

**Jesus' Relation to YHWH:
Trinity and Christology in Light of Modern Scholarship**

By

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In Partial Fulfillment of

Colin Brown's Systematic Theology 2

Much confusion surrounds the question of how Jesus is related to YHWH, the God of Israel. Questions erupt constantly within Sunday school classes concerning how one God can exist not only *in* but *as* three distinct co-eternal, co-equal persons. More specifically, how can the Father of Jesus be God, Jesus be God, and the Holy Spirit be God yet there not be three God's but only one? Appeal is usually either made to early church councils in which these issues were hashed out and ultimately decided upon, or the question is said to be shrouded in mystery and should be accepted by faith. Both of these answers seem to avoid explanation and neither of them ultimately satisfies our God given rationality. It is my contention that Jesus is not YHWH, the one God of Israel, but the son of YHWH. Evangelical and other biblical scholars have made sweeping strides in recent years, frankly acknowledging the lack of NT evidence for the Trinity, recognizing some of Trinitarianism's pitfalls, and have begun to conceive of Jesus as the human Messiah, the son of the one God of Israel and the world.

Millard Erickson, a mainline, prominent systematic theologian who has written multiple books on the Trinity admits,

This doctrine in many ways presents strange paradoxes...It is a widely disputed doctrine, which has provoked discussion throughout all the centuries of the church's existence. It is held by many with great vehemence and vigor. These advocates are certain they believe the doctrine, and consider it crucial to the Christian faith. Yet many are unsure of the exact meaning of their belief. It was the very first doctrine dealt with systematically by the church, yet it is still one of the most misunderstood and disputed doctrines. Further, *it is not clearly or explicitly taught anywhere in Scripture*, yet it is widely regarded as a central doctrine, indispensable to the Christian faith. In this regard, it goes contrary to what is virtually an axiom [that is, a given, a self evident truth] of biblical doctrine, namely, that there is a direct correlation between the scriptural clarity of a doctrine and its cruciality to the faith and life of the church.¹

¹ Millard J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons, A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 11, Emphasis mine.

If this is not eye opening enough, he goes on to say,

The question, however is this. It is claimed that the doctrine of the Trinity is a very important, crucial, and even basic doctrine. If that is indeed the case, should it not be somewhere more clearly, directly, and explicitly stated in the Bible? If this is the doctrine that especially constitutes Christianity's uniqueness, as over against unitarian monotheism on the one hand, and polytheism on the other hand, how can it be only implied in the biblical revelation? In response to the complaint that a number of portions of the Bible are ambiguous or unclear, we often hear a statement something like, "It is the peripheral matters that are hazy or on which there seem to be conflicting biblical materials. The core beliefs are clearly and unequivocally revealed." This argument would appear to fail us with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity, however. For here is a seemingly crucial matter where the Scriptures do not speak loudly and clearly.

Little direct response can be made to this charge. It is unlikely that any text of Scripture can be shown to teach the doctrine of the Trinity in a clear, direct, and unmistakable fashion.²

Millard Erickson is not alone in his frank candor about the lack of clarity on this matter.³ Here is a sampling of other scholars that are just as candid in their remarks concerning this subject matter:

Reformed scholars Roger Olson and Chris Hill state concerning the Trinity,

Nowhere is it clearly and unequivocally stated in Scripture...⁴

The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology edited by Dr. Colin Brown says,

The NT does not contain the developed doctrine of the Trinity. "The Bible lacks the express declaration that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are of equal essence and therefore in an equal sense God himself. And the other express declaration is also lacking, that God is God thus and only thus, i.e. as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These two express declarations, which go beyond the witness of the Bible, are the twofold content of the Church doctrine of the Trinity."⁵

The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology edited by Walter Elwell states,

² Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, 108-109

³ I am amazed that after such admissions, Millard Erickson continues to profess Trinitarianism.

⁴ Roger E. Olson and Christopher A. Hall, *The Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 1.

⁵ J. Schneider, "God, Gods, Emmanuel" *NIDNTT* 2:84.

