



Jesus Christ: God in Human Flesh

There is a particular group of passages in the Holy Scriptures that uses the word “God” of the Lord Jesus. While we could wish this would be enough to banish all doubt, obviously it is not. The deity of Christ is the constant object of attack and denial, and the verses that bear testimony to this divine truth have been mistranslated, twisted, and in various other ways undermined by nearly every false prophet and false teacher over the past seventeen hundred years.

Just as the writers of the New Testament and the early Christians did not hesitate to confess Jesus as their God, so we, too, must be bold in our profession of this divine truth. We will, in this chapter, see how the early Christians called Jesus “God.” Each passage has been attacked in almost every imaginable way; thus, we will have to explain why we believe these passages proclaim the deity of Christ, and why others should accept this truth.

There are many extensive and exhaustive works on each of these

verses of Scripture, and we will not seek to recreate those works here. Instead, I desire my fellow servants of Christ to be encouraged in their faith in our Lord and to be strengthened in their faith and their testimony to the Lord of glory, the one Thomas called "my Lord and my God."

RIGHT AT THE START

It seems an appropriate time to settle one of the most important issues regarding the Trinity and the text of Scripture. If all Christians would simply understand the following statement, their task of explaining and defending the Trinity would be much easier. Here is a basic, simple truth that is lost in the vast majority of discussions (or arguments) on this topic:

Difference in function does not indicate inferiority of nature.

Not exactly an earth-shattering concept? It isn't, but *the vast majority of material produced by those who oppose the deity of Christ ignores this basic truth*. What do I mean? It's really quite simple. Let's take a common argument against the deity of Christ: "The Father is the Creator of all things. He creates *through* Jesus Christ. Therefore, Jesus Christ is not fully God." Or here's another argument against the deity of the Spirit: "The Spirit is sent to testify of Jesus Christ and convict the world of sin. Since the Spirit is sent by the Father, the Spirit cannot truly be God." Both arguments share the same error: they ignore the above cited truth, *difference in function does not indicate inferiority of nature*. That is, just because the Father, Son, and Spirit *do* different things does not mean that any one of them is *inferior* to the others *in nature*.¹

Think of it this way: in eternity past² the Father, Son, and Spirit *voluntarily and freely chose the roles they would take in bringing about the redemption of God's people*. This is what is called the "Eternal Covenant of Redemption." The Father chose to be the fount and source of the entirety of the work; the Son chose to be the Redeemer and to enter into human flesh as one subject to the Father; and the Spirit chose to be the Sanctifier of the church, the indwelling Testifier of Jesus Christ.

Each took different roles of necessity—they could not all take the same role and do the same things.

The large portion of arguments against the deity of Christ and the Trinity make one major unspoken (and false) assumption: that for either the Son or the Spirit to be truly and fully God, *they have to do the exact same things as the Father in the exact same way*. That is, they assume there cannot possibly be any differentiation in the persons of the Trinity without introducing an automatic inferiority on the part of those who do something “different” than the Father. Any difference in function, they assume, results in an inferiority of nature. To put it simply, they *assume* a unitarian view of God (as opposed to the Trinitarian view), and *assume* that God could never do what He has revealed He has done in the work of redemption.

The truth of the matter is, however, that just because the Son takes a different role in the eternal covenant of Redemption, it does not follow that He is inferior in nature to the Father or the Spirit. The different role He takes *distinguishes* Him from the Father and the Spirit, but it does not make Him *less* than the Father or the Spirit. It is quite true that Jesus is normally described as the *agent* of creation and the Father as the *source* of creation, but it does not logically follow that the Son is therefore *inferior*. It only follows that He is *different*. In the same way, the Spirit is indeed *sent* by the Father and the Son, but this only makes Him *different* than the Father and the Son, not *less than* the Father and the Son.

When you dig past the rhetoric and really examine the *best* writings against the Christian confession of the Trinity and the deity of Christ, you find that these arguments are circular at their core. They assume that Yahweh is *uni-personal*, or *unitarian*, and then use that assumption to attack and deny all evidence to the contrary. Keeping this one truth in mind will help you evaluate the passages that describe the Lord Jesus Christ as God, even while distinguishing Him from the Father.

There is one other thought to keep in mind *whenever* we engage in dialogue on the issue of the deity of Christ. Christians often get so caught up in the “battle” that they lose sight of some basic considerations. When we encounter someone who denies the deity of Christ,

we often "let them off the hook" by not asking them to defend *their* view on the basis of each passage we are considering. We don't apply the same arguments to *their* position that they are applying to *ours*.

The most obvious example is provided by Jehovah's Witnesses. They have a positive belief that Jesus is actually an angelic creature, Michael, the Archangel.³ When dialoguing with Witnesses about the deity of Christ, we must not only give a positive defense of our own faith, but we must constantly be asking if the descriptions of Christ found in Scripture could possibly be applied to Michael the Archangel. Could we describe Michael as the Way, the Truth, and the Life? (John 14:6). Could an angel say, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest"? (Matthew 11:28). Is an angel King of kings and Lord of lords? (Revelation 19:16). Does divine grace come from God the Father and Michael the Archangel? (1 Corinthians 1:3). Can Michael say, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father"? (John 14:9). What could it possibly mean to say, "For to me, to live is Michael the Archangel and to die is gain"? (Philippians 1:21). We can go on and on in this way, for many of the strongest proofs of the deity of Christ are found in recognizing that no mere creature could ever say the words Jesus said, do the things Jesus did, or be described in the way Jesus is described.

