

Focus on the Kingdom

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Why One Half Is Not Enough

by Amy Littler

What is the Gospel? This one essential question holds so much in the balance. Paul tells us, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). Believing in the Gospel brings salvation to everyone regardless of background or tradition. The Gospel tells us that we have the same hope of salvation as the Jews. It offers us nothing less than life and immortality (II Tim. 1:10). It is the message of Truth and salvation (Eph. 1:13), and we are commanded by Jesus to "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). If we claim the name of Jesus and call ourselves Christians, our primary concern must be to understand "the Gospel" as Jesus understood it. This is what following Jesus means. This is not a matter of semantics or higher level theology. Understanding the Gospel is the foundation of one's faith. A deficient gospel or a twisted gospel will have disastrous short- and long-term effects.

Listen to Paul's passionate concern: "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel, which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the Gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" (Gal. 1:6-8).

At all costs we must avoid the wrong gospel! It cannot be about tradition or being comfortable in what we've always known. It must always be about the Scripture revealing to us the Truth. Let it not be said of us: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths" (II Tim. 4:3, 4).

It would be easy to find teachers telling you whatever you want to hear. But we need to cling to the words of Jesus and the rest of Scripture to find our

doctrine and Gospel. The Bible gives us this warning: "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ" (Col. 2:8). Armed with the thirst for Truth, let's see what the Bible has to say about the Gospel, the key to our ultimate destiny.

Jesus gives us a clear mission statement early on in his ministry. "**I must preach the good news of the Kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose**" (Luke 4:43, RSV). The word translated "good news" in the NT is the word *evangelion*, also translated "gospel." It is unarguable that Jesus here defines his purpose: To preach the *Gospel of the Kingdom of God*. "It may be said that the teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God represents his whole teaching. It is the main determinative subject of all his discourse."¹ This is radical and astonishing when one considers that the "orthodox" definition of the Gospel says nothing at all about the Kingdom that Jesus came to preach! The public has been offered a gospel based only on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus ("DBR") for the sins of the world. Vital as the DBR is to the Gospel it simply cannot be the whole story.

Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching **the gospel of God**, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the **Kingdom of God is at hand**; repent and believe in **the gospel**" (Mark 1:14, 15). Not a word about his death, at this stage.

The very first words of Jesus Christ, in Matthew, concern the Kingdom. Moreover, he equates the Gospel with believing in the Kingdom of God. Jesus' first commandment in the book of Mark is to believe that the Kingdom of God is coming and to repent. Jesus never stopped preaching this Kingdom Gospel. "Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the **Gospel of the Kingdom**, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people" (Matt. 4:23). Jesus traveled from place to place proclaiming this Good News of the coming Kingdom without a hint of his death, burial and resurrection. It is not until Matthew 16:21 that Jesus *begins* to teach about his death and

¹ F.C. Grant, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, Biblical World 50 (1917), pp. 121-191.

resurrection. And when he does, the disciples don't even believe him! How could they have been preaching the forgiveness of sin through Christ's death yet? They could not have, because they had heard nothing about it.

In Mark 9:31 Jesus instructs his disciples about what is about to happen to him. "For he was teaching his disciples and telling them, 'The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he has been killed, he will rise three days later.'" At this point, when he introduced his disciples to DBR, it still wasn't public knowledge or part of the Gospel. Verse 32 goes on to make this clear: "But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask him." The disciples **did not understand**. And again, in Luke 9:45 they **did not understand**. They could not have been preaching something they did not understand themselves. It was only *after* Jesus had been raised that they began to understand. What then did Jesus commission them to preach?

"And he sent them out to **proclaim the Kingdom of God** and to perform healing" (Luke 9:2). "Departing, they began going throughout the villages, **preaching the Gospel** and healing everywhere" (Luke 9:6). Jesus sent them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God before they knew anything about the DBR. Note: preaching **the Gospel** is directly connected to the Kingdom message.