In the NT there is no explicit statement of the doctrine...⁶

Lastly, Reformed scholar Shirley Guthrie, Professor of Systematic Theology at Columbia Theological Seminary states forthrightly,

The Bible does not teach the doctrine of the Trinity. Neither the word “trinity” itself nor such language as “one-in-three,” “three-in-one,” one “essence” (or “substance”), and three “persons” is biblical language. The language of the doctrine is the language of the ancient church taken from classical Greek philosophy...The doctrine of the Trinity is not found in the Bible...⁷

Again, this is only a sampling and scores of others could be quoted.⁸

Ontology, Metaphysics, and Functional Christology

One of the major problems for Trinitarian theology is that it relies heavily on a metaphysical understanding of the person of Jesus. It attempts to understand and grasp the nature of Jesus, his essence, that is, the substance he is made out of. Ralph P. Martin says that there is a growing consensus⁹ that holds that the NT contains no evidence for metaphysical language in Christology.¹⁰ He says, “The modern emphasis rather is upon a functional Christology which is set within the frame work of the Redeemer’s saving acts.”¹¹ If this shift from ontological to functional Christology is proper, then the NT does not even address the Greek philosophical questions that later church councils and Christological debates raged over. This means that Arius and Athanasius were far outside the questions posed and

⁶ G.W. Bromiley, “Trinity,” EDT, 1112.

⁷ Shirley C. Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, Revised Edition (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 76-80.

⁸ Respected systematic theologian Charles Ryrie says, “[T]he New Testament contains no explicit statement of the doctrine of the triunity of God (since ‘these three are one’ in 1 John 5:7 is apparently not a part of the genuine text of Scripture)...” *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1999), 60. These kinds of statements are not uncommon. He says earlier in the same work, “Furthermore, this is a doctrine that is not explicit in the New Testament even though it is often said that it is implicit in the Old and explicit in the New. But explicit means ‘characterized by full, clear expression,’ an adjective hard to apply to this doctrine” Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 58. C.M. Lacugna, an eminent Roman Catholic scholar states, “The doctrine of the Trinity as such is not revealed in either the OT or the NT” *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995), 1271.

⁹ Oscar Cullman and Hans Kung are leading representatives of this shift from metaphysical to functional Christology. See Douglas McCready, *He Came Down From Heaven: The Preexistence of Christ and the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 53.

¹⁰ See McCready, *He Came Down From Heaven*, 53.

¹¹ Ralph P. Martin, *Carmen Christi*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 106.

addressed within the NT itself. Debating whether Jesus was of a *similar* or of the *same nature* with God was not in the mind of the authors of our texts. NT writers simply do not address these speculative questions. Douglas McCready mentions Hans Kung's perspective that the first big paradigm shift within Christianity occurred when these conjectural Hellenistic questions about the nature of God and of Jesus replaced the cross and resurrection as the center of Christian thought.¹²

How High is too High?

There is no doubt that the NT is filled high Christological statements, but just how high? Do the NT documents intend to communicate that Jesus was actually YHWH, the one God of Israel, or even one person of three which can equally be considered to be the one God of Israel? From a linguistic standpoint this is highly unlikely, for Jesus speaks about the *one* God as someone other than himself, that is, in the third person. Jesus said,

If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the *one* who glorifies me. Though you do not know *him*, I know *him*. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know *him* and keep *his* word (John 8:54-5 NIV Emphasis mine).

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the *one* who sent him (John 3:16), anointed him (Acts 10:38), worked miracles through him (Acts 2:22), raised him from the dead (Acts 2:24), exalted him (Acts 2:32), and made him David's lord, the Messiah (Acts 2:36). In the book of Acts this is seen over and over again. Luke records Peter saying, "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified *his* servant Jesus" (Acts 3:13 NIV Emphasis mine).

Follow the Pronouns

Grammatically speaking, there are 20,000 plus singular personal pronouns and verbs referring to God in the Hebrew Bible. There are roughly 11,000 singular personal pronouns alone. Texts such as the following quotation from Hosea abound in Scripture. Follow the pronouns.

¹² See, McCready, *He Came Down From Heaven*, 49.

How can *I* give you up Ephraim? How can *I* hand you over, Israel? How can *I* treat you like Admah? How can *I* make you like Zeboïim? *My* heart is changed within *me*; all *my* compassion is aroused. *I* will not carry out *my* fierce anger, not will *I* turn and devastate Ephraim. For *I* am God, and not man – the Holy One among you. *I* will not come in wrath (11:8-9 NIV Emphasis mine).