Keeping these two concepts in mind will assist the follower of Christ in accurately handling the testimony of Scripture to the majesty of the Lord Jesus.

THOMAS'S CONFESSION

It is one of the most touching scenes in all of Scripture. Its meaning is clear, unambiguous, and plain. Its translation is not questionable on any serious grounds. And the only way around it is to engage in the greatest sorts of mental gymnastics. For the Christian, it is but an echo of the heart that loves Christ. For the person who denies the truth about Jesus Christ, it is an insurmountable barrier.

In God's providence, Thomas had been absent the first time the risen Lord Jesus Christ appeared to His disciples. John records the incident for us:

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe" (John 20:24-25).

The Lord was well aware of the word of His skeptical disciple, even though He was not physically present at the time. The encounter between the risen Lord and Thomas follows quickly:

After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace *be* with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing" (John 20:26-27).

Thomas surely was struck to his heart when the Lord immediately turned His attention to him and demonstrated that the words he had spoken were known to the risen Lord. How will Thomas respond? He has been invited to believe. We are not told if he actually put forth his hand to dispel his skepticism. All we are told is what he said, and how the Lord responded:

Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believed" (John 20:28-29).

Thomas's answer is simple and clear. It is directed to the Lord Jesus, not to anyone else, for John says, "he said *to Him*." The content of his confession is plain and unambiguous. "My Lord and my God!" Jesus is Thomas's Lord. Of this there is no question.⁴ And there is simply no reason—grammatical, contextual, or otherwise—to deny that in the very same breath Thomas calls Jesus Christ his "God."⁵

Jesus' response to Thomas's confession shows not the slightest

discomfort at the appellation "God." Jesus says Thomas has shown *faith*, for he has "believed." He then pronounces a blessing upon all who will believe like Thomas without the added element of physical sight. There is no reproach of Thomas's description of Jesus as his Lord and God. No created being could *ever* allow such words to be addressed to him personally. No angel, no prophet, no sane human being, could ever allow himself to be addressed as "Lord and God." Yet Jesus not only accepts the words of Thomas but pronounces the blessing of faith upon them as well.

What could be clearer? Should not such a passage banish all doubt? Should we not be able to simply cite this verse and see every person who denies the deity of Christ repenting of their error in its glaring light? Of course, such is wishful thinking. Man finds ways around everything, and the most common means of avoiding the weight of this passage is to move the conversation back a few verses:

Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God'" (John 20:17).

Why cite this passage? Because the truth I noted at the beginning of this chapter really *is* frequently ignored! The idea is simple: if Jesus can speak of His "God," then He can't really be *God*, but must be something less (i.e., a creature) who is called "God" but only in a "sort of" fashion. Remember the maxim: *Difference in function does not indicate inferiority of nature*. Here the Father is described as Jesus' "God." Since this is so, Jesus must be some inferior being, and therefore, John 20:28 can't mean what it so obviously says.⁶ Note how one writer has expressed it:

Such a confession, as in the case of Thomas, is *qualified* not only by the context (John 20:17), but also by the whole of Scripture. The use of later Chalcedonian christology does not come into play in verses such as John 20:17, either. Here Jesus, in the same state Thomas addressed him, says that the Father is his God, again

differentiating between the two in terms of *theos*, as well as acknowledging the Father's superiority over him, as his God.⁷

And just here we see the circularity of the arguments of those who deny the deity of Christ: why can't Thomas mean what he said? Because, of course, the Father is *different* than the Son. It was the *Son* who became Incarnate, and since the Son, as the perfect man, acknowledged the Father as His God, He, himself, can't be fully deity. The argument assumes that God *could not enter into human form*. Why? Well, what would the God-man be like? If one of the divine persons entered into human flesh, how would such a divine person act? Would He be an atheist? Would He refuse to acknowledge those divine persons who had *not* entered into human existence? Of course not. Yet when we see the Lord Jesus doing exactly what we would expect the Incarnate Son to do, we find this being used as an argument against His deity! So those who put forward such arguments have already made up their minds. They are not deriving their beliefs *from* the Scriptures but are forcing those beliefs *onto* the Scriptures. Thomas's confession is in perfect harmony with the fact that the Incarnate Son spoke of the Father as His God. As long as one recognizes that the word "God" can refer to the Father, to the Son, to the Spirit, or to all three persons at once, the asserted contradiction is seen to be nothing more than a circular argument designed to avoid having to make the same confession that Thomas made long ago.

GOD OVER ALL

Romans 9:5 presents us with another reference to the deity of Christ. However, this passage also carries some challenges along with it:

... whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

As the translation will be the key, let's look at some other renderings. Some translations directly identify Jesus as God in this passage:

Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human

ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.
(NIV)

... of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God. Amen.
(NKJV)

Their ancestors were great people of God, and Christ himself was a Jew as far as his human nature is concerned. And he is God, who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen.
(NLT)

They are descended from the patriarchs and from their flesh and blood came Christ who is above all, God for ever blessed! Amen. (JB)

Others leave the issue somewhat undecided:

Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen. (KJV)

To them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (NRSV)

And others insert a complete break into the text, leaving no room for the deity of Christ in the passage:

Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them, in natural descent, sprang the Messiah. May God, supreme above all, be blessed for ever! Amen. (NEB)

They are descended from the patriarchs, and Christ, as a human being, belongs to their race. May God, who rules over all, be praised forever! Amen. (TEV)

So what do we do with the text? We are able to clearly discern Paul's intentions here in reference to the deity of Christ. It just takes a little work and a little background.

