

The “God of Christ”

An explanation

Introduction

There are a handful of passages in the New Testament that refer to God as being “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,” “God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” or something very similar depending on the English translation. At a surface level, such expressions cause confusion to some Christians who believe that Jesus is very God and find the expression a bit hard to reconcile. Attempts to simply dismiss these as referring to the humanity of Christ is an oversimplification and without contextual support.

We will deal with these passages by looking at them from a grammatical and syntactical level while also attempting to examine the theological significance. Several of the passages actually are identical in Greek so that they can be examined together.

NOTE: There are several passages in the New Testament where we have God and Christ in close proximity but where the two terms are connected by a καί (“and”). For example,

Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 6:23)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, *who is* our hope (1 Tim 1:1)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil 1:2)

Such constructions do not pose the theological challenge that those passages where “God” and “Christ” are not connected by καί (“and”). Examples of these are: (1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; 6:23; Phil 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 3:11; 2 Thess 1:1, 2, 12; 1 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 3; James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:2)

We will now examine uses in the New Testament where “God” and “Christ” are not connected by καί (“and”) but which state God as being “the God....of Christ.”

New Testament Examples

This short study only looks at passages where “God” is used with “Christ” in a genitive construction without being connected by a καί (“and”). It is these construction that pose some difficulty for believers.

There are basically two kinds of Greek constructions where this issue is found. The first construction has four passages where the Greek text is basically identical.

Romans 15:6, 2 Corinthians 1:3, Ephesians 1:3, 2 Peter 1:3¹

“...the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (All 4 in English)

τὸν θεὸν καὶ πατέρα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Rom 15:6)

ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (2 Cor 1:3)

ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Eph 1:3)

ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (1 Peter 1:3)

The only difference in the Greek text is that Romans 15:6, “God” and “Father” are in the accusative case. The same genitive construction “of our Lord Jesus Christ” (τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) is maintained.

Our first observation about these four verses is that all contain the example of the grammatical construction known as the Granville Sharp rule.² This rule maintains that when two singular nouns (or substantives) which are not proper names are connected by καί and where the first noun has the definite article and the second noun does not, the two nouns refer to the same person. In other words, in these four examples, the term *God* and *Father* refer to the same person.

So we have in these four verses the fact that Paul is referring in each case to God the Father.³ The fact that God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is no theological challenge and *Father* is the closest grammatical antecedent. However since God and Father are the same person, in what way is God “the God...of our Lord Jesus Christ?” Since these are all basically the same Greek construction, let’s examine the Ephesians 1:3 use. Notice that in the previous verse Paul placed God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ on an equal par when he wrote,

¹ A similar construction is found in 2 Corinthians 11:31: “The God and Father of the Lord Jesus” (ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ).

² Granville Sharp, *Remarks on the Uses of the Definitive Article in the Greek Text of the New Testament; Containing many New Proofs of the Divinity of Christ, from Passages, which are wrongly Translated in the Common English Version* (Durham: L. Pennington, 1798), 3. This work had four editions. This rule of Greek grammar is as follows:

When the copulative καὶ connects two nouns of the same case, [viz. nouns (either substantive or adjective, or participles) of personal description, respecting office, dignity, affinity, or connexion, and attributes, properties, or qualities, good or ill], if the article ὁ, or any of its cases, precedes the first of the said nouns or participles, and is not repeated before the second noun or participle, the latter always relates to the same person that is expressed or described by the first noun or participle: i.e. it denotes a farther description of the first-named person . . .

