

**MONOTHEISTIC DISCOURSE AND DEIFICATION OF
JESUS IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY AS EXEMPLIFIED
IN 2 CORINTHIANS 3:16–4:6**

by

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SUMMARY

One of the central issues of early Christianity was the identity of Jesus Christ. Paul and other early Christians discussed this question within the framework of traditional Jewish monotheism and used the language of deity to describe Christ. This thesis explores how and why they integrated the two concepts of monotheism and the deity of Jesus. As a window into this process, it particularly examines Paul's discourse in 2 Cor 3:16–4:6, employing grammatical-historical exegesis with insights from rhetorical criticism and Oneness Pentecostal Christology.

We consider three fundamental questions: (1) *What* does the exalted language concerning Christ in this text represent? (2) *How* did Paul reconcile the deification of Jesus with his monotheistic heritage? (3) *Why* did Paul deify Jesus? What interests were served, and what were the practical consequences?

The conclusion is that early Christians, prior to and including Paul, worshiped Jesus within a Jewish monotheistic context and not as a result of Hellenization. They viewed Jesus as the revelation of the one God, not as a second deity or a different personage. Although they reinterpreted their core beliefs in light of Jesus, they did not see their worship of Jesus as violating their core beliefs. The evidence from Paul's Corinthian correspondence does not require an explicit binitarian or trinitarian model, but it reveals that many early Christians viewed God as both transcendent and immanent and worshiped Jesus as the God of Israel manifested in human identity.

We identify four significant socio-rhetorical factors in the monotheistic deification of Jesus: (1) In a context of rapid social change it enabled Christians to combine Hebrew monotheism with Greek longing for universals, thereby claiming both traditional heritage and Christocentric distinctiveness. (2) It gave them a unique social identity and cohesiveness. (3) It affirmed their soteriological experiences, beliefs, and outreach. (4) It positioned the movement to attract all people, moving the new faith beyond Jewish ethnicity and traditional boundary markers so that it became a universal monotheism with a missiological focus. The socio-rhetorically constructed identity of Jesus Christ defined the identity of the early Christians. The result was a distinctively Christian faith.

KEY TERMS

2 Corinthians; Christology; Deification; Glory of God; Image of God; Immanence of God; Monotheism; Oneness Pentecostalism, Rhetorical criticism; Transcendence of God, Trinitarianism

CONTENTS

1. Introduction	6
Christian Origins	7
Paul’s Discourse in Rhetorical Perspective	8
Monotheistic Discourse and Deification Language	12
Early Christian Discourse about Jesus	14
The Question of How: Describing Christological Monotheism	22
The Question of Why: Causation and Motive	27
Significance of 2 Corinthians 3:16–4:6	31
Summary: Questions, Approach, and Goals	33
Quotation of 2 Corinthians 3:16–4:6	36
2. Theory and Method	38
History-of-Religions Approach (<i>Religionsgeschichte</i>).....	38
Historical-Critical/Grammatical Exegesis	40
Philosophical and Theological Hermeneutics.....	42
Rhetorical Criticism	45
The Hermeneutical Context of Oneness Pentecostal Christology	48
Summary	60
3. Monotheism in Paul’s Rhetorical World	63
Pagan Monotheism.....	63
Monotheism in Second Temple Judaism	65
The Possibility of Two Divine Beings in Second Temple Judaism.....	75
Jewish Christian Scriptures.....	81
Developments in the Second Century and Beyond.....	83
Conclusions.....	95
4. Deification Language in Paul’s Rhetorical World	97
Christ, Χριστός	97
Yahweh, YHWH.....	98
Lord, κύριος	99
Jesus, Ἰησοῦς	101
Spirit, πνεῦμα	103

Image of God, εἰκῶν τοῦ θεοῦ.....	106
Glory of God, δόξα τοῦ θεοῦ.....	112
Hellenistic Influence	117
Conclusions.....	118
5. Deification Language in Paul’s Corinthian Correspondence	123
Rhetorical Situation of 1 and 2 Corinthians.....	123
Overview of 1 and 2 Corinthians	130
Significant Language in 1 Corinthians	131
Significant Language in 2 Corinthians	150
Conclusions.....	162
6. Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 3:16–4:6.....	170
Immediate Literary Background	170
Second Corinthians 3:16.....	176
Second Corinthians 3:17.....	179
Second Corinthians 3:18.....	189
Second Corinthians 4:1-4.....	196
Second Corinthians 4:5-6.....	199
Summary	204
7. Exploring the Textures	208
The Question of What: Significance of the Deification Language.....	208
The Question of How: Redescribing Early Christian Discourse about Jesus.....	209
The Question of Why: Causation and Motive	224
Ideological Texture: Hebrew Monotheism and Greek Universals	227
Social Texture: Group Integrity, Soteriology, and Missiology.....	230
Testing the Hypothesis: Baptism in the Name of Jesus.....	239
Conclusions.....	247
Bibliography	252

1

INTRODUCTION

One of the central issues of early Christianity—probably the central issue—was the identity of Jesus Christ.¹ Paul and other early Christians discussed this question within the framework of traditional Jewish monotheism, and they used the language of deity to describe Christ. We will explore how and why they integrated the two concepts of monotheism and deification of Jesus. As a window into this process, we will particularly examine Paul's discourse in 2 Cor 3:16–4:6. First, however, we will briefly consider the background of Christian origins, the broader context of Paul's discourse, first-century monotheism, and the broader context of early Christian discourse about Jesus.

Why is it worthwhile to look afresh at Christian origins and early Christian discourse about Jesus? First, by revisiting and redescribing Christian origins we can examine possibilities for today. Tradition can be a positive force for communicating beneficial concepts and solutions across centuries, but it can also be a restrictive force that precludes consideration of options for contemporary circumstances. As the Protestant Reformers discovered, redescribing Christian origins can be a way to overcome the potentially stultifying effects of tradition and to subvert or overrule theological, political, and social hierarchies.

Second, redescribing Christian origins is instructive in the twenty-first-century context of rapid globalization, interconnectivity, and diversity. Traditional biblical interpretations have developed in the matrix of Western theology and philosophy, but contemporary Christianity is increasingly non-Western. Revisiting Christian origins, particularly early Christian discourse about God and Jesus, places us at the intersection of Jewish, Hellenistic, and emerging Christian thought and causes us to reconsider the connections between the OT and the NT and between Greco-Roman and Christian worldviews. This discussion can generate fresh theological and sociological insights for today.

The materials for our study are ancient written texts, which developed by social processes and were imbedded in socio-historical contexts. Although associated with

¹ Bernard Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome: The First Three Centuries* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 60.

individual authors, texts are essentially produced by a community and read by another community.² In seeking to relate the past to the present by the study of texts, we should consider a range of sources and interpretations, not just those deemed authoritative or orthodox. We need to hear the voices history has excluded, paying attention to competing values, centers of power, struggles, and interests of past and present so we can consider options for our day.³

Christian Origins

Christianity emerged in a context of diversity and social change in the first-century Greco-Roman world. Beginning among Jews in Palestine who lived in a Hellenized culture under Roman rule, it quickly spread in the ancient Mediterranean world among Jews of the Diaspora, “God-fearing” Gentiles who were already attracted by Jewish monotheism, and Hellenistic pagans from a background of polytheism and idolatry.

Recent scholarship has focused on the formation of early Christian groups, such as the Pauline communities, as they engaged and responded to the challenges of social and cultural diversity in the ancient Mediterranean world, including social fragmentation and loss or transformation of identity.⁴ As noted by Cameron and Miller, the early Christians had to reconsider the significance of ethnicity and engaged in “creating a collective, social identity; making and marking boundaries; identifying group membership; interacting with others; inventing and maintaining tradition (by means and in spite of change); and imagining cultural difference.”⁵ Exploring these processes involves categories such as attraction, social experimentation, reflexivity, mythmaking, social formation, social locations, social logics, and social interests.⁶ From a historical perspective, then, we can examine the formation of Christianity as a collective sociological process, considering the human interests and benefits involved in this endeavor.⁷

² Gina Hens-Piazza, *The New Historicism* (GBS; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 6.

³ Hens-Piazza, *New Historicism*, 12, 34, 39, 45.

⁴ Ron Cameron and Merrill P. Miller, “Conclusion: Redescrining Christian Origins,” in *Redescrining Christian Origins* (ed. Ron Cameron and Merrill P. Miller; SBLSymS 28; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 503.

⁵ Cameron and Miller, “Conclusion: Redescrining Christian Origins,” 509.

⁶ Cameron and Miller, “Conclusion: Redescrining Christian Origins,” 499; Burton L. Mack, *The Christian Myth: Origins, Logic, and Legacy* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 54, 105.

⁷ Mack, *Christian Myth*, 58, 68-69.

The early Christians drew from both Jewish and Greek thought. Palestinian Jews were Hellenized before the emergence of Christianity, although they maintained their distinctive monotheistic belief in Yahweh. The spread of Christianity to the Gentiles brought further interaction of Jewish and Greek thought. Sociologically, the early Christians integrated aspects of both cultures into a new model. The new community drew its theological and ideological authority from the Hebrew Scriptures, yet the participants could no longer define their identity in terms of ethnicity. They faced the challenge of forging a new multicultural, multiethnic identity while maintaining continuity with Judaism. Mack has explained, “The Christian experiment dislodged the Jewish conception of the people of God from its national and ethnic roots, thought of individuals on the Greek model as agents capable of changing their minds and social identities, and rationalized both of these moves as essential ingredients of novel social experiments.”⁸ The early Christians sought to define their collective identity by identifying themselves with Israel, and they used the Hebrew Scriptures to establish their claim.⁹ They needed to answer the question: How could this new group of various ethnicities still consider itself to be the people of Israel and therefore the people of the one God?¹⁰ In other words, it is important to explore the Jewish background of first-century Christianity in order to appreciate fully the social interests involved in the claims of the early Christians to be true heirs of God’s promises to Israel.¹¹

Paul’s Discourse in Rhetorical Perspective

Since we are using a Pauline text as the primary window into our subject, we need to survey recent developments in Pauline scholarship. Traditional interpretations of Paul were framed by the Reformation debate over justification by faith. In the latter half of the twentieth century, however, scholars began to reexamine the exegetical basis of the traditional formulations of justification. As Sanders noted, Luther’s reading of Romans and Galatians depended on the view that the Jews in Paul’s day were legalists who believed in justification by works. Against this view Sanders said first-century Jews based their salvation in the grace of God, not human works. Thus, Luther’s reading of Pauline

⁸ Mack, *Christian Myth*, 108.

⁹ Cameron and Miller, “Conclusion: Redescribing Christian Origins,” 501.

¹⁰ Mack, *Christian Myth*, 112.

¹¹ Burton L. Mack, “Why *Christos*? The Social Reasons,” in Cameron and Miller, *Redescribing Christian Origins*, 372.

theology had more to do with Luther's own struggle against medieval Catholicism than with first-century issues.¹²

According to Sanders, Paul was actually concerned with the Jewish concept of "covenantal nomism." That is, the Jews believed they had an exclusive covenant with God based on the law of Moses, and early Jewish followers of Christ persisted in this view. By contrast, Paul asserted that both Jews and Gentiles could enter into covenant relationship with God. Therefore, it was not necessary for Gentile believers in Christ to keep the Jewish law. In particular, Paul taught that Christians did not need to keep the boundary markers of the Jewish covenant with God, namely, circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and the dietary laws. For Sanders, Paul's fundamental break with Judaism was not over the law as such but over Christ.

To a great extent, Dunn followed this analysis and labeled it "the new perspective."¹³ In his view, "works of the law" in Paul's writings refers specifically to legal obedience as a means of distinguishing Jews from Gentiles so that Jews could maintain national righteousness as God's unique covenant people.¹⁴ Nevertheless, he acknowledged the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith to be a legitimate corollary of Paul's doctrine.¹⁵

Several evangelical scholars have responded to this new perspective by saying we can understand Romans and Galatians only if we assume some first-century Jews indeed based their justification or salvation more on their works than on God's grace. Thus Paul's argument in Romans serves to invalidate any system of legalism or works-righteousness.¹⁶ Gathercole agreed in part with the new perspective critique of traditional Lutheranism, acknowledging that Jewish literature of the first century emphasizes both gracious election by God and obedience as a basis for vindication at the judgment, and the NT does likewise. Nevertheless, Paul and his Jewish contemporaries had significantly different understandings of obedience in this regard. For Paul, God's gracious action was both the source and the ongoing cause of the Christian's obedience.¹⁷ Paul stood within the overall tradition of first-century Judaism as rightly understood. Witherington and

¹² E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977), 1-12, 419-26, 492.

¹³ James D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul: Collected Essays* (WUNT 185; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005; rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

¹⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (WBC 38A; Dallas: Word, 1988), lxxv, lxxix, lxxxi, 158.

¹⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 366.

¹⁶ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 217.

¹⁷ Simon J. Gathercole, *Where Is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1-5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 263-66.

Hyatt similarly concluded that the new perspective correctly criticizes the traditional Protestant conception of justification, because Paul indeed expected the saved to lead righteous, holy lives and would have been appalled by any notion to the contrary. In the final analysis, Witherington and Hyatt also saw the new perspective as inadequate, however. For them the central thrust of Rom 2-3 is not against Jewish ethnocentrism or boundary markers but against self-righteousness, boasting, and judgmentalism based on human works and achievements. The disagreement between Paul and his Jewish contemporaries was not over obedience, for Paul believed members of the covenant needed to obey whatever God required. Rather, the disagreement centered on whether obedience *without transformation by God's power* could be the basis for justification.¹⁸

Despite these differing views over Paul's doctrine of justification, both proponents and critics of the new perspective of Paul agree that there is more continuity than discontinuity between Judaism and Paul. Thus, we should not pit Paul against first-century Judaism in toto, as if we were fighting the Reformation battles of Protestants versus Catholics. A characteristic of the new perspective is that Paul viewed Jewish beliefs and positions in a highly positive way, both before and after his faith in Christ. He did not fight against the Jewish law itself. The issue he faced was how to retain the law in his theological scheme in light of his new understanding of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, including salvation for the Gentiles, who did not live according to the Jewish law.¹⁹

Absent evidence to the contrary, then, we should assume Paul's use of Jewish theological terms and concepts to be in fundamental harmony with first-century Judaism. When he used the language of monotheism and deification, we will begin with the assumption that he meant much the same as his Jewish contemporaries unless he indicated a change of meaning. We will then explore the function, purpose, and significance of this language for Paul.

Drawing from the insights of the new perspective, our model is one of simultaneous continuity and change. Paul appealed to traditional Jewish theology as his source of authority while applying this theology in a new way to establish Christian uniqueness and maintain Christian identity. His main concern was not to void the law or ongoing obedience to God's commands but to establish faith in Christ among both Jew

¹⁸ Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 122-25, 247-49.

¹⁹ Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 14.

and Gentile. Smith described this model as “religious entrepreneurship,” representing “both a reinterpretation and a reaffirmation of native, locative, celebratory categories of religious practice and thought.”²⁰

By using the term *discourse*, we describe Paul’s letters as part of an ongoing discussion in the context of power relations. We thereby recognize such factors as the link between interests and assertions, the exercise of symbolic power, and appeals to credibility and authority in religious discourse.²¹ We also acknowledge the role of religious discourse in the construction, maintenance, and modification of social identities.²² Our purpose is not to revise Paul or use him to support contemporary dogmatic views but to understand his statements in their socio-rhetorical context. We will look beneath the discussion to investigate the unstated assumptions, the beliefs he evidently held in common with his readers, and the points he considered persuasive. The term *discourse* further signifies that, to conceptualize what was at stake in Paul’s day, we are analyzing his thought by means of a system of technical terms (such as *monotheism* and *henotheism*) created by a historical process.²³ Access to reality is mediated through concepts and terminologies that are themselves products of historical processes of meaning-making. Discourse thus implies that we encounter reality through representational practices that are thoroughly historicized. Discourse is not just a term for the contents of sets of representations (which include the spoken word, text, gesture, ritual, environments as arranged space, the rhythms of life as hidden persuasions, and symbolized capital). It also encompasses the social location that forms the matrix for the invention of the set of representations; the social interests encapsulated in and giving rise to the set of representations; the logic governing the interrelations between these factors or aspects; and the institutionalization of such representations in canons of tradition, schools of thought, habitus, social formations, cultural forms, and socio-political-economic conventions.²⁴

²⁰ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 186.

²¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Oxford: Polity, 1988), 16, 23, 163-70.

²² Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual and Classification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 23, 75.

²³ See “Discourse,” in Paul Veyne, *Foucault: His Thought, His Character* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity, 2010).

²⁴ Gerhard van den Heever, “Space, Social Space, and the Construction of Early Christian Identity in First Century Asia Minor,” *R&T* 17 (2010): 220.

Monotheistic Discourse and Deification Language

To speak of monotheism is already to engage in rhetoric, yet this choice of label seems the best way to redescribe the concept of God in Paul's rhetorical world. We start with the premise that monotheism is the best model or lens by which to understand Paul's beliefs about God and thus the deification language he and other early Christians used for Jesus. While it is beyond the scope of our study to discuss this point exhaustively, we will outline a threefold basis for making this assumption and examine it further in ch. 3.

First, the primary theological and cultural context of Paul's discourse was Second Temple Judaism, and the bedrock of this religious system was exclusive monotheism, the belief in and worship of only one God. Belief in God's oneness was fundamental to first-century Judaism; since it was not controversial it could be taken for granted.²⁵ Scholars debate the extent to which we should use the related terms of *henotheism* (personal or group devotion to only one god without denying the existence of other gods), *monolatry* (worship of only one god without denying the existence of other gods), or *monotheism* (belief in only one god), but for our purposes these nuances are secondary.²⁶ We do not use *monotheism* to deny that Judaism had concepts of other supernatural beings but to emphasize that the various strands of Second Temple Judaism agreed Yahweh was supreme over all beings and Yahweh alone should be worshiped.²⁷ The point of our describing Jewish monotheism is to highlight that Paul, in his socio-rhetorical context as a first-century observant Jew, had two alternatives if he wished to deify Jesus: (1) He could emphasize continuity by confessing Yahweh alone as supreme and worthy of worship while somehow presenting Jesus as the manifestation of Yahweh. (2) He could emphasize discontinuity by modifying or abandoning Jewish monotheism to allow the worship of

²⁵ James D. G. Dunn, "Judaism in the Land of Israel in the First Century," in *Judaism in Late Antiquity* (ed. Jacob Neusner et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1.2:253.

²⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus? The New Testament Evidence* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 64.

²⁷ Pieter Craffert, *The Life of a Galilean Shaman: Jesus of Nazareth in Anthropological-Historical Perspective* (Matrix: The Bible in Mediterranean Perspective 3; Eugene, Ore.: Cascade, 2008), 185. Craffert disagreed with the construct of *monotheism* especially when used to deny belief in other supernatural or divine beings but acknowledged the main point here: for most Jews God was the sole object of worship. Fredriksen likewise objected to the use of *monotheism* and *exclusive monotheism* on the ground that early Jews and Christians were actually henotheistic. They believed in the existence of other supernatural beings but affirmed "one god on top"; other gods were lower than and subordinate to the high god. Paula Fredriksen, "Mandatory Retirement: Ideas in the Study of Christian Origins Whose Time Has Come to Go," *SR* 35 (2006): 241. Our use of these terms allows for this construction, but we use them to emphasize that almost all Jews acknowledged Yahweh as supreme, the only being worthy of ritual worship, and the only God one should serve. See Anders Runesson, "Inventing Christian Identity: Paul, Ignatius, and Theodosius I," in *Exploring Early Christian Identity* (ed. Bengt Holmberg; WUNT 226; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 84 n.69.

Jesus as a being different from Yahweh. In either case, we would expect some discourse to explain his innovative belief and practice. Since he attempted to vindicate his apostolic authority by asserting continuity with the received tradition of the OT, in the latter case we would particularly expect some justification for the significant discontinuity. The evidence indicates that he chose the former alternative.

Second, monotheism as we have described it—the exclusive worship of Yahweh—served as a boundary marker for first-century Judaism, and as we shall see, Paul continued to use this boundary marker for the emerging Christian communities he established and nurtured. Despite the strands of monotheistic thought within Greco-Roman paganism, genuinely monotheistic statements by pagans were extremely rare,²⁸ especially prior to Christian origins. When Jews said, “God is one,” both Jews and non-Jews recognized this Jewish devotion to only one God as a characteristic factor distinguishing them from everyone else. Their exclusive worship of Yahweh, their substantial unity on this core belief, and their refusal to offer sacrifices to any other deity, often even on pain of death, distinguished them from mainstream religion in Hellenistic society.²⁹

Third, there was a monotheistic strain in Greek philosophical thought, which likely reinforced Paul’s monotheistic impulse and which he used as a bridge to non-Jewish people. From the beginning Greek philosophers sought for one ruling principle to explain the world in its diversity, and they described this principle as a divine substance existing in everything.³⁰ Indeed, by late antiquity (which was actually after Paul’s time) monotheism was widespread, especially among the educated elite and in the Greek east; consequently, some scholars interpret Christian monotheism as part of this broader development.³¹ The philosophical viewpoint of Plato, Aristotle, Zeno, and their followers, including the vast majority of philosophers in later antiquity, was similar to the Christian position as they believed in one God who rules the universe.³²

²⁸ Henk S. Versnel, *Ter Unus: Isis, Dionysos, Hermes: Three Studies in Henotheism* (vol. 1 of *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion*; Leiden: Brill, 1990), 194 n.322.

²⁹ James F. McGrath, *The Only True God: Early Christian Monotheism in Its Jewish Context* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 17, 35-36, 98.

³⁰ Wolf Liebeschuetz, “The Significance of the Speech of Praetextatus,” in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (ed. Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 187.

³¹ Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede, “Introduction,” in Athanassiadi and Frede, *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, 1, 20.

³² Michael Frede, “Monotheism and Pagan Philosophy in Later Antiquity,” in Athanassiadi and Frede, *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, 41, 43.

We should not make too much of this resemblance, however, as we see by comparing Paul to the Stoics. Stoicism was probably the most popular philosophy among the educated Hellenistic and Roman elite in Paul's day, and he was influenced by it to some extent or at least had some affinity to it. According to the Stoics everything is controlled by reason (*logos*) and the task of humans is to discover and accept their role in the scheme of things. Thus, the highest moral asset is self-control, and the goal of life is for the human mind to conform to reason alone.³³ Paul and the Stoics had similar views of anthropology, reason, virtue, ethics, ethical transformation, community formation, and the universal application of their ideas.³⁴ At the same time we find significant differences, especially their respective understandings of God and God's involvement with the world. Instead of a truly monotheistic faith centered on worship of the one God, Stoicism equated God with reason or fate, resulting in a pantheistic view of God as immanent. By contrast, Paul held to the Hebraic concept of God as transcendent yet involved in the world. Specifically, he identified reason with Jesus Christ, teaching that God had intervened in the world through the Christ event.³⁵ Moreover, God intervenes in human lives by God's Spirit, and this divine action is the true source of ethical transformation.

Acts 17 depicts Paul as quoting from Greek poets, including the Stoic philosopher Cleanthes (v. 28),³⁶ and appealing to the cult of Theos Hypsistos ("Unknown God") to lead people to the true God (v. 23). The Gentile "God-fearers" were already monotheistic, were connected to local Jews, and had their own non-Jewish traditions to which he could appeal.³⁷ Paul did not teach that people could worship the one God in many ways under many names, however, but he sought to convert everyone to faith in Jesus Christ. Ultimately, the contrast between pagans and Christians was not simply between polytheism and monotheism, but "the real issue is whether Jesus is God."³⁸

Early Christian Discourse about Jesus

A second premise of our investigation is that Paul and other early Christians used the language of deity for Jesus. We will examine this premise in chs. 4-6, particularly

³³ Konstantin Kolenda, *Philosophy's Journey: A Historical Introduction* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1974), 59-61.

³⁴ Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*, 33, 287-92.

³⁵ Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*, 103, 287.

³⁶ Aratus, *Phaenomena*; Epimenides, *Cretica*; Cleanthes, *Hymn to Zeus*.

³⁷ Stephen Mitchell, "The Cult of Theos Hypsistos between Pagans, Jews, and Christians," in Athanassiadi and Frede, *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, 122.

³⁸ Frede, "Monotheism and Pagan Philosophy," 67.

with reference to the text we have chosen as a window. To establish a starting point for this investigation, it is helpful to study the “metadiscourse”³⁹—scholarly discourse of the past one hundred years on early Christian discourse about Jesus. By doing so, we are able to delineate a range of interpretive options and situate our chosen text within the larger body of first-century Christian thought. Broadly speaking, there are two major approaches: those who attribute the deification of Jesus to general influences in the cultural milieu including pagan thought, and those who seek to explain it as a phenomenon primarily within first-century Judaism.

Early scholars who pioneered the history-of-religions approach (*Religionsgeschichte*) acknowledged that texts such as the one we have chosen exhibit the deification of Jesus, but they argued that this type of discourse did not come from the earliest Christians. For example, Bousset posited that the shift from Palestinian Judaism to Hellenistic Christianity explains the ascription of deity to Jesus, because he did not think Jewish monotheism was compatible with the deification of Jesus.⁴⁰ Bultmann accepted this analysis,⁴¹ as did many others in the history-of-religions school. More recently, Casey made a similar argument.⁴²

Hengel and others showed, however, that we cannot make a simplistic distinction between Palestinian and Hellenistic Christianity. For one thing, all of Judaism was already Hellenized by the first century C.E., and the developments of Christology could all have occurred within a Palestinian Jewish context. Moreover, with regard to the concept of God, the most significant changes in Christian discourse under the influence of Greek philosophical thought did not come until the second century with the Gnostics and the Greek apologists.⁴³ According to Hengel the deification of the crucified Jesus predated Paul and had no true precedent or analogy, and more development of Christology occurred in the first two decades than in the next seven centuries.⁴⁴ He acknowledged that a history-of-religions approach was helpful in explaining terms, themes, and traditions,

³⁹ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 71.

⁴⁰ Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus* (5th ed.; trans. J. E. Steely, 1913; repr. Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), 12, 20-21.

⁴¹ Rudolf Bultmann, introductory word to the fifth edition of Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 7; idem, *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951), 1:27.

⁴² P. Maurice Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God: The Origins and Development of New Testament Christology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 37, 169.

⁴³ Martin Hengel, *The “Hellenization” of Judaea in the First Century after Christ* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 1989), 53-56. See also our discussion in ch. 3.

⁴⁴ Martin Hengel, *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religions* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 1-2, 7. However, there are parallels in pagan apotheosis stories such as Heracles and Dionysos.

but it could not adequately account for the origin of Christianity as a whole, for there well could have been an unprecedented innovation.⁴⁵ In particular, the earliest Christians understood Jesus Christ to be God's self-communication in an unsurpassable, final form. They were intent on proclaiming the unique, eschatological message of "the *whole revelation of God, the whole of salvation* in his Christ Jesus."⁴⁶

As a starting point for our discussion, we will use the work of trinitarian Christian scholars Bauckham, Hurtado, and Dunn, who in recent years have used a new history-of-religions approach. These scholars formulated a response to the position of Bousset, Bultmann, and Casey, and by drawing from the work of predecessors they enunciated a more conservative "consensus position."⁴⁷ As numerous book reviews demonstrate, their work is largely responsible for a new majority view among NT scholars that a high Christology emerged in the first century from within a Jewish context.⁴⁸ For this reason, their work forms the foundation for the present study. They focused on the Jewish background of Christianity, seeking to understand the deification of Jesus within this context. While they have been criticized for not considering the ancient world in a more unified sense and for not considering more fully the pagan context for the concept of incarnation,⁴⁹ these limitations are not critical for our present study. The ideas of incarnation and apotheosis clearly existed in first-century pagan thought. Our focus is not on their possible origins but specifically on the three questions of what the early Christians said about Jesus, how they reconciled it with their Jewish heritage, and why they said it.

As Bauckham and Hurtado have demonstrated convincingly, Jesus was given the status of deity in early Palestinian Jewish circles. Bauckham found partial precedents and parallels in Second Temple Judaism through a study of principal angels, exalted patriarchs, and personified or hypostatized divine aspects but maintained these examples were not sufficient to explain the early deification of Jesus. He asserted that the deification of Jesus occurred at the outset of Christianity and this "high Christology,"

⁴⁵ Hengel, *Son of God*, 58-59. His focus was the influence of Judaism rather than paganism on early Christianity.

⁴⁶ Hengel, *Son of God*, 90. Unless otherwise noted, all emphasis in quotations is original.

⁴⁷ Carl Holladay, "New Testament Christology: A Consideration of Dunn's *Christology in the Making*," *Semeia* 30 (1984): 74-77. See also David Scaer, "Recent Research on Jesus: Assessing the Contribution of Larry Hurtado," *CTQ* 69 (2005): 52, 58; Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, "A New Explanation of Christological Origins: A Review of the Work by Larry W. Hurtado," *TynBul* 60 (2009): 165.

⁴⁸ Andrew Chester, "High Christology—Whence, When and Why?," *EC* 2 (2011): 22.

⁴⁹ E.g., Holladay, "New Testament Christology," 77, 81; Delbert Burkett, review of Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, *JAOS* 124 (2004): 129.

although novel, was consistent with Jewish monotheism. NT writers did not consider themselves to be repudiating their heritage of Jewish monotheism but understood their deification of Jesus to be the eschatological fulfillment of the expectation of universal monotheism.⁵⁰ Bauckham rejected an incremental or evolutionary interpretation, arguing for the deification of Jesus as the early, crucial step that provided the foundation for the development of Christology. In his view Jewish monotheism could not accommodate “semi-divine figures, subordinate deities, divinity by delegation or participation,” but early Christians were able to make a direct identification of Jesus with the one God in a way consistent with Jewish monotheism.⁵¹ Thus, “the earliest Christology was already the highest Christology.”⁵²

Like Bauckham, Hurtado concluded that the worship of Jesus was an unprecedented development in Judaism with no true parallel, although he suggested the Jewish concept of divine agency helped prepare the way. Against Bousset he argued that Jewish monotheism had not been modified by Gentile thought; against Casey he argued that the deification of Jesus occurred far too early to explain it as the influence of paganism upon Christians; and against Dunn (whom we will consider shortly) he argued that within the first two decades Christians were offering genuine worship to Jesus in a way novel and unprecedented for Judaism, being otherwise reserved for God alone.⁵³ According to the evidence in Paul’s letters, devotion to Christ took place in the earliest years, including among Jewish and Aramaic-speaking Christians.⁵⁴ To demonstrate this devotion to Jesus in the earliest Christian sources, Hurtado cited six specific practices: (1) hymns about Jesus, (2) prayer to God through Jesus and direct prayer to Jesus himself, (3) invocation of the name of Jesus especially in baptism, healing, and exorcism, (4) the sacred meal at which Jesus presides as Lord, (5) confession of Jesus in worship, and (6) prophecy from the risen Jesus, or Spirit of Jesus.⁵⁵ Significantly, five of these elements appear in the Corinthian correspondence; for the sixth, instead of hymns we have similar early liturgical fragments in 2 Cor 5:19 and 8:9. Also like Bauckham,

⁵⁰ Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 27.

⁵¹ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 27-28.

⁵² Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), ix.

⁵³ Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (2d ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), ix-xii, 3-11.

⁵⁴ Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 100, 125.

⁵⁵ Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 27-28.

Hurtado asserted that the deification and worship of Jesus did not result from pagan influences and was not a rejection of Jewish monotheism. Rather, it must be explained in the context of Jewish devotion to the one God.⁵⁶ It occurred far too early to be explained by an evolutionary process; it was “a more explosively quick phenomenon, a religious development that was more like a volcanic eruption.”⁵⁷ The deification of Jesus was a radical innovation best understood not by doctrinal development but by the powerful religious experiences of the early Christians, such as the resurrection appearances and the conversion of Paul, which came as new revelation to those who experienced them.⁵⁸

Similarly, many contemporary scholars from across the ideological spectrum, while not always agreeing fully with Bauckham and Hurtado or each other, have agreed that the deification of Jesus occurred very early, during or shortly after his life, in the context of Jewish Christianity. Yabro Collins rejected the old history-of-religions idea that the deification of Jesus belongs to a second stage of Christian reflection. Instead, she proposed two factors, one internal and one external, that combined to promote the worship of Jesus soon after his death: visions of the risen Jesus and the cultural influence of the Roman imperial cult.⁵⁹ From an anthropological-historical perspective, Craffert argued that Paul and others could have equated Jesus with God in some way from the very beginning.⁶⁰ According to Boyarin we can only understand the NT if both Jesus and his Jewish contemporaries embraced a “high Christology” in which the Messiah was expected to be a divine man, and in fact many Jews already expected the Messiah to be a “god-man.” He appealed to OT passages such as Daniel 7 to explain that this amounted to a form of “binitarianism” or “doubleness of the Godhead.”⁶¹ In the view of Chatelion Counet, some Jews in the Second Temple Period were inclusive monotheists who allowed the deification of human beings. Thus it was possible for early Jewish believers in Palestine to develop an understanding of Jesus as divine even before his death.⁶² According to Mack, who has taken a nontheistic approach to the study of Christian

⁵⁶ Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 41-42, 111. We discuss pagan monotheism in ch. 3.

⁵⁷ Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 25.

⁵⁸ Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 8, 181, 186, 194.

⁵⁹ Adela Yabro Collins, “The Worship of Jesus and the Imperial Cult,” in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus* (ed. Cary Newman et al.; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 241-42, 251.

⁶⁰ Craffert, *Life of a Galilean Shaman*, 235-36.

⁶¹ Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: New, 2012), 55-58.

⁶² Patrick Chatelion Counet, “The Divine Messiah: Early Jewish Monotheism and the New Testament,” in *The Boundaries of Monotheism: Interdisciplinary Explorations into the Foundations of Western Monotheism* (ed. Anne-Marie Korte and Maaïke de Haardt; STR 13; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 52.

origins, Pauline writings such as Philippians 2 demonstrate that many early Christians viewed Jesus as the cosmic Lord, the heavenly sovereign.⁶³ From a more conservative Christian perspective Wright said, “From the earliest days of Christianity we find an astonishing shift, for which again nothing in Jewish traditions of the time had prepared Jesus’ followers. They remained firmly within Jewish monotheism; and yet they said . . . Jesus was . . . the unique embodiment of the one God of Israel.”⁶⁴ They spoke of Jesus with the Jewish language of Spirit, Word, Torah, Presence/Glory, Wisdom, and Messiah/Son, “as though they discovered Jesus within the Jewish monotheistic categories they already had.”⁶⁵

Dunn agreed with Bauckham and Hurtado in emphasizing Jewish monotheism as the proper context for early christological development and in discounting the influence of paganism on the process. At the same time, he was more cautious than they in finding evidence of early deification of Jesus. To some extent he followed Bousset and Casey in saying the immediate deification of Jesus would have been startling or maybe even impossible in the Jewish monotheistic context, but he saw a process by which the Jewish prophet became the Jewish God. He thus traced a development or unfolding of ideas throughout the NT leading to the decisive step of attributing true deity to Jesus and the enunciation of a clear doctrine of incarnation, which he believed did not fully occur until the Johannine writings. For instance, he found veneration of Jesus in Paul’s writings but concluded it stopped short of true worship.⁶⁶

Dunn interpreted Paul’s discourse about Jesus in terms of Adam Christology (Jesus as archetypal human) and Wisdom Christology (Jesus as embodiment and expression of God’s wisdom). Characteristic is his treatment of passages often interpreted to mean Jesus was a preexistent, second divine person. He maintained: (1) an explicit compromise of monotheism, such as speaking of Jesus as a different person from God, was not an option for the early Christians; (2) an intermediate position of some sort of hypostatization “halfway between a person and personification” would not have occurred to them as first-century Jews; and thus (3) these passages use metaphor and personification to speak of “God’s interaction with the world and his people.”⁶⁷ In Second

⁶³ Mack, *Christian Myth*, 102, 139.

⁶⁴ N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 117.

⁶⁵ N. T. Wright, “The Divinity of Jesus,” in N. T. Wright and Marcus J. Borg, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 163.

⁶⁶ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 259-60.

⁶⁷ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 267-74.

Temple Judaism, Wisdom was not a being apart from God but was God's self-manifestation. Speaking of Christ as somehow preexistent and coming from heaven was a metaphorical way to describe Christ as the incarnation of Wisdom. A literal interpretation of a preexistent second person would have led to a kind of polytheism. According to the Wisdom/Word Christology of Paul and other NT writers, then, Jesus was not a second divine person but "the person/individual whom God's Word *became*."⁶⁸ They did not initially think of Christ as a divine being who preexisted with God as a heavenly redeemer figure. Instead he was the supreme revelation of God's purpose and power. It was actually God who was reaching out to humans through Christ's life, death, and resurrection. They identified him with "God's creative wisdom, God's redemptive purpose, God's revelatory word expressed in a final way that made the Christ-event the normative definition of divine wisdom and revelation—God's clearest self-expression, God's last word." The bottom line is that Jesus revealed *God*, not a divine intermediary known as Wisdom or the Son of God.⁶⁹

From this perspective, when Paul spoke of the preexistence of Christ he meant Adam was a template for Christ and Christ communicates the eternal Wisdom of God.⁷⁰ For example, in 1 Cor 8:4-6 (affirmation of "one God, the Father," and "one Lord, Jesus Christ"), it is "the preexistence and deity of the one God acting in and through Christ of which we are actually speaking. Christ is divine in no other sense than as God immanent, God himself acting to redeem as he did to create."⁷¹ For Dunn, this passage is a significant step in the development of a full Wisdom Christology, but the monotheistic emphasis is still paramount. He similarly regarded 2 Cor 4:4-6 (Christ is "the image of God") as a key step in the development of the concept of incarnation and Col 1:15-20 (Christ is "the image of the invisible God") as a late Pauline expansion of 2 Cor 4:4-6 that comes very close to the concept of incarnation, expressing essentially the same thought as John 1. In Col 1:15-20, Jesus is the incarnation of Wisdom, the fullness of God's self-expression, the embodiment of God's self, not someone other than the God of creation. "More precisely he embodies the outreach of the one God in its most tangibly personal

⁶⁸ James D. G. Dunn, *Christology* (vol. 1 of *The Christ and the Spirit: Collected Essays of James D. G. Dunn*; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 47.

⁶⁹ James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 262; see idem, *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (2d ed.; London: SCM, 2006), 259-62, 320. However, Dunn viewed the NT as a whole as supporting trinitarianism.

⁷⁰ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 292.

⁷¹ Dunn, *Christology*, 339.

(i.e., somatic) form (Col 2:9). . . . The deity of Christ is God himself reaching out to humans through Christ to offer his costly forgiveness.”⁷² In Colossians, then, “a concept of ‘incarnation’ is close to hand; but it is the ‘incarnation’ of ‘God in all his fullness’ (1.19), ‘all the fullness of the deity’ (2.9), not of a separate ‘being.’”⁷³

Even when Dunn did find the language of deification and incarnation—partially in Colossians and more fully in the Johannine writings—he understood these texts to mean Jesus is the self-revelation of the one God, not the incarnation of a second preexistent divine “person.” “To avoid confusion, therefore, it would be better to speak of the Johannine Christ as the incarnation of *God*, as God making himself known in human flesh, not as the incarnation of the Son of God (which seems to be saying something other).”⁷⁴ John’s Gospel was not a compromise or abandonment of monotheism but actually a victory for monotheism as redefined in terms of Christ. It presents Christ as God’s self-manifestation, “the one God insofar as he could make himself known in human flesh.” Consequently, it is wrong to argue from John 1:1 or Col 1:15 that the Messiah Jesus was preexistent. This would be the error of “treating ‘person’ in the trinitarian formula . . . in the way that Jesus of Nazareth was a person. If the preexistent Word of God, the Son of God, is a person in that sense, then Christianity is unavoidably tritheistic.” In this way Dunn rejected a more traditional binitarian or trinitarian explanation of these texts.⁷⁵

In summarizing the work of these scholars Nicholson offered three options to explain the NT deification language:⁷⁶ (1) The early Christians did not deify Jesus at first, because of their Jewish monotheistic beliefs. This is the position of Dunn with regard to the earliest Christians, although he saw the process of deification as gradually unfolding within the context of Jewish monotheism. (2) The early Christians deified Jesus by intentionally moving away from traditional Jewish monotheism. This is the position of Bousset and Casey, who attributed the shift to the influences of pagan polytheism. (3) The early Christians deified Jesus but in doing so “came to understand the parameters of

⁷² Dunn, *Christology*, 339-40.

⁷³ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 276 n.42.

⁷⁴ Dunn, *Christology*, 309; see idem *Partings of the Ways*, 299.

⁷⁵ Dunn, *Christology*, 312-14; see idem, *Partings of the Ways*, 319-20. For a similar but even more forceful explanation of John 1, see Frank Stagg, *The Holy Spirit Today* (Nashville: Broadman, 1973), 17-18: “Jesus Christ is God uniquely present in a truly *human* life, but he is not a second god nor only one third of God. . . . The Word which became flesh was God, not the second person of the trinity.”

⁷⁶ Suzanne Nicholson, *Dynamic Oneness: The Significance and Flexibility of Paul’s One-God Language* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick, 2010), 19.

Jewish monotheism in a new way while simultaneously believing they remained faithful to the tenets of Judaism.” This is the position of Bauckham, Hurtado, and Nicholson herself.

Recently Chester summarized the current state of scholarship and asserted the dominant view has shifted: “Whereas for much of the twentieth century the dominant view was that high Christology represented something that emerged relatively late and under Gentile or pagan influence, more recently it has been seen as coming about at an early stage and within a Jewish setting.”⁷⁷ He identified four positions: (1) High Christology was foreign to the original Jewish context of Christianity and so was a later development under Gentile influence (represented by Bousset and Casey). (2) High Christology evolved gradually within Jewish Christian thought (represented by Dunn). (3) High Christology developed rapidly within Jewish Christian thought as evidenced by Paul’s writings (represented by Hurtado, Hengel, and Chester himself). (4) High Christology was inherent in Christianity from the start and thus was essentially Jewish in nature (represented by Bauckham and Boyarin).

The Question of How: Describing Christological Monotheism

The question of what early Christians said about Jesus leads to a second question that has not been fully answered, namely, how did early Christians deify Jesus? Bauckham strongly asserted that the early Christians did not compromise Jewish monotheism but developed “Christological monotheism.”⁷⁸ While arguing that Jewish monotheism did not recognize intermediary figures as divine, he pointed out that it did not preclude the identification of a human being with the one deity. In other words, early Christians simply applied monotheism to Jesus.⁷⁹ Bauckham thus rejected Greek categories of substance and person in explaining early Christology.⁸⁰ Somewhat paradoxically, however, he stated that divine uniqueness does not require “unitariness” but makes room for “distinctions” within the divine identity, effectively allowing the worship of Jesus “alongside” God the Father.⁸¹ “Early Christians included Jesus, precisely and unambiguously, within the unique identity of the one God of Israel.”⁸² This

⁷⁷ Chester, “High Christology,” 22-50.

⁷⁸ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 18.

⁷⁹ Dan G. McCartney, review of Bauckham, *God Crucified*, *WTJ* 61 (1999): 283-84.

⁸⁰ J. Scott Horrell, review of Bauckham, *God Crucified*, *BSac* 157 (2000): 113.

⁸¹ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 22.

⁸² Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, ix.

“inclusion of Jesus in the identity of God” means God is no longer portrayed as a single person. Instead, it leads to “the inclusion in God of the interpersonal relationship between Jesus and His Father.” He acknowledged this to be a startling development: “Since the portrayal of God in the Hebrew Bible does, to a large extent, employ the analogy of a human agent, this might seem such a radical innovation as to throw doubt on the consistency of the divine identity.”⁸³

Like Bauckham, Hurtado argued that the early Christians did not accept Jesus as a new god to worship but, in the words of one reviewer, “the only God rightly deserving of worship.”⁸⁴ At the same time, he described early Christian worship as “binitarian”⁸⁵ and a “significant ‘mutation’ in Jewish devotion to the one God.”⁸⁶ Moreover, there is a “clear functional subordination” of Jesus to God the Father.⁸⁷ Casey criticized Hurtado’s use of *binitarian* as modeled on traditional trinitarianism and therefore “an exaggerated description” and “too strong.”⁸⁸ For Rainbow the term *trinitarian* would be an anachronistic way of describing the belief of NT authors, and even the term *binitarian* is not satisfactory.⁸⁹ The problem is that an explicit binitarianism was foreign to Jewish thought and probably to the NT authors’ rhetorical world more generally. While there were many examples of polytheism, ditheism, and subordinate deities, there was no clear example of the worship of two or more “persons” who had distinct identities yet were co-equal, co-eternal, and consubstantial as one supreme God. As Hurtado acknowledged, we should not read NT texts in light of later doctrinal developments or through the lens of later theological controversies. Specifically, we should not read the NT as the initial stage of the doctrine of the Trinity or think the NT authors saw their statements as laying the foundation for future doctrinal developments. He explained that by using the word *binitarian* he did not intend to project later ideas back into the NT but to acknowledge “an undeniable ‘two-ishness’ to the devotional life reflected in the NT, however one understands the specific beliefs about Jesus vis-à-vis ‘God.’”⁹⁰ Thus, in recent

⁸³ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 55.

⁸⁴ Michael J. Kruger, review of Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?*, *WTJ* 68 (2006): 370.

⁸⁵ Larry W. Hurtado, “The Binitarian Shape of Early Christian Worship,” in Newman et al., *Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism*, 187.

⁸⁶ Larry W. Hurtado, *God in New Testament Theology* (LBT; Nashville: Abingdon, 2010), 49.

⁸⁷ Hurtado, *God in NT Theology*, 44.

⁸⁸ P. Maurice Casey, “Lord Jesus Christ: A Response to Professor Hurtado,” *JSNT* 27 (2004): 89-90.

⁸⁹ Paul Rainbow, “Jewish Monotheism As the Matrix for New Testament Christology: A Review Article,” *NovT* 33 (1991): 91.

⁹⁰ Hurtado, *God in NT Theology*, 7, 103-7, 113.

publications he has chosen to speak of a “dyadic” rather than “binitarian” devotional pattern.⁹¹

Both Bauckham and Hurtado thus asserted that somehow the early Christians had a twofold object of worship—Jesus and the Father—while still seeking to maintain a monotheistic model. While emphasizing continuity between Jewish and Christian monotheism, they acknowledged their model means a radical reinterpretation of monotheism. Jesus is identified with the God of Israel, yet he is in some sense different from and possibly lesser than the God of Israel. There is a tension here, and it needs to be explored more fully.

Dunn dealt with this tension by saying the first Christians did not see the worship of Jesus as an alternative to worshipping God but as a way of worshipping God.⁹² Moreover, the full worship of Jesus was a later development. As we have seen, he explained the writings of Paul and even some statements in John in a way fully compatible with Jewish monotheism without positing a second “person.” When Dunn did find the full deification of Jesus he suggested that instead of using Bauckham’s description of Jesus as being “identified” with God it would be better to speak of his “equation” with God. “‘Equation’ seems to be a better way of saying that if Jesus is God he is not YHWH, he is not the Father, he is not the source of creation, he will finally be subject to God so that God (alone) will be all in all.”⁹³ Hurtado cited this comment seemingly with approval.⁹⁴ Bauckham presented a contrasting explanation: “Jesus himself is the eschatological manifestation of YHWH’s unique identity to the whole world.”⁹⁵

Building upon the work of these authors, Nicholson said for Paul the oneness of God did not primarily mean “numerical oneness” but “uniqueness” and could encompass “multiple participants in the divine identity.” Thus Paul could simultaneously affirm Jewish monotheism and “the inclusion of Jesus within the divine identity.”⁹⁶ As she pointed out, “The letters [of Paul] that contain the strongest monotheistic language paradoxically also describe Christ in terms that are normally reserved for God. The Lord

⁹¹ Larry W. Hurtado, “Revelatory Experiences and Religious Innovation in Earliest Christianity,” *ExpTim* 125 (2014): 469.

⁹² Don B. Garlington, review of Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, *BBR* 21 (2011): 429.

⁹³ Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 144.

⁹⁴ Larry W. Hurtado, review of Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, *JTS* 61 (2010): 740.

⁹⁵ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 193.

⁹⁶ Nicholson, *Dynamic Oneness*, 245.

Yahweh is now the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁹⁷ Nicholson’s formulation is significantly different from traditional Jewish monotheism, however. For instance, the OT passages we discuss in ch. 3 do use language indicating numerical oneness, such as “alone,” “by myself,” “besides me there is no god,” “there is no other,” and the “Holy One.” Nicholson’s language of “multiple participants in the divine identity” and “inclusion within the divine identity” does not originate with first-century Jewish thought. Indeed, the very notion of plural actors dwelling “within” God seems to redefine the Jewish concept of God. In Hebraic thought, God is a personal being who thinks, feels, speaks, acts, and relates to other beings, not an abstract, impersonal substance containing or including distinct actors or multiple centers of consciousness. As Bauckham acknowledged, “the analogy of human personal identity suggests itself as the category with which to synthesize the biblical and Jewish understanding of God. It is the analogy which is clearly at work in much of the literary portrayal of God in biblical and Jewish literature.”⁹⁸

When we read the early Christian discourse about Jesus in its rhetorical situation and literary context, something still seems missing in the christological discussion to date. Against Bousset, Casey, and Dunn, Bauckham and Hurtado have correctly identified the deification language as very early, predating as well as including Paul’s writings. Yet their description of “binitarian” worship does not seem to be the best way to describe the textual evidence. Dunn has correctly said that when the NT uses deification language for Jesus, it does so in a completely monotheistic sense, identifying Jesus as the self-revelation of the one God of the OT. Yet he did not completely attribute this concept to the earliest Christians such as Paul and his readers. We take as our starting point the position of Bauckham, Hurtado, and Dunn (with qualification) that the earliest Christians spoke of Jesus in divine terms and that the deification of Jesus was not a later development under the influence of paganism. Yet all three concede, to a greater or lesser degree, that the early Christians significantly modified their inherited Jewish monotheism. This idea is somewhat surprising, especially since these scholars have emphasized continuity with Judaism, and the evidence for it needs to be explored. In doing so, we must be careful not to allow the development of explicit binitarianism in the second

⁹⁷ Nicholson, *Dynamic Oneness*, 231-32.

⁹⁸ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 6.

century and trinitarianism in the third and fourth centuries to overshadow the meaning and significance of discourse in the first century.

While accepting the basic position of Bauckham, Hurtado, and Dunn regarding the early deification of Jesus, with great respect and indebtedness for their groundbreaking scholarship in this field, we will attempt a description using somewhat different terminology. It is common to speak of a “high Christology,”⁹⁹ which deifies Jesus and elevates him alongside God. But in framing the discussion this way we should not import the complete doctrine of the Trinity of the fourth century. Later theologians conceptualized the Godhead as an abstract, impersonal, transcendent substance instantiated in three distinct, eternal persons, only one of whom became incarnate as Jesus Christ. Although the three are in union as one God, they are sufficiently distinct that one became incarnate while the others did not. While the building blocks of fourth-century trinitarianism may be implicit in the NT, this category is not explicit in first-century Jewish and Christian discourse, which characterized God as one personal being who is transcendent and yet who intervenes personally in human lives and affairs. If we view trinitarianism as the logical or providentially directed result of Christian discourse about Jesus, then we are likely to see the first-century discourse as a steppingstone toward that outcome. But what if the subordinationism of the second-century apologists had resulted in the view of a supreme God and a lesser agent of God? What if modalism, which predominated in the third century, had prevailed? Or what if Arianism, which came close to victory in the fourth century, had become Christian orthodoxy? Would we still look at the first-century discourse in the same way? Would we instead see the first-century discourse about Jesus as the first step toward one of those solutions? In our investigation, we will attempt to examine the first-century discourse in its own sociological and historical setting without anticipating it as a development toward something else.

Bauckham, Hurtado, and Dunn are correct to say there is a definite “two-ishness” in the early Christian discourse about God and Jesus, and they are also correct to say the early Christians sought to maintain the worship of only one God. Casey, Rainbow, and Dunn are correct that an explicit binitarianism would have been a significant break with Jewish monotheism, which undercuts the conclusion that the early Christians deified Jesus within a Jewish context. Indeed, as we will discuss in ch. 3, according to evidence from the late first century through the second century many Jews and Christians

⁹⁹ Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 32, 63.

considered the emerging binitarianism of that time to be incompatible with Jewish monotheism. The affirmation of both oneness and twoness introduces a tension in these descriptions of early Christology. The same tension appears in the contrasting statements of scholars who otherwise agree that a high Christology arose within Jewish monotheism, namely, Bauckham's position that the early Christians identified Jesus with or as Yahweh and Dunn's position that the early Christians believed Jesus was *not* Yahweh. And Dunn's statement here is in tension with his description of the Johannine Christ as the incarnation of God in his fullness, not simply the incarnation of the Son of God. Do these tensions represent an inherent contradiction within the NT? If so, there may be no comprehensive, consistent theory to account for all the evidence. Alternatively, is there a way to describe or envision NT Christology that both preserves continuity with Jewish monotheism and acknowledges the early deification of Jesus? A full answer is beyond the scope of this thesis, but as a secondary goal we will attempt to make some contribution to this issue with particular reference to Pauline Christology as expressed in his Corinthian correspondence.

The Question of Why: Causation and Motive

An important critique has surfaced in the responses to Bauckham, Hurtado, and Dunn, especially the first two in light of their advocacy of an immediate high Christology. The question is one of causation and motive. If the earliest Christians came from an exclusively monotheistic Jewish background, why did they take such a radical step of deifying Jesus from practically the outset? Even if we posit supernatural experiences, they do not fully explain why early Christians would have been prone psychologically and sociologically to interpret supernatural experiences in this fashion and change their socio-religious location. In response to Bauckham's 1998 book Talbert noted: "Unanswered is the question why Christians would have made the moves they did. Was it Jesus' resurrection? If so, why?"¹⁰⁰ Similarly Siniscalchi responded to Bauckham's 2008 book with appreciation for his thesis of an immediate high Christology but observed that Bauckham said little about causal theories: "One is left wondering who or what was responsible for this radically abrupt change from Judaism to what we now know as

¹⁰⁰ Charles H. Talbert, review of Bauckham, *God Crucified*, *PRSt* 28 (2001): 309.

Christianity. Bauckham admirably presents what happened in the first century but leaves unaddressed key questions of how and why.”¹⁰¹

Recently, Hurtado summarized his position, identifying four forces or factors leading to the early deification of Jesus:

(1) the Jewish monotheistic tradition with its ability to accommodate “principal agent” figures, who can variously be chief angels, OT patriarchs such as Moses or Enoch, or even personified attributes of God (such as Wisdom or Word); (2) the impact of Jesus’ own earthly ministry and crucifixion; (3) the wider religious environment of the Roman era (the influence of which is more typically indicated, however, [by] reaction against it); and (4) the crucial role of revelatory religious experiences, through which earliest Christians came to the conviction that God now required them to reverence Jesus as they did.¹⁰²

Rainbow supported Hurtado’s critique of Bousset and commended Hurtado for addressing the issue of how such a “high christology” relates to “traditional monotheism,” but he identified some difficulties with Hurtado’s explanation of causation:¹⁰³ (1) If the Jewish concept of divine agency did not cause first-century Jews to reinterpret monotheism by worshiping an agent of God, why did it have this effect for early Christians? Or to put it in a slightly different way, why did not the Jewish concept of limited divine agency prevent early Christians from going so far as to worship Jesus? (2) An appeal to experiences cannot provide the complete answer because experiences are inherently ambiguous and are interpreted in light of one’s preexisting belief system. In 2009 Fletcher-Louis said Hurtado had not fully addressed the problem of experience identified by Rainbow and therefore had not fully answered the question of why. He referred to a sociology of knowledge whereby religious experiences are interpreted within the confines of existing theological categories. Religious experiences can produce new beliefs, but typically the parent body rejects the new beliefs and an individual founds a new religious group. In this case, if Judaism was the parent, Jesus would be the founder.

¹⁰¹ Glenn B. Siniscalchi, review of Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, *ATHR* 93 (2011): 160.

¹⁰² Larry W. Hurtado, “Early Devotion to Jesus: A Report, Reflections, and Implications,” *ExpTim* 122 (2011): 172-73.

¹⁰³ Rainbow, “Jewish Monotheism,” 81-87.

By Hurtado's hypothesis, however, the parent group would be the early Christian disciples, who did not recognize Christ's deity during his life. But then who founded the group that deified Christ, and why did almost all the early Christians convert to this belief? The implication is that all of them must have had the same experiences, which led to the same beliefs and which in turn resulted in a radical, costly break from their parent group.¹⁰⁴ To illustrate the problem, 1 Cor 15:5-8 says over five hundred disciples saw the resurrected Christ, and Acts records visions to Peter and Paul that motivated the early Christians to extend the gospel to the Gentiles. If, as Hurtado maintained, the worship of Jesus was an unprecedented development in Jewish monotheism shortly after Christ's death, then why are there no accounts of visions or other revelatory experiences specifically supporting this new paradigm? In short, there is a lack of evidence that the early Christians would have interpreted revelatory experiences contrary to their theological tradition. Thus, Fletcher-Louis proposed, the true source of Christ-devotion must have been Jesus himself—not experiences of dreams and visions but a historical experience of Jesus in which he was perceived in some sense as God incarnate.¹⁰⁵

In rebuttal Hurtado emphasized several points: (1) Multiple historical factors worked together. (2) The religious experiences were shaped by the theological and historical context. (3) Occasionally religious experiences do reconfigure beliefs. (4) These religious experiences were not restricted to visions. In sum, through the various revelatory experiences of many believers, early Christian groups became convinced that God had resurrected and glorified Jesus and that the exalted Jesus was worthy of worship.¹⁰⁶

Other scholars such as Boyarin, Segal, and Talbert have posited an "angel Christology." They agreed that the deification of Jesus occurred early and within a Jewish context but emphasized the role of angels in certain noncanonical Jewish texts as the key. We will examine the basic evidence for this view as part of our discussion of Jewish monotheism (ch. 3) and will examine the two contrasting views at the exegetical level in the Corinthian correspondence (chs. 5 and 6). Similarly, Rainbow argued that eschatological figures in the OT, such as David's Lord in Ps 110:1 and "one like a son of man" in Dan 7:13 (NIV), prepared the way for the worship of Jesus.¹⁰⁷ These

¹⁰⁴ Fletcher-Louis, "New Explanation of Christological Origins," 178-81.

¹⁰⁵ Fletcher-Lewis, "New Explanation of Christological Origins," 185-88, 200.

¹⁰⁶ Larry W. Hurtado, "The Origins of Jesus-Devotion: A Response to Crispin Fletcher-Louis," *TynBul* 61 (2010): 10-16.

¹⁰⁷ Rainbow, "Jewish Monotheism," 88.

explanations stress continuity with Judaism but do not fully address the unprecedented character of the deification of Jesus or the question of motivation.

While accepting the evidence for an early view of Jesus as divine, Mack rejected explanations involving the historical Jesus, the miraculous, or the divine. Instead, he focused on social interests, social formation, and social benefits the early Christians derived from adopting this view. Moreover, powerful motivations must have been involved, because speaking of Jesus as the cosmic Lord (the standard term for Yahweh in the LXX) was a startling and potentially offensive reinterpretation of Jewish beliefs.¹⁰⁸ As these remarks indicate, the proposals advanced thus far have not fully explained why the early Christians took such a radical step, and thus we should look for answers in the larger socio-historical context rather than simply at the level of individual experiences. At the same time, Dunn rightly responded to Mack and others that we cannot regard religion solely as a social construct. We cannot completely discount religious experience as an explanatory factor, as it was obviously decisive in the case of Paul himself.¹⁰⁹

As we will discuss in chs. 3 and 4, there were various ideas in Jewish and Hellenistic culture—such as deification, apotheosis, epiphany or manifestation, incarnation, angelic intermediaries, and exalted patriarchs—that could have influenced the thinking of early Christians and provided concepts and language for them to employ.¹¹⁰ However, the evidence for an early high Christology limits the impact of these influences, because the earliest Christians identified with mainstream Jewish thought, yet Jewish ideas did not rise to the level of the Christian deification of Jesus, and there was not a long evolutionary process by which these ideas could have grown into such a high Christology. As Fletcher-Louis noted, no one now suggests that Jewish worship of angels offers a full explanation of early Christology.¹¹¹ Therefore, we must face the central question of why Jewish Christians deified Jesus in a manner unprecedented in Judaism. For the earliest Christians, motivating factors could have included their encounter with the historical Jesus, their religious experiences, the exegesis of key OT texts, and some cultural influences as just discussed. However, these factors do not fully explain how the earliest Christians were able to forge a new movement and recruit to the worship of Jesus

¹⁰⁸ Mack, *Christian Myth*, 58, 68-69, 83, 142.

¹⁰⁹ James D. G. Dunn, review of Ron Cameron and Merrill P. Miller, eds., *Redescribing Christian Origins*, *JBL* 124 (2005): 763.

¹¹⁰ See Burkett, review of Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 129.

¹¹¹ Fletcher-Louis, "New Explanation of Christological Origins," 166.

thousands of Jews and Gentiles who did not have encounters with the historical Jesus or special revelatory experiences.

Once again, Chester has provided a helpful summary. Like Hurtado and unlike Bauckham, he agreed that principal angel traditions played some role in the development of a high Christology. Although Jewish intermediary figures served as a reference for early Christians to explain Christ's significance, they cannot completely explain the development of Christology. Other factors must also be considered, such as the ministry of Jesus himself, the Jewish messianic-royal traditions, and key scriptural passages. Moreover, a catalyst was needed to connect these factors together, and revelatory and visionary religious experiences served this function. Chester concluded that there is now a "substantial consensus" for the emergence of a high or divine Christology very early and from a Jewish context, so that the questions of "whence" and "when" have been addressed successfully. However, "it is much less easy to answer the question 'why,' and it is indeed a question that has been addressed much less often and much less clearly."¹¹²

In short, the question of causation and motive has not been fully answered. Therefore, the primary focus of this thesis will be to examine the evidence for the deification of Jesus in our selected text and use this information to address the question of why the early Christians deified Jesus, particularly considering neglected socio-historical factors.

Significance of 2 Corinthians 3:16–4:6

The nine verses of 2 Cor 3:16–4:6 are significant for the study of how the first-century church viewed Jesus. The passage provides insight into the thinking of early Christians, how they spoke of Jesus Christ, why they did so, and what purposes this discourse served. The Corinthian correspondence is particularly helpful in this regard because here we have an undisputed text written by a major leader, the apostle Paul, very early in the history of Christianity, ca. 55-56 C.E.¹¹³ Indeed, the undisputed epistles of Paul are the earliest Christian writings we have.¹¹⁴ "They are the best-documented

¹¹² Chester, "High Christology," 42-43, 46-50.

¹¹³ D. A. Carson, Douglas Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 282-83.

¹¹⁴ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 81.

segment of the early Christian movement. We have at least seven indubitable letters by the principal figure . . . the earliest of all extant Christian writings.”¹¹⁵

Information about Jesus as taken from 2 Corinthians is especially illuminating since Paul’s purpose in writing this letter was not to propound novel or controversial views of Christ. He wrote 2 Corinthians to explain his ministry and defend his apostolic authority,¹¹⁶ as we see in 2 Cor 3:1-6; 10-13. In order for a speaker to exercise authority in a situation, both speaker and audience must have a foundation of shared beliefs.¹¹⁷ Thus, it is unlikely for Paul to have deliberately made controversial statements on theological issues unrelated to his purpose, such as making statements that could leave him open to criticism by the Judaizers with whom he had already contended in other locales, notably Galatia. A faction in the Corinthian church followed Peter (1 Cor 1:12), and some apparently valued the Jewish law quite highly (2 Cor 3:7-18). Such people would have been sensitive to any perceived deviation from Palestinian Christianity. For the christological statements in the Corinthian correspondence to have noncontroversial status, the basic concepts must have predated Paul and must have characterized, or at least must have been compatible with, early Palestinian Jewish Christianity.¹¹⁸ Paul did not attempt to justify his deification of Jesus but assumed it, evidently because it was not a subject of dispute between Paul and his readers or between Paul and other Jewish Christians.¹¹⁹ Significantly, we find no evidence of a debate in the NT over Paul’s exalted view of Jesus.¹²⁰

Finally, 2 Corinthians gives us a unique opportunity to observe the response to Paul’s teaching by an early Christian community, which after the writing of 1 Corinthians had been influenced by rival leaders who claimed authority as apostles and challenged Paul’s authority (2 Cor 11:5, 13; 12:11-12). To the extent that any concepts in 1 Corinthians were confusing or controversial in early Christian circles, we would expect to see some correction, clarification, explanation, or justification in 2 Corinthians. Accordingly, in Paul’s discourse about Christ as found in 2 Cor 3:16–4:6, he appealed to

¹¹⁵ Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (2d ed.; New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), 7.

¹¹⁶ Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (3d ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 370.

¹¹⁷ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 23.

¹¹⁸ See Hengel, “Hellenization” of Judaea, 18; Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 25-28, 37.

¹¹⁹ Hurtado, *God in NT Theology*, 107-8.

¹²⁰ Craig Blomberg, review of Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, *JETS* 47 (2004): 712.

what he considered to be the common understanding of Jesus.¹²¹ Thus, we can expect to find descriptions of Jesus that were taken for granted by a broad range of Christians at this time—Palestinian Jews (such as Peter), Hellenistic Jews (such as Paul), and Gentiles (such as the Corinthian believers).

From this perspective it is significant that 2 Cor 3:16–4:6 uses exalted—even divine—language to refer to Christ, linking him in the closest possible way to God. That this type of discourse would come from a monotheistic Jewish context is quite remarkable. Analyzing this language in terms of the later theological formulations of orthodox Christianity in the fourth century does not help us understand its meaning and function in the first century.¹²² Nor is it satisfactory to explain this language as a Hellenizing tendency introduced by Gentile converts. First-century Judaism was already Hellenized,¹²³ and yet, as we will demonstrate in ch. 3, exclusive monotheism remained its theological foundation.¹²⁴ As contemporary Pauline scholars acknowledge, Paul’s thought was fundamentally Jewish and included an uncompromising monotheism.¹²⁵ Namely, the Jews worshiped only one God, Yahweh. Yet scholars have not given adequate attention to Paul’s strong monotheistic assertions. Specifically, how could Paul as a Jew simultaneously affirm the exclusive worship of the one God of Israel and yet affirm Jesus Christ as Lord?¹²⁶ In short, we will investigate the deification language of 2 Cor 3:16–4:6 in the context of first-century Judaism. We will attempt to understand the role, purpose, and function of this significant discourse.

Summary: Questions, Approach, and Goals

Paul’s discourse about Jesus in 2 Cor 3:16–4:6 raises three fundamental questions:

1. *What* does the exalted language concerning Christ in this text represent? Did Paul and other early Jewish believers in Jesus truly begin to speak of him in terms of deity otherwise reserved for Yahweh? Is it part of an “unfolding” Christology—a

¹²¹ Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 171.

