

## Faculty Address – Fall 2024

### “Jesus is Lord”: A Conversation with Key Recent Proposals for Pauline Divine Christology<sup>1</sup>

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Saul of Tarsus (Paul here onward) was traveling to Damascus to arrest adherents of a new sect of Judaism who had the audacity to claim that the Messiah had been executed and resurrected. The young Pharisee then suddenly encountered the risen Jesus and experienced a radical turning in his life.<sup>2</sup> Some years later, writing a letter to his ministry supporters, Paul confesses: “[Whatever] gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him” (Phil 3:7–9, ESV). As this passage and many other parts of Pauline writings imply, Jesus was the center of the apostle’s life and the recipient of his undivided devotion.<sup>3</sup>

In what sense, however, was Paul able to reconcile his Jewish monotheistic faith (or his commitment to the Shema)<sup>4</sup> with his

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<sup>1</sup> This faculty lecture is adapted from chapters 1–6 of *The Divine Christology of the Apostle Paul* by Chris Bruno, John J. R. Lee, and Thomas R. Schreiner. Copyright (c) 2024 by Christopher Bruno, John J. R. Lee, and Thomas R. Schreiner. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press, P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515, USA. [www.ivpress.com](http://www.ivpress.com). John J. R. Lee was the primary author of these chapters and the three appendices. The readers who want to have a more in-depth understanding of the material summarized in this lecture are strongly recommended to consult the above-mentioned book.

<sup>2</sup> See the three accounts in Acts 9, 22, and 26.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., 1 Cor 2:2; cf. Gal 6:14.

<sup>4</sup> Or his commitment to the Shema of Deut 6:4 and the first two commandments of the Decalogue.

devotion to Jesus as a divine figure? How could a teacher in Israel, who once was so passionately devoted to the worship of the one God and was willing to do even violence against a perceived threat to this worship, see his faith in Jesus as the fulfillment of the Torah?<sup>5</sup> This was, undoubtedly, a crucial question in the first century AD, and it remains so two millennia later.

Many people still claim that worship of Jesus as divine was impossible within Second Temple Jewish monotheism. Consequently, the divine Christology of the New Testament is seen to reflect a pagan influence or an anachronistic projection of later dogmatic theology into earliest Christian writings. Fortunately, however, we are not the first ones to wrestle with this crucial question of how Jewish monotheism and Christ's divinity go hand in hand. The history of the church provides a rich pool of resources for this matter, and, in recent decades, capable scholars, including the four the current lecture will introduce, have intensely dealt with this question and have advanced the conversations in some meaningful directions. My modest hope is to provide a representative overview of the recent arguments *in support of* Pauline divine Christology and offer a snapshot of an entry-point into the current conversations. I have chosen to focus on Richard Bauckham, Larry Hurtado, Chris Tilling, and N.T. Wright, based on the distinctive nature and the scholarly influence of their respective paradigms in recent conversations on Pauline divine Christology. I want to admit that I have learned a lot from each of these four scholars and that I agree with their overall conclusions. Yet, I also have some notable questions and concerns as revealed in my interaction with each of them below.

I acknowledge that not everyone accepts the view that earliest Christians had a divine Christology following Jesus' resurrection.<sup>6</sup> Holding that Jewish people were disgusted by pagan notions and practices, some scholars continue to question whether NT Christology

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<sup>5</sup> Rom 10:4.

<sup>6</sup> To be fair, there are still tangible objections to and qualifications of divine Christology, often with various tendencies that regard it as incongruent with Jewish monotheistic sensibilities. Refer to the immediately following footnote.

could truly be divine,<sup>7</sup> while others propose more nuanced positions which evaluate NT Christology as relatively high but not reaching a fully divine view of Jesus, as exemplified by James D. G. Dunn.<sup>8</sup> Yet, an early and high Christology has attracted growing scholarly support over the last few decades partly due to the influence of Richard Bauckham and Larry Hurtado and is now even referred to as an “emerging consensus,” at least by some scholars.<sup>9</sup>

Bauckham’s and Hurtado’s influences are easily felt in recent discussions of Pauline Christology. In recent years, a number of scholars have offered their fresh explanations of early and high Christology, but their discussions normally evolve around Bauckham and Hurtado. The two other scholars, whom this lecture will introduce (that is, Chris Tilling and N. T. Wright), and many other scholars working in the field of Pauline/NT Christology are in conversation with Bauckham and Hurtado in one way or another. In that sense, it is justifiable to begin my discussion of recent scholarship on Pauline divine Christology with Bauckham and Hurtado.