We should remember that punctuation did not exist in the most

primitive manuscripts of the New Testament. Hence, punctuation is an interpretational issue. We have to decide where to place periods and commas on the basis of Paul's style and his statements elsewhere.

The most often repeated argument *against* viewing this passage as speaking of the Christ as "God" is that Paul nowhere else refers to the Lord in that way. But such is a circular argument, for not only can one refer to Titus 2:13 (see below) where Paul does this very thing, but would it be a valid argument against Titus 2:13 to likewise say that Paul doesn't call Jesus "God" elsewhere? Seemingly the person offering this argument is not so much seeking to interpret the passage as to substantiate a particular theology.

The arguments in favor of seeing this passage as a reference to the deity of Christ are many. I will summarize them here:⁸

- (1) It is the natural reading of the text to see the entire verse as referring to Christ. Breaking the sentence up into two parts leads to difficulties in translation and interpretation. Some words become superfluous,⁹ and the balance of the sentence is thrown off.¹⁰
- (2) The phrase "who is" is used by Paul elsewhere to modify a word in the preceding context (as in 2 Corinthians 11:31, a very close parallel), and would naturally do so here as well.
- (3) The form of the doxology simply will not allow for it to be separated from the preceding context. Paul's consistent usage connects the doxology to the discussion of Christ. In his other doxologies¹¹ he follows this pattern.
- (4) In the Greek New Testament, and in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), the word "blessed" always¹² comes *before* the word "God," but here in Romans 9:5 it follows, which would indicate that the "blessing" is tied to what came before (i.e., the discussion of Christ). So strong is this last point that Metzger said it is "altogether incredible that Paul, whose ear must have been perfectly familiar with this constantly recurring formula of praise, should in this solitary instance have departed from established usage."¹³

Add to these weighty considerations the testimony of many of the early

Fathers as well,¹⁴ and the conclusion is inescapable: Paul breaks into praise at the majesty of the person of the Messiah who has come into the world through the Jewish race. The very God who is over all has entered into flesh, and for this, Paul gives glory and honor.

THE ANGELS WORSHIP HIM

And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, "AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP HIM." And of the angels He says, "WHO MAKES HIS ANGELS WINDS, AND HIS MINISTERS A FLAME OF FIRE." But of the Son *He says*, "YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM" (Hebrews 1:6-8).

We will have occasion to enter into the first chapter of Hebrews searching for golden nuggets on the deity of Christ a total of three times.¹⁵ But first we look at the use of the term "God" of the Lord Jesus in this passage, specifically in verse 8.

There is debate over the translation of the passage, for on a strictly grammatical basis, one could render it "God is Your throne" rather than "Your throne, O God," and, of course, this is exactly the argument presented by all who deny the deity of Christ. But again the context indicates otherwise. Without going into a lot of detail,¹⁶ the writer to the Hebrews is demonstrating the superiority of Jesus Christ to the angels. He says that all the angels of God worship the Firstborn.¹⁷ This is true religious worship, as the context demands.¹⁸ Such worship is only given to God. He contrasts this worship by the angels of the Son¹⁹ with the description God uses of angels as mere "winds" and "flames of fire." But, in opposition to this, the description God uses of the Son is striking. Quoting from Psalm 45:6-7, God (the Father) makes reference to God (the Son), saying, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever."

It should be noted that the passage the writer quotes, Psalm 45, was a "wedding" psalm written in reference to the king of Israel.²⁰ As with so many other passages in the Old Testament, it takes on a much greater meaning when applied to the King of kings, Jesus Christ. While

the Israelite king's reign was temporary, the reign of Christ will truly be forever and ever. In summarizing the teaching of this passage, Murray Harris said:

The appellation ὁ θεός that was figurative and hyperbolic when applied to a mortal king was applied to the immortal Son in a literal and true sense. Jesus is not merely superior to the angels. Equally with the Father he shares in the divine nature (ὁ θεός, v. 8) while remaining distinct from him (ὁ θεός σου, v. 9). The author places Jesus far above any angel with respect to nature and function, and on a par with God with regard to nature but subordinate to God with regard to function. There is an "essential" unity but a functional subordination.²¹

That Dr. Harris is correct is seen by noting how the context supports his conclusions. Not only is Jesus the object of divine worship in verse 6, but we will see that in verses 10 through 12 He is identified as Yahweh.²² Since Christ is shown receiving worship immediately before this passage, and identified with Yahweh immediately thereafter, there can be nothing strange about the Father referring to the Son as "God" in verse 8.

Finally, in another place where Christ is identified as God, Isaiah 9:6 (which will be examined below), the same truth that Christ's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom is found. The only One whose throne will *truly* be forever and ever is God himself.

OUR GREAT GOD AND SAVIOR

Paul describes Christians as faithful people who are looking for a blessed event: the coming of Jesus Christ. Here are his words:

... looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:13-14)

The appearing of Christ is described as our "blessed hope," and indeed

it is. The key phrase is obviously the description of Jesus as "our great God and Savior." Do both terms refer to Jesus? That is the issue. But before we demonstrate that indeed both words are being used of Christ, we dare not rush past the context itself. Could it be that Christians have a blessed hope that is anchored in looking for the appearance of a mere creature, say, Michael the Archangel?

