

The names of Jesus

But He was more than a man. Consider of the implications of the titles Paul uses of Him. He uses 'Christ' often; to all intents and purposes it is for him a proper name (just as it is for us). Probably this is because his letters are written to Gentiles for whom a title like 'the Christ' would not have much meaning. But if 'the Christ' meant little to Gentiles, 'the Lord' meant much. Paul uses 'the Lord' with great frequency and effect. He could, and did, employ it in its fullest sense of the divine Object of worship.

But whereas for the Gentile nations in general there were 'gods many, and lords many', for Paul there could be but 'one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things' (1 Cor. 8:6; cf. Eph. 4:5). His constant use of this term was inevitable for, as J. Gresham Machen points out,¹ it was the only term open to him if he wished to refer to [Jesus as God](#) in a way which distinguished him from the Father. 'Our Lord Jesus Christ' is an expression pregnant with meaning. 'Everything a man can feel towards God comes in this name to utterance.'²

But Paul does not content himself with repeating the names and titles others had used before him. His was an active and fertile mind, and his Christian experience was deep. His whole life had been transformed by what Christ had done for him. Small wonder then, that his magnificent powers, focused on the one Object of his adoration, illuminated by the Holy Spirit of God, should produce new insights into the wonder of the Person of Paul's divine Lord.

Sometimes Paul is thinking of Christ's pre-eminence, and then he may call Christ the Head over His Church (Eph. 4:15, 5:23; Col. 1:18, 2:19), a metaphor which also brings out the unity between the Lord and the Lord's people. Or he may refer to 'the firstborn among many brethren' (Rom. 8:29), 'the firstborn from the dead' (Col. 1:18), or 'the firstborn of every creature' (Col. 1:15). The first two of these remind us that Christ

underwent experiences Himself in order that He might bring others safely through them.

Believers may face death unafraid, because Jesus underwent death for them. He has removed its terrors. Some have misunderstood the third passage by pressing 'creature' to mean that Jesus was a created being, even though the first of such. This, however, is not the meaning. The [context](#) clearly excludes any thought that Christ might be a creature. Paul's point is that Christ stands to every creature in the relation of the first-born to his father's property, i.e. He is the heir. The word combines the ideas of primacy and sovereignty.

The same passage refers to Him as the 'beginning' (Col. 1:18). This word, too, combines two meanings, that of priority in time, and that of source or origin. Christ came before the Church, and He was the source of the Church. Through Him it had its being. The same passage tells us that it was the Father's pleasure that 'in him should all fulness dwell'.

This probably refers to teaching of a gnostic type. Some of the gnostics thought that there were many divine beings, each with his own particular nature and functions. Together they made up the 'fulness'. But Paul will have none of this. He brooks no rival to his beloved Lord. In Christ dwells *all* the fulness.

Sometimes Paul thinks of Jesus in terms of glory. He sees 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (2 Cor. 4:6). Christ is 'the Lord of glory' (1 Cor. 2:8). The 'glory' may well point us to the very presence of God, as it does in Old Testament passages like Ex. 24:16. More than one scholar has seen in these references the most far-reaching of all the titles that Paul uses of Christ. J. Weiss says that 'the Lord of glory' is 'perhaps the loftiest description of Him to be found in S. Paul'.¹ C. Anderson Scott reminds us that in the Book of Enoch this very expression is frequently used of the Almighty Himself.²

There are depths that the casual English reader might not expect in such a description of Jesus as ‘the power of God, and the [wisdom](#) of God’ (1 Cor. 1:24). Among the Jews there was a superstitious fear of using the name of God. Instead men employed terms like ‘the Holy One’, ‘the Blessed’, etc. One recognized term was ‘the Power’.

While Paul is not employing this use exactly (for he adds ‘of God’), yet he is associating Christ very closely with the divine Name. The same is true of ‘the [wisdom](#) of God’, for this was commonly used of God’s [revelation](#) to men (see Pr. 8:22ff.). Outside the Bible the idea is found in books like *Ecclesiasticus* and the *Wisdom of Solomon*. W. D. Davies has shown the importance of this concept within Judaism,¹ and makes it very clear that Paul’s use of it implies a very high view of the Person of Christ indeed.

Sometimes Paul speaks of Jesus as ‘the image of God’ (2 Cor. 4:4), or ‘the image of the invisible God’ (Col. 1:15). This striking term emphasizes that it is in Jesus that we see what God is like. Some have felt that if He is the ‘image’ of God, then He cannot be God, for the image and the object of which it is the reflection are not the same. Indeed some would go so far as to say that there is a qualitative difference between the two. But this is to push the metaphor too far. The most that we can allow is that it indicates that the Son is not identical with the Father.

The Greek term certainly denotes likeness and not unlikeness. It conveys the thought that Christ represents God, that He shows forth God. When we see Him we see God. Rawlinson says that in this concept Paul ‘has approximated with singular closeness to precisely that idea of a co-essential yet derivative Godhead which for later Church orthodoxy was expressed by the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son’.²

Once Paul makes use of the very lovely title, ‘the Lord of peace’ (2 Thes. 3:16). With us ‘peace’ is a negative concept. It is the absence of war or strife. But this is not the case among the Jewish-speaking and Jewish-thinking people of antiquity. For them ‘peace’ was connected with the

idea of wholeness. The man who had peace was the man whose life was rounded off, and who was prosperous in the whole range of living.

Most important of all, this included a right relationship with God. When Jesus is thought of as 'the Lord of peace', then the idea is that He is the source of that full and perfect peace which means the prosperity of the whole man. 'The peace of God, which passeth all understanding' is something that comes from Him.

There are many more titles of Jesus. If we were to attempt to be exhaustive in this aspect of Paul's writings we would need a whole book. But this selection is sufficient to demonstrate that from a study of the names and titles that Paul applies to Jesus much can be learned of his view of the Lord. One who could fulfil all that is involved in all these titles must be a very extraordinary Being.

Or to put it the other way round, if Jesus is such that all these titles and more are needed to give expression to some small fraction of His significance, then that significance must be very great indeed.

¹*The Origin of Paul's Religion*, Grand Rapids, 1947, p. 307.

²J. Weiss, cited in C. Anderson Scott, [*Christianity According to St. Paul*](#), Cambridge, 1927, p. 254.

¹Cited in *Cambridge Greek Testament* on 1 Cor. 2:8.

²*Op. cit.*, p. 276.

¹*Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, London, 1948, pp. 147-176.

²*The New Testament Doctrine of the Christ*, London, 1926, p. 132.

Morris, L. (1958). *The Lord from Heaven: A Study of the [New Testament Teaching on the Deity and Humanity of Jesus](#) (69)*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

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