### **Richard Bauckham’s Divine Identity Paradigm<sup>10</sup>**

Richard Bauckham argues for a “divine identity” approach and explores NT Christology with a focus on Jesus’ inclusion in the unique identity of the one God of Israel. Some of his key emphases include the following:

- Criticism of the traditional approach of ontic vs. functional Christology<sup>11</sup> in favor of a divine identity Christology.

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<sup>7</sup> See Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Essays on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008), 2 and the scholars mentioned in 2n2.

<sup>8</sup> See James D. G. Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus? The New Testament Evidence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Crispin Fletcher-Louis, *Jesus Monotheism, Vol. 1: Christological Origins, the Emerging Consensus, and Beyond* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), 3.

<sup>10</sup> The following summary of Bauckham’s approach is based on Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998) and *Jesus and the God of Israel*. The former book has been incorporated as chapter 1 of the latter.

<sup>11</sup> See Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, chapter 1, especially x, 30–31.

- Replacing categories of ancient Greek categories with a Second Temple Jewish understanding of Israel's God and who that God is.
- The exclusion of any other figure from a place in God's unique identity as sole creator and sovereign of the universe and as the only one worthy of worship.
- The understanding that Paul and other NT writers included Jesus in the identity of Israel's God and identified Jesus uniquely with God.

Bauckham argues that, with strict Jewish monotheism and monolatry in the background, Paul and other NT authors found Jesus within the unique identity of Israel's God and, thus, interpreted Jewish monotheism Christologically.<sup>12</sup>

Worship of Jesus, Bauckham suggests, is not the foundation of divine Christology but its consequence. Notably, one finds here some difference between Bauckham and Hurtado, as we will see more clearly once both Bauckham's and Hurtado's approaches have been overviewed. According to Bauckham, NT Christology does not signify a compromise, distortion, or disposal of ancient Jewish monotheism but, instead, its Christological explanation. Per Bauckham's divine identity paradigm, NT Christology did not develop through an evolutionary process. Rather, "[the] earliest Christology was already the highest Christology," Bauckham stresses.<sup>13</sup>

Bauckham's attempt to overcome the dichotomy of ontic *versus* functional Christology is noteworthy. Earlier generations of scholars often utilized an ontic *versus* functional dichotomy and then attempted to limit Jesus primarily within the functional category,

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<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, chapter 6. Drawing from David Capes's monograph, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul's Christology*, WUNT 2/47 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992) and Gordon Fee's exegetical-theological work, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), Bauckham explores Paul's Christological appropriation of the OT YHWH texts for Jesus, as seen in Romans 10:13, Philippians 2:6–11, and 1 Corinthians 8:5–6, among others.

<sup>13</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, x. Along this line, he notes that interest in intermediary figures (such as chief angels and heroes from the past), in the study of Christian origins, has been exaggerated (see, e.g., *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 2–5, 14–16).

arguing that Jesus is divine only in a functional sense but not in an essential sense.<sup>14</sup> Bauckham's divine identity Christology seems to offer at least a partial remedy for such one-sidedness, and it possibly provides a way forward in an area where other scholars may have been stuck in the proverbial mud.<sup>15</sup>

### **Critique of the Divine Identity Paradigm**

Although I do overall appreciate Bauckham's attempt with his divine identity Christology presented in his admirably clear writing style, there are still some questions to raise related to his approach. First, the term "identity," as part of his key phrase "divine identity," is ambiguous and thus slippery, and yet Bauckham does not define it clearly in his key books on NT Christology: *God Crucified* (1998) and *Jesus and the God of Israel* (2008). Bauckham just briefly explains the term "divine identity" as follows:

Reference to God's identity is by analogy with human personal identity, understood not as a mere ontological subject without characteristics, but as including both character and personal story (the latter entailing relationships). These are the ways in which we commonly specify "who someone is."<sup>16</sup>

In terms of modern usage and understanding of the term, "identity," this approach is correct. Nevertheless, the given concept is susceptible to misunderstanding. Considering that the term, "identity," is not drawn directly from primary sources (i.e., Scripture

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, x, 30–31.

<sup>15</sup> One of the strengths of Bauckham's divine identity paradigm is that it is very easy to follow. This particular strength might have to do with the fact that Bauckham began his academic career as a theologian rather than a NT scholar. In any case Bauckham explains his paradigm in a manner that anyone with basic theological training can understand without much difficulty. Regardless of whether one agrees with him or not, Bauckham's presentation itself tends to be clear and straightforward.