Paul says that the Lord Jesus "gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed." This is in reference to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross of Calvary. Since it is plainly the coming of the Lord Jesus that we are expectantly awaiting, and since it is the Lord Jesus who gave himself for us on the Cross, what reason is there, contextually, for introducing another person into the passage? Simply put, there is none. The only reason some attempt to do so is to avoid the clear identification of Jesus Christ as "God and Savior."

Another contextual clue confirms the assertion of the deity of Christ by Paul. Verse 14 says that Christ intends to "purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." To the person whose ear is attuned to the words of the Old Testament, this is a phrase that would bring to mind none other than Yahweh himself:

O Israel, hope in the LORD;
For with the LORD there is lovingkindness,
And with Him is abundant redemption.
And He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities. (Psalm 130:7-8)

What is not immediately apparent by simply looking at the English text is that this passage from the psalms uses the same terms²³ found in Titus 2:14. Specifically, "to redeem" in the psalm is the same term used by Paul of the redeeming work of Christ, and the term "iniquities" in the psalm is the term translated "lawless deed" in Titus. While it is Yahweh who redeems His people in the Old Testament, here it is Christ. But there is more:

"They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have

sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God" (Ezekiel 37:23).

Here Yahweh again speaks of His redemption of His people, and again Paul uses the same terms to describe the work of Christ. Specifically, the word "cleanse" is the same in both passages, as is the word "people." Just coincidence? Not at all, for there is more:

"Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine" (Exodus 19:5).

The phrase "My own possession" is the same in Exodus, where Yahweh speaks of His special people, and in Titus, where Christ has a people for His own possession. Deuteronomy 7:6 and 14:2 make the same statement. Anyone familiar with a "redeemed people" in the Old Testament would recognize that Paul is applying the same terms used of Yahweh there to the Lord Jesus here. The context, then, is one that would find no problem at all in calling Jesus "God and Savior," since it has freely applied to Him words that had been used by God's people for centuries to describe Yahweh, their Savior.

The focus of attention in Titus 2:13 has always been on whether we should understand Paul to be applying *both* terms "God" and "Savior" to Christ. We have seen that before addressing the grammatical concerns, the context gives us no reason whatsoever to think that two persons are in view here. Only Christ is under discussion. One must wonder, then, why anyone would *wish* to find a second person, since the context does not push us in that direction.

As with every other such passage, large numbers of papers and articles have been written regarding the proper translation of Titus 2:13. In fact, an entire grammatical rule finds its primary application in this passage. The rule has been dubbed Granville Sharp's Rule,²⁴ after Granville Sharp who first formulated it. In reality, Sharp's Rule is more of a set of rules, all relating to the use of nouns and the Greek connective καί, "and." Without going into great detail, Sharp's study of the text of the New Testament led him to recognize that when the writer used

a particular construction of “article (the word “the”)—substantive (noun)—καί —substantive,” and when the personal nouns involved were singular and not proper names, they *always* referred to the same person.²⁵ The significance to Titus 2:13 is found in the fact that the phrase “our great God and Savior” fits this pattern exactly:

τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

The word “God” has the definite article (“the”) before it. It is connected by the word καί with the word “Savior.” There is only one person in the context to which both terms, then, can be applied: Jesus Christ. He is our God and Savior.

Various attempts have been made to short-circuit this rule of Greek grammar, all prompted by an unwillingness to believe what the text itself says. Dr. Daniel Wallace’s work on the subject in recent years has only further strengthened the validity of Sharp’s Rule, and its application at Titus 2:13.²⁶

But we only see half the evidence when we look only at Titus 2:13. There is another very important passage that adds further evidence to the validity of this understanding of the text of the New Testament:

Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:1)

We can immediately see the Granville Sharp construction: “our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.” But this passage does not contain the surrounding context of Titus 2:13, so is it less certain? Not at all, for here we find that the use of other Granville Sharp constructions in 2 Peter provides us with the same kind of external support that Paul provided with his allusions to the Old Testament. There are a total of four²⁷ such constructions in this small epistle (1:1, 1:11, 2:20, 3:18), the second being found in 2 Peter 1:11:

... for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. (2 Peter 1:11)

Here the construction is "our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." By comparing the actual texts the similarity in these passages is clearly seen:

1:1: τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

1:11: τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

1:1: *tou theou hemon kai soterou Iesou Christou*

1:11: *tou kuriou hemon kai soterou Iesou Christou*

1:1: our God and Savior Jesus Christ

1:11: our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

The phrases are identical outside of the fact that in 1:1 the term is "God," and in 1:11 it is "Lord." No one hesitates to translate 2 Peter 1:11 as "Lord and Savior," so why do so at 2 Peter 1:1? The repetition of this construction in 2:20 and 3:18 only strengthens the argument. As Wallace concludes, "This being the case, there is no good reason for rejecting 2 Peter 1:1 as an explicit affirmation of the deity of Christ."²⁸ And I add that there is simply no reason, outside of *theological* reasons (which should not drive our translation in the first place), to avoid the proper rendering of either Titus 2:13 or 2 Peter 1:1. Both testify to the deity of Jesus Christ.

