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Deity of Jesus Christ based to the Gospel of Mark

The strict monotheism of the Old Testament meant any claim to deity would be ruled out as blasphemous. Israel was repeatedly warned that there is only one God, all other claims to religious worship being idolatry (e.g., Deut. 6:4, Isa. 44:6-8). The exile had reinforced this point. Jesus and the Father Given this, Jesus' repeated designation for God as his Father, with the entailment that he is the Son, was unprecedented and startling. The title "Son of God" was used in the Old Testament for the Messiah, and occasionally for Israel, but not for an individual.¹ Jesus used "Father" as a personal name rather than a metaphor or a description of what God is like.² God's revelation as the Father does not refer to a general fatherhood of all his creatures but to mutual relations within the being of God. Jesus speaks of the temple as "my Father's house" (Luke 2:49, John 2:16). At Jesus's baptism, the Father declares him to be his Son (Matt. 3:17). Jesus asserts that he was sent by the Father (John 5:30, 36, 6:38-40, 8:16-18, 26, 29), shares with the Father in raising the dead (John 5:24-29), and in judging the world (John 5:27). All will honor him just as they honor the Father (John 5:23). The Father gives him his disciples and draws them to him (John 6:37-65). The Father knows him and loves him, while he fulfills the Father's charge (John 10:15-18). In turn, Jesus prays to the Father (Matt. 6:9, John 17:1-26). "Abba" is his normal way of addressing God (Matt. 16:17, Mark 13:32, Luke 22:29-30), a familiar Aramaic word for father.³ In Gethsemane and on the cross Jesus calls on the Father, in extremis (Matt. 26:39-42 et. al., Luke 23:34). Jesus speaks of the glory he shared with the Father before creation, anticipating its renewal (John 17:5, 22-24), having completed the work the Father gave him (v.4). He reflects on his union and mutual indwelling with the Father (vv. 20ff). Earlier, he defended his equality and identity with the Father (John 10:30, 14:6-11, 20), an indivisible union, so that his own word will be the criterion the Father uses in judgment (John 5:22-24, 12:44-50). He tells Mary Magdalene he will ascend to his Father (John 20:17, cf. 16:10, 17, 28, 14:1-3). Conversely, Jesus also says that he is less than the Father (John 14:28), but this refers to his incarnate state in which he took human nature into union and restricted himself to human limitations. Thereby he does nothing other than he sees the Father doing (John 5:19). As the Father raises the dead, so the Son gives life to whoever he wills (John 5:21). As the Father has life in himself so he has given to the Son to have life in himself and to exercise judgment (John 5:26-29). To Thomas he says that to know him is to know the Father, and to Philip he says "he who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:6-9). Behind this is the fact that he and the Father are one (John 10:30), and that he is, with the Father, the object of the disciples' faith (John 14:1). No one can come to the Father except through Jesus. Throughout John 14-16 Jesus refers to himself in relation both to the Father and the Holy Spirit. He mentions the mutual indwelling of the three. The Father will send the Spirit in response to Jesus's own request (John 14:16ff, 26, 15:26). The disciples' prayer to the Father is to be made in the name of Jesus (John 15:16). In Matthew, Jesus claims mutual knowledge and sovereignty with the Father (Matt. 11:25-27). H.R. Mackintosh described this passage as "the most important for Christology in the New Testament," speaking as it does of "the unqualified correlation of the Father and the Son."⁴ Jesus the Son thanks the Father for hiding "these things" [the things he did and taught] from the wise, revealing them instead to babes. The Father is, he says, sovereign in revealing himself. However, Jesus immediately claims that he, the Son, has this sovereignty also. To know the Father is a gift given by the Son to whomever he chooses. As the Father reveals "these things" concerning the Son to whoever he pleases, so the Son reveals the Father - and "all things" the Father has committed to him - to whomever he pleases. Moreover, Jesus shares fully in the Father's comprehensive knowledge. Only the Father knows the Son and only the Son knows the Father. Jesus shares fully in both the sovereignty of God the Father and his knowledge, as the Father's, is comprehensive and mutual. On the other hand, in passages such as Matthew 24:36, where Jesus says he is ignorant of the time of his parousia, which the Father alone knows, he refers to the voluntary restrictions of his incarnate state. In short, Jesus as Son is distinct from the Father and yet one with him. Bauckham comments, "Jesus is not saying that he and the Father are a single person, but that together they are one God."