

One God and One Lord: Paul's Christology Reconsidered

Introduction

Discussions of the Trinity—or the broader claim that Jesus is God—often proceed by appeal to the cumulative witness of Scripture. Rather than pointing to a single passage that explicitly teaches the full doctrine, apologists typically argue that Trinitarian conclusions emerge from the synthesis of many biblical texts. The doctrine is therefore presented not as the teaching of any one passage, but as the best explanation of the biblical data taken as a whole.

Whether such a synthesis is correct is not the primary concern of this study. A prior methodological question must first be addressed: before asking what “the Bible teaches,” should we not first ask what its individual authors taught?

The Bible is not a single work written by a single human author. It is a collection of writings composed by numerous authors across centuries, each writing within a particular historical, literary, and theological context. Consequently, there is an important distinction between the theology of a biblical author and the conclusions later readers may draw from that author's writings. A theological system may be built from many biblical texts without being the theology of any one biblical author. In this way, it is possible to construct a Christology from biblical texts that more than one biblical author would reject.

For this reason, this paper argues that authorial theology should be given methodological priority. Questions of canonical and systematic theology are important, but they should come after we have understood individual biblical authors on their own terms¹. Before asking what Scripture collectively teaches about God and Christ, we should first ask what Paul taught, what John taught, what Peter taught, and so forth.

Methodological Priorities

To facilitate this distinction, two categories will be employed throughout this paper: assembly and teaching.

- *Assembly* is where readers combine statements from multiple texts into a larger theological conclusion.

¹ See Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1975), 15–17

- *Teaching*, on the other hand, is when an author intentionally and directly communicates an idea as part of his theological message.

While both categories may contribute to theological reflection, direct teaching deserves the greatest interpretive weight. If a doctrine is central to an author's theology, we should expect it to appear clearly, repeatedly, and intentionally within his writings rather than emerging only through later synthesis.

The priority of teaching over assembly leads to four interpretive principles:

1. Paul's theology should be reconstructed primarily from his own writings.
2. Repeated and explicit statements carry greater interpretive weight than isolated and disputed texts.
3. Clear statements should normally guide the interpretation of ambiguous statements.
4. Later theological categories should not be retroactively imposed upon Paul unless the evidence demonstrates that Paul himself employed those categories.

With these methodological considerations in view, this paper examines the letters of Paul as a case study and asks a straightforward historical question: What did Paul himself teach about God and Christ? This study argues that Paul's letters consistently present the one God as the Father, Jesus as God's Messiah and exalted Lord, and Paul maintains a distinction between the two throughout his explicit theological discourse. Whether later theological syntheses are justified is a separate question beyond the scope of this investigation.

Paul's Most Explicit Statements About God

If we wish to understand Paul's doctrine of God, the most natural place to begin is where Paul himself begins: the opening greetings of his letters. Virtually every Pauline epistle opens with some variation of the formula:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

(Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:2; Phlm. 3, English Standard Version²)

Minor variations occur throughout the corpus, but the pattern quite strong. Wherever both figures appear together, the title "God" is always applied to the Father, while Jesus is

² All Bible Citations will be taken from the English Standard Version (ESV), unless otherwise noted.

distinguished as Lord and Messiah. Paul closely associates the Father and Jesus, but he does not confuse them.

The same pattern appears throughout Paul's letters in another recurring expression: "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Rom. 15:6	God and Father <i>of</i> our Lord Jesus Christ
2 Cor. 1:3	God and Father <i>of</i> our Lord Jesus Christ
2 Cor. 11:31	God and Father <i>of</i> the Lord Jesus
Eph. 1:3	God and Father <i>of</i> our Lord Jesus Christ
Eph. 1:17	God <i>of</i> our Lord Jesus Christ
Col. 1:3	Father <i>of</i> our Lord Jesus Christ

These statements are straightforward. According to Paul, the Father is the God of Jesus. He reinforces the same idea in 1 Corinthians 11:3:

"The head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God."

Paul never reverses this relationship. God is presented as the God of Christ, the Father of Christ, and the one who stands as head over Christ. No corresponding language places Christ over God or identifies God as belonging to Christ in the same manner. Whatever exalted status Jesus possesses, Paul preserves an asymmetrical relationship between the two.

