



THE BEREIA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

Reflections

“The Garden of Eden is a horrible story, though the way we tell it in Sunday School class, it doesn’t seem all that bad. But the story of Adam and Eve strikes at the very core of our human predicament. In [sic] was in the Garden, you see, that ‘Man decided!’ That’s what is so horrible about the Garden—people decided to set their own agenda, rather than let God have his way. And mankind has paid a dear price ever since for their choice!”
~ Carroll D. Osburn, *The Peaceable Kingdom: Essays Favoring Non-Sectarian Christianity* (Restoration Perspectives, 1993), 136

“People with a gift of teaching shouldn’t just expect to be able to stand up and say whatever they think at the time; they should think it through, prepare their material, always be working at filling in gaps, seeing a larger picture, and being able to communicate it better.” ~ N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans Part Two (Chapters 6-16)*, (Westminster John Knox Press, Kindle Edition, 2004) 76

“Therefore, the goal of our instruction in the Scriptures is to know God better so that we can grow in our love for God.”
~ Michael F. Bird, *Seven Things I Wish Christians Knew About the Bible* (Zondervan Reflective, 2021), 154

“What Sort of Man Is This?”

David Anguish

Necessary, but not sufficient, for presenting a case for Jesus’s deity are the claims that he was divine. As previously [noted](#), the fact that a man claims to be a god does not prove he is, but the absence of such claims make later attributions of deity to him more difficult to establish. So, it is not surprising that a crucial issue in the discussion of Jesus’s identity is whether he or the witnesses who reported on his life claimed that he was divine.

Since Jesus left behind no personal writings, knowledge of whatever claims exist depends on the historical reliability of the sources that report his activities. While ascertaining their credibility is certainly an important issue for apologists to address, I will leave it for another time. My purpose here is only to introduce what the writings that tell his story do in fact say about him.

That question is debated with regard to each document and conclusions differ depending upon what various readers, both critical and popular, think about the writings. Richard Bauckham offers insight into one issue in the debate: “Many modern readers of the Gospels gain the impression that John has turned the merely human prophet of the three Synoptics into the figure Christians worship as God incarnate in human life. This contrast is certainly too stark” (Bauckham 2011, 93).

Craig Blomberg also acknowledges the difference between John and the Synoptics and cautions against overstating it:

We must be careful . . . not to overestimate the exalted picture of Jesus that John paints or to underestimate the portrait of Jesus in the Synoptics. It is true that only John records Jesus’ seven “I am” sayings and that John himself believes explicitly in Jesus as the Word of God made flesh (John 1:1-14)....

On the other hand, the Synoptics implicitly present a portrait of Jesus from which one could surely derive the more explicit claims of John.... (Blomberg 1995, 38-39).

In a different writing from the one cited above, Bauckham uses the term *Divine Identity Christology* to summarize the testimony of the earliest believers:

“If we go back to the Matthean account of the birth of Jesus, we are struck immediately by the reality that the birth of Jesus was terribly inconvenient and problematic to the political authorities of the time (Matt. 2:1-18). To the Herods and other claimants to power, Jesus’ *birth day* was subversive to another gospel which claimed their allegiance: namely, that Caesar was the patron of all spiritual and material benefits. We would humbly suggest that not much has changed. Ever since the calendar was changed to put Jesus at the center of history, the analogues to Caesar have sought to displace the stranger from Galilee from his rightful place as the central figure of history.”
 ~ Allan J. McNicol, “The Lure of Millennium 2000: What Is at Stake for the Christian Believer?” *Christian Studies* 17 (1999): 14

“Faith ... involves personal decision, trust, commitment and obedience; it is a wholehearted acceptance of the claim of God upon a man, in the situation in which he exists, with the appropriate response in life and action. Thus it is that in the New Testament obedience becomes virtually a technical expression for the acceptance of the Christian faith (e.g., Acts 6.7; Rom. 1.5; 6.17; 16.19; Gal. 5.7; II Thess. 1:8; I Pet. 1.2; 3.1; 4.17).
 ~ Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (SCM Press LTD, 1958), 30

“If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end: If you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth—only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin with and, in the end, despair.”
 ~ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pb. (Macmillan, [1943] 1952), 39

I have proposed this term to describe the way in which all the NT documents relate Jesus to God by including him in the unique identity of the one God, the God of Israel ... What early Christians did was include Jesus in this unique divine identity by speaking of him sharing in the inalienable prerogatives of the one God.... These facets of divine identity Christology will prove relevant to the Gospels, all of which maintain such a Christology, though in varying ways (Bauckham 2013, 127).

I’ll illustrate Bauckham’s point by looking briefly at a passage in Mark’s Gospel, a writing which “is strongly focused on answering the question ‘Who is Jesus?’” (Bauckham 2013, 127).

Mark 2.1–12 (par. Matt 9.1–8) records one of the occasions when Jesus is depicted as saying or doing something that was properly the prerogative of God. While teaching in Capernaum, he was interrupted by four men who brought a paralytic to be healed. Readers of the account may be surprised by the fact that his first pronouncement was not one of healing, but of forgiveness (v. 5). And the scribes who heard his words immediately grasped their significance, “questioning in their hearts, ‘Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! *Who can forgive sins but God alone?*’” (vv. 6–7, my emphasis). Of course, as a man, Jesus could forgive someone who had offended him in some way, but that is not what happened here; whatever the transgressions of the paralytic, there is no evidence he had sinned directly against the man Jesus. Thus, for Jesus, acting only as a man, to forgive him would be comparable to me forgiving a person for an offense he committed against you.

Jesus didn’t correct the scribes’ conclusion, but instead leaned into it, declaring that neither healing nor forgiving were easy to do. Both required a unique and divine “authority” (ἐξουσία; *exousia*) (vv. 8–10). Then, to show he had the authority to forgive him, Jesus healed the paralytic (v. 11).

The onlookers responded appropriately: “They were all amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We never saw anything like this!’” (v. 12b).

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Works Cited

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 _____. 2013. “Christology.” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. 2nd ed. ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown & Nicholas Perrin. IVP Academic.
 Craig L. Blomberg. 1995. “Where Do We Start Studying Jesus?” *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*. ed. Michael J. Wilkins & J. P. Moreland. Zondervan Publishing House.

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