One might ask: After his resurrection, did the Gospel message change from one about the Kingdom to one solely about the DBR? We find that this is not the case. "To these he also presented himself alive after his suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the Kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). Clearly the Gospel was still centered on the Kingdom. For forty days the disciples underwent an intensive "seminar" on the Kingdom of God taught by the King himself. "His great concern was that men would be led to make that irrevocable decision for the kingdom which would bring them into the present sphere of its saving power so that they would be prepared to enter the kingdom when it should finally come."²

It would be strange to think that the very mission of Jesus would be rejected or glossed over by his personally trained disciples. A change of Gospel is the very opposite of what we see in the book of Acts.

² George E. Ladd, *Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952, p. 173.

After his conversion Paul was dedicated to the same message which had preoccupied Jesus. "He entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the Kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8). "The continuity between Jesus' and Paul's Gospel is unmistakably clear and may be traced throughout Luke's report of the early Church: Apostolic practice is uniformly to propagate the Message about the Kingdom."³

Not for a moment did Paul abandon the Gospel of the Kingdom to proclaim the Gospel of the grace of God. They are the same thing! Compare Acts 20:24 and 25: "But none of these things move me, nor do I count my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the **Gospel of the grace of God**. And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I have gone **preaching the Kingdom of God**, shall see my face no more."

Furthermore, in verse 27, the Kingdom Gospel is called the "whole purpose of God." Paul did not abandon his wholehearted attachment to the Gospel of the Kingdom (I Cor. 9:23). In Acts 28:23 Paul is in Rome gathering the Jews. "And he expounded the matter to them from morning till evening, **testifying to the Kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus** both from the law of Moses and from the prophets." What we see after the ascension of Christ Jesus is the *addition* of the DBR, but **never** to the exclusion of the Kingdom of God. Paul preached to the Jews the Kingdom of God; they rejected it. Therefore, "this salvation of God" was then offered to the Gentiles."⁴ "This salvation of God" is the same as the Gospel of the Kingdom, which is seen in verse 30, 31:

"And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the Kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered." "The Good News about the Kingdom of God was Paul's message for both Jews and Gentiles."⁵ This means it is also our Good News. Galatians 3:29 tells us that if we belong to Christ then we are Abraham's descendents, and heirs to the same promises made to Abraham, i.e. the Kingdom of God.

This "two-pronged" Gospel was also preached by Philip in Acts: "But when they believed Philip

³ Anthony F. Buzzard, *Our Fathers Who Aren't in Heaven*, Restoration Fellowship, 1999, p. 201.

⁴ George E. Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, p. 127.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

preaching the good news about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike” (Acts 8:12). Water baptism, the outward sign of entrance into the Christian Church, did not take place simply after they had “accepted Jesus into their heart.” Rather it was only after they *believed the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and in Jesus as Messiah and King of that Kingdom and now Lord of their lives*, that they could be considered Christians. Does it worry us that today’s Christianity sounds nothing like the early Church? I think it should.

The Kingdom of God Message was one that the Jews understood well. It began with the promises made to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) when the land was promised to him and his descendents, who include now all those who are Christ’s. The promises were built upon through the Davidic Covenant. David is promised an heir to rule on his throne forever:

“When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his Kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his Kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever” (II Sam. 7:12-16).

A Messiah had been promised — a King over God’s Kingdom. God would give David a royal house, kingdom and throne forever. Clearly this hasn’t happened yet, and we are now awaiting the Second Coming of our Lord Christ Jesus to finally establish this promised Kingdom. Jesus is that heir of David. He will return to be King over the whole earth (Ps. 2:8). He will resurrect the faithful to reign with him in righteousness. Eventually a New Jerusalem is going to **come down out of heaven and God will dwell with His people on the earth**. There will be no more war, suffering or death. God will in fact wipe away all tears from His people’s eyes (Rev. 21:2-4). The followers of Jesus will help him rule the world and the wicked will be destroyed (Rev. 2:26; I Cor. 6:2; Dan. 7:27; Rev. 5:10).

The Jews knew the teachings of the prophets. They were waiting for the time when they would inherit the land. They were expecting the golden age.

“And behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming, and he came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and his kingdom is one which will not be destroyed...But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come” (Dan. 7:13, 14, 18).