These singular pronouns are italicized for the reader to understand that one individual, a single person; one God feels a deep and overwhelming love for Israel.

Furthermore, The word God occurs some 12,000 times in the Scriptures, including *YHWH* 6,800 times, *Elohim*¹³ 3,500 times, and *theos* 1,300 times. This is supremely significant in this discussion. If virtually all 12,000 refer to only *one* person, and none of them equates God with the number 3, then it must be asked, who are these names and titles are referring to? By reading the NT, it becomes abundantly clear that the *one* God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the *one* God and Father of Jesus.

Upon examining the NT usage of *o' theos*, Murray Harris, who wrote a book attempting to substantiate a handful of references of *'o theos* to Jesus comes to the same conclusion. He writes,

[F]or the author of Hebrews (as for all NT writers, one may suggest) 'the God of our fathers,' Yahweh, was no other than 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' (compare Acts 2:30 and 2:33; 3:13 and 3:18; 3:25 and 3:26; note also 5:30). Such a conclusion is entirely consistent with the regular NT usage of *'o theos*. It would be inappropriate for *Adonai*, or *Elohim* ever to refer to the Trinity in the OT when in the

¹³ This statistic includes the *El*. Some have seen a plurality of persons the word *Elohim*. If it is plural then it should be translated as "gods," which at times is translated as such, but when followed with a singular verb, it should be translated as "god/God" and likely is plural for emphasis and stress. Norman Geisler, a conservative scholar says,

[I]t is true that the very word for God in the Old Testament (*elohim*) is plural in form; indeed, it can be translated 'gods' (see Ps. 82:6). However, when used of God, it is plural grammatically, not ontologically. It is plural in literary form, but not in actual reality. The many verses (see above) that use this form for God but that declare He is absolutely one are proof that this form is not intended to indicate a plurality of gods. (Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology Vol. 2 God & Creation* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2003), 277)

Charles Ryrie makes a similar remark, "We have already suggested that the plural name for God, *Elohim*, denotes God's unlimited greatness and supremacy. To conclude plurality of persons from the name itself is dubious" (Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 58). Smith's Bible Dictionary confirms that scholarship has moved drastically in the direction both Geisler and Ryrie mention, "The fanciful idea that it referred to the *trinity of persons* in the Godhead hardly finds now a supporter among scholars. It is either what grammarians call *the plural of majesty*, or it denotes the *fullness* of divine strength, the *sum of the powers* displayed by God" (William Smith, "God," *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, New York: Nelson, 220).

NT *theos* regularly refers to the Father alone and apparently never to the Trinity¹⁴

This is an extremely substantial point. There is a contextual difference between the one God of Israel who is called God thousands and thousands of times and all others that are referred to as God one or two times. Moses is called God (Exod 7:1), the judges of Israel are called God(s) (Ex 21:6; 22:8, Ps 82:6), the king of Israel is called God (Ps 45:6), and even Satan is referred to as God (2 Cor 4:4). Once it is recognized that Jesus is called God only 2 times for certain and 8 times at most,¹⁵ it is clearly demonstrated that Jesus should be understood as God in a secondary sense, something more akin to a representative of God, functioning as God's agent in a similar manner, though to a greater degree than the judges and kings of times past. Jesus seems to make this very point when accused of making himself out to be God or a god. His argument is that if the unrighteous judges of Israel could be called gods, how much more could the righteous king of Israel, God's son¹⁶ (John 10:31-39).

Category Confusion Concerning Christ

If Jesus is not YHWH, the one God of Israel, who is he? Evangelistic tracts, books, preachers and apologists continuously ask the question, "Who is Jesus Christ?" From a Second Temple Period Jewish vantage point, there is something fundamentally wrong with

¹⁴ Murray Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 47.

¹⁵ Other than Hebrews 1:8 and John 20:28, each of the other alleged occurrences of *'o theos* being applied to Jesus are highly suspect. Texts like Romans 9:5 and Titus 2:13 are grammatically ambiguous and have multiple interpretive options. Even if these texts do apply to Jesus, there is an overwhelming contextual difference compared to the some 1,300 that are applied to God, his Father.