¹²² David Greenwood, “The Lord Is the Spirit: Some Considerations of 2 Cor 3:17,” *CBQ* 34 (1972): 469-72; Morna Hooker, “Beyond the Things That Are Written? St. Paul’s Use of Scripture,” *NTS* 27 (1981): 301.

¹²³ Hengel, “*Hellenization*” of *Judaea*, 2, 53; Lester Grabbe, *An Introduction to First-Century Judaism: Jewish Religion and History in the Second Temple Period* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 7.

¹²⁴ Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 91-92; Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 3-4.

¹²⁵ Nicholson, *Dynamic Oneness*, 5, 10.

¹²⁶ Nicholson, *Dynamic Oneness*, 2-3.

development from “Jewish prophet to Jewish God”?¹²⁷ Or does Paul’s language simply fit into preexisting categories used to describe humans who are clearly not identified with God? We will conclude that Paul’s language expresses a belief in Jesus as the self-revelation of God.

2. *How* did Paul and other early Christians explain, reconcile, or otherwise justify the deification of Jesus in light of their monotheistic heritage? Can we reconcile this language with the monotheistic background of early Christianity? Did Paul and his audience explicitly modify or abandon the exclusive monotheism of Second Temple Judaism? Or did they see this language as still compatible with Jewish belief? If the latter, how did they reconcile their devotion to Jesus with the worship of the one God of the Hebrew Scriptures? We will conclude that they affirmed their monotheistic tradition and incorporated devotion to Jesus by identifying him as the one true God of Israel revealed in a new, unprecedented dimension by coming into the world in human identity.

3. *Why* did Paul and other early Christians deify Jesus, given the Jewish insistence upon the worship of Yahweh alone? What motivated this discourse, what interests were served, and what were the practical consequences? We will conclude that the answer has much to do with theological and sociological boundary setting. Jewish monotheism served the function of setting theological and sociological boundaries, which in turn established authority, group identity, and community. Paul was concerned to uphold his Jewish monotheistic heritage, which was the source of his theological authority, yet he also was concerned to maintain a distinct group identity and community for the Christian groups he was forming and leading—distinct from both Jews and pagans in their cultural environs. He needed to communicate both continuity and distinctiveness with respect to Judaism, and the identity of Jesus Christ became a focal point in this process. At the same time, he sought to broaden the appeal of his monotheistic heritage beyond Jewish ethnicity, and again the identity of Jesus Christ was vital to this transformation.

As we investigate these questions, we will frame our discussion in terms of the following points: (1) In agreement with Bousset, Bauckham, Hurtado, and Dunn, Second Temple Judaism was characterized by strict or exclusive monotheism. For our purposes we are not excluding the possibilities of henotheism or monolatry because our focus is on Israel’s exclusive worship of Yahweh as the supreme God. (2) Contrary to Bousset but in

¹²⁷ James D. G. Dunn, “The Making of Christology—Evolution or Unfolding?,” in *Jesus of Nazareth, Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 437, 447.

agreement with Bauckham, Hurtado, and Dunn, early Christology emerged within a Jewish Christian context; it was not a development precipitated by Gentile inclusion in the early church. (3) In agreement with Hurtado and especially Bauckham, the earliest Christians spoke of Jesus as God and did so by identifying Jesus as the God of Israel. (4) In agreement with Dunn while avoiding the terminology of Hurtado, the earliest Christian discussion of the significance of Jesus was not binitarian; but in agreement with Hurtado rather than Dunn, Paul clearly described Jesus as deity and this development clearly took place before John's Gospel. Although we start with point 1 (the background of Jewish monotheism) as a premise, we will consider the evidence for this assumption in ch. 3. Using historical-critical/grammatical exegesis with insights from rhetorical criticism and Oneness Pentecostal Christology as described in ch. 2, we will test points 2, 3, and 4. We will do so by an investigation of Paul's Corinthian correspondence and particularly an examination of 2 Cor 3:16–4:6 in its historical and literary context, which we present in chs. 4, 5, and 6. In ch. 7, we use the results of our investigation to fulfill the purposes of our study.

Our primary purpose is to examine the deification of Jesus in our selected text and then to ask why this development took place in early Jewish Christian thought, particularly considering the type of socio-rhetorical issues raised by Mack, which have not been fully considered heretofore in this discussion. Given Paul's background of strict monotheism it is not obvious why he would begin speaking of Jesus in divine terms. Even considering the diversity present in first-century Judaism, his language is extraordinary. It is not enough to assert that he deified and worshiped Jesus. If we are to defend this interpretation as the best explanation of the evidence, we need a more thorough explanation of his motives and the motives of those who accepted his message.

As a secondary purpose, to describe the early Christian deification of Jesus we will seek language that expresses continuity with Jewish monotheism rather than terms such as "binitarian," "mutation," or "inclusion within the divine identity," which stand in tension with Jewish monotheism. While our investigation agrees in significant ways with Bauckham, Hurtado, and Dunn, we will suggest a somewhat different way of understanding Paul's deification of Jesus. This proposal will not be a definitive statement of Paul's Christology or a systematization of his thought, much less a reconstruction of NT Christology, as such projects would go far beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, based on our study of Paul's Corinthian correspondence and especially 2 Cor 3:16–4:6, we will offer nuances or modifications to the current discussion.

In short, we will look more closely at the questions of *why* Paul identified Jesus with the one God of Israel and *how* he did so. From our study we expect to obtain a fresh view of Christian origins that has relevance for modern, global Christianity. By distancing early Christian discourse about Jesus from subsequent developments and controversies in Western theology and by examining the socio-rhetorical strategies of Paul in the context of his day, we will suggest or sketch out new ways to understand and interpret early Christian discourse about the identity of Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, Paul and other early Christians believed they encountered divine presence, power, authority, and holiness, and his identity became central to their own group identity. But once they began to speak in such terms, they had to deal with their received religious tradition, which did not allow for other gods. Thus we see their attempt to speak of the identity of Jesus Christ in terms of the one God of the Jews.

Quotation of 2 Corinthians 3:16–4:6

(3:16) ἡνίκα δὲ ἔαν ἐπιστρέψῃ πρὸς κύριον, περιαιρεῖται τὸ κάλυμμα. (17) ὁ δὲ κύριος τὸ πνευμά ἐστιν· οὐ δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα κυρίου, ἐλευθερία. (18) ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντες ἀνακεκαλυμμένῳ προσώπῳ τὴν δόξαν κυρίου κατοπτριζόμενοι τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφούμεθα ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν καθάπερ ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος.

(4:1) Διὰ τοῦτο, ἔχοντες τὴν διακονίαν ταύτην καθὼς ἠλεήθημεν, οὐκ ἐγκακοῦμεν (2) ἀλλὰ ἀπειπάμεθα τὰ κρυπτὰ τῆς αἰσχύνης, μὴ περιπατοῦντες ἐν πανουργίᾳ μηδὲ δολοῦντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ τῇ φανερώσει τῆς ἀληθείας συνιστάνοντες ἑαυτοὺς πρὸς πᾶσαν συνείδησιν ἀνθρώπων ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ. (3) εἰ δὲ καὶ ἔστιν κεκαλυμμένον τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν, ἐν τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις ἔστιν κεκαλυμμένον, (4) ἐν οἷς ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου ἐτύφλωσεν τὰ νοήματα τῶν ἀπίστων εἰς τὸ μὴ αὐγάσαι τὸν φωτισμὸν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τῆς δόξης τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ. (5) οὐ γὰρ ἑαυτοὺς κηρύσσομεν ἀλλὰ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν κύριον, ἑαυτοὺς δὲ δούλους ὑμῶν διὰ Ἰησοῦν. (6) ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ὁ εἰπών, Ἐκ σκότους φῶς λάμπει, ὃς ἔλαμψεν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν πρὸς φωτισμὸν τῆς γνώσεως τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν προσώπῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

(3:16) But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. (17) Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (18) And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

(4:1) Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. (2) We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God. (3) And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. (4) In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (5) For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. (6) For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Unless otherwise indicated, quotations of the Bible and the Apocrypha in English are from the New Revised Standard Version.

THEORY AND METHOD

History-of-Religions Approach (*Religionsgeschichte*)

As exemplified by the discussion thus far, we will incorporate a history-of-religions approach, viewing the text from the outside. As Smith pointed out, this approach means the analysis must be more than a paraphrase of the author's expression. The interpretation "*cannot be simply the data writ large. . . . When map is the territory, it lacks both utility and any cognitive advantage.*"¹²⁹ Likewise, as van den Heever explained, if we merely take a text at face value and accept the insider viewpoint, we will not be able to relate its statements to their context effectively. To theorize about a religious text, we must view it from a distance and translate its statements into language foreign to the original author and audience.¹³⁰

Thus Paul would probably be astounded to read a detailed discussion of his thought in terms of "monotheism," "deification," and "Christology," much less "binitarianism" or "trinitarianism." Yet if we are to analyze his discourse and its significance, we must find ways to describe it from a distance. At the same time, we cannot study a text in isolation. Rather, we must locate it within its tradition and seek to explain its history of both continuity and change.¹³¹

By its very nature, religious discourse contains an appeal to authority. In the case of 2 Corinthians, the appeal is quite specific; indeed, it is the main theme of the letter. To understand how the text functioned in its original rhetorical situation, we must realize how difficult it would have been for the original readers simply to dispute it—and how difficult it would be for anyone else who accepts the text's authority. Instead, to the extent that theologians may question its ideas, they tend to express internal differences or conflicts in a way that still shows respect for the presumed authority, thus displacing the conflict to the arena of interpretation. Those who accept texts as having religious authority seek to address their concerns and struggles with reference to the teachings of the text. In some cases, the difficulty of doing so elicits highly selective readings and

¹²⁹ Jonathan Z. Smith, "Bible and Religion," *BCSSR* 29, no. 4 (2000): 91.

¹³⁰ Gerhard van den Heever, "Redescribing Graeco-Roman Antiquity: On Religion and History of Religion," *R&T* 12 (2005): 281.

¹³¹ Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, xi.

creative hermeneutics.¹³² This characteristic of religious discourse makes it more challenging to work through various interpretations and traditions of interpretation (discourse about discourse) in order to attain an understanding of the text in its rhetorical situation.

Lincoln's "Theses on Method" provides further guidance for the history-of-religions approach: We should examine the "temporal, contextual, situated, interested, human, and material dimensions" of religious discourses, practices, and institutions.¹³³ For example, we need to ask such questions as: (1) Who is speaking? (2) Who is being addressed (which leads to an investigation of contexts)? (3) Why was the speech act attempted (purpose of the discourse)? (4) What outcome is anticipated (i.e., who wins and who loses if the persuasion succeeds)? This investigation leads to a holistic study of texts as social discourse, which involves examination of appeals to authority and consideration of views whether deemed orthodox or heterodox.

Paul appealed to what he regarded as authoritative traditions received through Judaism (1 Cor 8:4) and through the early church (1 Cor 15:1-4). According to Acts, he defended the basic tenets of Pharisaic Judaism (Acts 23:6; 24:14), while obviously moving beyond this position. Clearly, he used the rhetorical strategy of connecting tradition to innovation. The early Christians were engaged in tradition formation, which includes the development of

a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.¹³⁴

In this sense, early Christians employed forms of narrative discourse possessing both credibility and authority in the cultural context. By appealing to selected episodes from the past, such discourse evokes sentiments of attachment, which establish and affirm

¹³² Bruce Lincoln, "Conflict," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (ed. M. C. Taylor; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 66.

¹³³ Bruce Lincoln, "Theses on Method," *MTSR* 17 (2005): 8.

¹³⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition* (ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger; Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

social identity and solidarity.¹³⁵ To study this type of discourse, we must consider “texts, contexts, intertexts, pretexts, subtexts, and consequences,” and to do so Lincoln has recommended the following protocol:¹³⁶

1. Establish the categories at issue in the mythic text. . . .
2. Note whether there are any changes in the ranking of categories between the beginning of the narrative and its conclusion. . . .
3. Assemble a set of related materials from the same culture area. . . .
4. Establish any connections that exist between the categories that figure in these texts and those which condition the relations of the social groups among whom the texts circulate.
5. Establish the date and authorship of all texts considered and the circumstances of their appearance, circulation, and reception.
6. Try to draw reasonable inferences about the interests that are advanced, defended, or negotiated through each act of narration. . . .
7. Remember that to treat pointed issues, even in the most manipulative form, is to acknowledge them and to open up possibilities for those with other interests to advance alternate interpretations and thematizations.

We will employ these concepts as we study the selected text. We will use categories such as monotheism and Christology; assemble related texts from Second Temple Judaism as well as early Christianity; establish connections among the texts; identify date, authorship, and other circumstances; consider the interests being advanced; and deal with the resulting issues in Christian theology without allowing later orthodoxy to predetermine the results of our investigation. Of course, both discourse and metadiscourse can be employed in ways different from original intentions, which in turn can result in both theological conflict and scholarly dispute.

Historical-Critical/Grammatical Exegesis

The core of this thesis is an exegetical study of 2 Cor 3:16–4:6. To examine this text we will use grammatical-historical exegesis as a traditional, standard starting point

¹³⁵ Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 23-24.

¹³⁶ Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 150-51.

for interpretation. Exegesis literally means to bring meaning out of the text. The foremost question is one of intention: What did the original author intend to communicate to his or her original reader(s)?¹³⁷ Meaning relates both to the use of particular words and to the context in which they appear: “Interpretation entails literal meaning. . . . There is no such thing as ‘religious language’ in need of a special grammar, semantics or code book. We must also hold firm to a second premise, the distinction between the meaning of a sentence and its indefinite uses in a variety of contexts.”¹³⁸ Exegetical questions include those of *content* (textual, lexical, grammatical, and historical-cultural data) and *context* (historical and literary).¹³⁹ This method of interpretation is grammatical because it derives meaning from the grammatical context—the definition of words and their grammatical forms and relationships. It is historical because it derives meaning from the historical context, seeking to understand the words and expressions according to their meaning when they were written. In short, the grammatical-historical method follows the usual or normal implication of an expression, the ordinary and apparent meaning.

Blomberg called this method “the historical-critical/grammatical view” and defined it as “studying the biblical text, or any other text, in its original historical context and seeking the meaning its author(s) most likely intended for its original audience(s) or addressees based on the grammar and syntax.”¹⁴⁰ Seeking authorial intent is not an attempt to imagine internal mental processes but to discern the probable meaning of a text based on a study of the original author and the original audience in their historical, social, and cultural contexts. The interpreter focuses on the text in existence along with available information concerning the circumstances in which the text was produced. The proper use of this method does not exclude other approaches to the text, nor does it establish one,

¹³⁷ Gordon Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 21.

¹³⁸ Hans H. Penner, “Interpretation,” in *Guide to the Study of Religion* (ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon; New York: Cassell, 2000), 69-70.

¹³⁹ Fee, *NT Exegesis*, 25.

¹⁴⁰ Craig Blomberg, “The Historical-Critical/Grammatical View,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2012), 27, 31, 46. See also Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1991); Hans Conzelmann and Andreas Lindemann, *Interpreting the New Testament: An Introduction to the Principles and Methods of N.T. Exegesis* (trans. Siegfried Schatzmann; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1988); Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics* (3d rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970); Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (3d ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

fixed, “objective” meaning. Other approaches can be legitimate and useful, but their foundation or starting point is the historical-critical/grammatical approach.¹⁴¹

Philosophical and Theological Hermeneutics

In the twentieth century, postmodern philosophers challenged the underpinnings of traditional hermeneutics. The prevailing modernist approach, based on the Enlightenment, championed unbiased reason and assumed a neutral observer could ascertain the intentions of an author and the fixed, objective meaning of a text by the straightforward use of historical-critical tools. In contrast Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur held it to be impossible to have presuppositionless thought.¹⁴² More than anyone else, Gadamer overthrew the Cartesian and Enlightenment approach to meaning and truth, emphasizing that everything involves hermeneutics, everything requires interpretation. Everyone approaches a text with prejudices or pre-judgment, everything is driven by tradition and interpretation, and neutral reason is a fallacy.¹⁴³ Since every interpreter brings a pre-understanding to a text, we must be sensitive to the distance between the original context and the contemporary context, or the “horizon of the text” and the “horizon of the reader.” We must seek to bring the two together, or fuse the horizons, in order for understanding, communication, and learning to take place.¹⁴⁴ Gadamer’s fusion of horizons is also called the hermeneutical circle. Every reader is situated in a historical tradition, which has interpretive power. Thus, interpretation begins with a pre-understanding based in the reader’s tradition, progresses as text and reader question each other and the reader fuses the horizons, and ultimately produces a revised understanding, which in turn can generate a further pre-understanding of the text.¹⁴⁵ The hermeneutical circle is more accurately a hermeneutical spiral, as understanding is progressively revised and as meaning develops in an iterative process.

Ricoeur spoke of “distanciation,” which creates distance between a discourse and its reader and enables the text to have a life of its own. It is followed by “appropriation,”

¹⁴¹ Blomberg, “Historical-Critical/Grammatical View,” 28, 47.

¹⁴² Merold Westphal, “The Philosophical/Theological View,” in Porter and Stovell, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 72.

¹⁴³ Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 218-19, 226.

¹⁴⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (trans. and ed. David Linge; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 82-94, 199-211.

¹⁴⁵ Roger Lundin, “Interpreting Orphans: Hermeneutics in the Cartesian Tradition,” in Roger Lundin, Clarence Walhout, and Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Promise of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 57.

which overcomes distanciation, enables the reader to apply the text, and functions essentially like Gadamer's fusion of horizons. By this process the text can be objectified and the reader can achieve some distance not only from the text but from his or her own tradition. Ricoeur viewed Gadamer as insufficiently critical of tradition and thus provided a way to critique tradition from within.¹⁴⁶ He also explained, "The sense of the text is not behind the text, but in front of it. It is not something hidden, but something disclosed."¹⁴⁷ The reader does not seek meaning in the hidden psychological processes of the author or in a timeless meaning of the text itself but in his or her interaction with the text.

Consequently, neither Gadamer nor Ricoeur looked to the author alone in fixing meaning but looked beyond. Within Gadamer's fusion of horizons there is a fusing of the objective and subjective, which creates new horizons—new options for meaning and understanding.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, for Ricoeur there is a "surplus of meaning," which leads to several potential ways of understanding a text even though not all interpretations are equally valid.¹⁴⁹ In postmodern hermeneutics, then, the reader is integrally involved in the formation of meaning. Meaning resides in the interaction of writer, reader, context, and society, and it is revealed by the impact the text makes on the reader. For this reason, it is important for interpreters to identify their own hermeneutical situation. "It is necessary to make our *own* situation transparent *so that* we can appreciate precisely the otherness and alterity of the text—that is, without allowing our unelucidated prejudices to dominate the text unwittingly and so conceal what is proper to it."¹⁵⁰

These developments in philosophical hermeneutics have influenced similar developments in theological hermeneutics, represented by scholars such as Thiselton and Vanhoozer.¹⁵¹ Theological hermeneutics encompasses various interpretive models and practices and applies these philosophical interests to biblical interpretation while remaining in the Christian theological tradition. The result is to approach the Bible as a

¹⁴⁶ Stanley E. Porter and Jason C. Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction to Interpretive Theory* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 120-28.

¹⁴⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 87-88.

¹⁴⁸ Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 86.

¹⁴⁹ Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 121-23.

¹⁵⁰ Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (trans. Jack Weinsheimer; New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), 97.

¹⁵¹ See Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

theological document, to recognize the importance of pre-understanding, and to employ the hermeneutical circle or spiral.¹⁵²

At the level of exegesis, theological hermeneutics recognizes that the intention of the biblical writer is still important and that critical historical inquiry is still needed.¹⁵³ It does not eliminate the original author and audience but recognizes that the meaning of a text goes beyond the author. Subsequent audiences are in different contexts and therefore construe the text differently. At the same time the original context provides necessary guidance; a text cannot simply mean anything. The situation of the original discourse serves as a guardrail. In this way a text places limits on its interpretation, but it also remains open to other meanings in contexts not anticipated by the author. We can speak of original meaning and present meaning in the traditional terms of exegesis and application, as long as we understand that application does not mean going “from theory to practice” but “from then to now.”¹⁵⁴ The following is one paradigm for the literary/postmodern exegesis of a text:¹⁵⁵

We begin by closely concentrating on the linguistic, stylistic, structural and thematic elements of the *final text* under investigation. From there, we widen out to connective *cotexts* within the larger narrative or book; then to suggestive *intertexts*, especially those ripe for fruitful “canonical conversation”; then to informative *contexts* in the surrounding rhetorical and cultural environments; and finally, to expansive horizons of different readers from diverse social locations and power positions, staking their distinctive claims to a dynamic *open text*. But no sooner do we fan out as far as we dare than we are drawn back in, with centripetal force, bringing our enhanced perspectives to bear on interpreting the focal text.

Our survey of contemporary philosophical and theological hermeneutics does not obviate the need for historical-critical/grammatical exegesis but provides guidance for its use and for the evaluation of its results, as demonstrated by the following points:

(1) Everyone comes to a text with theological, cultural, and sociological perspectives,

¹⁵² Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 245, 251.

¹⁵³ Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 10, 15, 20, 99.

¹⁵⁴ Westphal, “Philosophical/Theological View,” 77-79, 85.

¹⁵⁵ F. Scott Spencer, “The Literary/Postmodern View,” in Porter and Stovell, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 68.

presuppositions, assumptions, and beliefs. It is important to identify them, examine their validity, discern how they affect the understanding of the text, allow the text to critique them, and subject them to modification and reinterpretation through the iterative use of the hermeneutical spiral, which we apply to a single text or to a group of texts. (2) Instead of simply having a single, fixed, objective meaning, a text can have multiple layers of significance and many applications. The significance of a text can vary with the questions brought to the text and therefore with the readers who bring the questions. (3) A text develops a life of its own and can be appropriated for different purposes. (4) We should seek meaning through a humble, holistic approach in dialogue with the text and with other interpreters of the past and present.

Rhetorical Criticism

As we examine our selected text closely, we will employ methods of rhetorical criticism. Rhetorical criticism seeks to understand the purpose of an utterance or writing within the overall situation in which it was created. This approach recognizes that meaning can rest as much in the situation that generated the language as in the language itself. As we have discussed, historical-critical/grammatical exegesis focuses on the intention of the author, and while rhetorical criticism can aid in this process, it opens additional avenues of fruitful investigation. It reveals that meaning can change radically depending on the rhetorical situation—not just the verbal context of the words but the situation that evoked the words, the purpose for which the words were communicated, the effect that the words were intended or expected to have. The significance of a statement becomes fully apparent only when we examine the total situation including the role of the speaker, the role of the hearer, the need or condition of the moment, and the interaction between speaker and hearer.

For example, a simple statement such as “The door is open” can have radically different meanings depending on the rhetorical situation. Under a traditional analysis, it might seem to have a fixed meaning: A specific entrance or exit is presently in a state of being apart, not closed, so as to allow unobstructed entrance or exit. Nevertheless, it is possible to imagine circumstances in which this simple statement can have various meanings. If a professor makes this statement to a timid student who is standing outside her office seeking an audience, the meaning would be, “Please come in.” If the professor makes the statement to a brash student who has intruded into the office and rudely challenged her, it would mean, “Leave at once.” If the professor and student are working

together in the office and a gust of wind blows some of their papers, the statement would mean, “Please shut the door.” And these examples do not even consider possible metaphorical uses of the phrase such as in Col 4:3 and Rev 3:8.

In each case, the interpretation of these four words is tied to the same objective reality, and the phrase cannot mean anything the interpreter might arbitrarily decide. In other words, in order to understand the phrase we must first understand the condition of the door to which it refers. However, the openness of the door is only the starting point for a proper understanding of the sentence. Indeed, the rhetorical situation is so crucial to a proper understanding that the identical phrase in two different situations can have diametrically opposed meanings, as in the first two examples we gave.

Turning to biblical hermeneutics, we see the importance of examining the rhetorical situation in order to understand texts, especially occasional writings such as the letters of Paul. Vorster has proposed the adoption of an interactional model in order to analyze these letters:¹⁵⁶

Meaning does not reside . . . only in the relationship of linguistic elements to one another, but also and foremostly in the interaction of speech situation and linguistic elements. The question is no longer “what does this sentence mean or say,” but rather “why is this utterance appropriate to the context and not any other,” or “what does this utterance do within this context.”

In order to construct the rhetorical situation, it is necessary to construe the audience. Once we identify the author and the implied reader, then we are in a position to reconstruct the rhetorical situation. Bitzer explained that rhetorical discourse is created in response to a specific situation. He then gave what has become a much-quoted definition of the rhetorical situation:¹⁵⁷

Rhetorical situation may be defined as a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can

¹⁵⁶ J. N. Vorster, “Toward an Interactional Model for the Analysis of Letters,” *Neot* 24 (1990): 109.

¹⁵⁷ Lloyd Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968): 6.

so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence.

Postmodern thinkers have critiqued and modified Bitzer's formulation, pointing out that it presumes meaning to reside in events. Instead, they have argued, meaning is not discovered in situations but created.¹⁵⁸

As Vorster explained his interactional model, the interpreter should focus on the persuasive force of a text. He or she should take into consideration the *need* of the rhetorical situation, the *status* of the situation, the *roles* of persons within the situation, and the identification of *topoi* and their relationship to the status. In this model, the status refers to the subject of the deed (person involved), the definition or naming of that deed, the quality of the deed, and the questioning of the whole process. The *topoi* are fundamental categories underlying the arguments or tactical aids used in the rhetorical situation.¹⁵⁹ Examples are reputation, past acts, hierarchy, genealogy, and kinship.¹⁶⁰

In sum, rhetorical criticism leads us to examine a text within its social context and its rhetorical situation, rather than attempting to understand a text in the abstract. We gain a greater awareness of the perspective and motives of the author, the perspective and motives of the interpreter, and the gap between the two. We focus on what the text *does* rather than merely what it *is*. We understand what the text means in terms not only of the author's originally intended meaning but also the calculated impact upon the intended audience and the practical effect upon all audiences.

Our method is both descriptive and interpretive, namely, redescriptive. When we exegete an ancient text, we are actually using our historical imagination to construct these points, not merely describing objective reality. We also seek to integrate these aspects to draw our own conclusions from the data before us. For instance, we look at the author's stated purpose, but we also examine his or her statement as a rhetorical act and evaluate his or her larger purpose in this act.

We will also employ insights from socio-rhetorical criticism, which Robbins described as follows: "Interpretation is guided by the insight that language is a means of negotiating meanings in and among the worlds in which people live. This means

¹⁵⁸ Richard E. Vatz, "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 6 (1973): 157, 161.

¹⁵⁹ Vorster, "Interactional Model," 119, 124, 126.

¹⁶⁰ J. N. Vorster, "Rhetorical Criticism," in *Focusing on the Message: New Testament Hermeneutics, Exegesis and Methods* (ed. A. B. du Toit; Pretoria, S.A.: Protea, 2009).

interpreters are also asked to become aware of their own social location and personal interests as they attempt to approach the social location and personal interests the text embodies.”¹⁶¹ We will consider five major aspects of socio-rhetorical analysis identified by Robbins:¹⁶² (1) *Inner texture*: features and relationships within the text. We will consider the inner texture of the Corinthian correspondence, of 2 Corinthians as a whole, and of the selected passage. (2) *Intertexture*: relationships to other texts and the social, cultural, and historical environment. We will consider the Second Temple Jewish literary, historical, and cultural background of the selected text and its key words. (3) *Sacred texture*: communication about and impact upon religious beliefs and praxis. We will consider how the text both articulated and shaped the beliefs and practical piety of the early Christians. (4) *Ideological texture*: communication about and evocation of ideas, viewpoints, and interpretations. We will discuss how the text exemplified and synthesized Hebrew and Greek thought in the first century. (5) *Social and cultural texture*: impact upon and interaction with social and cultural circumstances. We will consider the significance of the text in the sociological setting of early Christianity and how it influenced the involvement of Christians in their society and culture.

The Hermeneutical Context of Oneness Pentecostal Christology

In applying the hermeneutical principles we have discussed, it is important to consider the context of contemporary Pentecostal Christology, including Oneness Pentecostal Christology, for three reasons: (1) As postmodern hermeneutics reminds us, it

¹⁶¹ See Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity, 1996), 2. Combining the methods of rhetorical and social-science criticism, in the past two decades socio-rhetorical criticism has developed into a major new approach of understanding ancient texts by their use of conscious and unconscious rhetorical devices. “Early Christians created a new, distinctive mode of discourse through the particular way they focused on the relation of ‘an overall story’ to ‘belief arguments’ (convictions).” Vernon K. Robbins, *The Invention of Christian Discourse* (Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity 1; Blandford Forum, U.K.: Deo, 2009). This approach has given rise to two new commentary series, *Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity* (Deo), edited by Vernon K. Robbins and Duane F. Watson, and *The Socio-Rhetorical Commentary Series* (Eerdmans), with volumes by Ben Witherington III and David A. deSilva.

¹⁶² Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 3. Recently, socio-rhetorical criticism has focused on “analysis of social, cultural, and ideological places in socio-rhetorical interpretation” and the blending of six first-c. Christian “rhetorolects” (rhetorical dialects) derived from three major streams of ancient Mediterranean religious discourse. “Currently, incorporation of conceptual blending, cognitive theory, and cultural geography theory are guiding interpretation of the blending in early Christian literature of six rhetorolects—prophetic, apocalyptic, wisdom, precreation, priestly, and miracle—in the context of religious mantic (divine communication), philosophical, and ritual discourse in the Mediterranean world.” Idem, “Socio-Rhetorical Criticism,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament* (ed. David Aune; Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 192, 199. The five textures we have listed are more pertinent to our current study.

is essential for me as an interpreter and for my readers to understand my own background, presuppositions, and theological context.¹⁶³ My views have been informed and shaped by Oneness Pentecostalism, and much of my work has taken place within or with reference to this tradition.¹⁶⁴ (2) From an academic perspective the study of Pentecostal Christology in general is underdeveloped,¹⁶⁵ and there has been even less scholarly examination of Oneness Pentecostal Christology. The Pentecostal/Charismatic/Renewalist movement is a significant force in twenty-first-century Christianity, larger than any other group except Roman Catholicism, with over six hundred million adherents worldwide.¹⁶⁶ It comprises one-fourth of all Christians and over 8 percent of world population.¹⁶⁷ Oneness Pentecostals are a significant part of this movement, numbering possibly as many as thirty million worldwide in 620 organizations.¹⁶⁸ Scholarly attention should be given to the theological needs, interests, and formulations of such a group. (3) It is important to listen to voices from the cultural and theological margins, as they potentially have much to contribute to the discussion even if we do not always accept their emphases or conclusions.¹⁶⁹ These voices help us consider new ideas, options, needs, and solutions and can provide helpful reminders, correctives, and balance. They cause us to examine unconscious biases and presuppositions and hence to refine our views. In turn, they can be more effectively challenged to consider their own suppositions and perceptions. Oneness Pentecostalism is a relatively young movement; only recently has it begun to engage in self-reflective scholarship and in scholarly conversation with other groups and

¹⁶³ Porter and Stovell, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 55, 72-74, 205.

¹⁶⁴ Consequently, my hermenetical proposals have been described as an example of “the contemporary Evangelical-Pentecostal hermeneutic.” L. William Oliverio Jr., *Theological Hermeneutics in the Classical Pentecostal Tradition: A Typological Account* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 165-67.

¹⁶⁵ Sammy Alfaro, *Divino Compañero: Toward a Hispanic Pentecostal Christology* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 1; Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christology: A Global Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 110.

¹⁶⁶ Todd M. Johnson, “The Demographics of Renewal,” in *Spirit-Empowered Christianity for the Twenty-First Century* (ed. Vinson Synan; Lake Mary, Fla.: Charisma, 2011), 62. This number includes classical Pentecostals, Charismatics, Renewalists, and various similar groups that can be described as quasi-, neo-, or post-Charismatic, even if they do not identify with these labels. David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, “Global Statistics,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (rev. and exp. ed.; ed. Stanley Burgess and Eduard van der Maas; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 283-302. Using a more narrow definition of Pentecostal, there may be only 10 percent of this number. Stanley M. Burgess, “Change and Continuity among Twentieth-Century Peoples of the Spirit,” in Synan, *Spirit-Empowered Christianity*, 54. Nevertheless, for our purposes the larger number accurately reflects people with the type of theological and spiritual worldview we are describing.

¹⁶⁷ Barrett and Johnson, “Global Statistics,” 287.

¹⁶⁸ Talmadge L. French, “Garfield Thomas Haywood and the Interracial Impulse of Early Oneness Pentecostalism” (Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, U.K., 2010), 9, 13. Even under a more narrow definition as described in n.166, there are an estimated twelve to fifteen million Oneness Pentecostals.

¹⁶⁹ See Hens-Piazza, *New Historicism*, 12, 34, 39, 45.

movements. It is important to include Oneness Pentecostals in dialogue in order for them to examine their theological location and to understand how they can relate to broader Christian theology, as well as for other Christian theologians to understand how to address them.

In this regard, it is significant that Pentecostalism is at the forefront of a dramatic, rapid shift from Western to Southern Christianity in which non-Western theology, spirituality, and praxis are influencing, modifying, or replacing traditional Western forms.¹⁷⁰ One hundred years ago, 95 percent of Christians lived in the West, but today 70 percent live in Africa, Asia, and Latin America—what we might call the Two-Thirds World or Majority World.¹⁷¹ Pentecostalism accounts for much of this rise of more theologically conservative, spiritually oriented, and culturally diverse forms of Christianity around the globe, especially in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and urban North America.¹⁷²

Possibly even more than Trinitarian Pentecostalism, from its beginnings Oneness Pentecostalism has epitomized this cultural and theological diversity. The three most important theological shapers of early Oneness Pentecostalism were Frank Ewart, a Baptist bush missionary from Australia who immigrated to Canada and then to America; G. T. Haywood, an African-American pastor of a large interracial congregation in Indianapolis, Indiana; and Andrew Urshan, an Assyrian Christian who fled from Turkish massacres in his native Persia, converted to Pentecostalism in Chicago, and became the earliest Pentecostal evangelist to Russia.¹⁷³ A recent scholarly examination of early Pentecostal theologies featured twelve seminal thinkers of enduring relevance and significance, and three of them were Oneness leaders—Haywood, Urshan, and R. C. Lawson, African-American founder of a church and denomination in New York City.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁷¹ David D. Ruiz et al., eds., “The Two-Thirds World Church” (Lausanne Occasional Paper 44; Hamilton, Mass.: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 2005), 8. Cited 19 December 2012. Online: http://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP44_IG15.pdf.

¹⁷² Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1995), xv-xvi.

¹⁷³ Frank J. Ewart, *The Phenomenon of Pentecost* (rev. ed.; Hazelwood, Mo.: Word Aflame, 1992); Talmadge L. French, *Early Interracial Oneness Pentecostalism, G. T. Haywood, and the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (1901-1931)* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick, 2014); Daniel L. Segraves, “Andrew David Urshan: A Theological Biography” (Ph.D. diss., Regent University, 2011).

¹⁷⁴ Douglas Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2003).

Around the world the vast majority of Oneness Pentecostals are nonwhite; many are members of large indigenous churches such as the True Jesus Church (China and Taiwan), the Apostolic Church of the Faith in Christ Jesus (Mexico), the United Pentecostal Church of Colombia, and the Apostolic Church of Ethiopia. Of the seven largest Oneness Pentecostal denominations in the U.S., four are predominantly African-American and one is predominantly Hispanic.¹⁷⁵ The largest Oneness Pentecostal denomination is the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI). Most of its constituents worldwide are nonwhite, and 25 to 30 percent of its U.S. constituents are Hispanic, African-American, Asian-American, or Native American.¹⁷⁶ About 60 percent of all Oneness Pentecostals in America are African-American.¹⁷⁷

The theological and social location of most Pentecostals also has implications for hermeneutics. We have based our hermeneutical method on the recognition of two very different horizons: the ancient biblical world and the modern Western world. For many Pentecostals, however, as well as for many Christians in the Majority World, miracles and extra-normal phenomena are expected, which means they identify closely with biblical contexts and worldviews foreign to modern and postmodern Westerners. In these situations, the Bible and the reader may actually share the same horizon.¹⁷⁸

As is true of Pentecostalism generally,¹⁷⁹ Oneness Pentecostalism is a pneumatological, eschatological, restorationist, and missiological movement that developed in the early twentieth century from Pietist, Evangelical, and Wesleyan-

¹⁷⁵ All participate in the annual Apostolic Fellowship Summit hosted by Urshan Graduate School of Theology, where I have served as president since 2000. The seven groups are Apostolic Assembly of the Faith in Christ Jesus, Assemblies of the Lord Jesus Christ, Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith, International Bible Way Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Pentecostal Churches of the Apostolic Faith, and United Pentecostal Church International.

¹⁷⁶ See David K. Bernard, "The Future of Oneness Pentecostalism," in Synan, *Spirit-Empowered Christianity*, 518. The UPCI had constituents in 208 nations and territories in 2014, including over 50,000 constituents in each of the following: Brazil, China, El Salvador, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Mexico, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Uganda, U.S., and Venezuela. I have served as UPCI general superintendent and chair of the UPCI Global Council from 2010. In 1991 the UPCI held what apparently was the first multiracial church conference in South Africa after the fall of apartheid. Nathaniel A. Urshan, "Word's-Eye View on Holiness," *Pentecostal Herald* 67, no. 4 (April 1992): 7.

¹⁷⁷ French, "Garfield Thomas Haywood," 9.

¹⁷⁸ Stanley E. Porter, "A Single Horizon Hermeneutics: A Proposal for Interpretive Identification," *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 13 (2011-2012): 47.

¹⁷⁹ See Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Donald Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1987); D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (JPentTSup 10; Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic, 1996; repr. Blandford Forum, U.K.: Deo, 2009).

Holiness roots.¹⁸⁰ The restorationist impulse caused some Pentecostals to reexamine the doctrine of the Trinity, and as a result in 1916 a major schism occurred within the movement. A significant minority began to teach a doctrine called “the New Issue,” “the Jesus Name message,” or “the Oneness of God.” They became known as Jesus Only (a label now usually considered inaccurate or pejorative), Jesus Name, Apostolic, or Oneness Pentecostals. In response, the majority of Pentecostals emphasized the historical doctrine of the Trinity. On a popular level many Trinitarian Pentecostals asserted a form of tritheism, which further illustrated essential Oneness concerns.¹⁸¹

After the split between Oneness and Trinitarian Pentecostals in 1916, there was mutual respect and some interaction among first-generation leaders, but the two movements went their separate ways. As a result, Oneness Pentecostals were generally neglected and typically misunderstood by the larger theological community. On their part, they did little to develop and explain their views in scholarly ways. Renewed discussion and better understanding came through the Society for Pentecostal Studies (SPS), formed in 1970.¹⁸² Since Oneness Christology is still not generally well understood in scholarly circles, we quote in some detail from the final report of a six-year Oneness-Trinitarian dialogue sponsored by SPS from 2002 to 2007. The Oneness team members defined their views on the Godhead as follows:¹⁸³

34. The Oneness Pentecostals stress that God is absolutely one (Isa 44:6, 8, 24)—that is, one without distinction of persons. There are no

¹⁸⁰ David A. Reed, *“In Jesus’ Name”: The History and Beliefs of Oneness Pentecostals* (JPentTSup 31; Blandford Forum, U.K.: Deo, 2008); J. L. Hall, *Restoring the Apostolic Faith: A History of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Hazelwood, Mo.: Word Aflame, 2007); Robin Johnston, *Howard Goss: A Pentecostal Life* (Hazelwood, Mo.: WAP Academic, 2010).

¹⁸¹ For example, a popular study Bible speaks of God as “three separate persons,” each of whom is an “individual” with his “own personal spirit body, personal soul, and personal spirit in the same sense each human being, angel or any other being has his own body, soul, and spirit. . . . The word *God* is used either as a singular or a plural word, like *sheep*.” Finis Dake, *Dake’s Annotated Reference Bible* (Lawrenceville, Ga.: Dake’s Bible Sales, 1963), NT:280. Consequently, many Oneness Pentecostals think Trinitarians believe in “three Gods.”

¹⁸² In 1973 Vinson Synan invited David Reed, who was writing a doctoral thesis on Oneness Pentecostalism, to make the first presentation to SPS on the Oneness movement. In 1984, Harvard Divinity School sponsored the First Occasional Symposium on Oneness Pentecostalism; presenters included Reed and me. In 1989 Manuel Gaxiola, vice president of SPS, invited me to present the first paper at SPS from a Oneness perspective, and in 1990 he became the first Oneness president of SPS. In 2002 SPS began sponsoring a six-year dialogue between Oneness and Trinitarian Pentecostal scholars. Frank Macchia chaired the Trinitarian team; I chaired the Oneness team.

¹⁸³ “Oneness-Trinitarian Pentecostal Final Report, 2002-2007,” *Pneuma* 30 (2008): 214-15; repr. in *Pentecostalism and Christian Unity*, vol. 2: *Continuing and Building Relationships* (ed. Wolfgang Vondey; Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick, 2013).

distinctions in God's eternal being, and the Godhead does not consist of three centers of consciousness (as some Trinitarians hold). Moreover, in Jesus dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col 2:9).

35. We affirm that God has revealed Himself as Father, in the Son, and as the Holy Spirit. The one God can be described as Father, Word, or Holy Spirit before His incarnation as Jesus Christ, the Son of God. While Jesus walked on earth as God Himself incarnate, the Spirit of God continued to be omnipresent.

36. We also affirm that the roles of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are necessary to God's plan of redemption for fallen humanity. In order to save us, God provided a sinless Man who could die in our place—the Son, in whose name we receive salvation (Acts 4:12). In foreordaining the plan of salvation and begetting the Son, God is the Father. In working in our lives to transform and empower us, applying salvation to us individually, God is the Holy Spirit. In sum, the titles of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit describe God's redemptive roles or works, but they do not indicate three eternal persons in God, just as the incarnation does not indicate that God had eternally preexistent flesh. . . .

40. In our understanding, all (whether Oneness or Trinitarian) who experience a genuine work of God encounter one Spirit, not two or three. They do not experience three personalities when they worship, nor do they receive three spirits, but they are in relationship with one personal spirit being.

The Oneness Pentecostal team further described their christological views as follows:¹⁸⁴

41. We affirm the genuine and complete humanity of Jesus. Christ's humanity means that everything we humans can say of ourselves, we can say of Jesus in his earthly life, except for sin. Moreover, in every way that we relate to God, Jesus related to God, except that he did not need to repent or be born again. Thus, when Jesus prayed, when he submitted his will to the Father, and when he spoke about and to God, he simply acted in accordance with his authentic, genuine humanity.

¹⁸⁴ "Oneness-Trinitarian Pentecostal Final Report," 215-16.

42. We regard the terms “Father” and “Son” in the New Testament as serving to emphasize the true humanity of Jesus, not to make distinctions within God’s being. The title of Father reminds us of God’s transcendence, while the title of Son focuses on the incarnation. Any attempt to identify two divine persons tends toward ditheism or subordinationism. Moreover, in our view, defining the Son as a second divine person results in two Sons—an eternal, divine Son who could not die and a temporal, human Son who did die.

43. Although we recognize both deity and humanity in Christ, it is impossible to separate the two in him. Humanity and deity were inseparably joined in him. While there was a distinction between the divine will and his human will, he always submitted the latter to the former. Jesus was, and remains, the one God manifested in flesh.

During and shortly after the SPS dialogue, scholarly books by Trinitarian Pentecostals began to engage Oneness Pentecostal theology in irenic fashion. Reed published the first comprehensive scholarly study of Oneness Pentecostalism, based on his earlier dissertation. Historically, he explained it as a logical development from nineteenth-century evangelical, Jesus-centric piety and from early Pentecostal impulses, notably the Finished Work theology of William Durham. He described its Christology as follows:

The Christology of Oneness Pentecostalism is a non-historical sectarian expression of Jewish Christian theology. Its distinctive characteristics are a theology of the name of Jesus, a christological model based on “dwelling” and the “Glory of God,” a zealous defense of the monarchy and transcendence of God, and the affirmation of the full humanity of Jesus reminiscent of the Antiochene and particularly Nestorian traditions.¹⁸⁵

In making the identification of “Jewish Christian theology,” Reed relied on Daniélou’s threefold classification of early Jewish believers in Jesus: (1) the Ebionites, who did not accept the deity of Christ; (2) the Jerusalem church and its leaders, who

¹⁸⁵ Reed, “*In Jesus’ Name*,” 306. Reed revised and updated his dissertation, “Origins and Development of the Theology of Oneness Pentecostalism in the United States” (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1978).

implied the deity of Christ; and (3) people such as Paul, who accepted the Jewish Scriptures and expressed their Christian beliefs in Jewish forms but did not keep the Jewish law.¹⁸⁶ Reed concluded that Oneness Pentecostals are an expression of the third category, as demonstrated by three characteristically Jewish Christian themes: the name of God, the nature of God, and the presence of God as “dwelling.”¹⁸⁷ Reed further distinguished the Oneness view from the traditional view of the Trinity and from traditional descriptions of ancient modalism:

The Oneness doctrine of God is distinguished from the classical Trinitarian doctrine primarily in its insistence upon permitting no distinctions, especially Trinitarian ones, in the nature of God as God exists apart from revelation. Since Oneness theologians hold to the monarchy and transcendence of God, the basic theological principle is that the Three-In-One is a simply dialectic of transcendence and immanence. . . .

Oneness theology self-consciously teaches that in Christ we do encounter the real God. Following Col. 2:9 . . . the Oneness position is that the “fullness” of God is encountered in the one person of Jesus Christ.¹⁸⁸

A recent comprehensive Pentecostal theology by Yong was one of the first works to include a serious treatment of Oneness theology as part of its synthesis.¹⁸⁹ He offered “justification for engaging Oneness Pentecostal perspectives as equal dialogue partners in the task of Christian theological reconstruction in the late modern world.” He explained that the “distinctive Oneness emphases served to reject what was perceived at the turn of the [twentieth] century as tritheistic interpretations of the Trinity, on the one hand, and both Arian and modern theological liberal rejections of the deity of Christ, on the other.” He then identified several ways in which Oneness theology makes valuable contributions to Christian theology generally: (1) It serves as a reminder that Christianity is truly

¹⁸⁶ Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (vol. 1 of *The Development of Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea*; ed. and trans. John A. Baker; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), 7-9. While Daniélou’s thesis of “Jewish Christian theology” is disputed, for Reed’s purposes and ours the designation points out how Oneness Pentecostals seek to construct Christology using OT themes instead of Greek philosophical categories employed in the second through fourth centuries.

¹⁸⁷ Reed, “*In Jesus’ Name*,” 233-36.

¹⁸⁸ Reed, “*In Jesus’ Name*,” 256, 268.

¹⁸⁹ Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 204, 206, 227-28.

monotheistic. (2) It teaches a strong incarnational Christology, which upholds the deity of the historical Jesus. (3) It makes an important contribution to global Christian theology by providing bridges for Christian-Jewish and Christian-Muslim dialogue.

While advocating the traditional doctrine of the Trinity, Yong sought a formulation acceptable to both sides. He based his proposal on a key insight: in the view of both sides God operates simultaneously as Father, Son, and Spirit in the economy of salvation. Thus both sides acknowledge, at least in some sense, the threefold (“trinitarian”) manifestation and work of God in salvation history.¹⁹⁰ Since the basic difference in the viewpoints relates to eternity and ontology, and since eternity lies beyond our present comprehension and experience, perhaps both sides could reach a pragmatic agreement on their understanding of God in the temporal order.¹⁹¹

Another recent work, by Macchia, sought to provide a pneumatological basis for systematic theology. In his enterprise to formulate a distinctively Pentecostal theology, he gave serious attention to Oneness views and recognized valuable Oneness contributions to Pentecostal soteriology and pneumatology.¹⁹²

More significant than the mere fact of its ethnic and cultural diversity, Oneness Pentecostalism owes much to non-Western categories of thought. Early Oneness thinkers applied the restorationist impulse of early Pentecostalism to theological inquiry, seeking to press behind Western creedal language and Greek philosophical categories to the thought world of the biblical text, particularly its Hebraic background.¹⁹³ One can make a strong case for Oneness Pentecostalism as an expression or expansion of characteristic Pentecostal spirituality, piety, praxis, and modes of thought. While Trinitarian Pentecostals typically see themselves as the theological heirs of orthodox Western Christianity, the motivating impulses of Pentecostalism led to new ways of thinking and new trajectories that Oneness Pentecostals continued to follow. The following comments of trinitarian historians illustrate this point:

¹⁹⁰ Yong, *Spirit Poured Out*, 213.

¹⁹¹ Yong further argued that the economic Trinity implies the ontological Trinity. Oneness proponents have responded that this argument is not persuasive because it is philosophical rather than biblical and is not applied consistently. That is, God is revealed through Jesus Christ, the Son, yet this revelation does not require God to be ontologically human or the Son to be ontologically subordinate to the Father.

¹⁹² Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 116.

¹⁹³ See David Norris, *I AM: A Oneness Pentecostal Theology* (Hazelwood, Mo.: WAP Academic, 2009).

The doctrinal departure aside, if one admits the strong restorationist component at the heart of the definition of Pentecostalism, Oneness proponents were more zealously restorationist, more doggedly congregational, and more Christocentrically spiritual—in short, in some important ways more essentially Pentecostal than the mainstream.¹⁹⁴

[The Oneness doctrine] is more in accordance with religious feeling and practice of Pentecostalism than a doctrine of the Trinity taken over without understanding from the traditional churches.¹⁹⁵

In a certain sense, the Oneness theologies of Haywood and Urshan were also more distinctively pentecostal than anything that preceded them.¹⁹⁶

Although the New Issue was rejected by the majority of the movement, the fact remains that it was the logical and inevitable development of Pentecostal theology. Pentecostalism emerged as a restorationist/eschatological movement which saw its task as calling the Church to prepare for its coming Lord.¹⁹⁷

It can be argued that Oneness Pentecostals . . . developed a theology *sui generis* that was more compatible with their Pentecostal experience of God. . . . Oneness worshippers are more characteristically Pentecostal than most Trinitarian Pentecostal bodies.¹⁹⁸

Not only does Oneness Christology appear to be more Hebraic than Hellenistic, but it also appears to be more non-Western than Western. “Oneness doctrine and practice may be more compatible in its core with an Afro-centric worldview than with that of non-Pentecostal white evangelicals.”¹⁹⁹ In short, Oneness Pentecostalism in many ways represents cultural, ethnic, and theological voices that have been marginalized historically. This is not to say that these voices are necessarily correct or superior but that they need to be considered and evaluated in scholarly discussion.

¹⁹⁴ Edith Blumhofer, *The Assemblies of God: A Chapter in the Story of American Pentecostalism* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel, 1989), 1:238.

¹⁹⁵ Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1972), 311-12.

¹⁹⁶ Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit*, 259.

¹⁹⁷ Faupel, *Everlasting Gospel*, 304.

¹⁹⁸ Reed, “*In Jesus’ Name*,” 53, 82.

¹⁹⁹ Reed, “*In Jesus’ Name*,” 82.

More specifically, Oneness Pentecostalism is part of the reception history of early Christian discourse, and as a restorationist movement it has a distinctive approach. It seeks to replicate the religious outlook and views of the earliest Christians, especially on the subject of Christology. In this regard, oral cultures such as those in Africa have a distinctive way of envisioning spirituality that is closer to Christian origins than Western Christianity with its many centuries of literary and philosophical development. Because of Oneness Pentecostalism's close connection to African spirituality and the Majority World hermeneutical horizon, interaction with Oneness Pentecostal Christology is both a legitimate scholarly endeavor in its own right and potentially a useful approach in the larger scholarly discourse of the origins of Christology.

From this perspective, some observers have described Oneness theology as pre-Nicene or economic trinitarianism in contrast to the more Hellenistic philosophical formulation of classical trinitarianism as defined by the ecumenical creeds of the fourth through seventh centuries. While Oneness theology bears affinity to modalistic thought, unlike the typical descriptions of ancient modalism it affirms Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as simultaneous, not sequential, manifestations of God and asserts God's essence is not hidden behind changing masks but is revealed in Christ. Faupel described the early Oneness Pentecostal view of God as simultaneously unitarian and trinitarian:

It was "Unitarian" in that adherents self-consciously dissociated themselves from traditional Trinitarianism rather than attempting to reinterpret the doctrine from within. However, it was "Trinitarian" in that proponents insisted on the significance of a three-fold revelation of God. . . . They preferred to replace the term "person" with the term "manifestation" when designating this three-fold distinction, believing it to be a more "scriptural" term. . . . Their battle was to show the centrality of Jesus as the "express image" of the full Godhead.²⁰⁰

As Faupel indicated, much of the discussion hinges on the word *person*, which has been the subject of considerable controversy and misunderstanding in both ancient and modern times. For example, one Trinitarian Pentecostal scholar recently criticized the

²⁰⁰ Faupel, *Everlasting Gospel*, 286.

Oneness refusal to believe “the Godhead exists in three separate personas.”²⁰¹ This comment indicates the intricacies of the discussion. If he meant “separate persons,” then many mainstream trinitarian theologians would say such a formulation is objectionable as being tritheistic or tending toward tritheism. The more accurate trinitarian characterization would be “distinct,” not “separate.” On the other hand, if by “personas” he meant something less than modern “persons” (more like the original meaning of the Latin *persona* or even the modern meaning of the English *persona*), his formulation may be unexpectedly close to the Oneness concept of “manifestations.”

Not only do some observers believe Oneness theology was to a great extent molded by non-Western thought, but some consider it to be a helpful interpretation or appropriation of the doctrine of the Trinity using non-Western categories. Thus, Gill described it as “the Oneness view of the Trinity” and positively assessed its missiological potential in non-Western and non-Christian contexts.²⁰² He argued that it could be more meaningful in the modern Two-Thirds World than a Western formulation based on fourth-century Hellenistic philosophy.

The core interest and concern of Oneness Pentecostals is not a metaphysical description of the essence of God or the inner life of God. Rather, as Yong indicated, Oneness Pentecostals opposed two perceived dangers: tritheism and subordinationism. They sought to uphold three interrelated truths: Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of the one true God of the Bible; Christ’s saving acts are thus the very acts of God; and God’s gift of salvation comes to sinful humanity through Jesus Christ.

From this brief survey, it appears that Oneness Christology could provide some fruitful insights for our understanding of Paul’s discourse, for at least three reasons: (1) As Reed suggested, Oneness thought has some affinity with Pauline thought, considering both to have forms of Jewish Christology. As such, it could be helpful as a vantage point that does not involve Greek philosophical categories foreign to first-century Christian thought. (2) Postmodern hermeneutics emphasizes that our interpretations should be meaningful and relevant to the diverse global readers of the twenty-first century and that we should be open to diversity of meaning, significance, and application.²⁰³ The

²⁰¹ Richard Shaka, “A Trinitarian Pentecostal Response,” *Pneuma* 30 (2008): 243.

²⁰² Kenneth D. Gill, “The New Issue Reconsidered: A Missiological Analysis of the Oneness Doctrine of the Trinity” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Dallas, 8-10 November 1990). See also idem, *Toward a Contextualized Theology for the Third World: The Emergence and Development of Jesus’ Name Pentecostalism in Mexico* (New York: Lang, 1994).

²⁰³ Porter and Stovell, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 68, 77-80, 136, 205.

inherent diversity of Oneness Pentecostalism can provide resources for this task. As both Yong and Gill indicated, Oneness thinking and language can be particularly useful in contextualizing Christian theology in non-Western culture. To bring this thought full circle, since first-century Christian discourse originally occurred in a non-Western context, perhaps Oneness Christology can provide a lens or at least a backdrop by which to appreciate Paul's perspective more fully. (3) Since the subject of Christology is what has separated Oneness Pentecostals from more traditional creedal forms of Christianity, an investigation in this area could assist Oneness Pentecostals in a fresh examination of their own beliefs and socio-religious location and promote fresh interaction and dialogue within the larger Christian community.

Summary

Given my own theological and social location as a Oneness Pentecostal Christian, it is important to identify some relevant pre-understandings Oneness Pentecostals would characteristically bring to a study such as this. While these pre-understandings are subject to critique and modification through the hermeneutical spiral, we cannot ignore them if this thesis is to succeed in generating dialogue within, about, and with Oneness Pentecostalism. They include the following beliefs: (1) God exists as a spirit being and acts personally in human affairs in ways that modern Westerners would typically consider miraculous or extra-normal; (2) God has spoken progressively to the human race first through the OT and then through the NT; and (3) God chose to manifest God's self historically in the person of Jesus Christ, who is thereby central to the biblical story. Methodologically, these pre-understandings predispose Oneness Pentecostals to approach the NT from the theological context of OT Hebraic thought and to be cautious of applying later philosophical categories to understand the NT. In appreciation of Oneness Pentecostal interests and concerns, this thesis will explore to what extent we can understand Paul's Christology as Jewish (as Reed suggested of both Paul and Oneness Pentecostals) and to what extent his Christology may relate to current Pentecostal options.

In this thesis, we will not seek to systematize Pauline thought, although we start with the presumption that he had a coherent center of thought.²⁰⁴ Nor will we draw

²⁰⁴ Douglas A. Campbell, "The *Diathēkē* from Durham: Professor Dunn's *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*," *JSNT* 72 (1998): 94; J. Christiaan Beker, "Recasting Pauline Theology: The Coherence-Contingency Scheme As Interpretive Model," in *Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon* (vol. 1 of *Pauline Theology*; ed. Jouette M. Bassler; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 15-16; Paul J. Achtemeier, "The

conclusions about NT christological thought as a whole, much less attempt a synthesis. The purpose is not polemical. We will not argue specifically for any particular theology for today's church, nor will we even argue for Paul's views to be normative. While we will seek fresh insights, we will not advocate a different paradigm for systematic theology. Instead, our purpose is a more restricted historical analysis of Paul's language and thought. While we believe that his thought is relevant and instructive, any specific applications for contemporary theology would be the subject of a different thesis. The goal is to contribute to Pauline and christological scholarship generally while speaking to Oneness Pentecostals in a relevant way and facilitating scholarly dialogue with Oneness Pentecostals.

As we examine the evidence from Paul's rhetorical world and from his Corinthian correspondence, we will use an inductive approach leading to tentative and modest conclusions. Although no one can completely step outside his or her own socio-rhetorical situation, we will not impose a predetermined view but will explore meanings that are plausible, advance coherent thought, and provide insight. Since Oneness Pentecostalism is a decidedly minority view and since Pentecostals in general have made relatively few scholarly contributions, we will not rely on Oneness Pentecostal authors but on exegetes and specialists who are recognized in their fields. We will seek scholarly corroboration for every significant exegetical or hermeneutical point so as to minimize the danger of eisegesis. Of course, the use of particular scholars does not mean they support a larger view being constructed but simply present a relevant point in question; generally we will assume they do not support Oneness Pentecostal theology. When proposing an alternative view, we will support every link in the chain of reasoning with credible scholarship, although the resulting conclusion may be original and unique. While it is not possible to give the complete context for all excerpts of scholarly discourse, we will attempt to convey a contextually accurate meaning and apply the discourse fairly and appropriately, even though the scholar in question may not have fully foreseen or intended the manner in which his or her particular insight is employed. After all, as postmodern hermeneutics teaches, a text cannot be completely restricted by the intention of the author but has a surplus of meaning and takes on a life of its own. Indeed, while authorial intent is a vital

Continuing Quest for Coherence in St. Paul: An Experiment in Thought," in *Theology and Ethics in Paul and His Interpreters: Essays in Honor of Victor Paul Furnish* (ed. Eugene H. Lovering Jr. and Jerry L. Sumney; Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 145; Halvor Moxnes, *Theology in Conflict: Studies in Paul's Understanding of God in Romans* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 5.

part of meaning and scholarly endeavor, one could argue that all intellectual advancement occurs by developing existing thought in new ways, connecting existing concepts in new combinations, and using existing discourse to say new things. Our hope is for an integration of current ideas to result in a coherent whole, provide alternative lenses, and offer fresh insights.

In summary, we will use the conceptual framework of the history-of-religions approach and of Lincoln to help us ask the overarching questions, discern the central ideas, and look anew at the early discourse about Jesus. To examine Paul's Corinthian correspondence, we will use the historical-critical/grammatical method of exegesis with insights from postmodern hermeneutics and methods of rhetorical criticism. We will focus our questions on the rhetorical situation of Paul and his first-century Christian readers, asking what understanding of the discourse makes sense in that context. We will situate the discourse in its socio-rhetorical setting, understand how it functioned ideologically and culturally, and integrate this information to give us a more holistic picture of the meaning and significance of this first-century Christian discourse.

MONOTHEISM IN PAUL'S RHETORICAL WORLD

To investigate the contribution of the selected text, 2 Cor 3:16–4:6, to early discourse about Jesus Christ, we will seek to establish its first-century theological context. Since the text speaks about God and relates Jesus to God in significant ways, we must examine what the author, Paul, a practicing Jew of the first century, believed and assumed about God. From his writings, it is apparent that he shared and appealed to the fundamental Jewish tenet of monotheism. Because this concept has foundational significance for our study, we will document and discuss it in some detail, first looking at the broader first-century religious context and then examining Second Temple Judaism.

Pagan Monotheism

Most people in the Mediterranean world of the first century C.E. were polytheists. On a philosophical level some thought in terms of the unity of the divine nature, but on a practical level they acknowledged the worship of many gods in the world. Some dedicated themselves to the worship of one god, but in these cases it would generally be more accurate to describe them as henotheists rather than monotheists.

Versnel described two pagan deities for whom claims of cosmic lordship and universal worship were made, Isis and Dionysos, noting that they were new types of gods and not typical of the ancient Greek gods.²⁰⁵ The *Bacchae*, a play by Euripides produced in Athens in 405 B.C.E., presents Dionysos as a foreign god who demanded reverence by everyone. It thus sets up a classic conflict between the socio-political community and the challenge of a new god and between institutional religion and a deviant sect. (Paul dealt with this potential conflict in preaching to Jews and God-fearers by explaining that Jesus was not a new god but the manifestation of the God they already worshiped.) Similarly, from the third or second century B.C.E., but possibly later, devotees of Isis described her as the one god who gives salvation, liberates humanity from cosmic despots, and encompasses all other gods in her one person. From the first centuries C.E., especially

²⁰⁵ Versnel, *Ter Unus*, 189-90.

from the second century, they considered her as victorious over fate and as the tyrant of those she liberated.²⁰⁶

Athanassiadi and Frede cited evidence for the prevalence of monotheism: “God being one, has many names” (Ps.-Aristotle 401.12); “The gods have one nature but many names” (Maxentius of Tyre 39.5); and the goddess Isis is “the uniform face of all gods and goddesses” (Apuleius, *Metam.* 11.15).²⁰⁷ The last example is from a statement by Isis in a second-century C.E. Latin novel:

I come, . . . I, mother of the universe, mistress of all the elements, first-born of the ages, highest of the gods, queen of the shades, first of those who dwell in heaven, representing in one shape all gods and goddesses. My will controls the shining heights of heaven, the health-giving sea-winds, and the mournful silences of hell; the entire world worships my single godhead in a thousand shapes, with divers rites, and under many a different name. Honour me with the worship which is truly mine and call me by my true name: Queen Isis. (Apuleius, *Metam.* 11.15 [Kenney]).

While we see a monotheistic impulse, we should also note a syncretism allowing the worship of other gods as subordinates or manifestations of Isis. By contrast, first-century Judaism and Christianity, while not denying the existence of other supernatural beings, denied that they should be worshiped or were manifestations of the true God. We could perhaps identify these respective views as a contrast between henotheism and monotheism. Indeed, the work contains a henotheistic protest against monotheism, perhaps directed against Jews or even Christians: “Worse still, she had rejected and spurned the heavenly gods, and in place of true religion she had falsely and blasphemously set up a deity of her own whom she proclaimed as the One and Only God” (*Metam.* 9.14). We find a similar example in Acts 19, where the worshipers of Artemis in Ephesus opposed Paul’s preaching of Jesus. As Versnel noted, both were henotheistic attempts to stop an invading monotheism.²⁰⁸ In classical times, then, the exclusive devotion to one god was restricted to marginal groups. Henotheism—the confession,

²⁰⁶ Versnel, *Ter Unus*, 49-51, 88, 92.

²⁰⁷ Athanassiadi and Frede, “Introduction,” in Athanassiadi and Frede, *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, 8.

²⁰⁸ Versnel, *Ter Unus*, 195.

worship, and exaltation of one God while accepting the possible existence of other gods—was not a structural religious or cultic phenomenon, but it became common in later religious thought.²⁰⁹

There was also a concept of deification in Hellenistic culture. People generally believed in the existence of supernatural powers, and evidence of supernatural powers could indicate either a human who had become a god or a god who had come in human form. First-century Jews and Christians were familiar with the concept of deification from various sources: philosophical schools, ruler cults, mystery religions, and veneration of popular teachers.²¹⁰

In a recent study, Versnel described three pagan experiments in divine oneness: the “unity in diversity” of Xenophanes in the Archaic period, “God” as a generic device exemplified by Herodotus in the Classical period, and henotheism centered on Isis in the Hellenistic period.²¹¹ These are examples of pagan monotheism or henotheism. In some instances, pagans held a concept of “the one and the many” that bears some resemblance to later Christian trinitarianism. In the first two examples, the divinity is depersonalized, nameless, and not conceived as interacting personally with humans. In the third example, the supreme goddess was worshiped as a traditional god but did not completely eliminate or absorb other deities. These pagan approaches demonstrate that there were options for early Christians who wished to deify Jesus while retaining a concept of divine oneness. At the same time, pagans who proposed a form of monotheism did not challenge the worship of the many deities of their cultural environment. Their philosophical ideas did not significantly influence popular religious beliefs and not even their own religious practices.²¹² The evidence is that early Christians chose a far different monotheistic model clearly derived from Judaism, namely, the exclusive worship of one supreme God.

Monotheism in Second Temple Judaism

First-century Judaism was pluralistic, yet its various forms were characterized by monotheism. While acknowledging the existence of a variety of Judaisms in that time, we

²⁰⁹ Versnel, *Ter Unus*, 194.

²¹⁰ Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 16, 50.

²¹¹ Henk S. Versnel, *Coping with the Gods: Wayward Readings in Greek Theology* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 173; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 251-306.

²¹² Hurtado, *God in NT Theology*, 28.

should still recognize that all of them were fundamentally monotheistic.²¹³ Similar views were held in ancient Egyptian culture, possibly influencing Judaism. In the Greco-Egyptian magical papyri, many passages display the idea of a supreme god, a universal supreme being whose visible manifestation is the world.²¹⁴ The Ten Commandments establish the worship of only one God, Yahweh, whose name is sacred (Exod 20:1-7). The Hebrew Scriptures do not describe God in theoretical or philosophical terms. Yahweh is not an abstract object with attributes but a personal deity with emotions. He is the sole creator, ruler, and savior, and he is the one who acts in both nature and history.²¹⁵

The Jews appealed to Deut 6:4 as the classic statement of their position: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (NIV). “Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone” (NRSV). Deut 4:35 similarly states: “The LORD is God; there is no other besides him.” Most Jews probably recited Deut 6:4, the *Shema*, on a regular basis.²¹⁶ Devout Jews quoted it twice a day.²¹⁷ It functioned as the fundamental creed of Judaism—essentially, a confession of faith²¹⁸—as revealed by a broad spectrum of Jewish sources we will discuss. We cannot separate the *Shema* from the command to love God (Deut 6:5); in this context “one” means one and only, unique, no other options or rivals, no one else to worship. It signifies: “There is nowhere else to go, . . . to look elsewhere than to YHWH is misguided and futile.”²¹⁹ Thus there is a close correspondence between the *Shema* and the later statements of monotheism in Isaiah. According to this analysis Jewish monotheism was not primarily philosophical but was closely connected to monolatry.