This is the Kingdom of God as the Jews understood it. They were not confused in the slightest by Jesus saying, “The meek shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5) or by Jesus’ model prayer, “Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). That is exactly what they were waiting for! What they did not understand was that the Messiah had to suffer before he could reign (Isa. 52, 53). Tragically they rejected the king they had been waiting for. Luke 1:33 tells us how intimately connected Jesus was to the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible. “And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever” (2 Sam. 7:13, 16; Ps. 89:36, 37; Dan. 2:44; 7:14, 18, 27; Matt. 28:18), “and his **kingdom** will have no end.” **Jesus Christ died for the Kingdom so that you and I could enter it.** ✧

What Is in a Vowel Point? The Difference between God and Man

I presented the following information at a recent One God Conference in Akron, OH sponsored by Ken Westby of Association for Christian Development. My point (pardon the pun as you will soon see!) was to establish that the key Christological text in Psalm 110:1 makes belief that “Jesus is God, an uncreated eternal being” impossible. I invite readers to inspect the evidence below, check it carefully, and share it with their fellow students of the Bible and churchgoers. The discovery that the Messiah is lord and not LORD will open up vistas of Bible understanding which you may have overlooked. (For further studies, see restorationfellowship.org. Books and booklets can be obtained from 800-347 4261.)

Jesus remarked that “the Scripture cannot be broken” and that not a “jot or tittle” would pass from the sacred text until all is fulfilled — brought to its final intended completion. Psalm 110:1 is an inspired oracle, a divine utterance of supreme importance. It is alluded to some 23 times in the New Testament and is massively significant. Not only does it provide a short encapsulation of God’s great immortality plan, it designates the two principal figures of the divine drama:

Firstly, the LORD (Yahweh), the One God of Israel. Secondly, “my lord,” in this case David’s lord, who is seen by divine prophecy sitting at the right hand of God in heaven, pending his return to this earth to inaugurate his worldwide Messianic government on earth, the Kingdom of God.

After a prolonged examination of the Hebrew word translated as “my lord” I wrote to a number of leading New Testament scholars to verify what seemed to be clear conclusions. Professor Larry Hurtado is the celebrated author of a classic on Christology, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*. I asked him about the validity of my conviction that the original Hebrew text of Psalm 110:1 makes a clear-cut category distinction between the One God and the Lord Messiah. That critically important difference designates the Messiah *not* as a second God beside the Father, but as the supremely exalted human being. The professor agreed that the second lord of Psalm 110:1 is not God but a human being. “There is no question but that the terms *ADONAI* [Lord] and *adoni* [my lord] function differently. The one [Adonai] is a reverent way of avoiding pronouncing the word YHVH, and the other [adoni] the use of the same word for *non-divine figures*” (correspondence, June 24th, 2000, emphasis mine).

Hard Facts on the Title for Christ in Psalm 110:1

Let me lay out for you the lexical facts from the standard lexicon of biblical Hebrew. (My explanation for those who do not read Hebrew is in square brackets. See further our *Who Is Jesus?* booklet.) From the entry “Lord” in *Whittaker Revised Brown Driver Briggs*, the standard lexicon of biblical Hebrew used by all scholars, and in software. (Strong’s will not show you this distinction.)

[Adoni, Ps. 110:1, ‘The LORD (Yahweh) says to my lord (adoni)...’ pronounced “adonee” = my lord, never a divine title]

“B147 אֲדֹנָי n.m. lord [ADON]

1. singular, *lord, master*

(1) ref. to **men**: (a) superintendent of household, or of affairs; (b) master; (c) king; (2) ref. to **God**, הָאֲדֹנָי יְהוָה [Ha Adon Yahweh], *the LORD Yahweh* (see יְהוָה).

2. plural, *lords, kings; masters; elsewhere intensive plural of rank, lord, master,*

(1) ref. to **men**: (a) *proprietor* of hill Samaria; (b) *master* (c) *husband* (d) *prophet* (e) *governor* (f)

prince (g) *king*. (2) ref. to **God**: אֲדֹנָי הָאֲדֹנָיִם *Lord of lords* [Adoney Ha Adonim].