<sup>16</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 6n5. Here, the word "relationship" is particularly important because Bauckham argues for the unique identity of Israel's one God with attention to how God *relates* to all reality—as the sole creator; as the only sovereign of the universe; and as the only one worthy of worship (*Jesus and the God of Israel*, 6–13).

or Second Temple Jewish literature), it is surprising that Bauckham did not make serious efforts in his key books on NT Christology to explain the term or justify his use of the term. Relatedly, it is not entirely clear whether all Second Temple Jewish people would have understood the notion of “divine identity” as clearly as Bauckham does, and, if so, we should ask whether Bauckham’s case is immune to some type of anachronism.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, while Bauckham attempts to include Jesus’ life, suffering, and death in the divine identity rather than connecting it with Jesus’ humanity,<sup>18</sup> a further inquiry is needed to examine whether Bauckham’s approach accounts for the NT data better than the classic explanation of the concurrence of Jesus’ divinity and humanity in paradox or as mystery.<sup>19</sup>

Second, although it is helpful that Bauckham discusses Jewish monotheism and divine identity Christology with two relational dimensions in view, that is, (1) God’s relationship with Israel, and (2) his relationship with all reality—it is unfortunate that Bauckham does not consider the former in much detail. A close examination of Paul’s Christology in light of God’s relation to Israel will bring some meaningful insights, as Chris Tilling’s study, *Paul’s Divine Christology* (2012), has demonstrated, which we will discuss below.

Third, since God’s relation to Israel and his relation to “all reality” are organically bound up with each other, if just one of them is considered and the other is neglected, such discussion is destined to be limited in its effect. Indeed, Bauckham’s proposal seems to suffer that problem.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Another issue is what Bauckham meant by the “inclusion of Jesus in the unique, divine identity” (e.g., *Jesus and the God of Israel*, x; emphasis added) is not clear.

<sup>18</sup> See Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 32–59.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 141–44.

<sup>20</sup> Bauckham’s discussion primarily focuses on God’s relation to all reality, thus missing a rich pool of evidence for Pauline divine Christology based on God’s relation to his people (Tilling, *Paul’s Divine Christology*, 61–62). Moreover, while Bauckham emphatically downplays the significance of Second-Temple Jewish intermediary traditions—and those traditions have, in fact, been abused by some scholars in accounting for Christian origins—he seems to overcorrect the problem by negating their significance altogether (Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 2–5, 14–16).

**Larry Hurtado's Corporate Worship Paradigm**<sup>21</sup>

Larry Hurtado presents a 'corporate worship' paradigm for Pauline and NT Christology, which looks at the question of Jesus' divinity from liturgical practices of his early followers, such as Paul and his churches. According to Hurtado, public and organized worship acts offered to Jesus guarantee that early Christians accepted Jesus as a divine figure.

Originally influenced by Bauckham's 1981 article, titled "The Worship of Jesus in Apocalyptic Christianity,"<sup>22</sup> which gave attention to the worship of Jesus in the book of Revelation, Hurtado has pursued the thrust of that article thoroughly and has located worship acts devoted to Jesus at the very center of Pauline and NT divine Christology, i.e., the view that Bauckham himself has subsequently qualified.<sup>23</sup>

Hurtado observes that even pagans used 'one-God' or 'only-God' language for their 'high god' figure. However, pagans still sacrificed to lesser deities and were thus pluralistic in their cultic practices, while using the 'one God' or 'only God' rhetoric for their supreme deity. In contrast, Second Temple Jews were monotheistic both in their religious rhetoric and in their worship practices; though it is true that in Second Temple Jewish literature some angels and patriarchs were attributed with remarkable rhetoric on several occasions, they were never regarded as legitimate recipients of worship. The radical difference between Second Temple Jews and neighboring pagans had to do more with their worship practices rather than their use of monotheistic-sounding language. Thus, worship practices should be taken centrally in considering any religious phenomenon of the first-century Mediterranean world. In light of that, religious rhetoric alone,

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<sup>21</sup> The summary of Hurtado's approach below is based on Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003); *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; London: T&T Clark, 2015); *Honoring the Son: Jesus in Earliest Christian Devotional Practice* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018). The last work presents Hurtado's own accessible summary of his life-long scholarship on NT Christology as exemplified in the first two works.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Bauckham, "The Worship of Jesus in Apocalyptic Christianity," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981): 322-41.