This usage is not confined to a handful of passages. Across his letters, Paul uses the term *theos* ("God") more than five hundred times³. With only a few disputed or exceptional cases, the referent is the Father. Moreover, Paul consistently speaks of God with singular pronouns and singular verbs. Taken together, these patterns suggest that Paul's ordinary conception of God is neither vague nor unexplained. God is a single personal subject whom Paul identifies as the Father.

The clearest evidence appears when Paul intentionally defines God's identity in exclusive terms. On several occasions he speaks of "the one God," "the only God," or "the true God." Significantly, these statements always refer to the Father.

³ Occurrence count derived from a lexical search of θεός in the Pauline Epistles using the Nestle-Aland 28th edition text via Blue Letter Bible. Exact totals vary slightly depending on textual variants.

Rom. 3:29-30	"Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since <i>God is one</i> "
1 Cor. 8:6	"...yet for us there is <i>one God, the Father</i> , from whom are all and for whom we are, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all and through whom we are." [Author's Translation]
Eph. 4:4-6	"There is one body and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <i>one God and Father</i> of all, who is over all and through all and in all."
1 Tim. 2:5	"For there is <i>one God</i> , and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus..."
Rom. 16:27	"...to the <i>only wise God</i> be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen."
1 Tim. 1:17	"To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the <i>only God</i> , be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."
1 Tim. 6:15-16	"he who is the blessed and <i>only Sovereign</i> , the King of kings and Lord of lords, who <i>alone has immortality</i> , who dwells in unapproachable light, whom <i>no one has ever seen</i> or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen."
Gal. 3:20	"and the mediator is not of one, but <i>God is one</i> ." (Literal Standard Version)
1 Thess. 1:9	"...how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and <i>true God</i> , and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead..."
	(emphases added)

Several of these passages mention Jesus in the immediate context, yet Paul continues to distinguish him from the one God rather than including him within the identification.

The most important example is 1 Corinthians 8:6. Confronting a pagan environment filled with "many gods and many lords," Paul summarizes Christian monotheism with striking simplicity:

Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all and we for him, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all and we through him. (Author's translation)

Paul does not merely say that the Father is God; he explicitly identifies the one God as the Father. At the same time, he distinguishes Jesus as the one Lord. The two figures are united in God's redemptive purpose, but they are not collapsed into a single identity or being. Several scholars argue that Paul includes Christ within the unique divine identity in

this passage despite distinguishing him from the "one God."⁴ The present study focuses instead on Paul's explicit identification of the Father as the "one God," while Jesus Christ is given a different title. This is significant, because in their ordinary uses, the term "god" carries both authority and ontology, while the term "lord" carries authority only.

A similarly clear distinction appears in 1 Timothy 2:5:

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

Here Paul distinguishes the one God from the one mediator and further identifies the mediator as "the man Christ Jesus." In a passage summarizing truths necessary for "all men to be saved," Paul does not blur the categories of God and Christ. Rather, he presents them as distinct figures standing in a mediatorial relationship.

Paul's Most Explicit Statements About Jesus

Paul's use of "Lord"

Just as Paul identifies the Father as God, he consistently identifies Jesus as Lord (*kyrios*). This distinction appears throughout his letters and forms one of the most stable features of his theological vocabulary. In Paul's greetings, prayers, and doctrinal discussions, "God" ordinarily refers to the Father, while "the Lord" ordinarily refers to Jesus Christ.⁵

There are exceptions when Paul quotes passages from the Septuagint in which "Lord" refers to YHWH, the name of Israel's God, but these do not alter his ordinary usage. In Paul's work, God is the Father, and Jesus is the Lord.

The Anointed Son

Paul's most common title for Jesus is "Christ" (*Christos*), a Greek word traditionally transliterated rather than translated into English. The Hebrew equivalent is *Mashiach* (anglicized "Messiah"), and both terms simply mean "Anointed One." For Paul, "Jesus Christ" is therefore not a first and last name but a confession: Jesus is God's Anointed King.

Although the title became closely associated with Jesus in Christian usage, it originated within the hopes and expectations of Israel's Scriptures. Kings, priests, and occasionally

⁴ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 210-18.
and Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 113-15.