3. with suffix. 1st singular [ADONI, my lord] אֲדֹנָי (אֲדֹנִי) [plural of adoni] [Ps. 110:1] [ADONI, 195 times in OT]

(1) **ref. to men**: *my lord, my master* (a) **master** (*Cov’t code*) (b) **husband** (c) **prophet** (d) **prince** (e) **king** (f) **father** (g) **Moses** (h) **priest** (i) **theophanic angel** (j) **captain** (k) general recognition of superiority.

(2) ref. to **God**: אֲדֹנָי [ADONAY, 449 times] **a. my Lord**; **b. Adonay noun, plural**, of **God**, parallel with *Yahweh*, substituted for it often by scribal error, and eventually supplanting it.”

More on adoni (“my lord,” wrongly capitalized in Ps. 110:1 in many versions, but not RSV, NRSV, NEB, JPS, etc.)

Adoni (“adonee”) is the Messianic title *par excellence* for Jesus as the Lord Messiah (Luke 2:11). Luke also calls Jesus the Lord’s Messiah (Yahweh’s Messiah) in Luke 2:26. Elizabeth was visited by Mary, the mother of “my lord” (Luke 1:43), a clear echo of Psalm 110:1.

Astonishingly, the facts about the Hebrew word behind “my lord” in Psalm 110:1 have not infrequently been misstated in commentaries and books. When authors have had this pointed out to them, they have agreed to make a correction in subsequent printings. A professor at Dallas Theological Seminary kindly agreed to change the misinformation in their *Seminary Bible Commentary* which reported wrongly the second lord of Psalm 110:1 as ADONAI! Adonai means the Lord God in all of its 449 occurrences in the OT. But it does not occur in Psalm 110:1. The word there is ADONI.

Religious studies professor Paula Fredriksen of Boston University wrote: “Thank you for this note [pointing out the error in reference to Adonai in Psalm 110:1]. I have just grabbed my Tanach: You are absolutely right. I made a mistake. I am terribly grateful to you for bringing this to my attention. We all depend upon each other.”

The Value of Psalm 110:1

James Dunn in *The Theology of Paul* discusses what it means to hail Jesus as “lord”: “The affirmation of Jesus’ lordship is one which we can trace back at least to the earliest days of Christian reflection on Christ’s resurrection. One of the Scriptures which quickly became luminous for the first believers was evidently Psalm 110:1. The first Christians now knew who ‘my lord’ was who was thus addressed by the Lord God. It could only be Messiah Jesus. The text was clearly in mind in several Pauline passages.” On I

Corinthians 8:4-6: “In direct opposition to the tolerant pluralism of Hellenism, Paul affirms, ‘But for us there is one lord Jesus Christ.’ For Paul the risen Christ was simply ‘the Lord’ and he was personally convinced that eventually his lordship would be acknowledged by all. As I Cor. 8:5-6 itself implies this was an expression not so much of intolerance as of belief in the uniqueness of Christ, and a corollary of the equivalent uncompromising Jewish monotheism. Jesus is the *one* Lord just as, and indeed because God is the *one* God.”⁶

In his *Unity and Diversity in the NT*, Dunn has this to say: “Should we then say that Jesus was confessed as GOD from the earliest days in Hellenistic Christianity? That would be to claim too much. **1.** The emergence of a confession of Jesus in terms of divinity was largely facilitated by the emergence of **Psalm 110:1** from very early on (most clearly in Mark 12:36; Acts 2:34; I Cor. 15:25; Heb. 1:13). “The Lord says to my lord...” Its importance lies here in the double use of *kurios* [lord]. The one is clearly Yahweh, but who is the other? [note two subjects, two individuals]. Clearly *not* Yahweh, but an exalted being whom the Psalmist calls *kurios* [lord]. **2.** Paul calls Jesus *kurios*, but he seems to have marked reservations about actually calling him ‘God.’ (Rom. 9:5 is the only candidate within the main Pauline corpus, and even there the text is unclear.) Similarly he refrains from praying *to* Jesus. More typical of his attitude is that he prays to GOD *through* Jesus (Rom. 1:8; 7:25; II Cor. 1:20; Col. 3:17). **3.** ‘Jesus is Lord’ is only part of a fuller confession for Paul. For at the same time as he affirms Jesus as ‘Lord,’ he also affirms ‘God is one’ (I Cor. 8:5-6; Eph. 4:5-6). **Here Christianity shows itself as a developed form of Judaism, with its monotheistic confession as one of the most important parts of its Jewish inheritance;** for in Judaism the most fundamental confession is ‘God is one.’ ‘There is only one God’ (Deut. 6:4). Hence also Rom. 3:30; Gal. 3:20, I Tim. 2:5 (cp. James 2:19). Within Palestine and the Jewish mission such an affirmation would have been unnecessary — Jews and Christians shared a belief in God’s oneness. But in the Gentile mission this Jewish presupposition within Christianity would have emerged into prominence, in face of the wider belief in ‘gods many.’ **The point for us to note is that Paul can hail Jesus as Lord not in order to identify him with God, but rather if anything to distinguish him from the One God (cp. particularly I Cor. 15:24-28).** So too Jesus’ Lordship