The book of Isaiah proclaims a vision of one God as ruler of the whole world, and it speaks of Yahweh as unique and transcendent.²²⁰ Its characteristic title for Yahweh is “the Holy One of Israel.” In view of Assyrian and then Babylonian aggression and

²¹³ G. Boccaccini, “History of Judaism: Its Periods in Antiquity,” in Neusner et al., *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, 1.2:298.

²¹⁴ Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 203.

²¹⁵ Bob Becking, “The Boundaries of Israelite Monotheism,” in Korte and de Haardt, *Boundaries of Monotheism*, 15.

²¹⁶ Dunn, “Judaism in the Land of Israel,” 1.2:253.

²¹⁷ Nicholson, *Dynamic Oneness*, 65.

²¹⁸ Rainbow, “Jewish Monotheism,” 82.

²¹⁹ R. W. L. Moberly, “How Appropriate Is ‘Monotheism’ as a Category for Biblical Interpretation?,” in *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism* (JSNTSup 263; ed. Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Wendy E. S. North; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 228, 230.

²²⁰ J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC 18; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1999), 16-17.

conquest, it asserts that God's people suffer divine judgment because of their worship of other gods. Consequently, it argues against polytheism and idolatry and strongly proclaims monotheism, especially in the portion known as Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 40-55). First-century Jews regarded the entire book of Isaiah as divinely inspired Scripture, and Paul followed this consensus, as shown by his quotations from all parts of the book including Deutero-Isaiah.²²¹ Here are examples of monotheistic proclamation in Isaiah:

- O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, who are enthroned above the cherubim, you are God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. (37:16)
- You are my witnesses, says the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior. (43:10-11)
- I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King. (43:15)
- Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let them proclaim it, let them declare and set it forth before me. Who has announced from of old the things to come? Let them tell us what is yet to be. Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one. (44:6-8)
- Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who by myself spread out the earth. (44:24)
- I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides me there is no god. I arm you, though you do not know me, so that they may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is no one besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. (45:5-6)

²²¹ For example, Rom 15:12 quotes Isa 11:10; Rom 15:21 quotes Isa 52:15; Rom 3:15-17 quotes Isa 59:7-8.

- For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited!): I am the LORD, and there is no other. (45:18)
- Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the LORD? There is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is no one besides me. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. (45:21-22)
- Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me. (46:9)

These passages particularly associate monotheism and monolatry with Yahweh's roles as the only creator and the only savior. In Isaiah, especially Deutero-Isaiah, salvation is not only present but eschatological. Deutero-Isaiah addresses the end of the Jewish exile and emphasizes that Israel's deliverance was not from the Persian king Cyrus or his gods, for Cyrus was simply an instrument in Yahweh's hands. Thus, Yahweh is the true God, the real deliverer, and the only one who is worthy of worship.

Zechariah, a later biblical apocalyptic writing from the post-exilic period, makes a strong connection between monotheism and eschatological rule: "And the LORD will become king over all the earth; on that day the LORD will be one and his name one" (Zech 14:9). In a context of unrest and Gentile dominion over Israel, the prophet focused messianic longings on the eschatological work of God in human history, extending the *Shema* to all nations and thereby demonstrating the ultimate triumph of Israel's faith and Israel's God.²²² The book envisions a movement beyond polytheism and henotheism to monotheism.

We find statements of God's oneness in subsequent Jewish texts written from various perspectives. The writers of the Apocrypha sought to maintain the unique identity of Judaism in a Hellenistic culture. While showing affinity to Stoic thought, they continued to stress monotheism as a distinguishing characteristic. "There is but one who is wise, greatly to be feared, seated upon his throne—the Lord" (Sir 1:8). "O Lord, Lord God, Creator of all things, you are awe-inspiring and strong and just and merciful, you

²²² Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC 24; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1972), 65, 204.

alone are king and are kind, you alone are bountiful, you alone are just and almighty and eternal” (2 Macc 1:24-25).

A similar view appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls of Qumran. The authors were separatists who opposed the Temple cult as corrupt but wished to affirm continuity as the true heirs of the Jewish tradition. Consequently, they promoted the worship of the one God of the Bible, whose covenant name is Yahweh.²²³ The *Thanksgiving Scroll* (*Hodayot*), second century B.C.E., states there is only one God.²²⁴ “Thou art an eternal God . . . and there is none other beside Thee” (1QH XV, 32). It also describes “the certain law from the mouth of God, . . . the precept which is and shall be for ever and ever without end. Without it nothing is nor shall be, for the God of knowledge established it and there is no other beside Him” (1QH XX, 9-11). *The Words of the Heavenly Lights* says, “Thou alone art a living God, and there is none besides Thee” (4Q504 V 9-10).

In the first century C.E., the historian Josephus, a self-identified observant Pharisee, sought to explain and defend Jewish thought in the context of Greco-Roman culture. He was a Hellenistic Palestinian Jew who evidently had some Greek education from his youth.²²⁵ As an apologist, he could have been expected to minimize any strong conflict between Jewish and Roman thought, but he provided further witness of monotheism as so fundamental to Judaism that it could not be minimized or harmonized with typical pagan thought:²²⁶

- Before all else they were taught that God, as the universal Father and Lord who beholds all things, grants to such as follow Him a life of bliss. (*Ant.* 1.20)
- He [Abraham] was thus the first boldly to declare that God, the creator of the universe, is one, and that, if any other being contributed aught to man’s welfare, each did so by His command and not in virtue of its own inherent power. (*Ant.* 1.155)
- The first word teaches us that God is one, and that He only must be worshipped. (*Ant.* 3.91)

²²³ Edward M. Cook, “What Did the Jews of Qumran Know about God?,” in Neusner et al., *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, 3.5.2:14.

²²⁴ Quotations of the Dead Sea Scrolls are from *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (rev. ed.; trans. Geza Vermes; New York: Penguin Classics, 2004).

²²⁵ Lester Grabbe, “Hellenistic Judaism,” in Neusner et al., *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, 1.2:69-70.

²²⁶ Quotations of Josephus are from Thackeray, LCL.

- In no other city let there be either altar or temple; for God is one and the Hebrew race is one. (*Ant.* 4.201)
- They [ancient Hebrew leaders] recognized but the one God, owned by all Hebrews alike. (*Ant.* 5.112)
- When the Israelites [in the time of Elijah] saw this, they fell upon the earth and worshipped the one God, whom they acknowledged as the Almighty and only true God, while the others were mere names invented by unworthy and senseless opinions. (*Ant.* 8.343)
- He [Moses] represented Him as One, uncreated and immutable to all eternity; in beauty surpassing all mortal thought, made known to us by His power, although the nature of His real being passes knowledge. (*Ag Ap.* 2.167)
- We have but one temple for the one God (for like ever loves like), common to all as God is common to all. (*Ag Ap.* 2.193)

Various other writings from Second Temple Judaism exhibit monotheistic thought. Collectively they demonstrate a desire to maintain Jewish identity in the prevailing Hellenistic culture while speaking in terms understandable and credible to pagan contemporaries. This strategy meant upholding belief in one supreme God while describing God in ways compatible with Greek philosophy. *The Letter of Aristeas*, a Hellenistic Jewish writing from the second half of the second century B.C.E., states concerning “our Lawgiver” (Moses): “He proved first of all that there is only one God and that his power is manifested throughout the universe.”²²⁷ Book 3 of the *Sibylline Oracles*, written by Jews of Alexandria in the second century B.C.E., says, “God, who rules alone, is unique, immensely great, uncreated, almighty, and invisible.” It admonishes, “Revere him, who is the only one, the leader of the world. He is the only one who exists forever and has existed from eternity. He is self-generated, uncreated, he rules everything forever.” Twice it affirms, “He is the sole God, and there is no other.”²²⁸ The *Apocalypse of Abraham*, probably from the latter part of the first century C.E., describes God in a song as the “Eternal One, Mighty One, Holy El, God autocrat self-originate,

²²⁷ *Let. Aris.* 132. *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (2 vols.; ed. R. H. Charles; Oxford: Clarendon, 1913).

²²⁸ *Sib. Or. fr.* 1.7-8a, 15-17; 3.629, 760. *Book III of the Sibylline Oracles and Its Social Setting with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (trans. Rieuwerd Buitenwerf; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 145, 334.

incorruptible, immaculate, unbegotten, spotless, immortal, self-perfected, self-devised, without mother, without father, ungenerated.”²²⁹ Other monotheistic statements or descriptions in the OT Pseudepigrapha include the following: “the name of God is one” (Coptic *Apocalypse of Elijah* 2:11, 50); a vision of one God sitting on a heavenly throne of fire (*Lad. Jac.* 2); “the only God” (Pseudo-Phocylides 54); “there is one Holy One” and “there is no god beside you alone, there is no Holy one beside you” (*Hel. Syn. Pr.* 4:1, 27-28); a description of one God on the heavenly throne as ruler (Pseudo-Orpheus 32-39); “God is one, one in very truth” or “one, truly one is God” (Pseudo-Hecataeus, attributed to Sophocles and quoted in Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5:113).²³⁰

A first-century C.E. witness is Philo of Alexandria.²³¹ Trained in Platonism and Stoicism, he was a full participant in Greek culture yet remained a fully observant Jew who embraced Jewish theology.²³² He sought to explain Jewish thought in terms of Greek philosophy, thereby demonstrating its credibility in his cultural context. He wrote against polytheism (*Flight* 114, *Names* 205) and used many phrases and statements to affirm Jewish monotheism in clear terms. In ch. 4, we will discuss possible qualifications to monotheism in Philo’s thought; nevertheless, he expressed a strong commitment to monotheism, recognized it as foundational to Judaism, and defined it in terms of numerical oneness. The following are monotheistic phrases he used to describe God:

- the one God (*Alleg. Interp.* 2.51; *Spec. Laws* 1.52; 2:258; 3.29)
- the One (*Alleg. Interp.* 3.126)
- the Maker and Father of all, . . . the One, the truly Existent, . . . a single God (*Virtues* 34-35)
- one God who is the Father and Maker of the world (*Embassy* 115)
- He alone being wise, who is also alone God (*Migration* 134)
- the God who is the God of all, . . . the one only and true ruler (*Rewards* 123)
- the supreme God (*Rewards* 162)
- the one truly existing God (*Spec. Laws* 1.65; 2:255)

²²⁹ *Apoc. Ab.* 17.8-10. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; ed. James H. Charlesworth; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1983), 1:697.

²³⁰ *OTP* 1:740, 743; 2:405, 576, 680-81, 800, 825, 913.

²³¹ Quotations of Philo are from Colson, LCL.

²³² Grabbe, “Hellenistic Judaism,” 1.2:65.

- the truly existent God (*Spec. Laws* 1.313)
- the one and truly existent Being (*Spec. Laws* 1.331)
- the one true God . . . the Being who truly exists, even God (*Spec. Laws* 1.332)
- the One, the truly existing God (*Virtues* 40)
- the one and truly existing God (*Virtues* 102)

The following are more extensive statements of his views, in which he affirmed the singleness of God in contrast to pagan thought and, like Josephus, connected the worship of the one God to the centralization of worship in ancient Israel:

God, being One, is alone and unique, and like God there is nothing. . . . There is another way in which we may understand the statement that God is alone. It may mean that neither before creation was there anything with God, nor, when the universe had come into being, does anything take its place with Him; for there is absolutely nothing which He needs. A yet better interpretation is the following. God is alone, a Unity, in the sense that His nature is simple not composite, whereas each one of us and of all other created beings is made up of many things. I, for example, am many things in one. I am soul and body. To soul belong rational and irrational parts, and to body, again, different properties, warm and cold, heavy and light, dry and moist. But God is not a composite Being, consisting of many parts, nor is He mixed with aught else. For whatever is added to God, is either superior or inferior or equal to Him. But there is nothing equal or superior to God. And no lesser thing is resolved into Him. If He do so assimilate any lesser thing, He also will be lessened. And if He can be made less, He will also be capable of corruption; and even to imagine this were blasphemous. The “one” and the “monad” are, therefore, the only standard for determining the category to which God belongs. Rather should we say, the One God is the sole standard for the “monad.” For, like time, all number is subsequent to the universe; and God is prior to the universe, and is its Maker. . . . Not that there is any other not Most High—for God being One, “is in heaven above and on earth beneath, and there is none beside Him.” . . . God is One. (*Alleg. Interp.* 2.1-3; 3.82, 105)

Moses teaches us among many other things five that are the fairest and best of all. Firstly that the Deity is and has been from eternity. This with a view to atheists. . . . Secondly, that God is one. This with a view to the propounders of polytheism, who do not blush to transfer from earth to heaven mob-rule, that worst of evil polities. Thirdly, as I have said already, that the world came into being. . . . Fourthly, that the world too is one as well as its Maker, who made His work like Himself in its uniqueness. . . . For there are those who suppose that there are more worlds than one. . . . Fifthly, that God also exercises forethought on the world's behalf. . . . He that has begun by learning these things with his understanding rather than with his hearing, and has stamped on his soul impressions of truth so marvellous and priceless, both that God is and is from eternity, and that He that really is One, and that He has made the world and has made it one world, unique as Himself is unique, and that He ever exercises forethought for His creation, will lead a life of bliss and blessedness, because he has a character moulded by the truths that piety and holiness enforce. (*Creation* 170-72)

Let us, then, engrave deep in our hearts this as the first and most sacred of commandments, to acknowledge and honour one God Who is above all, and let the idea that gods are many never even reach the ears of the man whose rule of life is to seek for truth in purity and guilelessness. (*Decalogue* 65)

The Godhead is without mixture or infusion or parts. (*Heir* 236)

This lesson he [Moses] continually repeats, sometimes saying that God is one and the Framer and Maker of all things, sometimes that He is Lord of created beings, because stability and fixity and lordship are by nature vested in Him alone. . . . Since God is one, there should be also only one temple. (*Spec. Laws* 1.30, 67)

The rabbinic tradition, properly speaking, dates after the first century C.E. Nevertheless, it evolved at the same time as the Jesus movement, developing out of Pharisaic beliefs.²³³ The rabbinic tradition strongly affirmed the monotheism of its roots. According to the Talmud, the prominent rabbi Abika ben Joseph (ca. 50-135 C.E.) died with the affirmation of the oneness of God on his lips (*b. Ber.* 61b). Rabbinic works such

²³³ Boccaccini, "History of Judaism," 299.

as the Mishnah and Tosefta maintained the continuity of monotheistic thought, as exemplified by *Sifré Deuteronomy*.²³⁴

Among first- and second-century pagans, the Jews were well known for their adherence to monotheism and rejection of polytheism. The Roman senator and historian Tacitus stated, “The Jews conceive of one god only, and that with the mind alone” (*Hist.* 5.5 [Jackson, LCL]). In a satirical allusion to Jewish monotheism Juvenal remarked, “Some happen to have been dealt a father who respects the sabbath. They worship nothing except the clouds and the spirit of the sky” (*Sat.* 14 [Braund, LCL]). Origen preserved the testimony of the second-century pagan writer Celsus concerning Jewish belief:

The goatherds and shepherds who followed Moses as their leader were deluded by clumsy deceits into thinking that there was only one God. . . . The goatherds and shepherds thought that there was one God called the Most High, or Adonai, or the Heavenly One, or Sabaoth, or however they like to call this word; and they acknowledged nothing more. (*Cels.* 1.23-24)²³⁵

The evidence is clear: first-century Jews believed in and advocated the worship of only one God. In an attempt to explain the deification of Jesus within a Jewish context, some have pointed to the exaltation of other personages within first-century Judaism, such as angels, kings, and priests. Although there is some evidence of reverence, honor, or praise given to exalted beings, there is no indication that personal devotion, cultic worship, or sacrifice was offered to them. For instance, there was no organized, ritual worship of angelic beings.²³⁶ In some cases there may have been a form of worship of such personages on the basis of their being manifestations of Yahweh. For instance, Fletcher-Louis identified the worship of Jesus as a new development but found a precedent in the worship of righteous individuals considered to be God’s living idols: “The high priest wears the divine *Name* precisely because he is the visible and ritual

²³⁴ Gary G. Porton, “Who Was a Jew?,” in Neusner et al., *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, 2.2:207, 210. The basic material of *Sifré Deuteronomy* probably comes from the editorial work of Rabbi Judah’s students in the third c. Idem, “Rabbinic Midrash,” in Neusner et al., *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, 1.1:231.

²³⁵ Origen, *Contra Celsum* (ed. and trans. Henry Chadwick; Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 22-23.

²³⁶ Loren T. Stuckenbruck, “‘Angels’ and ‘God’: Exploring the Limits of Early Jewish Monotheism,” in Stuckenbruck and North, *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, 68.

embodiment of Israel's *god*. In his gold and jewel-studded garments he *is* (ritually and dramatically) Yahweh. . . . In his official duties he plays the role of the creator and savior."²³⁷ We now discuss the possible role of exalted personages in greater detail.

The Possibility of Two Divine Beings in Second Temple Judaism

In recent decades, several scholars have argued for a significant modification within Second Temple Jewish monotheism that could have set the stage for the recognition of Jesus as a second divine being.²³⁸ At the end of the first century and beginning of the second century C.E., Jewish rabbis such as Akiva and Ishmael began to oppose vehemently what they described as the heresy of "two powers in heaven"; originally, this issue involved the identity and exaltation of a human figure in heaven.²³⁹ Against this view they cited classic monotheistic texts such as Exod 20, Deut 4, Deut 6, and Isa 44-47.²⁴⁰ Clearly they argued against variations of this belief in both Christian and Gnostic circles, but probably this controversy also provides evidence of first-century Jewish thought old enough to have influenced first-century Christianity.

The background for this type of thinking includes various elements in the OT: anthropomorphic language for God; contrasting descriptions of God, such being just and merciful; contrasting imagery for God, such as (old) man on a throne and (young) warrior; descriptions of God's presence and glory; use of plural pronouns and verbs for Elohim in a few places; the dual designation of God as Elohim and YHWH; theophanies; the angel of YHWH; and "one like a human being" in Daniel 7:13 (NRSV note: "Aram *one like a son of man*").²⁴¹ Other elements come from Jewish writings of the second century B.C.E. to the third century C.E. or later. These include the personification or philosophical abstraction of divine attributes, such as Wisdom in *Wisdom of Solomon* and Word in Philo; principal angels, such as Yael (whose name is a variation of Yahweh) in *Apocalypse of Abraham* and Metatron ("the Lesser Yahweh") in *3 Enoch*; and exalted humans, such as Moses in Ezekiel the Tragedian's *Exagogē* and the Son of Man in *I*

²³⁷ Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, "Alexander the Great's Worship of the High Priest," in Stuckenbruck and North, *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, 88.

²³⁸ See Charles H. Talbert, *The Development of Christology during the First Hundred Years and Other Essays on Early Christian Christology* (NovTSup 140; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 151-60. He cited works by Fossum, Segal, Rowland, Barker, and Stuckenbruck while noting that Dunn and Hurtado critiqued their position. *Ibid.*, 155-56 n.31. We discuss the evidence primarily as presented by Segal.

²³⁹ Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977; repr., Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2012), 260.

²⁴⁰ Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 149-52, 262.

²⁴¹ Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 260-61.

Enoch.²⁴² According to Boyarin, the ancient Israelites embraced the idea of a second deity as viceroy to the supreme God; they worshiped El, the sky god of the Canaanites, and his younger associate Baal, whom the Israelites called Yahweh. In the interests of monotheism the biblical writers merged these two deities into one, but evidence of the original separation remains.²⁴³

From a study of the rabbinical writings against the idea of “two powers in heaven,” we can identify two different strands of thought in certain Jewish writings: (1) A principal angel became God’s supreme helper and shared in God’s divinity; a human hero or exemplar could be exalted and could be identified with this angel. (2) Divine attributes of mercy and justice were personified, associated with the names of God, and used for stages on the journey to God. The rabbis opposed the first idea as a violation of biblical monotheism but accepted the second as a description of the one God.²⁴⁴

As we will discuss further in ch. 4, Philo apparently drew from the same traditions to speak of God’s word (*logos*) as a “second God” in the sense of a concept, manifestation, or emanation of God while in the same context insisting he believed in only one God.²⁴⁵ As a follower of Greek philosophy and an apologist for Judaism in a Hellenistic culture, his concern was to preserve God’s transcendence and immutability, which Greek philosophy required, and to explain the anthropomorphisms and theophanies of the OT, which seemed to contradict Greek philosophy. To avoid the implication of the perfect, unchanging God participating directly in the affairs of the imperfect, transient world, he used the concept of the *logos* to explain God’s interaction with the material world.²⁴⁶ While he spoke of the *logos* as an intermediary, his concept was more philosophical and allegorical than personal.

The rabbis labeled the idea of a principal angel or a hypostatic manifestation equivalent to God as the heresy of “two powers in heaven,” firmly rejecting it on the basis of OT monotheistic texts and providing alternate explanations of the relevant biblical passages.²⁴⁷ In their explanations the one God may be shown in various aspects; for example, Dan 7 shows the one God may be manifested either as a young man or an old

²⁴² Talbert, *Development of Christology*, 153-56.

²⁴³ Boyarin, *Jewish Gospels*, 44-45. He called this “the hypothetical originary ditheism of Israel’s religion.” *Ibid.*, 167 n.27.

²⁴⁴ Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 180.

²⁴⁵ *Flight* 101; *Dreams* 1.229-39; *QC* 2.62.

²⁴⁶ Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 164-65.

²⁴⁷ Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, ix-x, 264.

man.²⁴⁸ The rabbis opposed any depiction of a separate, independent angelic or human figure who seemed to be divine, who carried the divine name, or who acted as God. If this figure could be identified with God's presence or glory—by terms such as *shekinah* (Hebrew, “dwelling” or “manifested presence”), *kabod* (Hebrew, “glory”), *yekara* (Aramaic, “glory”), or *memra* (Aramaic, “word”)—then they were willing to accept it.²⁴⁹ Indeed, they elaborated on these terms to describe the manifestation or self-revelation of God. *Targum Onkelos* uses *memra* for a personal encounter with God, *yekara* for a visible manifestation of God, and *shekinah* for the presence of God.²⁵⁰ Where Isa 6:1 says, “I saw the LORD sitting on a throne,” *Targum Isaiah* says, “I saw the glory of the LORD resting upon a throne.” *Targum Isaiah* also interprets the threefold ascription of holiness to God in Isa 6:3 as a description of the house of Yahweh's *shekinah* in heaven, Yahweh's works on earth, and Yahweh himself.²⁵¹

Since our focus is particularly on the thought of Paul, what influence could these ideas have had upon him? In their present form, the descriptions of Yaoel in *Apocalypse of Abraham* and of Metratron in *3 Enoch* come after Paul's time. Significantly, Paul's exegesis of the relevant OT materials does not resemble typical “two powers” exegesis but is much closer to that of the rabbis. He employed some of the same concepts as the rabbis but in a unique way to describe the significance of Jesus within the context of Jewish monotheism. We note the following parallels between Paul and the rabbis on this issue: (1) He consistently appealed to the *Shema* (Rom 3:30; 1 Cor 8:4-6; Gal 3:20). (2) He united Elohim and Yahweh; indeed, as we shall see in ch. 6 he connected both terms to Jesus in 2 Cor 3:16–4:6. (3) He rejected the concept of a principal angel (Gal 1:8, 12); contrasted angels to the one God and considered the law “ordained through angels by a mediator” to be inferior to a promise directly from God (Gal 3:18-20); opposed the worship of angels (Col 2:18); warned that angelic appearances could be deceitful (2 Cor 11:14); and held Jesus to be superior to the angels as their creator and as the dwelling

²⁴⁸ See *Mek. R. Shimon, Tract. Shirata* 30.2. *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai* (trans. W. David Nelson; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2006), 132-34. Something similar occurs in Revelation, for Rev 1:12-16 identifies Jesus as “one like the Son of Man” and yet describes his appearance like that of Daniel's “Ancient One” (NRSV note: “Aram an *Ancient of Days*”), thus referencing both divine manifestations in Dan 7. Similarly, Rev 4:2 describes one being on the divine throne, yet Rev 22:3-4 speaks of this one as both God and the Lamb. One version of the LXX identifies the Ancient of Days as the Son of Man. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 202.

²⁴⁹ Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 52, 182-83.

²⁵⁰ *Targum Onkelos to Exodus: An English Translation of the Text with Analysis and Commentary* (ed. and trans. Alexander Sperber, Abraham Berliner, and Israel Drazin; Jersey City, N.J.: KTAV, 1990), 27-28.

²⁵¹ *The Isaiah Targum* (trans. Bruce Chilton; ArBib 11; Wilmington, Del.: Glazier: 1987), 14.

place of God (Col 1:15-20). (4) He did not appeal to any of the standard “two powers” texts or exegetical arguments. Occasionally he spoke of Jesus as the “Son” or “Son of God” but did not use the term “Son of Man” or make a direct argument from Dan 7. He did speak of Jesus as a glorified man but described the reign of the Son as ultimately merging into the eternal reign of God (1 Cor 15:24-28). (5) He held that righteousness (justice) and redemption (mercy) were united in God, specifically in Christ (1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:19-21). (6) He used the language of “glory” and “dwelling” to describe the manifestation of God and indeed to identify Jesus with God (2 Cor 4:4-6; Col 2:9). In short, there is no evidence that Paul identified himself with Jews who taught “two powers in heaven”; he would have denied the charge. In his letters and according to the accounts in Acts, Paul took pains to identify himself with mainstream Judaism (Acts 23:6; 24:14; 26:4-6; Phil 3:5-7) and with the earliest Jewish Christianity (1 Cor 15:3; Gal 2:2, 9). Both Paul and the rabbis sought to affirm continuity with the received biblical tradition of monotheism, so it is not surprising that both would use similar forms of exegesis and argumentation.

It is more plausible to posit some sort of affinity between “two powers” teaching and the Johannine community. A discussion of the Johannine literature is beyond the scope of this thesis, but the Gospel of John demonstrates a conflict with Judaism over claims of deity concerning Jesus Christ, and Revelation associates Jesus with divine titles and with the divine throne. Yet the Johannine literature maintains some distinction between God and Jesus.²⁵² While these writings do not present Jesus as an angelic being, they do present a concept of incarnation that could have led the rabbis to accuse them of “two powers” heresy. As we will discuss later in this chapter, beginning in the middle of the second century C.E. Justin and other Christian theologians explicitly adopted a form of angel Christology, speaking of Jesus as an angel and another God (*Dial.* 56), so by then the rabbis evidently directed their denunciations against Christians like them.²⁵³ Justin essentially accepted the charge and defended the position on exegetical grounds. Other Christians opposed this view, however. “The closing decades of the second century witnessed an attempt to salvage biblical monotheism in Christianity,” and in the third

²⁵² Examples of identification with God: John 1:1; 5:17-18; 8:56-59; 10:30-39; 14:6-11; 20:27-31; 1 John 5:20; Rev 1:7-8; 22:3-16. Examples of distinction from God: John 1:18; 5:17-38; 8:16-18; 14:23-24; 17:1-5, 20-26; 20:17; 2 John 3; Rev 1:4-6; 3:21; 5:6-7.

²⁵³ Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 224; Eric Osborn, *The Emergence of Christian Theology* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 29.

century modalistic Christians accused trinitarians such as Tertullian, Hippolytus, and Origen of believing in “two gods” just as the rabbis accused.²⁵⁴

In summary, we have definite evidence of binitarian or ditheistic thought in noncanonical texts and in both Jewish and Christian thought of the second century C.E. This way of thinking likely had roots in the first century, although we do not have evidence of a Jewish group at that time worshiping a second divine being or considering a second divine being to be equal to God. In some first-century Jewish writings we find language that second-century rabbis would associate with the “two powers” heresy. We do not find much evidence, however, that the entities being described were sufficiently independent to have caused a “two powers” indictment. Thus we cannot say these traditions were the roots of Christian doctrine, and indeed the very term “two powers” may be anachronistic when applied to the first century. Segal concluded, “The most we can say is that some kinds of Christianity found ‘two powers’ traditions favorable to their perspective.”²⁵⁵

Other scholars are more definite in saying these Hellenistic Jewish ideas influenced early Christology. For Talbert, the texts concerning exalted humans were part of a Hellenistic Jewish concept of a descending and ascending redeemer, which the early Christians adopted. He cited the Wisdom tradition and traditions concerning archangels in Hellenistic Jewish works of the first century B.C.E. to the first century C.E. such as *Joseph and Aseneth*, *Testament of Job*, *Apocalypse of Moses*, and *Testament of Abraham*.²⁵⁶ For Boyarin, there was an ancient binitarian element in Jewish tradition, and thus one can view early Christianity as the continuation and further development of an early strand of Israelite religion.²⁵⁷ For Chatelion Counet, there was deification of intermediaries and mediators other than Yahweh in pre-Christian Judaism, involving glorification, veneration, and even worship. He acknowledged, however, a significant difference between these Jewish figures and Jesus:²⁵⁸

The deified and glorified beings from early Judaism are beings in which God is so explicitly present that their own identity falls away. They represent God

²⁵⁴ Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 229-30, 265. For Justin’s Christian opposition, see *Dial.* 128.

²⁵⁵ Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 200, 201, 205, 215.

²⁵⁶ Talbert, *Development of Christology*, 86-96, 111.

²⁵⁷ Boyarin, *Jewish Gospels*, 99-100.

²⁵⁸ Chatelion Counet, “Divine Messiah,” 50-51.

not as individual persons, but in the professional or mythical appearance. . . . Through their profession or function (Enoch as the Son of Man, Adam as Assistant of creation), they lose their individuality. The venerators do not see this or that high-priest nor this or that prophet, they see God represented in them. This overshadows their person or mythical appearance completely.

In contrast, early Christians continued to regard Jesus as an actual, historical human being with a distinct human identity. Moreover, they did not worship him as a being other than Yahweh but identified him with Yahweh. Therefore, these examples may provide a backdrop for the development of Christology, but there is not a direct correspondence. In short, since none of these principal angels, agents of God, or exalted humans were considered as rightful recipients of worship, Second Temple Judaism does not provide a precedent for the early Christian worship of Jesus.²⁵⁹

What would become orthodox Judaism interpreted its tradition in opposition to the idea of a second figure who functioned as an extension of God yet who was numerically distinct from God.²⁶⁰ Some strands of early Christianity did as well. Other strands of Christianity probably made use of such concepts, albeit in a unique way. Definitely in the second century and possibly before the end of the first century we find some form of angel Christology. This concept was likely in the background of Jewish Christianity and could have influenced some Christians to think of Jesus in divine terms. It may have contributed some exegetical ideas but apparently did not provide a specific model that first-century Christians adopted or copied. To the extent that they used “two powers” terminology it had the effect of identifying Jesus as a manifestation of God rather than making him a separate, subordinate divine being as is typical in “two powers” texts.

Our discussion at this point is preliminary, for we have yet to take a close look at Paul’s language in the Corinthian correspondence. As we shall discuss in ch. 5, Paul used dual language for God and Jesus bearing some resemblance to “two powers” language, yet he did so in a unique way and while still insisting there is only one God. For our analysis at this stage, there are two important points: (1) Second Temple Judaism was strongly monotheistic. While these examples reveal a significant diversity in Judaism, which could have encouraged the development of new forms (such as Christianity), we

²⁵⁹ Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 90; Hurtado, *God in NT Theology*, 28.

²⁶⁰ Talbert, *Development of Christology*, 158.

still do not have evidence of an organized group who worshiped someone other than Yahweh or identified someone other than Yahweh as the creator, the savior, or the supreme ruler of the world. When ditheistic or binitarian concepts did emerge they aroused vociferous and united opposition from Jewish religious leaders. (2) When early Christians worshiped Jesus, prayed to him, and spoke of him as Yahweh, creator, savior, and supreme ruler of the world, they not only went beyond mainstream Judaism but also beyond these minority examples. While we may find some analogies or contributing influences in pre-Christian Judaism, the deification of Jesus was unique. He was not a philosophical abstraction or a mythical figure but a human who lived among them and whom hundreds alive in Paul's day could remember from personal experience (1 Cor 15:6). It is unlikely that early Christians encountered worshipers of Adam, Enoch, Moses, Metatron, or Yael, and it is even less likely that they sought encouragement, support, or approval from such people. We still must address the question: Despite the significant break from their own cherished theological tradition, their historic identity, and their socio-religious group, what motivated Jewish Christians in Paul's day to deify Jesus?

Jewish Christian Scriptures

The NT contains a number of Jewish writings from the first century. From a variety of these documents we see that, even as the early Christians developed a unique view of Jesus, they maintained continuity with Jewish thought about God. When we examine the overall rhetorical situation of the following quoted documents, we find that Matthew connects Jesus to OT prophecies and motifs, Mark explains Jesus to Gentiles while affirming his Jewish identity, James describes normative community life among early Jewish Christians, and Revelation uses the Jewish apocalyptic genre to proclaim Christ as the ultimate victor, King of kings, and Lord of lords.

- Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" (Matt 4:10, quoting Deut 6:13)
- One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God

with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” (Mark 12:28-30, quoting Deut 6:4-5)

- You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. (James 2:19)
- At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! . . . And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing, “Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.” (Rev 4:2, 8)²⁶¹

Of crucial import for our purposes, Paul interpreted the Jewish tradition monotheistically. While he treated Jesus in a unique fashion, at this stage of our analysis it is important to note that he explicitly appealed to Jewish concepts of God for his foundation. In chs. 5 and 6 we will analyze the rhetorical background and significance of these statements. Interestingly, Paul used a henotheistic form of argumentation in 1 Cor 8:4-6 to affirm the uniqueness of Yahweh and relate Jesus to Yahweh.

- Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one. (Rom 3:29-30a)
- Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.” Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—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. (1 Cor 8:4-6)
- For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from

²⁶¹ See Rev 7:15-17; 22:3-4, which describe one divine being on one divine throne who is simultaneously God and the Lamb. In Rev 7:17 the Lamb is “on the throne” (NLT); literally in, at, or “on the center of the throne” (NLT note; Greek, τὸ ἀνά μέσον τοῦ θρόνου).

the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming. (1 Thess 1:9-10)

- Now a mediator involves more than one party; but God is one. (Gal 3:20)

Developments in the Second Century and Beyond

Although our discussion focuses on the first-century context of Paul, it is helpful to trace the trajectories of Christian discourse in the second century as a means of locating Paul's thought. We can test our conclusions about Paul by considering how second-century concepts likely evolved from first-century concepts. We will briefly consider the early post-apostolic writers, Marcion, Valentinus and the Gnostics, Justin and the Greek apologists, Irenaeus, the modalists, and the early trinitarians.²⁶²

Outside the NT itself, the earliest Christian writings available to us are letters by three bishops—Ignatius of Antioch, Clement of Rome, and Polycarp of Smyrna; fragments from a fourth bishop, Papias of Hieropolis; *The Shepherd of Hermas*, an allegorical book of visions by an otherwise unknown writer in Rome; and several anonymous and pseudonymous writings—*Didache*, *Second Epistle of Clement*, *Epistle of Barnabas*, and *Preaching of Peter*. These early post-apostolic writings (ca. 90-140) follow the language and teaching of the NT closely with little innovation. They emphasize the teaching of one God and Lord of all.²⁶³ At the same time, they proclaim the deity of Christ, as exemplified by the following phrases:²⁶⁴

- The source of your unity and election is genuine suffering which you undergo by the will of the Father and of Jesus Christ, our God. (Ign. *Eph.* pref.)
- For Jesus Christ—that life from which we can't be torn—is the Father's mind. (Ign. *Eph.* 3.2)

²⁶² In addition to the primary sources, see Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*; Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome*; Otto Heick, *A History of Christian Thought* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965); Hurtado, *How on Earth*; idem, *Lord Jesus Christ*; Osborn, *Emergence of Christian Theology*; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (vol. 1 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

²⁶³ Ign. *Magn.* 8; Herm. *Mand.* 1; *1 Clem.* 19-20, 30, 59-60; *2 Clem.* 20.

²⁶⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, quotations of Polycarp, Ignatius, *1 Clement*, *2 Clement*, and Justin's *First Apology* are from *Early Christian Fathers* (ed. and trans. Cyril C. Richardson; LCC 1; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953).

- There is only one physician—of flesh yet spiritual, born yet unbegotten, God incarnate, genuine life in the midst of death, sprung from Mary as well as God, first subject to suffering then beyond it—Jesus Christ our Lord. (Ign. *Eph.* 7.2)
- For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary, in God’s plan being sprung both from the seed of David and from the Holy Spirit. (Ign. *Eph.* 18.2)
- For God was revealing himself as a man, to bring newness of life. (Ign. *Eph.* 19.3)
- The divine prophets . . . were inspired by his grace to convince unbelievers that God is one, and that he has revealed himself in his Son Jesus Christ, who is his Word issuing from the silence and who won the complete approval of him who sent him. (Ign. *Magn.* 8.2)
- Farewell—be at one with God, for you possess an unbreakable spirit, which is what Jesus Christ had (Ign. *Magn.* 15, Richardson). Fare ye well in the harmony of God, ye who have obtained the inseparable Spirit, who is Jesus Christ (*ANF*). Farewell in godly harmony to you who possess an undivided spirit, which is Jesus Christ (Holmes). (The last clause in Greek is: κекτημένοι ἀδιάκριτον πνεῦμα, ὅς ἐστιν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός.)²⁶⁵
- Let me imitate the Passion of my God. (Ign. *Rom.* 6.3)
- This you will do by not being puffed up and by keeping very close to [our] God, Jesus Christ, and the bishop and the apostles’ precepts. (Ign. *Trall.* 7.1)
- I extol Jesus Christ, the God who has granted you such wisdom. (Ign. *Smyrn.* 1.1)
- It was good of you to welcome Philo and Rheus Agathopus as deacons of the Christ God. (Ign. *Smyrn.* 10.1)
- I bid you farewell as always in our God, Jesus Christ. (Ign. *Pol.* 8.3)
- The scepter of God’s majesty, the Lord Jesus Christ, did not come with the pomp of pride or arrogance. (*I Clem.* 16.2)

²⁶⁵ *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (3d ed.; ed. Michael W. Holmes; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

- We are before the eyes of the Lord and God, and “everyone shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ.” (Pol. *Phil.* 6.2)
- Brothers, we ought to think of Jesus Christ as we do of God—as the “judge of the living and the dead.” . . . For he has given us light; as a Father he has called us sons; he has rescued us when we were perishing. . . . Now, if we say that the Church is the flesh and the Christ is the spirit, then he who does violence to the flesh, does violence to the Church. Such a person, then, will not share in the spirit, which is Christ. This flesh is able to share in so great a life and immortality, because the Holy Spirit cleaves to it. (2 *Clem.* 1.1.4; 14.4-5)

Ignatius was particularly fond of calling Jesus Christ “our God” (*Rom.* pref.) and said in a letter to Polycarp, “Be on the alert for him who is above time, the Timeless, the Unseen, the One who became visible for our sakes, who was beyond touch and passion, yet who for our sakes became subject to suffering, and endured everything for us” (*Pol.* 3.2). As this statement shows, these writers, unlike those in later times, readily spoke of God’s direct participation in the world including suffering in the realm of humanity. (See also *1 Clem.* 2.1.) They distinguished between the Father and the Son, relating the Son to the manifestation of God in flesh.²⁶⁶ They used a few triadic statements such as we find in 2 Cor 13:13/14 and Eph 4:4-6,²⁶⁷ but they did not make a clear distinction with regard to the Holy Spirit. A few statements could refer to a preexistent Son, although these may mean nothing more than an ideal existence in the mind and plan of God much like the church.²⁶⁸ As Osborn commented, the writers of this age were witnesses rather than interpreters; for example, “Ignatius, despite his use of triadic formulae . . . , thinks of one divine monad and different modes of revelation.”²⁶⁹ In 110-112 C.E., we also have the testimony of a Roman governor, Pliny the Younger, who said Christians sang hymns to “Christ as if to a god.”²⁷⁰

While these early writers worked primarily in the NT context, later writers increasingly drew from dominant ideas of Greek philosophy, especially Platonism,

²⁶⁶ Examples are *Ign. Magn.* 6.1, 7.1-2; *Ign. Eph.* 21.2; *Ign. Rom.* pref., 3.3; *Ign. Smyrn.* 1.1; *Pol. Phil.* 12.2.

²⁶⁷ *1 Clem.* 46.6, 58.2; *Ign. Eph.* 9.1; *Ign. Magn.* 13.1-2.

²⁶⁸ *Barn.* 5-6; *Herm. Vis.* 2.4; *Herm. Sim.* 9.12.

²⁶⁹ Osborn, *Emergence of Christian Theology*, 177-78.

²⁷⁰ Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 10.96 (Radice, LCL).

Middle Platonism, and Neoplatonism. In Platonism, there are two worlds: the good, real world of ideas or forms and the imperfect, physical world of phenomena that reflects the world of ideas.²⁷¹ The summit of the world of ideas is the one first principle of all things, the supreme and perfect God, who is remote from the material world and who is impassible—incapable of emotional feeling and suffering. The world of ideas serves as an intermediary between God and the physical world. Similarly, for Aristotle, there is one first mover, God, who is perfect, unchanging, and therefore unmoved by the world and its cares, desires, or emotions.²⁷² Under the prevailing Greek view, then, God is intrinsically unknowable, impassible, unchangeable, unapproachable, and uninvolved with the lesser world of matter.²⁷³

Influenced by this philosophical dualism with its emphasis on the imperfection of the material world, Marcion (ca. 140) repudiated both the OT and Jewish monotheism. He taught there are two deities: the Creator, or God of the OT, and the Redeemer, or God of the NT. The Creator is an inferior, evil deity known as the Demiurge (δημιουργός), a title borrowed from Plato's *Timaeus* and meaning “craftsman” or “artisan.” The Redeemer is good, is the only God worthy of worship, and came to this world as Jesus Christ, who was a spirit being only.²⁷⁴ While Marcion shared the view of his contemporaries that God was revealed as Jesus, they rejected him for denying monotheism.²⁷⁵

Valentinus (ca. 100-160) was the most prominent teacher of Gnosticism, although we know his views only from opponents such as Irenaeus and Tertullian. Like Marcion, the Gnostics drew from Greek philosophical dualism, considering spirit to be good and matter to be evil. The divine fullness or perfection (πλήρωμα) consists of the Father (the supreme God), who is pure spirit and goodness, and the aeons, a progression of lesser divine beings or powers who emanated from the Father.²⁷⁶ The material world came into being because of the sin of an aeon, and its creator is a lowly aeon identified as Yahweh or the Demiurge. Christ is a high aeon who came as a redeemer to emancipate humans from the material world through supreme knowledge (γνώσις) rather than faith. In some versions of Gnosticism, Christ had a spiritual body only; in others, he was a spirit who

²⁷¹ Kolenda, *Philosophy's Journey*, 30-33.

²⁷² Kolenda, *Philosophy's Journey*, 39, 55.

²⁷³ Heick, *History of Christian Thought*, 1:25, 29.

²⁷⁴ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*; 550-54; Heick, *History of Christian Thought*, 1:77.

²⁷⁵ Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome*, 73.

²⁷⁶ Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome*, 75-76.

identified with the human Jesus. Christ was thus neither the supreme God (because the supreme spirit could not be directly involved with evil matter) nor a true human (because only a spirit being could be truly good).²⁷⁷ According to Marcellus of Ancyra, a fourth-century opponent of Arius, Valentinus in his book *On the Three Natures* “was the first to invent three hypostases [ὑποστάσεις] and three persons [πρόσωπα] of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and he is discovered to have filched this from Hermes [Trismegistus] and Plato.”²⁷⁸ Christian writers of the second and third centuries rejected the Gnostics for, among other things, denying the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and the atoning death of Christ.

In the middle of the second century (ca. 130-180) apologists wrote in Greek to defend Christianity against pagan detractors. The most prominent of the Greek apologists was Justin Martyr (ca. 150), a converted philosopher. They explained Christian concepts in terms of the prevailing philosophy, much as Philo had done for Judaism. Somewhat like Marcion and Valentinus, they drew from Platonic dualism, identifying the Father as the supreme God and characterizing God as unchanging, impassible, and not directly involved with the material world.²⁷⁹ They also drew from the Middle Platonic concept of plurality in the one first-principle. Plato (late fifth and early fourth centuries B.C.E.) had spoken of plurality in the first-principle and of the first-principle as a complex unity. Xenocrates (late fourth century B.C.E.) likewise affirmed plurality in the first-principle, Moderatus Gades (first century C.E.) taught plurality in the One, and Numenius (late second century C.E.) posited three gods. As described by Osborn, the chief problem in Middle Platonism “is the relation between simple and complex unity, between the simplicity and negativity of the first God and his designation as the mind which contains the world of ideas.” It is “inconclusive because it turns its first-principles into hypostases and arranges them in a religious hierarchy.”²⁸⁰ For example, Plotinus (third century C.E.) merged the hypostases into one, Iamblichus (late third and early fourth centuries C.E.) established a hierarchy and multiple triads, while Proclus (fifth century C.E.) likewise developed many triads.

²⁷⁷ Heick, *History of Christian Thought*, 1:67-75.

²⁷⁸ A. H. B. Logan, “Marcellus of Ancyra (Pseudo-Anthimus), ‘On the Holy Church’: Text, Translation and Commentary,” 9, *JTS* 2/51 (April 2000): 91, 95.

²⁷⁹ Heick, *History of Christian Thought*, 1:59-61, 64-65.

²⁸⁰ Osborn, *Emergence of Christian Theology*, 42-52, 63.

In this intellectual environment, second- and third-century theologians drew from both the Bible and philosophy.²⁸¹ Like Philo and John, the apologists used the popular Greek philosophical concept of the Logos (Word) to describe the interaction of the transcendent God with the world. Unlike Philo and John, however, they clearly described the Logos as a second, preexistent, personal being instead of a personified attribute, a metaphorical description of immanence, or a manifestation. Originally the Logos was impersonally inherent in God, but in order to create the material world God first brought forth, or begot, the Logos out of God's self, so that God is the creator but by means of an intermediary.²⁸² The Logos is thus the Son of God in a temporal yet spiritual sense and is God's agent in creation and in appearances to humans. By this doctrine of the Logos, the apologists sought to protect God's transcendence while also affirming, in opposition to Marcion and Valentinus, the supreme God as good, as the creator, and as the God of the OT.

To act as God's intermediary in the salvation of humans, the Logos came in flesh as Jesus Christ.²⁸³ Jesus is not the supreme God, the Father, but a second person subordinate to the Father in time, essence, and power. Justin identified the Logos as "another [ἑτερος] God and Lord under the Creator of all things . . . : He . . . is distinct from God, the Creator; distinct, that is, in number, but not in mind." He sought to maintain God's transcendence by saying the Logos, not the Father, spoke to and appeared to humans in the OT: "You should not imagine that the Unbegotten God himself went down or went up from any place. For the ineffable Father and Lord of all . . . always remains in his place, wherever it may be."²⁸⁴ In short, Justin was binitarian. On one hand he insisted on belief in only one God; yet on the other hand he said the Father and the Son were two numerically distinct divine beings.²⁸⁵ In reference to Justin, Green concluded that, although the first-century Jewish concept of the Logos contained intimations of plurality, the most startling innovation of Christianity was the belief in two divine persons, the Father and the Son or Word.²⁸⁶

²⁸¹ Osborn, *Emergence of Christian Theology*, 109.

²⁸² Justin, *2 Apol.* 6; *Dial.* 61.

²⁸³ Justin, *2 Apol.* 13.

²⁸⁴ Justin, *Dial.* 56.4, 11; 127.2. *Dialogue with Trypho* (trans. and ed. Thomas B. Falls, Thomas P. Halton, and Michael Slusser; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 84, 191. See also Theophilus, *Autol.* 2.22.

²⁸⁵ Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome*, 90.

²⁸⁶ Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome*, 81.

Despite their differences, Valentinus, Marcion, and Justin shared common philosophical presuppositions about God. As a result, all of them made a personal distinction between the supreme God and the agent of creation:

All three theologians concurred that the busy god described as making the material world in Genesis *ipso facto* could not be the high god. According to their philosophical principles, the high god does not “create”: he is instead radically stable, because both perfect and changeless. The work of organizing matter was relegated to a lower deity, the *kosmokrator* or *demiurge*.²⁸⁷

Unlike the other two, Justin was willing to speak of the supreme God as the creator, thereby preserving the OT for Christians, but like them he believed the actual work of creation was performed by a second god under the first. For all three, a lower god created the physical world.²⁸⁸

Irenaeus (d. ca. 200), bishop of Lyon, was the foremost Christian writer of the late second century. Against Marcion and Valentinus he stressed the unity of God and the deity of Jesus. Like Justin he equated the terms *Logos* and *Son* and applied both to Jesus, but unlike Justin he did not speak definitively of Jesus as a subordinate or numerically distinct being. He taught there is only one God, who is the creator, the Lord, and the Father. The Father alone is called God, and he is all Mind and all Logos. God’s Logos (Word or Son) is the revelation of the Father and as such is truly God. Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh, and thus he is Lord and God. He is Savior, Son, Word, Spirit, and “He is indeed our Father,” so that the name of Jesus Christ belongs to the Father.²⁸⁹ “Through the Word made visible and palpable, the Father was revealed. The Father is the invisible of the Son, and the Son is the visible of the Father. That is why, in His presence, all said that He was Christ and called Him God.”²⁹⁰ In a few passages, Irenaeus described a threefold self-revelation of God as Father, Son (Word), and Holy Spirit (Wisdom) using the language of manifestation or activity rather than essence or eternal nature, similar to

²⁸⁷ Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement,” 242.

²⁸⁸ Paula Fredriksen, review of Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, *JECS* 12 (2004): 539.

²⁸⁹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.1.1; 2.13.8; 2.28.4-5; 2.30.9; 3.9.3; 3.10.2; 3.19.2; 4.17.6; 4.31.2. The quote is from *Haer.* 5.17.1, in *The Scandal of the Incarnation: Irenaeus against the Heresies* (trans. Hans Urs von Balthasar; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990), 47.

²⁹⁰ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.6.5-6, in *Scandal of the Incarnation* (Balthasar), 50.

some of the later apologists.²⁹¹ He did not contribute significantly to the development of trinitarian dogma but at most expressed an “economic” trinity, making distinctions with respect to God’s operations in the world for the salvation of humans.²⁹²

Some Christian teachers rejected Justin’s binitarianism on the ground that it compromised the oneness of God; they were not willing surrender their concept of divine unity and simplicity in order to protect his concept of divine transcendence.²⁹³ Known to church historians as modalistic monarchians or modalists, they emphasized that God is absolutely one, thus upholding the monarchy of God, and that Jesus Christ is the manifestation or incarnation of the one God, the Father. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three persons but three ways, or modes, in which God has manifested God’s self or related to the world. As the Word of God, Jesus is the self-revelation of the eternal God, the active expression of God in the world. As the Son of God, Jesus is a true human, begotten of a virgin by the Spirit of God, the revelation of God in flesh, and he suffered and died as a human. Leading teachers of modalism in the late second century and early third century were Noetus, Epigonus, Cleomenes, Praxeas, and Sabellius, with support from Roman bishops Victor, Zephyrinus, and Callistus. None of their writings have survived, but their views are preserved in writings of opponents such as Tertullian and Hippolytus. In the second century and early third century we also have expressions of modalistic thought in fragments from Melito, bishop of Sardis, and in various popular writings such as the apocryphal Acts.²⁹⁴ The latter speak of Jesus in terms of strict monotheism such as “the only God” and “the true God.” In the apocryphal Acts we have the best evidence of how early Christians communicated their faith to unbelievers; they contain appeals to turn from pagan polytheism to the worship of Jesus, which they present primarily in terms of monotheistic worship.²⁹⁵ From 180 to 300 C.E., modalism seems to have been the most serious rival to the emerging doctrine of trinitarianism.²⁹⁶ Indeed,

²⁹¹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.10.1; 5.20.1; Theophilus, *Autol.* 2.15; Athenagoras, *Leg.* 10, 12, 24. See also Justin, *I Apol.* 6, 13.

²⁹² Heick, *History of Christian Thought*, 1:108-9, 127; Denis Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 50, 56. Osborn implied the same. *Emergence of Christian Theology*, 134-36, 182-83.

²⁹³ Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome*, 91, 102. As Justin acknowledged, some Christians rejected his doctrine that God and the Logos were numerically distinct. *Dial.* 128.

²⁹⁴ William Horbury, “Jewish and Christian Monotheism in the Herodian Age,” in Stuckenbruck and North, *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, 26. See Melito, *frg.* 7-9; *T. 12 Patr.* 2.6; *Acts Pet.* 20-21, 30, 39; *Acts Paul frg.* 13; *Acts Andr.* 18, 33; *Acts John* 42-44, 77-79, 85; *Acts Thom.* 25-26. For the apocryphal Acts, see *The Apocryphal New Testament* (trans. M. R. James; Oxford: Clarendon, 1924).

²⁹⁵ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 143-44.

²⁹⁶ Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma* (6 vols.; London: Williams & Norgate, 1897), 3:51-54; Heick, *History of Christian Thought*, 1:149.

according to its opponents, it was the majority view during much of this time.²⁹⁷ Pelikan defined it “as an effort to provide a theology for the language of devotion” in order to safeguard both monotheism and the deity of Christ. As it is reported by Tertullian and Hippolytus, he characterized it as a “systematization of popular Christian belief” but “rather naïve.”²⁹⁸ Green analyzed modalistic thought based on a report by Hippolytus:

Cleomenes . . . attempted to preserve both the changelessness and the oneness of God by considering the tension between them not in terms of the relationship of God and the Logos but rather the relationship between the divine and human in Christ. Thus he did not speak of Father and Son as titles describing God in himself but used them rather to draw the contrast between God in himself and Christ.²⁹⁹

In the early third century writers such as Tertullian, Origen, Hippolytus, and Novatian rejected the views of the modalists in favor of a form of trinitarianism. Tertullian was the first writer to describe God by the Latin term *trinitas* (“trinity”) and Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by the Latin phrase *tres personae* (“three persons”).³⁰⁰ While the Son and Spirit are subordinate to the Father in time, rank, and power, the three persons share one “substance” (*substantia*).³⁰¹ For Origen the subordination was so pronounced that believers should pray only to the Father and not to Christ (*Or.* 10) and those who considered Jesus the most high God were in error (*Cels.* 8.14). At this point, two general schools of thought sought to “reconcile belief in the oneness of God with belief in a divine Trinity”—the subordinationists and the modalists.³⁰² Bauckham has described these two schools of thought as trends:³⁰³

²⁹⁷ Tertullian, *Prax.* 3; Origen, *Cels.* 8.14; Hippolytus, *Haer.* 9.2, 5; Novatian, *Trin.* 23; Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 1.23; 2.3; Athanasius, *Dion.* 5.

²⁹⁸ Pelikan, *Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, 178-79.

²⁹⁹ Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome*, 105.

³⁰⁰ Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome*, 111. Theophilus of Antioch, ca. 185, spoke of a “triad” (Greek τριάς, in the genitive form τριάδος) to describe God, God’s word, and God’s wisdom. *Autol.* 2.15. Clement of Alexandria, ca. 200, used the same Greek term to characterize Plato’s philosophy and apply it to Christian belief in the ἁγίαν τριάδα (“holy trinity”) of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. *Strom.* 5.14.103. In neither case is there a description of three distinct persons or self-conscious actors.

³⁰¹ Tertullian, *Herm.* 3, 18; *Prax.* 3-5, 8-9, 12-13. “Tertullian has not avoided a division of the divine substance, and . . . he may not have given the son and the spirit a totality of divine substance.” Osborn, *Emergence of Christian Theology*, 189.

³⁰² Minns, *Irenaeus*, 55-56.

³⁰³ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 147-48.

By means of a necessary oversimplification, we can identify two important trends in ante-Nicene Christianity's reflection on the relation of Jesus to God. One trend remained close to the worshipping life of the church *and* to Jewish monotheism; it reflects very faithfully the evidence just surveyed for the worship of Jesus and for the retention, in Christian witness, of exclusive monotheistic worship against the polytheistic worship of paganism. It is easy to see how this combination might lead in the direction of modalism. . . . If only God may be worshipped and if Jesus must be worshipped, then the conclusion could be drawn that there can be no real distinction between God the Father and God as incarnate in Jesus. . . .

The other trend is represented by the tradition of intellectual theology, which was relatively more independent of the worship and witness of ordinary Christianity. This tradition begins in the apologists of the second century and continues in the Alexandrians and the Origenist tradition. . . . The result was that they tended to use Platonic monotheism as the model for understanding the relation of Jesus to God. God, the Father, is the supreme God, while Christ, the Logos, is god in a subordinate and derivative sense. . . . The Christian practice of the worship of Jesus could be permissible as the relative worship of the principal divine intermediary, while absolute worship is reserved for the one who is God in the fullest sense. The danger in this Christian Platonism was the loss of monotheism in the Judeo-Christian sense.

Ultimately the "subordinationist" or "intellectual" school would prevail but by a significant modification in the late third and early fourth centuries, namely, by asserting the ontological distinction and equality of three divine persons. It took about a century for trinitarianism to attain its modern form—exemplified by Athanasius's teaching of three co-equal, co-eternal, and consubstantial persons—and to become the prevailing view. It took almost another century for it to be established as exclusive orthodoxy at the Council of Constantinople in 381. In short, it would take centuries of definition and controversy

before the early Christian confession that Jesus Christ is God developed into the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity and the person of Christ.³⁰⁴

In reviewing this development, Osborn noted that the question of God's unity had two fundamental answers: The first answer involved the unity of Father, Son, and Spirit in salvation history, while the second answer was the doctrine of the Trinity. He further differentiated the choices: "The explanation of monotheism could be philosophical, salvation-history, or trinitarian."³⁰⁵ At the risk of oversimplification and blurring important overlaps and differences, perhaps we can identify Justin and the apologists with the philosophical option; Irenaeus, the apocryphal Acts, and the modalists with the salvation-history option; and Tertullian, Hippolytus, and Origen with the trinitarian option. Osborn concluded, "The concept of Christ as one of three persons, comes from prosopographical (person-related) exegesis in Justin, Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Tertullian," where person-related exegesis means "the idea of person is derived from the dialogue character of the text, not from an explicit reference."³⁰⁶

To summarize the development of Christian discourse about Jesus, in the first century writers such as Paul and John affirmed monotheism while deifying Jesus. This practice continued in the first half of the second century with perhaps even greater emphasis on the deity of Christ by writers such as Ignatius. Under the influence of Greek philosophy, in the middle of the second century different paradigms began to emerge. To preserve the transcendence of God in accordance with Greek dualism, Marcion and Valentinus bifurcated the deity, relegating the creator to an inferior role but continuing to exalt Jesus in one way or another. The Christian mainstream ultimately rejected these views because they undermined the unity of God, the authority of the OT, the incarnation of God, and the atoning death of Christ. Unwilling to abandon these tenets of faith and yet desirous of addressing the same philosophical concern to preserve the transcendence of God, Justin and other apologists adopted a binitarian model based on the popular Greek concept of the Logos. The supreme God, the Father, retained transcendence but interacted with the physical world through a secondary emanation called the Logos, who came in flesh as Jesus. In contrast to the views of Marcion and Valentinus, this doctrine had the advantages of affirming the unity of God, the truthfulness of the OT, the humanity of Christ, and greater continuity with first-century Christianity, but it did so at the cost of

³⁰⁴ Pelikan, *Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, 173-74.

³⁰⁵ Osborn, *Emergence of Christian Theology*, 173, 194.

³⁰⁶ Osborn, *Emergence of Christian Theology*, 191.

modifying first-century Jewish and Christian monotheism. In the early third century, Tertullian and others expanded this form of thinking into trinitarianism. Terms that first-century Jewish and Christian writers used to affirm God's immanence without negating God's transcendence, such as Word and Spirit, were now interpreted to describe individual persons who worked in harmony with the supreme God, the Father, and yet were distinct from the Father so that his transcendence was undisturbed. At the same time, the modalists insisted that the Logos doctrine of the binitarians and trinitarians compromised both the historic monotheism of the Christian faith and the full deity of Jesus Christ.³⁰⁷ Essentially, the dispute was over a Hebraic concept of God as absolutely one, transcendent, yet fully engaged with creation versus a Hellenistic concept of God as impassible and incapable of direct interaction with the material world. Thus Tertullian famously charged the modalists with the "absurd" conclusion that in the experience of Christ's death the Father "suffered," and he rebuked them for reverting to a deficient Jewish concept of God.³⁰⁸

This survey supports two conclusions: (1) Jewish monotheism was the socio-rhetorical context for first-century Christian discourse about Jesus, for not until much later do we find significant modifications in favor of binitarianism (ca. 150) and trinitarianism (ca. 200). (2) The deity of Jesus was a consistent theme in the major branches of Christian thought in the first two centuries. It is somewhat anachronistic to speak of "high" or "low" Christology before the mid second century, because these terms imply a comparison between two "persons." Instead of thinking explicitly of multiple divine persons, the earliest Christians attempted to express how God acted in Christ and was revealed in Christ. As we see from the proposals of Marcion, Valentinus, Justin, and Tertullian, the real issue was how to reconcile Greek ideas of God's transcendence with the NT depiction of God's immanence in Christ.

Like Bauckham, Horbury identified two contrasting approaches to Christology in the second century: subordinationist and monarchian. The former identified the Father as the supreme God but recognized the Logos as another spirit or power associated with him. The latter effectively replaced God with Christ or at least envisioned Christ as the manifestation of the one God. These two approaches represent an intra-Christian dispute

³⁰⁷ Tertullian, *Prax.* 3, 20.

³⁰⁸ Tertullian, *Prax.* 29, 31.

between “inclusive” and “exclusive” monotheism.³⁰⁹ Dillon similarly contrasted “soft” versus “hard” monotheism.³¹⁰ The “hard” version is exemplified by Judaism, which allows angelic beings but emphasizes the exclusive worship of the supreme and only God, as stated by the first of the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:3-4). The “soft” version is exemplified by educated Greeks in the NT era who viewed Zeus as the supreme cosmic deity but recognized other gods, who in turn could be viewed as aspects of the supreme deity or as performing specialized functions of the supreme deity. Using this scheme, Dillon concluded that second-century Christianity developed into an intermediate form of monotheism:

On the one hand, it inherits the jealous and absolutist god of Judaism, but on the other, at least after the first generation or so of its intellectual contact with contemporary Hellenic philosophy (particularly Platonism and Stoicism), in the second century AD, it finds room . . . for a secondary divinity, on the model of the Platonic demiurge, in the person of Christ, who acts both as a world-creator and as a mediator between God and man.³¹¹

Conclusions

From our review of first-century sources, it is no exaggeration to speak of the “radical monotheism of the Jews,” for “it is the exclusiveness of Israel’s monotheism . . . which marked it out in the ancient world, and the intolerance of its attack on idolatry.”³¹² Paul himself unquestionably held steadfastly to the OT confession of the one God.³¹³ He

³⁰⁹ Horbury, “Jewish and Christian Monotheism,” 27. Again, some scholars prefer to say some groups within Second Temple Judaism and first-c. Christianity practiced “inclusive” rather than “exclusive” monotheism. Chatelion Counet, “Divine Messiah,” 49, 52; Becking, “Boundaries of Israelite Monotheism,” 13. By this they essentially mean monolatry, henotheism, or the recognition of other divine beings subordinate to the supreme God. Our argument is compatible with this viewpoint. By “exclusive” we simply describe the general consensus in Second Temple Judaism that Yahweh was the supreme God, the creator, the ruler of the universe, and therefore the exclusive object of true worship. The goal of our study is not merely to explore language identifying Jesus as a subordinate divine being like an angel or exalted patriarch in some Jewish texts but language identifying Jesus as, with, or equal to Yahweh, which would have been remarkable in the first-c. Jewish context. If Paul indeed used such language for Jesus, he used language otherwise reserved “exclusively” for Yahweh—hence our use of “exclusive monotheism.”

³¹⁰ John Dillon, “Monotheism in the Gnostic Tradition,” in Athanassiadi and Frede, *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, 69.

³¹¹ Dillon, “Monotheism in the Gnostic Tradition,” 70.

³¹² Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 33.

³¹³ Wolfgang Schrage, *Unterwegs zur Einheit und Einzigkeit Gottes: Zum “Monotheismus” des Paulus und seiner alttestamentlich-frühjüdischen Tradition* (BibS(N) 48; Neukirchen-Vluyn, Ger.: Neukirchener, 2002),

and other NT writers deified Jesus within the context of an exclusive monotheism. As shown by Versnel, there were pagan options for accepting “divine unity in diversity.” From a first-century Jewish perspective, however, these options would not have eliminated the perceived tension between the exclusive worship of Yahweh and the deification of Jesus. A model involving an impersonal deity would have required a significant reconception of Yahweh from personal to impersonal, while a henotheistic model would still have required the worship of Yahweh alone.

From our review of second-century sources, “inclusive” or “soft” monotheism first became common in Christian thought in the mid second century, when Marcion, Valentinus, and Justin employed concepts from Greek philosophy. They were the first Christian writers to speak explicitly of two deities or two divine beings. “Exclusive” or “hard” monotheism is thus the most appropriate context in which to understand the writings of Paul.

In the next chapter, we will investigate key terms in 2 Cor 3:16–4:6 that relate Jesus to God, examine possible challenges or qualifications to exclusive monotheism that these terms could indicate, and draw further conclusions about their significance within the monotheistic context.

43. “Zu diesen Grundvoraussetzungen gehört aber fraglos, daß Paulus unbeirrt an seinem alttestamentlich-jüdischen Erbe des Bekenntnisses zu dem *einen* Gott festhält.”