⁵ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 141

prophets were anointed as a sign that God had chosen and authorized them for a particular role. By the first century, however, "the Messiah" had become especially associated with the promised descendant of David through whom God would restore his people and establish his kingdom.⁶

Paul defines Jesus's role within this Davidic framework. The clearest example appears in the opening of Romans:

...concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 1:3-4).

This brief summary contains the essential elements of Paul's Christology. Jesus is God's Son, the descendant of David, the promised Messiah, and the risen Lord. These four ideas are not presented as separate categories but as complementary components of the same idea. This reflects the royal language of the Hebrew Scriptures, where God's covenant king could be described as God's son ⁷(2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7). Paul grounds Jesus' messianic status in two historical realities: his lineage from David and his resurrection from the dead. The first establishes his claim to David's throne; the second serves as God's vindication and exaltation of him as Messiah and Lord. Whatever additional significance the title "Son of God" may carry in later theology, Paul's opening presentation places it firmly within the framework of Israel's messianic expectations (cf. 2 Cor. 1:19; Gal. 2:20; Acts 9:20).

The same pattern appears elsewhere in Paul's letters. In 2 Timothy 2:8 he summarizes his gospel in similar terms: "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel." Once again, Davidic descent and resurrection function as the twin pillars of Jesus' messianic status.

Paul's understanding of the Messiah also extends beyond Israel. The risen Son of David is now Lord over the nations. Quoting Isaiah, Paul describes Christ as "the root of Jesse" who rises "to rule the Gentiles" (Rom. 15:12). The kingdom promised to David has expanded to encompass the whole world.

For Paul, then, Jesus is the promised Davidic Messiah whose obedience, resurrection, and exaltation have established him as the universal Lord. Yet even in this highest office, Jesus

⁶ John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 78.

⁷ James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 14–16.

remains distinct from the God who raised him, exalted him, and entrusted him with authority over the nations.

Christ and the Cosmic Powers

Paul's letters describe a cosmic order populated by spiritual powers and authorities. These beings can be described as heavenly or earthly, visible or invisible, and as rulers, authorities, powers, dominions, or other spiritual forces. More importantly, Paul repeatedly describes Christ as being exalted over these powers and placed at the head of the cosmic order.⁸

This idea is especially clear in Ephesians. Paul describes God's purpose as being "to bring all things together under one head in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10, author's translation). He then explains how this reordering takes place:

He [God] worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far *above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named*, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all under his feet and gave him *as head over all* to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Eph. 1:20-23)

God raises Christ, seats him at his right hand, places the cosmic powers beneath him, and gives him authority over all things. Christ's supremacy is therefore presented as the result of God's act of exaltation. Paul does not merely describe Christ as occupying a position above the heavenly powers; he describes God as placing him there.

These same powers appear elsewhere in Paul's letters. In Ephesians 6:12, believers are said to struggle against "rulers," "authorities," "cosmic powers over this present darkness," and "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul describes Christ's reign in similar terms:

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every *rule and every authority and power*. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. (1 Cor. 15:24-25)

Here again, Christ's universal rule is connected to the defeat and subjection of the cosmic powers. This framework provides an important context for Colossians 1:13-20. Paul describes God as transferring believers "from the domain of darkness" into the kingdom of his Son, then describes Christ's supremacy over "all things," including "thrones or

⁸ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 301-3.

dominions or rulers or authorities," whether "in heaven and on earth" and "visible and invisible" (Col. 1:13, 16).

Some interpreters see Paul including Jesus in the original Genesis creation. The verb *ktizō* ("create") can certainly refer to original creation, but Paul's repeated use of this cosmic-powers vocabulary gives reason to consider whether the passage is describing Christ's supremacy over the heavenly order rather than simply retelling Genesis 1. This interpretation is reinforced by Colossians 2:15, where Christ "disarmed the rulers and authorities" and triumphed over them at the cross. The grammar also deserves attention: the statement that these things "were created" (*ektistai*) is passive. Jesus is not explicitly presented as the acting subject; this must be determined by the surrounding context. The other reasonable candidate is the God who transferred believers into the kingdom in verse 13 is also creating (or re-creating) these powers under the headship of Jesus in verse 16.

The point is not that *ktizō* cannot refer to original creation, but that Colossians 1 should be read within Paul's broader picture of Christ's exaltation over the cosmic powers. Christ's universal authority does not erase the distinction between Christ and God: God raises and exalts Christ, places all things under him, and ultimately remains "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). Paul's picture is therefore one of universal authority under God: Christ is exalted above every power in heaven and earth, while God remains the source of his authority.