⁶ Eerdmans, 1998, pp. 246, 248.

could be expressed in cosmic dimensions without posing too many problems to monotheism, since Wisdom speculations provided a ready and appropriate terminology (particularly I Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:3ff).”⁷

“So far as we can now tell, Jesus thought of himself as Wisdom’s *messenger* — a self-understanding reflected particularly in Q (Matt. 11:25-27; Luke 7:31-35; 11:49-51). That is to say, there is no evidence that Jesus thought of himself as preexistent Wisdom and nothing in the traditions of Q and Mark which implies that the thought of preexistence was present either to Jesus or Mark. The idea of preexistence first entered by way of implication with *identification* of Christ with *Wisdom herself*..

“Now here we must recall that within Judaism Wisdom was only a way of speaking about God’s action in creation, revelation and redemption without actually speaking about God. Wisdom like the name of God, the spirit of God, the logos (word) of God denotes the immanent [present with us humans] activity of God, without detracting from God’s wholly other transcendence. For pre-Christian Judaism Wisdom was neither an inferior heavenly being (one of the heavenly council) nor a divine hypostasis [person] (as in the later Trinitarian conception of God). Such a development would have been (and in the event was) unacceptable to Judaism’s **strict monotheism**. Wisdom in fact is no more than *personification of God’s immanence, no more to be regarded as a distinct person within the Godhead* than the rabbinic concept or talk of a preexistent Torah.

“The probability then is that Paul in applying Wisdom language to Christ is in effect saying: that which you have hitherto ascribed to Wisdom [or Torah or word], we see most fully expressed and embodied in Christ; that same power and wisdom you recognize to be manifested in God’s creative, revelatory and redemptive purpose, we now see manifested finally and exclusively in Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Current critics of “charismata” are rightly unimpressed when they are asked to believe that Jesus Christ is present when only “power” and not wisdom and revealed Truth are present! Pushing people over on the stage may display power — what sort of power? — but there is a conspicuous absence of biblical spirit and wisdom — *ed.*)

Dunn concludes: “Jesus was not himself preexistent; he was the man that preexistent Wisdom became.” “Paul does not yet understand the risen Christ

⁷ SCM Press, 1990, p. 53, emphasis his.

as the *object* of worship; he is the theme of worship...Even the **title Lord** becomes a way of **distinguishing Jesus from God** rather than identifying him with God (Rom. 15:6; I Cor. 8:6; 15:24-28; II Cor. 1:3; 11:31; Eph. 1:3, 17; Phil. 2:11; Col 1:3). Paul was and remained a monotheist” (pp. 221, 226).