¹⁶ This would be in keeping with God's promise to David that one of his sons would possess an everlasting kingdom. God says of this son, "I will be his father, and he will be my son" (2 Sam 7:14 NIV). Jesus probably considers himself God's son in at least this sense. Also, Psalm 2, an enthronement Psalm that was read to the kings of Israel on the day of their coronation presents God decreeing, "You are my son; today I have become your Father" (vs. 7 NIV). In other words, a potential king was anointed and declared to be king, and it was at that moment, that very day, "today" that they became God's son. At one moment the individual was not God's son, and the next moment, he was. Endless speculation concerning the concept of the "eternal generation" of the son could be avoided if this non-metaphysical, historical, contextual understanding was taken seriously. Adam Clarke a Methodist expositor, maybe overstating the case says, "Here, I trust, I may be permitted to say, with all due respect for those who differ from me, that the doctrine of the eternal sonship of Christ is in my opinion anti-scriptural and highly dangerous" (Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 854). Charles Ryrie also lends credibility to a non-ontological meaning of Ps 2:7, "I agree with Buswell that generation is not an exegetically based doctrine...Eternal generation should not be based on Psalm 2:7" (Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 62).

the question. In fact, these words cannot be found on the lips of any Palestinian Jew of antiquity, nor would they have been understood if they ever were. Even though this question sounds just like what Jesus asked his disciples in Cesarea Philippi, it is not. The question that Jesus posed was, “Who do you say that I am?” (Matt 16:15 NIV). The answer which was so powerful that it needed to be kept a secret (Matt 16:20), so incredible that it would have caused people to gasp, then gulp, and so inflammatory that it had the potential to lead to a mass uprising was that Jesus was the *Christ*, the Son of the living God (Matt 16:16). If we were to ask Peter, “Who is Jesus,” he would have said that Jesus *is* the *Christ*, making the question “Who is Jesus Christ?” virtually absurd, only making sense if Jesus was the son of Mary and Joseph Christ. The idea and claim that Jesus is the Christ/Messiah was such a grandiose, jaw dropping, bold affirmation that when Peter said these words, he was told by Jesus that it must have been a revelation from God (Matt 16:17, 20).

It seems that as 21st century, Western, American Gentiles, far removed from the life and times of Jesus, the word Christ, or Messiah has lost its meaning, thus we can ask who is Jesus Christ without blinking an eye. We live in a country that is governed by presidents, not kings. We are basically unfamiliar with kings, priests, and prophets in general and even more the idea of oil being poured over their heads preparing them for a specific role in the purposes of God. The concept of an anointed Davidic king leading Israel from socio-political oppression is not as exhilarating for us as it was for Jews living under Gentile oppression. Since many of us live in relative peace and prosperity, were not raised in the synagogue, praying the *Shema* three times a day, observing the Sabbath, eating only kosher foods, and speculating about the son of man figure as described in Daniel, it is hard to appreciate just how Jewish and revolutionary it would have been to consider anyone the Messiah. In fact, there is no evidence that any Jew before Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. Even though the idea of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah: the anointed prophet, priest, and king of Israel is the central theme and overwhelming emphasis of our NT documents, sadly, in some circles, if Jesus is not YHWH, the one God of Israel, then he is perceived to be nothing at all. This seems to be a false dichotomy, really lacking appreciation of an exalted Messianic category and concept altogether. Many have been gullible to the apologetic which

claims that Jesus was either mad, bad, or God. That is, either Jesus is everything, the God of the universe, or not worth our time and attention.¹⁷

The “David’s Lord” Conundrum

Possibly the most quoted and alluded to text from the Hebrew Bible in the NT is Psalm 110:1.¹⁸ Few have grasped the Christological significance of the text, largely because of previous “faith commitments,” unchallenged presuppositions, or misleading commentary.¹⁹ The text reads as follows, “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’” (Ps 110:1 NIV). Significantly, the word “LORD” is translated from the Hebrew tetragrammaton YHWH, the untranslatable, exclusive personal name of the one God of Israel. Alternatively the word “my Lord” is translated from *Adoni*, a title of respect and reverence used of human dignitaries²⁰ 195 times, meaning master, owner, and lord, but never use of the one God of Israel, YHWH. Interestingly enough, Jesus is placed firmly in the category of *adoni*, that is “my Lord,” (never used of God) and not, YHWH (only used of God²¹). Peter, after quoting this exact text states, “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God (YHWH) has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both *Lord* and Christ” (Acts 3:36).

