

THE CONTRIBUTION OF 1 THESSALONIANS 3:11-13 TO A PAULINE CHRISTOLOGY

By
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Introduction

When approaching a study of the Apostle Paul's Christology, a theologian will likely first turn to Phil 2:6-11, 1 Cor 8:6 and Col 1:15-17.¹ These Pauline texts are celebrated for their rich and explicit descriptions of Christ's person and thus provide excellent starting points for understanding Paul's Christology. Yet there seems to be another valuable Pauline passage which is often left out of the conversation, that of 1 Thess 3:11-13. Such a text is important not only because of the significant christological freight it carries,² but also because it is part of the oldest Pauline letter³ to which we have access.⁴

The aim of this paper is to address the question, "How does 1 Thess 3:11-13 contribute to our understanding of Pauline Christology?" This question will be addressed by exegetical analysis of the passage and an exploration of three christological deductions drawn from the text: (1) Jesus is understood to be a participant in the unique divine identity and prerogatives of YHWH; (2) Jesus is the assumed recipient of prayer, a ritual closely associated with a pattern of worship; (3) Jesus is understood to perform YHWH's eschatological role in fulfilling Zech 14:5. An attempt will be made to understand how these three deductions contribute and cohere to the more prominent Pauline Christology passages (Phil 2:6-11, 1 Cor 8:6 and Col 1:15-17) while remembering the historical Jewish context from which nascent Christianity emerged. Richard Bauckham, an innovating voice in the discussion of the origin of Christian worship, describes such a context as a "Jewish framework of creational [and ruling], eschatological and cultic monotheism."⁵

The paper will begin with a brief discussion of the unique challenge which comes with studying Christology in the early Pauline letters. This will lead to exegesis of 1 Thess 3:11-13 and an exploration of the three christological deductions. These deductions will be followed with some concluding implications for Pauline Christology and systematic theology.

Challenge of Analyzing Christology in the Early Pauline Letters

Before exploring Paul's Christology in 1 Thess 3:11-13, it is important to note a particular challenge one faces in the early Pauline letters. This challenge, as Douglas

¹ These are the texts featured in the opening chapter of Gordon Fee's important new book *Pauline Christology* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 16-20.

² Fee believes this to be the "most significant christological passage" in 1 Thess: *Pauline Christology*, 53.

³ Margaret M. Mitchell, "1 and 2 Thessalonians," in *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 53; Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (rev.; NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 15.

⁴ Gordon Fee argues that 1 Thess is not only the oldest Pauline letter we have access to, but is also the oldest writing in the entire NT, making it the earliest Christian source available today: *Pauline Christology*, 45.

⁵ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008), 183, 185.

Moo wisely states, is that, “Christology is not a central topic in Paul’s early letters.”⁶ This means that instead of providing an explicit Christology, a vast majority of Paul’s christological statements present what Gordon Fee describes as an “assumed Christology” and not an “argued Christology.”⁷ Discovering these Pauline presuppositions and assumptions requires diligent attention to contextual clues and available background evidence. Therefore, the “[c]hristological task” is “to try to tease out what Paul himself understood *presuppositionally* about Christ, and to do so on the basis of his explicit and incidental references to Christ.”⁸ It is this assumed Christology which places a vital role in understanding 1 Thess 3:11-13.

Exegesis of 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

Assuming a basic coherence between Luke’s account and the Thessalonian correspondence provides us with background for 1 Thessalonians. In Luke’s account, Paul preached to the residents of Thessalonica while on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-9). In Paul’s brief stay (v. 2), he witnessed conversions (v. 4) and experienced persecution which forced him to leave the city abruptly (v. 8-9). After spending time in several more cities (17:10-34), Paul arrived in Corinth where he sent Timothy to find out about the fate of the Thessalonian believers. Upon Timothy’s return, Paul was thrilled to hear about the Thessalonians’ faith and penned 1 Thessalonians.⁹ The letter contains: encouragement to the Thessalonians regarding their new faith (1-3); instructions concerning holy living (4:1-11; 5:12-28); teaching about the fate of those who have passed away (4:13-18); and a discussion about eschatology (5:12-28).

1 Thess 3:11-13 is a prayer located at the end of a very long introduction (1:1-3:13) and before a set of instructions on holy living (4:1-12). Immediately preceding the passage is Paul’s account of Timothy’s encouraging report about the Thessalonians’ faith (3:6) and an assertion of Paul’s desire for their welfare in their faith (3:8-10). Paul’s passionate care and concern for the Thessalonians is expressed in hyperbolic language (‘now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord’ v. 8) and descriptions of previous thanksgiving and prayers made on their behalf. This fervent emotion prepares the way for Paul’s “wish prayer”¹⁰ of 1 Thess 3:11-13:

11 Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ ἡμῶν καὶ ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς κατευθῆναι τὴν ὁδὸν ἡμῶν πρὸς ὑμᾶς· 12 ὑμᾶς δὲ ὁ κύριος πλεονάσαι καὶ περισσεύσαι τῇ ἀγάπῃ εἰς ἀλλήλους καὶ εἰς πάντας καθάπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς, 13 εἰς τὸ στηρίξαι ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας ἀμέμπτους ἐν ἀγίωσύνῃ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων αὐτοῦ, [ἀμήν].

11 Paul connects¹¹ his mention of praying for the Thessalonians, from the previous verse, to the act of prayer itself in verses 11-13. The prayer begins with a wish to be

⁶ Douglas Moo, “The Christology of the Early Pauline Letters,” in *Contours in New Testament Christology* (ed. R. N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 169.

⁷ Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 4.

⁸ (Emphasis his), *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 8.

¹⁰ Moo, “Christology,” in Longenecker, 190.

¹¹ Connective δὲ rather than adversative δὲ

reunited with the Thessalonians and is addressed not only to “our God and Father¹² himself,”¹³ but also to “the Lord Jesus.”¹⁴ Paul applies the title “Lord” (κύριος) to Jesus; this application, common in Pauline thought, is christologically significant in considering Paul’s Christology and will be explored in the next portion of this paper.

It is also christologically significant to note how Paul assumes Jesus to be active in the divine prerogative of answering prayer along with the Father. This assumption is evident from the manner Paul’s prayer seems to be directed toward both the Father and Jesus by his use of an aorist active 3rd person *singular* verb κατευθύνω “lead, direct” (BDAG) in the rare optative¹⁵ mood. What can explain such grammar? Daniel Wallace suggests that one of three possibilities likely explains why the Father and Son are linked with a singular verb: (1) a clear distinction between the Father and Son was not present for Paul; (2) the verb in the optative mood “is uniting the Father and Son in terms of purpose and, to some degree therefore, placing Jesus Christ on the same level as God”; (3) “when a compound subject is used with a singular verb, the first-named subject is the more important of the two.”¹⁶ Of these three options, the second seems the most likely. This is because Paul does make a distinction between the Father and the Son in the following verse, when he addresses Jesus¹⁷ rather than God the Father. Such a distinction and address to Jesus between persons eliminates Wallace’s first and third options. Howard Marshall agrees with this conclusion and argues that Paul’s grammar here “strongly suggest[s] that Paul closely couple[d] God and Jesus together as the common subject of the verb.”¹⁸ Such a coupling of the Lord (κύριος) Jesus with God the Father as joint-recipients of prayer points to a Pauline presupposition that not only did Jesus work in unity with God the Father in prayer, but he also possessed the divine attributes necessary to answer it. Thus Paul seems to evidence here an assumption that Jesus in some way possessed the divine prerogative of hearing and answering prayer.

12 Paul’s petition to the Father and Jesus in v. 11 is followed by another petition to Jesus alone. Paul prays that “the Lord” might increase and multiple the Thessalonians’ love for each other and for everyone, just as he, and those with him, had for the Thessalonians. In this clause, Paul continues to use verbs in the optative mood (περισσεύω and πλεονάζω) to express his wishes. His prayer for the Thessalonians¹⁹ now is directed only to ὁ κύριος. While κύριος could possibly refer to either God the Father or Jesus, as it does in the NT,²⁰ in this passage the closest other occurrences of the noun (in 11 and 13) both explicitly refer to Jesus and not God the Father. This makes it most likely that ὁ κύριος here refers to Jesus as the recipient of Paul’s prayer rather than the

¹² Granville Sharp rule of a single article connecting two nouns. Wallace, *Grammar*, 270.

¹³ Predicate position indicates intensive quality rather than identifying. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996. BibleWorks, v.8), 348-9.

¹⁴ Raymond Collins notes how the ancient audience understood here that “Paul was praying to Jesus as well as to the Father due to the fact that several scribes added ‘Jesus’ to ‘the Lord’ in v 12.” (*Studies on the First Letter to the Thessalonians*. BETL LXVI; Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1984), 361.

¹⁵ Optative mood was used in the NT era to “denote an attainable wish” (BDF 194).

¹⁶ Wallace, *Grammar*, 482.

¹⁷ ὁ κύριος here most likely referring to Jesus, as will be argued in the exegesis of verse 12.

¹⁸ I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 100.

¹⁹ Note the emphatic place of ὑμεῖς.

²⁰ C. Kavin Rowe, “Biblical Pressure and Trinitarian Hermeneutics,” *ProEccl* XI (11/3 2002): 303.

Father. By praying to Jesus for the Thessalonians, Paul presumes that Jesus is the appropriate recipient of this type of ‘cultic’ service, which Larry Hurtado argues is closely associated to a pattern of worship and devotion.²¹ Thus the christological significance of this verse is Paul’s offering of prayer to Jesus, which may evidence worship of Jesus.

Paul concludes his prayer by hoping that the Thessalonians’ hearts would be blameless in holiness before God the Father and in the future coming (parousia) of Jesus with his ‘holy ones’.²² The conclusion of Paul’s prayer includes what appears to be an intentional allusion to Zech 14:5.²³ The context of Zech 14 is the great ‘Day of the Lord,’ where YHWH himself comes to bring judgment on the earth. Such an allusion is evident by comparing the Greek side by side along with the Hebrew:

וַיָּבֹא יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי כָּל־קְדוֹשִׁים עִמָּו (Zec 14:5 WTT)

ἦξει κύριος ὁ θεός μου καὶ πάντες οἱ ἅγιοι μετ’ αὐτοῦ (Zech 14:5)

παρουσία τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων αὐτοῦ (1 Thess 3:13)

While not an exact match, such conceptual and lexical similarity makes it likely that such wording was no accident by Paul. It seems that Paul is identifying ‘The LORD my God’ (ὁ θεός μου κύριος), YHWH (יְהוָה) in the Hebrew, as Jesus. By assigning Jesus as accomplishing the eschatological role and actions of YHWH, Paul seems to be making a very christologically significant statement.

Three Christological Deductions

An exegesis of 1 Thess 3:11-13 has revealed three deductions regarding Paul’s assumed Christology. First, Jesus is understood to share in the unique identity of YHWH and divine prerogative of hearing and answering prayer. Second, Jesus is understood to be an appropriate recipient of worship as evidenced in the receiving of prayer (a ritual closely associated with cultic worship). Third, Jesus is understood to perform a role previously assigned to YHWH in the final eschatological judgment. These three deductions surely reflect the thoughtful consideration of Paul who, being a former zealous opponent of the Christian faith, would likely have carefully considered the christological claims he made.²⁴

1. Jesus: Participant in the Divine Identity and Prerogatives

1 Thess 3:11-13 exposes Paul’s assumed theological beliefs that Jesus was a partaker in the unique divine identity of κύριος, the NT equivalent of YHWH, and a participant in

²¹ Larry Hurtado stresses the ‘cultic worship’ received by Jesus in early Christianity and cites this verse as an example of prayer being offered to Jesus. (*Lord Jesus Christ*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 138.

²² Paul’s ἁγίων αὐτοῦ could mean angels as it does when Matthew quotes Zech 14:5 in 25:31 and uses replaces ἅγιος with ἄγγελος and seems to be more in line with the Eschatological context of Zech 14:5, or it could refer to believers as it usually does when Paul uses ἅγιος or possibly both (Jeffrey A. D. Weima, “1-2 Thessalonians,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007), 875.

²³ Recognized by NA27 in the margin.

²⁴ L. W. Hurtado, “Paul’s christology,” in *Contours in New Testament Christology* (ed. R. N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 189.

divine prerogatives. These two theological features are worth investigating and contribute to our understanding of Pauline Christology.

In the first century, κύριος was used as the “expository equivalent of the divine name” YHWH (יהוה) in the LXX²⁵ and was “favored as a substitute for Greek-speaking Jews” of the 1st century for YHWH.²⁶ The New Testament continues this practice when it quotes Hebrew Bible texts, but it also leaves semantic room to use κύριος to describe masters and slave owners²⁷ or to “refer to and address someone in a variety of socially superior positions.”²⁸ Paul refers to Jesus as κύριος 24 times in 1 Thessalonians and in all of his other letters except for Titus.²⁹

Paul’s tendency to apply κύριος to Jesus in 1 Thessalonians was likely influenced by the historical setting of Thessalonica. The city was known for its allegiance to the Roman emperor who was also referred to as κύριος.³⁰ Paul would have understood the consequences of naming another person to be κύριος in such an environment and the increased tribulation which it would have brought upon the Thessalonian believers who publicly confessed it.³¹ Thus a repeated attribution of κύριος to Jesus served Paul’s rhetorical goals of encouraging the Thessalonian believers to serve the true κύριος and to remain faithful to him in spite of the persecution they faced.

As Paul attributed κύριος to Jesus, the term likely also carried overtones of the LXX designation for YHWH. This is supported by the fact that today’s scholars believe Paul’s use of κύριος for Jesus was influenced more by his Jewish background rather than his Greco-Roman setting.³² Jesus was viewed as the promised Messiah and the κύριος of Ps 110.³³ As nascent Christianity arose from its Jewish soil, Nils Alstrup Dahl believes a “remarkable hermeneutic phenomenon” occurred as “language about God” was transferred to Jesus and “Old Testament passages about the Lord (i.e., God) to Jesus.”³⁴ Moo notes the occurrence of such a transfer in a number of places where Paul “implicitly identifies the Lord in the OT quotation with Christ.”³⁵ Dahl stresses the significance and intentionality of this substitution with the fact that these early Christians might have “used Greek Bible manuscripts in which the written text had some form of transliteration of the Tetragrammaton.”³⁶ If this is true, then early Christians like Paul would have understood the radical move of assigning Jesus with the title and identity commonly understood as referring to YHWH.

²⁵ Gottfried Quell, “Kurios,” *TDNT* 3:1058.

²⁶ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 109.

²⁷ J. A. Fitzmyer, “Kurios,” *EDNT* 2:329.

²⁸ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 108.

²⁹ A letter many scholars assume Paul did not compose.

³⁰ Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 34

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Moo, “Christology,” in Longenecker, 188-189; Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 109.

³³ Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 41.

³⁴ Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Jesus the Christ* (ed. Donald H. Juel; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1991), 121.

³⁵ Rom 10:13 from Joel 2:32, 1 Cor 1:31 and 2 Cor 10:17 from Jer 9:23-24, and 2 Thess 1:8-10 from Isa 2:10, 19,21. “Christology,” in Longenecker, 189.

³⁶ Dahl, *Jesus the Christ*, 122. While not posing any evidence to support this claim, Dahl may be influenced by George Howard who argued such a position in his article: “Tetragram and the New Testament,” *JBL* 96 (1 1977):63-83. Howard supports the theory by citing Papyrus *Fouad 266*, a Greek scroll from the 1st century B.C., which spells the tetragrammaton in Aramaic letters (p. 64) and through various text critical evidence (p. 76-82).

By sharing in the divine identity of YHWH, Jesus receives the highest possible title and status, the title and status owned by God alone. This is a remarkably high Christology, very much in line with the Christology presented in Phil 2:6-11. In both 1 Thess 3:11-13 and Phil 2:6-11 Jesus is identified as YHWH of the Hebrew Bible passage alluded to (Isa 45 & Zech 14) and thus is understood in some manner to be a possessor of the identity of the God of Israel. Hurtado explains the christological significance in light of Paul's Jewish monotheistic background:

For appreciating the Christ-devotion affirmed and reflected in Paul's letters, it is particularly important to take account of the monotheistic emphasis of the Jewish tradition that shaped him...nothing was more central and more indicative of Jewish tradition than its monotheism... two features were especially important: in addition to refusing to accept and worship any of the other deities of the Roman religious environment, conscientious Jews also maintained a distinction between the God of Israel and any of the exalted figures who could be seen as prominent in God's entourage, such as principal angels or revered human figures like Moses or Enoch. This distinction was most clearly maintained in discouraging the worship of these figures; and devout Jews insisted that worship was to be given to God alone. In light of this attitude, *the level of reverence for Christ reflected in Paul's letters is historically remarkable, and will require some explanation.* Second, The Jewish Monotheistic stance forbade apotheosis, the divinization of human figures, and thus clashed with a major theme in pagan religion of the time.³⁷

Another reason Paul and the early Christians applied κύριος to Jesus was that they likely viewed him, as Moo argues, as "functioning for them" as YHWH "did for the people of God in the OT."³⁸ Even with this, NT writers still made a distinction between Jesus and God the Father while assigning the title κύριος to both persons. Kavin Rowe notes such a hermeneutical pressure and concludes that "New Testament texts never identify the Father as the Son or vice-versa, but they do give the divine name *kyrios* (=YHWH) to both the Father and the Son" which leads to the conclusion that YHWH is not the Father alone but also Jesus.³⁹ Thus YHWH is Jesus and YHWH is the Father, distinct persons yet one identity.

Along with assigning Jesus the unique identity possessed by the God of Israel, Paul also assigns Jesus with prerogatives and roles uniquely fulfilled by God.⁴⁰ One such prerogative found in 1 Thess 3:11-13 is that of receiving and answering prayer. Paul prayed that God the Father *and* the Lord Jesus would direct his way back to the Thessalonians (v. 11). By assigning Jesus a role in the fulfillment of prayer, Paul seems to assume that Jesus possessed powers and responsibilities unique to YHWH. It was YHWH who heard,⁴¹ accepted,⁴² and answered the prayers of his people⁴³ in the Hebrew

³⁷ Emphasis mine, found in Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 91.

³⁸ Moo, "Christology," in Longenecker, 189.

³⁹ C. Kavin Rowe, "Biblical Pressure," 303.

⁴⁰ Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 77.

⁴¹ 1 Kgs 9:3; Ps 4:1

⁴² Job 42:9; Ps 39:12

⁴³ 2 Chr 7:1; Isa 37:21

Bible. While assigning Jesus this divine prerogative, Paul seems to maintain a unity and a distinction between the Father and the Son. Such a distinction reminds post-Nicea readers of the Trinitarian concept of one essence and three persons. Although it is completely anachronistic to suppose Paul would have used the language of Nicene orthodoxy, there does seem to be at least a concept of unity and distinction in 1 Thess 3:11-13 which naturally and organically might have led to a latter affirmation of Nicea thought. Examining the evidence of the passage, Beale is surely correct in seeing here a “conjunctive relationship between the Father and Christ” in which “Jesus shares the same divine status as the Father.”⁴⁴

Such a ‘conjunctive relationship’ is visible in other places in 1 Thessalonians⁴⁵ and in Paul’s other early letters⁴⁶ but was an “unparalleled step in comparison with anything we know about other devout Jews of Paul’s time.”⁴⁷ Bauckham argues that such an unprecedented inclusion into the identity of YHWH allowed the early Jewish Christians “to preserv[e] monotheism against the ditheism that any kind of adoptionist Christology was bound to involve.”⁴⁸

Paul’s understanding of Jesus as a participant in the divine role and prerogatives seems to be compatible with the high christology found in Col 1:15-17. In 1 Thess 3:11-13, Christ shares in hearing, accepting and responding to prayer and in Col 1:15-17 Christ shares in the divine prerogative of creating and ruling. By viewing Jesus as a rightful participant in the divine prerogatives, Paul surely understood Christ to be more than just an exalted man.⁴⁹

2. Jesus: Recipient of Worship

While the first christological deduction was concerned with Paul’s assumed belief that Jesus shared in the divine identity of YHWH and the prerogative of hearing and answering prayer, this second deduction is concerned with the assumption that Paul believed Jesus was worthy of cultic service. In 1 Thess 3:12, Paul prayed that Jesus, in distinction from God the Father in the previous verse, would increase the Thessalonians’ love. Such an act of praying to someone in distinction from God the Father is astonishing considering Paul’s strict monotheistic framework.⁵⁰ While the act of petitionary prayer is not the equivalent of worship, it does as Bauckham argues, point to the “centrality of

⁴⁴ G. K. Beale, *1-2 Thessalonians* (IVP New Testament Commentary Series; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 108.

⁴⁵ “Church in God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ” 1:1; “will of God in Christ Jesus” 5:18; ‘Gospel of God’ 2:2,8 interchangeable with ‘Gospel of Christ’ 3:2

⁴⁶ Moo, “Christology,” in Longenecker, 189.

⁴⁷ Hurtado, “Paul’s christology,” in *Contours in New Testament Christology* (ed. R. N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 187.

⁴⁸ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 185.

⁴⁹ This contrary to P.M. Casey who completely overlooks 1 Thess 3:11-13 and rejects any notion that Paul or his communities understood Jesus to be divine and worshipped him: “Monotheism, Worship and Christological Development in the Pauline Churches,” in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism* (ed. James R. Davila, Gladys S. Lewis, and Carey C. Newman; Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 63; Boston: Brill, 1999), 257.

⁵⁰ Fee states the significance well: “Here is a strict monotheist praying with ease to both the Father and the Son, focusing first on the one and then on the other, and without any sense that his monotheism is being stretched or is in some kind of danger.” *Pauline Christology*, 54.

Jesus as object of religious devotion,⁵¹ which works together with other cultic elements to form what Hurtado describes as a “constellation or *pattern* of devotional practice, a programmatic treatment of Jesus as recipient of cultic devotion.”⁵² This ‘pattern of devotional practice,’ when taken as a whole, seems to be the equivalent of worship in which only YHWH was fit to receive.

There are some who reject the notion that Paul and his community worshipped or prayed to Jesus and cast doubt on the significance of 1 Thess 3:11-13. James D. G. Dunn is an example of this and believes that Paul held unto a type of ‘monotheistic reserve’ and worshipped God but only revered Jesus.⁵³ Dunn believes that Paul’s ‘reserve’ was lost soon after he passed away by the NT writers who came after him (such as John and the writer of Hebrews).⁵⁴ P.M. Casey is another scholar who finds the evidence that Paul worshipped or prayed Jesus to be “extremely sparse and not really convincing.”⁵⁵

These scholars argue against prayer to Jesus on both lexical and historical grounds. Dunn believes that the Paul did not use certain key phrases (*aitein* and *erotan*) normally associated with prayer.⁵⁶ Because these phrases were not used, Jesus was not prayed to. Yet to make this argument, Dunn has to redefine Paul’s account of praying to Jesus⁵⁷ about the thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12:8-9) and Paul’s use of the Aramaic *Marantha* ‘Our Lord Come!’ (1 Cor 16:22) as examples of “appeal” rather than examples of prayer.⁵⁸ Dunn believes it was acceptable within the 1st century Jewish mindset to appeal to intermediary figures, but prayer was reserved for God the Father alone, not Jesus.⁵⁹ Such a redefinition of ‘prayer’ requires disregarding a straightforward and natural reading of these passages as prayerful statements made to Jesus and the possibility that other verbs, such as *παρακαλέω* ‘to beseech’ in 2 Cor 12:8, might contain conceptual continuity linked with the idea of prayer.

In an effort to further support his case, Dunn argues that Jesus himself might have embraced the concept of making appeals to intermediary figures. He bases this argument on the possibility that Jesus might have made such an appeal to Elijah while on the cross

⁵¹ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 129.

⁵² Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 137

⁵³ James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 260.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 35-36; Casey, “Monotheism,” in Davila, Lewis, and Newman, *Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, 222, see p 220 for prayer.

⁵⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 34.

⁵⁷ 2 Cor 12:8-10: “8 ὑπὲρ τούτου τρίς τὸν **κύριον** παρεκάλεσα ἵνα ἀποστῆ ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ. 9 καὶ εἶρηκέν μοι· ἀρκεῖ σοι ἡ χάρις μου, ἡ γὰρ δύναμις ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελεῖται. ἥδιστα οὖν μᾶλλον καυχῆσομαι ἐν ταῖς ἀσθενείαις μου, ἵνα ἐπισκηνώσῃ ἐπ’ ἐμὲ ἡ δύναμις τοῦ **Χριστοῦ**. 10 διὸ εὐδοκῶ ἐν ἀσθενείαις, ἐν ὕβρεσιν, ἐν ἀνάγκαις, ἐν διωγμοῖς καὶ στενοχωρίαις, ὑπὲρ **Χριστοῦ**· ὅταν γὰρ ἀσθενῶ, τότε δυνατὸς εἰμι.” Fee argues that Paul’s consistent use of κύριος to refer to Jesus, the context of the passage (the responder to Paul’s prayer promising power in v. 8 and the power of Christ being praised in 9 and 10), and the language of receiving grace consistent with the benediction (13:14) point to Jesus being the recipient of prayer here: *Pauline Christology*, 194-195.

⁵⁸ Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus*, 34-35. Unfortunately this is how Dunn understands 1 Thess 3:11-13 (p. 36). He does not explain how Paul can somehow make a bifurcation between praying and appealing he when prays/appeals in the same sentence to the Father and Jesus.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

(Mark 15:35-36).⁶⁰ Dunn builds on Alan Segal (*Two Powers in Heaven*) who makes a case that certain heretical Jewish communities in the first and second century included other intermediary figures in prayer and worship and influenced nascent Christianity in their views of Jesus.⁶¹ The problem with this view is that it ignores the strict monotheistic Jewish orthodox background of nascent Christianity which, as Bauckham states, “so-called intermediary figures were not ambiguous semi-divinities straddling the boundary between God and creation” but understood to be part of God’s creation.⁶² God was prayed to and worshipped, and angelic beings merely served his goals.

Another piece of evidence placed against the notion that Paul offered cultic devotion to Jesus is what P.M. Casey refers to as a deficiency in “cultic veneration” normally associated with the worship of deity in the first century.⁶³ Casey lists three such deficiencies: (1) no sacrificial cultus were devoted to him; (2) no temple was built to him; (3) no “serious liturgy” was used in worship of him.⁶⁴ Such an argument fails to consider the Gospel accounts and Paul’s descriptions about Jesus’ sacrificial death and the resulting theological implications. First, the Gospels and Paul present Jesus’ death on the cross as the atoning sacrificial offering, through which Christians who trust in Christ receive forgiveness through faith (Matt 28; Mark 15-16; Luke 23-24; John 3:16; Rom 3:23-26); thus continued works of sacrifice are holy lives (Rom 12:1-2) and not burnt offerings or “sacrificial cultus.”⁶⁵ Second, Jesus describes himself as the new temple (Mark 14:58) and those who follow him become part of this structure spiritually (1 Cor 3:16).⁶⁶ Third, Paul’s prayer to Jesus in 1 Thess 3:12 is part of a liturgical document meant to be read in worship gatherings (1 Thess 5:27), which might be considered a type of “liturgy” designed to promote the knowledge and worship of Jesus.⁶⁷ Other liturgical documents are found in the ‘Christ hymns’ (Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20) which might have had a life as community hymns before Paul included them in his letters.⁶⁸

On the contrary to Dunn and Casey, Paul’s prayer to Jesus in 1 Thess 3:12 was a part of his grand matrix of worshipful devotion given to Jesus. Hurtado notes how a habit of praying to Jesus is supplemented by baptism in Jesus’ name, the Lord’s Supper,

⁶⁰ Ibid., 35. Dunn’s hypothesis seems to ignore evidence from Mark’s Gospel. To argue that Jesus’ cry was to Elijah is an irresponsible conjecture which overlooks the obvious fact that Mark recorded the actual words Jesus said in verse 34 ‘*Eloi, eloi, lema sabachthani.*’ The bystanders might have heard ‘Elijah’, a phrase similar sounding to what Jesus said in v. 34, but Mark makes no claim that Jesus actually cried out to Elijah. On the contrary, Jesus cried out to God (v. 34). Dunn’s view also contradicts Jesus’ own statements about prayer which do not seem to evidence any notion of praying to intermediary figures (Mark 6:46; 9:29; 11:25; 13:18).

⁶¹ Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven* (Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2002).

⁶² Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 182.