Christ as the New Adam

In addition to his lineage through David, Paul also focuses his readers to Jesus's relationship to Adam. In Romans 5, he at length explains how and why Jesus's life, obedience, and death could possibly yield eternal life to all believers. The answer is that he is the champion over Adam's failure. The "One Man" Adam, "who was a type of the one who was to come," (verse 14) brought sin and death into the world, "and death spread to all men, because all sinned" (verse 13). This cursed state is reversed through Jesus's obedience. Paul states four different parallels:

"For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many...

"For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many

were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." (Rom. 5:15, 17-19)

Each time, Paul assumes an equal exchange being made: one man's trespass for one man's gift of grace; one man's reign of death undone by one man's reign of life. Paul appeals not to divine metaphysics, Jesus's infinite worth, or even a penal exchange, but rather to one human's failure being over-written by his descendant's victory. In this sense, Jesus is viewed as the True and Ideal Adam, who has accomplished what the First Adam was unable to accomplish, which is to provide both the example of victory over sin and also the way to eternal life with God.

The Apostle develops the same idea in 1 Corinthians 15. Arguing for the future resurrection of believers, Paul anchors the entire hope of resurrection in the historical resurrection of Jesus:

"But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised."
(1 Cor. 15:13)

Paul's argument assumes that Jesus genuinely belonged to the realm of mortality. Christ died, was buried, and remained among the dead until God raised him. Indeed, Paul regularly attributes Jesus' resurrection to the action of God: "God raised him from the dead" (Rom. 10:9; cf. Rom. 4:24; Gal. 1:1). The resurrection is not presented as Christ resuming an inherently immortal existence, but as God vindicating and restoring his faithful servant to life.

Paul then returns to the Adam-Christ parallel:

"For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.
For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." (1 Cor. 15:21-22)

The symmetry is deliberate. Death entered through one man, and resurrection comes through another man. Paul identifies both Adam and Christ with the same term, *anthropos* (man), and presents Christ as the representative head of a new humanity. By calling Christ "the firstfruits" of the resurrection (v. 23), Paul places him in the same category as those who will later follow him. Christ is not an exception to the human condition but the first human of many to emerge victorious over death.

Later in the chapter, Paul expands the contrast beyond death and resurrection to the nature of the resurrection body itself:

"The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit." (1 Cor. 15:45)

Adam received life from God and passed mortality to his descendants. Christ, having passed through death and resurrection, now possesses the glorified life that he imparts to others. Paul describes him as "the man of heaven" (v. 48), not because he is no longer human, but because he has become the prototype of resurrected humanity. As Adam stands at the head of the old creation, Christ stands at the head of the new.

This framework also explains Paul's statement that Christ, having been raised, "will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him" (Rom. 6:9). The implication is clear: death once did have dominion over him. Like Adam and Adam's descendants, Jesus truly belonged to the mortal order. What distinguishes him is not an inherently immortal nature, but his perfect obedience, God's act of resurrection, and his subsequent exaltation. For Paul, the redemptive power of Christ rests precisely in his role as the victorious human successor to Adam.

Jesus the Mediator

Another central component of Paul's Christology is Jesus' role as mediator between God and humanity. This theme naturally follows from Paul's Adamic Christology. Having overcome sin and death through obedience, resurrection, and exaltation, Jesus now functions as the representative through whom human beings approach God.

Paul states this most explicitly in 1 Timothy 2:5–6:

"For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all."

This statement is noteworthy for the way it distinguishes the parties involved. Paul identifies "one God" on one side and humanity on the other, with Jesus occupying the mediatorial position between them. Notice, Paul describes the mediator as "the man Christ Jesus" (*anthropos Christos Iesous*). The emphasis is not on Jesus' identity as God, but on his identity as the human representative through whom reconciliation has been achieved.

The only other occurrence of the term "mediator" (*mesitēs*) in the Pauline corpus appears in Galatians 3:19, where it refers to Moses' role in the giving of the Law. While the contexts differ, both figures serve as intermediaries between God and his people. Moses mediated the covenant established at Sinai; Christ mediates the new covenant established through his death and resurrection. In both cases, the mediator stands between God and humanity rather than being identified with the God whom he represents.

