

PAUL'S THEOLOGY

Lesson 7

Jesus – Fully God

A few weeks ago, I sat with four of our pastors around some semi-healthy Italian food and discussed the upcoming classes on Paul's theology of Jesus the Messiah. Part of the discussion centered on my need for a substitute teacher while Becky and I took the girls to visit our daughter studying in Argentina. I needed a substitute for today!

During our discussions, Scott Riling, our Missions Pastor, told us about visiting with a man after Wednesday night services. This gentleman, who had been going to our church for some time, asked Scott if there was anywhere in the Bible that actually said Jesus was God.

Well, as you might have garnered from reading this introduction, not only are there places in the Bible that teach Jesus is God, but some of them are also found in the writings of Paul! What you also may have surmised thus far is that Scott will be teaching in my stead today! (Thank you Scott!)

Even with Scott teaching, I am preparing this written lesson to maintain the flow of where we are in the class, and to keep the internet lessons in written form as well as oral. This lesson will be abbreviated a bit to give Scott room to teach this subject as he sees fit, but I did want to map out a few of my thoughts, especially in light of the home work assignment I gave in last week's class.

You might recall last week's class closed with this challenge:

In 1 Corinthians 8:6, Paul wrote, "Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist." Here, Paul is referencing an Old Testament passage. Which passage is he referencing?

In this lesson, I felt it important to answer the challenge I issued! In doing so, we will understand one of the most significant and profound confessions on the deity of Christ. First, however, we must consider some background information that we may already know, and that is integral in placing Paul's statement into context.

BACKGROUND

In our church history lessons, we have written about the early church's use of the Jewish scriptures, translated into Greek, called the Septuagint.¹ These Jewish scriptures, in Hebrew for Hebrew readers and Greek for most Gentiles, are what we call the Old Testament. They are what Paul referenced in his writing to Timothy that "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching..." (2 Tim. 3:16).

Jews used those scriptures in the Greek in the dispersion (outside Jerusalem) whether the Jews were Christians or not. This means that as Paul wrote to Jews in the Greek-speaking world, he was writing to people who knew their scriptures in the Greek. Relatively few would have had command of the Hebrew language outside of Judea.

We should also add to our background section our knowledge of the Jewish practice related to the *Shema*. *Shema* is the Hebrew word we would translate as an imperative, "Hear." It is the first word in the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear [*shema*], O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." We should note that in English translations, the word "LORD" is written in large and small capital letters rather than simply a capital L and small letters. That is because the English is assigning "LORD" to the Hebrew word spelled "Yhwh," commonly assumed to be pronounced, "Yahweh."²

"Yhwh" was the name God gave Moses at the burning bush encounter. Our English Bibles read:³

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Ex. 3:13-14).

¹ These and other lessons in our series are available for download at www.Biblical-Literacy.com. A good review of the authorities supporting Paul's usage of the Septuagint is found in Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Hendrikson Publishers, Inc. 2007), p. 20ff.

² Actually, a good Jew never pronounced the word itself. As the name of God, it was deemed too holy to even pass through a person's lips.

³ In this and other quotes, we are using the English Standard Version unless noted otherwise.

As with “LORD,” the translators have put “I AM WHO I AM” into large and small capital letters. That is because the actual words in the Hebrew are “Yhwh, Yhwh.”⁴ God gave Moses “Yhwh” as his name. As God’s proper name, Jews would not pronounce “Yhwh.”⁵ So, when a Jew quoted the Shema in Hebrew, he/she would substitute the word “*adonai*” for “Yhwh.” “*adonai*” was the common name for “Lord.” We can tell when it is actually used in the Hebrew, as distinguished from the Hebrew “Yhwh” because “*adonai*” is translated simply “Lord” with lower case letters.⁶

Let us consider the *Shema*. Good Jews, whether Christian or not, would quote this passage several times each day of their lives. Those Jews operating in Hebrew would have “Yhwh” twice in their recitation. “Hear [*shema*] Israel, the LORD [Yhwh] our God, the LORD [Yhwh] is one.” Now, we must consider what Greek speaking Jews would be saying as they spoke or studied this important passage in its Greek translation.

The Greek version of the Old Testament is consistent in translating “Yhwh” as “*kyrios*.” In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, we read Deuteronomy 6:4 as:

Listen, Israel, the Lord [*kyrios*] our God [*Theos*], the Lord [*kyrios*] is one.

In the Greek, *kyrios* (“Lord”) is used as the translation of *Yhwh*! This bears repeating: Yahweh God in the Old Testament is translated, into *kyrios* “Lord” in the Greek. Once we realize this translation, the question of whether Paul ever

⁴ The Hebrew does not have special capitals used for the “y.” Hebrew had no capital letters. We capitalize the “Y” because it is a proper name and because that is the rule in the English with which we write!

⁵ Many times, the Jews would not write it either, substituting an abbreviation “yh.” We see this abbreviation in certain words like “Hallelujah” from the Hebrew “hallelu” meaning “praise” and “jah” the Anglicized “yh” abbreviation of “Yahweh.” Hence, “hallelujah” literally means, “Praise Yahweh” or “Praise the LORD.”

⁶ A good example of this is found in Psalm 110:1 where the ESV reads:

The LORD said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.”