⁵ It distinguishes him from the prophets and, in the writings of Paul, entails his participation in God's attributes.⁶ Paul, in his important statement about the Son in Romans 1:3-4, distinguishes between the Son of God "of the seed of David according to the flesh" and as he is "appointed Son of God with power by the Holy Spirit since the resurrection of the dead" (my translation). Both clauses refer to Jesus Christ, God's Son (v.3a). God's Son was descended from David in his incarnation; he was resurrected by the Spirit to a new, transformed state - Son of God with power. As God's Son before the crucifixion he was in weakness, "the form of a slave" (Phil. 2:7). Now that he has risen he is exalted to the right hand of God the Father (Acts 2:33-36, Phil. 2:9-11, Eph. 1:19-23, Col. 1:18, Heb. 1:3-4) and reigns over the whole cosmos (Matt. 28:18), directing all things until all his enemies submit (1Cor. 15:24-26), at which point death will finally be eliminated and he will hand back the kingdom to the Father (1Cor. 15:24-28). There is a distinction and an identity. Jesus' Equality and Identity with God Jesus asserts his equality and identity with God in the face of blasphemy charges by the Jewish leaders. He is charged with making himself equal with God (John 5:16-47) and later for identifying himself with God (John 10:25-39). His accusers threaten the penalty for blasphemy. In both cases, Jesus denies the charge on the grounds that he is speaking the truth, citing in support the plurality of witnesses required by Jewish law. In John 14:1 Jesus co-ordinates himself with God as the object of faith - "Believe in God; believe also in me." Similarly, like frames around a picture, John refers to him as "God" in John 1:18 at the start of his Gospel and has Thomas confessing him as "my Lord and my God" in John 20:28 at the end. Paul's characteristic name for Jesus Christ is "Lord" (kurios), the Greek word commonly used for YHWH (יהוה), the covenant name of God in the Old Testament. By this pervasive use Paul shows he regards Jesus as having the status of God, without abridgement. He makes no attempt to explain or defend it, mentioning it so self-consciously that, as Hurtado comments, it entails its being everyday currency among the early Christians. Paul's letters testify to belief in the full deity of Jesus Christ as the basic axiom of the church not as a point of contention. This, Hurtado points out, is confirmed by the Aramaic acclamation in 1 Corinthians 16:22, marana tha (Lord, come!). Paul uses this in a Gentile context without explanation or justification, suggesting that his readers were already familiar with the term and its connotation." In Romans 9:5 it is likely that Paul expressly designates Jesus Christ as theos (God). Witherington writes of John that he "is willing to predicate of Jesus what he predicates of the Lord God, because he sees them as on the same level."⁹ The author of Hebrews, too, in his argument for Christ's supremacy, cites Psalm 45 to support the incarnate Son as possessing the status of God (Heb. 1:8-9). The Son is the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of his being. All angels are to worship him (Heb. 1:1-14). Since he is superior to the angels, Bauckham comments, "he is included in the unique identity of the one God."¹⁰ Psalm 102, referring to the creator of the universe, is here applied directly to Christ. As T.F. Torrance puts it, Christ is "not just a sort of locum tenens, or a kind of 'double' for God in his absence, but the incarnate presence of Yahweh."¹¹ Furthermore, Jesus' resurrection discloses that he is Lord, the deity of Christ becoming "the supreme truth of the Gospel ... the central point of reference consistent with the whole sequence of events leading up to and beyond the crucifixion."¹² At the center of the New Testament message is the unbroken relation between the Son and the Father.