<sup>23</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, e.g., 11-12 and 11n20.

even the most impressive kind, cannot guarantee a biblical sense of monotheism or the full divinity of Jesus, in Hurtado's view. It is corporate worship acts directed to Jesus along with God the Father, with the background of Jewish monotheism, that guarantee the fully divine view of Jesus.<sup>24</sup>

In his book, *Lord Jesus Christ*, Hurtado carefully examines Christological titles such as "Christ," "Son of God," and "Lord (*Kyrios*)" as well as their respective significance.<sup>25</sup> Hurtado also gives attention to Christ's preexistence based upon Philippians 2:6-11 and 1 Corinthians 8:6 and carefully looks at the crucial role of Jesus' death and resurrection in redemption.<sup>26</sup> Thus, Hurtado does not deny the place of religious rhetoric in Paul's Christological and theological construct.

Nevertheless, Hurtado does not allow religious rhetoric a central place. Religious rhetoric reserved for Israel's God alone in the OT and in Second Temple Judaism is now appropriated for Jesus in Pauline writings (as we can see from the application of OT YHWH texts to Jesus<sup>27</sup>), and that is indeed impressive. But such rhetoric is authenticated when it is accompanied by worship acts directed to Jesus. For Hurtado, Paul's dyadic devotional pattern, which includes Jesus as a corecipient of worship together with the Father, is the clearest evidence for Jesus' divine status and significance among his earliest followers—who were Jews and thus knew that such worship acts were supposed to be reserved only for Israel's one God. Various devotional acts such as dyadic prayers including Jesus alongside God the Father, prayers offered to Jesus, confession of Jesus as divine κύριος, baptism in Jesus' name, the practice of the Lord's Supper, hymns focusing on who Jesus is and what he has done, and so forth do reveal a devotional pattern that includes Jesus as a legitimate recipient of worship, together with God the Father.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Hurtado, *Honoring the Son*, 19–64. For further discussion refer to his *One God, One Lord, and Lord Jesus Christ*.

<sup>25</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 98–118.

<sup>26</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 118–33.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul's Christology*.

<sup>28</sup> Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, chapter 5; *Lord Jesus Christ*, 134–53; *Honoring the Son*, chapters 4–5.

### **Critique of the Corporate Worship Paradigm**

Hurtado's account for Paul's divine Christology shows a genuine effort to integrate intense historical investigation and Christological reflection. Moreover, his observations on the nature of Christian worship and its Christological significance is stimulating. Despite these strengths, however, I wonder if Hurtado has downplayed a little too much the independent weight of religious rhetoric in Paul's Christological and theological construct.<sup>29</sup> Along with Bauckham, I think that it would be simply inconceivable for an early Jewish follower of Jesus to worship him without the prior conviction that he is divine and that he is one who fundamentally corresponds to the one God of Israel in his status and significance.<sup>30</sup> Otherwise, corporate worship of Jesus becomes a practice of mysticism. Identifying the worship of Jesus as worship of God, in the first century context, may not require a fully elaborate Christology as found in our systematic theology books. Yet, there should be some fundamental and sufficient understanding of who Jesus really is and why he is worthy of worship *as* a foundation for the devotional acts offered to him. While appreciating Hurtado's learned treatment of various issues related to Christology and the worship of Jesus, I wonder if his language is either hyperbolic or somewhat out of balance at this point.

Second, one may question Hurtado's distinction between religious rhetoric and worship acts, with more weight placed on the latter by him, and also question if such a distinction is artificial because descriptions of the worship acts, to which Hurtado refers, are parts of Pauline letters and thus parts of Pauline religious rhetoric. Then, it is not entirely clear in what sense the Pauline passages that Hurtado

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<sup>29</sup> On this point, Bauckham's criticism targeting Hurtado and the earlier position taken by Bauckham himself is helpful: "Some recent argument has tended to the position that the exclusive worship of the one God is really the factor that defines God as unique in Second Temple Judaism. This . . . is a confusion, because the exclusive worship of the God of Israel is precisely *a recognition of and response* to his unique identity. It is God's unique identity which requires worship of him alone." See Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 11–12 (italics original). Overall, Hurtado has underestimated, though not denied or dismissed, the importance of religious rhetoric in his examination of Paul's divine Christology while acknowledging the crucial place of cultic veneration.