DEIFICATION LANGUAGE IN PAUL'S RHETORICAL WORLD

Much work has been done to elucidate the meaning and significance of the possible deification language used to describe Jesus in our selected text. These terms have a rich history and theological significance in Second Temple Judaism, which can be ascertained from a study of the OT, the Apocrypha, and other Jewish writings. We will seek to integrate this information, place it within the rhetorical situation and literary context of 1 and 2 Corinthians, and apply it to the text at hand in a comprehensive way.³¹⁴

Christ, Χριστός

This title is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew “Messiah,” meaning “Anointed One.” Early Christians gave it to Jesus of Nazareth to confess their belief in Jesus as the anointed king of OT prophecy who would bring deliverance to his people.³¹⁵ This identification was so complete that Paul used “Christ” as another name for Jesus, undoubtedly reflecting early Christian practice. In itself, “Christ” is not explicitly a divine title, but the confession of Jesus as both Lord and Christ³¹⁶ serves to infuse it with divine connotations, as do references to Christ as a (the) heavenly ruler.³¹⁷ There is evidence that some Jews expected the Messiah to be divine in some way.³¹⁸ An example from the Dead

³¹⁴ We will limit our discussion to titles or descriptive phrases used for Jesus in 2 Cor 3:16-4:6. We will not provide a full catalog or discussion of divine epithets applied to Jesus. We do not intend a decontextualized compendium of divine epithets as a summary of Second Temple Judaism, nor do we intend a thorough exegesis of each textual reference. Instead, our purpose is to examine how these epithets are used in Second Temple Judaism in reference to God and how they are then applied to Jesus. For further discussion of these and related epithets, see Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (2d ed.; London: SCM, 1963); Marinus De Jonge, *Christology in Context: The Earliest Christian Response to Jesus* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1988); Ferdinand Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology: Their History in Early Christianity* (trans. Harold Knight and George Ogg; Cambridge, U.K.: Clarke, 1969); Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*; Werner Kramer, *Christ, Lord, Son of God* (trans. Brian Hardy; SBT 50; Norwich, U.K.: SCM-Canterbury, 1966); Cary C. Newman, *Paul's Glory-Christology: Tradition and Rhetoric* (NovTSup 69; Leiden: Brill, 1992); Newman et al., *Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism*; Neil Richardson, *Paul's Language about God* (JSNTSup 99; Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994).

³¹⁵ Matt 2:1-6; 21:4-5; 27:11; Mark 15:2, 32; Luke 19:38; 23:2-3; John 1:49; 12:13-15; 18:33-39; 19:13-22; Acts 17:7; Rev 17:14; 19:16. See Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 98-101.

³¹⁶ E.g., Acts 2:36; Rom 1:4, 7; 1 Cor 1:2-3, 7-10; Col 3:24.

³¹⁷ John 18:36; Rev 19:16.

³¹⁸ Boyarin, *Jewish Gospels*, 55-56.

Sea Scrolls is 11QMelch, which speaks of the Messiah as God (Elohim).³¹⁹ There was, moreover, a strong social interest in the use of this title, for it connected the early Christians with the identity of Israel and enabled them to claim the heritage of Israel as they formed a new community.³²⁰ According to Mack, in Paul's discourse the title took on honorific connotations as well as sovereign, cosmic, and even divine functions.³²¹

Yahweh, YHWH

The Hebrew name Yahweh (YHWH) was the unique covenant name of the God of Israel in the OT. The LXX regularly uses the Greek *Kyrios* (Lord) to substitute for Yahweh. Thus it is not surprising that when early Christians began to speak of Jesus as *Kyrios* they also began to identify Jesus directly with Yahweh. When they did so, "they meant by that exactly what their Jewish contemporaries would have meant, namely, that he was the God of Israel known in the Hebrew Scriptures and present in Jesus."³²²

NT authors sometimes applied OT passages about Yahweh to Jesus.³²³ Paul himself did so.³²⁴ "Paul consciously and unambiguously applies to Jesus sacred words and texts originally reserved for YHWH, the unspeakable name of God."³²⁵ It is a matter of debate as to whether he did so in 2 Cor 3:16-17, yet as we will discuss in ch. 6, a close reading indicates that he did. Coupled with the language of image and glory, the implication is that Jesus is the visible expression or manifestation of Yahweh.

³¹⁹ 11QMelch 2:10-11, in M. De Jonge and A. S. Van Der Woude, "11Q Melchizedek and the New Testament," *New Testament Studies* 12 (1966): 302-3. However, the "Son of God" in 4Q246 is probably not a reference to the Messiah but to a negative figure. Edward M. Cook, "4Q246," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5 (1995): 43-66.

³²⁰ Merrill P. Miller, "The Anointed Jesus," in Cameron and Miller, *Redescribing Christian Origins*, 409.

³²¹ Mack, "Why *Christos*?" 372.

³²² Margaret Barker, "The High Priest and the Worship of Jesus," in Newman et al., *Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism*, 93, 97.

³²³ In Isa 40:3 a voice in the wilderness will prepare the way for Yahweh. Matt 3:3; Mark 1:1-3; and Luke 3:4 apply this prophecy to John the Baptist's preparing the way for Jesus. The NT ascribes to Jesus the following OT statements by Yahweh: Exod 3:14 in John 8:58; Zech 12:10 in John 19:37; Isa 44:6 in Rev 1:8, 17. Also, Rev 22:6, 16 equates Jesus with the Lord God of the prophets.

³²⁴ Rom 10:13 (Joel 2:32); 1 Cor 1:31 (Jer 9:24); 1 Cor 2:16 (Isa 40:13); 2 Cor 10:17 (Jer 9:24); Phil 2:9-11 (Isa 45:21-23).

³²⁵ David Capes, "YHWH Texts and Monotheism in Paul's Christology," in Stuckenbruck and North, *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, 120.

Lord, κύριος

This term had a wide range of meaning, from the equivalent of “sir” to the equivalent of “God.”³²⁶ Throughout Paul’s epistles it is the predominant and most significant title for Jesus, as well as in Gentile Christianity generally.³²⁷ It had political and royal connotations since it was used for civil rulers as well as deities. The confession “Jesus is Lord” stood in direct contrast to the popular greeting and political statement “Caesar is Lord.” It signified that Christians were part of a spiritual kingdom and that Jesus was the ultimate sovereign, patron, and person worthy of honor.³²⁸

Of great significance for Paul’s writings, κύριος (*Kurios* or *Kyrios*) is the translation of the Hebrew *Adonai*, which in the OT refers to Yahweh. As a safeguard against taking God’s name in vain, which would violate the Ten Commandments, the Jews developed the practice of substituting *Adonai* for Yahweh, even when reading scriptural passages. Greek-speaking Jews, including the authors of the NT, continued this practice by substituting *Kyrios* for Yahweh when quoting the OT.

Given the strong monotheism of first-century Judaism and the strong association of *Kyrios* with Yahweh, the basic function of the title *Kyrios* in the NT is to attribute the works and role of deity to Jesus. This point is evident in the Corinthian correspondence, as we will discuss in ch. 6. Indeed, in Ladd’s view the title signifies that “the exalted Jesus occupies the role of God himself in ruling over the world,” and in some passages, such as Phil 2:6-11, is “elevated to the role of the Father himself.”³²⁹

In his early history-of-religions approach, Bousset acknowledged that in the NT the title *Kyrios* serves to ascribe deity to Jesus, and he regarded this usage as a violation of Jewish monotheism. Thus he maintained the title was not used by Palestinian Christians but only later by Hellenistic Christians.³³⁰ As we have discussed, however, according to more recent history-of-religion studies first-century Judaism was already thoroughly Hellenized by the time Christianity emerged. We cannot speak of a pristine Palestinian Judaism or Palestinian Christianity in the first century that was not heavily influenced by Hellenism.

³²⁶ Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God*, 79.

³²⁷ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 455.

³²⁸ Mack, *Christian Myth*, 140.

³²⁹ Ladd, *Theology of the NT*, 456-59. He wrote from a trinitarian perspective.

³³⁰ Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 28-29, 136, 149-51.

The earliest Christian documents, such as 1 and 2 Corinthians, speak of Jesus as *Kyrios*. There is no *a priori* historical reason to assert, as did Bousset, that only Jews of the Diaspora would have adopted this terminology and Palestinian Jews would not have done so. The Christology of the NT could have developed completely within the context of Palestinian Judaism.³³¹ Indeed, we have strong evidence in 1 Cor 16:22 that Palestinian Jewish Christians spoke of Jesus as Lord. There Paul wrote, “Let anyone be accursed who has no love for the Lord. Our Lord, come!” The words “Our Lord, come!” are *Μαράνα θά*, taken from the Aramaic language spoken by the first-century Jews of Palestine. Since Paul was writing in Greek to a Greek-speaking audience, the only plausible reason for his use of the Aramaic phrase here is that it was already a liturgical formula well known to all Christians at this time, including those who spoke Greek, much as the Hebrew-derived words *hallelujah* and *amen* are in common use throughout Christianity today. For this Aramaic phrase to acquire such status by the writing of 1 Corinthians in 55-56 C.E., it must have been current among Palestinian Jewish Christians for years before then. In short, speaking of Jesus as Lord dates back to the earliest Christians and was normative by the time the earliest Christian documents were written.

Thus, as most scholars today recognize, the use of *Kyrios* for Jesus goes back to Palestinian Christianity.³³² Even Casey, who accepted Bousset’s position that Jesus was regarded as deity only after the church left its original Jewish context and became Hellenized, agreed the title *Kyrios* was used by the earliest Christians. He explained it as signifying an intermediary being, although he conceded that in some contexts it approached the level of deity.³³³

Most scholars today agree that in at least some contexts the title of *Kyrios* signifies the worship of Jesus as divine.³³⁴ Since this use goes back to Palestinian Christianity, it is evidence for the early deification of Jesus. “The oldest liturgical formula we possess contains the title *Kyrios* in its Aramaic form. It is the very ancient prayer of the Church, *Maranatha*. . . . It is an expression of the cultic veneration of Christ by the original Aramaic-speaking Church.”³³⁵ To summarize, the title of Lord was part of the early Christian devotion to Jesus.³³⁶

³³¹ Hengel, “Hellenization” of Judaea, 55.

³³² E.g., Hengel, “Hellenization” of Judaea, 55; Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 110.

³³³ Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God*, 110-14, 133.

³³⁴ Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 145.

³³⁵ Cullmann, *Christology*, 108, 214.

³³⁶ Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 27-28; idem, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 108-18; Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 38.

Jesus, Ἰησοῦς

On one level the name Jesus is simply the name of the historical person from Nazareth in whom Paul believed, the one he proclaimed as the risen Lord. On another level this name bore theological significance for early Christians.

The name literally means “Yahweh (is) salvation,”³³⁷ and many Jewish males were given this name as a means of praising Yahweh. At least some early Christians began to view Jesus of Nazareth as uniquely personifying the meaning of this name. In some way he was actually Yahweh breaking into the human realm to bring salvation. Matthew linked the name Jesus with the meaning of salvation: “You are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). Moreover, this name fulfilled the prophecy of Isa 7:14 that God would come to dwell with his people: “All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,’ which means, ‘God is with us’” (Matt 1:22-23). In other words, the name Jesus corresponds to God (Yahweh) coming to be “with us” (as savior). Jesus is literally who his name says he is, the manifestation of Yahweh to save his people.

Did Paul attach this meaning to the name Jesus? There is an indication in Phil 2:9-11 that he and other Christians before him had a similar concept: “Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Most scholars identify this passage as an early Christian hymn Paul quoted or adapted for his purposes. It quotes from Isa 45:23, in which Yahweh declares, “To me every knee shall bow; every tongue shall swear.” In the immediate context Yahweh also states, “And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me. Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other” (Isa 45:21-22). This pre-Pauline hymn thus links the name of Jesus (Yahweh-Savior) with Yahweh’s identity as the only savior. It takes a strongly monotheistic passage from the OT and applies it to Jesus. “That a Jew should use such a text of a man who had recently lived in Palestine is truly astonishing.”³³⁸

³³⁷ J. B. Payne, “Yahweh,” *TWOT* 1:211.

³³⁸ Dunn, *Partings of the Ways*, 250.

Most commentators identify “the name that is above every name” as “Lord,” with “Lord” standing for “Yahweh.”³³⁹ Thus God’s supreme name, which is Lord/Yahweh, has now been given to Jesus. Paul was clearly writing within the context of Jewish monotheism, predicting a day when the whole universe would confess one Lord and thereby one God. The main point is not merely that everyone will one day confess *a* Lord, but specifically that everyone will one day confess *Jesus* as Lord. For instance, Paul knew the Jews confessed one Lord, but he did not consider their confession to be sufficient; he wanted them to confess *Jesus* as the one Lord.

From a socio-rhetorical perspective, the focus of the passage is the name of Jesus, which Paul used as the functional equivalent of Yahweh. It is specifically ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ, “in the name of Jesus” or “when the name of Jesus is mentioned,”³⁴⁰ that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess the identity of the one Lord to the glory of the one God (who is revealed in or through the one Lord). The hymn thus “pictures a heavenly enthronement of Christ in which, at the sign ‘in the Name of Jesus,’ everyone kneels.”³⁴¹ It is probably a reflection of “the cultic invocation of Jesus’ name . . . where the universal acclamation of Jesus as Lord is to be done ‘in/at the name of Jesus.’”³⁴² For this reason the point may be as follows: Under the new covenant Jesus has now become God’s supreme name so that we can rightly call Jesus by the OT designation of Lord/Yahweh. “Perhaps it would be truer to early Jewish Christian thought to say that since Jesus is the name of God, evidencing the presence and power of God, it is appropriate that the Old Testament title for God be his as well.”³⁴³ Applying this language to Jesus clearly points to a time when all beings will worship him.³⁴⁴

Even understanding the name here to be “Lord/Yahweh,” the name Jesus clearly bears theological significance in the thinking of Paul, more than the generic title of Lord and even more than the OT name Yahweh standing alone. To illustrate, the most powerful office in the United States is that of president. The power and authority of the office is not merely invoked by the generic title, but the bearer must sign his or her personal name on legal documents in order to make them operative. Perhaps we could say, without negating

³³⁹ Cullmann, *Christology*, 234, 237; G. W. H. Lampe, *God As Spirit: The Bampton Lectures* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 126; Richard Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (SBT 17; Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1970), 128.

³⁴⁰ “ὄνομα,” BDAG, 711-14, esp. 713.

³⁴¹ Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 148.

³⁴² Hurtado, “Binitarian Shape of Early Christian Worship,” 200.

³⁴³ Longenecker, *Christology*, 128.

³⁴⁴ Capes, “YHWH Texts,” 134.

the name Yahweh, the name Jesus has now become τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντων ὀνομα (“the name that is above every name”) because Jesus has been visibly exalted as Lord through his death, resurrection, and ascension. Yahweh has become the eschatological savior in Jesus. Consequently, the name of Jesus under the new covenant functions here essentially like the name of Yahweh under the old covenant.³⁴⁵ The meaning of “Jesus” as “Yahweh-Savior” undoubtedly facilitated the transfer of significance from the name “Yahweh” to the name “Jesus,” as “Jesus” still incorporates and confesses “Yahweh” while investing the OT conception of God with new significance.

Spirit, πνεῦμα

In the OT, the Hebrew word *ruach* means “wind, breath, mind, spirit.” The basic idea was “air in motion,” and the connotations included power and courage. It came to denote “the entire immaterial consciousness” of a human as well as a supernatural being.³⁴⁶ The OT speaks of the Spirit of God as God’s effective power in creation.³⁴⁷ The Spirit of Yahweh is God’s anointing or power coming upon God’s people, particularly leaders.³⁴⁸ God’s Spirit is God’s active, personal presence among God’s people.³⁴⁹ The Spirit of Yahweh is not an entity distinct from Yahweh. The term refers to “God’s power—the personal activity in God’s will achieving a moral and religious object, . . . the active principle that proceeds from God and gives life to the physical world.”³⁵⁰ “*Spirit of God is in no sense distinct from God, but is simply the power of God, God himself acting powerfully in nature and upon men . . . God in effective relationship with (and within) his creation. To experience the Spirit of God is to experience God as Spirit.*”³⁵¹ The close identification of the Spirit and Yahweh means it is virtually impossible to think of the Spirit as merely a creature in first-century Judaism:

The Spirit is not a second heavenly being, but a way of speaking of God’s own “vitality,” “life,” or “self-expression,” of God himself in action or of the extension of his personality. . . . Whereas there is some evidence that

³⁴⁵ Norris, *I AM*, 76.

³⁴⁶ J. B. Payne, “*rúah*,” TWOT 2:836.

³⁴⁷ Gen 1:2; Ps 104:30.

³⁴⁸ Judg 3:10; 6:34; 1 Sam 10:6; Isa 11:1-2; 59:19-21; 61:1.

³⁴⁹ Ps 51:11; 139:7; 143:10; Hag 2:5.

³⁵⁰ Ladd, *Theology of the NT*, 323.

³⁵¹ Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 133.

intertestamental Judaism hypostatized Wisdom and Logos, this never convincingly happens with the Spirit. God’s “Spirit” is virtually always a synecdoche for God himself, and is usually a way of speaking of God’s *presence* while preserving his transcendence (from Isa 63:10 and Ps 143:10 through to Josephus [*Ant.* 8.114] and the rabbis [*Exod. Rab.* 1:22; *Num. Rab.* 20:10; *Deut. Rab.* 6:14; *Ruth Rab.* Proem 7]).³⁵²

The LXX uses πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) as the translation of *ruach*. In relation to God *pneuma* is “effective divine power . . . specifically, God’s creative power” and “the inner nature of God.”³⁵³ In ancient Greco-Roman culture, the basic meaning of *pneuma* was “air in movement, blowing, breathing, . . . wind”; “that which animates or gives life to the body, breath, (life-) spirit”; “a part of human personality, spirit . . . as the source and seat of insight, feeling, and will, gener. as the representative part of human inner life”; “an independent noncorporeal being, in contrast to a being that can be perceived by the physical senses, spirit.”³⁵⁴

The Greeks could speak of *pneuma* as divine—not in the personal sense of OT and NT thought but as immanent. The Stoics thought of *pneuma* as “a cosmic and universal power or substance” and used the word for “the being and manifestation of deity itself.”³⁵⁵ They believed it was universal; it permeated the visible world. More generally, in Hellenistic scientific and philosophical thought “*pneuma* as a physical or physiological term remains essentially materialistic and vitalistic.”³⁵⁶ There are some parallels in Greco-Roman thought for the NT use of *pneuma* to refer to God’s Spirit. Plato spoke of *pneuma* as the inspiration for poetry and prophecy. Quintilian noted that some thought God was a spirit (*spiritum*), and similar to Plato, Plutarch used *pneuma* for the divine spirit that inspires prophecy.³⁵⁷

In the NT, “God is spirit” (John 4:24). Holiness forms the basis of God’s moral nature while spirituality forms the basis of God’s nonmoral nature, so the title “Holy Spirit” designates the invisible God, the Holy One. It particularly describes the one God

³⁵² Max Turner, “The Spirit of Christ and ‘Divine’ Christology,” in Green and Turner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 414, 422, brackets in original.

³⁵³ H. Kleinknecht et al., “πνεῦμα, πνευματικός,” *TDNT* 6:332-451, esp. 362-64.

³⁵⁴ “πνεῦμα,” *BDAG*, 832-86, esp. 832-33.

³⁵⁵ Kleinknecht et al., *TDNT* 6:338-39.

³⁵⁶ Ladd, *Theology of the NT*, 323.

³⁵⁷ Craig S. Keener, *The Spirit in the Gospels and Acts: Divine Purity and Power* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997), 7-8.

in spiritual essence and action—performing miracles, guiding people, speaking to them, giving them words to say, dwelling in them, and empowering them for service.³⁵⁸ In John the Spirit gives believers a spiritual birth (3:5), comes to dwell in them in a new way under the new covenant (7:38-39), and is the presence of the ascended Christ in the lives of believers (14:16-18). In Luke-Acts the phrase “Spirit of the Lord” (πνεῦμα κυρίου) appears as the equivalent of the OT “Spirit of Yahweh.”³⁵⁹

For Paul the Spirit of God pours love into the hearts of believers, dwells in them, imparts life, leads, adopts, bears witness, makes intercession, sanctifies, empowers, teaches, bestows spiritual gifts, and produces spiritual fruit.³⁶⁰ As in OT and first-century Jewish use, Paul spoke of the Spirit as the presence, power, or manifested action of the one God, not as an entity distinct from the one God. For instance, 1 Cor 2:11 compares a person and his or her spirit to God and God’s Spirit: “For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God’s except the Spirit of God.” In the same context, Paul equated “the mind of the Lord” with “the Spirit of Yahweh” by adapting an OT verse: “Who has directed the spirit of the LORD, or as his counselor has instructed him?” (Isa 40:13). “For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16). Not only did Paul equate the Spirit of God with God, but from the evidence in 1 Cor 15:45 and 2 Cor 3:17, which we will discuss in chs. 5-6, he identified the risen Christ “with the life-giving Spirit of God. . . . Christ is experienced in and through, even *as* the life-giving Spirit.”³⁶¹

In sum, “Spirit” in the Bible “stands for God himself experienced as Spirit: that is, in his personal activity; not a ‘go-between’ deity, but God himself, the Father and Creator, in his personal presence within his creatures.”³⁶² In NT times, the concept was reinterpreted: “God’s active presence in and with human beings was now understood in terms of Christ. . . . To experience God as Spirit and to experience the presence of Christ were one and the same thing. . . . In Christ God the Spirit was concretely manifested.”³⁶³

³⁵⁸ Matt 1:18, 20; 3:11; 10:20; Luke 1:35, 67; 2:25-27; 4:1, 18; John 14:17, 26; Acts 1:4-8; 2:4, 38.

³⁵⁹ Luke 4:18, quoting Isa 61:1; Acts 5:9; 8:39.

³⁶⁰ Rom 5:5; 8:9-11, 14-16, 26; 15:16, 19; 1 Cor 2:13; 12:3-11; Gal 5:22-23.

³⁶¹ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 262-64.

³⁶² Lampe, *God As Spirit*, 116.

³⁶³ Lampe, *God As Spirit*, 62.

Image of God, εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ

The word εἰκὼν (*eikōn*) “is primarily a functional term for manifestation, representation, and revelation.”³⁶⁴ It refers to a reality and “indeed, it is the reality. Thus εἰκὼν does not imply a weakening or a feeble copy of something. It implies the illumination of its inner core and essence.”³⁶⁵ The biblical concept of the image of God first appears in the creation account, which says God created humans in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27; 9:6). Paul alluded to this concept in 1 Cor 11:7, as did Philo in *Moses* 2.65. Thus, when the NT applies this phrase to Jesus, the implication is that Jesus is the epitome of humanity as originally created by God, expressing what we can call an Adam Christology.³⁶⁶

Yet there is more to the concept than this. The ancient Greeks used εἰκὼν to describe the visible form of a god appearing in a theophany.³⁶⁷ In ancient Near Eastern and Hellenistic thought, an image of a deity actually mediated the presence or spirit of the god; the divine being manifested him- or herself in the idol.³⁶⁸ Images and statues were typically understood as concrete vehicles of divine presence.³⁶⁹ The OT rejects the idea that idols could represent the image of God,³⁷⁰ and Second Temple Judaism as a whole strongly rejected the use of idols.³⁷¹ Paul and other NT Christians shared this abhorrence of idols.³⁷² In the context of worship, the image of God would necessarily refer to God’s self—God’s attributes, self-expression, and manifestation—not a substance or entity different from God. Indeed, Hebrew thought connected the essence of something to its appearance.³⁷³ In 2 Corinthians, then, the “image of God” likely refers more directly to God’s self-revelation (deity), not merely a reflection of God (humanity), although it includes the latter.

³⁶⁴ Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul’s Gospel* (WUNT 2/4; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981), 195.

³⁶⁵ H. Kleinknecht, “εἰκὼν,” *TDNT* 2:388-90, esp. 389.

³⁶⁶ Dunn *Christology in the Making*, 109; Stanley J. Grenz, “Jesus As the Imago Dei: Image-of-God Christology and the Non-linear Linearity of Theology,” *JETS* 47 (2004): 623-26.

³⁶⁷ Kim, *Origin of Paul’s Gospel*, 198.

³⁶⁸ Grenz, “Jesus As the Imago Dei,” 621-22; Edward M. Curtis, “Image of God (OT),” *ABD* 3:390; Kleinknecht, *TDNT* 2:389.

³⁶⁹ Henk S. Versnel, “What Did Ancient Man See When He Saw a God? Some Reflections on Greco-Roman Epiphany,” in *Effigies Dei: Essays on the History of Religions* (ed. Dirk van der Plas; SHR 51; Leiden: Brill, 1987), 46.

³⁷⁰ Isa 40:18-19, 25; 46:5-9; Jer 10:1-16.

³⁷¹ Wis 11:15-16; 12:23-27; 13:10-19; 14:1-31; 15:7-17; Ep Jer 8-73; *Sibylline Oracles* 3.11-46. See Samuel Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 168; Dunn, “Judaism in the Land of Israel,” 1.2:253.

³⁷² 1 Cor 8:4-6; 10:14-22; Acts 15:20, 29; 1 John 5:21.

³⁷³ Kim, *Origin of Paul’s Gospel*, 200.

The development of the concept of the image of God in the intertestamental Wisdom literature is significant in this regard. Paul's use of the term probably owes much to the Wisdom tradition of Hellenistic Judaism.³⁷⁴ For example, Wis 7:24-26 describes wisdom as an image (εἰκὼν) of God's character:

For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things. For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness.

Similarly, Philo spoke of God's word (λόγος) as God's image. In doing so, he described the word as God's intellect, mind, self-revelation, and means of creation.³⁷⁵

- The Divine Word, Who is high above all these, has not been visibly portrayed, being like to no one of the objects of sense. Nay, He is Himself the Image of God, chiefest of all Beings intellectually perceived, placed nearest, with no intervening distance, to the alone truly existent One. For we read: "I will talk with thee from above the Mercy-seat, between the two Cherubim" (Ex. xxv. 21), words which shew that while the Word is the charioteer of the Powers, He Who talks is seated in the chariot, giving directions to the charioteer for the right wielding of the reins of the Universe. (*Flight* 101)
- For it well benefits those who have entered into comradeship with knowledge to desire to see the Existent if they may, but, if they cannot, to see at any rate his image, the most holy Word, and after the Word its most perfect work of all that our senses know, even this world. For by philosophy nothing else has ever been meant, than the earnest desire to see these things exactly as they are. (*Confusion* 97)
- But if there be any as yet unfit to be called a Son of God, let him press to take his place under God's First-born, the Word, who holds the eldership

³⁷⁴ Hengel, *Son of God*, 75.

³⁷⁵ Quotations of Philo are from Colson, LCL.

among the angels, their ruler as it were. And many names are his, for he is called, “the Beginning,” and the Name of God, and His Word, and the Man after His image, and “he that sees,” that is Israel. . . . For the Word is the eldest-born image of God. (*Confusion* 146-47)

- For if the priest’s body, which is mortal by nature, must be scrutinized to see that it is not afflicted by any serious misfortune, much more is that scrutiny needed for the immortal soul, which we are told was fashioned after the image of the Self-existent. And the image of God is the Word through whom the whole universe was framed. (*Spec. Laws* 1.81)
- In other ways also it is easy to discern this by a process of reasoning. In the first place: God is light, for there is a verse in one of the psalms, “the Lord is my illumination and my Saviour” (Ps. xxvii. [xxvi.] 1). And He is not only light, but the archetype of every other light, nay, prior to and high above every archetype, holding the position of the model of a model. For the model or pattern was the Word which contained all His fullness—light, in fact; for, as the lawgiver tells us, “God said, ‘let light come into being’” (Gen. i.3), whereas He Himself resembles none of the things which have come into being. (*Dreams* 1.75)
- He that is truly God is One, but those that are improperly so called are more than one. Accordingly the holy word in the present instance [Gen 31:13] has indicated Him Who is truly God by means of the article saying “I am the God,” while it omits the article when mentioning him who is improperly so called. . . . Here it gives the title of “God” to His chief Word. (*Dreams* 1.229-30)
- “Why does (Scripture) say, as if (speaking) of another God, “in the image of God He made man” and not “in His own image”? Most excellently and veraciously this oracle was given by God. For nothing can be made in the likeness of the most high One and Father of the universe but (only) in that of the second God [τὸν δεύτερον θεόν], who is His Logos. For it was right that the rational (part) of the human soul should be formed as an impression by the divine Logos, since the pre-Logos God is superior to every rational nature. But He who is above the Logos (and) exists in the best and in a special form—what thing that comes into being can rightfully

bear His likeness? Moreover Scripture wishes also to show that God most justly avenges the virtuous and decent men because they have a certain kinship with His Logos, of which the human mind is a likeness and image. (QG 2.62)

Some of Philo's descriptions make a distinction between God and God's word—at least in concept if not in substance. The use of "image" in this context communicates Philo's belief that God's word reveals or manifests the essence or character of God. In this sense, humans were created in the likeness of God's word. For Philo, God's image can refer both to humanity as the reflection of God's character and to God's word as a personified divine attribute or possibly an emanation from God. Philo also spoke of God's image as a visible manifestation of God, such as God appearing in the form of an angel or a man (*Dreams* 1:238-39). In other words, in a theophany humans see the εἰκών of God, not the spiritual essence of God directly.³⁷⁶

In the context of 2 Cor 3:16–4:6, the image of God is closely connected to the glory of God (discussed in the following section). Since God's glory is a manifestation of deity, God's image here encompasses more than an ideal humanity but refers more directly to God's nature, mind, wisdom, and self-revelation, or what we might call a form of Wisdom Christology. If so, the primary idea seems to be the following: Jesus is the image of the invisible God because God's Spirit indwelt him and was manifested in him. In other words, Jesus is the self-revelation of God and as such is to be worshiped as God. This worship is not in opposition to the worship of God as Father but instead is "the distinctively Christian way of offering worship to the one true God. The exalted Jesus was worshipped as the 'image' of God who reflects God's glory."³⁷⁷

This understanding corresponds to other uses of the image of God in the NT, notably Col 1:15-20.³⁷⁸ This passage is a Wisdom poem presenting a traditional Jewish concept: The world's creator is the world's redeemer and vice versa. "But at every point of creation and redemption we discover, not Wisdom, but Jesus."³⁷⁹ The poem describes

³⁷⁶ Kim, *Origin of Paul's Gospel*, 222-23.

³⁷⁷ Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 137.

³⁷⁸ See Christian Stettler, *Der Kolosserhymnus: Untersuchungen zu Form, traditionsgeschichtlichem Hintergrund und Aussage von Kol 1,15-20* (WUNT 2/131; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

³⁷⁹ Wright, "Divinity of Jesus," 161.

Christ as “the image of the invisible God,” attributes divine characteristics to him, and concludes that all God’s fullness dwells in Christ:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col 1:15-20)

The statement “in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” is a preview of an even more direct statement later in the letter that ascribes complete deity to Christ as the self-revelation of the one God: “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9). Both passages communicate a concept close to incarnation³⁸⁰—not specifically the incarnation of a second divine “person” but of the one God in all God’s fullness.

Whether Colossians is a later writing by Paul³⁸¹ or a disciple of Paul,³⁸² Col 1:15 shows how the idea of Christ as “the image of God” developed in Pauline thought—namely, as a deification concept. In this text, “Jesus is *God* acting and outgoing; Jesus brings to visible expression the very purpose and character of God himself.”³⁸³ “The word εἰκὼν here . . . implies that Christ, being the embodiment of the fullness of deity (Col 2.9), is the perfect manifestation of the invisible God.”³⁸⁴ In the same vein of thought is Heb 1:3, which describes Christ as “the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint [χαρακτήρ] of God’s very being.” If, as many scholars conclude, Col 1:15 is part of an early christological hymn, then the idea of Christ as God’s image was already part of

³⁸⁰ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 276 n.42.

³⁸¹ Carson et al., *Introduction to the NT*, 334; Lampe, *God As Spirit*, 135.

³⁸² Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 600.

³⁸³ Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 125.

³⁸⁴ Kim, *Origin of Paul’s Gospel*, 259.

early Christian liturgy and Paul drew upon this tradition in writing to the Corinthians.³⁸⁵ While the language of “image” identifies Christ with God, there is also an inherent distinction between the invisible God and the visible image of God, which we find in these passages (e.g., Col 1:13; Heb 1:3b).

There is both continuity and discontinuity in Paul’s use of “image” for Christ and the Hellenistic Jewish use of it for God’s word and wisdom. In both cases, “image” is not merely a faint copy, but it faithfully represents and embodies the original. In contrast to Hellenistic Jewish usage, where “image” is an emanation or a reflection from God and is thus the mediating agency of God’s presence to humans, Paul understood God’s “image” primarily in terms of revelation, manifestation, and proclamation.³⁸⁶

In a similar way, the Johannine literature depicts Jesus as embodying God or being God’s visible self-revelation. In John 1, Jesus is the Word of God, God’s self-expression (v. 1). “The Word became flesh,” lived among humans, displayed divine glory, bestowed grace out of “his fullness,” and revealed the invisible God (v. 14-18). The Greek for “fullness” is πλήρωμα, the same word describing the fullness of the Godhead in Col 1:19; 2:9 and here indicating divine abundance, completion, and perfection.

In John 12:45 Jesus said, “Whoever sees me sees him who sent me.” When Philip asked Jesus to show him God the Father, instead of doing so or promising to do so at a later time such as in heaven, Jesus mildly rebuked Philip for not understanding who he was:

Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?
Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father”? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?
The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.
(John 14:9-11)

According to this passage, God the Father dwelt in Jesus, Jesus as a human was united with God in an inseparable way, and Jesus manifested divine words and works. Thus

³⁸⁵ Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 32A; New York: Doubleday, 1984), 248.

³⁸⁶ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 248.

Jesus was the definitive and visible revelation of the God who is otherwise invisible. While we cannot directly read this entire concept into Paul's use of "the image of God," we see a confluence of thought in 2 Corinthians, Colossians, Hebrews, and John, showing how first-century Christians used "image of God" language to deify Jesus.

According to Rabbinic Judaism of the first three centuries C.E., no one could actually see God in his invisible, spiritual essence; it described the theophanies of the OT in terms of beholding God's image, which the rabbis described in a human form, as in Ezek 1:26-28.³⁸⁷ Thus, "when God appears as man he appears both as the εἰκών of himself and of ideal humanity,"³⁸⁸ as "both the manifestation of God and the true human."³⁸⁹ This understanding corresponds to our discussion of the foregoing NT passages. Namely, the ultimate implication of speaking of Jesus as "the image of God" is to regard him as God in human form.

Glory of God, δόξα τοῦ θεοῦ

In Jewish thought there is a close link between the image of God and the glory of God. "Glory" is nothing less than the self-revelation of God."³⁹⁰ "Glory . . . is the appearance of God, the manifestation of God's being . . . the revelation of who God is."³⁹¹ The vision of God in Ezek 1:26-28 is the crucial backdrop for this concept:

And above the dome over their [the living creatures'] heads there was something like a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was something that seemed like a human form. Upward from what appeared like the loins I saw something like gleaming amber, something that looked like fire enclosed all around; and downward from what looked like the loins I saw something that looked like fire, and there was a splendor all around. Like the bow in a cloud on a rainy day, such was the appearance of the splendor all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.

³⁸⁷ Anthony T. Hanson, "The Midrash in 2 Corinthians 3: A Reconsideration" *JSNT* 9 (1980): 3-6.

³⁸⁸ Hanson, "Midrash in 2 Corinthians 3," 5.

³⁸⁹ Grenz, "Jesus As the Imago Dei," 620.

³⁹⁰ Morna Hooker, "The Authority of the Bible: A New Testament Perspective," *ExAud* 19 (2003): 49.

³⁹¹ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 67.

This passage describes God's appearance in the form of a man as the appearance of the divine glory. This use of "glory" was later associated closely with God's εἰκὼν.³⁹² The prophet described the glory of God (*kabod Yahweh*) in detail and equated it with the human form seated on the throne. Here "glory" refers to God appearing in "something that seemed like a human form" (v. 26).³⁹³ Consequently, "glory" designates the presence of God; specifically it is "a technical term to refer to God's visible, mobile divine presence."³⁹⁴ It functions here as a term for the "appearance of God in human likeness."³⁹⁵

The LXX uses δόξα (*doxa*) to translate the Hebrew *kabod*. It is "God's honor," "power," "divine nature," "divine glory," "form of the divine manifestation or revelation," or "divine radiance."³⁹⁶ Pagan literature also uses *doxa* for divine revelation, while *epiphany* is the technical term for the visible manifestation of pagan deities.³⁹⁷

We can trace the background of this concept of glory throughout the OT. It uses glory to describe God's manifested presence in various ways. God's glory "fills" the tabernacle in the wilderness, the temple in Jerusalem, and ultimately the whole earth.³⁹⁸ It represents God's intervention in the human sphere by descending, rising, standing, coming, and departing.³⁹⁹ Although God's Spirit is invisible, God's glory "appears" to God's people.⁴⁰⁰

When Moses asked God to continue leading the people of Israel even after they sinned, as a confirmation he requested, "Show me your glory" (Exod 33:18). God promised to allow the divine glory to pass by and then fulfilled this promise (Exod 33:22; 34:5-6). As a consequence, Moses' face shone with God's glory, so much that he veiled his face when he spoke to the Israelites (Exod 34:29-35). This story about God's glory was in Paul's mind as he wrote 2 Corinthians, for in 3:15 he referred to Moses' veil.

Isaiah associates God's glory with the revelation of God. God appeared in a vision to Isaiah, surrounded with glory depicted as smoke, and commissioned Isaiah to prophesy

³⁹² Hanson, "Midrash in 2 Corinthians 3," 5.

³⁹³ Newman, *Paul's Glory-Christology*, 74, 93.

³⁹⁴ Newman, *Paul's Glory-Christology*, 163, 190.

³⁹⁵ Margaret E. Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 1:319.

³⁹⁶ G. Kittel, "δόξα," *TDNT* 2:233-53, esp. 244.

³⁹⁷ Newman, *Paul's Glory-Christology*, 151-52.

³⁹⁸ Exod 40:34-35; Num 14:21; 1 Kgs 8:11; 2 Chr 5:14; 7:1-2; Isa 6:3; Ezek 10:4; 43:5; 44:4.

³⁹⁹ Exod 24:16; Isa 60:1; Ezek 3:23; 9:3; 10:18; 11:23; 43:2, 4.

⁴⁰⁰ Exod 16:7, 10; 24:17; Lev 9:6, 23; Num 14:10; 16:19, 42; 20:6; 2 Chr 7:3; Isa 35:2; 40:5; 60:2; Ezek 1:28; 3:23; 8:4.

to his people (Isa 6). According to Isa 35, when the redeemed of Israel return to Jerusalem, they will see the glory of Yahweh, and God will come to save them. Similarly, Isa 40:5 prophesies, “The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together.” These and other passages speak of divine eschatological appearances as the revelation of God’s glory.⁴⁰¹ At the same time, God’s glory is associated with none other than God; God will not give God’s glory to anyone else (Isa 42:8; 48:11).

In the Apocrypha, we find references to God’s glory as the manifestation of God. Adam and Eve “saw his glorious majesty, and their ears heard the glory of his voice” (Sir 17:13). “For as the neighbors of Zion have now seen your capture, so they soon will see your salvation by God, which will come to you with great glory and with the splendor of the Everlasting” (Bar 4:24). In the pseudepigraphal *I Enoch*,⁴⁰² God is both “the Lord of the Spirits” and “the Lord of Glory” (*I En.* 40:1-5). “The righteous one shall be victorious in the name of the Lord of the Spirits. . . . He is righteous in his judgment and in the glory that is before him” (*I En.* 50:2-4). He sits “on the throne of his glory” (*I En.* 62:2-3). One passage describes the visible glory of God and God’s throne and identifies God as “the Great Glory”:

And I observed and saw inside it a lofty throne—its appearance was like crystal and its wheels like the shining sun; and (I heard?) the voice of the cherubim; and from beneath the throne were issuing streams of flaming fire. It was difficult to look at it. And the Great Glory was sitting upon it—as for his gown, which was shining more brightly than the sun, it was whiter than any snow. None of the angels was able to come in and see the face of the Excellent and the Glorious One; and no one of the flesh can see him—the flaming fire was round about him, and a great fire stood before him. (*I En.* 14:18-22a)

The Dead Sea Scrolls also associate glory with God’s manifestation. The *Thanksgiving Scroll* says, “For God shall sound His mighty voice, and His holy abode shall thunder with the truth of His glory” (1QH III, 34 [Vermes]). In *Songs for the Holocaust of the Sabbath* we find: “[Praise the God of . . . w]onder, and exalt Him . . . of glory in the te[n]t of the God of] knowledge. . . . The cherubim bless the image of the

⁴⁰¹ Newman, *Paul’s Glory-Christology*, 191.

⁴⁰² *OTP* 1:21, 31-32, 36, 43.

throne-chariot above the firmament, [and] they praise [the majes]ty of the luminous firmament beneath His seat of glory” (4Q405 20 II, 21-22).

The glory of God is also significant in “Second Temple Jewish apocalyptic writings and later mystical Hekhalot literature,” particularly in stories of ascent into heaven to view the manifestation of God on God’s throne:

The goal of the ascent journey was entry into the Holy of Holies in order to gaze on God’s *Kavod* [glory], often depicted as an anthropomorphic figure of fire or light (cf. Ezek 1:27-28; Isa 6:1-4) seated on the *merkavah*, the special throne consisting of two cherubim with wings spread over the *kapporet*, the lid of the Ark of the Covenant.⁴⁰³

Like the other Jewish literature we have surveyed, the NT uses glory terminology to describe the manifestation of the divine presence: in OT times (Rom 9:4), in heaven (1 Tim 3:16), and God’s future self-manifestation (Titus 2:13). In Rom 9:4 Paul referred generally to OT theophanies as revelations of divine glory.⁴⁰⁴ The NT ascribes glory to God through, in, or by Jesus,⁴⁰⁵ and it ascribes glory directly to Jesus.⁴⁰⁶ It also associates glory with Christ’s resurrection and his future appearance.⁴⁰⁷ Hebrews 1:3 (NIV) describes Christ as “the radiance of God’s glory” (ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης). The NT applies to Jesus key statements from Isaiah about the glory of God, thus indicating Christian belief in Jesus as the revelation of God. Here are notable examples:

- John 12:40 quotes from Isa 6:10, the vision of God in glory, and then John 12:41 makes this remarkable statement: “Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him” (NIV). In other words, John identified the visible manifestation of God to Isaiah as a revelation of Jesus.⁴⁰⁸
- Matt 11:1-6 applies to Jesus the prophecy of Isa 35:1-6 of God’s coming to save God’s people and the people seeing God’s glory.

⁴⁰³ April D. DeConick. “Heavenly Temple Traditions and Valentinian Worship: A Case for First-Century Christology in the Second Century,” in Newman et al., *Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism*, 310-11.

⁴⁰⁴ Newman, *Paul’s Glory-Christology*, 217.

⁴⁰⁵ Rom 16:27; Eph 3:21; Phil 2:11; 1 Pet 5:10.

⁴⁰⁶ Heb 13:21; 2 Pet 3:18; 2 Tim 4:18.

⁴⁰⁷ Rom 6:4; Phil 3:21; Col 3:4; 2 Thess 1:9.

⁴⁰⁸ Dunn, *Christology*, 45.

- All four Gospels identify John the Baptist as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isa 40:3-5: a voice in the wilderness would prepare the way of Yahweh, and everyone would behold the glory of Yahweh (Matt 3:1-3; Mark 1:1-4; Luke 3:2-6; John 1:19-23). Since the Gospels describe John as the one who prepared the way for Jesus, the implication is that Jesus is Yahweh and reveals Yahweh's glory, or is the visible manifestation of Yahweh.
- Isa 60:19 promises, "The LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory." Rev 21:22-23 applies this prophecy to Jesus, as the Lamb of God who is also God: "I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb."⁴⁰⁹

In our selected text and its immediate context, Paul associated glory with God's presence in the OT (2 Cor 3:7-10) and then with the ministry of God's Spirit under the new covenant (2 Cor 3:8-11). He summarized the gospel of Jesus Christ as the revelation of God's glory (2 Cor 4:3-4).⁴¹⁰

In short, the use of "glory" places Jesus at the end of a long list of divine appearances. In the OT God revealed divine glory in the tabernacle or temple; now God reveals divine glory in the person of Christ and in the proclamation about Christ. Ultimately Paul, like apocalyptic writers, asserted that by knowing God's glory (Christ) believers can establish a relationship with God.⁴¹¹ Both Josephus and Philo expressed a common Jewish idea: Since there is only one God there should be only one temple—one dwelling place of God's glory or self-revelation. When early Christians applied the imagery of glory, temple, and tabernacle to Christ, they identified Christ as the unique visible manifestation or revelation of God.⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁹ Verse 22 uses the singular verb ἔστιν, indicating that "the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" is one being. The KJV, NKJV, and NIV do not give due recognition to the number of this verb when they translate that the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb "are" the temple.

⁴¹⁰ See Newman, *Paul's Glory-Christology*, 220.

⁴¹¹ Newman, *Paul's Glory-Christology*, 223.

⁴¹² John 1:1, 14, 18 describes Jesus as "the Word"—God's self-revelation. The Word became flesh (human), lived (σκηνώω, literally, "tabernacled") among humans, manifested God's glory, and made known the invisible God.

In the second century C.E. Justin identified Glory as one of the names for Jesus Christ, along with Lord, God the Son, Angel, Man, Human Being, and Word. In this context, Glory is “the power which was sent from the Father of all,” which he regarded as “something distinct in real number” from the Father and “generated from the Father.” He conceded in a debate with a Jew, however, that some other Christians in his day regarded this power as “indivisible and inseparable from the Father” (*Dial.* 128 [Slusser]). In their view, Jesus was the power of the Father revealed in flesh as Glory but not as a being distinct from God.

Hellenistic Influence

When discussing important terms related to the manifestation of God, such as the image of God and the glory of God, we may well ask if these concepts qualify the strict monotheism we described in ch. 3. Are our previous conclusions concerning Jewish monotheism untenable? Were Bousset and Casey correct to claim the deification language for Christ reveals a Christian compromise of Jewish monotheism under the influence of Hellenism?

In examining this possibility, we must remember that Second Temple Judaism was already thoroughly Hellenized by the first century. Greek ideas had progressively influenced the ancient world to such an extent that they were no longer distinctively Greek but had been assimilated into the common cultural heritage. This Hellenizing process encompassed the Jews as well as others.⁴¹³ The Jews in Palestine had lived under Greek cultural domination for over three hundred years; in this sense we can think of Palestinian Judaism itself as Hellenistic Judaism. Contrary to the old history-of-religions school, by the time of Christian origins we cannot make a meaningful distinction between Palestinian Judaism and Hellenistic Judaism for the purpose of tracing the development of early Christology.⁴¹⁴

Despite Hellenistic influence, first-century Judaism retained its exclusive monotheism, as a diversity of scholars have noted. “A repeated theme in all the literature (Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and Rabbinic) is the total uniqueness of Israel’s God.”⁴¹⁵ Postexilic Judaism does not represent a weakened form of “exclusivist monotheism.”⁴¹⁶

⁴¹³ Grabbe, *Introduction to First-Century Judaism*, 7.

⁴¹⁴ Hengel, “*Hellenization*” of *Judaea*, 53.

⁴¹⁵ Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings*, 169.

⁴¹⁶ Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 22.

Second Temple Judaism indeed held to “strict” monotheism.⁴¹⁷ “Strict monotheism” not only characterized the Jews of Palestine but also the Diaspora.⁴¹⁸ “Strict monotheism” was a pillar of Judaism throughout the first century C.E.⁴¹⁹

As we move forward with a new history-of-religions approach, Hellenized Judaism rather than pagan Hellenism is the matrix in which to analyze the origins of Christology.⁴²⁰ In this Hellenistic milieu the early Christians likewise maintained the strict monotheism of their Jewish heritage. Speaking of a movement from Palestinian to Hellenistic Jewish Christianity, as Bousset did, is problematic.⁴²¹ In the first century and early second century C.E., Christian writers expressed their concept of God within a fundamentally Jewish framework. They spoke of God as one, unique, personal, active, thinking, and feeling. God created the world, deeply cares for it, and is actively involved in it. God reveals God’s self to God’s creation, is gracious and loving toward humans, calls them to personal and corporate holiness, and opposes evil. As we discussed in ch. 3, this understanding of God contrasted sharply with the Greek philosophical concept of God as transcendent, unknowable, impassible, unapproachable, and uninvolved with the world. Yet the Greek apologists of the mid to late second century developed their view of God primarily from the latter framework. Their Hellenistic outlook caused them to think of Christ as a second, subordinate divine being who emanated from God and served as God’s intermediate agent in the world. Only then do we have the distinctive Hellenization of Christianity, as it became mostly detached from its Jewish roots.⁴²²

Conclusions

What are we to make of Philo’s identification of the word (*logos*) as the “image of God” and also “the second God”? He used the term *logos* to describe God’s self-revelation; it is not entirely clear whether he regarded the *logos* as an actual reality or simply a philosophical construct.⁴²³ If we take his language literally, the *logos* would seem to be a distinct being, but such a conclusion is likely a misunderstanding of

⁴¹⁷ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 3.

⁴¹⁸ Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 36.

⁴¹⁹ John Collins, “Jewish Monotheism and Christian Theology,” in *Aspects of Monotheism: How God Is One* (ed. Hershel Shanks and Jack Meinhardt; Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1997), 81.

⁴²⁰ Paul Rainbow, “Jewish Monotheism,” 81.

⁴²¹ Hengel, “*Hellenization*” of *Judaea*, 56.

⁴²² Hengel, “*Hellenization*” of *Judaea*, 56, citing Adolf Harnack.

⁴²³ Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings*, 290, 298.

allegorical religious language.⁴²⁴ According to Talbert, who described a consensus of modern scholars, for Philo the *logos* was not truly personal. It was a projection of God rather than a distinct creature. Philo employed the myth of a divine redeemer figure and interpreted it allegorically; in the end his *logos* is an impersonal philosophical entity.⁴²⁵

In any case, Philo considered his views to be compatible with mainstream, strict Jewish monotheism (*Decalogue* 65). To the extent that they were not, we cannot attribute them to early Christians, for while the NT speaks of Christ as the “word, wisdom, image, glory” of God, nowhere does it call him a “second God” or the equivalent. Instead, its use of these terms fits well within the mainstream of Second Temple Judaism. Indeed, there is no Christian statement comparable to that of Philo until about 150 C.E., when Justin went even further than Philo by describing the Logos as “another God and Lord” who is numerically distinct from and subject to the Creator (*Dial.* 56).

More generally, can we think of the terms “word, wisdom, image, glory” as somehow representing divine beings in Second Temple Judaism? Rabbinic specialists maintain that the concepts of “name, glory, wisdom, word” in Jewish writings are not intermediary beings between God and humans. Instead, they are “ways of asserting the transcendent God’s *nearness* to his creation, his involvement with his people. They are ways of speaking about *God* in his relation to the world; they serve to express his immanence without compromising his transcendence.”⁴²⁶ They are “circumlocutions for ‘God’” but in no way “personal divine beings distinct from God.”⁴²⁷ “The spirit of God” and “the glory of God” are similar circumlocutions, although not as vivid or poetic as wisdom.⁴²⁸ In sum, these terms simply denote God as working in the world but not a personal distinction within God’s own being.⁴²⁹

A key insight here is to recognize the significance of worship. To understand religious terms and texts, it is important to connect them with actual practices in the religious tradition.⁴³⁰ We cannot merely look at written texts in the abstract or solely with modern intellectual analysis, but we must examine the set of practices that were crucial in

⁴²⁴ Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 46.

⁴²⁵ Talbert, *Development of Christology*, 20, 95.

⁴²⁶ Dunn, *Christology*, 329.

⁴²⁷ Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 130.

⁴²⁸ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 35.

⁴²⁹ Rainbow, “Jewish Monotheism,” 80.

⁴³⁰ Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 116.

forming and expressing belief.⁴³¹ Since the formation of tradition is a way of perpetuating valued practices, we should consider what practices led to the formulation of theological statements.

When we do so, we find no evidence in Second Temple Judaism of Name, Glory, Wisdom, or Word being worshiped as deities. There were no temples, priests, liturgies, ceremonies, or rituals dedicated to such deities. While Diaspora Judaism was not oriented to temple worship, nevertheless personal and group devotions such as prayer, worship, and other rituals abounded. Indeed, as we will discuss in ch. 5, we see such developments with regard to Jesus. The absence of direct prayer, worship, or ritualistic confession with regard to Name, Glory, Wisdom, and Word indicates that first-century Jews used these terms as symbols or figurative expressions for the one God but did not recognize them as distinct deities, beings, or persons.

A corollary of Jewish monotheism was monolatry, the worship of Yahweh alone. Despite the diversity within Judaism in many ways, the Jews agreed on monolatry. Yahweh alone is the creator and ruler of the universe and as such he alone is worthy of worship. When it came to worship, the Jews made a clear distinction between God and everything else. God alone should be worshiped; nothing and no one else should be worshiped.⁴³² For instance, the exclusive worship of the one God and the refusal to worship any other was the genesis of the Maccabean revolt (1 Macc 2:15-26). In sum, Second Temple Judaism was essentially monotheistic and monolatrous. We do not find clear evidence of first-century Jews offering cultic devotion or worship to personified divine attributes.⁴³³

Hurtado methodically examined various entities in the texts of Second Temple Judaism that have been proposed as possible objects of worship. In ch. 3 we considered much of the evidence, but we now summarize Hurtado's conclusions:

- *Angels* are not substitutes for God but are clearly God's servants, subject to God's will; the assertion that some Jews worshiped angels is not well attested.⁴³⁴ Although some texts attribute god-like attributes to principal

⁴³¹ See Hobsbawm, "Inventing Traditions," 1.

⁴³² Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 11, 13.

⁴³³ Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 39, 48.

⁴³⁴ Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 25, 39.

angels, they clearly distinguished these angels from the one God for in them God is the sole object of worship.⁴³⁵

- *Personified divine attributes* were vivid descriptions of God's own qualities and activities. While some texts used the language of personification for certain attributes, the Jews of this time did not regard them as hypostases, and they did not play an important theological role, except possibly in the thinking of Philo.⁴³⁶
- *Exalted patriarchs*: There is no evidence of Jewish groups worshipping these historical figures.⁴³⁷

In short, none of the proposed categories—angels or angelomorphic beings, divine personifications or hypostases, or exalted patriarchs—is satisfactory in explaining the deification of Christ in early Christianity.⁴³⁸ There is some indication of veneration of exalted human or angelic beings in apocryphal, pseudepigraphal, and Sethian writings. These instances do not correspond closely to the Christian deification of Jesus, however, as these beings were clearly subordinate to Yahweh whereas the combined deification language used for Jesus was otherwise reserved for Yahweh himself. For Segal, a Jewish scholar, it is mostly correct to say that Jewish ideas about angels, Spirit, Word, and Wisdom do not adequately account for the deification of Jesus. He did not find it surprising that the distinctively Christian ideas were not well developed before Christianity, for the historical experience of a resurrected Messiah transformed early Jewish Christian thinking and exegesis on this subject.⁴³⁹

We draw the following conclusions from our preliminary analysis of the key terms used for Jesus Christ in 2 Cor 3:16–4:6:

1. *Early Christians used both the name of Jesus itself and the title of Lord to attribute deity to Jesus of Nazareth and to identify him with Yahweh, the one God of Israel.* The title of Christ primarily communicated their conviction that he was the anointed king who would deliver Israel, but from early times it came to be another name for Jesus, so that by association it too was infused with divine connotations.

⁴³⁵ Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 117.

⁴³⁶ Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 36, 41, 47.

⁴³⁷ Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 67.

⁴³⁸ Nicholson, *Dynamic Oneness*, 32.

⁴³⁹ Alan F. Segal, "Pre-existence and Incarnation: A Response to Dunn and Holladay," *Semeia* 30 (1984): 91-92.

2. Paul used the terms “Spirit,” “image of God,” and “glory of God” within the context of the strict monotheism of Second Temple Judaism. By applying them to Jesus, he did not designate Jesus as a second divine being. Rather, he identified Jesus in the closest possible way with the one God of Israel.

3. *The effect of using these terms in this way was to deify Christ “within a Jewish monotheistic context, not by applying to Jesus a Jewish category of semi-divine intermediary status, but by identifying Jesus directly with the one God of Israel.”*⁴⁴⁰ For instance, regarding Jesus as the image of God allowed Paul to maintain a strong monotheism while providing a paradigm for the worship of Jesus, which was an essential feature of early Christianity.⁴⁴¹

At this point, our conclusions are tentative, for we have yet to investigate the rhetorical situation of 2 Corinthians, the literary context of the Corinthian correspondence, and the specific statements in 2 Cor 3:16–4:6. We have explored the “categories” (Lincoln) or “intertexture” (Robbins) of 2 Corinthians in its background of monotheistic Second Temple Judaism, but now we need to explore the “inner texture” of our selected passage to ascertain the significance and applicability of these preliminary observations and to understand how the text functions within this milieu.

⁴⁴⁰ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 4.

⁴⁴¹ Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, “The Worship of Divine Humanity as God’s Image and the Worship of Jesus,” in Newman et al., *Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism*, 125.

DEIFICATION LANGUAGE IN PAUL'S CORINTHIAN CORRESPONDENCE

With the theological and ideological background in mind, we will now examine the deification language in Paul's Corinthian epistles. To describe the rhetorical situation, we will first use Burke's pentad of act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose.⁴⁴²

Rhetorical Situation of 1 and 2 Corinthians

Act, in the Burkeian pentad, refers to the letter and its effect. It is important to understand that 1 and 2 Corinthians are letters, written to a specific local audience for a particular purpose. While they have many theological implications, we must not forget their occasional nature in our attempt to understand their message. More particularly, 2 Corinthians is the culmination of an extensive discourse between Paul and the Corinthian church, involving both letters and visits, which we detail below.⁴⁴³ We base the dating on evidence in Acts, the Pauline Epistles, and secular historical sources, but regardless of the historicity of Acts there is a scholarly consensus that the Corinthian correspondence was written no later than the 50s C.E.⁴⁴⁴

1. *First visit (founding of the church)*. According to Acts 18, Paul founded the church during his second missionary journey. He stayed there one and a half years, leaving probably in the spring of 51 C.E. In 1 Cor 9:1, he reminded the Corinthian believers that they were the result of his missionary work.

2. *First letter (lost)*. Sometime after his departure he wrote a letter instructing the Corinthian church not to have fellowship with professing Christians who lived immorally (1 Cor 5:9). This letter has not survived.

⁴⁴² See Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1952), x; Bernard Brock, "Rhetorical Criticism: A Burkeian Approach Revisited," in *Methods of Rhetorical Criticism: A Twentieth-Century Perspective* (3d ed.; ed. Bernard Brock, Robert Scott, and James Chesebro; Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 187.

⁴⁴³ See Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson, eds., *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 333; Robert Gundry, *Survey of the NT*, 370-71; Brown, *Introduction to the NT*, 514-15, 541-42; Carson et al., *Introduction to the NT*, 264-67.

⁴⁴⁴ Our dating follows Carson et al., *Introduction to the NT*, 283; Rainer Riesner, "Pauline Chronology," in *The Blackwell Companion to Paul* (ed. Stephen Westerholm; Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 23. For other scholarly alternatives, see Riesner, "Pauline Chronology," 24.

3. *Second letter (1 Corinthians)*. Later, he wrote our 1 Corinthians from Ephesus during his third missionary journey (1 Cor 16:8, 19; Acts 19:1), probably in 54 or 55 C.E. His purpose was to address church problems that had been reported to him and to answer questions (1 Cor 1:11; 5:1; 7:1; 11:18). After writing the letter, he sent Timothy to assist the church (1 Cor 4:17; 16:10). In the meantime, it appears, some Christian teachers came to Corinth, held themselves to be apostles, and rejected the authority of Paul. They were able to gain control of the church there.

4. *Second visit*. In his second letter, Paul had stated his plans to visit the church soon (1 Cor 4:19; 11:34; 16:2, 5). Timothy was not successful in dealing with the problems in the church and returned to Paul with a negative report. Paul then made a quick trip from Ephesus to confront the situation. He was not successful either; thus he spoke of the “painful visit” (2 Cor 2:1; 13:1-2).

5. *Third letter (lost)*. After his unsuccessful trip, Paul wrote a third letter. The purpose was to confront rebellion in the church and ask the church to discipline the ringleader who had opposed him during his visit. This letter has been variously called the grievous, tearful, or severe letter, and it was delivered by Titus. (See 2 Cor 2:3-9; 7:8-12.) Some commentators conclude that, because of its tone, 2 Cor 10-13 is this letter, at least in part.⁴⁴⁵ If so, only 2 Cor 1-9, or maybe 2 Cor 1-7, would be Paul’s fourth and final letter.

6. *Fourth letter (2 Corinthians)*. The church responded by disciplining the rebellious man, who then repented. After Titus returned to Paul with a favorable report about the church’s action, Paul wrote our 2 Corinthians while in Macedonia during his third missionary journey, in 55 or 56 C.E. (2 Cor 7:5-15; 12:18). It was delivered by Titus and two unnamed coworkers (2 Cor 8:16-24). In it, Paul asked the church to restore the repentant man (2 Cor 2:5-11).

Many scholars believe 2 Cor 10-13 was originally a separate letter from Paul, because unlike chs. 1-9, these chapters manifest a negative, harsh tone.⁴⁴⁶ It may well be, however, that in these final chapters Paul responded to a further negative report he received before completion of the letter. Alternatively, he could have addressed an unrepentant minority. We can explain the difference in tone and emphasis if chs. 1-9 primarily address the repentant majority while chs. 10-13 primarily address the obstinate

⁴⁴⁵ For discussion, see Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 7, 34; Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (WBC 40; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1986), xlvi.

⁴⁴⁶ Brown, *Introduction to the NT*, 548.

minority. Or chs. 10-13 could be a response to news of a revived opposition.⁴⁴⁷ Although there is no manuscript evidence of a division,⁴⁴⁸ based on the internal evidence the majority of commentators conclude that 2 Cor 1-9 (or some portion thereof) was Paul's fourth letter to the Corinthians and that 2 Cor 10-13 was a fifth letter by Paul after he heard the situation had gotten worse again.⁴⁴⁹ Another possibility is that 2 Cor 1-7 comes at the end of the correspondence. In this case, after confronting the problem in Corinth and achieving reconciliation, Paul once again defended his apostleship in a mostly positive way, much as he did previously in 1 Cor 9.

As this discussion indicates, most commentators do not think our 2 Corinthians was originally written as a whole. There are many theories of partition, focusing on four major sections: 2:14–7:4; 6:14–7:1; 8-9; 10-13. There is a general consensus that all of the material is from Paul except possibly 6:14–7:1, which is variously considered to be Pauline, originally non-Pauline but inserted by Paul, or non-Pauline but inserted by an editor. In Thrall's proposal, the material originally formed three Pauline letters—chs. 1-8, ch. 9, and chs. 10-13—in that order.⁴⁵⁰ Harris presented a detailed discussion of the various options but concluded in favor of the unity of the letter.⁴⁵¹ For our purposes, these questions are not of great importance, as no lengthy time separated the proposed segments and the overall rhetorical situation remained essentially the same. The exact timing or sequence of these passages does not affect our analysis very much, and we make no significant use of the possibly non-Pauline passage. We tentatively proceed with an assumption that 2 Corinthians is a compositional unity but with the realization that 2 Cor 10-13 could have been written a short time before or after the main letter and that 2 Cor 1-7 or 2 Cor 1-9 could have been written last.

Agent refers to the author and audiences (both explicit and implied). The undisputed author of 1 and 2 Corinthians is Paul, the Jewish apostle to the Gentiles. If we accept the biographical information about Paul in Acts and combine it with information in Paul's letters, we glean quite a bit of information concerning him. Paul was a Jew, born in Tarsus, a major city of Cilicia in southeastern Asia Minor, but brought up in Jerusalem as

⁴⁴⁷ Gundry, *Survey of the NT*, 371.

⁴⁴⁸ Achtemeier et al., *Introducing the NT*, 347.

⁴⁴⁹ See C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC 8; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1973), 9-10; Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 35-42; Martin, *2 Corinthians*, xlvi; Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:3-43.

⁴⁵⁰ Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:43.

⁴⁵¹ Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 8-51. For a concurring opinion, see Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 16-25.

a Pharisee and thoroughly trained in the Jewish law under Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3; 23:6; 26:4-5). He was also a Roman citizen from birth (Acts 22:27-28). Although he initially persecuted the Christians, he received a revelation of Jesus Christ on the Damascus road, which caused him to believe in Jesus (Acts 9; 22; 26; Gal 1:11-12). He was befriended by Barnabas and became a Christian minister (Acts 9:27; 11:25-26). He preached the good news of salvation based on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—a message he asserted was in harmony with that of the Jerusalem apostles (1 Cor 15:1-4; Gal 2:2). Paul was converted about 34 C.E. or earlier and conducted ministry in Damascus and Arabia (the Nabataean kingdom ruled by Aretas) (Acts 9:19-25; Gal 1:15-17). After three years, he visited Jerusalem and met two important Christian leaders, Peter and James the brother of Jesus (Acts 9:26-29; Galatians 1:18-19). Subsequently he ministered in Tarsus and later, at the invitation of Barnabas, in the city of Antioch in Syria (Acts 9:30; 11:25-26; Gal 1:21-24). After fourteen years (probably overlapping the earlier three years), he made a second visit to Jerusalem to provide famine relief to the church there (Acts 11:27-30; Gal 2:1). This visit was probably the occasion for his encounter with the Jerusalem apostles in Gal 2:1-10.

Acts provides further information about Paul's life and ministry including three missionary journeys, imprisonment in Caesarea, voyage to Rome, and imprisonment there. The Acts account ends at this point. If we accept information from the Pastoral Epistles as historical, then Paul must have been released for a time and resumed ministry in the east, including Ephesus and Crete (Phlm 22; 1 Tim 1:3; Titus 1:5). According to early church tradition, Paul was arrested (again) and executed in Rome under Emperor Nero. Below is a chronology of Paul's ministry.⁴⁵²

- Conversion about 34 C.E.
- Ministry in Damascus and Arabia in 35-37
- First post-conversion visit to Jerusalem in 37
- Ministry in Tarsus and Antioch in 37-46/47
- Second post-conversion visit to Jerusalem in 47
- First missionary journey (Acts 13-14) in 47-48. The church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to proclaim the gospel in Asia Minor.

⁴⁵² Based primarily on Carson et al., *Introduction to the NT*, 228-31. Riesner differs slightly in the early years but is almost identical in the later years. "Pauline Chronology," 23.

- Participation in the Jerusalem council (Acts 15) in 48 or 49
- Second missionary journey (Acts 15:36–18:22) in 48/49-51. Founding of the church at Corinth.
- Third missionary journey (Acts 18:23–21:17) in 52-57. Writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians.
- Imprisonment in Caesarea (Acts 23:23–26:32) in 57-59
- Voyage to Rome to stand trial before Caesar (Acts 27:1–28:15) in 59-60
- Imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:16-31) in 60-62
- Further ministry in the east in 62-64
- Death in 64 or 65

Scholars debate whether all the foregoing information is historically accurate. Despite disagreements over details and dates, a fairly good portrait emerges of a man who was one of the earliest leaders and proponents of Christian belief. After Jesus himself, he was the most influential preacher, teacher, missionary, and writer of the early Christians.