¹³ Jesus as Creator, Judge, and Savior To Jesus Christ are attributed works God alone can do. John declares that Jesus Christ is the eternal Word who made all things, who is with God and who is God (John 1:1-18). Not one thing came into existence apart from that Word. The Word who is "in the beginning" is "with God," directed toward God and is God. This entails pre-existence. He is the only-begotten God (v.18). Paul echoes this (Col. 1:15-20). Hebrews 1:1-4 says the same, for the Son made the world and directs it towards his intended goal. In 1 Corinthians 8:6, Paul couples God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ in their respective work in creation. This throws light on incidents in the Gospels (Matt. 14:22-36, cf. Psa. 77:19, Job 9:8, Job 26:11-14, Psa. 89:9, 107:23-30) where Jesus displays the functions of deity, in sovereign charge of the elements. While presented as signs of the kingdom of God they point to his lordship over the world as its king. In John 5:22-30 Jesus describes himself as the judge of the world; this can only be God. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus as the Son of man will judge the nations with righteousness (cf. Mark 8:38, Dan. 7:14). Paul is emphatic (1Thess. 3:13, 5:23, 2Thess. 1:7-10); we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2Cor. 5:10). The Old Testament stresses that deliverance could only come from Yahweh, not man (Psa. 146:3-6).¹⁴ The name Jesus, required by the angel, means "savior." He was to save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). His healings demonstrate him to be the lord of life. Beyond that, he delivers from sin and death. Since salvation is a work of God, Paul's persistent description of Jesus as savior is an implicit attribution of deity (Titus 2:11-13, 1:4, 3:6, Phil. 3:20, 2Tim. 1:10; 2 Pet. 1:11). The once common view that New Testament teaching about Christ was purely functional misses the point; in Bauckham's words, "Jesus' participation in the unique divine sovereignty is not just a matter of what Jesus does, but of who Jesus is in relation to God." As a result, "it becomes unequivocally a matter of regarding Jesus as intrinsic to the unique identity of God."¹⁵ Worship of Jesus A number of New Testament passages express praise to Jesus Christ, indicating Christ to be an object of worship (John 1:1-18, Heb. 1:3f, Col. 1:15-20, Phil. 2:5-11, 2Tim. 2:11-13). The way Jesus is described requires that hymns be addressed to him. Not needing any special explanation, and assuming wide familiarity in the church, it seems likely that the hymns in Revelation were based on an established practice. Hurtado considers that "the practice of singing hymns in Christ's honor goes back to the earliest stratum of the Christian movement."¹⁶ Moreover, there is no hint of objection from the Jewish churches.¹⁷ Since he is the Son of the Father, worship of Christ is simultaneously worship of the Father (Phil. 2:9-11). Wainwright lists a range of New Testament doxologies clearly or probably addressed to Christ (2Pet. 3:18, Rev. 1:5b-6, Rom. 9:5, 2Tim. 4:18).¹⁸ Bauckham concludes that the bearing of the divine name YHWH, via kurios, by the risen Jesus "signifies unequivocally his inclusion in the unique divine identity, recognition of which is precisely what worship in the Jewish monotheistic tradition expresses."¹⁹ Prayer is also offered to Christ. Stephen calls out to the Lord Jesus as he is being stoned to death (Acts 7:59-60), his cry in parallel with Jesus' own words (Luke 23:46). Paul prays to the risen Christ that his thorn in the flesh be removed (2Cor. 12:8-9). He refers to a common cry "Maranatha" (1Cor. 16:22, cf., Rev. 22:20; see also 1Thess. 3:11-12, Acts 9:14, 21, 22:16). Salvation consists in confessing Jesus Christ as kurios (Rom. 10:9-13, 1Cor. 12:1-3, Phil. 2:9-11). As T.F. Torrance says, we rely for our belief in the deity of Christ not on various incidents recorded in the Gospels or on particular statements but upon the whole coherent evangelical structure of historical divine revelation given in the New Testament Scriptures. It is when we indwell it, meditate upon it, tune into it, penetrate inside it, and absorb it into ourselves, and find the very foundations of our life and thought changing under the creative and saving impact of Christ, and are saved by Christ and personally reconciled to God in Christ, that we believe in him as Lord and God.²⁰ In consequence, Torrance continues, we pray to Jesus as Lord, worship him and sing praises to him as God. No wonder Thomas, confronted with the very tangible evidence of Jesus' resurrection could say in response "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

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