<sup>30</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 11–12.

categorizes as “liturgical” or “devotional” do not belong to the apostle’s religious rhetoric. At least some clarification, if not a more nuanced approach, is desirable in this regard.

Third, as Chris Tilling has pointed out, the whole scope of life, and not just the matters directly related to worship acts, should be considered in fathoming Jewish monotheism and Pauline divine Christology (see Rom 12:1). Otherwise, one may commit the same error, against which the OT prophets accused Israel: paying attention to sacrificial matters while turning away from Israel’s one God himself.<sup>31</sup>

### **Chris Tilling’s Christ-Relation Paradigm<sup>32</sup>**

Though not having the long tenure of Bauckham or Hurtado, Chris Tilling has recently advanced the conversation on Pauline Christology in important ways. Tilling’s approach is summarized as a “Christ-relation” paradigm by Tilling himself.<sup>33</sup> Carefully building from and critically engaging with Bauckham’s “divine identity” paradigm, Hurtado’s attention to a devotional pattern found in Pauline writings, and Gordon Fee’s exegetical insights, Tilling focuses on Paul’s language regarding the relationship between believers and Christ, which is analogous to the relationship between Israel and her God in the OT.<sup>34</sup> Bauckham himself recognized the two dimensions in God’s relation: his relationship to Israel *and* his relationship to all reality.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, Bauckham ended up focusing on the latter while neglecting the former.<sup>36</sup> Tilling’s monograph gives due attention to

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<sup>31</sup> Chris Tilling, *Paul’s Divine Christology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), notes that, for Paul, “worship” covers the entire life as seen, for example, in Romans 12:1 (60), and in that sense Hurtado’s account for Pauline Christology, which focuses primarily on a cultic worship pattern, is “insufficiently Pauline” (254). For further, see Tilling, *Paul’s Divine Christology*, 56–61. With such criticism, Tilling proposes his Christ-relation paradigm, which will be summarized and evaluated in the very next section.

<sup>32</sup> The summary of Tilling’s approach is based on Tilling, *Paul’s Divine Christology*.

<sup>33</sup> Tilling, *Paul’s Divine Christology*, e.g., 6–10.

<sup>34</sup> See Tilling, *Paul’s Divine Christology*, chapter 3, for his interaction with the three scholars mentioned: Bauckham, Hurtado, and Fee.

<sup>35</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 7–8.

<sup>36</sup> Tilling, *Paul’s Divine Christology*, 61–62.

what Bauckham identified but failed to pursue in his work, that is, God's relation to Israel, which Tilling uses in his study as a key background for Pauline divine Christology.

Tilling's study is a welcome addition to the conversations of Paul's Christology, as he takes a notable step forward in arguing for a Pauline divine Christology, especially by exploring Christ's relationship with believers as something comparable to God's relationship with Israel. Tilling argues that Paul's pattern of language relating Christ to believers directly mirrors the pattern relating God to Israel in the OT and Second Temple Judaism (e.g., 1 Cor 8:1–10:22; 16:22), claiming that this overlapping *relational* pattern does most forcefully prove a divine Christology in Paul.<sup>37</sup>

In considering Pauline texts, Tilling's study is not limited to a few key passages or a set of individual data but instead seeks to trace, analyze, and integrate various themes in the Pauline corpus, thus locating a holistic pattern.<sup>38</sup> Tilling's approach is, thus, a strong contribution in and of itself.

In crafting his argumentation, Tilling begins with the exegesis of the Pauline corpus and then examines Second Temple Jewish texts—rather than going the other way around, which is the common way of progression in NT Christology scholarship. Tilling's order of progression, i.e., dealing with Pauline corpus first and then Second Temple Jewish texts, seems to be helpful in terms of giving due attention to the most important primary source in the pursuit of Pauline Christology: Paul's own writings!

### **Critique of the Christ-Relation Paradigm**

With the above-mentioned strengths affirmed, however, Tilling's order of progression has a danger of making his investigation of background material (especially Second Temple Jewish sources) very

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<sup>37</sup> Tilling's key point is summarized in statements like this: "The Christ-relation was Paul's way of expressing a divine-Christology" (*Paul's Divine Christology*, 9).