Paul was a committed Pharisee, and this basic theological commitment did not change after his conversion (Phil 3:4-6). At the same time, he was a Hellenistic Jew from the Diaspora. Indeed, the NT credits him with knowledge of Greek poets and philosophers, and 1 Corinthians contains a quotation from one of them.⁴⁵³ Paul was a man of the first-century Mediterranean world, and as such he was a member of a collectivist culture. The defining attributes of collectivist cultures are family integrity, solidarity, and keeping the primary in-group in good health. Thus Paul was group oriented, loyal, obedient, and seeking both to honor God and to strengthen the group.⁴⁵⁴

Paul wrote 1 and 2 Corinthians to the Christian community in the Greek city of Corinth as well as to believers throughout the province of Achaia (2 Cor 1:1). The church included both Jews and Gentiles, but from the references to their past life of immorality and idolatry the intended readership was predominantly Gentile (1 Cor 6:9-11; 8:7; 12:2). The extended discussion of wisdom and subsequent references to wisdom (1 Cor 1:17–2:16; 3:18-20; 2 Cor 1:12) are primarily a response to Gentile questions and interests, as

⁴⁵³ Acts 17:28 (Aratus, Epimenides, Cleanthes); 1 Cor 15:33 (Menander); 1 Tim 6:10 (similar to statement of Diogenes); Titus 1:12 (Epimenides).

⁴⁵⁴ Bruce Malina and Jerome Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 199, 203.

noted in 1 Cor 1:22. The encoded explicit readers, then, are the Gentile Christians in Corinth.

The encoded implicit readers of 1 and 2 Corinthians are the ideal or competent readers. We can ascertain from the letter itself what the reader is assumed to understand or be like. For instance, the letter assumes Greco-Roman culture, some knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, and knowledge of Paul and his ministry. While the readers were members of Corinthian society and culture, they were also members of a relatively small sect who saw themselves as distinct from the surrounding society. As such, a social dynamic was at work.⁴⁵⁵ Sectarian communities emerge as a protest movement within a larger body and gradually become marginalized and dissociated from the original group. At this point they experience social disapproval, harassment, and pressure to conform. Consequently, they develop strategies to establish their collective identity, maintain their own social cohesion, and affirm their ideological commitment. They conceive of themselves as a specially chosen group with a superior understanding of truth, a superior moral code, and a unique identity. They are conscious of a clear separation from the outside world and expect strong commitment from those within the group.

Agency includes social mechanisms, letter writing, and special literary forms. While 1 and 2 Corinthians are literary compositions, their primary effect was in oral reading. Paul did not write them as treatises to be handed from individual to individual and to be read silently. Instead, he wrote them to be read aloud to the congregation. Paul dictated a letter to a trusted member of his local group and chose an emissary to communicate it orally to the recipients. Thus the Pauline letter was supremely a performance of Hellenistic rhetoric and oratory.⁴⁵⁶

Scene is the socio-historical situation or setting. According to Acts 18, Paul started the Corinthian church on his second missionary journey. He joined forces with Aquila and Priscilla, a Jewish husband and wife who had departed from Rome due to the expulsion of the Jews there by Emperor Claudius in 49 C.E. As was his custom, Paul initially taught in the Jewish synagogue, but after most of the Jews rejected his message he focused on the Gentiles and won many converts. Some Jews did accept his message, however, including Crispus, the synagogue ruler.

⁴⁵⁵ John H. Elliot, *What Is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (GBS; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 80.

⁴⁵⁶ Lucretia B. Yaghjian, "Ancient Reading," in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (ed. Richard Rohrbaugh; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996), 217.

Corinth was a wealthy city located on the Isthmus of Corinth, which connects the Peloponnese Peninsula to the mainland of Greece. It was in a strategic position to control both north-south and east-west trade. The Romans destroyed the ancient city-state in 146 B.C.E, but in 44 B.C.E. Julius Caesar refounded it as a Roman colony. From 29 B.C.E., it was the capital of the senatorial province of Achaia and the seat of a proconsul. At the time of Paul's visit the city was quite cosmopolitan, with people from many areas of the Roman Empire. Jews were definitely part of the community. (In confirmation of Acts 18:4, archeologists have discovered an inscription with the words "Synagogue of the Hebrews."⁴⁵⁷)

In this cosmopolitan Hellenistic environment, we can see how the Wisdom speculation common in paganism and Hellenistic Judaism could have influenced the Corinthian believers. According to the predominant view today, the Corinthian opposition drew from the Wisdom tradition in Hellenistic Judaism.⁴⁵⁸ In this regard, the opponents of Paul in 2 Cor 10-13 need special mention. Paul referred to them as "super-apostles" (in their opinion) and "false apostles" (in his opinion) (11:5, 13; 12:11). They had recently come to Corinth (11:4) and joined forces with the false teachers Paul had opposed in 1 Corinthians.⁴⁵⁹ They were evidently Hellenistic Jews,⁴⁶⁰ for they valued their Jewish heritage (11:22) and, in contrast to Paul, were recognized for their skills in Greek rhetoric (11:6).

The immediate *purpose* of 2 Corinthians was to follow up on Titus's favorable report, to ask the Corinthian church to restore the opponent who had repented, and to arrange an offering for the needy church in Jerusalem (2:6-9; 8:6-11). Chapters 10-13 may also address a subsequent, less favorable report. Paul took the opportunity to provide a lengthy explanation of his ministry, which is the larger purpose of the letter. (See 2:14–3:6.) Consequently, the main theme is a defense of Paul's apostleship and message. The chief issue was Paul's apostolic authority, and much of the letter provides a defense against attacks on Paul's authenticity, faithfulness, and authority as an apostle.⁴⁶¹

In examining the rhetorical situation, we should consider the relationships between the elements of Burke's pentad, such as between act and agent, act and agency,

⁴⁵⁷ Carson et al., *Introduction to the NT*, 263.

⁴⁵⁸ Carson et al., *Introduction to the NT*, 281.

⁴⁵⁹ Brown, *Introduction to the NT*, 555-56.

⁴⁶⁰ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 505.

⁴⁶¹ Achtemeier et al., *Introducing the NT*, 348-49.

and so on. Indeed, to some extent we have already done so. For instance, we have examined the relationship between the act (letter) and the agents (Paul and the readers) in the context of their total interaction. We can also look at how the scene affected the act, agency, and purpose. The socio-historical setting of Hellenism, and specifically Hellenistic Judaism, influenced both Paul and the Corinthians. As a product of Pharisaic Judaism, Paul employed the Hebrew Scriptures and rabbinic methods of interpretation, such as *midrash* in 2 Cor 3. At the same time, he both used Hellenistic thought and responded to distortions caused by Hellenistic thought, such as when he discussed wisdom. In 1 Cor 1:18-25 he argued against making wisdom supreme, yet in 1 Cor 1:30 he presented Jesus Christ as the true wisdom of God. Likewise, in 2 Cor 1:12 he warned against earthly wisdom, yet in 2 Cor 4:4-6 he availed himself of concepts in wisdom literature to describe Jesus Christ. In doing so, he drew from his own cosmopolitan background and sought to establish his credibility in the cosmopolitan environment of Corinth.

Overview of 1 and 2 Corinthians

Before focusing on our selected text in 2 Corinthians, we need to investigate the literary context of the extant Corinthian correspondence. Written in response to church problems, 1 Corinthians has as its overall theme growing into maturity in Christ. Achtemeier et al. identified two related themes: (1) the contrast between the standards of the world and the standards of Jesus and (2) the lordship of Jesus.⁴⁶² Following is a brief outline of the letter.

1. Opening, 1:1-9
2. Reproofs in response to reports, 1:10–6:20
 - a. Overcoming divisions, 1:10–4:21
 - b. Disciplining of open immorality, 5:1-13
 - c. Settling disputes in the church, 6:1-8
 - d. Overcoming immorality in general, 6:9-20
3. Answers to questions, 7:1–16:12
 - a. Marriage, 7:1-40

⁴⁶² Achtemeier et al., *Introducing the NT*, 336-37.

- b. Food offered to idols, 8:1–11:1, including discussion of Paul’s apostleship and example, 9:1-27
 - c. Distinction between male and female symbolized by hair, 11:2-16
 - d. The Lord’s Supper, 11:17-34
 - e. Spiritual gifts, 12:1–14:40, including discussion of the priority of love, 13:1-13
 - f. The resurrection, 15:1-58
 - g. Offerings and travel plans, 16:1-12
4. Concluding exhortations and greetings, 16:13-24

As we have discussed, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to explain and defend his ministry.⁴⁶³ As a result of his passionate personal defense, it is one of the most persuasive of Paul’s writings.⁴⁶⁴ Following is a brief outline.

- 1. Opening: greeting and thanksgiving, 1:1-11
- 2. Defense of Paul’s travel plans, 1:12–2:13
- 3. Nature and purpose of Paul’s ministry, 2:14–7:4
- 4. Paul’s self-defense concluded, 7:5-16
- 5. Offering for Christians in Jerusalem, 8:1–9:15
- 6. Response to opponents, 10:1–13:10
- 7. Conclusion, 13:11-14

Significant Language in 1 Corinthians

We now turn to an examination of the key statements in the two letters concerning the identity of Jesus. Our purpose is to obtain a clear picture of Christ through the eyes of Paul. We will seek to avoid anachronistic interpretations; that is, to explain the text we will not employ later concepts such as binitarianism, trinitarianism, and modalism. Nevertheless, we must recognize the embeddedness of all analysis; there is no neutral place from which to examine a text “objectively” or in isolation from its history of reception. At best, we can identify our location and proceed with grammatical-historical exegesis. We must also understand that the ultimate purpose of exegesis and of the

⁴⁶³ See particularly 2 Cor 1:17-19, 2:17; 4:2-5; 5:12-13; 10-13.

⁴⁶⁴ Brown, *Introduction to the NT*, 541.

present thesis is to speak to contemporary issues, so even as we seek to exegete with intellectual integrity and with respect for majority scholarship, we will relate our exegesis to questions of interest to contemporary, global Christianity as explained in ch. 2.

1:1-2. *“Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.”* From the outset, Paul identified both himself and his readers in relation to Jesus Christ. He was an “apostle” (messenger, ambassador, commissioner) of Jesus, and the church in Corinth was “sanctified” (set apart, consecrated, made holy) by Jesus. Here, Paul attributed to Jesus both commissioning authority and sanctifying power, transcending the power that Jews attributed to humans.

Paul used the phrase “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ) to speak of God’s saving work on behalf of humans. (See also 1 Cor 1:4; 2 Cor 2:14.) The phrase “occurs in contexts which suggest that it denotes the place (‘field of force’), focus, or means of God’s action.”⁴⁶⁵

He further identified the “saints” (sanctified ones, holy ones) as those who “call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In this context, to speak of Jesus as “our Lord” is to give him a divine title and, from a Jewish perspective, even to identify him with or as Yahweh.⁴⁶⁶ To “call on the name” indicates a ritual act of worship, a formal invoking of the name of a deity particularly in sacrifice, prayer, praise, or worship.⁴⁶⁷ In the OT, people invoked the name of Yahweh in this fashion.⁴⁶⁸ Indeed, there is little evidence that for Jews this phrase ever applied to anyone other than Yahweh.⁴⁶⁹

Socio-rhetorically, Paul employed the name of Jesus as the functional equivalent of Yahweh. To identify and define Christian believers, he used a formulaic phrase indicating that believers everywhere prayed to and worshiped Jesus. Indeed, the phrase may have been a common description for the entire Christian life or at least a common description of Christian worship.⁴⁷⁰ Some argue that in the religious context of the NT, to worship (προσκυνέω) a deity is only complete when it involves sacrifice, and since no

⁴⁶⁵ Richardson, *Paul’s Language*, 245.

⁴⁶⁶ See our discussion in ch. 4 and of 1 Cor 16:22 in this chapter.

⁴⁶⁷ Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 16; Capes, “YHWH Texts,” 128; Hurtado, “Binitarian Shape of Early Christian Worship,” 198.

⁴⁶⁸ E.g., Gen 4:26; 12:8; 13:4; 26:25; 1 Kgs 18:24; 2 Kgs 5:11; Ps 105:1; 116:17; Isa 12:4-6.

⁴⁶⁹ Capes, “YHWH Texts,” 128.

⁴⁷⁰ Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 109.

sacrifices were offered to Christ we have less than full worship offered to Christ in the NT.⁴⁷¹ However, the ritualistic invocation of the divine name is associated with sacrifice in the OT, and sacrifices were abolished and replaced with the “sacrifice of praise” in the NT (Heb 10:1-14; 13:15). Here the ritualistic invocation of the divine name is transferred to the name of Jesus, in what is the NT equivalent of sacrificial worship.

1:3. “*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*” As is standard in his letters, Paul invoked both God and Jesus in pronouncing grace and peace upon the believers, a remarkable expression for a monotheistic Jew. From the outset we see a certain duality that goes beyond typical OT expressions. Clearly, Paul made some distinction between God and Jesus but at the same time associated or equated them in some way. Perhaps the best way to understand this phrase is by examining the OT priestly invocation of God’s name upon God’s people.⁴⁷² It appears in Num 6:22-27:

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them, The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.

The priests specifically pronounced grace and peace upon God’s people by calling the divine name Yahweh over them. In the NT rhetorical situation, Paul adapted this blessing by using the name of Jesus instead of Yahweh. To describe Jesus as separate from Yahweh but performing the works of Yahweh would compromise monotheism, and there is no indication that Paul intended this meaning. The alternative is to view Jesus as performing the works of Yahweh by being the extension or expression of Yahweh.

This understanding gains support from 2 Thess 1:12: “So that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” The last clause in Greek is κατὰ τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. There is one definite article “the” (τοῦ) for both “God” (θεοῦ) and “Lord Jesus Christ” (κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), which are separated by “and”

⁴⁷¹ J. Lionel North, “Jesus and Worship, God and Sacrifice,” in Stuckenbruck and North, *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, 198-99.

⁴⁷² Norris, *I AM*, 41-42. See Harry Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, vol. 1: *Faith, Trinity, Incarnation* (3d ed.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), 147.

(καὶ). Based on this Greek construction we can translate the phrase as follows: “according to the grace of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ” (NIV note).⁴⁷³

Moreover, in 1 Cor 1:3 “God our Father” and “Lord Jesus Christ” share one preposition (“from,” ἀπό), and thus it may mean Christ is the mediator of divine grace and peace.⁴⁷⁴ Paul did not speak of grace and peace coming from God and Jesus as from two different beings but from the one God of Israel as revealed in Jesus.

1:4. “*I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus.*” Here Paul used dual language to speak of Jesus as the agent or means of God’s grace. He differentiated Jesus from God but at the same time attributed the action of God to Jesus.

1:7-8. “*So that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Paul looked for the personal return of Jesus Christ in the end of time (see also 11:26), and he spoke of the end-time judgment as the “day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The OT speaks of “the day of the LORD” as the eschatological day of judgment. For instance, in Joel it is a day when Yahweh will come at the head of an army and thus a day of judgment but also a day of salvation for the righteous.⁴⁷⁵ Here, Jesus fulfills the role of Yahweh in Paul’s eschatological thought.

1:9. “*God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*” In addition to this verse, in the Corinthian correspondence Paul used “Son” standing alone one other time (1 Cor 15:28) and the specific designation “Son of God” one time (2 Cor 1:19). He did not use the term “Son of Man.”⁴⁷⁶ Paul rarely spoke of Jesus as God’s Son—only seventeen times compared to over two hundred times for Christ and over three hundred times for Lord. He did not use it primarily as a divine title but to describe Jesus as a true human who was born, died, and rose again to fulfill God’s plan of salvation for humanity.⁴⁷⁷ “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his

⁴⁷³ See Longenecker, *Christology*, 138. This verse is likely an example of the following rule in BDF, 276.3: “The article is (naturally) omitted with the second of two phrases in apposition connected by καί.” See also Titus 2:13; 2 Pet 1:1.

⁴⁷⁴ Richardson, *Paul’s Language*, 261.

⁴⁷⁵ E.g., Joel 1:15; 2:11, 31-32.

⁴⁷⁶ Kazen concluded that the Pauline community did not use this term but had a similar concept of Jesus as eschatological redeemer who would transform suffering into divine vindication. Thomas Kazen, “Son of Man and Early Christian Identity Formation,” in *Identity Formation in the New Testament* (ed. Bengt Holmberg and Mikael Winninge; WUNT 227; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 118, 121.

⁴⁷⁷ Paul’s use of “Son” for Jesus is as follows: Rom 1:3 (descent from David); 1:4 (resurrection of); 1:9 (gospel of); 5:10 (death of); 8:3 (in likeness of sinful humanity); 8:29 (firstborn within a large family); 8:32

Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children” (Gal 4:4-5). “For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life” (Rom 5:10). Moreover, Paul connected this title with God’s self-revelation to him—“God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me” (Gal 1:15-16a)—referring to his Damascus road encounter with the exalted Christ.⁴⁷⁸

Theologically, the term “Son of God” serves a twofold purpose in the NT. First, by contrast with the title of “Father,” it underscores the authentic humanity of Jesus Christ in submission to the transcendent God. “While Son of God very soon came to signify divine nature, it was probably used in a more functional manner by the earliest Jewish believers to denote Jesus’ unique relationship with God the Father and his obedience to the Father’s will.”⁴⁷⁹ At this point the title was primarily functional, speaking of a human appointed by God or a human to whom God transferred royal authority.⁴⁸⁰ In the NT it refers to “the historical person of Jesus, not to a preexistent being.”⁴⁸¹ Second, by identifying the work of the Son as the work of God through the Son, it describes God’s manifestation and action in human flesh. “Paul’s language here is both functional and wholly theocentric. . . . ‘That God the Father himself is working salvation in that which has happened and will happen through Jesus Christ is what Paul wants to emphasize when he speaks of the Son of God.’”⁴⁸² The NT writers, then, “rejected the idea of another person (in our sense of ‘person’) other than the Father, the invisible God.”⁴⁸³ Rather, “the Son” is a “metaphor” for God’s own action because from Paul’s monotheistic perspective God could not literally beget another divine entity: “His ‘Son’ is himself in his aspect as concerned with his creation and supremely with his

(giving of, in death); 1 Cor 1:9 (fellowship of); 15:28 (subjection to God); 2 Cor 1:19 (proclamation of); Gal 1:16 (revelation of, in Paul); 2:20 (Paul’s faith in); 4:4 (born of a woman); 4:6 (Spirit of); Eph 4:13 (knowledge of); Col 1:13 (kingdom of); 1 Thess 1:10 (coming from heaven, raised from dead). The last use has the clearest connection to deity but still occurs in the context of humanity.

⁴⁷⁸ Kim, *Origin of Paul’s Gospel*, 230. He considered “his Son” in Gal 1:16 to be a parallel to “image of God” in 2 Cor 4:4-6. *Ibid.*, 256.

⁴⁷⁹ Longenecker, *Christology*, 98-99.

⁴⁸⁰ Hahn, *Titles of Jesus in Christology*, 306, 340.

⁴⁸¹ Pelikan, *Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, 189. He stated that, whether correct or not, this conclusion “has become part of the conventional scholarly wisdom.”

⁴⁸² Richardson, *Paul’s Language*, 270, citing Kümmel.

⁴⁸³ Dunn, *Christology*, 267. However, for Dunn the NT ultimately supports the doctrine of the Trinity.

creature man. So when we say God gave his only Son we mean that God gave himself.”⁴⁸⁴

1:10. “*Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.*” Here again the name of Jesus functions socio-rhetorically just as the name of Yahweh did in the OT. Paul invoked the name of Jesus in an appeal for unity in the church. Much like taking an oath, the purpose of invoking a name in this fashion is to rely upon the power and authority of the name to accomplish a work. The ancient Hebrews similarly invoked the name of Yahweh to invoke God’s power and to pronounce blessings, cursings, and oaths.⁴⁸⁵ Paul believed the name of Jesus was effective in the same way and believed the Corinthian church would acknowledge the authority of the name.

1:13-15. “*Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name.*” Looking at the socio-rhetorical situation, Paul wrote against factionalism in the Corinthian church, in which various members were claiming to follow Paul, Apollos, Cephas (Peter), or Christ alone. The implication of his questions is: Yes, the Corinthians have (wrongly) divided Christ. No, Paul was not crucified for them, but Christ was. No, they were not baptized in the name of Paul but in the name of Jesus Christ. Since Christ died for all of them and since all of them had been baptized in his name, they should overcome divisions and unite around Christ.

To make this point, Paul appealed to the early practice of baptizing believers with the invocation of the name of Jesus.⁴⁸⁶ The name of Jesus was a prominent feature of their sacred conversion rite. As such, it was closely associated with the forgiveness of sins and the experience of salvation.⁴⁸⁷ The literal phrase here is “into the name” (εἰς τὸ ὄνομα).

⁴⁸⁴ Anthony T. Hanson, *The Image of the Invisible God* (London: SCM, 1982), 140-41. He wrote from a trinitarian perspective.

⁴⁸⁵ E.g., Gen 31:49-53; Deut 21:5; 1 Sam 17:45; 20:42; 2 Sam 6:18; 1 Kgs 22:16; 2 Kgs 2:24.

⁴⁸⁶ Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16; Rom 6:3-4; Gal 3:27. See Lars Hartman, “*Into the Name of the Lord Jesus*”: *Baptism in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 35, 60-62; Longenecker, *Christology*, 44. For further discussion, see ch. 7.

⁴⁸⁷ Acts 2:21, 38; 10:43; 22:16; Rom 10:13.

First-century rabbis used the phrase for religious rites to identify the god associated with the particular rite.⁴⁸⁸

1:24. “*But to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*” The OT describes Yahweh as having all power, unlike other gods, and his name proclaims his power.⁴⁸⁹ Likewise, Yahweh has all wisdom, unlike other gods, and he is the source of wisdom for humans.⁴⁹⁰ He gives both wisdom and power (Dan 2:20-23). Here, Paul associated Christ with divine power and wisdom.

1:30-31. “*He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’*” Again Paul associated Jesus with divine attributes and works. In addition to wisdom, the OT describes righteousness, sanctification, and redemption as coming from Yahweh.⁴⁹¹ Indeed, Exod 6:2-8 associates the significance of the name Yahweh with the redemptive work of Yahweh. Here Paul attributed God’s work of salvation to Jesus.

Since Jesus is the source of all these attributes, Paul admonished believers to glory only in him. To justify this praise to Jesus, he quoted Jer 9:24, which advocates boasting in Yahweh, and he quoted the same statement again in 2 Cor 10:17. The latter portion of Jer 9:24 reveals Yahweh to be the source of righteousness, thus reinforcing the identification of Jesus with Yahweh here. Because of Paul’s exalted view of Jesus he saw no problem in taking a statement about Yahweh from the Hebrew Scriptures and applying it directly to Jesus without justification or commentary.⁴⁹² Moreover, he expected the various factions of the Corinthian church to agree with this practice.

The LXX no doubt facilitated this identification. Instead of reading YHWH aloud in Hebrew, the Jews substituted the word *Adonai* (Lord); and when they translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, they substituted the word *Kyrios* (Lord).⁴⁹³ This usage of the LXX caused some overlap between language for God and the language applied to Christ.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁸⁸ Hartman, “*Into the Name of the Lord Jesus,*” 42.

⁴⁸⁹ Exod 9:16; 15:3, 16; Num 11:23; Deut 4:32-39.

⁴⁹⁰ Job 11:5-9; 28:12-28; Prov 3:19-20; Isa 28:29; 33:3-6; Jer 10:12; 51:14-15.

⁴⁹¹ Righteousness: Jer 9:24; 23:5-6; 33:16; sanctification: Exod 31:13; Lev 20:8; 21:8; 22:32; Ezek 20:12; 37:28; redemption: Exod 6:2-8; Ps 130:7; Micah 4:10.

⁴⁹² David Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul’s Christology* (WUNT 2/47; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 134.

⁴⁹³ Cullmann, *Christology of the NT*, 200-1.

⁴⁹⁴ Richardson, *Paul’s Language*, 283.

2:8. *“None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”* This verse gives Jesus the divine title of “Lord of glory.” It is equivalent to the OT titles of “King of glory” (Ps 24:8-10) and “God of glory” (Ps 29:3) for Yahweh.

2:16. *“For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.”* This verse adapts Isa 40:13: “Who has directed the spirit of the LORD, or as his counselor has instructed him?” Paul thereby equated the mind of Christ with the mind or spirit of Yahweh.⁴⁹⁵ From vv. 10-16 we see plainly that for Paul “the Spirit is not a third entity, a power or influence or even a personal being . . . but rather that the Spirit is God: the inner personal being of God, self-conscious deity. God’s inner consciousness has been disclosed in Jesus Christ.”⁴⁹⁶

3:1. *“And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.”* Paul repeatedly used the phrase “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ) to describe believers, indicating that their spiritual life originated with and was sustained by Christ.⁴⁹⁷ The effect is to elevate Christ above all other humans.

3:23. *“And you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.”* In the OT, the Israelites were the people of Yahweh; they belonged to him.⁴⁹⁸ For Paul, NT believers are first and foremost the possession of Christ, the leader of redeemed humans, and then by extension of God.

4:4-5. *“I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God.”* In the OT, Yahweh is the judge of all the earth.⁴⁹⁹ In the end, “he is coming to judge the earth” (Ps 96:13; 98:9). Paul placed Jesus in the position of eschatological judge here and in 2 Cor 5:10. He used the OT expression for God’s salvific appearance to identify Jesus as the eschatological Lord who is coming—a significant attribution of the functions of God to Jesus.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁵ Capes, *OT Yahweh Texts*, 139.

⁴⁹⁶ Lampe, *God As Spirit*, 81.

⁴⁹⁷ See also 1 Cor 4:10; 15:18-22; 2 Cor 1:21; 5:17.

⁴⁹⁸ Lev 20:26; Ps 100:3; Isa 43:1; Ezek 16:8.

⁴⁹⁹ Gen 18:25; Judg 11:27; 1 Sam 2:10; Ps 50:6; 82:8; 94:2; Isa 33:22.

⁵⁰⁰ Hurtado, “Binitarian Shape of Early Christian Worship,” 199.

5:3-5. *“For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.”* Paul used the name of Jesus to invoke divine power and authority and to execute divine judgment, much as in 1:10. Notably, the believers gather to worship in the name of the Lord Jesus and issue judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus.⁵⁰¹ Once again, the name of Jesus functions as the rhetorical equivalent of Yahweh in the OT, and the eschatological day of Yahweh becomes the day of Jesus. (To make the thought explicit, some manuscripts add “Jesus” to “the day of the Lord.”)

6:11. *“And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”* The name of the Lord Jesus was a key element in the conversion of the Corinthians, including their washing from sins, sanctification, and justification. This verse probably refers to the early practice of water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, as in 1:13-15.⁵⁰² Acts similarly links washing from sin, water baptism, the name of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Jesus was invoked in the initiation rite as the divine agent in conversion. The duality here is connected with the related but distinct initiatory experiences of water baptism and Spirit baptism.⁵⁰³ As in 1 Cor 1:2 and 5:4, the name of Jesus functions like the name of Yahweh in the OT.

6:14. *“And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power.”* This verse makes a distinction between God and Christ in the context of the resurrection of humans. The title “God” communicates transcendence and omnipotence, while the divine title “Lord” identifies a human who died, rose again, and is a forerunner for other humans.

6:15-17. *“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, ‘The two shall be one flesh.’ But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with*

⁵⁰¹ Hurtado, “Binitarian Shape of Early Christian Worship,” 199.

⁵⁰² Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 130-31; Hartman, “*Into the Name of the Lord Jesus*,” 65; Longenecker, *Christology*, 44.

⁵⁰³ See Acts 8:15-16; 10:44-48; 19:5-6.

him.” Paul considered believers to be members of the mystical body of Christ and united with him in spirit. “Christ himself functioned in effect as the Christian sacred space.”⁵⁰⁴

7:10. “*To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord—that the wife should not separate from her husband.*” Paul cited the Lord Jesus as an authoritative teacher. Like Yahweh in the OT (Deut 11:1), his commands must be obeyed. Paul made a distinction between Christ’s teaching and his own, deriving his authority from Christ and presenting his own instructions as an application of Christ’s teaching. (See also 7:25.)

7:22. “*For whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ.*” Whether slave or free, believers belong to the Lord Jesus, just as the OT Israelites belonged to Yahweh as his people. Paul thereby placed Christ in the unique category as universal owner or patron, superior to all other humans.

7:32-35. “*I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord.*” The ideal of the Christian life is to please the Lord Jesus. Believers are to establish their priorities based on the will of Christ and strive to accomplish the work he has for them.

7:39. “*A wife is bound as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord.*” As in 7:10, Christians are to live in under the authority of Christ.

8:4-6. “*Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that ‘no idol in the world really exists,’ and that ‘there is no God but one.’ Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—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.*” Paul appealed to the *Shema* (Deut 6:4) to establish that there is only one God. He consciously affirmed Jewish monotheism and expected his Gentile Christian audience—both supporters and detractors—to agree. The Greek form of the *Shema* uses both *theos*

⁵⁰⁴ Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 47.

(θεός) and *kyrios* (κύριος) as titles for Yahweh, and in the context Paul denied that pagan deities deserved to be called by these titles. Yet he immediately gave the title of *kyrios* to Jesus, thereby attributing divine honor to him.⁵⁰⁵ As in Phil 2:9-11, Paul took a strongly monotheistic passage from the OT and applied it to Jesus. Again, it is remarkable that he would identify God with a human who had recently lived in Palestine.

At the same time, Paul made a real distinction between God and Christ; there is a duality similar to that in 1 Cor 1:3. The Father is the transcendent God, while Jesus is a human who died, rose again, and became the exalted Lord. Yet somehow they are identified as the one God of Israel. From the context, it is unlikely that Paul intended to describe Christ as a second deity, for then his detractors could have accused him of compromising the monotheistic text he cited. In 2 Corinthians, when he faced opponents who appealed to the Jewish law, there is no evidence that they charged him with violating the fundamental confession of Judaism. Instead, Paul presented Christ as the manifestation or revelation of the one God for the purpose of salvation. He used a dual reference to underscore, first, God's "creative work" and, second, "his salvific work through Christ."⁵⁰⁶ In Rom 11:36 Paul described God as the source, means, and object of creation: "From him and through him and to him are all things." Here he inserted Christ in the middle of God's creative work. The effect is not to split God's creative work into two parts but to attribute the divine creative work to Christ. Dunn suggested that Paul, like Philo and the Wisdom tradition, was making a distinction between "God as the ultimate and unknowable source of being, and God making himself known through his acts of creation and what he created"; and in this context Paul "thought of God acting through Jesus and making himself known in and through Jesus."⁵⁰⁷ Perhaps we can say Paul expanded or amplified the *Shema*, and thus "the lordship of Christ *is* for Paul the expression of his (Jewish) monotheism. . . . Faith in Christ is an abbreviation for faith in God."⁵⁰⁸ For Schrage, the first commandment is not outmoded or dismissed, because the acting God embraces the acting of the one Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is not a second God next to or under the one God; rather, God reveals God's self in a new and ultimately valid

⁵⁰⁵ Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 130 n.2.

⁵⁰⁶ Richardson, *Paul's Language*, 297. Richardson did not reject the idea of two "persons" here.

⁵⁰⁷ Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 109-10. Talbert agreed that this statement at most speaks in the manner of the Wisdom tradition and Philo, perhaps of a projection from God. *Development of Christology*, 22-23.

⁵⁰⁸ Richardson, *Paul's Language*, 300.

way in Christ. In the end, we will see God's uniqueness, oneness, and unrestricted Godhead.⁵⁰⁹

According to Dunn, the "most natural" reading of the description of Christ here would be to say the man Jesus was present with God at creation, but this would be a misinterpretation, for then we would have polytheism rather than monotheism as the passage clearly intends. Moreover, it would be a selective reading because those who view it as signifying distinct personal preexistence generally interpret it as describing coequal persons, whereas a consistent interpretation would result in Arianism. Thus, we must look for another explanation. The passage actually uses personification to identify Jesus with divine Wisdom. It is "a way of expressing God's self-revelation," not a way of establishing a new ontological category or a new divine being: "the 'entity' was God in his self-revelation, not someone other than God."⁵¹⁰

As Nicholson explained this passage, "Paul is not differentiating Christ from God but rather is uniting them in his argument against pagan deities" to affirm that "God's salvific acts in history reach their ultimate conclusion in the work of Christ, and cannot be separated from Christ." Paul was "including Jesus within the divine identity."⁵¹¹ This description is an unnecessary concession to later modes of thought, however, as Jews did not speak of someone as being "included" or "within" the deity. Instead, we can more easily understand this passage to mean Jesus is the revelation or expression of the deity.

Elsewhere in the NT we find similar statements distinguishing between God and Christ; their purpose is not to bifurcate the deity but to identify Christ as the human personification of God for the purpose of salvation.⁵¹² "The one Lord (of believers) is not

⁵⁰⁹ "Das Wirken Gottes selbst umklammert das Wirken des *einen* Herrn Jesu Christi. . . . Recht wird damit das erste Gebot nicht überholt oder gar verabschiedet. . . . Es impliziert aber andererseits, daß auch Christus, der kein zweiter Gott unter oder neben dem *einen* Gott ist, in dem Gott sich aber neu und letztgültig offenbart hat und mit dem seit seiner Auferweckung die neue Schöpfung und die Entmachtung der Mächte begonnen hat, den eschatologischen Vorbehalt nicht überholt. Auch seine Herrschaft ist noch nicht zu Ende gebracht und universal verwirklicht. Am Ende aber wird nicht nur Gottes Einzigkeit, sondern auch Gottes Einheit und uneingeschränkte Gottheit hervortreten." Schrage, *Unterwegs zur Einheit und Einzigkeit Gottes*, 171, 186. He did not reject a trinitarian explanation.

⁵¹⁰ Dunn, *Partings of the Ways*, 260-62. He did not reject a trinitarian explanation.

⁵¹¹ Nicholson, *Dynamic Oneness*, 59.

⁵¹² See John 17:3; Acts 7:55-60. John describes meditorial prayer in which Jesus said eternal life comes from "the only true God" and himself as someone sent by God. In Acts a dying Stephen saw Jesus in the midst of God's glory, "standing at the right hand of God." He responded by praying to Jesus to receive his spirit. The text gives no indication that Stephen saw two separate bodily manifestations of God. Rather, the right-hand position signifies that Christ is the supremely exalted human, the divinely anointed king, who exercises the power and authority of the invisible, omnipresent deity. It is "figurative language" for "Christ's exaltation." F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 133, also citing Martin Luther for this point.

separable from the one God (the creator); the Lord through whom salvation comes is the Lord through whom all things come.”⁵¹³ Later, in 1 Cor 10:26, which is still in the same discussion of eating food offered to idols, Paul quoted Psa 24:1: “The earth is the LORD’S and all that is in it.” This OT verse identifies Yahweh as the creator and ruler of the world, and Paul applied it to Jesus. Contextually, then, 1 Cor 8:4-6 does not say one being called God is the creator and ruler while a second being called Lord is the agent of creation. Rather, we have a dual reference to the one God of Israel who is the creator but who has been revealed in a new way as the Lord Jesus Christ.

An examination of the socio-rhetorical situation provides insight as to why Paul used a dual reference to God in this passage. Longenecker suggested that for Paul to identify Jesus as Lord implied that Jesus was God. Why then did not Paul directly affirm Jesus as both God and Lord in this passage? It is because Paul wanted to avoid a polytheistic interpretation by Hellenistic readers, whereby they would accept Jesus as just another one of the gods.⁵¹⁴

In order to proclaim both the absolute lordship of Jesus and yet to preserve the proclamation of Jesus from being accepted as another polytheistic presentation, Paul employed the bipartite confession “God the Father” and the “Lord Jesus Christ” [1 Cor 8:6]—using the title God to signal the note of monotheism and the title Lord to designate absolute supremacy, though for him they were roughly equivalent. But as occasionally the unitary confession of the early church that “Jesus is Lord” appears in his writings, so his consciousness of the nature of his Lord occasionally expressed itself in the direct assertion that Christ is “God blessed for ever” [Rom 9:5] and in joining the titles God and Lord in respect to Jesus [2 Thess 1:12; Titus 2:13].

An alternate explanation is that Paul added Jesus as a second object of worship by modifying or expanding the *Shema*. Bauckham discounted this possibility on the ground that he would have been “repudiating Judaism and radically subverting the Shema’.” If Paul were “*adding* the one Lord to the one God of whom the Shema’ speaks, then, from the perspective of Jewish monotheism, he would certainly be producing . . . outright

⁵¹³ Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 180.

⁵¹⁴ Longenecker, *Christology*, 141. He supported the trinitarian perspective.

ditheism. . . . The *addition* of a unique Lord to the unique God of the Shema' would flatly *contradict* the uniqueness of the latter."⁵¹⁵

8:12. "*But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.*" In the OT, all sin, even sin against another person, is ultimately an offense to God.⁵¹⁶ Here Paul regarded sin against other believers as sin against Christ.

9:1-2. "*Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.*" Paul claimed to have seen the ascended Jesus as the Lord. Moreover, the exalted Jesus had worked through him to establish the Corinthian church.

9:14. "*In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.*" Paul cited the Lord (Jesus), probably referring to the tradition behind Luke 10:7,⁵¹⁷ and he equated the Lord's authority with that of God in Deut 25:4 (1 Cor 9:9). We see a parallel in 1 Tim 5:17-18, which identifies both the words of God in Deut 25:4 and the words of Jesus in Luke 10:7 as authoritative Scripture.

9:21. "*To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law.*" Paul made a ready substitution of Christ in place of God. If Paul has not completely equated Christ with God, at least his expression indicates a movement of thought in this direction.⁵¹⁸

10:4b. "*For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.*" In Exod 17 and Num 20, God brought water from a rock to quench Israel's thirst. Paul drew a typological comparison to Christ as the means by which God quenches spiritual thirst today. At the same time, "the Rock" is a title for Yahweh in Deut 32:4, 15, 18. Paul used the same OT text a few verses later to speak of the worship of Christ (2 Cor 10:21-22), so he clearly intended a divine reference.

10:9. "*We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents.*" Paul used a story in Num 21, in which Israel complained of lack of food and water in the wilderness and God sent serpents to judge them. In the story the

⁵¹⁵ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 101.

⁵¹⁶ Gen 39:9; Ps 51:4.

⁵¹⁷ Capes, *OT Yahweh Texts*, 79-80.

⁵¹⁸ Richardson, *Paul's Language*, 269.

Israelites tested Yahweh, but Paul interpreted it as a test of Christ, thus equating the two. While a textual variant puts “Lord” instead of “Christ” here, in the context Paul referred to Christ.

10:20-22. *“No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?”* The OT forbids the worship of other gods or the making of idols because God is jealous (Exod 20:4-5; 34:14). In the OT those who sacrificed to idols were worshiping demons instead of Yahweh, thereby provoking him to jealousy (Deut 32:16-17, 21). Those who offered polluted food on the altar were despising the table of Yahweh (Mal 1:7). Paul applied this teaching about Yahweh to the Lord Jesus to explain that Christians, who partake of the Lord’s Supper, should not partake of foods associated with idol worship. The Lord Jesus presides over the distinctive ritual meal of the early Christians explicitly like God in the OT and like the pagan gods of other religions.⁵¹⁹ The Lord Jesus hosts the Lord’s meal just as Serapis hosted the meals of his cult, implying that Christians worship the Lord Jesus like the devotees of Serapis worshiped him.⁵²⁰ Here, then, the equivalent of OT sacrificial worship is given to Christ. Moreover, Paul equated Jesus with God in opposition to false gods, who were demons. In Deut 32:21 Yahweh says, “They made me jealous with what is no god, provoked me with their idols”; in 1 Cor 10:22 Jesus assumes Yahweh’s identity.

10:26. *“For ‘the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s.’”* In the same context, Paul quoted Ps 24:1, a statement about Yahweh’s ownership of the earth, and applied it to the Lord Jesus.⁵²¹ Here Jesus assumes Yahweh’s role as the creator and the ruler of the world.

11:3. *“But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ.”* We can also translate the middle clause: “and the head of the woman is man” (NIV). This verse distinguishes God, Christ, man, and woman in what sounds like a hierarchy. According to recent scholarship, however, the word translated “head” (κεφαλή) means “source” in this context and not

⁵¹⁹ Hurtado, “Binitarian Shape of Early Christian Worship,” 203.

⁵²⁰ Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 50.

⁵²¹ Kramer, *Christ, Lord, Son of God*, 156; Capes, *OT Yahweh Texts*, 143.

“authority.”⁵²² The point is not to establish a rigid hierarchy but to draw an analogy from creation and redemption based on time sequence. The transcendent God is the source of Christ as the manifested image of God (2 Cor 4:4). Christ is the source of humans both in the original creative concept of God (1 Cor 8:6) and in the new creation (2 Cor 5:17). Man is first of the human creation and the historical source of woman in the creation account (1 Cor 11:8).

12:2-3. *“You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says ‘Let Jesus be cursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.”* For Paul, the fundamental and distinguishing confession of Christians is “Jesus is Lord.” (See also Rom 10:9, 13; Phil 2:9-11.) This confession means they are not idolaters or polytheists. Socio-rhetorically, it corresponds to confessing the name of Yahweh in the OT (1 Kgs 8:33-36; 2 Chr 6:24-27). In the OT, Yahweh is both God (*Elohim*) and Lord (*Adonai*) (Deut 10:17). For Paul, the Spirit of God prompts believers to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, and they also encounter Jesus as the image of the invisible God (2 Cor 4:4-6; Col 1:15). “The universal lordship of Jesus is the new expression of Jewish monotheism.”⁵²³ This passage depicts some people as opposing the deification of Jesus, but it also depicts them as outside the Christian faith. Paul expected the Corinthian church to agree with him in affirming Christ’s divine status.

12:4-6. *“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.”* In this passage, Paul used parallel statements to communicate the same basic idea of unity amid diversity in the exercise of spiritual gifts. From the parallels, the work of the Lord Jesus is the work of God; there is a functional equivalence. Here we have Hebraic repetition for emphasis, not to make an ontological distinction.⁵²⁴ However, some see a triadic reference supporting the construction of a trinitarian model.

12:12-13. *“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one*

⁵²² Philip Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 123-37. Thus “God is the head of Christ” refers to “Christ’s source as from God in the incarnation.” *Ibid.*, 138-39.

⁵²³ Richardson, *Paul’s Language*, 288.

⁵²⁴ Norris, *I AM*, 59.

Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” By partaking of the Spirit of God, believers are incorporated into Jesus Christ. Jesus is more than a prophet or a rabbi, but in some sense believers identify personally with him.

15:15a. *“We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ.”* As in 6:14, we have a distinction between God and Christ based on Christ’s identity as a human and his resurrection from the dead.

15:20-28. *“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For ‘God [Greek, “he”] has put all things in subjection under his feet.’ But when it says, ‘All things are put in subjection,’ it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all.”* As a human, Christ is the divinely anointed king who was born as a son, died, was raised from the dead, and received authority to defeat all enemies of the human race. After completing this task, his final act as a son will be to deliver the kingdom to God and subject himself to God.

As in 15:15 we have a dual reference to God and Christ. The distinction between the two is that Christ is a human who was raised from the dead. We could understand the ensuing discussion as a binitarian description of the supreme God and a subordinate Son who is distinct from God. Elsewhere Paul affirmed both monotheism and the divine work of Christ, so this passage could indicate an inconsistency in his thinking or expression. But according to the explanation of some trinitarian scholars, there may not be a pronounced discrepancy if, instead of anticipating the later debates between Athanasians and Arians, we examine the passage in terms of an “apocalyptic Christology.” The focus is on “Christ as the messianic agent of God” and “God’s agent for all of humanity and for

the entire cosmos.”⁵²⁵ “This passage does not depict ‘a sharing of government by two monarchs’ but rather presents the exalted Christ ‘in such a way that one might call him a divine plenipotentiary holding absolute sway for a limited period.’”⁵²⁶ It describes the end of Christ’s rule as a human mediator but does not speak concerning his divine identity.⁵²⁷ For Nicholson, the “apparently hierarchical language” does not “separate God and Christ” but unites them. Handing over the kingdom to God in the end is an affirmation that God has fulfilled the original plan for creation and has fulfilled all of God’s promises. The one God is the “source of all reality,” and God’s “design throughout salvation history” is fulfilled in Christ.⁵²⁸ Paul later described the one God as bringing believers into God’s own presence: “The one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence” (2 Cor 4:14). Thus the God who is revealed in Christ and who acts in Christ is ultimately “all in all.”

Verse 25 says, “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.” According to Richardson, “the subject of v. 25 is Christ: the context requires it,” and if so Paul ascribed the work of Yahweh in Ps 110:1 directly to Christ.⁵²⁹ Phil 3:21 similarly says Christ subjects all things to himself. Dunn heard in 1 Cor 15:24-28 “echoes of Philo’s understanding of the Logos: that the Logos is the ultimate, as far as humankind can reach out to God, and as far as God can come to humankind, but that God is always beyond the Logos. So with the Lordship of Christ.”⁵³⁰

In short, we can understand this passage as describing the activity of the one God in Christ. It associates the title of Son with a temporal role for a specific purpose, which fits well with Paul’s other uses of this title.⁵³¹ The eternal God manifested himself in and as the human Son in order to give humans ultimate victory over sin, demonic powers, and death itself. As a result of this work in the end God, the Father, reigns over the entire universe throughout eternity.

15:45. “*Thus it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.*” In some way Christ is the divine Spirit who gives life,

⁵²⁵ Scott Lewis, “So That God May Be All in All: 1 Corinthians 15:12-34,” *SBFLA* 49 (1999): 209-10.

⁵²⁶ Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 96, citing D. M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity* (SBLMS 18; Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), 61.

⁵²⁷ Kevin Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 114, 199.

⁵²⁸ Nicholson, *Dynamic Oneness*, 101, 103.

⁵²⁹ Richardson, *Paul’s Language*, 303.

⁵³⁰ Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 111.

⁵³¹ See our discussion of 1 Cor 1:9 and see n.477.

a work that the OT ascribes exclusively to God. In the beginning, God breathed into the first human “the breath of life; and the man became a living being” (Gen 2:7). In a metaphorical sense, God’s breath or Spirit (same Hebrew word *ruach*) would resurrect the nation of Israel (Ezek 37:14). Under the new covenant, “Paul regards Jesus as now in some sense the definition of the Spirit; it is the Jesus-character of his and his converts’ experiences of the Spirit which marks them out as authentic.”⁵³² “In 1 Cor 15:45, Paul identifies the exalted Jesus with the Spirit. . . . In the believer’s experience there is *no* distinction between Christ and Spirit.”⁵³³ “Jesus himself as the archetypal Adam ‘has become life-giving Spirit.’ The Spirit, as the new life of believers, is Christ, and Christ is the Spirit.”⁵³⁴ Jesus “is the incarnation of the very Spirit of God.”⁵³⁵

15:58. “*Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*” Christians are working for Jesus Christ, and they can expect a reward from him.

16:7. “*I do not want to see you now just in passing, for I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits.*” Jesus Christ directs the lives of believers and is their authority for all plans and activities.

16:21-24. “*I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Let anyone be accursed who has no love for the Lord. Our Lord, come! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with all of you in Christ Jesus.*” Paul’s personal closing invokes the Lord Jesus four times in as many verses. He pronounced judgment on those who do not love Jesus, called on Jesus to return, commended his readers to the grace of Jesus, and gave them his love in Jesus. As we have previously noted, Paul used an untranslated Aramaic expression here, *Marana tha*, which is generally considered to be a prayer or an invocation formula, and is probably to be translated something like “O Lord, come!” Well before the date of the letter, it must have already been a standard worship phrase, in which case the worship of Christ was characteristic of Aramaic-speaking Christians. If so, devotion to Jesus and a high view of Jesus emerged very early.⁵³⁶ Looking at the rhetorical situation, *Marana tha* is a prayer rather than a confession.⁵³⁷ The confession

⁵³² Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 145.

⁵³³ Dunn, *Christology*, 165. Ultimately he did not reject an overarching trinitarian explanation.

⁵³⁴ Lampe, *God As Spirit*, 79.

⁵³⁵ William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians* (rev. ed.; Daily Study Bible Series; Edinburgh: Westminster, 1975), 157.

⁵³⁶ Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 36-37.

⁵³⁷ Longenecker, *Christology*, 121-22; Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 36.

that Jesus is Lord was derived from the practice of prayer, not vice versa, with both originating in ancient Palestinian Christianity.⁵³⁸ In turn, the lordship of Jesus underlies every NT passage that identifies Jesus with or as God.⁵³⁹

God's people were recipients of his grace or favor in the OT,⁵⁴⁰ as reflected also in the greetings of Paul's letters, including this one. Yet here Paul simply referred to grace from the Lord Jesus.

Significant Language in 2 Corinthians

1:2. "*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" As in 1 Cor 1:3, Paul used a dual reference to speak of grace and peace coming from the one God of Israel as revealed in and through Jesus. Again he used one preposition (ἀπό, "from"), which may signify that Christ mediates God's grace and peace. In that case, both grace and peace come from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, with God as the source and Christ as the means.⁵⁴¹ God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ together become the single source of divine grace and peace. Moreover, "quite apart from the theological implications of a single preposition, the deity of Christ is here implicitly affirmed, for a monotheistic Jew would never juxtapose a mere human being with God as a comparable fount of spiritual blessing; equality bespeaks deity."⁵⁴² There is some tension with the next verse, however, which indicates that "equality" does not tell the whole story.

1:3. "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation.*" There is only one article in the phrase ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ; thus the two titles of "God" and "Father" identify the same subject. Consequently, God is not only the Father of Jesus but also the God of Jesus.⁵⁴³ In other words, when making the distinction between the Father and Jesus, Paul thought of Jesus outside or beyond the identity of God. This language indicates some type of subordination of Jesus to God. We might suppose God and Jesus to be two persons who are ontologically equal, yet with Jesus being functionally subordinate in some sense, although this type of explanation stretches Jewish monotheism quite far and imposes a degree of

⁵³⁸ Cullmann, *Christology of the NT*, 215.

⁵³⁹ Cullmann, *Christology of the NT*, 218.

⁵⁴⁰ See Gen 6:8; Exod 33:13-17; Prov 3:34.

⁵⁴¹ Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 56.

⁵⁴² Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 136.

⁵⁴³ Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 142.

philosophical complexity not immediately apparent from the text. Perhaps an easier explanation is that, for Paul, Jesus was a genuine human being who served God and yet in whom God dwelt; thus he could be identified with God as the manifestation of God. The significance of the distancing language is to say something new about the identity of God in relation to God's people. The OT identified God by covenant relationships—the God of Abraham, the God of Israel. Now God is revealed by God's actions in and through Christ. Jesus Christ reveals both how God is God and how God is Father.⁵⁴⁴

1:13b-14. *“I hope you will understand until the end—as you have already understood us in part—that on the day of the Lord Jesus we are your boast even as you are our boast.”* As in 1 Cor 1:7-8, Paul spoke of the end-time day of judgment as “the day of the Lord Jesus.”

1:19. *“For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not ‘Yes and No’; but in him it is always ‘Yes.’”* The title “Son of God” appears only here in the Corinthian correspondence, although “Son” appears in 1 Cor 1:9; 15:28. As we discussed at 1 Cor 1:9, the title underscores the genuine human identity of Jesus, the one who died and rose again, which is the content of the proclamation about him (1 Cor 15:1-4).

1:21-22. *“But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first installment.”* Here we have triadic language, which perhaps could support the construction of a trinitarian model. As in 2:14 and 3:3, however, it is instrumental in nature. God secures believers in their union with Christ and imparts God's Spirit to them as a seal and pledge.

2:10. *“Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ.”* Christ is present in the lives of believers and observes their conduct. In this life believers stand before Christ to give account of their actions; this reality foreshadows Christ's judgment to come (5:10).

2:12. *“When I came to Troas to proclaim the good news of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord.”* Christ opened a door of ministry for Paul. Not only did Paul preach about Christ, but Christ was active in guiding his ministry.

2:14. *“But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing*

⁵⁴⁴ Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 59.

him.” Believers enjoy present victory by the work of God in Christ, and their lives are transformed by having a personal relationship with Christ. Roman generals celebrated a foreign military victory by a procession in Rome upon their return. The dual reference describes one general, not two. God as manifested in Christ is the triumphant general.

3:3. *“And you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”* The Corinthian believers are a letter from Christ, written by Paul by means of God’s Spirit. Christ was the true founder of the Corinthian church and the true author of the new spiritual lives of believers there. Paul was his agent or scribe, working through the Spirit. As we will discuss in ch. 6, Paul drew from OT passages in which God promised to write God’s laws on the hearts of people and give them a new spirit (Jer 31:33; Ezek 11:19-20; 36:26-27). Here Christ assumes the functions of God and employs God’s Spirit.

3:17-18. *“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.”* As we will discuss in ch. 6, this passage identifies Jesus with Yahweh and with God’s Spirit.

4:4-6. *“In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”* As we will discuss in ch. 6, this passage identifies Jesus as the glory of God and the image of God.

4:10. *“Always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.”* Jesus is alive and lives in believers. The goal of believers is to reveal the living Christ to others.

4:14. *“Because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence.”* This verse parallels 1 Cor 6:14 and 15:15, which name the one who raised Jesus from the dead as God. Once again, this dual reference distinguishes Jesus from God by identifying Jesus with humans.

5:1. *“For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”* Although the

reference is to the future resurrection body of believers, we may have here an allusion to the description of Christ's body as the temple of God's presence.⁵⁴⁵

5:8. *"Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord."* Paul's hope after death was to dwell with Jesus, his Lord.

5:10. *"For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil."* The OT identifies Yahweh as "the Judge of all the earth" and ascribes to him the role of supreme judge,⁵⁴⁶ yet here (and in Rom 14:9-10) Jesus will be the judge of the human race.

5:11. *"Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences."* In the OT, the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom (Prov 1:7; 9:10), yet Paul was motivated by the fear of the Lord Jesus.

5:17. *"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"* In the OT, Yahweh is the creator (Isa 40:28; 43:15), yet believers become a new creation in Christ. The life of believers is transformed by their relationship with the living Christ. In v. 15 Paul said Christ "died for all." Death is an event that occurs to humans, while creation is an act of God. According to this passage Christ has both divine and human functions.

5:18-20. *"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."* This passage further describes the significance of Christ's death and his work of new creation. This work of Christ is actually the work of God. God is the one who has reconciled us to God's self using Christ as the means. God could not die in any physical sense, yet somehow Christ's death is a divine event that brings sinful humans into relationship with God and gives them new life.

Verse 19 explains how the death of Christ can actually be the reconciling work of God. The first clause in Greek is: *ὡς ὅτι θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῷ κόσμον καταλλάσσει*

⁵⁴⁵ Scott Hafemann, review of C. Marvin Pate, *Adam Christology as the Exegetical and Theological Substructure of 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:21*, *JBL* 113 (1994): 347. See John 1:14; 2:21.

⁵⁴⁶ Gen 18:25; 1 Sam 2:10, 25; Ps 7:8; 50:6; 75:7; Isa 33:22.

ἐαυτῶ. The most natural reading based on the word order would be: “Namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (NASB) or “For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself” (NLT). A note in the NRSV says: “Or *God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.*” To most contemporary commentators, however, this meaning seems too incarnational for this early date, especially since the opening words, ὡς ὅτι (“that is”), indicate Paul was quoting a traditional doctrinal confession.⁵⁴⁷ They typically conclude that Paul probably employed a traditional formulation but did not intend it as an explicit incarnational statement because the idea of incarnation is not otherwise present in Paul’s letters or in this context.⁵⁴⁸

The question is how to translate the key words θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῶ κόσμον καταλλάσσω. The two most likely options are: (1) “God was reconciling the world in (= through) Christ, i.e., by his agency”; and (2) “God was in Christ, reconciling the world.”⁵⁴⁹ Linguistically, both are possible although BDF notes that ὡς ὅτι θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῶ is equivalent to ὡς θεοῦ ὄντος ἐν Χριστῶ (“that God being in Christ . . .”), which supports the second option.⁵⁵⁰

The first option makes ἐν Χριστῶ (“in Christ”) the equivalent of διὰ Χριστοῦ (“through Christ”).⁵⁵¹ The grammatical context favors the second option: “after the ἐν Χριστῶ of v. 17 and διὰ Χριστοῦ of v. 18, it would be confusing, to say the least, if Paul did not intend ἐν Χριστῶ to have its normal meaning in v. 19.”⁵⁵² A mediating possibility is that ἐν indicates instrumentality while also alluding to God’s presence in Christ. If so, the concept of incarnation would be present although not stated explicitly.⁵⁵³ For our purposes it is sufficient to note that, under any interpretation, this verse designates a unique, exalted status for Christ. Furthermore, the second option is more compelling, namely, “God was in Christ.”⁵⁵⁴ The reasons are as follows:

⁵⁴⁷ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 334; Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:433.

⁵⁴⁸ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 318.

⁵⁴⁹ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 153-54.

⁵⁵⁰ BDF, 396.2.

⁵⁵¹ Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:434.

⁵⁵² Richardson, *Paul’s Language*, 292.

⁵⁵³ Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:434. She presented but did not adopt this view.

⁵⁵⁴ Adopting this option are Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (14 vols.; 1932-1977; repr., New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 4.2:86; Greenwood, “The Lord Is the Spirit,” 470; Richardson, *Paul’s Language*, 334; Dunn, *Christology*, 209; Talbert, *Development of Christology*, 116; Larry W. Hurtado, “Did the First Christians Worship Jesus? A Review Essay,” n.p. [cited 4 February 2013]. Online: <http://larryhurtado.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/dunn-was-jesus-worshipped-review.pdf>.

First, while a full concept of incarnation may not be enunciated in the context, throughout the Corinthian correspondence Paul used exalted language to equate Christ with Yahweh. In the immediate context, he proclaimed Christ as the supreme judge and as creator (2 Cor 5:10, 17), roles otherwise reserved for Yahweh, showing Paul could “mentally fuse the two.”⁵⁵⁵

Second, in the context, Paul declared the gospel has been revealed through Christ as the image and glory of God (2 Cor 4:4-6). Later in the letter, he described the generous act of Christ, who was rich yet who became poor for our salvation (2 Cor 8:9). This verse surely communicates incarnational concepts,⁵⁵⁶ so we cannot rule out an incarnational understanding of 5:19 on contextual grounds.

Third, when we examine the rhetorical situation, the idea that “God was in Christ” is intertwined with the idea that “God was . . . reconciling the world to himself,” for in Pauline thought reconciliation is specifically God’s act in Christ, not merely Christ’s act on behalf of God. “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:4). From his own conversion experience, which lies behind 2 Cor 5:16-17, Paul associated Yahweh’s revelation in Christ with Yahweh’s work of reconciliation. “The creator God was himself acting in and through Christ . . . so that Christ’s death in particular was an enactment of God’s love.”⁵⁵⁷ “It [2 Cor 5:19] obviously means that all that God is, without either needing or being subject to any change or diminution or increase, is characterized by the fact that He is everything divine, not for Himself only, but also, in his Son, for the sake of man and for him.”⁵⁵⁸

Fourth, the letter to the Colossians—whether we regard it as a letter from Paul himself or someone writing in the Pauline school of thought—communicates a similar concept. Speaking of Christ it says, “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:19-10). “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9).⁵⁵⁹ We see a clear connection

⁵⁵⁵ Greenwood, “The Lord Is the Spirit,” 470.

⁵⁵⁶ Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 306.

⁵⁵⁷ Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 195; idem, *Christology*, 379.

⁵⁵⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4.2:86.

⁵⁵⁹ Barth connected 2 Cor 5:19 with Col 2:9 (*Church Dogmatics*, 4.2:86), and Dunn connected 2 Cor 5:19 with Col 1:19 (*Christology in the Making*, 196).

and development of christological thought in the description of Christ as “the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4) and “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). There is also a connection and development of thought from “image of God” to “fullness of deity . . . bodily” (σωματικῶς).⁵⁶⁰ We can likewise see the connection and progression from the statement that God was “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ) to the statement that all the fullness of the Deity was “in him” (ἐν αὐτῷ). Moreover, Col 1:19-20 makes explicit what we are arguing for 2 Cor 5:19; namely, God chose to dwell fully in Christ in order to bring reconciliation and peace by the cross of Christ.

In short, on the basis of the Greek grammar and context the preferable translation of 2 Cor 5:19 according to *NIDNTT* is: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.” *NIDNTT* gives this reason: “It was only because God in all his fullness had chosen to dwell in Christ, only because there dwelt embodied in Christ the total plentitude of Deity (Col 2:9), that reconciliation was accomplished.”⁵⁶¹ After giving five detailed grammatical reasons to prefer the translation “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself,” Harris said the phrase is not a direct reference to incarnation because there is no specific concept of dwelling or taking up residence. There is, however, “a functional Christology [that] presupposes, and finds its ultimate basis in, an ontological Christology. Not only was Christ God’s agent in effecting reconciliation . . . he also mediated the divine presence, thus giving validity to his reconciliatory sacrifice. God was in Christ and therefore acted through Christ.”⁵⁶² This meaning fits well with Paul’s own testimony as recounted in Acts. As an enemy of God, Paul was reconciled to God by a Christophany, the manifestation of God in Christ.

In the context, Paul had already said “one [Jesus Christ] has died for all” (v. 14) and God “reconciled us to himself through Christ” (v. 18). In v. 19 he did more than simply restate the thought of v. 18. He expanded it to the whole world (as already indicated in v. 14), but he also explained the connection between Christ’s death and God’s work of reconciliation. The two statements are not in conflict, nor do they describe two different acts. Instead, v. 19 explains how the two previous thoughts merge together as one. Because God was in Christ, the death of Christ for all is in fact God’s act of reconciliation for the world. “God was doing the reconciling. . . . Christ’s act is the act of

⁵⁶⁰ Kim, *Origin of Paul’s Gospel*, 227. He suggested equating σωματικῶς to εἰκονικῶς (imagelike).

⁵⁶¹ Murray J. Harris, “Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament,” *NIDNTT* 3:1193.

⁵⁶² Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 441-43.

God.”⁵⁶³ Even if the full conception of incarnation comes later, the basic ideas are present in 2 Cor 5: the human identity of Christ (v. 15), the divine identity of Christ (v. 17), and the integration of these two concepts with the reconciling work of God in Christ (vv. 18-19). Moreover, the passage uses both God- and Christ-language to convey the full idea.

For Richardson, 2 Cor 5:19 is highly significant in understanding Paul’s view of Christ:

I am suggesting, therefore, that Paul’s use of ὡς ὅτι in 2 Cor. 5.19 gives us a remarkable glimpse into the mind of a Jew struggling to express the “radically new” and coming, in the process, to the very brink of incarnational language. . . . “Namely that (as some put it) it was ‘God in Christ,’ reconciling the world to himself.” . . . “Incarnational” language of this kind was the logical corollary of Paul’s other statements that juxtapose God- and Christ-language.⁵⁶⁴

While Paul may have organized and expanded the understanding of Christ in a new way—exemplified by 2 Cor 5:19 and later Col 1:15-19—as we have already noted in both passages he apparently quoted from early traditional material such as a confession and a hymn. Thus, the elements for the deification of Christ go back to the earliest strata of distinctively Christian thought, even predating Paul’s writings.

Verse 20 continues with the dual language of God and Christ, underscoring Christ’s death as the reconciling work of God. In acting as Christ’s ambassador Paul was simultaneously acting as God’s spokesperson. For him, to represent Christ was to represent God (as revealed in Christ).

6:15-16. *“What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’”* God’s people are God’s temple, or dwelling place, yet God’s temple is also equated with Christ. This thought is similar to the description of the church as “the body of Christ” (1 Cor 12:27) and Christian communion as the “table of the Lord” (1 Cor 10:21).

⁵⁶³ Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 177.

⁵⁶⁴ Richardson, *Paul’s Language*, 295-96.

8:9. *“For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”*

Here we have what is possibly the most incarnational language in Paul’s Corinthian correspondence. In the rhetorical situation, it is not in an attempt to establish the identity of Jesus but part of an appeal for an offering. Paul did not consider the idea to be controversial or innovative but expected the Corinthians to understand and acknowledge the truth of the statement. He stated the accepted belief of the early Christians.

Paul probably quoted “traditional words”⁵⁶⁵ or “a creedal sentence,”⁵⁶⁶ or at least this verse is his “free adaptation of a traditional theological statement.”⁵⁶⁷ The use of the full name “Lord Jesus Christ” indicates a possible liturgical background. Although Furnish was reluctant to interpret 5:19 as incarnational, he acknowledged that 8:9 speaks of the incarnation of Christ.⁵⁶⁸ Indeed, this passage is typically seen as incarnational.⁵⁶⁹

We should be careful not to read later ideas back into this text, however. The verse seems to assume preexistence in some way, but it need not require the preexistence of Christ as a divine being distinct from God the Father, for other passages of this nature are “allusive and strongly metaphorical.”⁵⁷⁰ It is sufficient to understand that, for Paul, the Lord of glory was uniquely revealed in the humble human person of Jesus, and his example is instructive for believers. Christ’s sacrificial giving, not an explanation of his ontological preexistence, is the basis for the appeal to give an offering.

8:21. *“For we intend to do what is right not only in the Lord’s sight but also in the sight of others.”* Christ oversees the life and ministry of believers, which implies the divine attributes of omniscience and omnipresence. Once again, believers give account to Christ as Lord in their daily lives. This verse is parallel to Prov 3:4, with Christ assuming God’s role: “So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and of people.”

10:4b-5. *“We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.”* Christ is Lord even of the thought life of believers. Christ has power over all opposing forces, rational and

⁵⁶⁵ Hanson, *Image of the Invisible God*, 264.

⁵⁶⁶ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 263.

⁵⁶⁷ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 417.

⁵⁶⁸ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 417.

⁵⁶⁹ Hanson, *Image of the Invisible God*, 263; Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 291; Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 407-8; Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 223; Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 579.

⁵⁷⁰ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 291.

spiritual, and empowers believers to overcome them. By implication Christ has the divine attribute of omnipotence.

10:8. *“Now, even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it.”* Christ is the source of Paul’s apostolic authority. Christ works through Paul to build up the church.

10:17. *“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”* In the context of describing ministry for Christ, Paul again quoted from Jer 9:24. The Lord of this OT passage is Yahweh, whom Paul identified with Jesus Christ.

10:18. *“For it is not those who commend themselves that are approved, but those whom the Lord commends.”* The source of true commendation and approval is Christ, here again identified as the Lord God of the OT.⁵⁷¹

11:2. *“I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”* Christ is the husband of believers. In the OT, Yahweh was the husband of Israel (Isa 54:5; Hos 2:16). In Jer 31:31-34, Yahweh proclaimed that, although he had been the husband of Israel, she had broken his covenant. Nevertheless, he would establish a new covenant in which he would write his laws on the hearts of his people. Paul alluded to this promise in 2 Cor 3:2-3, but under the new covenant Christ is the husband of God’s people. Once again, we see Christ in the NT fulfilling the role of Yahweh in the OT.

11:31. *“The God and Father of the Lord Jesus (blessed be he forever!) knows that I do not lie.”* As in 1:3 there is only one article for “God and Father,” so the translation accurately says “the God and Father of the Lord Jesus” and not “God, the Father of the Lord Jesus.”⁵⁷² Thus when Paul distinguished Jesus from the Father he did so with reference to identification outside of divinity, namely, with reference to humanity.