Someone might point out that some older translations, such as the *King James Version* of the Bible, do not translate these passages well. The main reason²⁹ the KJV does not clearly render the passages has to do with the fact that Sharp did his work long *after* the KJV was translated. The Latin usage had a great influence on the KJV translators, and being unaware of the proper relationship discovered by Sharp's inquiry, they could not be expected to provide the best rendering. But why do some other older versions incorrectly translate these passages? The great American Greek scholar A. T. Robertson maintained that it is mainly due to the influence of George B. Winer and his grammatical work. For three generations Winer's work was supreme, and many scholars did not feel inclined to disagree with him and insist on the correct translation of these passages. However, Winer himself, an anti-trinitarian, admitted that it was not grammatical grounds that led him

to reject the correct rendering of Titus 2:13, but theological ones. In the Winer-Moulton Grammar (as cited by Robertson), page 162, Winer said, "Considerations derived from Paul's system of doctrine lead me to believe that σωτήρ is not a second predicate, coordinate with θεοῦ, Christ being first called μέγας θεός, and then σωτήρ." However, Robertson put it well when he said, "Sharp stands vindicated after all the dust has settled. We must let these passages mean what they want to mean regardless of our theories about the theology of the writers."³⁰

THE MIGHTY GOD

Long before the blessed night of the Incarnation, Isaiah was led by the Spirit of God to utter these words:

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

As this prophecy was originally given, it had a particular and immediate application in Isaiah's day. But we know that its true fulfillment went far beyond the days of Isaiah. Christians have always seen this passage applying to the Lord Jesus Christ. There are a number of reasons why this is true. Isaiah says a "child" will be "born" to us. Both terms are the normal words for the natural birth of children. But when Isaiah says a "son will be given to us," he uses the literal word for "given." One cannot help but think of the fact that the one born in Bethlehem was truly a child, *born* as children are born (that is to say, truly man, truly flesh), but was also the Son, given to us so as to redeem us.

The passage is definitely Messianic, referring to the coming Messiah and His rule and reign (v. 7). But before speaking of what the Messiah will *do*, the passage tells us who the Messiah will *be*. Here we have a string of descriptive names, all of which are filled with high meaning. We must focus, however, upon that name that indicates the

deity of the coming One, that being the name *El gibbor*, "Mighty God."³¹

Very few deny that this phrase is being used of the Messiah, the Son of God. Instead, two routes are taken to avoid the impact of the description. Some say that the phrase simply means "Mighty Hero" or something along these lines, drawing from the use of the Hebrew term *gibbor* in other contexts. Others are willing to allow the normal translation to stand, "Mighty God," but will quickly say, "Yes, He is a mighty God, but He is not the *Almighty God*." This is the normal response given by Jehovah's Witnesses when faced with this passage.

Apart from the problem introduced by having two "true" Gods, all of these attempted ways around the force of the verse run smack dab into a brick wall provided by Isaiah himself. F. Delitzsch put it this way:

But all these renderings, and others of a similar kind, founder, without needing any further refutation, on ch. x. 21, where He, to whom the remnant of Israel will turn with penitence, is called *El gibbor* (the mighty God). There is no reason why we should take *El* in this name of the Messiah in any other sense than in *Immanuel*; not to mention the fact that *El* in Isaiah is always a name of God, and that the prophet was ever strongly conscious of the antithesis between *El* and *âdâm* [i.e., between God and man], as ch. xxxi. 3 (cf. Hos. xi. 9) clearly shows. And finally, *El gibbor* was a traditional name of God, which occurs as early as Deut. x. 17, cf. Jer. xxxii. 18, Neh. ix. 32, Ps. xxiv. 8, etc. The name *gibbor* is used here as an adjective, like *shaddai* in *El shaddai*. The Messiah, then, is here designated "mighty God." Undoubtedly this appears to go beyond the limits of the Old Testament horizon; but what if it should go beyond them? It stands written once for all, just as in Jer. xxiii. 6 *Jehovah Zidkenu* (Jehovah our Righteousness) is also used as a name of the Messiah. . . . Still we must not go too far. If we look at the spirit of the prophecy, the mystery of the incarnation of God is unquestionably indicated in such statements as these. But if we look at the consciousness of the prophet himself, nothing further was involved than this, that the Messiah would be

the image of God as not other man ever had been.³²

The use, then, of *El gibbor* of Yahweh in Isaiah 10:21, a scant chapter later, makes the attempted excuse that the phrase indicates an inferiority and does not indicate true deity untenable. The Incarnate One will be the Mighty God, truly, Immanuel, God with us.

THE CHURCH OF GOD

"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

As Paul traveled to Jerusalem, sure of the chains and imprisonment awaiting him there, he called the elders of the church at Ephesus to meet him along the seashore. There he exhorted them to remain faithful to the cause of Christ. He strongly impressed upon them the need to watch over the flock, recognizing that it was the Holy Spirit himself who had placed them in that position of leadership. Then Paul described the church they were to shepherd as that which He "purchased with His own blood." The phrase has prompted a large amount of discussion,³³ and, of course, controversy. Here are the two major issues in looking at this passage:

- (1) The passage contains an important "textual variation" in the Greek manuscripts.³⁴ Many manuscripts read "the church of the Lord" rather than "the church of God."³⁵
- (2) There is great debate over whether the last phrase should be translated "His own blood" or, as it is rendered in other translations, "blood of His own Son" (so NRSV, NJB).

As a result, we cannot, with certainty, insist that this passage is a reference to the deity of Christ. It can be understood in the following ways:

- (1) The passage is, in fact, a reference to the deity of Christ, and the phrase "with His own blood" would refer directly to the term "God," making Jesus God.

