

The Nature of Yeshua in the Pauline Epistles and Hebrews

“[T]his great text on the incarnation, life, and death of Jesus Christ is in line with Paul’s view of ministry as nontriumphalist and ‘slave’ like, which is a major strand running through the entire letter. Christ’s sacrificial other-centeredness, as expressed in this verse, tells the story of Christianity itself, a story that was under assault in Corinth at that time through the self-centeredness of the ‘superlative’ apostles.”⁴⁹

Beyond Yeshua’s self-emptying of His pre-existent glory, and the horrific events involving Yeshua’s execution, a fair reading of the Gospels does reveal that Yeshua the Messiah was not economically rich. On the whole, Yeshua lived in what many would consider to be an economically poor, perhaps borderline destitute, condition. Each of the Corinthians, in being prompted by Paul to consider the poverty of Yeshua, would have to consider their own relative economic security and stability, and they should appropriately respond to the example left by Yeshua. When recognizing the sacrifices of Yeshua, including but not limited to His death, it would certainly behoove a relatively prosperous audience like the Corinthians to be generous in giving to the Jerusalem poor. As Garland concurs,

“The self-emptying of Christ for Christians [meaning, Believers] should lead them to empty their pocketbooks for others, if only in proportion to what they have. Paul followed Christ’s example in his own way of life as one who emptied himself for others, becoming poor, and bearing great hardships to reach others with the gospel. Yet Paul is not asking the Corinthians to give as Christ has given to them, or even to give of their lives to others in the same way as he has as their apostle, nor even to give out of their impoverishment as the Macedonians have. Paul asks them only to give a fair share, a proportion of what they have, and promises that they will receive blessings in return.”⁵⁰

2 Corinthians 13:14

“The Lord Yeshua, God, the Holy Spirit”

“The grace of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”

The closing words of 2 Corinthians, while mainly depicting the spiritual experiences that the Apostle Paul wanted his audience to have, do significantly affect discussions about the nature of God and the plurality of the Godhead.⁵¹ As it is rendered in the TLV, 2 Corinthians 13:14 says, “The grace of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah and the love of God and the fellowship of the *Ruach ha-Kodesh* be with you all. Amen.” While many people look for a formula of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit regarding the plurality of the Godhead—here it is Son, Father, and Holy Spirit which are described. Messianic people who deny the revealed tri-unity of God will tend to focus their attention heavily on a passage like Matthew 28:19 (previously addressed in **Volume I**), but 2 Corinthians 13:14 tends to almost always be glossed over. What does 2 Corinthians 13:14 inform us as Bible readers about the composition of God?

Among Messianic writers, Stern indicates in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, “*Adonai* is never called a ‘Trinity’ in the New Testament. However, the three terms which appear here, along with equivalent terms, are used in various ways in both the New Testament and the *Tanakh* when speaking of God.”⁵² Stern, in no uncertain terms, supports the Divinity of Yeshua as a Messianic Jewish Believer, and rightfully notes that the common Christian term “Trinity” is, at best, extra-Biblical. There are ways that the plurality of God can be described, upholding

⁴⁹ Ibid., 409.

⁵⁰ Garland, *2 Corinthians*, pp 378-379.

⁵¹ This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *2 Corinthians for the Practical Messianic*.

⁵² Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 519.

Yeshua as being integrated into the Divine Identity, which do not employ the term Trinity. Still, there are definitely things to be appropriately learned from Christian examiners of this passage. Witherington is one who correctly concludes,

“Paul does not elaborate a doctrine of the Trinity, but as a Jew he would not offer such a blessing in the name of anyone but the one God. Trinitarian thinking in its rudiments is thus present in his letters. Here the ‘economic’ Trinity is in view, that is, the persons of God in their roles in relationship to believers.”⁵³

In seeing the closing blessing or benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:14, the question is rightfully raised why one would see the Son, Father, and Holy Spirit all working together—if they were not a part of the Godhead: “The grace of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, the love of God and the fellowship of the *Ruach HaKodesh* be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14, CJB/CJSB). Harris further directs how Paul’s words here do not just bear significance for how he viewed the nature of Yeshua as a First Century Jewish monotheist, but how they are also connected to other statements about the nature of Yeshua present in his letters:

“Without embarrassment Paul has conjoined the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit with God in a benediction, just as God the Father and Christ are presented in 1:1 as forming a single source of divine grace and peace. In both cases parity of status between Christ and God is implied by the juxtaposition, for it would be blasphemous for a monotheistic Jew to associate a mere mortal with God in a formal, religious salutation or benediction. But these are not the only evidences in the Pauline epistles of a high christology. That Paul believed in the deity of Christ is also indicated by his description of Christ as sharing the divine nature (Rom. 8:5; Phil. 2:6; Tit. 2:13) and attributes (Eph. 4:10; Col. 1:19; 2:9), as being the object of saving faith (Rom. 10:8-13) and of human and angelic worship (Phil. 2:9-11), as being the addressee in petitionary prayer (1 Cor. 1:2; 16:22; 2 Cor. 12:8), and as exercising exclusively divine functions, such as creational agency (1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16), the forgiveness of sins (Col. 3:13), and final judgment (1 Cor. 4:4-5; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:7-9).”⁵⁴

It has been rightfully thought that the listing of Son, Father, and then Holy Spirit in 2 Corinthians 13:14 is reflective of a born again Believer’s common supernatural experience⁵⁵: (1) salvation is provided through the work of Yeshua the Son, (2) the Son brings a redeemed man or woman to God the Father, (3) God the Father then sends the Spirit to His own. Theologians, of course, have over many centuries had a great deal of time in trying to probe the nature of God, and a God defined principally as a “Trinity” has been a common model expressed. Messianic people, given some of the limitations that can be imposed upon our eternal God—while being supportive of Yeshua the Messiah integrated into the Divine Identity, along with the Father and Holy Spirit—will frequently avoid the term “Trinity,” and instead speak more generally of the plurality of *Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים). It is often thought that since the term “Trinity” is extra-Biblical, and was not present in the First Century, that at the very least today’s Messianic people should use it rather sparingly—as it was not a term employed by the Apostle Paul. At the same time, a revealed tri-unity of the Godhead is undeniably present in 2 Corinthians 13:14. Sampley is right to conclude,

“What people came to call a trinitarian formulation is appropriate to Paul, who, though he clearly does not have well-formulated trinitarianism, nevertheless uses references to all three—

⁵³ Witherington, *1-2 Corinthians*, pp 475-476.

⁵⁴ Harris, 938.

⁵⁵ Cf. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 496.

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God, Christ, and Holy Spirit—to express the complex and rich divine engagement of people that Paul calls grace.”⁵⁶

For each of us who have read through 2 Corinthians, and followed its words verse-by-verse, what does it mean for any of us to close our review of Paul’s letter with v. 14? As Messianic Believers, who are a part of an emerging, maturing, and still-developing faith community, the theological questions posed about Son, Father, and Spirit and the debates we are having about whether or not Yeshua is God, are unavoidable. Speaking entirely for myself—and especially in light of changing dynamics: be they spiritual, theological, or geo-political—I want to make sure that I have consciously experienced the salvation of Yeshua, have been reconciled to the Father, and have the presence of the Holy Spirit imbuing my heart and mind. *I pray that the same is true for you as well!*

⁵⁶ Sampley, in *NIB*, 11:179.