12:8. *“Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me.”* In the context, the Lord is clearly Jesus Christ, for Paul requested divine power, which v. 10 identifies as “the power of Christ.” Significantly, Paul prayed directly to the post-resurrection, exalted Christ. Moreover, he did not pray to Christ as if he were an intermediate agent who would in turn present the request to a superior being, but he appealed directly to Christ to solve his problem by Christ’s power. Paul’s monotheistic heritage required him to address such prayers to Yahweh alone. Moreover, Paul

⁵⁷¹ Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 269.

⁵⁷² Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 818-19.

mentioned this practice in the context of vindicating his apostolic authority, exhibiting confidence that none of the factions in Corinth would find it innovative or objectionable.

12:9. *“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”* Paul reported that Christ answered his prayer and imparted power to him. He quoted a prophetic utterance from Christ, much as the OT prophets recited words from Yahweh. Here Christ acts as a divine figure to give revelation, direction, grace, and strength to Paul, and by extension he can do so for all believers.

13:3a. *“Since you desire proof that Christ is speaking in me.”* As proof of Paul’s apostleship, the Corinthians expected Christ to speak in (ἐν) him—for Christ to dwell in him in the sense of empowerment and to speak from within him. Again, this concept is not an innovation of Paul’s but something he and his readers held in common. And again, Paul derived his authority from the superior authority of Christ.

13:4. *“For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.”* Here Paul described Christ in a dual way much like 8:9: both weak and strong, both poor and rich. He was capable of dying out of or because of (ἐκ) human weakness, but he lives because of (ἐκ) God’s power. This duality of weakness and power reveals the character of the one God who is manifested in Christ: God identified with weakness in the crucifixion, which demonstrates divine grace, while the resurrection demonstrates God’s power.⁵⁷³

13:5. *“Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test!”* Likewise, Paul expected the Corinthians to understand Christ was in (ἐν) them. They were to examine themselves to verify the indwelling presence of Jesus.

13:13/14. *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”* The equivalent statement at the end of 1 Corinthians is simply, *“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you”* (16:23). In 2 Cor 13:13/14 we have an expanded invocation of Jesus. According to both passages divine grace comes directly from Jesus, and the petition is directly to him. While this phrase makes a threefold reference to deity in contrast to Paul’s more typical singular or dual references, we should not read a developed trinitarianism back into this verse, such as

⁵⁷³ Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 335-36.

three persons in one substance.⁵⁷⁴ Doing so would be anachronistic, as these concepts involved several centuries of development, although we can trace their roots to texts such as this.⁵⁷⁵ Paul did not use the traditional trinitarian designations and order of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit but varied his language to highlight certain attributes and works of God. Grace was particularly associated with the work of God in Christ, love is the essence of the one God, and communion with God and fellow believers comes through the action of the one God in human lives, namely, by participation in the Holy Spirit. Barth identified the focal point of the verse as the saving work of Jesus. The second and third phrases both begin with καὶ (“and”), and they explain what the first phrase has already stated. Thus the meaning is: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, in which the love of God is exercised, and the communion of the Spirit disclosed and imparted, be with you all.”⁵⁷⁶ Speaking of and to Jesus in this context is a strong indication of deity, “for it would be blasphemous for a monotheistic Jew to associate a mere mortal with God in a formal, religious salutation or benediction.”⁵⁷⁷

Indeed it is not too much to say that we have here a genuine prayer to Christ, as we see from a comparison with similar statements in the Thessalonian correspondence.⁵⁷⁸ In 1 Thess 3:11-13 we have a prayer for direction, love, and holiness addressed to “our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus”:

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

While Paul referred first to God in transcendence and then to God as revealed in Jesus, he clearly did not envision two different beings, for the verb in v. 11 is singular—“may he direct” (κατευθύναι). Moreover, the subject in vv. 12-13 is also singular—“the Lord” (ὁ κύριος). In v. 13 Paul distinguished “our God and Father” from “our Lord Jesus” by

⁵⁷⁴ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 587.

⁵⁷⁵ Hurtado, *God in NT Theology*, 45-47.

⁵⁷⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4.2:766.

⁵⁷⁷ Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 938. See Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 345.

⁵⁷⁸ Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 105; idem, “Binitarian Shape of Early Christian Worship,” 105.

speaking of spiritual presence and physical manifestation: Jesus will appear physically on earth with his saints, and believers will stand in the presence of the Father.

In 2 Thess 2:16-17 there is a similar prayer for comfort and strength using the two designations in reverse order: “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.” Again, the verbal forms are singular—literally, “the [one] having loved . . . and . . . having given” (ὁ ἀγαπήσας . . . καὶ . . . δούς), “may he comfort . . . and strengthen” (παρκαλέσαι . . . καὶ στηρίξει). From the singular verbs in these passages, we see an identification of God and Christ to the extent that God acted in Christ.⁵⁷⁹

Conclusions

Our survey of the Corinthian correspondence reveals that Paul spoke of Jesus in various ways: fundamentally as a human who died and rose again; sometimes as Yahweh, the one God of Israel; and yet somehow in distinction from God. He expressed this distinction by two sets of titles: God and Father versus Lord, Christ, and (occasionally) Son. Even so, he often spoke of Jesus Christ in terms otherwise reserved for deity. While affirming Christ to be a true human being, he thought of him as resurrected, glorified, dwelling in heaven, and manifesting all the characteristics and attributes of God. At the same time, he dwells spiritually in believers and gives them power for salvation, daily life, and ministry.

Specifically, Paul identified Jesus as the Lord, using the title as the OT uses it of Yahweh, the one true God. In asserting the exclusive lordship of Jesus, Paul applied OT texts about Yahweh to the Lord Jesus, but in doing so he did not perceive a violation of historic Jewish monotheism.⁵⁸⁰ Indeed, he and other early Christians made a direct connection between the OT worship of Yahweh and their own worship of Jesus.⁵⁸¹ They appropriated OT language about God to describe Jesus because only in this way could they communicate the full reality of their experience with Jesus. In doing so, they expressed that “to see Jesus in action . . . is to see God in action.”⁵⁸²

⁵⁷⁹ Richardson, *Paul's Language*, 263.

⁵⁸⁰ Dunn, *Christology*, 16.

⁵⁸¹ Hurtado, “Binitarian Shape of Early Christian Worship,” 198-99.

⁵⁸² Craig Evans, *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospel* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2008), 151-55.

To illustrate, the Corinthian correspondence attributes deity to Jesus in various socio-rhetorical contexts as follows:

- Salutations: identifying Jesus as source of divine grace and peace (1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2)
- Invocation of Jesus as Lord (1 Cor 1:2), paralleling the invocation of Yahweh and sacrificial worship to Yahweh in the OT. A similar parallel to OT sacrificial worship is the recognition of Jesus as Lord of the ritual meal (1 Cor 10:21).
- Confession of Jesus as Lord (1 Cor 8:6; 12:3; 2 Cor 4:5), paralleling the Jewish identification of Yahweh as Lord (Adonai/Kyrios)
- Description of the eschatological judgment day of the Lord (day of Yahweh in the OT) as the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 1:8; 2 Cor 1:14)
- Direct, personal prayer to Jesus (1 Cor 16:22; 2 Cor 12:8)
- Authoritative, prophetic utterance from the heavenly Jesus (2 Cor 12:9)
- Benedictions: invoking Jesus as imparter of divine grace (1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 13:13/14)

Significantly, some of Paul's deification rhetoric comes from pre-Pauline liturgy and thus reflects both early and widespread belief: 1 Cor 8:6; 16:22; 2 Cor 5:19; 8:9 (as well as Phil 2:9-11; Col 1:15-20). In the foregoing usage, we see the "intensity of devotion to Jesus."⁵⁸³ We also see that "Jewish monotheism is now to be expressed and confessed *christologically*."⁵⁸⁴ Elaborating on this concept, Richardson explained:

Paul's θεός-language is dependent on Χριστός-language for its full explication. . . . Paul had begun to think of God and Christ in such close intimacy that the same qualities and actions could be attributed to both. . . . There is a prima facie case for the view that κύριος-language functions as θεός-language. That does not mean that there is a simple identification of Christ with God. Rather, the exalted Lord stands *in loco Dei*.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸³ Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, 208.

⁵⁸⁴ Richardson, *Paul's Language*, 285.

⁵⁸⁵ Richardson, *Paul's Language*, 255, 273, 288.

Paul did not simply equate Christ with God. He sometimes used dual references to distinguish Christ from God. It is possible to understand these dual references as indicating some inconsistency in Paul's thought or inconsistency with Paul's previous monotheism. They could indicate an incipient or developed binitarianism. On the other hand, in some of these instances Paul clearly described God as acting through Christ. Moreover, when making a distinction between God and Christ, Paul spoke of Christ as a man outside the identity of God not as a second entity within God.⁵⁸⁶ The focus is on Christ as a true human rather than a second divine person in a binitarian model. Thus, Paul's main point seems to be that under the new covenant God acts in and through Christ as God's manifestation in human identity. Because of God's new manner of operation, God-language is needed to explain Christ and vice versa; moreover, God-language and Lord-language do not typically appear together, but alternatively.⁵⁸⁷ The reason is that the title of Lord now refers primarily to Jesus Christ as the revelation of God. God-language refers primarily to God in transcendence, while Lord-language and Christ-language focus on the tangible, human Christ. As we discussed in ch. 4, in human society the title of Lord also had political and social implications.

In the Corinthian correspondence, Paul spoke of Jesus as participating in divine titles, attributes, and activities; thus he did not think of Jesus merely as an exalted human or even an angelic being. For example, there is no indication he would have been comfortable speaking of Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Michael, or Gabriel in the terms he used of Jesus. Similarly, Paul's language does not easily lend itself to an Arian interpretation, for he saw Christ as the source of divine grace and the direct object of prayer. His portrait is not one of a second, subordinate being—whether divine or human—but of the one God acting in, through, and as Jesus Christ.

According to Nicholson, while there is some “apparently hierarchical language” concerning God and Jesus, such as in 1 Cor 8:4-6 and 15:24-28, it does not define a “subordinate relationship” but instead has “a boundary-setting function” of preventing a disconnection between the two: “The exalted Christ has not superseded the one God; Jesus is not a new God, nor is Yahweh an outmoded deity. . . . The plans of the one God

⁵⁸⁶ See our discussions of 1 Cor 6:14; 11:3; 15:15; 2 Cor 1:3; 4:14; 11:31.

⁵⁸⁷ See Richardson, *Paul's Language*, 268, 281.

have not changed. Instead, they come to their fulfillment in Christ.” We cannot separate God from Christ, for it is the one God who redeems humanity through Christ.⁵⁸⁸

In later trinitarian explanations God, Jesus, and the Spirit are three distinct, coequal persons. Since the Corinthian correspondence does not emphasize a threefold distinction, binitarianism would be more descriptive of most of the texts we have examined. Moreover, Paul did not enunciate an explicit concept of coequal persons or divine centers of consciousness. Such ideas would have been a significant modification of traditional Jewish monotheism from the perspective both of Paul and of his readers. We would thus expect an extensive explanation and defense of such a concept. As Greenwood explained:⁵⁸⁹

St. Paul’s Christology was a functional one. . . . The apostle did not see Jesus’s divinity as a nature, but as the activity of God in Christ. . . . Essential Christology, with its division of God into a trinity of three persons, with two natures in the second person, is post-Pauline. It is not meaningful to speak of the *being* of the Son of God in St. Paul’s theology: the apostle saw Him as inseparable from Yahweh’s revelatory action.

To summarize, Paul thought of Jesus as unique—as much more than an exalted human, a prophet, a patriarch, or even an angelic being. At the same time, he did not clearly describe a plurality of persons or the Godhead as an abstraction containing multiple persons. Rather, God is personal as in the OT. Jesus is the personal God manifested, expressed, revealed, or extended into human flesh. In this way, Jesus is equated to the one God, and yet as a human there is a sense in which he is distinct from God. The distinction is not one of separate divine personhood, which was foreign to Jewish monotheism. Rather, the distinction is between God as ruling in heaven and God as revealed in and working through Jesus. If our understanding of 2 Cor 5:19 and 8:9 is correct, we can say the distinction is between God transcendent and God incarnate. This terminology raises the question of precisely how the transcendent God can simultaneously be the incarnate God. The historical answer is binitarianism or trinitarianism, although the complete explanation from this perspective takes us beyond

⁵⁸⁸ Nicholson, *Dynamic Oneness*, 37-38, 246. She wrote in a trinitarian context.

⁵⁸⁹ Greenwood, “The Lord Is the Spirit,” 470.

first-century thought. Nevertheless, the question itself is meaningful in the first-century rhetorical world because the same kind of language and thought appear in Greek myths and novels with reference to gods who appear as humans and humans who are recognized as the incarnated deity.⁵⁹⁰ The Bible itself contains examples of such thought.⁵⁹¹

What are we to make of Paul's various statements about Jesus? There are at least five options, possibly with some overlap:

1. *Paul's description of Jesus was not always consistent and perhaps was even contradictory.* While this hypothesis could account for some of the evidence, it is not sufficient to explain everything. Even when a writer seems to be self-contradictory we still look for a central, coherent core of thought.⁵⁹² More specifically, if Paul's letters had been confusing to the Corinthians or contradictory to preexisting Jewish Christian beliefs, his opponents would have attacked him on this point, and he would have been forced to correct, defend, or explain his christological statements. The Corinthian correspondence provides no evidence of his doing so, however.

2. *Paul essentially thought of Jesus as a human being only.* If there were only a few divine allusions, this solution might be plausible, but Paul identified Jesus with God too many times and in too many different ways.

3. *Paul essentially thought of Jesus as a subordinate divine being.* There is some language of subordination. If Jesus was the divine equivalent of an angel or an exalted patriarch then Jewish monotheism could be preserved—at least from the perspective of some noncanonical Jewish texts, although not from the perspective of late first-century and early second-century rabbis. However, this hypothesis does not fully account for passages in which Paul actually equated Jesus with Yahweh, ascribed worship to Jesus, and ascribed to Jesus unique divine functions such as creation, rulership, and salvation. As an alternate explanation, the subordinationistic language protects the authentic humanity of Jesus and prevents a bifurcation of God from the OT to the NT as we see later in Marcion and Valentinus.

4. *Paul essentially thought of Jesus as a divine being separate or distinct from God but equal to God.* A separate divine being would violate Jewish monotheism, but the

⁵⁹⁰ For example, "a conception of the miracle-working divine man was . . . available in the Hellenistic period and the first century A.D." Jaap-Jan Flinterman, "The Ubiquitous 'Divine Man': Review Article," *Numen* 43 (1996): 89-90.

⁵⁹¹ Dan 11:36-37 (Antiochus Epiphanes); John 10:33; Acts 14:11-15; 28:3-6; Rev 19:10. The examples in Acts are pagan.

⁵⁹² See n.204.

Corinthian correspondence gives no indication of either Paul's supporters or opponents interpreting his words in this way. If Jesus were somehow distinct yet "included" within the Godhead, this concept would still be a significant innovation in the context of first-century Judaism, what we might anachronistically call binitarianism or trinitarianism. A historical question is whether first-century Jewish Christians such as Paul were prepared to think in the implied philosophical categories. For instance, this view requires a shift from the OT analogy of God as a personal actor to a more abstract notion of God as a substance within which multiple personal actors can be included, preserving the oneness of God only at the impersonal level of essence.

5. *Paul essentially thought of Jesus as the epiphany, manifestation, or incarnation of the one God; Jesus as God in self-revelation.* This view is consistent with Jewish monotheism, uses categories of thought available in both Jewish and Hellenistic circles, and fits Paul's use of dual language to distinguish Jesus from God according to his human identity. However, the concept of incarnation would still be a significant innovation in the context of Jewish monotheism, although it was prevalent in Greco-Roman culture. A historical question is whether first-century Christians such as Paul were prepared to think of the one God as becoming incarnate. Moreover, on the surface, some of Paul's dual language lends itself more readily to options (3) and (4). An exegetical and ultimately a theological question is whether we can adequately explain Paul's dual language by the concept of one transcendent God who became incarnate as a human being, or whether two divine persons, personalities, divine centers of consciousness, or eternal modes of being are necessary. The distinction between Father and Son implies two centers of consciousness. If so, is the contrast between divine consciousness and human consciousness or between two centers of consciousness within God's being? Even among trinitarians, theologians differ on the answer to these questions.⁵⁹³

⁵⁹³ See, for example, Norman Metzler, "The Trinity in Contemporary Theology: Questioning the Social Trinity," *CTQ* 67 (2003): 270-87; John Hick, "The Logic of God Incarnate: A Review," *RelS* 25 (1989): 409-23. Metzler described Barth and Moltmann as holding contrasting views of God, namely, "one personality" versus "three centers of conscious activity" (273, 277). He argued for God as "a distinct, individual center of consciousness and potential for action" as opposed to a social trinitarian theory of "three distinct and separate personalities" (282-83). In a review of *The Logic of God Incarnate* by Thomas Morris, Hick described ways in which theologians explain the Chalcedonian doctrine of Christ as having two natures in one person. He agreed with Morris about the problematic nature of the kenotic view that "in becoming incarnate God the Son temporarily divested himself of such divine aspects as are incompatible with being genuinely human." However, he also critiqued Morris's "two-minds view of Christ," in which God incarnate has "something like two distinct ranges of consciousness," divine and human (416).

A final choice among these options would require an extensive examination of all of Paul's writings in the context of the other writings of the NT and of the first four centuries C.E., which is beyond the scope of the present thesis. Based on the Corinthian correspondence, options (4) and (5) are the most plausible. Either one, however, involves complexities that go beyond a surface reading, as we will explore in ch. 7. Either one is consistent with our inquiry into the motivation for the deification of Jesus, which is the primary question that the present thesis attempts to address.

In further discussion of option (1), Talbert made a proposal that brings coherence to what may otherwise appear to be inconsistent or contradictory language; namely, early Christians used four different models drawn from contemporary culture to describe the role of Jesus. These models are not mutually exclusive but complementary, culturally relevant descriptions of the significance of Jesus for early Christians. The four models appear in two patterns: The first pattern is a human taken up into heaven in order to (1a) return as eschatological judge, savior, or helper or (1b) exercise present sovereignty. The second pattern is a preexistent being who descends from heaven for a purpose and then ascends back again, either as (2a) an epiphany of a true deity or (2b) the indwelling of a human by a divinity.⁵⁹⁴

In Talbert's estimation Paul used both models of the first pattern and one or both models of the second pattern without trying to systematize his thought, which is why putting all his statements together seems "jarring" on the surface.⁵⁹⁵ Using these models, we conclude that in the Corinthian correspondence Paul used language related to all four of these concepts, in a functional rather than an ontological description of Jesus. (1a) The risen Jesus is the eschatological judge and savior: 1 Cor 1:7-8; 4:4-5; 15:51-57; 16:22; 2 Cor 5:10. (1b) The risen Jesus is sovereign in this present age: 1 Cor 1:10; 10:26; 2 Cor 8:21; 12:8-9; 13:3-4. This model also explains 1 Cor 15:24-28. (2a) Jesus is the creator and the epiphany of God: 1 Cor 8:6; 2 Cor 4:4-6. (2b) Jesus is indwelt by God, with the implication of incarnation: 2 Cor 5:19; 8:9.⁵⁹⁶ Paul's identification of Jesus with or as Yahweh demonstrates the second pattern to be significant, even if not always clearly defined.

⁵⁹⁴ Talbert, *Development of Christology*, 7.

⁵⁹⁵ Talbert, *Development of Christology*, 33.

⁵⁹⁶ This concept is developed in Col 1:19; 2:9; 1 Tim 3:16; Titus 2:13. In the last two, epiphany becomes more than a change of form so that "incarnation is implied." Talbert, *Development of Christology*, 21.

In any case, whatever the precise theological explanation of the dual references to God and Christ in Paul's Corinthian correspondence—or even if there is no systematic, comprehensive explanation—for the purposes of our study one point is clear. Throughout the Corinthian correspondence, Paul spoke of Jesus in terms that monotheistic Jews did not use of a mere human. Indeed, he attributed to Jesus many titles and works that the OT associates exclusively with Yahweh. Considered individually, some of his phrases are subject to various interpretations and would not compel this conclusion, but taken as a whole the effect is to deify Jesus. This pervasive deification language in the Corinthian correspondence provides the context for understanding the terms and phrases Paul used to describe Jesus in 2 Cor 3:16–4:6.

EXEGESIS OF 2 CORINTHIANS 3:16–4:6

As we discussed in ch. 5, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to explain and defend his ministry, particularly in response to opponents who had newly arrived at the Corinthian church. Our selected text, 2 Cor 3:16–4:6, is embedded in the heart of the letter.⁵⁹⁷ It is part of a lengthy section that discusses the main theme of the letter, namely, the apostolic ministry of Paul.⁵⁹⁸

Immediate Literary Background

We will follow the decision of several commentators who identify this section as beginning at 2 Cor 2:14 and ending at 7:4. They have described it as a “lengthy articulation of the nature and purpose of his ministry,”⁵⁹⁹ a “defense of the ministry of the new covenant,”⁶⁰⁰ and a “defence of the apostolic ministry.”⁶⁰¹

Paul had previously experienced challenges to his authority in the Corinthian church and had responded in 1 Cor 9. There he appealed to his authority as an apostle, his personal encounter with the Lord, his establishing of the church, and their fellowship with him in the Lord. “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?” (1 Cor 9:1). But circumstances had changed with the arrival of pseudo-apostles. They claimed their understanding and experience were superior to his, they asserted their alleged apostolic authority against his (probably claiming the authority of the mother church in Jerusalem), and they cultivated their own relationship with the Corinthians in his absence. The conflict had mutated and intensified due to these new Jewish Christian voices. Consequently Paul was compelled to explain the difference

⁵⁹⁷ Our exegesis of this passage relies foremostly on Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*; Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “Glory Reflected on the Face of Christ (2 Cor 3:7-4:6) and a Palestinian Jewish Motif,” *TS* 42 (1981); Furnish, *II Corinthians*; Greenwood, “The Lord Is the Spirit”; Hanson, “Midrash in 2 Corinthians 3”; Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*; Hooker, “St. Paul’s Use of Scripture”; Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians* (NCBC; Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Martin, *2 Corinthians*; Richardson, *Paul’s Language*; R. V. G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (TNTC 8; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*; Willem Cornelis van Unnik, “With Unveiled Face: An Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 3:12-18,” *NovT* 6 (1963).

⁵⁹⁸ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, vii-viii.

⁵⁹⁹ Carson et al., *Introduction to the NT*, 261.

⁶⁰⁰ Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 51.

⁶⁰¹ Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:xiii.

between traditional Judaism and the gospel of Jesus Christ and the distinctiveness of his own ministry as apostle to the Gentiles. He again resorted to rhetorical questions to establish his authority, but this time he cited the Corinthian believers themselves as the fruit and proof of his ministry, something the new teachers could not claim. “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all” (2 Cor 3:1-2). Thus 2 Cor 2:14–4:6 is both apologetic and polemical.⁶⁰² If 2 Cor 1-7 came at the end of the Corinthian correspondence, the purpose was more generally instructional than strictly polemical, but Paul was still concerned to establish his apostolic authority, his ministry, and his gospel.

Because of the need to respond to these Jewish Christian influences, the engagement with Jewish ideas is apparent in 2 Cor 3-4. A comparison with Qumran texts underscores the Jewish connection.⁶⁰³ Of course, Paul used this occasion to do more than respond to his opponents at Corinth. He took the opportunity to explain more generally why Jews, Gentile God-fearers, and any Christians who observed or respected the law of Moses should now focus their faith on Jesus Christ.

Following is a simple outline of 2 Cor 2:14–7:4, with an expansion of part 2 because it contains our selected passage:

Nature and Purpose of Paul’s Ministry, 2 Cor 2:14–7:4

1. Paul’s ministry among the Corinthians, 2:14-17
2. Paul’s ministry of the new covenant, 3:1–4:6
 - a. Letters of recommendation, 3:1-3
 - b. The new covenant in contrast to the old, 3:4-15
 - c. New covenant work of Jesus Christ by the Spirit, 3:16-18
 - d. The gospel of the new covenant revealed in Jesus Christ, 4:1-6
3. Ministry of present distress and future glory, 4:7–5:10
4. Ministry of reconciliation, 5:11-21
5. Appeal for an open heart toward Paul, 6:1-13
6. Appeal to act as the temple of God, 6:14–7:1
7. Appeal to accept Paul’s ministry, 7:2-4

⁶⁰² Richardson, *Paul’s Language*, 142, 147.

⁶⁰³ Fitzmyer, “Glory Reflected,” 631.

To defend his ministry, Paul placed it in the context of the new covenant instituted by Jesus Christ. He sought to frame the issue not in terms of his personality or his methods but in terms of the gospel of Christ. It was the gospel that determined the character of his ministry. Thus, to accept Christ's gospel was to accept his ministry, while to reject his ministry was to reject the gospel.

This argument was designed to convince the Corinthian church in response to arguments from the newly arrived opponents who were challenging his ministry. While he did not identify a definite doctrinal error on their part, from 2 Cor 3 it appears the opponents emphasized their Jewish heritage,⁶⁰⁴ and perhaps they even asserted the continuing validity of the Jewish law as did the false teachers in Galatia.⁶⁰⁵ In response, Paul explained that the new covenant was superior to the old, and thus his ministry was superior to that of his opponents. He appealed to the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures to show that the old covenant itself pointed toward a new and greater covenant to come.

First, he drew from the OT to describe the Corinthians as his letter of recommendation: "You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor 3:2-3). While not directly quoting from the OT, Paul alluded to prophecies from Jeremiah and Ezekiel, where God promised to write God's law in the hearts of God's people and to give them hearts of flesh instead of stone to enable them to keep the law:

- I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jer 31:33b)
- I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, so that they may follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God. (Ezek 11:19-20)
- A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of

⁶⁰⁴ Brown, *Introduction to the NT*, 555.

⁶⁰⁵ Achtemeier et al., *Introducing the NT*, 349.

flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. (Ezek 36:26-27)

If the Corinthian believers agreed that they had received the prophetic fulfillment of these promises, then they should acknowledge Paul's ministry as the means by which they had done so. To deny his ministry was to deny God's work in their lives. By means of his ministry, they became recipients of "a new covenant" instituted by Christ, which is "not of letter but of spirit." This new covenant is superior to God's previous covenant with Israel, the law of Moses, "for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor 3:6). For people who had sinned the law could only offer death, but the new covenant brings life through the Spirit. (See Rom 8:2-4.) To acknowledge God's Spirit in their lives was to acknowledge the existence of the new covenant and the validity of Paul's ministry under the new covenant.

Second, Paul employed the story of Moses in Exod 34:29-35, when he returned from Mount Sinai to deliver the Ten Commandments to Israel for the second time. This event instituted God's covenant with Moses and the nation of Israel (v. 27). The account describes how the face of Moses shone from his encounter with God:

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him. (Exod 34:29-35)

After giving the Ten Commandments to the people, Moses veiled his face, apparently to shield the people from the brightness when in close personal interaction with them, for they were afraid. For a time he continued to speak to God and then to the people to convey God's full instructions. To commune with God, he went into "the tent of meeting" outside the camp (Exod 33:7-11). Whenever he went into the presence of the Lord he took off the veil, but when he emerged to talk to the people he put it back on.

In 2 Cor 3:7-16, Paul used a form of rabbinic exegesis known as *midrash* to discuss the Exodus account.⁶⁰⁶ This approach is characterized by careful attention to each phrase of the text; explaining ambiguities; drawing out assumptions, implications, and principles; and making current applications.⁶⁰⁷ We also see the use of *peshet*, particularly in 3:16.⁶⁰⁸ This form of rabbinic interpretation focuses on the contemporary or imminent fulfillment of the ancient text.⁶⁰⁹

Paul used the Exodus account to contrast the old covenant with the "new covenant." Following the thought that "the letter kills" (v. 6), he called the old covenant "the ministry of death" (v. 7) and "the ministry of condemnation" (v. 9). Nevertheless, this covenant came in glory, as demonstrated by the glory on Moses' face. This glory was not permanent, however; it was "set aside" (v. 7). In midrashic fashion, Paul derived three relevant points from the OT account:

1. The glory was temporary. There is no indication in the text that Moses wore a veil for the rest of his life; he wore it only during this time of giving the law to Israel. From the rest of Exodus it is apparent that his use of a veil was temporary. Eventually, the glory faded from his face. Paul concluded that if this temporary ministry was glorious, then how much more glorious is the permanent ministry of the new covenant, which he called "the ministry of the Spirit" and the "ministry of justification" (vv. 8-11).

2. Moses "put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside" (v. 13). Moses was unveiled when he first spoke to the people, so the veil did not completely hide the glory but more precisely "the end of the glory." There may be an implication that Moses did not want the people to see the

⁶⁰⁶ Hanson, "Midrash in 2 Corinthians 3," 2; Dunn, *Christology*, 123; Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 169.

⁶⁰⁷ See Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 22-25; Porton, "Rabbinic Midrash," 222-28.

⁶⁰⁸ Hanson, "Midrash in 2 Corinthians 3," 20; Hooker, "St. Paul's Use of Scripture," 297; Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 70.

⁶⁰⁹ Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 25.

slow fading away of the glory.⁶¹⁰ The use of the veil underscores not only the glory but the temporary nature of the glory.

3. Moses' veil obscured the people's vision and thus their perception or understanding. Paul then likened the veil to the obscurity in the minds of those who still follow the old covenant, the obscurity of which is set aside only in Christ (vv. 12-16). Just as the physical veil in Moses' day hid the temporary nature of the glory associated with the old covenant, so the mental veil in Paul's day hid the temporary nature of the old covenant itself. But when people come to Christ, the mental veil is removed so they see the permanent divine glory of Christ and the permanent nature of the new covenant in Christ. In short, the temporary glory on Moses' face was nothing in comparison to the abiding glory of the ministry of the Spirit.⁶¹¹

In Paul's application, the veil is set aside "only in Christ" (v. 14). Only when a person "turns to the Lord"—i.e., to Christ—is the veil removed (v. 16). In essence, Paul argued that the OT could only be fully understood with reference to Christ.⁶¹² His opponents were wrong because they did not view the OT through the lens of Christ and did not base their ministry foremost on Christ. By contrast, Christ had removed the veil from Paul's eyes at his conversion. Indeed, when he was healed of the blindness caused by the light from heaven, "something like scales fell from his eyes" (Acts 9:18). In fulfillment of his ministry, all his preaching to the Corinthians was based on "Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). Paul presented his ministry of Christ as the true fulfillment of the very OT that his opponents tried to invoke as their source of authority.

At this point, Paul described the new covenant ministry of Christ through the Spirit (2 Cor 3:16-18) and the gospel of the new covenant as revealed in Christ (4:1-6), which will be the subject of our detailed analysis. He moved from a comparison of the two covenants or ministries to a comparison of the ministers themselves, and he moved from past to present.⁶¹³ By use of Scripture and experience (the work of the Spirit and the encounter with God's glory), he sought to demonstrate that ministry under the new covenant is superior to ministry under the old covenant. While Moses ministered only temporary glory, Paul ministered the permanent glory of God as revealed in Christ.⁶¹⁴

⁶¹⁰ Barclay, *Letters to the Corinthians*, 192.

⁶¹¹ Hooker, "St. Paul's Use of Scripture," 297.

⁶¹² Tasker, *Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 66.

⁶¹³ Richardson, *Paul's Language*, 144.

⁶¹⁴ James M. Scott, review of Scott J. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3*, *JBL* 115 (1996): 761.

Paul defended himself not merely by denying the accusations against him but primarily by presenting God's work of salvation through Jesus Christ, of which Paul was a minister.⁶¹⁵

Building on his exposition of the new covenant, in 4:7–5:21 Paul explained why his ministry took the character that it did, shaped by the death and life of Jesus Christ and the love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Having thus demonstrated the validity of his ministry under the new covenant, in response to his opponents who were apparently judging him by old covenant standards, in 6:1–7:4 Paul appealed to the Corinthians to receive his ministry and be transformed accordingly.

As we will discuss in our comments on 2 Cor 4:4-6, the text indicates that Paul's own conversion experience, in which Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus, served as a backdrop for this discussion. If so, we find two important comparisons.⁶¹⁶ First, Paul contrasted his experience with that of Moses. At the giving of the law, Moses saw God's glory, but it was only a partial revelation. He asked, "Show me your glory"; God responded by letting him see God's "back" but not God's "face" (Exod 33:18-23). By contrast, Paul saw "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). Thus Paul demonstrated the superiority of the new covenant and his ministry to the old covenant and Moses' ministry, to which his opponents had appealed. Second, Paul compared his encounter with Christ to that of the original twelve apostles (1 Cor 15:5-8), which presumably the false apostles at Corinth could not match.

Second Corinthians 3:16

In the socio-rhetorical context of 2 Cor 3:16-18, Paul sought to persuade his readers that the new covenant of faith in Jesus Christ supersedes the old covenant based on the law of Moses, and therefore Paul's new covenant ministry is legitimate—in fact, it is superior and enduring.

(16) ἡνίκα δὲ ἐὰν ἐπιστρέψῃ πρὸς κύριον, περιαιρεῖται τὸ κάλυμμα. *"But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed."*

This verse refers back to the veil of Moses mentioned in vv. 13-15, which in turn is based on Exod 34:29-35. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai after communing with Yahweh, his face shone, although he did not realize it at first. When he spoke to the

⁶¹⁵ Unnik, "With Unveiled Face," 153.

⁶¹⁶ Kim, *Origin of Paul's Gospel*, 234-38.

people, they were afraid to come near him. Therefore, when he finished speaking to them, he veiled his face.

As we have discussed, Moses' physical veil served to hide the glory shining from his face, and it also obscured the fading of the glory. Paul used this veil as a metaphor for the mental veil preventing most Jews in the first century from recognizing the passing of the old covenant. This veil is removed when people turn to the Lord. In Exodus 34:34, when Moses went back into the presence of Yahweh after speaking to the people, he removed the veil, so in reference to Moses the Lord is Yahweh.⁶¹⁷ Continuing Paul's contemporary application, when people turn to the Lord today the mental veil will be removed.

Commentators variously interpret "the Lord" in v. 16 to mean God (Yahweh), Christ, or the Spirit.⁶¹⁸ The different interpretations have arisen because in the Exodus background the Lord is Yahweh, but in Paul's application the Lord is Christ, while in vv. 17-18 the Lord is the Spirit. The solution to this dilemma is to recognize Paul's use of the *peshar* method; he made a contemporary application of the Exodus text. In effect, he identified Jesus Christ as the new-covenant, eschatological revelation of Yahweh, and in v. 17 he further stated that believers currently encounter the risen and ascended Christ through the Spirit. So Hooker explained:⁶¹⁹

Insofar as the words refer to Moses, "The Lord" must refer to Yahweh. But Paul is also applying the passage to the present situation. And since the veil is now on the heart of Israel, he must be thinking also of Israel turning to the Lord—that is to Christ, with whom the veil is abolished. The text from Exodus is given a new meaning, as it is applied to the time of fulfillment: Israel turns away from the letter to the Spirit.

To understand Paul's application, it is important to realize that the phrase "turns to the Lord" is a technical term for conversion.⁶²⁰ The Greek word here for "turn" is ἐπιστρέφω, which the NT uses frequently for Christian conversion.⁶²¹ In the Gospels, it

⁶¹⁷ Unnik, "With Unveiled Face," 165.

⁶¹⁸ Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:278-81.

⁶¹⁹ Hooker, "St Paul's Use of Scripture," 301.

⁶²⁰ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 211, citing Bultmann.

⁶²¹ Matt 18:3; Acts 3:19; 14:15; 15:19; 26:18-20; 28:27; 1 Thess 1:9; Jam 5:19-20.

appears three times in quotations of Isa 6:10 to describe people who do not turn to Jesus Christ because of lack of spiritual desire, perception, and understanding.⁶²² In Acts, the phrase “turn to the Lord” specifically means to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. For instance, after Peter healed a paralyzed man in the name of Jesus Christ, many residents of Lydda and Sharon “turned to the Lord” (Acts 9:34-35). Likewise, when Christians first came to Antioch, “proclaiming the Lord Jesus, . . . a great number became believers and turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:20-21). If Paul’s conversion is the backdrop for this passage, then it is indeed likely that the ultimate meaning here is conversion by and to Christ as Lord. Although Furnish did not think “the Lord” in v. 16 is a direct reference to Christ, he acknowledged that we must not discount the christological reference: “In Paul’s view turning to the Lord means accepting the gospel of Christ. . . . To turn *to the Lord* then would mean, in the context of Paul’s preaching, to acknowledge and receive one’s reconciliation with God through Christ.”⁶²³

We find a similar example in 1 Cor 10:4.⁶²⁴ There, Paul alluded to the two incidents when God miraculously supplied water out of a rock to the Israelites in the wilderness (Exod 17:5-6; Num 20:7-11). Using *peshet* interpretation Paul said, “The rock was Christ.” The reference is typological: just as under the old covenant God supplied Israel’s physical needs through a rock, so under the new covenant God supplies the spiritual needs of believers through Christ. Probably there is also a stronger identification of Christ with God: in retrospect, we realize that the Spirit of Christ preexisted the human birth of Christ and, as God, supplied the need through the rock. In the same chapter Paul quoted from a song of Moses (1 Cor 10:20-22; Deut 32:16-17, 21), and this song also extols Yahweh as the Rock of Israel (Deut 32:4, 15, 18).⁶²⁵ Thus it is likely we have the same type of interpretation in 1 Cor 10:4 and 2 Cor 3:16. In both verses Paul applied the work of Yahweh in the OT to the work of Christ under the new covenant.

Certainly in Exod 34 the Lord is Yahweh, but the point of 2 Cor 3 is to apply Exod 34 to Christ and the new covenant. “When one turns to the Lord” in 2 Cor 3:14 thus describes Christian conversion.⁶²⁶ By turning to Jesus Christ, people acknowledge and enter into the new covenant, for the veil is set aside only in Christ.⁶²⁷ Verse 18 also

⁶²² Mat 13:15; Mark 4:12; John 12:40.

⁶²³ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 235.

⁶²⁴ Richardson, *Paul’s Language*, 156.

⁶²⁵ Nicholson, *Dynamic Oneness*, 82.

⁶²⁶ James D. G. Dunn, “‘The Letter Kills, but the Spirit Gives Life’ (2 Cor 3:6),” *Pneuma* 35 (2013): 173.

⁶²⁷ Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 199.

speaks of Christian conversion, and there “the glory of the Lord” refers to Jesus. Moreover, in the same literary context and still dealing with Christian conversion, Paul proclaimed Jesus as the Lord (2 Cor 4:5). In short, 2 Cor 3:14, 3:18, and 4:5 all provide the contextual meaning that Jesus is the Lord in 3:16.⁶²⁸ For our purposes, it is important to note that Paul’s argument works socio-rhetorically only if his readers agree that Jesus is the Lord of the new covenant and moreover that Jesus is the revelation of Yahweh, the Lord of the old covenant.

Second Corinthians 3:17

(17) ὁ δὲ κύριος τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν· οὗ δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα κυρίου, ἐλευθερία. “*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*”

In v. 17a, we immediately face another interpretive dilemma: Who is “the Lord” here? Again, commentators are divided on the identification of the Lord and the meaning of this statement. Greenwood summarized the six major explanations:⁶²⁹ (1) “Lord” refers to Yahweh. (2) “Lord” refers to Christ. (3) “Lord” refers to the Holy Spirit. (4) “Lord” refers to “spirit,” i.e., the spiritual nature of the new covenant. (5) The text is corrupt. (6) The verse is an interpolation. Once again, there are good arguments for several options, particularly the first three. In the Exodus account the Lord is Yahweh, while in Christian conversion the Lord is Jesus, but at the end of v. 18 the Lord is the Holy Spirit. As discussed below, the fourth option seems to be motivated by a concern to uphold classical trinitarianism, which is not the contextual issue. Finally, as Greenwood noted, the fifth and sixth options are inherently implausible and lack supporting evidence. Thrall analyzed the interpretive options somewhat differently,⁶³⁰ presenting three main identifications of “Lord”: (1) God, (2) Christ (with four sub-options⁶³¹), and (3) the “Lord” of v. 16. Modern commentators, including Thrall, tend to follow her third option; namely, the Lord of v. 17 is the Lord of v. 16, who in turn is the Lord of Exod 34.⁶³²

⁶²⁸ See Capes, *OT Yahweh Texts*, 156-57.

⁶²⁹ Greenwood, “The Lord Is the Spirit,” 467-68.

⁶³⁰ Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:278-80.

⁶³¹ (a) “Christ is the inward spiritual meaning of the OT.” (b) “Christ is spirit.” (c) “The risen Christ is identical with the Holy Spirit.” (d) “Christ is active through the Spirit, and is experienced by believers as Spirit.” Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:280. Options (a), (b), and (d) seemed designed to address trinitarian concerns that two persons of the Trinity could otherwise be confounded, as in option (c). These four sub-options correspond roughly to Greenwood’s options (2), (3), and (4).

⁶³² See Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:274; Richardson, *Paul’s Language*, 156; Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 202; Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 70.

Verse 16 introduces the discussion of “the Lord,” while v. 17 continues the discussion. Thus the most natural reading is to say the Lord of v. 16 is also the Lord of v. 17. In our discussion of v. 16 “the Lord” originally referred to Yahweh in Exod 34, but Paul applied the statement to Jesus, the Lord of the new covenant. Citing 2 Cor 5:19 (with the meaning of “God was in Christ”), Greenwood concluded that for Paul “Yahweh” had christological connotations. Instead of saying the “Lord” is either Yahweh *or* Christ, Paul wrote “κύριος in 17a with the notion of *Yahweh in Christ* at the back of his mind.”⁶³³

One explanation of Paul’s thought is to say when Moses returned to the tabernacle he saw the preexistent Christ and removed his veil.⁶³⁴ If so, Paul compared the experience of Moses to that of a Jew today who turns to the glorified Christ, has the veil removed from his heart, and sees the Lord Jesus. This explanation is unlikely, for Paul spoke of Jesus as “born of a woman, born under the law” (Gal 4:4). He gave no indication of believing Jesus preexisted in the physical image born of Mary. Nevertheless, in the context of monotheism Paul understood the Lord to whom Moses turned and the Lord to whom the Jews today should turn, to be one and the same.

To summarize, the “Lord” of v. 17a is indeed the Lord of Exod 34 and the Lord of v. 16—namely, Yahweh—but since the context of 2 Cor 3 is christological, the “Lord” of v. 17a must be Yahweh as revealed in Jesus Christ. To put it another way, the “Lord” of v. 17a is Jesus Christ, specifically Jesus as the revelation of Yahweh. In a sense, then, whether we focus on the context of Exod 34 and think of God/Yahweh, or whether we focus on the context of 2 Cor 3 and think of Jesus, in the end we come to the same conclusion. “If one takes κύριος to mean ‘Yahweh,’ the Pauline implication is that under the new dispensation He is inseparable from the risen Christ; if one takes the denotation to be Christ, He is inseparable from Yahweh.”⁶³⁵

We still face the question of what it means to say “the Lord is the Spirit.” Part of the problem for Christian interpreters today, and part of the appeal of Greenwood’s fourth option (the “Lord” is the spiritual nature of the new covenant), is the belief in three divine persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—with the terms “God” and “Yahweh” typically referring to the first person unless otherwise specified. If the “Lord” is either the first or second person of the Trinity, then the statement “the Lord is the Spirit” potentially confounds two members of the Trinity. This concern is one of historical and systematic

⁶³³ Greenwood, “The Lord Is the Spirit,” 470.

⁶³⁴ Hanson, “Midrash in 2 Corinthians 3,” 19.

⁶³⁵ Greenwood, “The Lord Is the Spirit,” 469.

theology, however, not of exegesis, as there is no explicit discussion of three coequal divine persons in the context. To preserve a trinitarian option we could say the terms “Lord” and “Spirit” are identified in the realm of action rather than in person or substance⁶³⁶—although these categories of thought are somewhat removed from the text itself. The immediate question is whether Paul identified the risen Jesus with the Spirit in 2 Cor 3:17. Most commentators say he did.⁶³⁷ When we examine the Pauline corpus, including the Corinthian correspondence, the logic for this interpretation is compelling.

First, the fundamental confession of Pauline Christians is “Jesus is Lord” or “Jesus Christ is Lord” (Rom 10:9; Phil 2:11). Making this confession is an essential part of conversion, or turning to the Lord, as indicated a few verses later (2 Cor 4:5). At the same time, this confession can only be made through the Holy Spirit. “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). This confession involves not only human reason but inward spiritual experience.

Second, Paul’s fundamental message was the gospel of Jesus Christ, and he preached Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:2-4; 1 Thess 1:5). Again, this proclamation involved not only human reason but was accompanied by spiritual demonstration. Indeed, Christ worked in him by the Spirit: “I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God so that . . . I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ” (Rom 15:18-19).

Third, other statements of Paul support the identification of Christ with the Spirit. He used the terms “Spirit of Christ” and “Christ” interchangeably when speaking of Christians as living in the Spirit and having the Spirit dwelling in them (Rom 8:9-10). Moreover, in the same text he identified the Spirit of Christ as the “Spirit of God.” He spoke of “the same Spirit,” “the same Lord,” and “the same God” as bestowing spiritual gifts, identifying these gifts as “the manifestation of the Spirit” (1 Cor 12:4-7). He even described the resurrected Christ as the “life-giving spirit” (1 Cor 15:45).⁶³⁸ “According to the flesh” Christ was a descendant of David, but “according to the spirit of holiness” he was declared to be Son of God with power by resurrection from the dead (Rom 1:3-4).

⁶³⁶ Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 123.

⁶³⁷ Dunn, *Christology*, 115. This is not to say these commentators necessarily held Jesus and the Spirit to be the same “person” in a trinitarian sense.

⁶³⁸ See our discussion in ch. 5.

The “spirit of holiness” here is πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης, which is linguistically equivalent to πνεῦμα ἅγιον, “Holy Spirit,”⁶³⁹ and in the context it appears to describe Christ’s divine identity.

The Holy Spirit is the “Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9), the Spirit of God’s Son (Gal 4:6) and the “Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:19). The Spirit dwells in believers (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor 1:22), yet Christ dwells in them (Col 1:27). The believers are “in Christ” (1 Cor 1:2; 3:1; 2 Cor 5:17), yet they are also “in the Spirit” (Rom 8:9; Phil 2:1). Indeed, they are joined with Christ so as to be “one with him in spirit” (1 Cor 6:17 NIV). It is more reasonable to understand Paul to mean the Spirit is the presence of Christ instead of meaning two spirits dwell in believers and believers dwell in two spirits. Moreover, while some translations of v. 17a say the Lord is “that” Spirit, which implies a narrow focus on the context, the Greek text literally says “the” Spirit, a more general statement with the flexibility to encompass both the OT Yahweh and the NT Jesus as one Spirit.

Consequently, a number of commentators have made a direct identification of Christ with the Holy Spirit in 2 Cor 3:17. According to Gunkel, here and in some other verses Paul simply identified the Spirit with Christ. The Spirit does not merely come through Christ; rather, Christ is the Spirit.⁶⁴⁰ With some qualification Bousset accepted this interpretation, seeing 2 Cor 3:17 as the supreme example when for Paul the Spirit actually becomes the Spirit of Christ.⁶⁴¹ Bultmann likewise followed this interpretation.⁶⁴² For Barth, v. 17a means, “The Lord—Jesus Christ Himself—is that Spirit.” Thus for the early Christians “the Spirit was simply and directly the existence of Jesus Christ as the divine act of majesty in its character of revelation.”⁶⁴³ Consequently, the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost was the fulfillment of Christ’s promise in Matt 28:20: “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Put simply, “‘The Lord’ is clearly the risen Christ, whom [Paul] even calls ‘the Spirit.’”⁶⁴⁴ We thus see in vv. 16-18 a Christian reinterpretation of the OT concept of God’s Spirit: “God’s active presence in and with

⁶³⁹ Gordon Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 483; Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 50; Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 24.

⁶⁴⁰ Hermann Gunkel, *The Influence of the Holy Spirit: The Popular View of the Apostolic Age and the Teaching of the Apostle Paul* (1888; trans. Roy Harrisville and Philip Quance II; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 113.

⁶⁴¹ Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 160.

⁶⁴² Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:124.

⁶⁴³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4.2:129. Of course, Barth wrote as a trinitarian.

⁶⁴⁴ Fitzmyer, “Glory Reflected,” 638.

human beings was now understood in terms of Christ. . . . The Spirit comes as the new mode of Christ's presence. . . . When we speak of the 'presence of Christ' and the 'indwelling of the Spirit' we are speaking of one and the same experience of God."⁶⁴⁵

The point is not to obliterate all distinction between Christ and the Spirit. For Paul, Jesus Christ was a historical person who was born, died, rose again, and dwells in heaven. The Spirit is the presence and active power of the eternal God. The point is that believers now experience Jesus spiritually—in and as the divine Spirit. Again, many commentators have offered a similar explanation. "For Paul *no distinction can be detected in the believer's experience between exalted Christ and Spirit of God*. . . . For Paul Christ can be experienced now only in and through the Spirit, indeed only *as the Spirit*."⁶⁴⁶ "The experience of the Spirit is the experience with the Lord. In the new age, the Lord is the Spirit. . . . The Spirit is the ascended Jesus in His earthly action. . . . The Spirit *is* Christ *in* His redemptive functions."⁶⁴⁷ "Paul thought of the πνεῦμα as the functional means by which Jesus continued after his death to promote Christianity."⁶⁴⁸ "The touch of the Spirit becomes finally and definitively the touch of Christ. . . . As the Spirit was the 'divinity' of Jesus . . . , so Jesus became the personality of the Spirit."⁶⁴⁹ Thus there is "an 'economic' identity between Christ and the Spirit, an identity of experience."⁶⁵⁰

Paul did not use the term "Spirit" to connote a distinct or separate personality from the one God. As we discussed in ch. 4, in the OT and in other Jewish literature of the first century B.C.E. and first century C.E., the Spirit is God's presence, activity, power, and inner nature.⁶⁵¹ Paul compared God and the Spirit of God to a human being and the spirit of that human (1 Cor 2:11). The spirit is the inner life of the person in disclosure and interaction with others. The spirit and the person are not merely equated, nor are they separated into two persons. Similarly, there is a conceptual distinction between God and God's Spirit. God is transcendent, above and beyond God's creation, while the Spirit is God as immanent, interacting with God's creation.

⁶⁴⁵ Lampe, *God As Spirit*, 62, 92, 117.

⁶⁴⁶ Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 146.

⁶⁴⁷ Lewis Smedes, *Union with Christ: A Biblical View of the New Life in Jesus Christ* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 41, 48, 52.

⁶⁴⁸ Greenwood, "The Lord Is the Spirit," 471.

⁶⁴⁹ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 325.

⁶⁵⁰ Hanson, "Midrash in 2 Corinthians 3," 20.

⁶⁵¹ Richardson, *Paul's Language*, 154.

Likewise, Christ is the human manifestation and visible glory of the invisible, transcendent God. Since Christ has ascended to heaven, he is not visibly present in the flesh among his people in this age. The Spirit of Christ is Christ as he is present and active among his people. As such, the Spirit of Christ is not different from the Spirit of God or the Holy Spirit. Just as Christ is the new covenant revelation of God in flesh, so the Spirit of Christ is the new covenant God as present and active among the people of God.

We see a similar explanation of the Spirit in the Gospel of John. According to this text, after Jesus ascended God would send the believers “another Advocate”; in fact, this Advocate would come only after Jesus departed from them physically (John 14:16; 16:7). Yet this other Advocate, or “Spirit of truth,” was not unknown to them. At that time he dwelt “with” (παρά) them but would come to dwell “in” (ἐν) them (14:17). The implication is that the other Advocate would actually be Jesus himself coming in another form (spirit rather than flesh) and in another relationship (internally rather than externally present). This implication becomes explicit with the promise of Jesus in the next verse: “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you” (14:18).

Paul’s understanding of the Spirit probably came from his conversion experience.⁶⁵² In the Corinthian correspondence Paul testified that Christ had appeared to him (1 Cor 9:1), yet he acknowledged his experience with Christ to be different from other eyewitnesses who had seen Christ before his ascension. “Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me” (1 Cor 15:8). According to the Acts accounts, Paul encountered Christ in the Spirit. “A light from heaven flashed around him,” and he “heard a voice” speaking to him (Acts 9:3-4; cf. 22:6-7; 26:13-14). Paul spoke of this encounter as a “heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19). It was the visible manifestation of Christ to him (Acts 9:17; 22:14; cf. 22:18; 23:11). This was a spiritual event, different from the physical interactions of the other apostles with Christ in his earthly life or even after his resurrection, when he offered: “Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost [spirit, πνεῦμα] does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39). When Paul followed Christ’s instructions to find a disciple named Ananias, the man baptized him and prayed for him to be healed and to be filled with the Holy Spirit, thus completing Paul’s conversion (Acts 9:17-18).

⁶⁵² Gordon Fee, “Paul’s Conversion As Key to His Understanding of the Spirit,” in *The Road from Damascus: The Impact of Paul’s Conversion on His Life, Thought, and Ministry* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 166-83.

Although Paul had previously encountered Christians (Acts 7:58; Rom 16:7), the primary motivating factor in his conversion was not preaching, teaching, or argumentation but his spiritual encounter with the ascended Christ. The Lord Jesus himself appeared to Paul in divine glory and arrested him. Paul's first encounter with Jesus was an experience of the Spirit and vice versa. From that time forward, then, he understood Christ as the Spirit.⁶⁵³ He experienced the glorified Christ through the Spirit; thus for him the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus.⁶⁵⁴ "On the Damascus road Paul saw the glorious Christ as being spiritual, as a spiritual being, indeed as the Spirit."⁶⁵⁵

Recent commentators have looked primarily to the background of Exod 34 to explain 2 Cor 3:17. As we have seen, in Exod 34 the Lord is Yahweh, and this identification is indeed the starting point for understanding "the Lord" in 2 Cor 3:16-17. Paul applied the OT text to the new covenant experience of the Holy Spirit. Richardson paraphrased: "'The Lord'—that is to whom I have just referred in the Scriptural quotation—*means* the Spirit."⁶⁵⁶ According to Thrall, the "Lord" in the Exodus text stands for the Spirit, and as she noted the LXX frequently uses πνεῦμα κυρίου ("Spirit of the Lord" here) to translate *ruah yhw*, the "Spirit of Yahweh."⁶⁵⁷ Martin explained concerning v. 17:⁶⁵⁸

This v[erse] is a parenthesis, with a consensus emerging that it stands as Paul's *peshet* or interpretative comment on v 16. The text there spoke of Moses' turning to the Lord (=Yahweh). The updating procedure in Paul's exegetical method is to refer ὁ κύριος, "the Lord," in quotation marks . . . to the Spirit (τὸ πνεῦμα), with the copulative ἐστίν being treated as the exegetical *significat*, "it represents." "The Lord" in the passages just cited means [for us] the Spirit.

Martin then offered the following paraphrase of v. 17: "Now in the verse mentioned, the Lord whom Moses approached means for us the Spirit who leads a person to turn to

⁶⁵³ Gunkel, *Holy Spirit*, 114.

⁶⁵⁴ Dunn, *Christology*, 125.

⁶⁵⁵ Kim, *Origin of Paul's Gospel*, 228-29.

⁶⁵⁶ Richardson, *Paul's Language*, 156.

⁶⁵⁷ Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:274.

⁶⁵⁸ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 70-71, last brackets in original.

Christ and confess his lordship.”⁶⁵⁹ Thrall similarly argued, “The promised new covenant has been inaugurated, and it is the powerful presence of the Spirit which distinguished the new order from the old. Entrance into relationship with God now requires entrance into this life in the sphere of the Spirit.”⁶⁶⁰ Just as Moses turned to Yahweh, so people under the new covenant should turn to the Spirit for redemption. Dunn paraphrased, “All this comes . . . from the Lord of Exod. 34:34, who in our experience is the Spirit.”⁶⁶¹

While this insight is helpful, it does not obviate our previous discussion: Paul identified the OT Yahweh with the Lord Jesus and then proceeded to identify Jesus with the Spirit. By speaking of the new covenant made effective through the Spirit (vv. 2-3) and then by saying “the Lord is the Spirit,” Paul moved beyond a simple OT identification of the “Lord.” Merely turning to the Lord Yahweh would not signify the new covenant. Turning to the Lord Jesus, who is also the Spirit, clearly brings the new covenant (vv. 3, 6, 8). By saying “the Lord is the Spirit” Paul pointed to the outpouring of the Spirit as the fulfillment of God’s promises in the OT.⁶⁶²

In 2 Cor 3 Paul contrasted the old covenant with the new covenant in two important ways reflected in v. 17: (1) The new covenant is superior to the old because it leads from temporary manifestations of God’s glory in the OT to the permanent manifestation of God in Jesus Christ. (2) The new covenant is superior to the old because believers no longer walk by the letter of the law, but they now walk in the Spirit. The law was weak because it depended on sinful flesh for fulfillment, but the Spirit bestows power for fulfillment and thus grants liberty. (See Rom 8:3-4.)

Verses 16-17 are pivotal in making both points. We should not overstate the parallel with Exod 34 without considering Paul’s new-covenant context and application. While Exod 34:34 says Moses “went in before the LORD,” it does not say he “turned to the LORD.” The idea of turning is specific to Paul’s application in 2 Cor 3, and as we have seen, it speaks of conversion to Christ as the Lord. The Lord to whom believers are to turn is Jesus Christ. The Lord is reinterpreted to refer to Christ.⁶⁶³

Once we understand this first point, then we are ready to proceed to the next point. The way that believers turn to Christ is by receiving the Holy Spirit. The way they

⁶⁵⁹ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 74.

⁶⁶⁰ Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:281.

⁶⁶¹ Dunn, *Christology*, 119-20.

⁶⁶² Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 201.

⁶⁶³ Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 122; Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 122, 145.

experience Christ is in the Holy Spirit. They enter into the body of Christ by being baptized in the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). Only by receiving the Spirit of Christ do they belong to Christ (Rom 8:9). When they accept the gospel of salvation and believe on Jesus, then they receive “the seal of the promised Holy Spirit” (Eph 1:13). In the NT when people responded to apostolic preaching about the Lord Jesus, they turned to Jesus and Jesus bestowed the Spirit upon them.⁶⁶⁴ In short, when people “turn to the Lord” and speak directly with him, they encounter the Spirit of God.⁶⁶⁵

When Paul equated turning to the risen Christ with receiving the Spirit, he was not idiosyncratic but making a point similar to that of other NT writers such as Luke and John. Luke recorded the expectation of both Peter and Paul that those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ would receive the Holy Spirit with miraculous confirmation as on the day of Pentecost (Acts 11:15-17; 19:2-6). According to John, Jesus promised that after his glorification the Holy Spirit would fill all who believe in him (John 7:37-39).

Since believers experience the new covenant Lord (Jesus) by the Holy Spirit, the new covenant is characterized by life in the Spirit. By declaring the Lord to be the Spirit, Paul emphasized that the Lord to whom the Corinthians turned at their conversion was the God of the new covenant, which works by the Spirit and not by the letter.⁶⁶⁶ When hearers turn to the Lord they receive the Spirit, and thus they receive the glory of the new covenant, which is internal. In this experience the veil is removed, as it was for Moses, so they can encounter the Lord directly through the Spirit.⁶⁶⁷ By saying the Lord is the Spirit Paul contrasted the letter (γράμμα) under the old covenant (vv. 6-7) with the Spirit under the new covenant.⁶⁶⁸ Hooker helpfully summarized the interpretive dilemma and the main point of v. 17:⁶⁶⁹

Just as it seems as if the veil is being lifted from our minds, too, and we think that we begin to grasp Paul’s meaning, he confounds us all by declaring: “Now the Lord is the Spirit.” Paul is not, of course, concerned here with the niceties of trinitarian theology. Rather, he is returning to the contrast with which he began—the contrast between letter and Spirit. The Lord is the Spirit

⁶⁶⁴ Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 200.

⁶⁶⁵ Hooker, “Authority of the Bible,” 50.

⁶⁶⁶ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 236.

⁶⁶⁷ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 169.

⁶⁶⁸ Unnik, “With Unveiled Face,” 165.

⁶⁶⁹ Hooker, “St. Paul’s Use of Scripture,” 301.

who writes directly on men's hearts. In turning to the Lord, Israel not only experiences the removal of the veil, but moves from a relationship with God which is based on the letter to one which is based on Spirit.

To this explanation, we should add that, for Paul, the Lord to whom Israel (and the Corinthians) must turn is the Lord Jesus Christ, the revelation of Yahweh. By turning to the Lord, the veil over people's hearts is removed because "*the Lord* mentioned in the previous verse, who has already been interpreted as the Christ in whom the Old Testament is fulfilled, is also one with the Holy Spirit."⁶⁷⁰

"*And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom*" (v. 17b). The reference to "the Spirit of the Lord" indicates some distinction between "Spirit" and "Lord."⁶⁷¹ Some even regard this phrase as meaning there are two "separate" persons,⁶⁷² but the idea of separate personhood is not apparent in the context. The distinction here more likely relates to the Jewish use of the term "Spirit" to describe divine immanence, active presence, and work in the human realm, as we discussed in chs. 3 and 4.

The OT frequently uses the title "Spirit of Yahweh" to describe God's action, presence, and power with no thought of making the Spirit a different person from Yahweh. God works by God's Spirit; the action of the Spirit is God's action. For instance, in the story of the Othniel the judge, "the spirit of the LORD came upon him, . . . and the LORD gave King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram into his hand" (Judg 3:10). God's Spirit is God's presence. When Samuel anointed David, "the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward" (1 Sam 16:13). By contrast, "the spirit of the LORD departed from Saul" (1 Sam 16:14). When "the spirit of the LORD" spoke through David, it was actually the God of Israel who spoke (2 Sam 23:2-3). In messianic prophecies, "the spirit of the LORD" would rest upon the Messiah (Isa 11:2; cf. 61:1).

In the Corinthian correspondence Paul exhibited this understanding of the Spirit. The Spirit is God's inner life imparting God's power and wisdom (1 Cor 2:4-13). He then indicated that Christ works by God's Spirit, for he equated the "spirit of the LORD" in Isa 40:13 with the "mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16). At the beginning of the present letter, Paul explained that God establishes believers in Christ by putting God's Spirit in their hearts (2 Cor 1:21-22). At the beginning of the present chapter, he identified believers as "a

⁶⁷⁰ Tasker, *Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 66.

⁶⁷¹ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 213.

⁶⁷² Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 202.

letter of Christ . . . written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God” (v. 3). As we have discussed, he drew from Jer 31 and Ezek 11, where God promised to write God’s laws in the hearts of people by the Spirit. Christ fulfills the functions of God by means of the Spirit. Already at the beginning of this chapter, then, Paul indicated that a promise of God in the OT was fulfilled by Christ in the new covenant and specifically by means of God’s Spirit, much as in vv. 16-17.

Verse 17 concludes by emphasizing the newfound freedom in Christ through his Spirit. The early part of the chapter contrasts the old way of the letter with the new way of the Spirit, the ministry of condemnation and death with the ministry of justification and life. Since believers are now under the new covenant instituted by Christ, which means life in the Spirit, they have boldness (v. 12) and freedom (v. 17).

For the purposes of our study, the significance of 2 Cor 3:17 is Paul’s deification of Jesus Christ within the context of monotheism. “Here is a thoroughgoing monotheist, whose encounter with Christ on the Damascus road, and subsequent encounter with the Holy Spirit, forever radically altered his understanding of God and of his (now Christian) existence.”⁶⁷³ First, Paul equated Jesus Christ with Yahweh of the Old Testament. It is not too much to say that “faith is for Paul in the same sense and to the same extent faith in Christ Jesus as in God.”⁶⁷⁴ Second, Paul equated the risen Jesus with the Holy Spirit. Jesus works in the world and specifically in the lives of believers through the Spirit of God, which is his Spirit. We cannot import later categories of thought into the text. “We do not serve a biblical purpose by insisting on the Spirit as a person who is separate from the person whose name is Jesus.”⁶⁷⁵ The point of 2 Cor 3:15-18 is to describe how the risen, glorified Jesus dwells powerfully in the lives of believers,⁶⁷⁶ by or as the Spirit.

Second Corinthians 3:18

(18) ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντες ἀνακεκαλυμμένῳ προσώπῳ τὴν δόξαν κυρίου κατοπτριζόμενοι τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφούμεθα ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν καθάπερ ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος. “*And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord*

⁶⁷³ Gordon Fee, “Christology and Pneumatology in Romans 8:9-11—and Elsewhere: Some Reflections on Paul as a Trinitarian,” in Green and Turner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 327.

⁶⁷⁴ Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 204.

⁶⁷⁵ Smedes, *Union with Christ*, 53-54. He did not deny the trinitarian distinctions, however.

⁶⁷⁶ Hurtado, *God in NT Theology*, 90-91.

as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.”

Earlier in the chapter, Paul contrasted the inferior glory of the old covenant with the superior glory of the new covenant (2 Cor 3:7-11). Moses saw only the partial glory of God (Exod 33:18-23). By contrast, the new covenant brings the progressive and ultimately the full revelation of God’s glory, which comes by the Spirit, as previously indicated in 2 Cor 3:3, 6.⁶⁷⁷

As we discussed in ch. 4, God’s glory is God’s self-revelation, the manifestation of God’s being, and thus is closely linked to the concept of God’s image. In the LXX, δόξα (glory) describes the nature of God, and the NT continues this usage.⁶⁷⁸ In this verse, believers behold God’s glory “as though reflected in a mirror.” This thought is parallel to that of 2 Cor 4,⁶⁷⁹ which says Christ is “the image of God” (v. 4) and God gives “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (v. 6). In other words, the man Christ Jesus is like a mirror reflecting the glory of the invisible God. When believers behold Christ they actually behold God’s glory.⁶⁸⁰ They behold God’s glory as revealed in God’s image, which is Christ; they behold God’s glory in the person of Christ.⁶⁸¹

This idea of Christ as reflecting God’s glory is rooted in Palestinian Jewish motifs and has parallels in the Dead Sea Scrolls of Qumran.⁶⁸² The OT background is Num 6:24-26, where the priests invoked the name of Yahweh upon the people and thereby asked Yahweh to bless them, “make his face to shine upon” them, and “lift up his countenance upon” them. Ps 67:1-2 similarly associates Yahweh’s blessing with his shining face and his delivering power: “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, *Selah* that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations.” In 2 Cor 3-4, God shines upon people through Jesus Christ, who manifests God’s transforming Spirit and saving message (the gospel). Under the old covenant, Moses and Israel received a partial revelation through the name of Yahweh, but under the new covenant believers receive a full revelation through the name of Jesus and by his Spirit (1 Cor 6:11).

⁶⁷⁷ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 169.

⁶⁷⁸ Richardson, *Paul’s Language*, 157.

⁶⁷⁹ Unnik, “With Unveiled Face,” 169.

⁶⁸⁰ Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:283.

⁶⁸¹ Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 315, 947.

⁶⁸² Fitzmyer, “Glory Reflected,” 639, 644.

In Qumran's *Thanksgiving Scroll*, God illuminates the face of a teacher and thereby illuminates the entire community:

I thank Thee, O Lord, for Thou hast illumined my face by Thy Covenant. I seek Thee, and sure as the dawn Thou appearest as [perfect Light] to me. . . .