- (2) The passage is actually a Trinitarian passage, with all three divine Persons being mentioned: the Holy Spirit (who sets apart the overseers for their duties in the church), God the Father ("the church of God"), and Jesus Christ ("the blood of His own," or "His own Son").
- (3) If we read the passage as "church of the Lord," the phrase "with His own blood" would naturally refer to the blood of Christ.

I believe the evidence favors the second choice, though certainly the first choice remains a valid possibility. But in light of the possibilities, one cannot be dogmatic on the passage.

THE TRUE GOD AND ETERNAL LIFE

The same must be said regarding an inability to be dogmatic concerning the last passage we will examine, where the specific word "God" may be used of Christ, that being 1 John 5:20:

And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

Two possible understandings are easily seen: the phrase "the true God and eternal life" can refer, logically and grammatically, to *either* the Father ("Him who is true") *or* to Jesus Christ. The demonstrative pronoun "this one" normally refers to the closest antecedent, in this case, "Jesus Christ." But one can even argue that "His Son Jesus Christ" would make the "His" (i.e., the Father) the antecedent. In either case, we cannot say with absolute certainty what the antecedent is, nor, really, do we have to be overly concerned to know. Why? The relationship between the Father and the Son in John's writings is so close, so intimate, and so perfect, that in reality, the description "the true God and eternal life" can be used of *either one* or *both*. Think about it: Jesus said that it is eternal life to know the Father *and* to know the One sent by the Father, Jesus Christ (John 17:3). It is not eternal life, in John's theology, to know the Father *without the Son*. He had just written these words:

The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. (1 John 5:10-12)

So to have eternal life, one must have *both* the Father and the Son (cf. 1 John 2:23!). Thus, we might well be completely missing the point in trying to find out whether it is the Father *or* the Son who is being referred to in 1 John 5:20. There is a third possibility that has the added advantage of explaining why John would allow the phrase to be ambiguous. He may well have done so on purpose, for the phrase may need to be understood as describing *both* the Father and the Son, for to know *them* is to have eternal life. Given the established fact that John has already referred to Jesus as God (John 1:1, 20:28), we should not be surprised to find such a usage in 1 John.

OTHER TESTIMONIES TO HIS DEITY

There are literally hundreds—no, thousands—of passages that testify to the deity of Christ once we understand that no creature could possibly do or say the things that the Lord Jesus did and said. And we certainly cannot catalog them in this brief work. Instead, I would like to focus upon just a few more passages that, while not using the term “God” of Jesus, communicate the very same idea but in different terms.

When Paul wrote to the Colossians, he emphasized over and over again the supremacy of Jesus Christ. I again remind my fellow believers that the descriptions of our Lord found throughout the New Testament defy any attempted application to a mere³⁶ creature. Only true deity can be described as our Lord is. This is especially true in Paul’s description of Christ to the Colossians as the one in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3). Paul then makes Jesus Christ the standard of all human knowledge and thought:

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. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form. (Colossians 2:8-9)

Why is Christ the standard? Why is He worthy to be the benchmark by which everything else is to be measured? Because all the "fullness of Deity" dwells in Him. Each word is full of meaning. When we read of the "fullness of Deity," we find here a claim to the deity of Christ that is, in some respects, stronger than if Paul had used the very word "God" of the Lord in this passage. Why? Because the word itself is very strong. The *King James Version* renders it "godhead," which is not only ambiguous, but since the KJV elsewhere renders other *less strong* terms by the same word (e.g., Romans 1:20), it can be quite confusing. The Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker lexicon renders the word "deity, divinity, used as an abstract noun for θεός."³⁷ Thayer's lexicon says, "deity, i.e. the state of being God, Godhead: Col. ii. 9."³⁸ Dr. Thayer is here giving us the words of Dr. Grimm. However, he then goes on to provide some important information on his own:

[SYN. θεότης, θειότης; θεότη. *deity* differs from θειότη. *divinity*, as essence differs from quality or attribute]

What does this mean? Basically, this lexical source is indicating that the word we have at Colossians 2:9 is different from the weaker term used at Romans 1:20. The term Paul uses here of Christ refers to the very *essence* of deity rather than a mere quality or attribute.³⁹ Thayer notes as one of his sources the work of Richard Trench on synonyms in the New Testament. Trench said of these two terms:

... yet they must not be regarded as identical in meaning, nor even as two different forms of the same word, which in process of time have separated off from one another, and acquired different shades of significance. On the contrary, there is a real distinction between them, and one which grounds itself on their different derivations; θεότης being from Θεός, and θειότης not from τὸ θεῖον,

which is nearly though not quite equivalent to Θεός, but from the adjective θεῖος . . . But in the second passage (Col. ii. 9) St. Paul is declaring that in the Son there dwells all the fulness of absolute Godhead; they were no mere rays of divine glory which gilded Him, lighting up his person for a season and with a splendour not his own; but He was, and is, absolute and perfect God; and the Apostle uses θεότης to express this essential and personal Godhead of the Son.⁴⁰

This is why B. B. Warfield hit it on the head when he said of this passage, "that is to say, the very Deity of God, that which makes God God, in all its completeness, has its permanent home in Our Lord, and that in a 'bodily fashion,' that is, it is in Him clothed with a body."⁴¹

ALPHA AND OMEGA

In the book of Revelation we read the following passages:

BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Revelation 1:7-8).

When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades" (Revelation 1:17-18).

"Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Revelation 22:12-13).