Although Paul uses the title "mediator" only once of Christ, the concept appears throughout his letters. In Romans 5:1–2, believers have "peace with God through our Lord

Jesus Christ" and "through him" obtain access to divine grace. Likewise, Paul describes reconciliation as an act originating with God but accomplished through Christ:

"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself" (2 Cor. 5:18).

Paul further develops this mediatorial role in Romans 8:34, where the exalted Christ is described as interceding on behalf of believers:

"Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."

Christ's mediatorial function seems to come by virtue of his current place at God's right hand. Having died, been raised, and exalted to God's right hand, he now serves as the continual advocate for his brethren, the believer on earth. : God is the one before whom believers are represented, while Christ is the one who represents them. God is the source of salvation, while Christ is the divinely appointed mediator through whom that salvation is accomplished and applied.

God and Christ in Paul's Theology

God as Source, Christ as Agent

A recurring feature of Paul's theology is the pattern of God acting through Christ. God is the ultimate actor, while Christ serves as the means by which God's purposes are accomplished.

Paul thanks "my God through Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:8). Believers have peace with God "through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). Victory over death comes from "God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57). Reconciliation originates with God, who "through Christ reconciled us to himself" (2 Cor. 5:18). Likewise, believers receive grace, access, justification, redemption, and adoption through Christ. Paul does not merely describe God and Christ acting together; he repeatedly presents God acting through Christ.

The same structure appears in Paul's doxologies. Ultimate praise is directed to God, often through Christ as mediator. Paul concludes Romans with the words: "to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ" (Rom. 16:27). Even the universal confession that "Jesus Christ is Lord" culminates not in Christ's glory alone but "to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11). For Paul, Christ's work ultimately magnifies the God above him rather than blurring the line between them.

God Raises, Exalts, and Authorizes Christ

The same asymmetry appears in Paul's treatment of Christ's resurrection and exaltation. Paul repeatedly attributes Jesus' resurrection to the action of God. God raised Jesus from the dead (Rom. 4:24; 6:4; 10:9; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:20), vindicating him as the righteous Messiah and inaugurating the age to come. Paul always presents the resurrection as something God does for Christ rather than something Christ does for himself.

Likewise, Christ's exaltation is portrayed as a gift bestowed by God. Philippians 2:9 states that "God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name." Romans 1:3-4 similarly presents Jesus as publicly designated and vindicated through resurrection. The authority Christ possesses is not self-originating but granted by God.

At the same time, Paul attributes the highest honors conceivable to the risen Christ. He is seated at God's right hand, "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion" (Eph. 1:20-21). In him "all the fullness" dwells, and he possesses "the preeminence in all things" (Col. 1:18-19). Every knee will bow before him and every tongue confess him as Lord (Phil. 2:10-11). Yet in each case, God is distinct as the source of Christ's authority and exaltation. Christ's supremacy is real and universal, but it is repeatedly presented as derived rather than intrinsic.

Paul makes this relationship explicit in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28. After describing Christ's victorious reign over every enemy, including death itself, Paul explains that the Son's authority ultimately serves a larger purpose. Christ reigns until every hostile power has been defeated, after which he delivers the kingdom to God the Father:

"When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all."

This passage provides perhaps the clearest summary of Paul's theological framework. God is the source of Christ's authority, the one who exalts him, the one who places all things under him, and ultimately the one to whom the kingdom returns. Christ's reign is universal, but it is neither independent nor ultimate in itself. Even at the climax of redemption history, the distinction between God and Christ holds. The Son remains subject to the God who exalted him, and the goal of history is not that Christ replace God as supreme ruler, but "that God may be all in all."

Throughout Paul's letters, there is a clear pattern. God acts through Christ, exalts Christ, grants authority to Christ, and receives the kingdom back from Christ. Christ stands at the center of God's redemptive plan, but never at the center of God's identity. For Paul, the one God is the Father, while Jesus is God's Messiah, Lord, mediator, and exalted agent.

Possible Exceptions

The argument of this paper does not depend upon the claim that Paul never applies the title *theos* ("God") to Jesus under any circumstance. Rather, the argument is that Paul's ordinary and explicit theological language overwhelmingly identifies the Father as God and distinguishes Jesus from him. Therefore, any passage that appears to call Jesus *theos* must be evaluated within the broader context of Paul's established usage.

