



Taking God's Name

What's in a name? Christ's divinity, laid bare

One of the most extraordinary things about the way the New Testament presents the person of Christ is that it will, without blushing, cite Old Testament references which deal with God and apply them to Christ. John the Baptist cries out as the voice in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord (Jehovah or Yahweh). This comes from Isaiah 40:3 but when it is cited in the New Testament, Yahweh is clearly Christ Himself (Mt. 3:3). The man Jesus is identified with the *I am who I am*, the one who made Himself known from the burning bush to Moses (cf. Ex. 3). Similarly, Malachi 3:1 prophesies that a messenger would be sent who would prepare the way before the Lord (Yahweh). In the New Testament, John the Baptist is identified with the messenger, which means that again Christ is identified as Yahweh (Mt. 11:9-11).

In the aftermath of His cleansing of the temple of the money-changers, Christ cited Psalm 8:2 to His critics: *"Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babes you have prepared praise"* (Mt. 21:16). The Psalmist was referring to the praise of God, but Christ is referring to children singing *"Hosanna to the Son of David"* when the chief priests and scribes refused to do so (Mt. 21:14-15). What is said of God in the Old Testament is said of Christ in the New.

When Isaiah saw the Lord Yahweh in the temple, he saw not the Father but the Son (Isa. 6; John 12:39-41). Psalm 45 speaks of the throne of God as forever and ever (Ps. 45:6-7), a text which in Hebrews 1:8 is applied to the Son of God. Even more startling is the fact that Psalm 102 tells us that the Lord is the eternal and unchangeable creator of the heavens and the earth. This surely is God and can be no other. Yet in the New Testament, the author of Hebrews applies these verses to Christ (Ps. 102:25-27; Heb. 1:10-12).

In the Old Testament, the promise is that *"everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved"* (Joel 2:32), but in the New Testament, the Lord (Yahweh) is identified as Christ (Acts 2:21 Rom. 10:13). In the Old Testament, God is a stone of offence and a rock of stumbling (Is. 8:14; 28:16), but in the New Testament both Paul and Peter apply these verses to Christ (Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:6, 8). In the Old Testament every knee will bow to God and every tongue swear allegiance to Him (Is. 45:23), but in the New Testament, Paul applies this text to God (Rom. 14:11) and also to Christ (Phil. 2:10-11). Similarly, to boast in the Lord in the Old Testament (Jer. 9:24) is to boast in Christ in the New (1 Cor. 1:31).

Both God and Christ can be described as the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega (Is. 44:6; 48:12; Rev. 1:8, 17; 22:13). Those are not the sort of descriptions that can in any way be applied to human beings. It is true that sometimes what is said of Christ can also be said of those who are in Christ (see how Psalm 2 is referred to in Revelation 2:26-27). But that hardly means that Christians become divine. Rather, it means that Christians receive the benefits of being saved by the one who is divine. Christ has eternal life in Himself, we receive eternal life from Him; Christ rules forever, we rule through Him.

To apply texts which speak of God in the Old Testament to Christ in the New Testament is, on the surface, a bold and daring thing to do. Imagine the apostle Paul, for example, citing verses from the Old Testament which speak of God, and then saying that these verses referred to himself. *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"* would become *"In the beginning Paul created the heavens and the earth"*.

That would be blasphemy and absurdity taken to an unheard of level. The only persons in history who have dared to utter anything like this have been ancient Pharaohs, Roman emperors, New Age devotees, and demented lunatics. Yet verses which tell of God as the only creator and judge of all the earth are happily applied by strict monotheists to a man who walked and talked in their midst during His three years of public ministry.

What does all this mean? The Scottish comedian Billy Connolly once commented: *"I can't believe in Christianity, but I think Jesus was a wonderful man."* That is not funny, nor is it even remotely rational. Christ is only wonderful if He is indeed God come in the flesh as man.

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