The first “LORD” is “Yhwh;” the second is “*adonai*.”

asserts that Jesus is God disappears. Paul refers to the “Lord Jesus Christ” 60 times in his letters!⁷ Additionally, Paul references Jesus as “Lord” over 150 times.

1 CORINTHIANS 8:6

With this background in mind, let us use our Greek with the passage in 1 Corinthians 8:6:

Yet for us there is one God (*Theos*), the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, **and one Lord** (*Kyrios*), Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Here, Paul has taken the Old Testament confession of Deuteronomy 6:4, the *Shema*, and inserted the phrases orienting the passage to believers (“from whom are all things and for whom we exist” as well as “through whom are all things and through whom we exist”). The rest of the passage, as shown above in bold, echoes the *Shema* in Greek.

At the risk of turning this lesson into a Greek class, let us set out the actual passage. We will transliterate the Greek (put the Greek letters into English) to make it a bit easier to follow:

Septuagint:

<i>kyrios</i>	<i>ho Theos</i>	<i>hemon;</i>	<i>kyrios</i>	<i>eis</i>	<i>estin</i>
the Lord	our God		the Lord	one	is

Now we compare Paul:

<i>hemin</i>	<i>eis</i>	<i>theos</i>	<i>.... kai</i>	<i>eis</i>	<i>kyrios</i>	<i>Iesous</i>	<i>Christos</i>
our (for us)	one	God	and	one	Lord	Jesus	Christ

Lest we get lost in the details, let us put this all together. The Hebrew name for God, *Yahweh*, the most Holy One who called Moses, who led the people from Egypt, who gave the commandments on Sinai, to whom the Psalmists sing, and whom the prophets proclaim – *Yahweh* is in Greek *Kyrios*. Paul uses *kyrios* over and over again as his reference point for Jesus Christ! Paul sees in Jesus, *Yahweh*. In commenting on the many times Paul uses *kyrios* as a title for Jesus that replaces *Yahweh*, Fee puts it nicely:

⁷ Paul’s word order does vary occasionally. He uses the “Lord Jesus Christ” 48 times, “Jesus Christ the Lord” five times, and “Christ Jesus the Lord” another seven times.

Paul can hardly help himself; his own life had been steeped in Scripture from the time of his youth. Once he had encountered the exalted Lord, the sacred text was transformed into a place where the long-awaited Christ could now be found everywhere.⁸

Before we finish with this passage in 1 Corinthians, we should note the way Paul transforms the *Shema* in a bit more detail. Paul keeps the “one-ness” which is the key to the *Shema*’s profession. There is still only “One” divinity for Paul. But the One is divided among two persons, “God [*Theos*] the Father” and the “Lord [*Kyrios*] Jesus Christ.” The One is seen in two – each with a tie to us. The Father is the One “from whom” are all things and “for whom” we exist. The Lord Jesus Christ is the One “through whom” are all things and “through whom” we exist.

This language is consistent with the passages we studied last week about the preexistent Christ. God the Father made all things *through* the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are remiss, even though this is an abbreviated lesson, if we fail to point out that there are many places where Paul echoes and even quotes the Old Testament substituting the Lord [*Kyrios*] Jesus for *Yahweh*.⁹

As F. F. Bruce explained,

“To Paul, however (and to other early Christians), the acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord in the highest sense which that title can bear was far from being the result of a linguistic accident; it was far, too from being but an ex officio designation of the Messiah. It was the most adequate term for expressing what he (and his fellow-believers) had come to understand and appreciate of Jesus’ person and achievement and his present decisive role in the outworking of God’s purpose of blessing for the universe.”¹⁰

⁸ Fee at 23.

⁹ Fee sets out a chart in Appendix B of his book showing those that, in his opinion, are echoes of various Old Testament passages.

¹⁰ F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Eerdmans 1977) at 117.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. “There is one God the Father, from whom are all things” (1 Cor. 8:6).

The Jews had this reinforced in their theology for centuries. It was no less important in the Greek world with its pantheon of gods. There is only one God. He is the Father from whom are all things. There is not any thing at all, in heaven or earth, that is not under his control. That means there is nothing in our lives, nothing we face, nothing that tempts us, that is outside the authority of God our Father.

2. “There is...one Lord, Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 8:6).

There is only one God, but he is both the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Two distinctions in person, although united in substance as the one God (we will insert the Holy Spirit into this discussion in weeks to come!). Jesus is fully God! He was never simply a good man. He was not some human who came under God’s special spell. He is, and always has been, God. When we seek to be like Jesus, we seek to be like God. When we hold up the banner of Christ to a lost world, we hold up the banner of God. Too many people read their scripture blind to the context in which it was written, blind to the life settings and situation into which Paul wrote. But as we study and focus, we see the beauty of God’s divine plan unfold with God at every turn.

3. “Jesus Christ through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor. 8:6).

All things exist through Christ, which raises the question: where do we bend our knee? What do we worship? Not in church, but outside the church. During the week, is there anything we value so highly that we are willing to compromise our beliefs to find or achieve it? Do we value our selves so high that we look out for our “rights” even to the detriment of our witness? God, have mercy on us. May we daily bend our knee before Jesus and acknowledge him as King of Kings, Lord of Lords, fully God, through whom and for whom we exist!