Several passages have been interpreted by some scholars as applying the title *theos* to Jesus, most notably Romans 9:5, Titus 2:13, Colossians 2:2, and 1 Timothy 3:16.⁹ While each deserves careful consideration, all four involve grammatical or textual ambiguities, and none provides a decided instance of Paul intentionally teaching that Jesus is God.

Romans 9:5 is perhaps the most debated example. The passage may be translated either as a description of Christ—"Christ, who is over all, God blessed forever"—or as a separate doxology directed to God: "...Christ. God who is over all be blessed forever." Because the earliest Greek manuscripts lacked modern punctuation, both readings are grammatically possible. The verse therefore cannot bear substantial theological weight by itself.

Titus 2:13 presents a similar difficulty, having three interpretive options. "Waiting for... the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." Paul could be connecting Jesus Christ to the terms "God and Savior" together, Savior distinct from God, or he could be referring to Jesus as the glory of God. Colossians 2:2 contains a comparable ambiguity, with the relationship between "God" and "Christ" capable of being understood in more than one way. In both cases, the grammar is sufficiently disputed that certainty is difficult.

The dispute in 1 Timothy 3:16 is primarily textual rather than grammatical. Early manuscripts differ between readings that identify the subject as "God" (*theos*) and those that read "he who" (*hos*). Most modern critical editions and contemporary translations adopt the latter reading, reflecting the judgment that it is more likely original.

The question here is not how to resolve every debate, but how much weight these passages should carry. Even if one were to apply "God" to Jesus in every ambiguous case, the result would still be a handful of uncertain texts set alongside hundreds of undisputed passages in which Paul distinguishes God from Christ and identifies the Father as the one God. Conversely, if the ambiguities are resolved according to Paul's established usage, no exception remains.

⁹ See, for example, Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 143–286; and Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 171–195.

Because of the ambiguity, the disputed texts are better understood as possible exceptions requiring interpretation in light of Paul's broader theology rather than as controlling texts that redefine it. Historical reconstruction normally proceeds from the clear and frequent to the rare and disputed, not the reverse. Whatever conclusions one ultimately reaches regarding these passages, they cannot overturn the dominant pattern found throughout Paul's letters: the one God is the Father, while Jesus is God's Messiah, Lord, mediator, and exalted agent.

Conclusions

This study began with a methodological question: before asking what "the Bible teaches" about God and Christ, should we first ask what its individual authors taught? Examining Paul's letters on their own terms produces a remarkably consistent picture.

Paul identifies the one God as the Father. He repeatedly calls the Father "God," "the one God," "the only God," and "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." At the same time, he presents Jesus as God's Messiah, Lord, Son, mediator, and exalted representative. Jesus occupies the central role in God's redemptive plan, but Paul consistently distinguishes him from the God who sent him, raised him, exalted him, and gave him authority.

This distinction extends beyond titles. Paul's theology repeatedly presents God as the ultimate source and authority, while Christ is the one through whom God accomplishes his purposes. God raises and exalts Christ, places all things under him, and ultimately remains the one to whom Christ is subject. Even at the climax of Christ's reign, Paul says that "the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).

Several Pauline passages have been interpreted as identifying Jesus as God, but these passages remain disputed on grammatical, textual, or contextual grounds. They therefore should not be allowed to overturn the much larger body of clear and repeated evidence concerning Paul's ordinary understanding of God and Christ. The same principle applies to highly debated passages such as Colossians 1:13–20: whatever interpretation is ultimately preferred, it should be considered within Paul's broader theological vocabulary and not treated as though its meaning were self-evident.

The goal of this paper has not been to determine whether a later theology can be constructed from Pauline texts. Rather, what did Paul himself teach? On this more limited question, the evidence points consistently in one direction: one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 8:6).

Paul's Christ is therefore both exalted and distinctly human. Jesus is the promised Messiah, the obedient Son, the victorious new Adam, the mediator between God and humanity, and the Lord whom God has raised and enthroned over every earthly and heavenly power. His exaltation does not erase the distinction between him and the God who exalted him. Paul's Christology can and should be understood on its own terms, without importing the later categories of Nicaea, Constantinople, or Chalcedon.

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