The *International Critical Commentary* on Peter makes the important statement that the NT does not present Jesus as GOD. Charles Bigg, Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Oxford, writes: “We are not to suppose that the apostles identified Christ with Jehovah; there were passages which made this impossible, for instance, Psalm 110.”⁸

“From Justin Martyr to the Council of Nicea, Christians generally built up their interpretations in accord with patterns established in the earlier period. **They went beyond** the writings of the NT age, principally in two respects: in applying the entire psalm to Jesus and in arguing explicitly for his divinity [Deity] on the basis of its first and third verses.”⁹

The text in Psalm 110:1 is secure. There are no MSS variations. *L’adoni* means “to my lord.” There are 195 samples of ADONI (my lord). These include “my lord” (162 times), “against my lord” (twice), “and my lord” (6 times), “from my lord” (once) and “to/for my lord” (24 times). Total of 195 times. *L’adoni*, “to my lord,” appears 24 times. These are found in Genesis, I, II Samuel, I Kings, I Chronicles and Psalms (110:1). *L’adoni* is properly translated in our versions as: “to my master Abraham,” “to my lord Esau,” “to our lord” (Joseph). David says: “to my lord (*l’adoni*), the LORD’s anointed” (Saul).

Abigail says: “for my lord [David] (*l’adoni*), who is fighting the LORD’s battles.” She says: “the LORD will do well for my lord (*l’adoni*) David.” Joab says: “May the LORD add to His people a 100 times as many as they are...But my lord king [*adoni*, David], are they not all my lord’s (*l’adoni*) servants? Why does my lord [*adoni*, David] seek this thing?” **David says: “The LORD said to my lord (*l’adoni*)” (Messiah) (Ps. 110:1).**

The phrase *l’adoni* (to my lord) is contrasted with LORD both in the Hebrew and in the Greek LXX translation from the second century BC. Because *l’adoni* is rendered in Greek as “to kurio **mou**” — to my lord — we have the clearest confirmation that the

vowel points are entirely accurate in our Masoretic text. In other words both the LXX and the NT Scripture translate the *l’adoni* of Psalm 110:1 as *to kurio mou*, “to my lord.”

Thus we have testimony from BC times *plus the inspired NT* (Mark 12:28ff) that the vowel points for ADONI have not been altered. There is no basis at all for questioning the accuracy of the Bible at this point. The text of the Hebrew Bible has been faithfully preserved in Psalm 110:1 and provides the key to the relationship of God to the Son, Jesus. Jesus is not God, because there is only one God. Jesus is the supremely elevated human Messiah, the “my lord” of our Psalm. In none of its 195 occurrences does ADONI (“my lord”) ever refer to God. It distinguishes the one addressed as someone who is a superior but not God Himself.

Psalm 110:1 is the master Christological key to the NT and the original meaning of “lord” here has been either ignored by commentators or corrupted in many translations by placing a capital letter on the second lord, which according to the practice of the translations would misleadingly tell you that the word there is ADONAI (Lord God), which it is not. The NASB (updated) in its margin at Acts 2:34 misreports the facts of the Hebrew text and says that the Hebrew word for “my lord” was ADONAI, the Lord God. ADONAI means the Lord God in all 449 occurrences. The word in Psalm 110:1 as we know is not *adonai* but *adoni*, a mere difference between God and man!

I wrote to the “dean” of evangelical scholarship, Dr. Howard Marshall: “Professor Marshall, may I please venture a comment on your interesting discussion of the all-important Christological testimonium from Psalm 110:1. On p. 204 of *Jesus the Savior* you note the crucial difference between *adonai*, the divine title, and *adoni*, the exclusively human (occasionally angelic) title (195 times). You say that the confusion of the two lords is avoided in the printed versions of the OT which use ‘lord’ both times and print the first lord in caps, LORD for YHVH.

“The problem is that most (not RV, RSV and NRSV) print the second lord with initial capital Lord. Now that form of printing, with capital, belongs in every other case to the Hebrew ADONAI, the substitute divine title. This leaves the reader with the false impression that ADONAI and not *adoni* is the word in the original. Thus in many commentaries and some books, it is confidently asserted that the Messiah is addressed as *Adonai* in this psalm, and that this is proof of his Deity. The facts here presented in the psalm, however, place the Messiah in a superior human, royal Messianic category. It is in that sense that the NT

⁸ T&T Clark, 1910, p. 99.