Now that these distinctions have been made and a category for Jesus as Lord and Messiah has been derived from the Scriptures themselves, it is possible to appreciate and comprehend the many unitary monotheistic creeds of the NT.

For there is one *God* and one mediator between God and men, the *man* Christ Jesus (1 Tim 2:5 NIV Emphasis mine).

¹⁷ Many times it is argued that we have sinned against an infinite God and therefore deserve an infinite penalty. Since only an infinite God could pay such a punishment, God alone had to pay the price. Therefore, Jesus must have been God in order to satisfy the demand. This argument is so common and often used with such force that one would think that it is straight out of the book of Hebrews. However, it was first used by Anselm in the Middle Ages (1003-1109 CE), and finds no Scriptural support.

¹⁸ It is quoted or alluded to about 30 times. For a few examples, see the following (Matt 22:43-45; Mk 12:36-37; Lk 20:42-44; Acts 2:34-35).

¹⁹ I am primarily thinking of *The Treasury of David* by Charles H. Spurgeon who uses this text as evidence that Jesus is YHWH.

²⁰ It is also used of angels just a handful of times.

²¹ YHWH at times has placed his name in special messengers, who then act and speak as YHWH, but are chosen representatives of YHWH (Ex 23:21).

There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called - one *Lord*, one faith, one baptism, one *God* and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Eph 4:5-6 NIV Emphasis mine).

[Y]et for us there is but one *God*, the Father...and there is but one *Lord*, Jesus Christ...(1 Cor 8:6 NIV Emphasis mine).

Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one *God*...(Rom 3:29 NIV Emphasis mine).

God is [only] one person (Gal 3:20 AMPLIFIED Emphasis mine).

You believe that there is one *God*. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder (Jas 2:19 NIV Emphasis mine).

The NT virtually assumes that God is one individual, one mind, one heart, one will, one person, yet it is so crucial to Hebrew theology and identity that it is expressly stated over and over again in the NT. It is clear from these creedal passages, that the monotheism²² carried over from the Hebrew Bible is exclusively in reference to YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the same God who is the God and Father of Jesus. A human Jesus, faithful to the same God as Moses, David and the prophets is easily overlooked when he is conceived as one of three members within a Godhead. Jesus is not typically conceived as one who has YHWH as his God and Father even though Paul and Peter begin epistles with this type of language (Eph 1:3; Col 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3). With traditional lenses, it is easy to skip right over the implications of Jesus telling Mary who is clinging to him after his resurrection, “I am now ascending to *my Father* and your Father, *my God* and your God” (John 20:17 NEB Emphasis mine). Furthermore, Jesus is depicted in the book of Revelation as saying, “Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of *my God*. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of *my God* and the name of the city of *my God*, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from *my God*” (3:12 NIV Emphasis mine). These are astounding texts which assume that YHWH is the God of Jesus.

²² It could be argued that monotheism was a development from henotheism. In other words, it seems that in the early stages of Israel’s history there was thought to be many gods, but YHWH was the supreme God whom was to be worshiped exclusively as God. This later morphed into what today is called monotheism, or belief in only one true God.

An Argument from History

If there is still doubt concerning Jesus' relationship to YHWH, it should be noted that if the man Jesus taught or proclaimed at some point that he was actually YHWH himself, the one of God of Israel, this would have caused utter confusion and would have made no sense.

Raymond Brown says,

The question concerns Jesus, a Galilean Jew of the first third of the first century, for whom "God" would have a meaning specified by his background and the theological language of the time. By way of simplification (and perhaps oversimplification) let me say that I think that by a Jew of that period 'God' would have been thought of as One dwelling in the heavens – among many other attributes. Therefore, a question posed to Jesus on earth, "Do you think you are God?" would mean did he think he was the One dwelling in heaven. And you can see that would have been an inappropriate question, since Jesus was visibly on earth. As a matter of fact the question was never asked of him; at most, he was asked about his relationship with God. One can get the flavor of the language and the problem in the scene in Mark 10:17-18: A man addresses Jesus as "good teacher," and Jesus answers him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." You can see that there is a distancing between Jesus and the term "God."²³