Christians have used the title "Alpha and Omega" of the Lord Jesus from the very beginning. Alpha (A) was the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and Omega (Ω) was the last. It would be the same as saying "the A and the Z" in the English language. It carries the same meaning

as "first and last"⁴² and "beginning and end."⁴³

Is Jesus identified as the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end? Certainly He is. Revelation 22:12 speaks of the coming of Christ and continues directly into verse 13. There is no reason, grammatical or otherwise, to insert a break here and separate verse 13 from verse 12.⁴⁴ This chapter ends with the words "Come, Lord Jesus." There is no reference to the "coming" of the Father, and the attempts to find such a reference are feeble at best.⁴⁵ Logically, if Jesus is the Alpha and Omega in 22:13, He is likewise everywhere else, for there can be only one first and last, only one beginning and end. Does this exclude the Father? Of course not. Since Jehovah is the first and the last (Isaiah 41:4), and each of the divine Persons is likewise identified as Yahweh (see chapter 9), the phrase "Alpha and Omega" would apply equally to the Father, to the Son, or to the Spirit.

EQUAL WITH GOD

When Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath, a controversy ensued that sheds light on the deity of Christ:

For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working." For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless *it is* something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner" (John 5:16-19).

Jesus healed on the Sabbath. The Jews objected to this, alleging He was breaking God's law. Jesus' response is often missed in the rush to get to the phrase, "making Himself equal with God." The Jews took great offense when He said that His Father was working till then, and He himself was working. The reason they were so upset is that they had a belief that Yahweh "broke" the Sabbath. That is, Yahweh kept

the world spinning in its orbit, kept the sun shining or the rain falling, even on the Sabbath day. Thus, in one sense, God was above the Sabbath law because He continued to "work" in maintaining the universe. You can see, then, why Jesus' words offended them. He claimed the same right for himself! They are enraged that by calling God "Father" in a way that was unique and special to himself, He was making himself equal with God. They knew that to be *the* Son of God was to be deity. The son is always like the father, and if Jesus is the Son of the Father in a special and unique way, He must be deity.

Now, many are confused by the discourse that follows, for in it Jesus says that "the Son can do nothing of Himself." All through the discourse the dependence of the Son upon the Father is stressed. Many use this to argue against the deity of Christ. Yet, in reality, just the opposite is true. The Son of God is not here repudiating the allegation of His equality with the Father. Instead, He is *expanding* upon it, and in the process correcting it. That is, He is making sure that no one misunderstands what it means for Him to be equal with the Father. How does He do this?

First, the Jews, while rightly sensing the exalted nature of the Lord's claim, misunderstand the claim and phrase in the context of *competition* between the Father and the Son. That is, the Jews use a term of the Son that is technically incorrect—it speaks of an equality of *persons*, which would confuse the distinction that exists between the Father and the Son.⁴⁶ Rather than using the term in the way Paul does when speaking of the equality the Son had with the Father in Philip-
pians 2:6, they use the term in a different form. Jesus corrects their misapprehension in the following verses by carefully distinguishing Himself from the Father, while maintaining the truth of the claim He has made in verse 17.

Secondly, Jesus makes it clear in the following discourse that there is no competition between the Father and the Son. There are no differences of opinion, no disagreements to be ironed out. The Son is not a "loose cannon" off on His own, doing His own thing. No, monotheism and the singular glory of God is not in any danger by the coming of the Son in human flesh. Instead, the Son's actions are in *perfect*

accord with the Father, in *everything*. And again, no mere creature could possibly utter such words. Jesus did indeed claim equality with God by healing on the Sabbath—and in the rest of the chapter He makes sure that we recognize that equality with God does not mean He and the Father are at odds. Instead, He and the Father are “one” (John 10:30) in all things.

TWO FINAL TESTIMONIES TO THE DEITY OF CHRIST

As I indicated at the outset, it is not my purpose to provide an exhaustive apologetic for the doctrine of the Trinity. Instead, I have attempted to provide helpful information along the way that is designed to assist those who so love this truth about God’s nature that they have to tell others about it! One such hopefully helpful bit of information is found in looking at two passages that are often cited *against* the deity of Christ, but which, in fact, when properly understood, testify *to* the deity of Christ. These passages have the added advantage of removing from the hands of the detractors of the Trinity some of their “favorite” texts, and causing them to reconsider what they have been taught.

As the Lord Jesus walked with His disciples on the night of His betrayal, He taught them many deep truths about himself, the Father, and the soon coming Spirit. He told them that He was going to be leaving them and returning to the presence of the Father. In the midst of this discourse, Jesus says,

“You heard that I said to you, ‘I go away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28).

Probably no passage comes to the lips of the person who denies the deity of Christ faster than John 14:28. Yet if we will but consider the passage, and avoid embracing surface-level uses of it, we will find that it does not lead us to deny the deity of Christ, but rather to embrace it.

Most of the time we see this passage only partially quoted. The last few words are recited as if they by themselves settled all question of

the deity of Christ. "The Father is greater than I." Doesn't that say it all? No one is greater than God; therefore, Jesus can't possibly be God if, in fact, there is anyone greater than Him. How could it get any simpler than that? But such an argument ignores what Jesus himself is saying. Why does He refer to the Father as being greater than He is? He does so because He is reproaching the disciples for their selfishness. He had told them that He was going back to the presence of the Father. If they truly loved Him (and were not simply thinking about themselves), this announcement would have caused them to rejoice. Why? Because the Father is greater than the Son.

