain there. Tit. 2, 13 the apostle speaks of the "glorious appearing of the great God

and our Savior Jesus Christ." The respective Greek words are: ἐπιφάνειαν τῆς δόξης τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. In reading the English rendering one might think that Paul differentiates between God and Christ, but the Greek makes it plain that one and the same person is here referred to by both terms. The point of the argument lies in this, that the article is used but once, the noun σωτῆρος being *anarthrous* (without the article). Thus Jesus is here called the great God and our Savior. Dr. Robertson in *The Minister and His Greek New Testament* has an illuminating chapter with the caption: "The Greek Article and the Deity of Christ." p. 61ff. He dwells especially on Tit. 2, 13 and reiterates and defends the rule laid down by Sharp: "When the copulative καί connects two nouns of the same case (*viz.*, nouns — either substantive or adjective or participle — of personal description respecting office, dignity, affinity, or connection, and attributes, properties or qualities, good or ill), if the article ὁ or any of its cases precedes the first of the said nouns or participles and is not repeated before the second noun or participle, the latter always relates to the same person that is expressed or described by the first noun or participle: *i. e.*, it denotes a further description of the first named person." Robertson points out that just as, for instance, in 2 Pet. 2, 20 and 3, 2, as everybody admits, the words "the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" describe one person, so here in Titus the expression, "the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" is a double designation of our Lord, the article in both passages connecting the two epithets. *The Expositor's Greek New Testament*, while not inclined to accept the interpretation just presented, is fair enough to quote the grammatical rule appealed to above, namely, that there is "identity of reference of two substantives when under the vinculum of a common article." IV, p. 195. This work seeks to set aside our argument from grammar by observing that it is "too slender to bear much weight, especially when we take into consideration not only the general neglect of the article in these epistles, but the omission of it before σωτήρ. 1 Tim. 1, 1; 4, 10." This reasoning, however, is very faulty. Let us grant that σωτήρ, having acquired the nature of a proper noun, did not *per se* need the article to be definite. But let it be remembered too that θεός shares this nature with σωτήρ, being likewise a proper noun, at least when referring to the true God. Now, in Tit. 2, 13 both these nouns are united. It would have been correct Greek if the article before μεγάλου θεοῦ had been omitted; in that case the statement

would have been ambiguous, that is, it would have been impossible to determine from the words themselves whether two persons or merely one was spoken of. But since *θεοῦ* is given the article and *σωτήρος*, being a noun of the same kind, is not given it, the conclusion is inevitable that the article was here meant to bind together these two nouns so that there would be no hesitation in applying both titles to Christ. The grammar of Blass-De Brunner (§ 276) fully sanctions this view of the use of these two nouns in Titus 2, 13.

There are two more passages which call for consideration. The one, 1 Tim. 3, 16, has a text which is in dispute, and hence we had better not appeal to it in this connection. Concerning the other one, 2 Thess. 1, 12, there is no doubt as to the correct reading. The Authorized Version renders, "that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." We quote the last words in Greek: *κατὰ τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*. Jesus is here designated our God and Lord. The proper name Jesus Christ is accompanied by two nouns in apposition to it, God and Lord. Just as in Tit. 2, 13, the two nouns are connected by a common article. What was said above concerning that passage applies here. Probably somebody will be inclined to think that the insertion of *ἡμῶν* after *θεοῦ* serves to disconnect *θεοῦ* and *κυρίου*. But this is not at all the case. *ἡμῶν* belongs to both nouns; according to Greek usage, a modifier belonging to two nouns, joined by *καί*, often attaches itself to the first one. Cf. 2 Pet. 1, 11. We may say then with confidence that here too the name God is applied to Christ. That He is called both God and Lord is not a tautology, but is due to this, that He is described from two different points of view. When He is called God, He is viewed as the Creator and Ruler of all beings, when He is termed our Lord, His relation to the Church is considered. Our question, does Paul call Jesus God, then receives a decided affirmative answer. While much more could be said on this subject, so much is clear from the texts examined, that the Unitarians and the Modernists cannot hide behind the cloak of St. Paul when they attempt to rob Jesus of His deity. This means, then, that our salvation, in being based on Christ, rests on a secure foundation. The blood shed for us was not that of a mere human being, but of the one God-man. Our Champion is divine. "Verily, such a high priest became us, who was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens."