

OUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS OUR MESSIAH

Sometimes, as an over-reaction to the Trinity doctrine, Unitarians can fail to pay Jesus the attention and **honour** that are rightfully his. So how do we maintain a **balanced perspective** regarding the honouring of Our Heavenly Father and the honouring of Our Lord Jesus the Messiah?

THE QUESTIONS

1. Are we to worship Jesus?
2. If so how do we reconcile this with worship as being **directed only to God**?
3. If we must not worship Jesus **as God** then in what way should we worship him?
4. Furthermore, if we should worship Jesus does that mean that we should **talk to Jesus**? Yet would that not be called *prayer*? And isn't prayer **only to be directed to God**?

WORSHIP OF JESUS AS "THE LORD MESSIAH" AND NOT AS "THE LORD GOD"

JESUS WAS WORSHIPPED

❖ "...the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders **fell down before the Lamb**, ... 'saying, "**Worthy** are you to take the scroll...many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 'saying with a loud voice, "**Worthy is the Lamb** who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" 'And I heard every creature...saying, 'To **him who sits on the throne** and to **the Lamb** be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!' "...and the elders **fell down and worshiped**" (*Rev. 5:8, 12-14*).
Also see: Matt. 2:2, 8, 11; 14:33; 15:25; 18:26; 28:9, 17; Luke 24:52; John 9:38.

DEFINITIONS OF 'WORSHIP'

The English word 'worship' comes from the Old English 'weorthscipe' which means '**worthiness**.' The Greek word *proskyneō* is used often in reference to Jesus and according to the Greek-English lexicons means: **worship, do obeisance to, prostrate oneself, to show reverence**. Also several Bible translations give "**pay homage to**" as a meaning of *proskyneō*. Because this word is used of Jesus as well as of God Trinitarians say that it is a proof that Jesus is the **Almighty God**. However, note what *The NIV Theological Dictionary of NT Words* says about *proskyneō*:

whenever **obeisance is made before Jesus**, the idea is either explicit or implicit that he is *king* (Matt. 2:2), *Lord* (8:2), the *Son of God* (14:33), or one who can act with divine omnipotence (e.g., 14:33; Mk. 5:6; 15:19).

So rather than our worship of Jesus being a worship of him *as literally being God Almighty*, our worship of him is as King, Lord or Son of God i.e. God's representative. So this means that we worship him **as the Lord Messiah**. Under the word *proskyneō*, *Bauer's Gk/Eng Lexicon* states that it can be directed: "to human beings, but by this act they are recognized as belonging to the superhuman realm ... Jesus, who is rendered homage as Messianic king..." So ones worship of someone, human or divine is because of the recognition that that person is **one's superior**. This is why Peter refused the worship of himself by Cornelius (Acts 10: 25, 26); and also why the angel refused the worship of himself by the apostle John (Rev. 19:10) giving the reason as his being only "a fellow servant" (Rev. 22:19).

BY HONOURING THE SON WE HONOUR THE FATHER

- ❖ “The Father judges no one, but **has given** all judgment to the Son, that all may **honor the Son**, *just as they honor the Father*. Whoever does *not honor the Son does not honor the Father* who **sent him**” (John 5:22-23).

This passage is also *misused by Trinitarians* to make Jesus into literally being the Almighty God. However, the **principle of agency** is clearly stated by the words: “**has given all judgment to**” and “**who sent him**.” So the point Jesus is making is that if we don’t honour the agent – Jesus himself - then we fail to honour his “sender” – the Father. Rather than incorrectly understanding this in a twenty-first century way, we should **view Jesus as “God,”** only in this biblical way – **as functioning as God** – God’s agent. This was how **Thomas** honoured Jesus when calling him “my Lord and my God” (John 20:28). The following are some of *the biblical statements concerning the Christian’s relationship with Jesus*.

JESUS ACTS AS GOD’S CHIEF AGENT

TO GRANT FUTURE LIFE

- ❖ “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to **come to me** that you may **have life**” (John 5:39, 40).

TO SHOW US THE FATHER

- ❖ “Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "**I am the way**, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through **me**. If you had **known me**, you *would have known my Father also*. From now on you do know him and have seen him” (John 14:5- 7).

Honouring, worshipping and praying to Jesus does not mean that one would be “serving two masters” (Matt. 6:24). Neither does it make one guilty of idolatry. This is because Jesus functions as God i.e. is His representative; and so all honouring, worshipping and praying to him is as to the one almighty God the Father.

JESUS’ COMMUNICATION WITH CHRISTIANS IS BY SPIRIT

- ❖ “But you are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the **Spirit of God** *dwells in you*. Whoever does not have the **Spirit of Christ** does not belong to him. But **if Christ is in you**, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you”
(Rom. 8:9-11 NAB).

Black’s Commentary on Romans states that:

It is idle to seek a distinction between **Spirit of God** and **Spirit of Christ**. Each is a correct description of what Paul means. The Spirit is the Spirit of God; and it is only through Christ that the Spirit is known and received.

THE MANIFESTING OF JESUS

- ❖ “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and **manifest myself to him**” (John 14:21).

As shown in Romans 8:9, 10 such manifesting is by the **Spirit of Christ ... Christ in you** until such time as Jesus returns. So this manifesting of Jesus is **not a promise to literally appear** to the Christian while Jesus himself is still in heaven. Nevertheless shouldn't this manifesting of Jesus by spirit **elicit an appropriate response to Jesus** himself from the individual Christian?

- ❖ “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone **hears my voice** and opens the door, *I will come in to him* and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20).
Although this, too, involves the “spirit of Jesus” in hearing his voice, again wouldn't the **appreciative Christian respond** with words of thankfulness and praise to Jesus?

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF COMMUNICATION WITH JESUS

JESUS COMMUNICATED WITH PAUL

- ❖ “And he [Ananias] said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see **the Righteous One** and **to hear a voice from his mouth**; for you will be *a witness for him* to everyone of what you have seen and heard ... The following night **the Lord stood by him** [Paul] and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about **me** in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome” (Acts 22:14, 15; 23:11).

Acts 18:9 shows that these communications with Paul were by means of **visions**. However, “*the Lord*” in all these instances is Jesus.

PAUL COMMUNICATED WITH JESUS

- ❖ “So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming too elated. Three times *I pleaded with the Lord* about this, that it should leave me. But *he said to me*, "My grace is sufficient for you, for **my power** is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that **the power of Christ** may rest upon me”
(2 Cor. 12:7-9).

So Paul is here pleading with Jesus. Evidently it seems to be right for us to talk to Jesus. However, if this is the case **would we call it prayer**? All statements in the Scriptures about prayer show that it is **directed to God**.

STEPHEN COMMUNICATED WITH JESUS

- ❖ “Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and **Jesus standing at the right hand of God**. And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and *the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God*." But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, **he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.**" And falling to his knees **he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them.**" And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (Acts 7:54-60).

For Stephen to speak to Jesus at such a time of uncertainty he must have been fully **in the habit of speaking** with Jesus. So is this an **example for us** to follow? Is it prayer to Jesus?

FELLOWSHIP WITH JESUS

- ❖ “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And **our fellowship is** with the Father *and with his Son, Jesus Christ*” (1 John 1:3).

This statement is in the present tense and was made quite a long time after Jesus had been resurrected

and was sitting at the Father's right hand. This shows that Christians are to have fellowship now with Jesus.

IS THE COMMUNICATION REALLY PRAYER TO JESUS?

- ❖ “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place **call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”
(1 Cor. 1:2, 3).

In the phrase “call upon” the Greek word *epikaleo* means “**to appeal to**” and in the Greco/Roman world it was often the word used to describe an appeal to or an invoking of one's god. In 1 Corinthians 1:2, according to *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Vol.10, p. 189), this word is: “in the present middle participial form, indicating a continual earnest appeal and dependence upon Christ, who alone can save”

However, because the phrase “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” refers to: **all that Jesus is as Lord and Messiah** - then any **calling upon** i.e. appeal to *must involve our communication with him*. It is just as **Paul's appeal (epikaleo) to Caesar** (Acts 25:11) would have involved *direct communication with Caesar* and not just his aides. So this is a form of prayer, but is offered to Jesus as the Lord Messiah – God's chief representative - functioning as God, but not actually Almighty God.

ALL WHO CALL ON JESUS' NAME

- ❖ “But Ananias replied, “Lord, I have heard from many people about this man [Saul], how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem, and here he has authority from the chief priests to imprison all who call on your name!” (Acts 9:13, 14).

The context here shows that the Lord to whom Ananias was speaking was “the Lord Jesus.” So to call on his name means to pray to him.

PRAISE GIVEN TO JESUS

- ❖ “Let all God's angels worship him.” (“Pay him homage” REB) (Heb. 1:6).
- ❖ “**To him** who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood..., to him **be glory** and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (Rev. 1:5b, 6).
- ❖ “And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders **fell down before the Lamb**, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, “**Worthy are you** to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” (Rev. 5:8-10)
- ❖ “And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne **and to the Lamb** be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and **the elders fell down and worshiped.**” (Rev. 5:13-14).

CONCLUSION

Evidently **it is right to communicate** with Jesus in imitation of both Paul and Steven and to praise Jesus by following the admonition to “call upon *the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*”. Such communication or prayer to Jesus is to him as the Lord Messiah. Furthermore, in *honouring him in this way we honour God – our heavenly Father*.

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