Through me Thou hast illumined the face of the Congregation and has shown Thine infinite power. . . .

Thou hast done wonders before the Congregation for the sake of Thy glory, that they may make known Thy mighty deeds to all the living. (1QH XII, 5-6, 27-28 [Vermes])

Similarly, in *The Community Rule*, the priests pronounce a blessing like that of Num 6: "May He bless you with all good and preserve you from all evil! May He lighten your heart with life-giving wisdom and grant you eternal knowledge! May He raise His merciful face towards you for everlasting bliss!" (1QS II, 2-4). *Blessings*, an adjunct to the *Rule*, says: "May He make you holy among His people, and an [eternal] light [to illumine] the world with knowledge and to enlighten the face of the Congregation [with wisdom]!" (1QSb=1Q28b IV, 25-28).

Clearly, Paul's thought was not alien to the first-century monotheistic context. At the same time, there is a significant difference.⁶⁸³ In the Qumran literature, the law of Moses illuminates the teacher and is the means by which he in turn illuminates the congregation. For Paul, however, Christ is the image or mirror that reflects God's glory so as to illuminate believers. Moreover, illumination also involves transformation by the power of the Spirit of Christ. Here we see Paul's point precisely: The old covenant was inferior because it depended upon the law of Moses, while the new covenant is superior because it is based on the transforming gospel of Christ, which bestows the Spirit.

We also find a parallel in Hellenistic Jewish literature, namely Wis 7:25-26: Wisdom "is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness." Like 2 Cor 3-4, this passage connects the themes of divine glory, divine image, reflection

⁶⁸³ Fitzmyer, "Glory Reflected," 643.

of divine light, and mirror, but for Paul, Christ is the mirror that perfectly reflects God's glory.⁶⁸⁴ Once again, the crucial difference is Paul's attribution of these works to Jesus Christ as the human manifestation of God.

This theme appears in the Pastoral Epistles also. Believers "wait for . . . the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). Here, Jesus Christ is the revealed glory of God, the visible manifestation of God's glory, not another God alongside the one God.⁶⁸⁵

By speaking in the first person plural ("all of us"), Paul probably had in mind the congregation gathered for worship and so contrasted the corporate Christian experience with Jewish worship in the synagogue.⁶⁸⁶ As believers worshiped Christ, they experienced the glory of God and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

"All of us . . . are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (v. 18b). By beholding the divine glory of God in Christ, believers are progressively transformed into the divine image. God's nature as revealed in God's image, Christ, is also revealed progressively in those who are transformed into the same image.⁶⁸⁷

Paul developed the thought of "image" more fully in 4:6, where he identified Christ as "the image of God." As we discussed in ch. 4, "the image of God" encompasses two related thoughts: a reflection of God (humanity) as in Gen 1:26-27 and God's self-revelation (deity) as in Col 1:15-19. Both ideas are present in this context: Christ is the ideal human in whom we see "the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror" (2 Cor 3:18), and Christ is the self-revelation of God, who "has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). The latter predominates in Pauline thought overall. That is, God's Spirit indwelt Jesus and was manifested in Jesus; thus Jesus is God in human form and is to be worshiped as God. Christ is the embodiment of God's revelation.⁶⁸⁸ This point is evident in the Corinthian correspondence. Jesus is the "life-giving spirit," and "just as we have borne the image of the man of dust [Adam], we will also bear the image of the man of

⁶⁸⁴ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 170.

⁶⁸⁵ Dunn, *Christology*, 236.

⁶⁸⁶ Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 159.

⁶⁸⁷ Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:286.

⁶⁸⁸ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 71.

heaven [Christ]” (1 Cor 15:45, 49). “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. . . . God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Cor 5:17, 19 NKJV).

Elsewhere Paul spoke of Christ in divine terms as transforming believers and conforming them to his glory: “But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself” (Phil 3:20-21). He also spoke of God as molding believers to Christ’s image: “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family” (Rom 8:29). Paul’s concept of “image” in 2 Corinthians is both theological and christological. In the words of Furnish, “Christ is God’s image because he is God’s Son (see Rom 8:29) in whom God is beheld, and the image into which believers *are being transformed* is the *same* one they see mirrored there.”⁶⁸⁹

The concept of transformation by God’s glory, light, and image appears in other literature of Second Temple Judaism, in the Pseudepigrapha:⁶⁹⁰

- For the light of the Lord of the Spirits has shined upon the face of the holy, the righteous, and the elect. (*1 En.* 38:4b)
- In those days, there will be a change for the holy and the righteous ones and the light of days shall rest upon them; and the glory and honor shall be given back to the holy ones, on the day of weariness. (*1 En.* 50:1)
- Blessed are you, righteous and elect ones, for glorious is your portion. The righteous ones shall be in the light of the sun and the elect ones in the light of eternal life which has no end, and the days of the life of the holy ones cannot be numbered. They shall seek light and find righteousness with the Lord of the Spirits. Peace (be) to the righteous ones in the peace of the Eternal Lord. (*1 En.* 58:3-4).
- Also, as for the glory of those who proved to be righteous on account of my law, those who possessed intelligence in their life, and those who planted the root of wisdom in their heart—their splendor will then be glorified by transformations, and the shape of their face will be changed

⁶⁸⁹ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 215.

⁶⁹⁰ *OTP* 1:30, 36, 39, 638.

into the light of their beauty so that they may acquire and receive the undying world which is promised to them. . . . For they will live in the heights of that world and they will be like the angels and be equal to the stars. And they will be changed into any shape which they wished, from beauty to loveliness, and from light to the splendor of glory. (2 Bar. 51:3, 10)

Indeed, the idea of transformation by the image of God was widespread in Hellenistic culture. As exemplified by the mystery religions, a common belief was that beholding a god or goddess would be a transforming experience for a devotee.⁶⁹¹ A well-known example is in *Metamorphoses* by Apuleius. Lucius, the narrator, was magically transformed into a donkey and held captive. Escaping at Corinth, he was transformed back into a man by a vision of the goddess Isis (*Metam.* 11). In Middle Platonism, mentally perceiving or beholding the supreme deity would cause a transformation into the likeness of the deity.⁶⁹²

In both Jewish and Hellenistic examples, transformation takes place not merely by an exemplary human such as a teacher or mentor but specifically by divine revelation and divine action. Paul's thought resembled both Hellenistic and apocalyptic Jewish notions with the key difference being Paul's concept of faith as conforming one to the image of God in Christ.⁶⁹³ It is not sufficient for believers to be transformed into the image of the original Adam; they must be transformed into the image of Christ.⁶⁹⁴ They specifically share in the glory of Christ.⁶⁹⁵

Engberg-Pedersen has proposed a somewhat different view of transformation, linking 2 Cor 3:18; 4:6, 10 with the resurrection of the dead in 1 Cor 15. Thus he posited an initial, cognitive, complete transformation as in Paul's conversion, followed by a progressive, physical, material change through the reception and gradual filling of material *pneuma* but which may also involve further cognitive change. While the bodies of believers will gradually die away, they are being transformed into pneumatic bodies

⁶⁹¹ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 240.

⁶⁹² Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 170.

⁶⁹³ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 241.

⁶⁹⁴ Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 106.

⁶⁹⁵ See Rom 8:17, 29-30; 2 Thess 2:14; Col 3:1-4, 10-11.

until a final, complete, material transformation at the resurrection of the dead.⁶⁹⁶ It is true that both initial and progressive transformation is in view, as well as both cognitive and (ultimately) physical transformation. *Pneuma* here is not a material substance, however, but the very presence and power of the Lord, and the physical transformation at the resurrection is instantaneous (1 Cor 15:51-52).

“*For this comes from the Lord, the Spirit*” (v. 18c). Once again, we face the question of identifying “Lord” and Spirit” here. First, there is a question of translation. Should we render κυρίου πνεύματος as “the Spirit of the Lord” (KJV, NKJV) or “the Lord, who is the Spirit” (NIV)? Either is linguistically possible, but most modern scholars follow the Greek word order and consider “Lord” and “Spirit” to be in apposition.⁶⁹⁷ This option is more likely because of the contextual identification of the Lord with the Spirit in v. 17. The meaning would thus be “the Lord who is the Spirit” (RSV, ESV), “the Lord—who is the Spirit” (NLT), or “the Lord, the Spirit” (NRSV, NASB). The alternative identifies the Lord as the one who possesses the Spirit, which still carries much the same theological meaning.

The last clause of v. 18 describes the transforming work of Christ as taking place progressively in the life of the believer by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit forms Christ’s image and imparts Christ’s glory in the believer’s life. As in vv. 16-17, we see an identification of Yahweh with the Lord Jesus and also an identification of the Lord Jesus with the Holy Spirit. The Lord of the old covenant is also the Spirit at work under the new covenant.⁶⁹⁸ Moreover, the presence of the Spirit in the lives of believers is the way in which the Lord Jesus manifests himself to them. Jesus Christ bears the glory of Yahweh and transforms believers by Christ’s own Spirit.⁶⁹⁹ Christ transmits his holiness by his Spirit. For Paul, the glorified Christ and the Spirit are identical in experience. Christ lives in us by the Spirit, and we are transformed into his image by the holiness of the Spirit.⁷⁰⁰ By speaking of “Spirit” Paul thus appropriated Jewish language for God’s presence,

⁶⁹⁶ Troels Engberg-Pedersen, “Complete and Incomplete Transformation in Paul—A Philosophical Reading of Paul on Body and Spirit,” in *Metamorphoses: Resurrection, Body and Transformative Practices in Early Christianity* (ed. Turid Seim and Jorunn Økland; Ekstasis 1; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 138-39.

⁶⁹⁷ Tasker, *Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 68. Commentaries that agree include Barclay, *Letters to the Corinthians*, 191-91; Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 110; Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 57; Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 202; Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 317. BDAG offers “the Lord who is the Spirit” in two places but “Lord of the Spirit” in one place. “ἀπό,” BDAG, 106; “πνεῦμα,” BDAG, 835.

⁶⁹⁸ Richardson, *Paul’s Language*, 157. See also Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 144.

⁶⁹⁹ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 113.

⁷⁰⁰ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 125.

activity, energy, and power to describe how Jesus Christ transforms believers from uncleanness to cleanness and “from one degree of glory to another” (v. 18b).⁷⁰¹

The language of Spirit also describes how Jesus will resurrect believers in the last day. The ultimate degree of glory will be resurrection in a spiritual body.⁷⁰² In the context of the resurrection Paul said Christ is a “life-giving spirit,” and one day believers will “bear the image of the man of heaven” (1 Cor 15:45, 49). The thought is similar to that of Rom 8:9-11: For those in whom Christ dwells, the Spirit who raised Christ from the dead will resurrect them also.⁷⁰³

Second Corinthians 4:1-4

(1) Διὰ τοῦτο, ἔχοντες τὴν διακονίαν ταύτην καθὼς ἠλεήθημεν, οὐκ ἐγκακοῦμεν (2) ἀλλὰ ἀπειπάμεθα τὰ κρυπτὰ τῆς αἰσχύνης, μὴ περιπατοῦντες ἐν πανουργίᾳ μηδὲ δολοῦντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ τῇ φανερώσει τῆς ἀληθείας συνιστάνοντες ἑαυτοὺς πρὸς πᾶσαν συνείδησιν ἀνθρώπων ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ. (3) εἰ δὲ καὶ ἔστιν κεκαλυμμένον τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν, ἐν τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις ἐστὶν κεκαλυμμένον, (4) ἐν οἷς ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου ἐτύφλωσεν τὰ νοήματα τῶν ἀπίστων εἰς τὸ μὴ αὐγᾶσαι τὸν φωτισμὸν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τῆς δόξης τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ.

(1) Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. (2) We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God. (3) And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. (4) In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Having established the superiority of the new covenant and therefore the superiority of his own ministry, in 2 Cor 4:1-6 Paul described the good news of the new covenant, particularly the divine glory revealed in Jesus Christ. He first acknowledged his ministry as completely dependent on the mercy of God, and he characterized it as the

⁷⁰¹ Richardson, *Paul's Language*, 172.

⁷⁰² Robert H. Gundry, “The Essential Physicality of Jesus' Resurrection According to the New Testament,” in Green and Turner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 217.

⁷⁰³ John more directly states that Jesus raised himself from the dead and will also resurrect the dead in the eschaton by the life-giving power and authority of the Father. See John 2:18-22; 5:21-29; 11:25-26.

open proclamation of truth rather than the use of secret, shameful, deceptive, or dishonest tactics. Indeed, if the gospel message is obscure, it is obscure to unbelievers whom the devil has blinded. The truth is to be found in the light of the gospel of Christ. In v. 4 and in v. 6, Paul alluded to Isa 42:6-7 and 49:6, where God promised to give God's servant as "a light to the nations" to provide healing, deliverance, and salvation.⁷⁰⁴

In 2 Cor 4:1-4 the most significant statement for our purposes is v. 4b: "*to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*" Here Paul described Jesus as the "image of God" (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ). As we discussed in ch. 4, this term identifies Jesus as the manifestation of the invisible God, or God in human form. The "image of God" here is essentially equivalent to the "glory of God" in v. 6, both functioning as terms for the embodiment or visible manifestation of God.⁷⁰⁵ It is probably equivalent in function to the phrase "in the form of God" (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ) in Phil 2:6. People in the Greco-Roman world believed in divine manifestations ranging from tangible, personal appearances to visions to an awareness of overwhelming divine presence.⁷⁰⁶ Paul's language here encompasses all these options in describing Jesus as God's revelation to humans.

In using these terms Paul drew from the theophanies of the OT, such as the depiction of God in Ezek 1. He also employed the language of first-century Hellenistic Judaism that we explored in ch. 4, such as the use of "image" to describe the Logos and theophanies in Philo and to describe Wisdom in Wis. 7:24-26. The difference is that Paul presented Jesus as the supreme fulfillment of this concept.⁷⁰⁷ Jesus becomes the one who manifests the character and identity of God. "The glorified Christ is the ultimate and eschatological revelation of God. There is nothing more that can or will be seen of God."⁷⁰⁸

In Jewish thought of the OT and the rabbinic tradition of the first three centuries C.E., God is an invisible spirit, no one can see God's essence, and when humans in Scripture saw God they must have seen some kind of image, such as a human form.⁷⁰⁹ The NT also reflects this type of thinking with statements about the invisibility of God as

⁷⁰⁴ Peter T. O'Brien, "Was Paul Converted?," in *The Paradoxes of Paul* (vol. 2 of *Justification and Variegated Nomism*; D. A. Carson et al., eds.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 69.

⁷⁰⁵ Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:319.

⁷⁰⁶ Versnel, "What Did Ancient Man See?," 47, 53.

⁷⁰⁷ Grenz, "Jesus As the Imago Dei," 618.

⁷⁰⁸ Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 219.

⁷⁰⁹ Hanson, "Midrash in 2 Corinthians 3," 3-6.

Spirit.⁷¹⁰ In this context, Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), the way humans can see God. As we discussed in connection with 2 Cor 3:18, the Dead Sea Scrolls describe God’s face as shining upon God’s people. Paul used similar language with a new fulfillment: God’s glory is revealed through Christ, who is God’s image or God’s face.⁷¹¹ There is also a parallel in the Hellenistic ruler cults, in which the god-ruler was the “image of God” (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ), meaning the visible manifestation of the invisible deity.⁷¹² For Paul, then, Christ is “the visibility of God” or “the apprehensibility of God,”⁷¹³ and as such he manifests the glory of God. Christ reveals God in the greatest way possible in the visible realm. In Christ, “God has revealed himself so fully that he could not have manifested himself more clearly by any other means.”⁷¹⁴ “As God’s εἰκὼν, Christ . . . is the precise and visible representation of the invisible God.”⁷¹⁵ He is “the (visible, therefore material) manifestation of (the invisible) God” and “the physical embodiment of divinity,” with the implication that God’s presence was in him.⁷¹⁶

In sum, “image” here means “Christ is not only the full representation of God, but the coming-to-expression of the nature of God, the making visible . . . of who God is in himself” and “the *shekinah* present in visible form.”⁷¹⁷ Stated another way, “through Christ as the image of God men come to apprehend the *Göttlichkeit* [divinity] of God—that is to understand what it means really to be God.”⁷¹⁸ Moreover, Paul used the term “image” in this context to connect creation with redemption. Christ not only epitomizes or embodies God’s original creative plan for humans but also God’s plan of redemption for humans. Thus there is soteriological significance: God’s image, God’s true being, including God’s love for humanity, is revealed through Christ’s life, ministry, death, burial, and resurrection.⁷¹⁹

⁷¹⁰ See John 1:18; 14:8-9 (implied); 1 Tim 6:16.

⁷¹¹ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 81.

⁷¹² Kleinknecht, *TDNT* 2:390; Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 206.

⁷¹³ Hanson, “Midrash in 2 Corinthians 3,” 22-23.

⁷¹⁴ Hanson, *Image of the Invisible God*, 89.

⁷¹⁵ Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 331.

⁷¹⁶ Kim, *Origin of Paul’s Gospel*, 199, 219, 226.

⁷¹⁷ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 79, quoting the last phrase from Vincent Taylor, *The Names of Jesus* (London: Macmillan, 1954), 127.

⁷¹⁸ Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 132.

⁷¹⁹ Hengel, *Son of God*, 14-15.

Second Corinthians 4:5-6

(5) οὐ γὰρ ἑαυτοὺς κηρύσσομεν ἀλλὰ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν κύριον, ἑαυτοὺς δὲ δούλους ὑμῶν διὰ Ἰησοῦν. (6) ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ὁ εἰπὼν, Ἐκ σκοτῶν φῶς λάμψει, ὃς ἔλαμψεν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν πρὸς φωτισμὸν τῆς γνώσεως τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν προσώπῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

“(5) For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake. (6) For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Paul’s ministry was not one of self-proclamation or self-glorification but proclamation of Jesus as Lord; he was only a slave in the process. It is God who illuminates the hearts of people to receive the revelation of the glory of God in Jesus Christ.

Paul shifted from speaking of Jesus as “the Spirit” (3:17-18) to speaking of Jesus as “the Lord” (4:5), a consistent theme of his.⁷²⁰ Drawing a parallel with the creation account in Genesis, Paul further identified Jesus with the “glory of God” (δόξα τοῦ θεοῦ). Just as God spoke light into existence at creation (Gen 1:3), so God speaks light into the hearts of believers to reveal God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ. The God who manifested the divine glory at creation has now manifested the fullness of divine glory in Jesus Christ.⁷²¹

In v. 6 “glory” functions much as “image” in v. 4. A few verses earlier, Paul had associated the two words in describing the believer’s progressive conformity to God’s character (2 Cor 3:18; cf. Rom 8:29-30). Elsewhere he used the terms together to describe a man as the apex of God’s visible creation (1 Cor 11:7). In Hebrew thought, both words signify the visible revelation of God.⁷²² Since Jesus is the image of God, he is the revelation of the glory of God to humans.⁷²³ Glory is nothing less than the manifestation of God’s presence.⁷²⁴ “The divine *doxa* is . . . the way God exists and acts, that is, God

⁷²⁰ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 290. See Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3; Phil 2:10-11.

⁷²¹ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 174.

⁷²² Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 115.

⁷²³ Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 206; Hurtado, “Binitarian Shape of Early Christian Worship,” 212.

⁷²⁴ Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:246; Newman, *Paul’s Glory-Christology*, 163.

Himself. If the *doxa* of Christ is mentioned, that means that God himself is present in Christ.⁷²⁵

The glory of Christ (v. 4) is the glory of God's own self as revealed in or on the face of Christ (v. 6); the description thus identifies Christ with God. This point is evident from a comparison of the two verses:

- “the light of the gospel / of the glory of Christ / who is the image of God” (v. 4)
- “the light of the knowledge / of the glory of God / in the face of Jesus Christ” (v. 6)

Paul used the word πρόσωπον, which literally means “face” but often has the figurative meaning of “person” or “presence,” to say God's glory is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. Paul's vivid depiction of Christ in v. 6 seems to be more than a theological construct. It sounds as if Paul was describing a personal vision or encounter, and the context supports this conclusion. In 2 Cor 3, he referred to the glory of the Lord revealed visibly on the face of Moses (Exod 34). His main point was that the ministry of the new covenant is superior to the ministry of the old covenant. In this context, his readers would have expected the revelation of the Lord's glory under the new covenant likewise to be visible but even more glorious. Earlier Paul testified to the Corinthians of his seeing the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8), so they probably understood this description as coming from an actual vision of Christ.

When did Paul have such an experience? It seems he was speaking of his encounter with the resurrected and ascended Christ at his conversion.⁷²⁶ Kim made a strong case that on the Damascus road Paul saw the exalted, glorified Christ as the image of God.⁷²⁷ Acts records Paul's conversion experience three times (Acts 9; 22; 26). From the similarity of vocabulary in 2 Cor 4:6 and Acts, it seems the two accounts are connected and the Acts accounts have their origin in Paul's testimony:⁷²⁸

⁷²⁵ Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 132, quoting J. Jervell, *Imago Dei* (1960), 216.

⁷²⁶ Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:284, 317-18; Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 119; idem, *How on Earth?*, 195; Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 224-25.

⁷²⁷ Kim, *Origin of Paul's Gospel*, 193. For Kim, 2 Cor 3:1-4:6 is the strongest evidence that Paul's conversion experience was the source for his concept of “the image of God.” Ibid., 229.

⁷²⁸ Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:317-18.

- “Light”: 2 Cor 4:6 (φῶς and φωτισμός) and Acts 9:3; 22:6, 11; 26:13 (φῶς)
- “Glory” (δόξα): 2 Cor 4:6 and Acts 22:11 (“glory” in NKJV and “brightness” in NRSV)
- “Shine” (forms of λαμπ-): 2 Cor 4:6 (λάμπω, “to shine”) and Acts 26:13 (λαμπρότης, “brightness,” and περιλάμπω, “to shine around”)

In each of the three accounts in Acts, Paul saw not only a brilliant light but also the Lord in human form, which he understood to be Jesus Christ manifesting the glory of God. According to Acts 9:17 Ananias told Paul, “The Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me.” According to Acts 22:14-16 he said, “The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear his own voice; for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.” This account identifies the voice of Jesus speaking to Paul as God’s own voice (φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ, literally, “the voice out of his mouth”) and further identifies the name of Jesus with God’s own name. According to Acts 26:19, after recounting how Jesus spoke to him, Paul told King Agrippa, “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.”

While this experience was spiritual, Paul made a distinction between the appearance of Christ to him on the road to Damascus and subsequent visionary experiences. He placed it in the same category as the other apostles’ encounter with the resurrected Christ so that he was a witness of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:5-8), and he did not cite it when relating the kind of charismatic visions that Christians in general might expect to have (2 Cor 12:1-2). In other words, he thought of it as a direct, objective encounter.⁷²⁹

Regardless of how we may interpret Paul’s conversion experience and vision, this event defined the rest of his life and ministry by transforming his religious perspective. Religious experiences acquire enduring significance by the way people interpret them in theistic terms.⁷³⁰ Thus, for our present purposes it is not helpful to seek a twenty-first-

⁷²⁹ Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 308; Kim, *Origin of Paul’s Gospel*, 6, 55-56.

⁷³⁰ Timothy Fitzgerald, “Experience,” in *Guide to the Study of Religion* (ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon; New York: Cassell, 2000), 126.

century neurological or psychological explanation. Instead, we need to understand how Paul interpreted this experience and particularly how his interpretation was conditioned by his social and theological context. Significant personal experiences become significant because they occur within and are interpreted by a specific social, institutional context.⁷³¹ Paul was a theist who believed in what modern Westerners might call supernatural events. When he perceived a light from heaven flashing around him and blinding him, he understood it to be a supernatural, divine event. More specifically, Paul was a monotheistic Jew. For him, a divine encounter of this sort could only originate with the one God of Israel; there was no other god. At the same time, he interpreted this experience to mean his understanding of God's will and work was inadequate. He had been traveling on the road to Damascus to fulfill what he thought was the will of God by persecuting Christians, but evidently God was not pleased with him. "He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting'" (Acts 9:5). His question did not indicate a willingness to deny his monotheistic faith, but he sought a new understanding of the one God in light of his unexpected, miraculous encounter with the divine.

He inferred that he had directly encountered the risen Jesus radiating the very glory of God. Since, according to his monotheistic faith, God could not share divine glory with anyone else (cf. Isa 42:8), Paul identified Jesus Christ as the eschatological revelation of Yahweh. When Paul had his vision on the Damascus road he immediately understood it to be the image of God, but then he realized it was the glorified Christ.⁷³² He did not change his religious allegiance; he still worshiped the God of his ancestors and adhered to the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures (Acts 23:6; 24:14). He concluded, however, that the one God had revealed God's self in a new way as the fulfillment of prophecy for the last days. In short, Paul's vision of the exalted, heavenly Jesus caused him to identify Jesus as the image and glory of God, the visible manifestation of Yahweh.⁷³³ It was the reason why he felt justified in applying to Jesus texts that clearly refer to Yahweh.⁷³⁴ Jesus was not merely a representative or a representation of God but

⁷³¹ Fitzgerald, "Experience," 128-29.

⁷³² Kim, *Origin of Paul's Gospel*, 233. Kim compared Paul's experience to Isaiah's vision of Yahweh and call in Isa 6, which John 12:41 interprets as a vision of Christ. Thus Paul saw "the enthroned Christ" as Yahweh. *Ibid.*, 94.

⁷³³ Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 118; Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:318.

⁷³⁴ D. A. Carson, "Mystery and Fulfillment: Toward a More Comprehensive Paradigm of Paul's Understanding of the Old and the New," in Carson et al., *Paradoxes of Paul*, 399.

the fullness of God revealed in human flesh, as expressed later in Col 1:19; 2:9. “The Christophany transformed Paul’s convictional world—Paul preached Jesus as Lord (= Yahweh).”⁷³⁵

In 2 Cor 4:5-6, Paul applied the revelation of God’s glory in Christ to the personal spiritual experience of Christians.⁷³⁶ Christ was the supreme image of God during his earthly life, and he is still the supreme image of God when he is known by faith.⁷³⁷ Just as God revealed the divine glory to Paul in the face of Jesus Christ by a literal vision, so now God reveals the divine glory to believers through an inward experience of Jesus Christ. By turning to the Lord Jesus and receiving his Spirit, they can see “the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror” (3:18) and experience the “glory of God” (4:6). The main emphasis of v. 6 is on the transformation of believers as they perceive and encounter God’s glory emanating from the face of Jesus Christ.⁷³⁸ Paul interpreted his vision of Christ in terms of theophany, providing him with a new interpretive paradigm. He concluded that God was acting in, through, and as Christ. As he stated also in 2 Cor 5:17, God’s act in Christ was a new act of spiritual creation comparable to God’s original act of physical creation.⁷³⁹

In short, Paul drew from his own dramatic conversion experience to describe the conversion of all those who turn to Jesus Christ in faith. The key to his conversion was a vision of the glorified Jesus, which he interpreted as the manifestation of God’s glory on or in Jesus. He perceived Jesus as bearing the fullness of divine glory.⁷⁴⁰ This vision is likely the source of Paul’s description of Jesus as “the Lord of glory” (1 Cor 2:8).

As we previously noted, according to the Exodus text Moses saw God’s glory but only as a partial revelation. God told him, “While my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen” (Exod 33:22-23). By saying God gave “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6), Paul claimed a superior, plain, and full revelation of

⁷³⁵ Newman, *Paul’s Glory-Christology*, 183.

⁷³⁶ Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:319; Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 224-25.

⁷³⁷ Hanson, *Image of the Invisible God*, 89.

⁷³⁸ Tasker, *Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 68.

⁷³⁹ William S. Campbell, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity* (LNTS 322; London: T&T Clark, 2006), 142, 145.

⁷⁴⁰ Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 195; idem, *One God, One Lord*, 119.

God's glory under the new covenant. By encountering Jesus, people now can see God's face.

Summary

In 2 Cor 3 Paul asserted that the new covenant, which he ministered, was superior to that of the old, which his opponents ministered, in three ways:⁷⁴¹ (1) The glory of the Spirit is greater than the glory of the law (vv. 1-6). (2) The ministry of justification/life is greater than the ministry of condemnation/death (vv. 6-9). (3) The glory of the old covenant was temporary, while the glory of the new covenant is permanent (vv. 7-13). Consequently, those who still adhere to the old covenant today do not have clear understanding (vv. 14-15), while those who have entered the new covenant have a superior position of enlightenment, freedom, glory, and progressive transformation into the image of Christ (vv. 16-18). Paul's argument here serves not only to silence his opponents at Corinth but to provide a more general rationale for why the people of Israel, and anyone else who appreciated the Jewish law, should now follow Jesus Christ according to Paul's gospel.

What gives the new covenant its superiority and efficacy? The Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Spirit. Christ instituted the new covenant by his death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor 15:1-4), which brings about reconciliation with God and bestows the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:19-21). But Christ's work did not end with his earthly life. He continues to work in the lives of believers by his divine Spirit. When believers turn to Christ, they are filled or baptized with the Spirit.⁷⁴²

Under the old covenant, only a few privileged people saw God's glory and were moved upon by God's Spirit, and even these experiences were partial and transitory. Under the new covenant, however, every believer can behold the glory of God and experience the abiding, indwelling presence of God's Spirit. In Exodus, only Moses beheld the Lord face to face for a short time, while the rest of Israel saw God's reflected glory through a veil. Under the new covenant, all who turn to the Lord have an

⁷⁴¹ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 168.

⁷⁴² Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 200 n.20. See Acts 1:5; 2:4; 11:15-17; 1 Cor 12:12-13; Eph 1:13.

experience equivalent to that of Moses. The Spirit, which is the Lord Jesus, gives them life and the assurance of salvation in the end.⁷⁴³

Throughout 2 Cor 3 the basic assumption is that Jesus is the key to the contemporary interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures.⁷⁴⁴ In true *peshet* fashion, Paul identified Christ as the Lord of the old covenant, who revealed his glory in a partial, transitory manner to Moses but who has now revealed his glory in permanent fashion in flesh and by the ongoing work of his Spirit. No doubt Paul's interpretation of the OT was shaped by his experience of the risen Christ on the road to Damascus and his subsequent reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:1-18). With his post-conversional perspective, he saw Jesus Christ as both the manifestation of Yahweh and the "life-giving" Spirit.

Paul redefined the Old Testament concept of divine glory in terms of Christ.⁷⁴⁵ By associating divine glory with a vision of the resurrected Christ, Paul proclaimed his gospel to be the ultimate fulfillment of the old covenant and superior to the old covenant. He thereby sought to refute the claims of his opponents and to vindicate his ministry and apostleship. The God who was revealed on Mount Sinai by a partial glimpse of divine glory has now been revealed in Jesus Christ, who displays the same glory but in full measure. By his use of "glory" Paul associated Jesus with OT theophanies and specifically with the revelation of Yahweh.⁷⁴⁶ The very God of creation is now active in salvation. In short, Paul's conversion experience caused him to redefine Yahweh in terms of Christ.⁷⁴⁷

We find a similar discussion in the Gospel of John; both authors apparently drew from a common Christian tradition.⁷⁴⁸ We note the following parallels between 2 Cor 3-4 and John 1:

- Grounding in the creation account of Gen 1 (John 1:1-3; 2 Cor 4:6)
- Jesus as the true light of the world (John 1:4, 9; 2 Cor 4:4-6)
- Appeal to the giving of the law to Moses in Exod 34, making contemporary application to Christ (John 1:17; 2 Cor 3:3, 7)

⁷⁴³ Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 101.

⁷⁴⁴ Hooker, "St. Paul's Use of Scripture," 306-7.

⁷⁴⁵ Richardson, *Paul's Language*, 174.

⁷⁴⁶ Newman, *Paul's Glory-Christology*, 235, 246; Alan F. Segal, "Paul's 'Soma Pneumatikon' and the Worship of Jesus," in Newman et al., *Jewish Roots of Theological Monotheism*, 264.

⁷⁴⁷ Nicholson, *Dynamic Oneness*, 60.

⁷⁴⁸ Hooker, "St. Paul's Use of Scripture," 302-5; idem, "Authority of the Bible," 52.

- Contrast between God’s revelation of the law through Moses and God’s self-revelation in Christ (John 1:14-18; 2 Cor 3:6, 14-16)
- Contrast between the partial divine glory revealed to Moses and the fullness of divine glory revealed in Christ (John 1:17-18; 2 Cor 3:7-11)

There are also similar parallels between 2 Cor 3-4 and 1 John 1:⁷⁴⁹

- Grounding in creation, the beginning (1 John 1:1; 2 Cor 4:6)
- Jesus as the visible manifestation of God (1 John 1:1; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:6)
- Life through Christ (1 John 1:1-2; 2 Cor 3:6; 4:10-12)
- Jesus as the revelation of God (1 John 1:2; 2 Cor 4:6)
- Declaration of the truth of Christ by the apostle (1 John 1:3; 2 Cor 3:12; 4:2)
- Fellowship with the Father and the Son; beholding God’s glory in Jesus (1 John 1:3; 2 Cor 4:6)

For Paul, Christ is the Spirit of the Lord, the image of God, the glory of God, and spiritual life (2 Cor 3:17; 4:4, 6, 11). For John, Christ is the Word made flesh; the revelation of God’s grace, truth, glory, and life; and the only Son, who makes God fully known (John 1:1, 14, 18; 1 John 1:1-2). For Paul, believers are progressively transformed into the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:18). For John, believers are being purified; and when Christ, the manifestation of God, is revealed they will become like him (1 John 3:1-3). John further described Jesus as the visible revelation of the Father, who dwells in him and works through him so that the Father is glorified in the Son (John 14:8-13). The ultimate significance of these descriptions appears at the end of John’s Gospel, which presents the confession of Thomas as the climactic revelation of who Jesus is, namely, the Lord God of Israel manifested in the flesh, or the Son of God:

Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of

⁷⁴⁹ For a study of the structure of 1 John 1:1-4, see Jeffrey E. Brickle, *Aural Design and Coherence in the Prologue of First John* (LNTS 465; New York: T&T Clark, 2012).

his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:28-31)

While Paul and John were not dependent upon each other, both evidently drew from the bedrock of early Christian tradition to describe who Jesus is. The parallels between the two are unmistakable. The deification language of Paul is not aberrational but stands as an early expression of a strong NT tradition. It is not primarily Hellenistic but rooted in Second Temple Jewish thought. When Paul spoke of Jesus as the image of God and the glory of God, the Jewish background of these terms leads us to think of deification. The subsequent language of John intersects with the language of Paul and gives further indication that the early Christians used these terms to speak in the strongest possible way about the identity of Jesus. From their expressions, a consistent portrait emerges of Jesus Christ as viewed through their eyes: one who was born as a true human, who died, and who rose again, yet one who was also the human embodiment or personification of the one God of Israel. Paul thus interpreted his conversion experience and then applied this concept to the conversion of believers. When believers under the new covenant receive the Holy Spirit, they receive Jesus Christ in Spirit form, and thereby they encounter the God of Israel in glorious self-revelation.

EXPLORING THE TEXTURES

To use the language of Robbins as discussed in ch. 2, we have considered the inner texture and intertexture of 2 Cor 3:16–4:6, and we are now ready to look at the ideological and social textures. Our goal is to use this text to help us understand the thought and motivation of Paul and other early Christians. Our exploration of the textures adequately demonstrates the validity of the two main premises stated in ch. 1: (1) Jewish monotheism is the best model or lens by which to understand Paul's beliefs about God and thus the language he and other early Christians used for Jesus. (2) Paul and other early Christians used the language of deity with reference to Jesus.

Our exploration also enables us to address the three main questions posed in ch. 1: (1) *What* does the exalted language concerning Christ represent? Did Paul and other early Jewish believers in Jesus truly begin to speak of him in terms of deity otherwise reserved for Yahweh? (2) *How* did Paul and other early Christians explain, reconcile, or otherwise justify the deification of Jesus in light of their monotheistic heritage? (3) *Why* did Paul and other early Christians deify Jesus, given the Jewish insistence upon the worship of Yahweh alone? What motivated this discourse, what interests were served, and what were the practical consequences?

The Question of What: Significance of the Deification Language

What does this text articulate concerning early Christian beliefs about Christ? Specifically, how does it describe the identity of Christ in the context of Second Temple Jewish monotheism? How does its discourse about Jesus intersect with the prevailing ideologies of the time? From our inner-textual and intertextual study of 2 Cor 3:16–4:6, we conclude: (1) The text deifies Jesus using the language and concepts of Second Temple Judaism. Since Judaism in this period was strongly monotheistic, we immediately face the challenge of understanding the relationship between monotheism and the deification of Jesus. (2) Paul and those he represented did not repudiate their Jewish heritage by espousing an essentially incompatible theology. Instead, they simultaneously affirmed both the oneness of God and the deity of Christ by presenting Christ as the human manifestation of Yahweh. We will explore this concept later in this chapter.

While we must be cautious about generalizing from Paul to all of early Christianity, his writings provide evidence that most Christians in his day, both Jews and Gentiles, held a similar view of Christ: (1) He relied on pre-Pauline liturgical material in his deification of Christ.⁷⁵⁰ Indeed, this liturgical material contains some of the strongest deification language in Paul's writings. (2) He presented his message as in continuity with the Jerusalem church, and his opponents did not contest his Christology although they challenged his authority in other ways and appealed to Jewish tradition for their alleged authority. In other words, we find no significant controversy within the early Christian community over Paul's deification language. (3) Paul was a product of Hellenistic (Diaspora) Judaism, the Corinthians were mostly Gentile Christians, and Paul's newly arrived opponents were Palestinian Christians, thus representing the diversity of early Christianity. In short, our study supports the new scholarly consensus: "a Christology that portrays Christ as divine emerges very early, in distinctively Jewish terminology and within a Jewish context."⁷⁵¹

The Question of How: Redescribing Early Christian Discourse about Jesus

As we examine early Christian discourse about Jesus as well as recent discourse on first-century Christology, we should not simply define the terms of study based on the usage of religious adherents themselves, but we should discuss the temporal and contingent aspects of religious discourse.⁷⁵² Religion is constructed as social discourse, and scholarship on religion is likewise social discourse.⁷⁵³ Religion maps conceptual matrices onto experiences, while scholarship on religion maps theoretical matrices onto religious experiences.⁷⁵⁴ Both the scholarly study of religion and the practice of religion are types of discourse and discourse-making. Religious speech is a form of mythic discourse and is ideological in nature, but so is scholarship on religion.⁷⁵⁵

Our study indicates the need to redescribe early Christian discourse about Jesus, and this is a secondary focus of our investigation. Since we have examined only one segment of Paul's discourse, our contributions to this discussion can only be suggestive

⁷⁵⁰ Probable examples are 1 Cor 8:4-6; 16:22; 2 Cor 5:19; 8:9; Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20.

⁷⁵¹ Chester, "High Christology," 38.

⁷⁵² Lincoln, "Theses on Method," 10.

⁷⁵³ Gerhard van den Heever, "Making Mysteries: From the *Untergang der Mysterien* to Imperial Mysteries—Social Discourse in Religion and the Study of Religion," *R&T* 12 (2005): 262.

⁷⁵⁴ Van den Heever, "Redescribing Graeco-Roman Antiquity," 219.

⁷⁵⁵ Gerhard van den Heever, "Undoing the Sleights of Hand: Prophets and Scholars—Two Mythic Discourses," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 63 (2007): 941-43.

and tentative. Drawing from our exegetical findings in the Corinthian correspondence, particularly our selected text, and employing insights from Oneness Pentecostal Christology, we will attempt to sketch what this redescription could look like. A full development would require not only an extensive analysis of all of Paul's discourse but a similar analysis of other NT discourse, further historical investigation, and engagement with systematic theology, all of which are beyond the scope of this thesis. Since this attempt at redescription does not correspond in every respect to traditional creedal orthodoxy, it should simply be understood as adding a voice to the ongoing conversation in the global appropriation of historic Christianity for the twenty-first century. When considering the broad spectrum of scholarship on Christology and Christian origins—from the more conservative stance of Bauckham, Hurtado, and Dunn to the more skeptical stance of Casey and Mack—this attempt aligns much more closely with, and is greatly indebted to, the former. While these scholars would not endorse our redescription and probably would not wish to be associated with it, in the larger conversation the differences amount to an intramural dispute. With these qualifications and caveats, we will attempt a brief outline of a possible redescription.

Against the traditional history-of-religions school as exemplified by Bousset and later Casey, Hurtado and Bauckham were essentially correct that from the earliest times Christians spoke of Jesus Christ in terms of deity. In contrast to Hurtado and Bauckham, however, we suggest another way to describe the early deification of Jesus instead of “binitarian” or “dyadic” devotion or “distinctions” and “interpersonal relationship” within God. Dunn more accurately described the early Christian view of Jesus as the revelation of Yahweh, but he dated the worship and full deification of Jesus somewhat later and ended up with a similar model of Jesus as a second divine person (in some sense) in John's Gospel.⁷⁵⁶ Dunn called John's view the extension of a “nascent Jewish binitarianism” and also said Philo's Logos doctrine was a kind of binitarianism. By this he meant the Jews traditionally understood God to be both transcendent and immanent, both far and near, and experienced God's power as both impersonal and personal.⁷⁵⁷ He partially qualified his discussion by saying the early Christians did not view the Son as a person other than the invisible Father and John presented Jesus as “the incarnation of *God*

⁷⁵⁶ Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 244, 250.

⁷⁵⁷ Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 263-64, 352 n.5; idem, *Partings of the Ways*, 265.

. . . not as the incarnation of the Son of God.”⁷⁵⁸ However, more recently he wrote that in the NT “Jesus is not the God of Israel. He is not the Father. He is not Yahweh.”⁷⁵⁹

One problem with this discourse is the danger of interpreting first-century evidence based on the assumption of a linear development toward later doctrinal formulations. Instead of studying first-century Christology as a logical precursor to third- and fourth-century models of the Godhead, we should interpret and evaluate it on its own terms. Bousset and Casey were right to say a truly binitarian model would have breached Jewish monotheism,⁷⁶⁰ which is why they believed it must have developed later. In partial agreement, Dunn said the notion of an actual, second, preexistent person would not have initially occurred to the early Christians and would have been seen as “some kind of polytheism” in their Jewish context.⁷⁶¹ Bauckham and Hurtado sought to develop models that recognize distinctions within the divine identity yet do not violate Jewish monotheism. Nevertheless, Bauckham acknowledged his proposal to be a “radical innovation” within Judaism, and Hurtado acknowledged his proposal to be a “significant ‘mutation’” within Judaism.⁷⁶²

Bauckham, Hurtado, and Dunn have correctly pointed out a duality in Paul’s discourse about God and Jesus, but terms such as *binitarian* unavoidably import too much that is foreign to first-century thought. In the final analysis if we use the terms *binitarian* and *high Christology* to mean Jesus is the human personification of Yahweh, or the incarnation of the fullness of the OT God, then they describe the evidence. On the other hand if we use them to mean Jesus is in some sense the manifestation of Yahweh but not actually Yahweh—less than or equal to, but a different person from, the OT God—then they do not adequately describe Paul’s discourse about Jesus. In any case, it is not accurate to characterize early christological thought as an evolution from a low to a high Christology.⁷⁶³

The real issue is how first-century Christians sought to relate their encounter of the divine in the flesh-and-blood Jesus to the transcendent, singular God of Judaism. As shown by our discussion in ch. 4, first-century Jews such as Philo had ways to describe

⁷⁵⁸ Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, xxviii; idem, *Christology*, 267, 309. See idem, *Partings of the Ways*, 299, 320.

⁷⁵⁹ Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 142.

⁷⁶⁰ Casey, “Lord Jesus Christ,” 94.

⁷⁶¹ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 267-74; idem, *Christology*, 47.

⁷⁶² Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 55; Hurtado, *God in NT Theology*, 49.

⁷⁶³ Talbert, *Development of Christology*, 41.

how the transcendent God operated in the world among humans, although these categories did not allow for the worship of a second divine being.⁷⁶⁴ Bauckham, Hurtado, and especially Dunn recognized that early Christians used these categories to describe Jesus, but their models go further than the evidence requires. It is more fruitful to consider early Christology in terms of the transcendence of God (being outside the material world) and the immanence of God (involved with the material world, present and working in human lives). As we have just seen, Dunn indeed mentioned this concept but pressed it into the mold of binitarianism and did not employ its full explanatory power especially as related to the human Jesus. The key to understanding Paul's "binitarian" language is not a new theory of the Godhead foreign to Second Temple Judaism and to first-century thought generally, but recognizing the human identity of Jesus as the ultimate means by which the transcendent God became immanent. While this concept involved some innovation as well, it was not explicitly incompatible with the tenets of Second Temple Judaism, and it was current in first-century culture in the forms of epiphany, apotheosis, and incarnation.

To Dunn, "equating or even identifying Jesus with God" would "constitute such a radical revision of the dogma of monotheism as to make a parting of the ways" between Judaism and Christianity "inevitable and . . . irretrievable."⁷⁶⁵ While this is true from the perspective of Rabbinic Judaism, early Christians saw their doctrine of Christ as unique and unprecedented but still within the biblical definition of Jewish monotheism. As Dunn noted, to speak of the Logos-Son as a different person from the Father in the sense that Jesus of Nazareth was a person would be to abandon monotheism, but this is not what the early Christians were saying, although it is possibly what the rabbis thought John was saying. In actuality, the Wisdom Christology of Paul and John could be maintained in harmony with the *Shema*. They presented "*Jesus as God, in the sense that the Logos/Wisdom is God—that of God which may be manifested within the limits of human history and flesh. . . .* The belief which triumphed was the belief in God as one and in Jesus as the expression of the one God."⁷⁶⁶ According to Dunn, in passages such as 1 Cor 8:6 Paul expressed the deity of Jesus in terms compatible with Jewish monotheism using Wisdom Christology, but John's idea of incarnation was a significant modification of Jewish monotheism and therefore Rabbinic Judaism rejected it. Dunn's reading of Paul

⁷⁶⁴ Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 73, 83-84, 90; McGrath, *One True God*, 56.

⁷⁶⁵ Dunn, *Partings of the Ways*, 250.

⁷⁶⁶ Dunn *Partings of the Ways*, 319-20.

here is essentially accurate, yet it seems Paul did have some concept of incarnation, as in Col 1:19; 2:9 (which Dunn attributed to Paul). Moreover, while this concept was innovative it was not actually a modification of monotheism itself. Although the rabbis of the late first and early second centuries considered this view heretical, their form of Judaism was not definitive at the time of Paul himself. His understanding of monotheism was just as compatible with Second Temple Judaism as theirs, not on the basis of a “two powers” theory but on the basis of historic monotheism combined with contemporary concepts of incarnation.

On one hand, early Christians were convinced they had encountered the divine in Christ and sought ways to describe this reality. On the other hand, they wanted to maintain their identification with Jewish monotheism. The issue was whether they could affirm the deity of Christ within the context of strict monotheism or whether Jewish monotheism needed to be modified in order to account for God’s immanence in Christ. There seems to be a scholarly assumption that strict monotheism would require a lesser deification of Christ, while full deification of Christ would necessitate a modification of monotheism. But this assumption appears unnecessary when we redescribe the discussion by a new matrix of terminology focusing on transcendence and immanence.⁷⁶⁷

Paul affirmed strict monotheism but deified Jesus. The Pauline community worshiped Jesus without identifying him as a second divine person. To use Dunn’s

⁷⁶⁷ As discussed in chs. 1 and 3, the characterization of “strict” monotheism does not deny the diversity of first-century Judaism, including possible henotheistic practices. Nor does it deny *a priori* the possibility that a first-century Jew like Paul could have developed a form of binitarianism or trinitarianism. However, we have followed Bauckham, Hurtado, and Dunn by using this characterization and interpreting Paul in this context. Based on our analysis of Second Temple Jewish thought, we have chosen it as a starting point while recognizing it is subject to modification based on further evidence, which in our case is Paul’s discourse. In other words, there is a strong but rebuttable presumption that a Jew such as Paul would be hesitant to acknowledge a second divine being. While most scholars have concluded he ultimately moved in this direction, we have explored another way to evaluate the evidence in greater harmony with strict monotheism. While our proposal differs from those of Bauckham, Hurtado, and Dunn, in the broad spectrum of scholarship it is fundamentally similar. Moreover, even if first-century Jewish monotheism was not so strict, the discussion highlights an important point: the early Christian deification of Jesus was unique. In any case, therefore, the main point of the thesis needs to be addressed: Paul deified Jesus in a significant way, and given his socio-religious background, this discourse was highly unusual and requires explanation. Although we have redescribed Paul’s deification of Jesus, our primary purpose is not to place his thought in a precise theological category (such as binitarianism, trinitarianism, modalism, or something else) but to demonstrate how strong, pervasive, and significant his deification of Jesus was and to provide a socio-rhetorical explanation of why he employed this type of discourse. Strict monotheistic makes any deification of Jesus problematic, whatever description we adopt. Since the evidence of Paul’s deification of Jesus is so strong, we cannot simply dismiss it as mistaken discourse (on his part) or mistaken interpretation (on our part). While a binitarian or trinitarian description is not impossible, it is not necessary to account for the evidence. In short, we need to understand Paul’s deification language socio-rhetorically, addressing the question of what important purposes and interests it served in his day.

language but extend it beyond his own application, they “recognized that the one God should be worshipped as the God active in and through Jesus, indeed, in a real sense, as Jesus—Jesus as the clearest self-revelation of the one God ever given to humankind.”⁷⁶⁸ The rest of the NT—notably John, Hebrews, and Revelation—is close to Paul in thought, and so were the post-apostolic writers of the early second century. They too worshiped Jesus as God without explicitly defining him a second divine person. Irenaeus continued in this tradition with some modification. By contrast, Justin handled the tension between transcendence and immanence by developing an explicitly binitarian model. What Philo described in abstract, impersonal terms, Justin implemented concretely and personally, saying the transcendent God could not become incarnate in all his fullness but only in an intermediary form. The early trinitarians followed this tradition, while the modalists reacted against it in an attempt to uphold a strict monotheistic model. It is not until Origen that we find a developed, ontological trinitarianism going beyond an “economic” model,⁷⁶⁹ and even in his construction the second person is ontologically subordinate to the first.

The first-century Christian discourse was framed by both Jewish and Greek concepts. In Jewish thought, God was both transcendent and immanent.⁷⁷⁰ Thinking about the supreme God in this way was characteristic of Hebraic thought, and it stood in contrast to prevailing Hellenistic thought as described in ch. 3. The following OT passages are a few of many examples:

- In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears. . . . He bowed the heavens, and came down; thick darkness was under his feet. He rode on a cherub, and flew; he came swiftly upon the wings of the wind.

⁷⁶⁸ Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 129.

⁷⁶⁹ Hanson, *Image of the Invisible God*, 87.

⁷⁷⁰ See Abraham Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud* (rev. ed.; New York: E. P. Dutton, 1949; repr. New York: Schocken, 1975), 40-47. Much like Dunn, we use these terms not to import foreign categories of thought but as shorthand to describe observed phenomena, or in the words of J. Z. Smith, to provide a “map” for the “territory.” Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 263-64, 352 n.5; idem, *Partings of the Ways*, 265; Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*. Divine transcendence and immanence are also well-known aspects of discourse in the larger Greco-Roman world. See Verity Platt, *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature and Religion* (Greek Culture in the Roman World; Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Laurent Bricault and Corinne Bonnet, eds., *Pantheé: Religious Transformations in the Graeco-Roman Empire* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 177; Leiden: Brill, 2013); Dirk van der Plas, ed., *Effigies Dei: Essays on the History of Religions* (SHR 51; Leiden: Brill, 1987).

. . . He reached down from on high, he took me; he drew me out of mighty waters. (Psa 18:6, 9-10, 16)

- For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite. (Isa 57:15)
- I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst. (Hos 11:9)

As discussed in ch. 4, Second Temple Judaism used terms such as “word, wisdom, glory, image of God, spirit of God” to describe God’s immanence while preserving God’s transcendence. Significantly, Paul applied most of these terms to Christ in 2 Cor 3:16-4:6. Of course, they also connote transcendence; indeed, the very concept of deification involves transcendence. These terms thus express how the transcendent God became immanent in Christ while at the same time they exalt Christ. In other words, Christ is the transcendent God made immanent. In ch. 5, at the conclusion of our inductive analysis of deification passages in 1 and 2 Corinthians, we likewise found the concept of divine transcendence and immanence to be useful as a means of understanding the “two-ishness” in Paul’s discourse about God and Jesus.

For most Jews, however, immanence did not extend so far as becoming human, even though their religious texts did not explicitly exclude this possibility. Therefore, for many traditionally minded Jews, Christ could not actually be God. The Ebionites, dynamic monarchians, and Arians followed this line of reasoning in maintaining strict monotheism. In Greek thought, the emphasis was on the transcendence of God; therefore, immanence required a distinction in the Godhead. Following this line of reasoning, Marcion and Valentinus divided the Godhead, making Yahweh a lesser deity and Christ a greater deity. In a similar vein of thought but in a different way, Justin, Tertullian, and Origen bifurcated the Godhead by making the Father a greater deity and Christ a lesser deity. In both cases, the supreme, transcendent God could not fully come in flesh; therefore, either Christ was a spirit being only (so Marcion and Valentinus), or else Christ was not actually the supreme God (so Justin, Tertullian, and Origen). Justin and Tertullian were adamant that the Father himself could not become incarnate. In the fourth century, Eusebius of Caesarea similarly argued that the Father was too pure to unite with

corruptible flesh except by an intermediary power, namely, the Word.⁷⁷¹ Athanasius elevated Christ to equality with the Father, resulting in a high Christology in a trinitarian context. Paul's view was somewhat different from both Jewish and Greek ideas about Christ: God is both transcendent and immanent, and God came in human identity as Christ. As Paul characterized the situation, the preaching of Christ was a stumbling block to Jews (because it did not accord with their view of the Messiah) and foolishness to Gentiles (because it did not accord with their philosophical view of the transcendent God). (See 1 Cor 1:22-23.) Nevertheless, God could reveal God's self in this way because humans were created in God's image. Thus Christ could be the true image of God—both the manifestation of God in flesh, or incarnation of God, and the fulfillment of God's creative plan for humanity. This early Christian concept was unique, yet it explains why Christianity became a distinct movement.

As Fredriksen summarized the evidence, the Jews were monotheists and some Christian Jews such as Paul attributed divinity to Jesus. She rightly rejected any conclusion that these early Christians somehow anticipated later trinitarian thought: "The correct inference from these observations is not, I think, the tortured Chalcedonianism *avant la lettre* that we now see assigned to 1st-century figures, who supposedly 'identified' Christ with the Father in some unique, binitarian way."⁷⁷² For her, the early Christians were able to call Jesus *theos* and still be ancient monotheists because ancient monotheism allowed the existence of other gods in a hierarchical structure. As long as there was one supreme God at the top of the theological pyramid, there could be many other deities at the base. Her proposal falls short of the evidence, however, because the issue is much more than the attribution of some sort of generic, subordinate divinity to Jesus. First, the early Christians were loyal to the Jewish form of monotheism, which insisted on the supremacy and uniqueness of Yahweh. Second, Paul and other early Christians attributed the unique name, titles, descriptions, functions, and roles of Yahweh to Jesus. When speaking of Jesus as a human, they indeed spoke of him as subordinate to God, but when describing his divinity they identified him as the manifestation or revelation of Yahweh in human form, not a subordinate deity.

Bauckham, Hurtado, and Dunn are correct to say the early Christians identified Jesus with the God of Israel instead of considering him to be a different deity or simply a

⁷⁷¹ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Laud. Const.* 11.11.5-7.

⁷⁷² Fredriksen, "Mandatory Retirement," 242-43.

human being. In Dunn's final analysis, however, Jesus is equated to Yahweh but is not Yahweh. Yet from our investigation of the Corinthian correspondence, Paul did speak of Jesus as Yahweh. Capes made a detailed study of Yahweh texts in Paul's writings, and he concluded that for Paul Jesus is "in some sense Yahweh himself," manifested as the human Messiah.⁷⁷³ Capes followed Hurtado in considering the background of divine agency, particularly the angel of Yahweh in the OT, to be significant for the development of Christology, and he said Paul often presented Jesus "as a theophany, God revealed in time and space for a redemptive purpose."⁷⁷⁴ The OT appearance of the angel of Yahweh and other theophanies indeed provided a background for understanding Jesus, yet the deification of Jesus was unprecedented and unique. Paul never presented Jesus as an angel, and while he sometimes used the language of theophany, he pointed to a divine revelation both more permanent and more human than a theophany, which would ultimately result in a concept of incarnation.

We thus suggest that an explicit binitarian or trinitarian model in terms of the fourth-century meaning of *persons* is not the most productive way to describe the Christology of Paul. We perhaps could say the roots or elements of fourth-century trinitarianism are present in the NT, but we could also say the NT ideas were later placed in a trinitarian mold adapted from Hellenistic philosophy. Fourth-century Christians wished to affirm the deity of Christ against Arianism in order to affirm God's saving work in Christ, and they rightly claimed to uphold the NT on this point. Since the prevailing Platonic philosophy stressed the transcendence of God, they considered it necessary to maintain the deity of Jesus by the doctrine of the Logos as a preexistent second person distinct from the transcendent Father. But Paul's theology rests upon the Jewish concept of God as both transcendent and immanent. His description of Jesus as "the image of God" assumes divine compatibility with human nature so that God could manifest God's self in human form and thereby interact with the world of humans in a salvific way. In 2 Cor 3-4 Paul combined an Adam Christology with a Wisdom Christology to present Jesus as both the epitome of true humanity and the manifestation of God in human identity. In this way Paul enunciated the immanence of God in Christ

⁷⁷³ Capes, *OT Yahweh Texts*, 169. His remarks are in a trinitarian framework.

⁷⁷⁴ Capes, *OT Yahweh Texts*, 169.

without articulating an explicit binitarian or trinitarian model of a preexistent Son personally distinct from the Father.⁷⁷⁵

Second Temple Jews had a clear concept of God as a personal actor; they did not envision God as an abstract impersonal substance that multiple actors could instantiate or in which multiple actors could dwell. It does not appear that Paul developed a radically new concept of God's nature or substance, a new explanation of God-in-God's-self. Instead, he sought to persuade his hearers that God had revealed God's self in an unprecedented way and had taken unprecedented action to save the human race. The new revelation was Jesus Christ, God manifested in the flesh. The key to understanding Paul's discourse about Jesus is to understand his emphasis on Jesus as a genuine, authentic human as well as the revelation of Yahweh. If Paul had simply portrayed his encounter on the Damascus road as a theophany or a vision of God without reference to an authentic human life, he would have stayed wholly within traditional Jewish parameters. If he had presented Jesus as a second deity, he clearly would have violated Jewish monotheism. Instead, he presented Jesus as the human self-revelation or personification of God. While this teaching did not violate Jewish monotheism, it did raise the issue of whether God could really do such a thing. Paul affirmed it to be possible, and he cited his personal encounter with the risen Jesus as empirical evidence that it had indeed taken place.

Although somewhat later than Paul, evidence from the Gospel of John suggests the first-century struggle between Judaism and Christianity did not focus on a binitarian or trinitarian model as such but on the issue of how a human could be God. As portrayed by John, when Jesus claimed the unique name of God ("I am") and when he claimed unique oneness with God, his Jewish audience interpreted it as a claim of deity and therefore inherently blasphemous (John 8:58-59; 10:30-38). John does not frame the discussion in terms of two divine persons or beings but in terms of incarnation: "You, though only a human being, are making yourself God" (John 10:33). The stumbling block was not how Jesus could be a second deity or a second divine person—which would have been foreign to both sides of the first-century, intra-Jewish debate—but how someone who was obviously human could be the invisible, transcendent God, who is not flesh but Spirit.

⁷⁷⁵ For this argument as it relates to Nicene theologians, see Claude Welch, *In This Name: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), 48-49, describing the thought of John Baillie, *The Place of Jesus Christ in Modern Theology* (1929), 185, and A. C. McGiffert, *History of Christian Thought* (1932-1933).

Paul simultaneously affirmed the oneness of God (Jewish monotheism), the deity of Jesus (identity as the one God of Israel), and the humanity of Jesus (distinction from God). For him the challenge was to explain how a human could be God. He could not simply present Jesus as God or transfer all of Jesus' human experiences and qualities directly to God without denying the distinction between deity and humanity. He had to describe Jesus in human terms and yet identify Jesus as God. This need is the source of the twoness we encounter in Paul's writings, which Bauckham described as distinctions within God and Hurtado described as binitarian or dyadic. To the extent that these terms may indicate eternal, personal relationships within God, they are problematic, for the purpose of Paul's twofold language is to maintain the humanity of Jesus, not to describe the essence or inner life of the transcendent God. As a human, Jesus is the king exalted by God, the Son who delivers the kingdom to the Father so God may be all in all. Terms such as *binitarian* could obscure the descriptions of Christ as human, instead referring them to deity, and could result in a portrait of Christ as a subordinate, secondary deity (at least functionally), which certainly stretches if not breaks traditional Jewish monotheism.

Several reviewers have pointed out this weakness. As McCartney noted from a trinitarian perspective, exaltation in the NT is not an aspect of Christ's deity but of his human experience: "It is as God's human viceregent that Jesus becomes exalted. Bauckham neglects this whole dimension of the exaltation of Jesus *as a man*, and that leads to confusion as he tries to read Jesus' human experience into God's identity."⁷⁷⁶ In Seitz's analysis, Bauckham rejected two choices incompatible with Jewish monotheism: Jesus functions like God but is not God ontologically or Jesus is God ontologically. As a result, there is a danger of discontinuity between the God of the OT and Jesus as the revelation of God. We could explain this discontinuity as "merely instrumental to the economy of God" or as two different persons. Seitz opted for the latter but found Bauckham's discussion of "God crucified" to blur the distinction between the persons, for it implies an immanent Trinity dying on the cross. Instead, he preferred to say "God the Son" was crucified, and in this context he explained, "God the Son is this man Jesus in his living and dying."⁷⁷⁷ While Seitz thus critiqued Bauckham's proposal from the standpoint of trinitarian systematic theology, he suggested a solution could be found in understanding the humanity of Jesus. Theissen similarly indicated that the key to

⁷⁷⁶ Dan G. McCartney, review of Bauckham, *God Crucified*, *WTJ* 61 (1999): 285.

⁷⁷⁷ Christopher Seitz, review of Bauckham, *God Crucified*, *IJSysT* 2 (2000): 114-16. In keeping with Paul's language and thought, it would be more appropriate to say "the Son of God" rather than "God the Son."

understanding early Christology lies in the distinction between deity and humanity: “If the identity of Jesus and God are so closely tied, in what sense is there a distinction between Jesus’ divinity and Jesus’ humanity? Between God and the human Jesus acting for humanity as a human? And what does it mean for God to become human?”⁷⁷⁸

From the perspective of systematic theology, the prayers of Jesus to God as recorded in the Gospels provide a good example of the complexities and subtleties involved. “Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed, ‘Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done’” (Luke 22:41-42). From a surface reading, we see a Jewish man praying to the one God of Israel, but this explanation does not take into account the deification of Jesus throughout the NT. If we adopt a binitarian model, a subordinate divine being (Christ) is praying to the supreme divine being (God the Father), appealing to the latter’s superior power and submitting to the latter’s superior will. In this case, however, Christ would not truly be God from the perspective of Jewish monotheism, for he would not be self-sufficient, self-existing, and all powerful. We could adjust the binitarian model to posit two persons who are ontologically equal, although this solution remains in tension with Jewish monotheism. Moreover, it seems inconsistent to use the prayers of Jesus to establish an eternal, ontological distinction or relationship of persons without also using his prayers to establish the nature of this ontological distinction or relationship. As a possible response, we could say Jesus prayed according to his human identity; his prayers do not indicate an ontological, eternal subordination but a functional subordination due to incarnation. In this case, however, his prayers no longer demonstrate an ontological distinction of persons but rather his authentic human identity.

To explore this model further, let us assume the fourth-century trinitarian solution of three divine persons who are coequal, coeternal, and consubstantial. We might think of the Son submitting his will to the Father’s will and praying to the Father. But it is problematic to think of one God as having two wills, and in trinitarian orthodoxy the Godhead has only one will. According to the Third Council of Constantinople in 680, which responded to the monothelite (“one will”) controversy, Jesus has two wills—human and divine—but is only one person. The prayers of Jesus thus demonstrate the submission of his human will to the will of the Trinity. As Rahner explained, when Jesus prayed as a human, he prayed to the Trinity. Indeed, it is theologically accurate, although

⁷⁷⁸ David A. Theissen, review of Bauckham, *God Crucified, Did* 13 (2001): 107.

not kerygmatically appropriate, to say the human Jesus prayed to the eternal Son. “It is true, objectively speaking, that when Jesus prayed as man, he prayed to the three divine persons. Yet kerygmatically it would be incorrect to dwell on the fact that Jesus worshipped the Son of God.”⁷⁷⁹ From this perspective, Paul’s language of duality ultimately describes the relation of the human Jesus to the entire Trinity, including the second divine person. Using Occam’s razor, a simpler explanation would be that Paul’s language of duality describes the relation of the human Jesus to God.

We can further explore Paul’s distinction between Jesus and God by posing a hypothetical question from systematic theology, using the trinitarian framework: In principle, based on what we know about the nature of God in the Bible, could any of the three persons become incarnate? Or is incarnation a unique action that only the second person could take? As we have seen, some ancient theologians such as Justin, Tertullian, and Eusebius of Caesarea maintained the Father was too transcendent to unite with corruptible flesh or even to appear in the human realm as a theophany; only the Son could do so. Under this view, the two persons do not seem to be truly the same in essence. Moreover, the uniqueness of the eternal Son would lie in temporal incarnation rather than eternal generation as orthodox trinitarianism asserts.⁷⁸⁰ An alternate view is that the Father could become incarnate. Since Augustine’s time theologians have generally assumed that any one of the three persons of the Trinity could have become human.⁷⁸¹ Assuming the trinitarian model of God, let us imagine that the Father became incarnate at some point. The Godhead would have remained transcendent, and the human who was the Father incarnate would have related to the Godhead. He would have prayed to the Trinity, and he would have submitted his will as a human to the will of God. In short, this divine-human person would necessarily have related to the Godhead, including the Father, in the same way as Jesus in the Gospels. As this thought experiment indicates, we may be able to explain the textual distinction between God and Jesus in terms of incarnation rather than eternal distinctions within the essence of God.

⁷⁷⁹ Karl Rahner, *God, Christ, Mary and Grace* (vol. 1 of *Theological Investigations*; Baltimore: Helicon, 1965), 129. The original German says: “Jesus, wenn er als Mensch betet, objektiv zu den drei göttlichen Personen betet, dennoch wäre es kerygmatisch nicht richtig, wollte man viel davon reden, daß Jesus den Sohn Gottes anbetet.” *Schriften zur Theologie* 1 (7th ed; Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1964), 146.

⁷⁸⁰ The distinction among the three divine persons lies in their unique internal relationships or properties: the ingenerateness of the Father, the begottenness of the Son, and the procession of the Holy Spirit. Harold O. J. Brown, *Heresies: The Image of Christ in the Mirror of Heresy and Orthodoxy from the Apostles to the Present* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), 151.

