

## 1 Timothy 1:15-17

### “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God”

“It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Messiah Yeshua came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Yeshua the Messiah might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

The Apostle Paul is very thankful for the salvation and redemption which have been provided to him.<sup>11</sup> Having just reported on some of the terrible deeds he committed in the past, and how Yeshua’s grace was able to cover them (1 Timothy 1:13-14), Paul can exclaim, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst” (1 Timothy 1:15, NIV). Paul still likely had memories of how he had tried to eliminate the early Messianic movement—memories which still haunted him at times (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:9).

Yeshua’s function as coming to save sinners *eis ton kosmon* (εἰς τὸν κόσμον) or “into the world” has generated some discussion on the nature of the Messiah. Within the Fourth Gospel, coming into the world is to be understood within the context of Yeshua’s Incarnation (John 1:9; 3:19; 11:27; 12:46; 16:28; 18:37). Marshall & Towner note how some support for what, in their commentary, they label as an *epiphany Christology*, is offered in 1 Timothy 1:15, specifically in how its description of Yeshua coming into the world “intends to focus” principally “on the salvation-historical moment.”<sup>12</sup> This would relate to how decisive action needed to be taken to offer atonement for sinners. Marshall & Towner do not necessarily think that the subject of 1 Timothy 1:15 is the Messiah’s Incarnation or birth, although they do conclude that it is stated elsewhere (1 Timothy 3:16). They further argue, “the author’s main purpose [here] has less to do with fine points of Christology and more to do with the fact of salvation and the linkage with the traditional gospel.”<sup>13</sup> And this point is certainly expounded upon in 1 Timothy 1:16, in how Paul as the “first” of sinners was saved by Yeshua:

“But this is precisely why I received mercy—so that in me, as the number one sinner, Yeshua the Messiah might demonstrate how very patient he is, as an example to those who would later come to trust in him and thereby have eternal life” (CJB/CJSB).

Having just lauded the great salvation enacted within his life—via the intervention of Yeshua toward Paul as “foremost” of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15-16)—a doxology is interjected to draw greater attention and praise to God: “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen” (1 Timothy 1:17, TLV). 1 Timothy 1:17 sees the employment of some common Jewish descriptions of God, working from the basis of the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4). Of notable importance is the designation of God as “King of the ages” (RSV),<sup>14</sup> which could very easily depict Him as ruler of the two ages: this age and the future age to come.<sup>15</sup> God described as immortal is obviously a description of how He possesses an existence without beginning and without end (cf. Romans 1:23; Colossians 1:15).

Given the fact that in 1 Timothy 1:16 preceding, Paul has just referred to the saving activity of Yeshua, who is specifically labeled to be the eternal and immortal King in 1 Timothy 1:17?

<sup>11</sup> This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *The Pastoral Epistles for the Practical Messianic*.

<sup>12</sup> Marshall & Towner, 398.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Grk. *basilei tōn aiōnōn* (βασιλεῖ τῶν αἰώνων).

<sup>15</sup> Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles*, 77.

## The Nature of Yeshua in the Pauline Epistles and Hebrews

Some see 1 Timothy 1:17 as only referring to the Father.<sup>16</sup> Philip H. Towner thinks, “The need Paul felt to emphasize the humanity of Christ in the salvation plan does not diminish his belief in God as the author of salvation (2:3-4; 4:10).”<sup>17</sup> So, even while the Messiah is to be regarded as Divine, 1 Timothy 1:17 is thought by some to probably just be speaking of God in general and not the Messiah specifically. Mounce, however, thinks that the salvation activity of the Father and Son are so intertwined in the Pastoral Epistles that it is probably best to see this as a reference to both. He summarizes his perspective,

“The only other doxology in the PE is in 2 Tim 4:18, where the subject ὁ κύριος [*ho Kurios*], ‘the Lord,’ is Jesus. βασιλεία [*basileia*], ‘kingdom,’ is used twice, both times referring to Christ (2 Tim 4:1,18), the latter occurring immediately before a doxology. The only divine actor in 1:12-17 seems to be Christ...who is specifically addressed in vv 12, 14, 16. However, doxologies tend to be addressed to God and not to Christ, as in 1 Tim 6:15...The theological question is whether Paul can describe Christ as ‘incorruptible, invisible, the only God.’ Perhaps this is another indication of the Christology of the PE, which joins God and Christ in such close union that at times it is difficult to distinguish them...If the doxology is addressed to Christ, declaring him to be the ‘only God,’ it is theologically significant.”<sup>18</sup>

It is easy to acknowledge how both the Father and Son can be referenced together in the affirmations of 1 Timothy 1:17. But, given the fact that Yeshua the Messiah is the main subject of 1 Timothy 1:12-16 preceding, then it is very likely, and indeed textually valid, to conclude that the doxology of 1 Timothy 1:17 is more directed to Yeshua as “the only God” as a part of His integration into the Divine Identity.

### 1 Timothy 2:3-6

#### “Yeshua the Messiah, the Mediator Between God and Humans”

“This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Messiah Yeshua, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *given* at the proper time.”

There is perhaps no passage more frequently quoted by adherents of a low Christology, who advocate that Yeshua the Messiah is a created being, than Paul’s assertion in 1 Timothy 2:6, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (RSV).<sup>19</sup> Adherents of a high Christology of Yeshua the Messiah being integrated into the Divine Identity, have little issue with Biblical passages which stress the humanity of Yeshua. But, adherents of a high Christology of Yeshua the Messiah being God, can get caught off guard when encountering 1 Timothy 2:3-6 quoted to them, without any certain evaluation of the details being presented. The issue in 1 Timothy 2:3-6, as can be easily seen, is the universal availability of salvation present in what the One God of Israel has accomplished via the work of His Son Yeshua. The stress of Yeshua being human, is directly associated with the Messiah being a mediator and being sacrificed for sins.

The Apostle Paul preceded his statements of 1 Timothy 2:3-6, by affirming how prayer was to be offered for all people, and most especially the emperor and Roman leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-

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<sup>16</sup> Marshall & Towner, 404.

<sup>17</sup> Philip H. Towner, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 152.

<sup>18</sup> Mounce, 60.

<sup>19</sup> This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *The Pastoral Epistles for the Practical Messianic*.