Now immediately we can see what the term "greater" means. If it meant "better" as in "a higher type of being," these words would have no meaning. Why would the disciples rejoice because Jesus was going to see a being who is greater than He? Why would that cause rejoicing? But the term does not refer to "better" but "greater" as in *positionally* greater. The Son was returning back to the place He had with the Father before the world was (John 17:5, see below). He would no longer be walking the dusty roads of Galilee, surrounded by sin and sickness and misery. He would no longer be the subject of attack and ridicule by legions of scribes and Pharisees. Instead, He would be at the right hand of the Father in heaven itself. So we see that the term "greater" speaks to the position of the Father in heaven over against the position of the Son on earth. The Son had voluntarily (Philippians 2:6) laid aside His divine prerogatives and *humbled* himself by entering into human flesh. He would soon be leaving this *humbled* position and returning to His position of *glory*. If the disciples had been thinking of the ramifications of Jesus' words, they would have rejoiced that He was going to such a place. Instead, they were focused upon themselves and their own needs, not upon the glorification of their Lord.

So we can see that rather than denying the deity of Christ, John 14:28 implies it, for the position into which the Son was returning is a position fit only for deity, not for mere creatures. This is brought out plainly in the words of Jesus in John 17 and His prayer to the Father:

"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true

God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:3-5).

Amazingly, even this passage is sometimes cited against the truth of the Trinity. How can a passage that connects eternal life itself with knowledge of *both* the Father and the Son, and that speaks of the Son sharing the very glory of the Father in eternity past (cf. Isaiah 48:11), be used *against* the deity of Christ? Again, it requires one to make a couple of false assumptions right at the start. First, one must assume unitarianism and refuse to see that "God" can refer either to the person of the Father, or can be used more generically of the godhead *en toto*. Secondly, one must assume that if there is any difference between the Father and the Son, then the Son is not truly deity, the old "*difference in function does not indicate inferiority of nature*" issue. So the argument is, "Jesus said the Father was the only true God. Hence, Jesus is not God and is an inferior creature." Yet what Jesus said was that to have eternal life one must know *both* the one true God *and* Jesus Christ, who was sent by the Father. This is exactly what we read in 1 John, where having eternal life involves knowing *both* the Father and the Son.

But what of the phrase "the only true God"? Doesn't this mean that Jesus isn't God? Of course not. How else would Jesus make mention of the truth of monotheism? Since He is not a separate *God* from the Father (He is a separate person, sharing the one Being that is God), how could His confession of the deity of the Father be taken as a denial of His own deity? As the perfect God-man, we again encounter the question of how the Incarnate One would behave and relate to the Persons who did not enter into human existence (i.e., the Father and the Spirit), just as we discussed above in reference to John 20:17. Would Jesus deny the deity of the Father? Would He say that the Father is *not* the only true God? What is often missed by those who present John 17:3 as an argument against the deity of Christ is that they have only two options as to what the passage is saying, if, in fact, it is not

supporting the deity of Christ. Either (1) Jesus is a *false* god, separate from the Father, or (2) Jesus would have to make some statement supporting polytheism, like "You are one of a couple of true Gods" or some other such absurd statement. Instead, Jesus speaks the truth: There is only one true God. And as the God-Man, He prayed to the one true God, just as we would expect.

Having seen the misuse of the passage, we can then see how it is directly relevant to John 14:28, in that it describes the exalted position the Son had before the Incarnation, sharing the very glory of the Father. It is no surprise to recall that John himself had insisted that when Isaiah saw the glory of Jehovah, Isaiah was, in fact, seeing the glory of Christ and was speaking about Him (John 12:39-41, see chapter 9). Therefore, we can easily understand that the Father was, during the entire time of the Incarnation, positionally *greater* than the Son, who voluntarily subjected himself to the Father, taking a subordinate position, doing the Father's will, all to fulfill the eternal covenant of redemption.

We close by looking at our final passage, which has again been presented as if it denies the deity of Christ, when in reality it is beyond understanding outside of that truth:

Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him. (1 Corinthians 8:4-6)

Here some wish us to believe that, just like in John 17:3, Paul's use of the phrase "one God, the Father" excludes Jesus from the realm of deity. Of course, we immediately recognize that there is a real problem here: that's not all Paul says. If "one God, the Father" is meant to be taken exclusively, then does it not follow that "one Lord, Jesus Christ" also excludes the Father from the realm of Lordship? When we see the

distinctive use of the terms "God" and "Lord," we should realize that the Scriptures are not here introducing a competition or contest between the two. God is just as much Lord as the Lord is God. The two terms are merely being used to describe different Persons in their relationship to one another. They are not being used to say that God is more "Lord" than the Lord is "God." But beyond this, B. B. Warfield very accurately sums up the beautiful testimony of this passage of sacred Scripture:

In the very act of asserting his monotheism Paul takes our Lord up into this unique Godhead. "There is no God but one," he roundly asserts, and then illustrates and proves this assertion by remarking that the heathen may have "gods many, and lords many," but "to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him" (I Cor. vii. 6). Obviously, this "one God, the Father," and "one Lord, Jesus Christ," are embraced together in the one God who alone is. Paul's conception of the one God, whom alone he worships, includes, in other words, a recognition that within the unity of His being, there exists such a distinction of Persons as is given us in the "one God, the Father" and the "one Lord, Jesus Christ."⁴⁷