⁷⁸¹ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (trans. William Dych; New York: Seabury, 1978), 214.

Our interaction with systematic theology has extended far beyond Paul's discourse, but it suggests we can explain his dual language about God and Jesus in terms of Jesus' human identity. Thus binitarian or trinitarian terms may not be the best way to explain Paul's dual references. Their significance rests in the identity of Jesus as a historical human being who was anointed, indwelt, and exalted by God and yet who was also the revelation, manifestation, incarnation, or human personification of the one God. Nevertheless, while trinitarianism may not be required to understand or explain Paul's monotheistic deification of Jesus, we cannot simply dismiss it. The doctrine emerged from broader exegetical, theological, philosophical, sociological, and historical considerations, and all these aspects need to be engaged. The systematization of biblical and post-biblical thought as informed by these various considerations is beyond the scope of this thesis, however.

A goal of our investigation is to contribute to the larger discussion of constructing a global theology for the twenty-first century especially in the non-Western world. Our descriptions of the oneness of God, the deity and humanity of Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit have incorporated Oneness Pentecostal insights relevant to this task. Our hope is that this discussion will benefit both Oneness Pentecostals and other Christians who seek to understand, glean from, interact with, and critique Oneness Pentecostalism. Our discussion raises a number of questions beyond the scope of this thesis: (1) Are the roots or building blocks of trinitarianism present in the NT? The answer from the perspective of later orthodoxy is yes. Even so, this answer needs to be qualified because these building blocks did not inevitably dictate the form that classical trinitarianism would ultimately take. (2) In light of the NT evidence as well as historical developments, is trinitarianism the best model for twenty-first-century theology? Our preliminary answer is that it does not appear to be necessary or sufficient to explain Paul's discourse, but his discourse is only part of the consideration. (3) Is it possible or advisable to redescribe trinitarianism while remaining faithful to the NT evidence, preserving key trinitarian insights, and yet addressing central interests and concerns of Oneness Pentecostalism, Majority World Christianity, Jewish-Christian dialogue, and Muslim-Christian dialogue? (4) In the alternative, it is possible or advisable to redescribe Oneness Pentecostal Christology while remaining faithful to the NT evidence, preserving key Oneness Pentecostal insights, and yet addressing central interests and concerns of historic trinitarianism, perhaps resulting in a Oneness model of the Trinity? (5) Finally, is there enough common ground for each

side to recognize valid points and concerns of the other, and in this way could their Christologies become complementary or at least alternative rather than antagonistic?

For the last three questions, Barth could provide a helpful starting point. He said the main theme of the doctrine of the Trinity is the deity of Christ. He preferred to speak of “three distinctive modes of being” instead of “persons,” summed up the doctrine of the Trinity “briefly and simply by saying that *God* is the one who reveals Himself,” and emphasized that Jesus “has revealed the invisible God.”⁷⁸² In his analysis when the early Christians, as Palestinian Jews, said “Jesus is Lord,” they identified him with Yahweh. Moreover, the “material point in the New Testament texts is that *God* is found in Jesus because in fact Jesus Himself cannot be found as any other than God. And God is found in *Jesus* because in fact He is not found anywhere else but in Jesus.”⁷⁸³

Dunn’s insights are also helpful here.⁷⁸⁴

The danger in assessing and reaffirming Nicene orthodoxy is that *it is all too easy to forget the earlier stage of the debate and development* (Logos-Wisdom christology as an expression of monotheism) and to start christological reflection from the classic Father, Son language of the Nicene creed. It is the danger of starting with the question of *relationships* between the persons of the Godhead, the danger of identifying Jesus as the Son of God *simpliciter*, or of thinking of the Son of God as a person in the same way that Jesus was a person. For the theological path which starts at that point leads assuredly into the trap of polytheism, of thinking of God as three persons (in the modern sense of “person”), that is, as three gods!

Here, Dunn expressed the same concerns as Oneness Pentecostals, yet he has ended with a trinitarian model in some form while Oneness Pentecostals describe their model as nontrinitarian (although one could describe it as having trinitarian features). In this regard, Dunn asked if it was really necessary after all for Jews and Christians to separate over Christology and concluded that the greatest schism within God’s people is the one between Jews and Christians.⁷⁸⁵ The question could also be asked whether it is necessary

⁷⁸² Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1.1:315, 348, 380, 491.

⁷⁸³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1.1:405.

⁷⁸⁴ Dunn, *Partings of the Ways*, 321.

⁷⁸⁵ Dunn, *Partings of the Ways*, 322, 325.

for Oneness and Trinitarian Pentecostals to separate, and if so, in what way and why. The differences are not trivial or merely semantic, but they should be explored with the goal of clearly understanding what is and what is not at stake.

In the end, whether we adopt the description of Bauckham, Hurtado, and Dunn or the present attempt to suggest a modification, the evidence supports the early Christian deification of Jesus within a Jewish monotheistic context. Either conception provides an adequate basis for our investigation into causation and motive and for the major conclusions of this thesis, to which we now turn.

The Question of Why: Causation and Motive

Having established that early Christians as represented by Paul deified Jesus within a monotheistic context, the question now before us is: “How did the man Jesus come to be worshiped as a divine being by communities who nevertheless regarded themselves as monotheists? What were the historical and cultural factors that caused the worship of Jesus to make sense to some people in the first century C.E.?”⁷⁸⁶ What does it say about the sociological setting of early Christians and their interaction with society and culture? Following Lincoln, we want to examine the “temporal, contextual, situated, interested, human, and material dimensions” of our text, seeking to understand the socio-rhetorical purpose and effect of this early Christian ideological discourse.⁷⁸⁷ What motivated this discourse? What interests were “advanced, defended, or negotiated”?⁷⁸⁸ What were the practical consequences? In short, why did Paul and other early Christians deify Jesus? This question is the primary focus of our investigation.

As we have seen, most explanations emphasize such factors as: (1) personal experiences with Jesus including his teaching, ministry, and resurrection (however interpreted today); (2) revelatory experiences of the early disciples (however interpreted today); (3) key OT passages such as Dan 7:13-14 and Psa 110:1, which deal with eschatological figures; (4) other Jewish influences, especially from noncanonical texts, including principal angels, personified divine attributes, and exalted patriarchs; and (5) influences from the wider Greco-Roman culture such as the ideas of epiphany, incarnation, apotheosis, and ruler cults. These factors all have merit. For instance, as

⁷⁸⁶ James Davila, “Of Methodology, Monotheism and Metatron,” in Newman et al., *Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism*, 3.

⁷⁸⁷ Lincoln, “Theses on Method,” 8.

⁷⁸⁸ Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, 151.

discussed in ch. 6, Paul's conversion experience was a key factor in forming his Christology. Paul also claimed his preaching was accompanied by powerful signs and wonders to convince his hearers of his message concerning Jesus.⁷⁸⁹ The OT certainly influenced Paul, although his writings do not quote Dan 7 or Psa 110 but appeal to monotheistic texts such as Deut 6:4 and Isa 45:23 in describing Jesus. The other Jewish and Greco-Roman influences possibly provided useful concepts and terms, but Paul did not adopt a direct model from them, for his deification of Jesus was different in significant ways. As we discussed in ch. 3, it appears he would have rejected an explicit "angel Christology," for he employed arguments similar to those the rabbis of the late first and early second centuries used against the teaching of "two powers in heaven."

Moreover, while these factors help to explain the theological, spiritual, and religious background, they do not fully explain why early Jewish Christians would have understood their experiences in such a way as to require significant reinterpretation of their preexisting beliefs, why there was immediate and widespread agreement regarding their innovative belief and practice, why Paul would incorporate these ideas as part of his rhetoric, and why both Jews and Gentiles would find this new hermeneutic and rhetoric so appealing. As postmodern hermeneutics emphasizes, everything requires interpretation, including Paul's spiritual experiences and his rhetorical use of OT texts. Therefore, as we move beyond the sacred or theological texture, we must ask what larger ideological and sociological factors in the culture could have been a catalyst for this innovation. These factors do not negate the importance of biblical exegesis and spiritual experiences for Paul and other early Christians but help to explain why the biblical texts and spiritual experiences were interpreted as they were and why these interpretations were relevant, satisfactory, and successful.

The answer has much to do with the formation of Christian identity. There has been much recent scholarly discussion about when and how Christians developed as a distinct group and when and how Christians and Jews parted ways.⁷⁹⁰ According to Runesson, the formation of early Christian identity was quite complex, and in some sense there was not a parting of the ways in the first century. For him, first-century believers in

⁷⁸⁹ Rom 15:18-19; 1 Cor 2:4-5; Gal 3:2-5; 1 Thess 1:5.

⁷⁹⁰ See Bengt Holmberg, ed., *Exploring Early Christian Identity* (WUNT 226; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); Bengt Holmberg and Mikael Winninge, eds., *Identity Formation in the New Testament* (WUNT 227; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); Dunn, *Partings of the Ways*; Campbell, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*; Kathy Ehrensperger and J. Brian Tucker, eds., *Reading Paul in Context: Explorations in Identity Formation: Essays in Honour of William S. Campbell* (LNTS; New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

Christ were not “Christians” as the term later came to be used. Instead, he chose the label of “Apostolic Judaism” to highlight that they still held Jewish worldviews; alternatively we can call the movement “Christ-centered Judaism,” as their identity centered on Jesus.⁷⁹¹ Thus both Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism developed after the first century. From this perspective, Paul continued to believe the Jews were the people of God and considered non-Jewish followers of Christ to be adopted into God’s family. Gentiles no longer needed to join the Jewish ethnos (as Paul held prior to his encounter with Christ), but they needed to worship the one God of Israel, and they were forbidden to worship other gods, including the gods of their own ethnic traditions. In this way, Paul based his proposal for non-Jews on Jewish theological beliefs and focused it on Jesus as the Messiah. In sum, Apostolic Judaism included various Christ-groups of Jews and of Gentiles who accepted the Apostolic Jewish worldview without becoming Jews.⁷⁹²

Many scholars would propose the formation of distinct Christian identity somewhat earlier, but Runesson’s description demonstrates a couple of points relevant to our purpose: (1) Early Christian identity formation took place within the context of Jewish worldviews. (2) Some identity formation was taking place in the first century, perhaps not in opposition to Judaism but as a new option within Judaism or within the family of Judaisms. Early believers in Christ, including Paul, saw themselves as having a unique socio-religious location in at least two ways: (1) While they did not abandon Jewish identity, their relationship to Jesus transformed their identity through spiritual encounters and theological reinterpretations. (2) Their transformed identity encompassed both Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles who did not become Jews); both participated in a new fellowship of Jesus-believers.

Under any interpretation, Paul consciously sought to shape the identity of the believers to whom he wrote; identity formation was an integral part of his work.⁷⁹³ He

⁷⁹¹ Runesson, “Inventing Christian Identity,” in Holmberg, *Exploring Early Christian Identity*, 72-73 & n.37.

⁷⁹² Runesson, “Inventing Christian Identity,” 82-83, 90-91.

⁷⁹³ Kathy Ehrensperger, *Paul and the Dynamics of Power: Communication and Interaction in the Early Christ-Movement* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 15, 123, 193. This discussion does not deny the reality of a divine calling or Paul’s perception of a divine calling. Undoubtedly he believed he was being faithful to the OT, his calling, and his revelatory understanding of Jesus. (See 1 Cor 4:1-2.) Nevertheless, the logic of his position and the nature of his interactive discourse led to identity formation whether or not he fully realized or intended it. He was compelled to preach the uniqueness of Jesus and the soteriological significance of Jesus. Given his own socio-historical context and his own theological commitments, the way for him to do so was to engage in deification discourse with the resulting effects.

was clearly concerned about boundary and identity formation.⁷⁹⁴ This new Christian identity was not in opposition to Jewish identity. To the contrary, Paul was thoroughly embedded in Judaism and its Scriptures, and he maintained Jewish identity as shaped by the exclusive devotion to the one God of Israel.⁷⁹⁵ To summarize, a study of the formation of Christian identity provides important insights for our purposes. Specifically, Paul and other early Christians sought to understand their unique socio-religious position in terms of both Judaism and Jesus. They embraced Jewish identity, which required the maintenance of strict monotheism. At the same time, they saw their fellowship as a distinct option for both Jews and non-Jews. And somehow they had to explain their uniqueness in terms of the identity of Jesus.

Ideological Texture: Hebrew Monotheism and Greek Universals

The Jews of the first century C.E. were ruled politically by pagans, and their culture was greatly influenced by Hellenism. While they maintained their exclusive monotheism, they faced tremendous pressure to relate to the surrounding Hellenistic culture. Josephus attempted to make Judaism understandable and reasonable to the Greco-Roman world. Philo sought to interpret and explicate the Hebrew Scriptures by means of Greek philosophy. In the Gospels, the ministry of Jesus himself attracted attention beyond accepted Jewish circles; “sinners,” tax collectors (collaborators with the Roman rulers), Samaritans, and even Gentiles were drawn to him. Acts records the spread of the church to Jewish proselytes, Hellenistic Jews, Samaritans, “God-fearing” Gentiles, and eventually pagan Gentiles. Even while the early Christians still considered themselves to be practicing Jews, they intentionally began to communicate their faith to outsiders.

At its core, Greek philosophy sought to understand the world in terms of universals—general concepts or the generic nature of things. The seminal thought concerning universals came from Plato. According to his theory of forms, which he attributed to his teacher, Socrates, everything in the material world is a copy or image of something in the eternal, unchanging realm of forms, which is the real world. We are able to have general concepts because our souls recollect the archetypes or abstract

⁷⁹⁴ Halvor Moxnes, “From Theology to Identity: The Problem of Constructing Early Christianity,” in *Moving Beyond New Testament Theology: Essays in Conversation with Heikki Räisänen* (ed. Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele; Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 88; Göttingen, Ger.: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 270.

⁷⁹⁵ Ehrensperger, *Paul and the Dynamics of Power*, 4-11.

representations they previously encountered in the world of forms. Plato's forms include not only the archetypes of physical objects but also ideal patterns and principles such as beauty, truth, and justice.⁷⁹⁶ Aristotle, a student of Plato, also sought to understand universals, or the essence of things. In his view, however, forms do not originate in another world but arise from the study of particular things in our world. By the process of induction we can discern properties that certain things have in common, and if the properties are essential to those things then they are universals. There is no eternal realm of forms; instead, universals arise from individual substances.⁷⁹⁷ In short, a central aspect of Hellenistic thought was the desire to understand the world by universal principles and concepts. Just as the Macedonian Empire and later the Roman Empire brought political unity to the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean worlds, so there was a cultural impetus to develop ideologies applicable to all peoples. In particular, the popular Stoic philosophy, for which Paul had an affinity, advocated a universal worldview.

Boyarin explained early Christianity as a combination of "Hebrew monotheism and Greek longing for universals."⁷⁹⁸ On one hand, the early Christians wanted to remain faithful to their monotheistic heritage, for they believed it to be theologically accurate and essential to their identity. More than anything else, the exclusive monotheistic belief and worship of the Jews had set them apart from all other peoples. The early Christians likewise believed they were a unique people, different from the pagans around them because they worshiped the one true God. On the other hand, the early Christians were not content to remain isolated and separate; they wanted to communicate their message to their contemporaries and ultimately to transform their world. This impulse to find universals was conditioned by their political and cultural milieu.

Building upon Boyarin's insight, Räisänen suggested that this impulse was a reaction to cultural crisis. As the unique Jewish identity was under cultural attack from Hellenistic universalism, some Jews withdrew in self-defense while others sought an ideology capable of reaching the world while retaining the essential core of scriptural truth. As he saw it, both Qumran and Paul reacted to a cultural crisis in which the people of Israel were no longer separate from other nations. "The Qumran people retreated to a

⁷⁹⁶ Kolenda, *Philosophy's Journey*, 27-33.

⁷⁹⁷ Kolenda, *Philosophy's Journey*, 33-39.

⁷⁹⁸ Boyarin, *Radical Jew*, 225.

holy isolation. Paul tried to destroy barriers, being ‘impelled by a vision of human unity that was born of two parents: Hebrew monotheism and Greek longing for universals.’”⁷⁹⁹

In this context the deification of Jesus becomes quite understandable. Jewish monotheism was exclusive because it insisted on the worship of Yahweh alone and abhorred the worship of other gods. It was unlike the tolerant philosophical monotheism of the time,⁸⁰⁰ which explained the worship of various gods as pointing toward the same ultimate spiritual reality. In Greco-Roman culture, the monotheism of the Jews and later the Christians appeared to be intolerant, isolationist, and an impediment to political and social unity. In the new Christian understanding, however, the one God was not simply transcendent or remote, but God had intervened in the human realm. God had somehow become part of the human race, and therefore it was possible to connect God to everyone. The one God could become the God for all peoples.

Viewing Jesus as a secondary divine being would have contradicted mainstream Jewish thought and would not have been a natural means of fulfilling this purpose. Pagans could have accepted the idea easily enough, but they would merely have incorporated it into their existing theological scheme. It would not have had the power to transform their thinking or their lives. While Plato had spoken of “the Form of the Good” and Aristotle had spoken of “the Unmoved Mover” and the “First Cause,” these were abstract ideas, not to be equated with the personal God of Jews and Christians. As we see later in Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism, attempts to understand God in terms of Greek philosophy typically resulted in a God who was impassible, unmovable, and not directly involved with the material world. The Jews believed God was involved with the world but primarily through the nation of Israel. The distinctive contribution of the early Christians was to teach that the supreme God—not an agent or a secondary deity—bestows grace upon everyone; desires a relationship with everyone regardless of race, nationality, or culture; and has entered the world of humanity to provide salvation for everyone.

Paul’s discourse about Jesus in 2 Cor 3:16–4:6 is a good example of the marriage of Hebrew monotheism and Greek longing for universals. It is rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures and uses characteristically Jewish concepts such as image of God, glory of God, and Spirit of the Lord. At the same time, it employs these concepts in a Gentile

⁷⁹⁹ Heikki Räisänen, “Paul’s and Qumran’s Judaism,” in Neusner et al., *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, 3.5.2:200, quoting Boyarin.

⁸⁰⁰ Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 91.

context to present Jesus as the prototypical human for everyone and the revelatory image of God to everyone. Under the old covenant, God's glory was restricted and was specifically identified with the law of Moses, but under the new covenant God's glory is universal—it shines upon everyone to bring God's salvation through Jesus. Under the old covenant, experiences with God were limited primarily to Jewish priests and prophets, but under the new covenant everyone can have a relationship with God by the indwelling Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus.

Social Texture: Group Integrity, Soteriology, and Missiology

When exploring the textures, it is also important to understand that “early Christian texts speak from and into a context of social formation, literally a context in which Christianity is still being manufactured and defined in opposition to the rest of the smorgasbord of Graeco-Roman religious options.”⁸⁰¹ As Christianity spread from Palestinian to Diaspora Jews, Christians had to forge an identity in a deracinated context, an imperial setting, and an oppressive society. They conceived of an alternative world of Jesus as emperor and accordingly established boundaries to preserve the group and attract others who sought a new identity.

While the early Christians began to reach out to their world, they had to maintain integrity as a group or else they would cease to exist. In order to survive, a social group must create boundaries, develop a distinctive culture, and maintain structural stability. Moreover, belief in a unique revelation is an important means of shaping and strengthening identity for religious groups.⁸⁰² The challenge for Paul and other early Christian leaders was to maintain continuity with their Jewish heritage, which they believed to have originated from God, and yet to preserve and perpetuate the Jesus movement, which they believed to be the supreme work of God in their day. Acts portrays Paul as simultaneously affirming the theological inheritance of Judaism and following the new Way of Jesus: “But this I admit to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our ancestors, believing everything laid down according to the law or written in the prophets” (Acts 24:14). If the early Christian leaders had simply stressed their Jewish heritage they would have curtailed the growth of the church among the Gentiles, and they would have risked obscurity and absorption as a

⁸⁰¹ Gerhard van den Heever, “Making Body Politic: The Rhetoric of Early Christian Baptismal Discourse,” *Scriptura* 90 (2005): 719.

⁸⁰² Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 84, 92.

minor sect of Judaism. Monotheism was essential to their identity in opposition to the pagan world around them, but it did not distinguish them within the matrix of Judaism.

What made Christians unique with respect to both Jews and pagans? What made them a community? “What then were the specific identity factors of the Jesus movement? It existed at this stage wholly within Judaism—what marked it off from the rest of Judaism? There is only one answer to that question—Jesus himself.”⁸⁰³ The key to Paul’s own conversion was Jesus. His spiritual encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road transformed him from a persecutor of Christians to an evangelist for Christ. It provided a new point of departure for his theology.⁸⁰⁴ He did not see himself as converting away from Judaism or monotheistic worship, but he did see himself as becoming a follower and worshiper of Jesus, and this fact was the essential core of his new identity. He was a Jew who believed in and worshiped Jesus. It was thus natural for him to use Jesus as the focal point of the religious communities he established in the Gentile world. In defining and underscoring the identity of the early Christians, Paul focused on the development of Christology. Based on his own conversion, he recognized and promoted “the centrality of Jesus, the sole identity factor of the earliest church.”⁸⁰⁵

Their identification with Jesus set apart the early Christians from other Jewish groups, motivated them to proclaim the gospel, caused them to be persecuted by mainstream Judaism, and yet caused them to suffer this rejection willingly (Acts 5:40-42). If they were going to survive and thrive as a movement, they had to proclaim a supreme reason for existence, and this reason had to focus on the identity of Jesus.

In Dunn’s account, first-century Jews and Christians ultimately parted over views of monotheism. Jewish authorities thought Christians went too far in their exaltation of Jesus, in effect making him a second power in heaven. Christians rejected this evaluation of their belief as false, since for them Jesus was not a second divine being but the self-revelation of God, the visible image of God, the incarnation of God (not the incarnation of the Son of God), “God’s self-revelation become flesh and blood.”⁸⁰⁶ While Dunn attributed the parting to the teaching of the Johannine community, we see essentially the same issues in Paul. And while this teaching eventually led in subsequent centuries to the doctrine of the Trinity, for our purposes the important point is that the early Christians did

⁸⁰³ Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God*, 73-74.

⁸⁰⁴ Campbell, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*, 142.

⁸⁰⁵ Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God*, 122-24.

⁸⁰⁶ Dunn, *Partings of the Ways*, 299.

not see themselves as compromising or abandoning Jewish monotheism. They continued to use the language of Jewish monotheism (as Dunn's description indicates) but applied it directly to Jesus. Thus the monotheistic deification of Jesus became the primary boundary marker to distinguish the early Christians from Jews who did not believe in Christ. At the same time it was an important means for the early Christians to assert theological continuity with Judaism—whether by having a form of Judaism (in Runesson's view) or by being legitimate heirs of Judaism.

The Jews maintained their sense of identity in the midst of pagan cities by four primary means: exclusive monotheism, circumcision, dietary laws, and Sabbath observance. For both Jews and Christians, monotheism was part of their heritage, the fundamental premise of their faith, the focus of their difference from others, and the basis for their internal unity.⁸⁰⁷ If the early Christians had simply retained these four boundary markers they would not have maintained their distinctiveness from the Jews who rejected Jesus as Messiah, yet if they had simply abandoned the boundary markers they would not have maintained their distinctiveness from the pagan world around them. In each of the four instances, the Christian solution was to reinterpret the boundary markers in light of Jesus Christ. They maintained exclusive monotheism but identified Jesus as the manifestation of Yahweh. They gradually abandoned the other three boundary markers by interpreting them as OT types fulfilled in Jesus; their continuing significance lay not in physical observance but in the ongoing work of the Spirit of Jesus. Specifically, Christians received spiritual circumcision through baptism in the name of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit (Phil 3:3; Col 2:12). The dietary and Sabbath laws were fulfilled in Jesus (Col 2:16-17), and their role in bringing separation or sanctification was now accomplished by Jesus through the Spirit (1 Cor 1:30; 2 Thess 2:13).

As an observant Pharisaic Jew who never denied his heritage (see Acts 23:6), Paul personally embraced monotheism. He firmly believed it was essential in retaining the Jewish heritage of the Jesus movement. He also saw how it could be advantageous in propagating the message of Jesus across the Roman Empire and establishing a universal church to unite people of diverse cultures (see Rom 3:30). For the Christians to truly become one people they needed to worship one God. Since the one factor Christians had in common was their belief in and experience of Christ, somehow the identity of the one God had to be linked to Christ. In this regard Paul anticipated the development of the

⁸⁰⁷ Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 91-92.

central organizing concept of later antiquity, namely, the joining of the ideas of empire and monarchy with monotheism. The example of Judaism shows, however, that while monotheism may be necessary for a universal religion, it is not sufficient. For Christianity to become truly universal, it had to become a proselytizing monotheism rather than an ethnic monotheism.⁸⁰⁸

Smith described the Mediterranean world of late antiquity as one of rapid social change, mobility, and dislocation, all of which resulted in shifts of religious construction:

Rather than a city wall, the new enclave protecting man against external, hostile powers will be a human group, a religious association or secret society. . . . Rather than a sacred place, the new center and chief means of access to divinity will be a divine man. . . . Rather than celebration, purification and pilgrimage, the new rituals will be those of conversion, of initiation into the secret society or identification with the divine man.⁸⁰⁹

From this sociological perspective, Paul's theological construction and rhetorical strategies were well suited to the needs of his day. His discourse about Jesus as exemplified in 2 Cor 3:16–4:6 gave Christians a new identity, which maintained continuity with Judaism and yet transformed the distinctive Jewish categories through the believer's encounter with Jesus by the Spirit. In the text, Paul used the fundamental Jewish story (the giving of the law to Moses), Jewish theological terminology ("Lord, Spirit, image, glory"), and Jewish methods of interpretation (*midrash* and *peshet*). At the same time, he employed these tools to forge a new Christian identity centered on Jesus. In doing so he effectively outflanked his Corinthian opponents. They had appealed to the authority of the OT to support their claim to a superior ministry. He relied upon the same authority but used it to support the new paradigm of Jesus-centered, Spirit-filled life and ministry. This message was exactly what the early Christians needed in order to survive and thrive, for they acknowledged the OT as truth yet also knew their conversion and their very existence as a community had resulted from Jesus.

Paul saw this message as helping to maintain group integrity, for he coupled monotheist assertions with a call for Christian unity. By defining God in terms of Jesus,

⁸⁰⁸ Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 3, 5, 71.

⁸⁰⁹ Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, 187.

he defined the new covenant people of God as those who believe in Jesus. In this context, an appeal for God's people to acknowledge the divine self-revelation in Jesus facilitated an appeal for God's people to unite around faith in Jesus.⁸¹⁰ For example, in 1 Cor 8:4-6 Paul asserted the oneness of God in Christ in opposition to pagan worship. In chs. 8-10 he then applied the oneness of God to the discussion of eating food offered to idols, explaining that Christians could not separate their responsibility to worship the one God from their responsibility to act with sacrificial love for one another. He taught that the oneness of God in Christ has an ethical dimension; it leads to the practical oneness of Christian believers.⁸¹¹ Similarly, in Rom 3:30 Paul connected the oneness of God to the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the church as they believe on Jesus.

By appealing to the foundational concepts of God and Christ that had created the new Christian communities in the beginning, Paul sought to maintain unity among them.⁸¹² He used their common, preexisting understanding of the oneness of God; he did not try to lead them into the worship of a new god. In Gal 3:20 he asserted the oneness of God to show that Jesus was not another god but God's plan of salvation from the beginning and the fulfillment of the law of Moses. In Rom 3:30 he asserted the oneness of God to proclaim one plan of salvation for all people. Jewish Christians needed to move beyond the law into the fullness of Christ, while Gentile Christians did not need to move beyond the God of Israel. In both cases, the common ground was Jesus.

We should also note that maintaining group integrity can be a means of asserting authority. Particularly in 2 Corinthians, Paul was concerned to uphold his authority as an apostle and the authority of the message he preached. By appealing to unity based on the unique identity of Jesus, he confirmed the authority of the gospel of Jesus and his authority as a minister of this gospel.

We see both continuity and discontinuity in the early Christian concept of God, and this combination facilitated the missiological development of the church. On one hand, there was continuity in acknowledging the one God of Israel. On the other hand, there was discontinuity in claiming God had revealed God's self in an unprecedented way—as a human, in Jesus Christ. Again, in the words of Boyarin, there was a combination of “Hebrew monotheism and Greek longing for universals.” This combination enabled both Jews and Gentiles to identify with the movement, and as such

⁸¹⁰ Nicholson, *Dynamic Oneness*, 29, 31.

⁸¹¹ Nicholson, *Dynamic Oneness*, 37-38, 168. Cf. Eph 4:4-6.

⁸¹² Nicholson, *Dynamic Oneness*, 168, 240, 242.

it became a powerful catalyst for evangelism and growth. By defining their uniqueness in terms of Jesus Christ rather than the traditional boundary markers of Jewish praxis, the early Christians positioned their faith as a universal monotheism instead of an ethnic monotheism, thereby enabling it to become a missiological movement.⁸¹³

Soteriology was an important aspect of group identity and integrity. Paul and his fellow Christians experienced a dramatic life transformation, which he characterized as a moral transformation, a new creation, and a deliverance from sin to righteousness, darkness to light, and death to life. Moreover, he specifically identified Jesus as the source and means of this salvation.⁸¹⁴ This soteriological experience is what made Christians a new people, and it was bound up in the identity of Jesus. Understanding, protecting, and proclaiming their soteriological experience and message thus had to involve an explanation of the uniqueness of Jesus, including his power and authority to save. According to the Jewish Scriptures, only Yahweh is the redeemer and the savior (Isa 44:24; 45:21-23). Indeed, the story of Moses at the burning bush connects the divine name in both the forms “I AM” and Yahweh with God’s redeeming, delivering character and work (Exod 3:15-17; 6:2-8). According to Mark, some Jewish leaders challenged Jesus on this very ground when he pronounced forgiveness of sins. Jesus did not refute their assertion that only God could forgive sins but demonstrated his power to deliver people from disease and, by implication, sin itself. (See Mark 2:6-11.) In the Jewish monotheistic context, then, if Christians wished to establish the reality of their salvation in Jesus, they somehow had to identify him with Yahweh. We see an example of this rhetorical strategy in Paul’s appropriation of Isa 45:21-23, a strongly monotheistic text that says Yahweh is the only savior, and his application of it to Jesus in Phil 2:9-11.

As Dunn has explained, the initial experience of salvation in the early church included three significant aspects: justification by faith, participation in Christ, and the gift of the Spirit.⁸¹⁵ This threefold emphasis is characteristic of Paul.⁸¹⁶ Luke-Acts emphasizes forgiveness of sins and receiving the Holy Spirit with power.⁸¹⁷ Paul typically spoke of justification rather than forgiveness of sins, but he associated the two concepts closely (Rom 4:5-8). Paul also proclaimed salvation as a divine work, not a human work,

⁸¹³ Richardson, *Paul’s Language*, 173; Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 71.

⁸¹⁴ Rom 6:17-23; 8:1-11; 1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor 4:6; 5:17; Col 1:13-14.

⁸¹⁵ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 332-33, 416, 425, 442, 455.

⁸¹⁶ See Rom 5:1-11 with 8:1-16; 1 Cor 6:11, 17; Gal 3:2-6, 26-29.

⁸¹⁷ See Luke 24:47-49; Acts 2:38; 3:19. See also Titus 3:5-7; Talbert, *Development of Christology*, 130, 140.

provided through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.⁸¹⁸ The identity of Jesus is crucial to all of these soteriological elements. Justification and forgiveness must come from God, so if Jesus is the one who justifies and forgives he must be the manifestation of God for this purpose. Participation with Christ means his life, death, and resurrection must have both cosmic and present significance. As we saw in ch. 6, reception of the Spirit was for Paul an experience with the risen Christ. Finally, since salvation involves the death of Jesus, his corporeal, human existence is essential; but since salvation is emphatically not a human work, the involvement of Jesus must be the action of divine grace, received through faith.

According to Talbert, to a great extent early Christology arose out of soteriology. The four basic assumptions of his argument are that experience preceded reflection, soteriological experience preceded Christology, the reflection occurred mostly within existing cultural categories, and the cultural context of Palestinian believers was Hellenistic Judaism. From these assumptions he argued three theses: (1) Culture supplied four basic models for christological reflection. (2) These models developed from experiential dynamics. (3) We best understand their usefulness in light of their sociological contributions. As we discussed in ch. 5, Talbert then identified four models or strategies that early Christians used to describe Jesus. These models focused on: (1) Christ's future function as eschatological redeemer and judge, (2) his present function as helper and intervener in human affairs, (3) the Christians' past experience of Jesus in the flesh, and (4) their ongoing (permanent) experience of Jesus as indwelling spirit. The urgent question for them was: Who must Jesus have been in order to accomplish what they needed? Since their soteriology included multiple functions only God could fulfill and since it encompassed both body and spirit, they were led to describe Jesus in terms of deity but also in terms of humanity. Thus the four models expressed soteriological realities; they were both experiential and soteriological. For this reason, they did not represent the thinking of different Christian communities, nor were they mutually exclusive.⁸¹⁹ As we see in Paul's writings, the early Christians used multiple models in a complementary way to describe the significance of Jesus and to express a comprehensive soteriology. They used general cultural concepts to understand and communicate their essential identity, to the extent that they could adapt such concepts to their distinctive

⁸¹⁸ See Rom 3:21-28; 4:25; 5:10-11; 6:1-11; 1 Cor 15:1-4; Gal 2:16-21.

⁸¹⁹ Talbert, *Development of Christology*, 4-6, 25-26.

sociological experience and perspective. Essentially, their construal of Jesus was designed to explain how Jesus could be their savior. “The divine presence is manifest in Jesus for our salvation. To put it in Pauline terms: God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.”⁸²⁰

As we discussed in ch. 6, in our selected text of 2 Cor 3:16–4:6 Paul explicitly linked the divine identity of Jesus to his soteriological work. The context is turning to the Lord, or Christian conversion (3:16). The key to understanding the entire passage is to realize that Paul appropriated a text about Yahweh in Exod 34, applied it to Jesus as Lord, and simultaneously explained how believers encounter Jesus in the Spirit, for “the Lord is the Spirit” (3:17). The work of salvation moves forward as believers are progressively transformed by the power of “the Lord, [who is] the Spirit” (3:18). Deliverance from evil and knowledge of salvation come through the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is the image and glory of God (4:4-6).

Soteriology naturally flowed into evangelism, as the early Christians sought to share their transformative experience with others. They quickly saw the opportunity for evangelism and interpreted it as their fundamental mission.⁸²¹ Paul believed he was called to proclaim the gospel to all nations, including pagans.⁸²² In contrast to traditional Judaism, he preached a universal plan of salvation, an inclusive monotheism for everyone including those on the margins of society.⁸²³ In 2 Cor 3:16–4:6, Paul explained how everyone has the opportunity to turn to the Lord and receive “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (4:6). There are no longer any barriers of race, culture, nationality, or ritual as under the law of Moses. The only barrier now is “the god of this world [who] has blinded the minds of unbelievers” (4:4). When an unbeliever, regardless of background, “turns to the Lord,” then the veil is removed (3:16). Paul’s Christocentric reformulation made the new teaching broadly accessible. Part of his motivation in refuting his Corinthian opponents was a realization that their doctrine would fatally restrict Christianity’s future in the Gentile world. According to traditional history-of-religions Christology, pagan religious beliefs and practices shaped the early Christians’ view of Jesus, and thus in their minds he gradually evolved from Jewish prophet to Gentile God. The evidence suggests, however, that they saw him as the Jewish

⁸²⁰ Talbert, *Development of Christology*, 33, 41, 116, quoting 2 Cor 5:19.

⁸²¹ Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8.

⁸²² Rom 1:5, 14-16; 15:16-19; 16:26; Gal 1:15-16.

⁸²³ Nicholson, *Dynamic Oneness*, 32, 175; Hurtado, “Binitarian Shape of Early Christian Worship,” 173.

God. It is more appropriate to think of the influence going the other way: Their Christology gave them an innovative way to share the God of Judaism with the Gentiles.⁸²⁴

From a sociological perspective, one of the reasons why Christianity became so successful in late antiquity was its ability to incorporate a diversity of peoples by forging a cultural identity based on shared beliefs and practices rather than physical ethnicity. Much as the Hellenistic and Roman empires had used language and cultural identity to unite various peoples, so the early Christians used the language of a new ethnicity and a universal culture to create unity. They identified themselves as a cosmopolitan movement from the very beginning.⁸²⁵

From evidence in the second century it seems the monotheistic deification of Jesus was an effective evangelization strategy. As early Christians moved beyond their original Jewish context into the Greco-Roman world, increasingly their evangelism focused on pagans. While Justin and other Greek apologists interacted with philosophical thought and while Irenaeus responded to Gnosticism and other heresies, the popular writings of the late second and early third centuries show how average Christians thought about their faith and how they presented Christianity to the world at large. According to Bauckham, the apocryphal Acts of this time provide the best evidence of how early Christians presented conversion to outsiders. These writings promote the worship of Jesus and describe it primarily in terms of Jewish monotheism. The early Christians confessed one God as creator—not as the abstract, impersonal deity of Greek philosophy but as the personal, active God of Jewish thought who intervenes in the lives of humans. They proclaimed that God had come into the world as Jesus and that there was no place for the many gods of paganism. The worship of Jesus was thus the worship of the one true God. The supreme God of pagan philosophy was impersonal and remote, but the one God of the Christians was personal and immanent. The Christian God could replace the lesser deities of pagan polytheism, “because, in Jesus himself, the one God was religiously accessible. Hence the formula ‘Jesus is the only God’—however theologically problematic in other respects—did summarize the missionary appeal of Christianity.”⁸²⁶

⁸²⁴ Dunn, “Making of Christology,” 447, 450-51.

⁸²⁵ Judith Perkins, *Roman Imperial Identities in the Early Christian Era* (Florence, Ky.: Routledge, 2008), 17, 29.

⁸²⁶ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 143-44.

In summary, in answering the question of motive and cause for the deification of Jesus, to previous explanations we add four decisive ideological and socio-rhetorical factors. Moreover, we find evidence of each factor in 2 Cor 3-4:

- *Combination of Hebrew monotheism and Greek longing for universals.* (See 2 Cor 3:2-6, 12-16; 4:1-6.) The one God of Israel, the creator, has established a “new covenant” through Jesus Christ including both Jew and Gentile, and believers are a letter of Christ “to be known and read by all.” God now reveals God’s self to everyone who turns to Christ, Jew or Gentile. Indeed, the Gentiles who turn to Christ are now in God’s light, while the Jews who do not turn to Christ are in darkness.
- *Group integrity.* (See 2 Cor 3:1-11.) Because of Christ, Christians are the new people of God, a letter written “not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts,” participants in a covenant greater than God’s covenant with the people of Israel.
- *Soteriology.* (See 2 Cor 3:16-18; 4:12-18.) By the Spirit of Christ, believers receive freedom and are progressively “transformed . . . from one degree of glory to another.” In Christ they have new spiritual life in the present, the promise of resurrection with Christ, future life in the presence of God, and “an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.”
- *Missiology.* (See 2 Cor 4:1-15.) Paul’s ministry is characterized by “the open statement of truth . . . to the conscience of everyone.” “The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” has shone forth, and it overcomes the blindness caused by the devil. As exemplified by Paul, believers have “this treasure in clay jars” so they can minister life to others. Consequently, the grace of God now “extends to more and more people.”

Testing the Hypothesis: Baptism in the Name of Jesus

Is there a way to test our hypothesis that the monotheistic deification of Jesus was central to the theological, ideological, social, and cultural identity of the early Christians? In considering the possibilities, it is important to understand that early Christianity involved worship, spiritual experience, and a new way of life as much as doctrinal formulation and discourse. Moreover, when we analyze early Christian rhetoric, we must

take a holistic approach. “Rhetoric is more than speech or text. . . . What lies outside of the rhetorical artifact (the speech or text) is equally important for and determinative of the construction of reality effected by the rhetorical act/event. Simply put, the rhetoric is constituted by a contextualised performance.”⁸²⁷ We should not only look at what the early Christians such as Paul said or wrote but how they symbolized and enacted their beliefs. We can do so by examining the rituals or symbolic performances most important to them.

The early Christians had two outstanding, distinctive rituals: water baptism and the Lord’s Supper.⁸²⁸ Both had antecedents in Judaism. Baptism was prefigured by OT ceremonial cleansings and Second Temple proselyte baptism, while the Lord’s Supper had its origins in the Jewish Passover. As our hypothesis would predict, both rites were transformed by identification with Jesus Christ. Jesus was the new Passover (1 Cor 5:7). Just as Yahweh through the Passover delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt and the judgment of the death angel, so Jesus through his death, burial, and resurrection, as symbolized by the Lord’s Supper, delivered believers from the slavery of sin and the sentence of death. Jesus personally instituted the Lord’s Supper, and he invisibly presided over this sacred meal in which Christians affirmed his sacrificial death, resurrection, and promised return (1 Cor 10:16-21; 11:23-26).

Even more significant for our purposes is water baptism, which was an important part of the process of identity formation and boundary demarcation.⁸²⁹ It was the means by which a believer visibly became part of the Christian community, separating from his or her old identity and adopting a new one. The rite signified a radical realignment of allegiances, in which for most purposes the church became the primary group for its members.⁸³⁰ Water baptism was the central initiatory rite. Paul wrote, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal 3:27). It was a necessary act of obedient faith in Jesus Christ, putting the participant into a relationship with him.⁸³¹ Together with the baptism of the Holy Spirit it was an integral part of conversion and regeneration.⁸³² Since baptism was an initiatory confession of faith and was administered for the forgiveness of sins, the baptismal formula provides evidence

⁸²⁷ Van den Heever, “Making Body Politic,” 709-10.

⁸²⁸ Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 150.

⁸²⁹ Moxnes, “From Theology to Identity,” 272.

⁸³⁰ Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 78.

⁸³¹ Matt 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, 41; 10:47-48; 22:16; Rom 6:3-4; Col 2:11-12; Heb 6:1-2; 1 Pet 3:21.

⁸³² John 3:5; Acts 2:38; 1 Cor 6:11; 12:13; Titus 3:5.

about beliefs in God and the means of salvation provided by God. The baptismal formula expresses theology in a nutshell. It brushes past theological and philosophical nuances to focus on the practical faith of the common believer as expressed in concrete action.

As such, we would expect that, if our thesis is correct, water baptism would be integrally connected to the identity of Jesus Christ. And indeed, a careful reading of the NT reveals an important fact usually obscured by later tradition: The early Christians invoked the name of Jesus Christ upon all converts at water baptism. There is a scholarly consensus among theologians and church historians that the original Christian baptismal formula featured the invocation of the name of Jesus, such as “in the name of Jesus Christ” or “into the name of the Lord Jesus.”⁸³³ The Greek text of Acts clearly describes the invocation of the name of Jesus at water baptism,⁸³⁴ as the following phrases show:

- Acts 2:38: ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “in [literally, on] the name of Jesus Christ.” This phrase signifies, according to BDAG, “when someone’s name is mentioned or called upon, or mentioning someone’s name.”
- Acts 8:16; 19:5: εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ, “in [literally, into] the name of the Lord Jesus.” BDAG comments, “Through baptism . . . those who are baptized become the possession of and come under the dedicated protection of the one whose name they bear. An additional factor, to a degree, may be the sense of . . . with mention of the name.”
- Acts 10:48: ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “in the name of Jesus Christ.” This phrase primarily means “with mention of the name, while naming or calling on the name”; often this construction is “a formula.” Thus BDAG offers the translation: “be baptized or have oneself baptized while naming the name of Jesus Christ.”

⁸³³ Kirsopp Lake, “Baptism (Early Christian),” *ERE* 2:384; W. F. Flemington, “Baptism,” *IDB* 1:351; Martin Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” in *Word and Sacrament II* (vol. 36 of *Luther’s Works*; ed. Abdel Wentz; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959), 63; Ulrich Zwingli, *Of Baptism*, in *Zwingli and Bullinger* (trans. G. W. Bromiley; LCC 24; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 144-45, 168, 171; F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments* (rev. ed.; Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1984), 57 n.20; Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 130, 295; Hurtado, “Binitarian Shape of Early Christian Worship,” 200; Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 183; Hartman, “*Into the Name of the Lord Jesus*,” 35-37.

⁸³⁴ “ὄνομα,” BDAG, 713.

- Acts 22:16: ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, “calling on his name.” The verb ἐπικαλέω is used “to call upon deity for any purpose”; in the middle voice, as here, it means “to call on, invoke.”⁸³⁵ The same verb appears in Acts 15:17 and Jas 2:7, and both verses probably allude to the invocation of the name of Jesus at water baptism.

The Epistles also refer repeatedly to the invocation of the name of Jesus at water baptism.⁸³⁶ The only possibly conflicting evidence in the NT appears in Matt 28:19 (“in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”), but scholars generally conclude that this wording does not quote the original baptismal formula.⁸³⁷ Acts presents the twelve apostles and Paul as using the Jesus-name formula, while Paul’s epistles provide further evidence of his use of this formula. The formula is somewhat peculiar in Greek, but it appears to be “a literal translation of a Hebrew-Aramaic idiom which the Aramaic-speaking early church used when speaking of Christian baptism. Accordingly we are brought down to a very early period of the church. In its Greek version the formula became a Christian technical term.”⁸³⁸ As a study of ancient Christian writings indicates, this formula still predominated at least until the middle of the second century and was popular even in the third century.⁸³⁹

What is the significance of this practice? First, it is strong evidence that the earliest Christians regarded Jesus as God and invoked his name as their deity. Socio-

⁸³⁵ “ἐπικαλέω,” BDAG, 373.

⁸³⁶ Rom 6:3-4; 1 Cor 1:13; 6:11; Gal 3:27; Col 2:12; Jas 2:7 (implication).

⁸³⁷ There are five main lines of explanation (which can overlap): (1) This clause was not originally intended as a formula. R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (TNTC 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 275; Zwingli, *Of Baptism*, 144-45. (2) It is an indirect description of the Jesus-name formula. Norris, *I AM*, 192-94. (3) It is an expansion of the christological formula of Acts and Paul that still centers on Jesus and his redemptive work. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4.4:96-99; John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 98. (4) It is not the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, for the context demands a christological formula, but it is an interpretation or adaptation by the author to reflect the liturgical tradition of the author’s community. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 83-84; Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives*, 98; Dunn, *Partings of the Ways*, 77 n.3, 156 (“a later elaboration”). (5) It is a later modification or interpolation. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 299, citing F. C. Conybeare.

⁸³⁸ Hartman, “*Into the Name of the Lord Jesus*,” 43.

⁸³⁹ For direct references to baptism in the name of Jesus, see Herm. *Vis.* 3.7; Herm. *Sim.* 9.16, 28; Irenaeus, *frg.* 34 (*ANF* 1:574); Cyprian, *Ep.* 72.4, 16-19; 73.5; 74.18; *Rebapt.* (throughout); Rufinus, *Clem. Recogn.* 1.39, 73; *Acts Pet.* 5 (mentions both formulas); *Acts Paul* 34; *Gos. Phil.* II,3:72, in *NHL*, 153; Didymus, *Trin.* 2:15 (mentions modalistic baptism by Montanists), cited in Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* (4 vols.; Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1963), 3:98-99. For probable allusions to baptism in the name of Jesus, see *1 Clem.* 58-64; *Ign. Eph.* 1, 3, 7; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.12.2, 4, 7. For discussion of early triadic formulas, see nn.849-54.

rhetorically, the name of Jesus served the same function in NT worship as the name of Yahweh did in OT worship.⁸⁴⁰ Just as Yahweh was the specific personal name by which Jews identified God, so Jesus became the specific name by which Christians identified God.⁸⁴¹ The Christian God was still Yahweh, but this name appears nowhere in the NT because God was now revealed in a new way and had entered a new covenant relationship as defined by the life and work of Jesus. The use of the title *Kyrios* in the formula did not replace the name Jesus but demonstrated that Jesus was regarded as God in this event.⁸⁴² A study of rabbinical usage sheds further light on the phrase “into the name.” It was used for rites performed “into the name” of the person’s god, upon whom the rite was based and who made the rite effective.⁸⁴³

Second, baptism “into the name of the Lord Jesus” placed recipients in a new community under the lordship of Jesus. He was the head of the community, the convert had to acknowledge his headship, and the rite was performed by his authority and power.⁸⁴⁴ In his ministry Jesus had acted by his own authority and power, but the early church acted in his name. Believers exercised power to preach and teach in his name; to perform miracles, healings, and exorcisms in his name; to admit people into the church by baptizing in his name; and to endure suffering for the sake of his name.⁸⁴⁵ They exalted the name of Jesus as the only name given for salvation (Acts 4:12). Jewish opponents recognized the significance of the name of Jesus for the early Christians, specifically forbidding them to preach or teach in the name of Jesus and persecuting them for their insistence on using the name of Jesus.⁸⁴⁶ Clearly, the invocation of the name was more than a formality or technicality; it was central to the identity of the early church. Baptism in Jesus’ name must also have had an effective missiological appeal, as it is prominent in calls to conversion and stories of conversion in both Acts and the apocryphal Acts. To the prospective convert it represented the hope of forgiveness, deliverance, new life, and new identity based on God’s self-revelation in Jesus.

⁸⁴⁰ Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 215; Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 194.

⁸⁴¹ Christopher Seitz, *Word without End: The Old Testament As Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998; repr., Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2004), 260.

⁸⁴² Hurtado, “Binitarian Shape of Early Christian Worship,” 200.

⁸⁴³ Hartman, “*Into the Name of the Lord Jesus*,” 42.

⁸⁴⁴ Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 183-84, 194-95. See also Wilhelm Heitmüller, “*Im Namen Jesu*”: *Eine sprach-und-religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Neuen Testament, speziell zur altchristlichen Taufe* (FRLANT 1/2; Göttingen, Ger.: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1903), 99-122, which says baptism in Jesus’ name signifies ownership by Christ and submission to him.

⁸⁴⁵ Mark 16:17-18; Acts 2:38; 3:6, 16; 4:10-12; 5:41; 8:16; 9:27-29; 10:43, 48; 15:26; 16:18; 19:5, 13; 22:16.

⁸⁴⁶ Acts 4:17-18; 5:28, 40; 9:14, 21.

Third, baptism “into the name of the Lord Jesus” connected the believer to the soteriological work of Jesus. The traditional history-of-religions school emphasized the similarity between Christian baptism and initiatory ceremonies of the mystery religions of the Greco-Roman world. There is a debate as to how much the mystery religions influenced Christianity and vice versa, but in any case the formula “into the name of the Lord Jesus” is evidence of a similar thought process. It is possible to view the ceremony as a reenactment of a divine action, where Jesus was the divine figure. If so, baptism in the name of Jesus would be an actualization of his saving work.⁸⁴⁷ As repentant believers were baptized in the name of Jesus, the blood of Jesus was spiritually applied by faith to forgive their sins. Thereafter, they could look back to their baptism as a time when the redemptive work of Jesus became active in their lives. Paul linked baptism to Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. It signified that believers had died to the old life through repentance, it identified them specifically with Christ’s burial, and it prepared them for new life in the Spirit (Rom 6:3-4). Paul compared water baptism to circumcision, connecting it to an inward spiritual purification by which believers had the old life of sin cut away, received forgiveness of sin, and were incorporated into the new covenant in conjunction with the work of the Spirit (Col 2:11-13). This identification with the salvific work of Jesus was predicated on the identity of Jesus as the fullness of the Godhead incarnated (Col 2:9-10). Moreover, the significance of baptism was connected to the invocation of the name of Jesus at baptism.⁸⁴⁸

In sum, the original Christian practice of baptism “into the name of the Lord Jesus” offers strong evidence that the early Christians deified Jesus within the context of Jewish monotheism. On occasions when they would be expected to call on God, they invoked the name of Jesus. They did not add his name to that of Yahweh as if calling on two deities. Nor did they replace one deity with another. Instead, they continued to worship the God of Israel by invoking the name of Jesus because Jesus was the new covenant name of God. The name of Jesus in water baptism represented both continuity and discontinuity—continued affirmation of the one God of Israel yet confession that God had been revealed in a new way, namely, manifested in flesh to fulfill God’s plan of salvation for the human race. The name of Jesus in water baptism represented what was

⁸⁴⁷ Hartman, *“Into the Name of the Lord Jesus,”* 89, 164.

⁸⁴⁸ For example, baptism is connected with forgiveness of sins and salvation; and forgiveness of sins and salvation come through the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12; 10:43). Sins are washed away by calling on his name at baptism (Acts 22:16).

essential to their identity as Christians, what simultaneously distinguished them from both nonbelieving Jews and pagans. Far from accommodating to paganism, they deified Jesus in recognition that everything essential to their new identity, new life, salvation, existence as a community, and outreach to the world was centered on Jesus of Nazareth.

When considering the question of how the early Christians deified Jesus, the history of baptismal formulas supports our redescription of Christology. The early baptismal formula “into the name of the Lord Jesus” suggests the early Christians focused on the identity of Jesus as Lord and savior. If a binitarian model was emerging in the first century, it was not reflected in the early baptismal formula. By the time of Justin we definitely find a binitarian model. From his theology we would not expect a baptismal formula that focused exclusively on Jesus but one that emphasized the Father while also acknowledging the Son or Logos. Apparently there was no tradition of a binitarian formula from which Justin could draw. In the NT, he had the christological formula in Acts and the triadic reference in Matt 28:19, so he chose the latter as more suitable to his theology of exalting the Father as the supreme God. Curiously, however, he retained the name of Jesus in his formula: “They are then washed in the water in the name of God the Father and Master of all, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit.”⁸⁴⁹ He also identified Jesus as the name by which God has revealed God’s self.⁸⁵⁰ When Irenaeus later cited a triadic formula, he also included the actual invocation of Jesus: “We have received baptism for remission of sins in the name of God the Father, and in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was incarnate and died and was raised, and in the Holy Spirit of God” (*Epid.* 3).⁸⁵¹ Elsewhere Irenaeus is quoted as teaching baptism with “the invocation of the Lord,”⁸⁵² which is probably a reference to the christological formula or at least a christological interpretation of the formula. Throughout the second century, then, there was a concern to connect the name of Jesus Christ to Christian initiation, even when triadic baptismal formulas came into use. Innovators such as Justin considered it important to continue invoking the name of Jesus, apparently in deference to older practice and to a strong theology of Jesus as the divine name under the new covenant.

⁸⁴⁹ Justin, *1 Apol.* 61 (Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*).

⁸⁵⁰ Justin, *Dial.* 85, 132.

⁸⁵¹ Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (trans. Joseph P. Smith; Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1952), 7-8.

⁸⁵² Irenaeus, *frg.* 34 (*ANF* 1:574). See also Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.12.2, 4, 7. He similarly identified the name of Jesus as belonging to the Father. *Haer.* 4.17.6.

Perhaps Barth's comments on Matt 28:19 explain why the name of Jesus continued to play a central role in early triadic formulas. He viewed Matt 28:19 as an extension of the shorter christological formula; baptism is not into three different names but into one name explicated in three different ways. The Father is the basis for the history of Jesus Christ and indeed for all human history. The saving work of God was accomplished by the Son, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the forward extension of God's one act of salvation. Thus, the focal point of baptism remains God's revelation and redemption in Jesus Christ, so that "in faith, love and baptism the Christian moves towards the name of Jesus Christ, towards Jesus Christ Himself."⁸⁵³

In the early third century we find the modern trinitarian baptismal formula in the writings of Tertullian, Origen, and others.⁸⁵⁴ Their explanations of the baptismal formula enunciate a trinitarian model of God and shift the focus from Jesus to the three persons as sharing in the work of salvation.

The history of the baptismal formula thus illuminates the development of Christology. It does not support development from a low to a high Christology or an explicit binitarian model from the beginning. It does support the monotheistic deification of Jesus in which Jesus is the focal point of divine revelatory and redemptive action, the human personification of God's salvation.

When considering the question of why the early Christians deified Jesus, the early practice of water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ supported the four motives we have considered: (1) It exemplified the combination of Hebrew monotheism and Greek longing for universals, for in Jesus the Hebrew God became accessible to the whole world. (2) It provided a boundary marker for the construction of group identity and maintenance of group integrity. (3) It affirmed the unique soteriological experience and message of early Christians. (4) It helped fulfill their missiological purpose.

⁸⁵³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4.4:96-99.

⁸⁵⁴ E.g., Tertullian, *Bapt.* 6.1; idem, *Prax.* 26; Origen, *Princ.* 1.3.2. Tertullian seems to have been the first Christian theologian to specify a baptismal formula featuring the three titles of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit while excluding the name of Jesus. Of course, this triadic language also appears in Matt 28:19 (see n.837) and in the *Didache*. The *Didache* refers to both the triadic formula (7:1) and the christological formula (9:5). The triadic passage is probably a later modification. J. V. Bartlett, "Baptism (New Testament)," *ERE* 2:378. Clement of Alexandria provided evidence that the Gnostic leader Theodotus baptized in the "three Names" of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the late second c. *Exc.* 76, 80.

Conclusions

To summarize our discussion, let us return to Nicholson's options as presented in ch. 1: (1) The early Christians did not deify Jesus at first because of their Jewish monotheistic beliefs. (2) The early Christians deified Jesus by intentionally moving away from traditional Jewish monotheism. (3) The early Christians deified Jesus but in doing so came to understand Jewish monotheism in a new way while simultaneously believing they remained faithful to it. The best way to account for the evidence is by a fourth option Nicholson did not consider: (4) The early Christians deified Jesus not by defining monotheism in a new way but by concluding that God was *revealed* in a new way, namely, by manifestation in human identity. In other words, Jesus Christ is not a second actor or second participant in the divine identity but the human personification or embodiment of Yahweh himself. The dual references in the NT to Father/Son and God/Lord make a conceptual distinction between God as transcendent and God as immanent, participating in the human condition. The worship of early Christians was classically monotheistic. They worshiped the one God revealed in or as Jesus. They simultaneously confessed the one God of their historic faith and the eschatological revelation of the one God in or as Jesus for the redemption of humanity. They prayed to God in the name of Jesus and prayed to Jesus as God. They viewed Jesus as the incarnation of God, in essence God acting as God's own agent by coming in an unprecedented way, in humanness. They believed Jesus to be "God on earth" so that "faith in the one God of Israel has become centred on Jesus"; instead of describing this belief as a "Christology," perhaps it is more accurate to call it "*Theology* in a human environment."⁸⁵⁵ In this way, early Christians considered themselves to be completely faithful to OT monotheism, although from a traditional Jewish perspective the concept of incarnation was something new. The debate between first-century Jews and Christians was not about whether multiple, distinct entities could be "included" in an abstract Godhead but whether the one, personal God could become manifested in flesh in all God's fullness and whether God had actually done so in Jesus.

Since this formulation does not require the development of an explicit binitarian or trinitarian model in terms of Greek philosophical categories, the explanation for its historical origin is not as complex. As Dunn and Wright have explained, and as

⁸⁵⁵ Wendy E. S. North, "Monotheism and the Gospel of John: Jesus, Moses, and the Law," in Stuckenbruck and North, *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, 155, 166. While she attributed this view to John, we see essentially the same phenomenon earlier in Paul.

exemplified in part by 2 Cor 3:16–4:6, the Jewish categories of Spirit, Lord, Word, Presence/Glory, Image, Torah, Messiah/Son, Wisdom, and personified divine attributes all prepared the way for the monotheistic deification of Jesus. Categories such as divine agents, angels, exalted patriarchs, and divine hypostases do not appear to have played a major role, although they may have had some suggestive or allusive influence. As Hurtado has rightly noted, the process of deification was not merely or even primarily doctrinal; the spiritual experiences of the early Christians were crucial. In whatever way we might interpret the post-resurrection appearances, outpourings of the Holy Spirit, and visions described in Acts, they caused first-century Jewish believers to take a fresh look at their belief in God through the lens of Jesus.

Despite Christian attempts to maintain continuity with their Jewish heritage, their concept of incarnation ultimately caused a break with Judaism. Yet the early Christians persevered in the deification of Jesus even though it meant conflict. “They said it within a single generation. And they said it even though it was shocking to the religious sensibilities of both Jews and pagans. Moreover, they said it even though it meant a direct political confrontation with the claims of Rome.”⁸⁵⁶

Clearly, the early Christians had powerful reasons for deifying Jesus. This innovative discourse involved some creative tension within the monotheistic tradition, necessitating some extension or reinterpretation of Jewish thought. It was not a gradual development toward a more abstract, philosophical concept of God or a development from a low to a high Christology. Instead, it was a simultaneous affirmation of the transcendence of God and the immanence of God in the most profound way possible, by presenting God as identifying fully with the human race.

Early Christians, prior to and including Paul, worshiped Jesus as divine; their worship occurred within a Jewish monotheistic context; and it did not result primarily from Hellenization. They viewed Jesus as the revelation of the one God of the Hebrew Scriptures, not as a second deity or personage. Although they reinterpreted their core beliefs in light of Jesus Christ, they did not see their worship of Jesus as violating their core beliefs. The evidence from Paul’s Corinthian correspondence is subject to various interpretations, but it does not require an explicit second-century binitarian or third-century trinitarian model. It does reveal that many early Christians viewed God as both transcendent and immanent and worshiped Jesus as God manifested in human identity.

⁸⁵⁶ Wright, *Simply Christian*, 117.

This conclusion best explains the discourse about Jesus in 2 Cor 3:16–4:6 in its historical, literary, and rhetorical context.

Although our redescription differs somewhat from the explanations of Bauckham, Hurtado, and Dunn, and while they certainly would not agree with it, in essential respects our analysis of Paul’s discourse, especially in 2 Cor 3:16–4:6, supports their core contention that the early Christians understood Jesus to be the revelation of the God of Israel. For Bauckham, “Jesus reveals the divine identity—who God truly is.”⁸⁵⁷ For Hurtado, “Paul’s God-talk was Christ-oriented. . . . The particularity of God remains but is relocated in Jesus. . . . ‘God’ must now be understood *and engaged devotionally* in light of Jesus.” Hurtado also acknowledged the significance of Christ’s humanity for Paul’s discussion of God: “From Jesus’ resurrection onward, ‘God’ in some profound way now includes a glorified human.”⁸⁵⁸ Dunn similarly asserted, “For Paul, God was now to be known definitively by reference to Christ. . . . The revelation of Christ was the revelation of God,” so that “Christ became the definition of God.”⁸⁵⁹

To relate this discussion to Oneness Pentecostalism, we read Bauckham, Hurtado, and Dunn as ultimately supporting the development of classical trinitarianism while Oneness Pentecostalism distinguishes itself from classical trinitarianism. Yet there is a convergence of interests. To a great extent Oneness Pentecostalism emerged as a distinct movement within twentieth-century Pentecostalism as an attempt to recapture and underscore the revelation of the one God of Israel in Jesus Christ. Despite the differences, our investigation reveals that there is much to gain by Oneness Pentecostals entering into this scholarly discourse.

Returning to our central question of why the early Christians deified Jesus, the four socio-rhetorical factors we have identified—universalization of Hebrew monotheism in a diverse society, group integrity, soteriology, and missiology—all have relevance for Oneness Pentecostalism and for Christianity generally in the twenty-first century. As Western culture becomes increasingly secular and as Christianity’s center of gravity shifts to the Majority World, today’s Christians encounter many cultures and ideologies and must appropriate biblical texts for this diverse world. As we have seen, first-century Christians used Hebraic thought as transformed by a universalizing Hellenistic impulse. In the second through fourth centuries Christian thinkers formulated, interpreted, and

⁸⁵⁷ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, ix.

⁸⁵⁸ Hurtado, *God in NT Theology*, 11, 23, 72, 113-14.

⁸⁵⁹ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 722-23.

expanded their Christology in terms of Hellenistic thought, working with two horizons. Now, global Christians increasingly face the challenges of group integrity, soteriology, and missiology in non-Hellenistic, non-Western contexts as well as in postmodern Western contexts. In some cases, they see a collapse of horizons as they encounter Majority World people who embrace the first-century biblical worldview of divine immanence, miracles, extra-normal occurrences, and experiential faith. These people tend to read biblical texts with a sense of immediacy and direct appropriation without the distance caused by centuries of Western philosophical and theological development. While the result may be theological views that seem “naïve” and “untutored,”⁸⁶⁰ it is a reality for millions of people today, and therefore theological resources should be brought to bear. Global Christians must consider how to preserve and transmit the central core of Christian faith in new expressions appropriate to new contexts. Majority World Christians in general and Oneness Pentecostals in particular seek to maintain group integrity in a pluralistic world in which rival ideologies such as humanism, secularism, paganism, and Islam are becoming increasingly prominent. They also face the need to explain their soteriological experiences and to direct their missiological impulses.

In many ways, they face a situation similar to that of first-century Christians. Talbert explained how first-century Christians borrowed contemporary cultural concepts to develop several complementary models of Christology in order to meet certain needs. Something similar seems to be occurring in contemporary Christianity, as exemplified by the emergence of Pentecostalism in its diverse and culturally adapted forms. In this historical and cultural situation, our study of Paul’s discourse has attempted to make a small contribution to the redescription and revisioning of Christology by going back to Christian origins. Our hope is that this study will assist Oneness Pentecostals in reflecting on their Christology in light of their own present socio-rhetorical location and also provide categories of thought whereby they can engage others and others can engage them.

To summarize our findings, Paul and other early Christians were convinced that the OT taught and supported their beliefs. They also had religious experiences that they understood to be divine, revelatory, authoritative, and determinative.⁸⁶¹ As we have seen,

⁸⁶⁰ Pelikan, *Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, 179; Hurtado, *God in NT Theology*, 49-50.

⁸⁶¹ Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 61; Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 70-74.

Paul's own conversion experience was fundamental to his understanding of Jesus.⁸⁶² His vision of the glorified Jesus was apparently the source of his identification of Jesus as the image and glory of God in 2 Cor 4:4-6. In short, regardless of how we may evaluate them today, we should not discount the role of these experiences and the perceptions of them in the development of early beliefs about Jesus. At the same time, without minimizing the beliefs and experiences of early Christians, we can identify sociological factors in the formation of a new Christian identity. The monotheistic deification of Jesus accomplished four significant socio-rhetorical purposes:

1. In a context of rapid social change and dislocation as well as cultural diversity and pressure, early Christians combined "Hebrew monotheism and Greek longing for universals."⁸⁶³ Their understanding of the deity of Jesus enabled them to claim both traditional heritage (Jewish monotheism) and distinctiveness (Christocentrism).
2. The monotheistic deification of Jesus gave early Christians a unique social identity and cohesiveness.
3. The monotheistic deification of Jesus affirmed the soteriological experiences, beliefs, and outreach of early Christians.
4. The combination of continuity and discontinuity positioned the movement to attract all people, both Jews and Gentiles. The monotheistic deification of Jesus moved the new faith beyond Jewish ethnicity and traditional boundary markers so that it became a universal monotheism with a missiological focus.

The socio-rhetorically constructed identity of Jesus Christ defined the identity of the early Christians. The result was a distinctively Christian faith.

⁸⁶² Newman, *Paul's Glory-Christology*, 182-83; Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:317-18; Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 34; Kim, *Origin of Paul's Gospel*, 100-268.

⁸⁶³ Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 122.

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