<sup>38</sup> This is most clearly seen from Tilling's examination of the undisputed letters in chapter 6 of *Paul's Divine Christology*, where Tilling's examination of Pauline data has a holistic shape that looks at the pattern of themes found across the relevant letters.

shallow.<sup>39</sup> His order of progression has made his study firmly founded on Pauline texts. Yet that very order has made Tilling's discussion of Jewish monotheism and the relevant Jewish texts very limited. Early in his study, Tilling presents the following as one of his two core research questions: "How does Paul's Jewish-style faith in God affect our understanding of his Christology?"<sup>40</sup> One is, however, led to ask whether understanding the apostle's Jewish-style faith in God is indeed a crucial part of Tilling's investigation, given the absence of serious treatment of Second Temple Jewish monotheism and the related primary sources within his study. Rather than examining Second Temple Jewish texts himself, Tilling mainly cites secondary literature. The only notable exception is found in chapter 9 of his monograph, where Tilling examines three Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphal texts: Sirach 44–50, the *Life of Adam and Eve*, and the Similitudes of Enoch. Though that discussion itself is useful, what Tilling provides there is more of a test case rather than a substantial investigation. Overall, in-depth discussion of Jewish monotheism is lacking in Tilling's study.<sup>41</sup>

Second, what is also lacking in Tilling's study is the discussion of the relation between Christ and God. Looking at Paul's Christology from a notably *relational* angle is certainly relevant and even necessary. And comparing Christ's relationship with believers in Paul to God's relationship with Israel in the OT is enriching and rewarding. But what about Christ's relation to God, and God's relation to Christ? For Tilling's study to be more holistically *relational*, he should consider the God-Christ relation, too, which involves both unity and distinction between the two persons.<sup>42</sup> As a result of not significantly

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<sup>39</sup> As I critique Tilling here, I want to note that he has not written as much as the other three scholars surveyed in this lecture, so the questions raised here intend to seek his further clarification.

<sup>40</sup> Tilling, *Paul's Divine Christology*, 6; also 63, 253.

<sup>41</sup> It seems that Tilling has overcorrected the issues noted in some previous studies, which gave primary attention to Second Temple Jewish or Greco-Roman texts while assigning only a limited discussion to the pertinent Pauline/NT texts—usually towards the end of the study.

<sup>42</sup> Although Tilling himself criticizes Bauckham, Hurtado, and Fee for leaving important aspects of Pauline Christology, especially by neglecting the "Christ-relation" relational pattern in the Pauline corpus, Tilling's approach itself seems to have some notable lacuna as well. As Hurtado, *Honoring the*

considering the relation between God and Christ, Tilling's account of Christ-relation is only partially complete. If Bauckham's account of divine identity Christology was lacking with regard to giving attention to the God-Israel relation as helpfully noted by Tilling,<sup>43</sup> Tilling's own approach is lacking with reference to fathoming the God-Christ relation substantially.

Third, Tilling's case needs to be substantiated further by facing more directly and rigorously the so-called subordination texts as they relate to cases of Pauline divine Christology. In chapter 10 of his study, Tilling integrates his substantial arguments from the preceding chapters, and he attempts to establish his case for Pauline divine Christology, especially from the angle of Christ's relation to his people. As part of such efforts, Tilling mentions texts like Romans 15:6 and 2 Corinthians 1:3 and 11:31 (which describe the Father as Jesus's God) and other passages describing Christ's mediatory role.<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, Tilling never seriously or directly addresses the so-called subordination question. It is surprising that Tilling does not rigorously engage with the subordination texts, after he himself complains, "modern publications affirming a Pauline divine-Christology have not engaged with such [i.e., subordinationist] material and scholarly arguments . . . thoroughly enough."<sup>45</sup> Instead,

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*Son*, 13, observes, "typically in early Christian texts Jesus was revered in, and on account of, his relationship to the one God, for example, as the unique Son of God, Word of God, and image of God." If so, it is somewhat surprising that Tilling does not consider the relation between Christ and God. Without considering the God-Christ relation, Tilling's otherwise helpful, relation-oriented account seems to remain only incomplete. In part, filling this lacuna will require Tilling to do the additional work of considering differences between the Christ-relation and the God-relation found in the Pauline corpus, something that Tilling himself acknowledges (*Paul's Divine Christology*, 235–36), but does not seek an explanation in any substantial manner.

<sup>43</sup> Tilling, *Paul's Divine Christology*, 61–62.

<sup>44</sup> See, e.g., Tilling, *Paul's Divine Christology*, 245–46.

