

The Nature of Yeshua in the Pauline Epistles and Hebrews

Some see 1 Timothy 1:17 as only referring to the Father.¹⁶ 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).”¹⁷ 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.”¹⁸

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).¹⁹ 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-

¹⁶ Marshall & Towner, 404.

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

¹⁸ Mounce, 60.

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

2).²⁰ This is something he asserts “is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior” (1 Timothy 2:3, NRSV). The specific designation of God as Savior (Grk. *sōtēr*, σωτήρ) is seen elsewhere (Titus 1:3), an indication that one’s deliverance from sin originates with the Creator (Philippians 1:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; Titus 2:11). The One God of Israel being represented as “Savior” in 1 Timothy 2:3, right after prayers for kings are to be made (1 Timothy 2:2), is intended to convey how He is to be reckoned as the universal Deity of all humanity—especially when contrasted against the many man-made deities of the Roman Empire, many of them localized or provincial.

It is very true that in 1 Timothy 2:3, it is the Father who is designated to be the Savior, but there is no theological debate being presented as to whether or not the Son is also Savior. If there is any claim to be made, it is a subversive attempt to communicate how Israel’s One God is Savior—over and against any others—the foremost imposter savior being Caesar. Towner appropriately comments,

“The title is apt, for the controlling theme of the passage is salvation, and ‘Savior’ depicts God as the source and architect of the plan to rescue humanity through Christ. It is worth noting that in such close proximity to the prayer for rulers (especially the emperor), both the attribution of salvation to God and worship of him as ‘Savior’ represent a direct challenge to the Imperial cult’s claim to such things.”²¹

Many different thoughts could be proposed as to why in this letter to Timothy, Paul must emphasize the wide-reaching effects of God’s salvation, as One “who desires everyone to be saved” (1 Timothy 2:4, NRSV), *pantas anthrōpous* (πάντας ἀνθρώπους). While the Ephesian Believers are to be His representatives to the wider world around them, the universal appeal of Israel’s One God is likely presented against a false teaching that had advocated a salvation for only some people, or worse: only for the false teaching’s adherents. And indeed, if anything could be definitely classified as a “myth” (1 Timothy 1:4),²² it would be that only a select few have the accessibility to be redeemed! The God of Israel was concerned about the salvation status of all people, even pagans such as Caesar. Paul will repeat this again in 1 Timothy 4:9-10:

“It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men²³ [all people, NRSV], especially of believers.”

So with the Apostle Paul having asserted that the Lord God of Israel desires all to be saved (1 Timothy 2:3-4), following in 1 Timothy 2:5-6 he lays out an essential truth of what such salvation involves. There is certainly discussion as to whether or not 1 Timothy 2:5-6 made up some kind of an early creedal formula employed by the First Century Believers, perhaps in their worship or liturgy, but what is obviously more important is the theological theme communicated. What Paul wants the Ephesians, and to a lesser extent Timothy, to consciously understand, is the universalness of God in His desire to see all redeemed (1 Timothy 2:4).

Paul’s affirmation “there is one God, and one mediator” (*heis gar Theos, heis kai mesitēs*, εἷς γὰρ θεός, εἷς καὶ μεσίτης) interweaves concepts seen in the *Shema* of how “the LORD is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4), meaning that He is the only One to whom people in His Creation should be loyal. Knight observes, “That there is one God means that there are not other gods for non-Jews

²⁰ “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties *and* prayers, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

²¹ Towner, 176.

²² “[N]or to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than *furthering* the administration of God which is by faith” (1 Timothy 1:4).

²³ Grk. *theō zōnti, hos estin Sōtēr pantōn anthrōpōn* (θεῷ ζώντι, ὅς ἐστιν σωτήρ πάντων ἀνθρώπων).

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alongside the God of the Jews,"²⁴ something which Paul has had to make light of at various times in his ministry (Acts 17:23-31; Romans 3:30). Of notable importance would be 1 Corinthians 8:6, which also definitely relies on the *Shema*: "for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Yeshua the Messiah, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him." **Salvation is something that comes entirely from God, not from one's ethnicity or standing within a particular religious clique.** Knight also validly recognizes, "That God would have all sorts of people to be saved is a necessary corollary of the truth of monotheism and of the provision of only one mediator, the man Christ Jesus."²⁵

With only One God supreme over Creation, there is only a single means by which people can truly know Him: the Mediator Messiah Yeshua. This Yeshua says in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me," and by His mediatorial work He has enacted the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). The need for a mediator, who stands in the middle between the Father and His human creations, is realized in Job 9:33, when Job is trying to reason with God: "There is no arbiter [Heb. verb *yakach*, יָכַח; Grk. LXX *mesitēs*, μεσίτης]²⁶ between us, who might lay his hand on us both" (ESV). *Thayer* defines *mesitēs* (μεσίτης) or "mediator" as "one who intervenes between two, either in order to make or restore peace and friendship,"²⁷ further detailing how in 1 Timothy 2:5 "Christ is called the μεσίτης Θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπων [*mesitēs Theou kai anthrōpōn*], since he interposed by his death and restored the harmony between God and man which human sin had broken."²⁸

The role of the mediator is to bring peace to some kind of a dispute, which in the case of God and humanity is the schism caused by sin. This is no ordinary problem like two people being confused over a prior agreement exchanging money, or of some misunderstanding over ownership of property needing to be sorted out. **The problem of human sin has cosmic and eternal repercussions.** Therefore, the uniqueness of Yeshua as the one Mediator should be easily realized. For those who hold to a low Christology of Yeshua only being human, or being some kind of quasi-spiritual agent, 1 Timothy 2:5 is a very important verse as it speaks of the Messiah as "the Man." Yet an affirmation of Yeshua as a human man should by no means be approached as contradictory to the doctrine of the Incarnation, nor is it a subtraction of His Divinity as directly affirmed in Titus 2:13.²⁹ **Yeshua as "the Man" is also the Mediator who has brought about the work of redemption (1 Timothy 2:6).** Marshall & Towner describe, "the mediator here is the sort who is related, implicitly at least, to both parties and whose task is to bring about reconciliation between them."³⁰ Witherington indicates how Yeshua "could not represent human beings unless he was one, but equally he could not fully represent God unless he was divine as well."³¹ Ralph Earle's thoughts of what Yeshua's mediation between God and humanity involves are also useful for our consideration:

²⁴ Knight, 120.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

²⁶ Do note how "Hebrew has no single term for 'mediator' but we find words meaning 'interpreter' and 'negotiator'" (A. Oepke, "*mesitēs*," in *TDNT*, 586).

²⁷ *Thayer*, 401.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ "[L]ooking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Messiah Yeshua" (Titus 2:13).

Other places, where Yeshua the Messiah is directly referred to as God, include: John 1:1; 20:28; Romans 9:5; 1 John 5:20; Hebrews 1:8.

³⁰ Marshall & Towner, 430.

³¹ Witherington, *Titus, 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John*, 215.

“To be of any use, a bridge across a chasm or river must be anchored on both sides. Christ has closed the gap between deity and humanity. He has crossed the grand canyon, so deep and wide, between heaven and earth. He has bridged the chasm that separated man from God. With one foot planted in eternity, he planted the other in time. He who was the eternal Son of God became the Son of Man. And across this bridge, the man Christ Jesus, we can come into the very presence of God, knowing that we are accepted because we have a Mediator.”³²

When entering into discussions over Christology, it is not just many Messianic Believers who wonder about Yeshua’s humanity—but also many of today’s evangelical Christians. Many have accepted dogma which forces them to only acknowledge Yeshua’s Divinity as Lord, but not as a man who lived on Earth, and participated in the human experience.

In 1 Timothy 2:5, the Mediator is called *anthrōpos Christos Iēsous* (ἄνθρωπος Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς), “Christ Jesus, himself human” (NRSV/TNIV). (The vocabulary correctly represents Yeshua as a human, not just a male [*anēr, ἀνήρ*].) What this assertion means, beyond just the capacity for the Messiah to mediate between the Father and limited mortals, has created some interesting discussion in contemporary theology. Fee thinks, “This seems to reflect Paul’s use of the Adam-Christ imagery, wherein Christ becomes the representative ‘man’ for people of the New Age, as Adam was of the Old.”³³ While this might be correct, another aspect is indicated by Mounce: “ἄνθρωπος is anarthrous, emphasizing the quality of being human; i.e., it was as a human being that Christ gave himself for all humanity...This is not a denial of Christ’s divinity...but an emphatic assertion of the incarnation.”³⁴ In being Mediator between the Father and the human race, not only do we see Yeshua having to die for us, but also emphasized is how the Messiah is truly “human”—but more in the sense of how Adam and Eve were supposed to be before the Fall.

Being without sin, yet in being one of us, Yeshua was able to demonstrate the Father’s heart in action and show us genuine humanity. In emulating “the Man Messiah Yeshua” we are to strive to serve one another and remember others’ needs, remembering how He gave up His exalted glory to be humiliated *yet* accomplish redemption (Philippians 2:2-8). Knight is correct to describe how “The humanity of the mediator is specified to emphasize his identity with those whom he represents as mediator,”³⁵ but Yeshua’s humanity is clearly far more significant than our humanity.

So what is the significance of Yeshua’s humanity? Yeshua’s humanity is directly associated with His mediation between the Father and mortals at large. Yeshua’s humanity concerns His being sacrificed on behalf of sinners, just as Paul has previously stated (1 Timothy 1:15), and how he will further assert concerns His paying ransom (1 Timothy 2:6). Asserting that Yeshua is a man should not be contrary to considering Him Divine, nor is asserting Yeshua to be the Father’s agent of redemption contrary to considering Him Divine. Yeshua is One who we can relate to because He experienced humanity (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15), as opposed to the Eternal God just remaining distant and largely out of our reach to us as limited creatures. Asserting Yeshua to be human—every bit as much as Divine—is necessary for us to consider how we as Messiah followers are to live, emulating Him *and demonstrating our own humanity*. In the thought of Bruce A. Ware, “it was as ‘the man Christ Jesus,’ filled with the Spirit, whom we see living in obedience, exercising supernatural power, and fulfilling the mission the Father sent

³² Ralph Earle, “1 Timothy; 2 Timothy,” in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. et. al., *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 11:358.

³³ Gordon D. Fee, *New International Bible Commentary: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 65.

³⁴ Mounce, 88.

³⁵ Knight, 121.

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him to accomplish.”³⁶ So are these all the things, even if on a much smaller scale, that Messiah followers are to be out performing.

Yeshua the Messiah, the Man, in His accomplishments as the Mediator, “gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time” (1 Timothy 2:6, RSV). Such a ransom is a debt that has been paid. Yeshua’s role as described here is often connected to His own words, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28; cf. Mark 10:45). The concept of substitutionary atonement, where the Lord has had to experience the penalties which fallen sinners deserve, is fully Biblical as stated in His own words. All that those who desire redemption have to do is acknowledge the Messiah event, His payment for our sins, confess their sins, and ask for the complete forgiveness it provides.

1 Timothy 6:13-16

“King of Kings and Lord of Lords”

“I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Messiah Yeshua, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.”

The closing doxology to 1 Timothy, was doubtlessly inserted to continue to uplift Timothy in the midst of the difficult circumstances he had been facing in Ephesus.³⁷ It is used to highlight the great significance of God and His majesty, and the smallness of mortals by comparison—but still what He has accomplished for humanity via the work of His Son. Paul writes, “I charge you before God who gives life to all things and Messiah *Yeshua* who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate” (1 Timothy 6:13, TLV).

1 Timothy 6:13 claims a number of important things about the Father and the Son. God as Creator, of course, is the Source of all life,³⁸ but is also the One who can “*preserve alive*” (LS),³⁹ as one definition of *zōogoneō* (ζωογονέω) indicates. Mounce describes, “The linear aspect of ζωογονοῦντος [*zōogonountos*], ‘who gives life,’ emphasizes the continuing presence of God as a witness.”⁴⁰ Such a provision of life could also be viewed in terms of God’s sustaining the universe (Ephesians 1:11, 23).

In 1 Timothy 6:13, Yeshua is said to have “made the good confession” before Pontius Pilate (John 18:34-37; 19:11), asserting His authority. Marshall & Towner describe how references to Pontius Pilate “the Roman governor naturally became a stock part of the description of Jesus’ passion and were used to date it historically.”⁴¹ This is probably why “Who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was buried” appears in the later Apostles’ Creed.⁴² Before their own deaths, in a similar way to how Yeshua testified of Himself before Pilate, so were the Apostles Peter and Paul able to testify of their faith to the authorities (1 *Clement* 5:4, 6).

³⁶ Bruce A. Ware, “The Man Christ Jesus” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* Vol. 53 No. 1 (2010):9.

³⁷ This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *The Pastoral Epistles for the Practical Messianic*.

³⁸ Nehemiah 9:6; Wisdom 16:13; Romans 4:17; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45.

³⁹ LS, 345.

⁴⁰ Mounce, 357.

⁴¹ Marshall & Towner, 663.

⁴² Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, eds., *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 26.