³ **NOTE:** The New Testament does in fact sometimes use the term “God” (θεός) in a way that is broad enough to denote what we would call the entire Godhead or trinity. In other words, θεός is used without any reference to any person within the trinity (John 9:3; 10:33; 21:19; Acts 1:3; 3:8; 16:10, 14; Rom 2:2; 1 Cor 3:7; Heb 10:31;) and so it is able to refer to all persons of the trinity. However, oftentimes θεός is singled out and identified as being God the Father. All five uses that we are examining are used this way with God being equated with the Father.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 1:2)

While this doesn't solve the issue, before Paul states that God is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3), he does connect "God the Father" and "our Lord Jesus Christ" equally in 1:2. As O'Brien notes, "God and Christ are entirely at one in securing and bestowing salvation."⁴ Indeed, since only God can save sinners, Paul has equated God with Jesus Christ. And having equated them in their divine work of salvation in 1:2, Paul isn't relegating Christ to the Father in 1:3 in terms of deity. However this is not yet a complete explanation.

Next, in what way shall we classify the genitives contained in the expression, "of our Lord Jesus Christ" (τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ)? Since Paul has equated God and Father as the same person in all four examples, the genitives all refer back to the expression "the God and Father."⁵ We sometimes think in English that an expression like "the God...of our Lord Jesus Christ" must mean that Jesus isn't God because the Father is his God. However the Greek genitive has at least 20 ways it can be classified⁶ and the context (1:2) will not allow us to take the expression as seeing Jesus in any way as deficient to the Father in terms of deity but simply in a descriptive manner.⁷ Harold Hoehner states that the genitives describe four things:

(1) His personal relationship to the believer ("our Lord"); (2) his name ("Jesus"); (3) his Lordship ("Jesus is Lord" was an early confession of the church, as in Acts 2:36; 8:16; 10:36; 11:17; 19:5; Rom 10:9; 14:9 1 Cor 12:3; 2 Cor 4:5; Phil 2:11); and (4) his title ("Christ"), which is more than just a name, denotes that he is the promised Messiah who would bring salvation.⁸

In other words, Hoehner is stating that the genitives are simply descriptive of Christ within his relationship of God the Father. The genitives are not declaring in any way that Jesus isn't fully God.

In many ways, what Paul is declaring in these four passages is no different than what Jesus himself said to Mary after his resurrection when he stated,

⁴ Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 88.

⁵ Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 164.

⁶ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 72-136.

⁷ In most cases when a clear classification like a genitive of time, a subjective or objective genitive, or a genitive of apposition is not obvious, the default is simply a descriptive genitive, a loose relationship between the two nouns is a which bit ambiguous. However it would not make the Son inferior to God the Father in any way.

⁸ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 164.

Jesus said to her, “Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.’” (John 20:17)

If God and the Father are the same person, and God is Jesus’ Father, then in a sense, the Father is Jesus’ God.

The final example poses a slightly different kind of challenge.

Ephesians 1:17

“God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory”

ὁ θεὸς τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ πατὴρ τῆς δόξης

An interesting observation is that like the four other passages which equate God with the Father as being the same person based on rules of grammar, Paul also equates God and the Father but through another means. He calls God “the Father of glory.” So in Ephesians 1:17, “God,” equated with the expression, “the Father of glory” is the “God of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

It is true that the Arians interpreted this verse to mean that Jesus was not the eternal God “but was the created Son of God who prayed and worshiped his Creator.”⁹ However, in this very chapter Paul has already equated the Father and the Son in 1:2 and then in 1:3 Paul equated God with the Father so that if God is his Father, then in a way he is also his God. This however doesn’t mean that the Son is not God. Nothing in the context can support such a view. Hoehner notes the theological significance when he writes, “The Arians failed to distinguish between the subordination of the Son to the Father, and the unity of essence of both the Son and the Father.”¹⁰ Yes, this is a theological solution. But grammar and syntax alone do not solve every interpretive issue. All syntactical decisions have to take context into consideration and sometimes that means asking whether an exegetical decision violates the larger context of God’s word. In other words, we can try and say that the Father is the God of Jesus to the point that Jesus is not God, but that cannot be supported from both the immediate and remote context of the New Testament.

Summary

There are 5 passages in the New Testament that by their translation into English state that God is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. These passages do not in any way diminish his deity but really describe him in his relationship to the Father who is also described in all 5 passages as God.

⁹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 255.

¹⁰ Ibid.