<sup>45</sup> Tilling, *Paul's Divine Christology*, 27. For an additional critique, Tilling uses the term "worship" in a somewhat imprecise manner, not clearly distinguishing its use with a cultic sense and without, for instance, when he states that in "the Similitudes of Enoch, the *Life of Adam and Eve* and Sirach 40–55 . . . various [exalted] figures are certainly worshipped" (Tilling, *Paul's*

Tilling states that, due to its “relational nature,” Paul’s understanding “could embrace mystery, paradox and tension” —the coexistence of (1) Paul’s Christ-relation intersecting with the God-relation, and (2) Paul’s subordination language applied to Christ.<sup>46</sup> In Tilling’s view, “the problem [of this tension] may well be ours, but it was not Paul’s.”<sup>47</sup> I agree with Tilling that there is room for mystery and that Paul’s Christology could and does facilitate a paradox. Nevertheless, Tilling’s answer appears to be too general and brief and even rushed. Moreover, his response seems to essentially evade the challenges posed rather than attempting to face and address them. Thus, R. B. Jamieson critiques Tilling in that his “solution, it seems, either dodges the question or pushes it back a step.”<sup>48</sup> Jamieson also asks, “What is a ‘relational epistemology,’ and how does it enable us to conceive of the Son as both divine and submissive to the Father?”<sup>49</sup> Tilling’s answer on the Pauline subordination texts is not satisfactory or at the very least incomplete.

### **N. T. Wright’s “YHWH’s Return to Zion” Paradigm<sup>50</sup>**

N.T. Wright proposes the “YHWH’s return to Zion” paradigm, which emphasizes the narrative of the return of Israel’s God to Zion, as he accounts for the deity of Jesus the Messiah in Pauline writings. According to his “YHWH’s return to Zion” paradigm, which takes Bauckham’s divine identity approach<sup>51</sup> with a decisive eschatological thrust, Wright claims that Paul understood the life, death, and

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*Divine Christology*, 71; italics original). Given that “worship” is a key term employed by Tilling, for instance, in his interaction with Hurtado’s case for a divine Christology (*Paul’s Divine Christology*, 52–61), a more measured and nuanced use of the term would be desirable.

<sup>46</sup> Tilling, *Paul’s Divine Christology*, 247.

<sup>47</sup> Tilling, *Paul’s Divine Christology*, 248.

<sup>48</sup> R. B. Jamieson, “1 Corinthians 15.28 and the Grammar of Paul’s Christology,” *New Testament Studies* 66, no. 2 (2020): 192.

<sup>49</sup> Jamieson, “1 Corinthians 15.28 and the Grammar of Paul’s Christology,” 192.

<sup>50</sup> The following summary of Wright’s approach is based largely on N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), chapters 9–11.

<sup>51</sup> See Bauckham, *God Crucified; Jesus and the God of Israel*, especially chapters 1 and 6. Refer also to the discussion on Bauckham above.

resurrection of Jesus and the indwelling of God's Spirit as fulfilling the ancient Jewish hope for YHWH's personal return to Zion—which was often expressed in the language of the exodus (e.g., Isa 40–55).

According to Wright, the hope that YHWH, who had judged Israel and sent them into exile, would return to Zion, reside gloriously in the temple, and rule as the king of the whole world, was a widespread belief among devout Second Temple Jews—who Wright argues viewed themselves as still in exile. Recognizing Jesus' death and resurrection and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit as YHWH's own return was the key essence for Pauline divine Christology in Wright's view. He asserts that only when one understands the significance of YHWH's return in Jesus the Messiah can one arrive at the core of Paul's divine Christology. For the apostle, Wright proposes, Jesus the Messiah and the Holy Spirit have fulfilled what YHWH himself had promised to do: to return to Israel, lead his people in a new exodus, and dwell with them. Such an understanding implies that Paul included Jesus in the divine identity of Israel's one God, thus reaffirming and redefining Second Temple Jewish beliefs about one God, about election, and about the eschaton, the three of which are tightly bound with one another, according to Wright.

The link between Pauline divine Christology and the theme of YHWH's return to Zion is intriguing. Also, Wright's discussion of Paul's divine Christology is impressive in its scope; he relates Christology to suffering, ecclesiology, pneumatology, the kingdom of God, the problem of evil, and even more. Additionally, Wright's integrative effort to bridge the discussions of Christology, ecclesiology, and eschatology is commendable, given that NT scholars have often separated their Christological investigation from other components of Pauline theology.