⁶³ Casey, “Monotheism,” in Davila, Lewis, and Newman, *Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, 224

⁶⁴ Ibid. 225

⁶⁵ Casey does not define “sacrificial cultus,” but the reader is left to assume that it is some type of physical sacrifice, Ibid.

⁶⁶ An important element of biblical theology is this aspect of Christ as temple. No longer do worshippers require a physical building to experience God’s presence and to offer worship, this was accomplished in Christ, and all who worship Christ are filled with God’s Spirit and become part of the spiritual temple. This concept is argued persuasively by G.K. Beale in his work: *The Temple and the Church’s Mission* (New Studies in Biblical Theology 17; Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2004).

⁶⁷ Similar to Col 4:16

⁶⁸ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 147.

hymns praising Jesus, and prophecy.⁶⁹ These acts create a system or pattern of worship very different to the sporadic accounts of statements offered up to angelic beings in the first century, which in no way constitute a “pattern of devotional actions.”⁷⁰

As Hurtado argues, the evidence of worship given to Jesus is credible and substantial:

Pauline letters show an impressively full and amazingly early pattern of belief and religious practice in which Jesus figures very prominently...this pattern of devotion and beliefs seems in fact to be presupposed as already in place by the time Paul wrote his epistles to various churches... Already in the earliest extant Christian writings we have this historically noteworthy devotional pattern. It did not appear through some slow evolution or in easily definable stages.⁷¹

An examination of Paul’s prayer to Jesus reveals the hidden assumption that Jesus was a worthy recipient of cultic service, namely prayer, as part of a pattern of worship. Paul’s right to pray to and worship Jesus was rooted in the understanding that Jesus shared in the divine identity of YHWH. This high Christology is compatible with the ‘Christ Hymns’ (Phil 2:6-11 and Col 1:15-20) which celebrate the exalted person of Jesus. Perhaps Bauckham is correct in stating that the “New Testament evidence for personal prayer to Jesus as regular feature of early Christianity has sometimes been underestimated.”⁷²

3. Jesus: Eschatological Judgment of YHWH

The third Pauline Christological deduction in 1 Thess 3:11-13 is that Jesus is understood to perform the role of YHWH in the eschatological ‘day of judgment.’ While assigning Jesus a role in the eschatological judgment is similar to descriptions of intermediary figures in 2nd Temple Judaism, Paul takes the concept much further and reveals his high Christology.

The concept of the eschatological judgment, often referred to as the ‘Day of the LORD,’ is a significant theme in the Hebrew Bible. It was believed that in the eschaton, YHWH himself would bring terrifying judgment on the wicked and on those who have rebelled against YHWH.⁷³ Such judgment is described in Zech 14, where YHWH is pictured as making war with the nations (v. 3) and coming with his ‘holy ones’ (v. 5) to bring justice to bear. Zechariah states in 14:5 that it is “YHWH my God” (κύριος ὁ θεός μου) who brings judgment, but Paul quotes this verse and replaces the phrase with the Lord Jesus, an act which greatly “underscore[s] Jesus’ deity.”⁷⁴ Paul and his readers would have likely recognized such a substitution and the implication which came along with it: Jesus fulfills the eschatological identity and role of YHWH. Fee argues that in Paul’s “theology, the future coming of the *Lord* is always seen as the return of the present reigning Lord, Jesus Christ.”⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Ibid., 143,144, 146, 150.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 137.

⁷¹ Ibid., 153.

⁷² Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 128.

⁷³ Isa. 13:6, 9; 58:13; Jer 46:10; Ezek 30:3; Joel 2:1; Amos 5:18, 20; Zeph 1:14.

⁷⁴ Beale, 1-2 Thessalonians, 111.

⁷⁵ Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 44.

It should be noted that within 2nd temple Jewish literature, namely in 1 Enoch 46-71, there is mention of an eschatological ‘Son of Man’ figure who is revered and shares in the eschatological judgments of God. Such a figure is referred to as the “Son of Man” (1 Enoch 46:2) and has been chosen by God to judge those on the earth (1 Enoch 46:4-8). This figure receives adoration (1 Enoch 48:5; 62:9) and takes some type of important role in the restored creation with the righteous (1 Enoch 71:14-17). James R Davila is right in stating that the “Son of Man in the Similitudes is clearly an eschatological redeemer.”⁷⁶ Could such a concept be the source of Paul’s tendency to assign YHWH’s eschatological role to Jesus, and in particular in 1 Thess 3:13?

While 1 Enoch’s concept of a second person partaking in YHWH’s eschatological judgment is similar to 1 Thess, there are important distinctions between the two accounts. First, the figure in 1 Enoch is given the title ‘Son of Man,’ which likely is drawing from imagery rooted in Daniel 7 where the ‘Son of Man’ is given an exalted ruling status (Dan 7:13-14). This is vastly different from the identification of Jesus in 1 Thess 3:13, who receives the LXX title and eschatological role of YHWH. Second, as Hurtado argues, the language of exaltation and reverence of an exalted figure in 1 Enoch is a “literary phenomena,” while the NT evidence displays characteristics of “devotional *praxis*.”⁷⁷ 1 Thess is a liturgical document with explicit instructions to be read aloud in worship gatherings (1 Thess 5:27), while 1 Enoch is not.

If Paul was influenced by 1 Enoch, he certainly took the concept much further by actually assigning Jesus to be a partaker in the divine identity of YHWH, not just the eschatological functions. Such a phenomenon matches Paul’s Christology of Jesus as the eschatological agent of Phil 2:5-11. In both passages Christ is understood to be one who brings eschatological conclusion and both passages replace the Hebrew Bible reading of YHWH and with the name Jesus.

Implications for Pauline Christology and Systematic Theology

An exegetical and theological analysis of 1 Thess 3:11-13 has yielded a highly exalted picture of Jesus. This Christology embraces Jesus as a participant in the divine identity, a recipient of cultic worship and the bringer of God’s judgment at the eschaton. Such a presentation enables a fuller and more comprehensive understanding of Pauline Christology in a number of ways: (1) it shows the relevance of 1 Thessalonians in approaching Paul’s Christology; (2) it uniquely highlights Paul’s affirmation of prayer to Jesus; (3) it demonstrates that Paul’s high Christology, most clearly articulated in passages like Phil 2:5-11 and Col 1:15-17, was present in his oldest letter and not necessarily the product of mere evolutionary development. These three components highlight the relevance and importance for including 1 Thess 3:11-13 in discussions regarding Paul’s Christology.

Along with deepening our understanding of Pauline Christology, 1 Thess 3:11-13 has important implications for systematic theology. If our Christology seeks to be

⁷⁶ James R Davila, “Of Methodology, Monotheism and Metatron,” in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism* (ed. James R. Davila, Gladys S. Lewis, and Carey C. Newman; Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 63; Boston: Brill, 1999), 10.

⁷⁷ Larry W. Hurtado, “The Binitarian shape of Early Christian Worship,” in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism* (ed. James R. Davila, Gladys S. Lewis, and Carey C. Newman; Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 63; Boston: Brill, 1999), 194.

faithful to the Scriptures, it must include Paul's portrait of Jesus. Such a portrait embraces his divinity and kingship, includes his distinction from the Father and acknowledges his role in the eschaton. It will be helpful to conclude with a brief reflection on how these implications impact our Christology.

First, our Christology must recognize Jesus' divinity and kingship. Centuries after Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, early Christians embraced this reality and declared in the Nicene Creed that Jesus was "very God of very God" and of one "essence" with the Father. Such statements seem to be the organic result of the NT witness. Along with possessing divinity, Paul's Jesus fulfills God's kingly responsibilities of ordering the world through answering prayer. This fits well with Reformed theology's understanding of Christ fulfilling the office of king.⁷⁸ Reformed theologian Michael Horton articulates such an idea well, "Christ rules history and nature in the service of redeeming, creating and ruling his church."⁷⁹ If our Christology is to be faithful to Paul, it must include a Jesus who is divine and rules as a king.

Second, our Christology must embrace both a unity and a distinction between Jesus and the Father. Paul's Jesus was included within the unique God of Israel, which maintains a radical oneness in his conception of God. Such an oneness was accompanied with a distinction between Jesus and the Father as seen in Paul's prayer. These truths have led to a rejection of modalism and tritheism by Christian theologians throughout the centuries, and lead us to continue down the same path of Trinitarian orthodoxy today.

Third, our Christology must embrace Paul's eschatological Jesus in terms of how we view history and our role in the present. By identifying Jesus as the eschatological agent of Zech 14:5, Paul understands Jesus to be the center and the consummative agent of history's finale. All of history is shaped and governed by Jesus. This statement radically confronts a view of history which views man as the centerpiece or ultimate determining factor. According to Paul, we are not the makers of our own destiny, but are subject to Jesus and the time of his return. Such a notion of time also reshapes the way we approach social ethics in the present. Yoder is correct in asserting that Jesus makes demands on his people to work toward social justice in the world.⁸⁰ This action must be accomplished in the light of Christ's certain return, and it must recognize that perfect justice will only arrive at Jesus' *parousia*.

Conclusion

1 Thess 3:11-13 is a key text in the discussion of Pauline Christology and systematic theology. Being one of the earliest writings we have from Paul, it possesses remarkable unity with later christological statements found in Phil 2:5-11 and Col 1:15-17. Such a portrait of Jesus confronts and shapes our own Christology by leading us to embrace a divine Jesus who rules the world and brings a consummation to history itself. A wise theologian will do well to not overlook 1 Thess 3:11-13 in forming his or her Christology.

⁷⁸ Reformed theologian Michael Horton describes the threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest and king: *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011), 483.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 523.

⁸⁰ John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 102, 112.

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