⁹ Larry Hurtado, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christian Interpretation*.

recognizes Jesus as Lord (cp. Luke 2:11) and Mary as ‘the mother of my lord.’ Would it be fair to add that the LXX version shows the difference properly by rendering l’Adonai (to the Lord God) as ‘to kurio’ whereas l’adoni (to my lord) comes over in the Greek as *to kurio MOU* ‘to my lord’? I feel that this psalm and the careful distinction it displays is only now beginning to get the careful attention it deserves.” Dr. Marshall replied: “Dear Anthony, I agree with what you say about Psalm 110:1. The LXX is translating correctly...The use of the psalm does not identify Jesus as Adonai.”

How the Human Son of God Was Suppressed

Adolf Harnack, prince of church historians, in his *History of Dogma* explains the shift from one understanding of Jesus to a radically different one. He calls this the “displacement or suppression of the historical Christ by the preexisting Christ, that is, the real Christ by **the imagined or fictitious Christ.**” This happened through dogmatics, that is, the dogmas of the Church. This development he says led to the “triumphant attempt to get rid of the earlier speculation about God and Christ not by going back to the original teachings but a more speculative ‘advance’ — an advance which finally *split monotheism* and weakened it, and also made Christ unrecognizable by splitting him [i.e. into two ‘natures’]. When the logos Christology [i.e. the idea that Jesus was preexistent as the Son of God] triumphed fully, the **condemnation of the teaching of strict monotheism** led to the putting in place of the Gnostic two-natures teaching about Christ. This apparent enrichment of Christ amounted to an impoverishment, because it in fact obliterated the complete human personality of Christ.”¹⁰

In his *What Is Christianity?* Harnack wrote: “Under the influence of dogma...Christ’s appearance in itself, the entrance of a divine being into the world came of necessity to rank as the chief fact, as itself the real redemption.” Harnack says that “with the Greeks this inevitably set an entirely **new theory** in motion.” It shattered the Messianic idea. With this new view of redemption, that is, the entrance from a preexisting life of a person into the world, “the very existence of the Gospel was threatened by drawing away men’s thoughts and interests into another direction. When we look at the history of dogma, who can deny that that is what happened?” (185,186).

Harnack points out that the “first formulated opposition to the emerging Logos Christology [i.e.

that the Son preexisted his birth]...was called forth by interest in the evangelical synoptic idea of Christ [the picture of Jesus presented by Matthew, Mark and Luke]. The opposition [to the idea of a preexisting Son] also attacked the idea of the use of Platonic philosophy in Christian doctrine...The whole theological interpretation of the first two articles of faith was gradually involved in controversy [as today still!].” In his *History of Dogma*, English version, Harnack asks: “Did not the sending forth of the Logos [i.e. the preexisting *Son*, rather than word] to create the world recall the emanation of the aeons? Was not ditheism [belief in two Gods] set up, if two divine beings were to be worshipped?

“Did not the doctrine of a heavenly aeon rendered incarnate in the Redeemer contain another remnant of the old *Gnostic* leaven? Not only were the laity driven to such criticisms...but also all those theologians who refused to give any place to Platonic philosophy in Christian dogmatics. A conflict began which lasted for more than a century...It was not a war of the laity against theologians...but also a war of theologians against those theologians who opposed their brethren. We must describe it as the strenuous effort of Stoic Platonism to obtain supremacy in the theology of the Church...the victory of Plato...the history of the displacement of the historical Christ by the preexistent Christ, **of the Christ of reality by the imagined Christ**, in dogmatics. Finally as the victorious attempt to substitute **the mystery of the person of Christ** for the person himself. And by means of a theological formula unintelligible to the laity, to put the laity with their Christian faith under guardians...When the Logos Christology obtained a complete victory, the traditional view of the supreme Deity as **one person**, and along with this every thought of the real and complete human personality of the Redeemer was in fact condemned as being intolerable in the Church. Its place was taken by the ‘nature’ of Christ which without ‘the person’ is simply a cipher. The defeated party had right on its side” (Vol. III, p. 9, 10).✧

Comments

“I recently read your exceptionally excellent book *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity’s Self-Inflicted Wound.*” — *South Africa*

“We are thankful for you and your continued ministry.” — *Ohio*

¹⁰ 4th edition, 1909, Vol. I, pp. 703, 704.