### **Critique of the “YHWH's Return to Zion” Paradigm**

While Wright's account is stimulating and it advances the ongoing conversation about Pauline divine Christology, some questions remain. First, given that Wright adopts Bauckham's divine identity approach and then nuances it eschatologically from the angle of YHWH's return to Zion, we can direct to Wright the very question raised for Bauckham's use of the term “divine identity.” Since the phrase, “divine identity,” was not drawn directly from primary sources (i.e., Scripture or Second Temple Jewish literature) and was, instead,

coined by Bauckham himself for its technical usage, it is somewhat surprising that a scholar of Wright's caliber has not made much effort to carefully define the term or justify its adoption.<sup>52</sup>

Second, although YHWH's return to Zion was expected by many Second Temple Jews, it is not fully clear whether the majority believed that they themselves were still in exile, while living back in their homeland. I agree that many of the theological issues surrounding the exile remained unresolved in the first century AD —such as the presence of YHWH, the reign of the Davidic king, and the forgiveness of sin. However, Wright does not seem to sufficiently consider diversity within first-century Judaism. Some first-century Jews might have held this view, but it is not clear whether that would apply to the majority of first-century Judaism.<sup>53</sup> As Timo Laato has pointed out, Wright's language is exaggerative, if not too simplistic, when he equates the socio-political oppressions and limitations with an exile.<sup>54</sup> Those oppressions and limitations were certainly present in the Second Temple period. Nevertheless, whether Second Temple Jews themselves identified those experiences as an "exile" is another matter, or at least a matter at another level. While the concept can be present without a key word, it is still noteworthy that the New Testament does not speak of "exile" explicitly except in one place, that is, the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:11–12, cf. v. 17 [μετουκεία]), i.e., the passage that expresses the "exile" but does not end with it right there and, instead, moves on to the subsequent generations of the genealogy.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 141–44.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Timo Laato, "A New Quest for Paul: A Critique of the New Perspective on Paul," in *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls: Justification in Biblical, Theological, Historical, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 295–325.

<sup>54</sup> Laato, "A New Quest for Paul," 295–325 (306–18).

<sup>55</sup> Such a phenomenon does not seem to work well with Wright's projection that first-century Jews were thinking that they themselves were still in exile. Various degrees and extents of oppression and problems were certainly there among the Second Temple Jews, but those experiences cannot and should not be too hastily or flatly equated with an "exile." To demonstrate that this notion of "exile" is central to Paul and the NT authors, Wright should answer the question of why they do not express it very often.

Third, it should also be noted that Wright's formulation of Paul's divine Christology around a singular, narrow focus like the lens of YHWH's return to Zion seems to be somewhat reductionistic and is liable to an all-or-nothing sort of fallacy. N. T. Wright has helpfully noted but overstated the significance of the OT promise of YHWH's return to Zion when he presents it as "*the* key initial Christological resource appropriated in earliest Christian circles."<sup>56</sup>

### Conclusion

Despite the diversity of the proposals outlined above, there is a fundamental unity to the observations and conclusions of the four scholars we have considered: Their respective proposals on Pauline Christology conclude that the apostle uniquely identified Jesus of Nazareth with the God of Israel.<sup>57</sup>

I have also observed the variety of methods and conclusions from each of these four scholars and have raised some questions, pointing out lack of clarity, consistency, and integration in their specific approaches. I hope the presented interaction will be useful in refining and improving subsequent conversations. These proposals, though helpful, at times fail to integrate all the evidence and to consider how Paul's Christology fits within his larger theological construct. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that Bauckham, Hurtado, Tilling, and Wright have each advanced the conversation and have strengthened our overall understanding of Pauline divine Christology.

We have looked at four representative scholars in the field of Pauline Christology. But the task of doing Pauline Christology or NT Christology is not bound with these few representative experts. It is equally our task—if Paul indeed matters, if the NT truly matters, and if Christology really matters. Yes, all of us need to do our own work of Christology—not only with our pen and with our mouth but also with our life and with our obedience—because this confession does not

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<sup>56</sup> The quoted wording is from Larry Hurtado, "YHWH's Return to Zion: A New Catalyst for Earliest High Christology," in *God and the Faithfulness of Paul: A Critical Examination of the Pauline Theology of N. T. Wright*, ed. Christoph Heilig, J. Thomas Hewitt, and Michael F. Bird (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 420; italics original.

<sup>57</sup> The clear consensus among these scholars as such signifies that Paul's Christology is essentially consistent with later orthodoxy.

belong only to Paul but also to each of us: “[Whatever] gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him” (Phil 3:7–9, ESV).

Amen. Jesus is Lord.