Jewish historian and theologian Geza Vermes strongly agrees, "The identification of a contemporary historical figure with God would have been inconceivable to a first-century A.D. Palestinian Jew."²⁴ If Paul, at an early stage of Christianity intended to teach that Jesus was YHWH, the one God of Israel, the question must be asked, where is the controversy, where is the discussion, where is the mass confusion that would have arisen and been addressed within our NT documents? Within the NT there is fierce controversy raging concerning circumcision, the inclusion of Gentiles, Sabbath, food laws, things all of importance to Jews, how much more so if Paul were understood to be teaching that the *man* was actually YHWH, their God. At the very least there would have been vigorous questions surrounding this obviously strange and confusing teaching to a 1st Century Jew. Reformed scholar Douglas McCready says, "In terms of first century Judaism, it would be understandable if no New Testament writer described Jesus as God because of the difficulty such language would create for early Christians with a Jewish background..."²⁵

²³ Raymond Brown, *Responses to 101 Questions On The Bible* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990), 98.

²⁴ Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (Augsburg Fortress Publishers), 212.

²⁵ McCready, *He Came Down From Heaven*, 51.

If Paul was compelled to take a vow in order to demonstrate that he was living in obedience to the law because there was merely suspicion that he was teaching diaspora Jews to turn away from Moses, how much more would these same Jews have been in complete dismay if the rumor was that he was teaching that the *man* Jesus was YHWH, the one *God*. Again, if this was the case, gobs of clarifications would be needed, especially when the Jews did not expect the Messiah to be God. McCready says, “In biblical Judasim the term Messiah did not necessarily carry any connotation of divine status, and the Jews of Jesus’ day were not expecting their messiah to be other than human.”²⁶

Jews were born and bred in an environment which held a strict distinction, and differentiation between God and man, the Creator and the creation. They may have been familiar with passages such as “But the Egyptians are *men* and not *God*” (Is 31:3 NIV Emphasis mine), “For I am *God*, and not *man* – the Holy One among you” (Hos 11:9 NIV Emphasis mine), “*God* is not a *man*...nor a *son of man*” (Num 23:19 NIV Emphasis mine), and the whole Genesis account which assumes a contrast between God the Creator and man, the creation; God, and the man who was created in God’s image (Gen 1:27). Paul bases his argument for the sinfulness of man in Rom 1 on the men who exchanged the glory of the *immortal God* for images made to look like *mortal man*. He says that they “worshipped and served *created* things rather than the *Creator* – who is blessed forever praised. Amen” (Rom 1:25 NIV Emphasis mine). With this milieu in mind, Ben Witherington III makes these insightful remarks concerning Jesus,

If he had simply announced, “Hi folks; I’m God,” that would have been heard as “I’m Yahweh,” because the Jews of his day didn’t have any concept of the Trinity. They only knew of God the Father – whom they called Yahweh – and not God the Son or God the Holy Spirit. So if someone were to say he was God, that wouldn’t have made any sense to them and would have been seen as clear-cut blasphemy.²⁷

Jesus’ relationship to YHWH has been firmly established. Jesus is not YHWH, the one God of Israel, but the son of YHWH. James Dunn has said expressly, “Jesus is NOT

²⁶ McCready, *He Came From Heaven*, 55.

²⁷ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ: A Journalist’s Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 133.

Yahweh”²⁸ and Colin Brown states, “Indeed, to be a ‘Son of God’ one has to be a being who is *not* God! It is a designation for a creature indicating a special relationship with God. In particular it denotes God’s representative, God’s vice-regent. It is a designation of kingship, identifying the king as God’s son”²⁹ These are no small concessions and Christendom is yet to fully awaken to this simple reality. It is truly remarkable to be able to confess with Jesus, that the Father is the only one who is truly God (John 17:3).

²⁸ Personal correspondence.

²⁹ Colin Brown, “Trinity and Incarnation: In Search of Contemporary Orthodoxy,” *ExAud* 7 (1991): 89. Within this same article, Brown points out that the term son of God is also used of the Israelite nation (Exodus 4:22), angels (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Genesis 6:2,4), Adam (Luke 3:38), and as quoted, kings (Psalms 2:6-8; 89:26-27; 2 Samuel 7:14).

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