

ROMANS 9.5: THE DEITY OF CHRIST

In this verse, the Godhead of the Lord Jesus Christ is very clearly affirmed in the Authorised Version:

“Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.” In the Revised Standard Version and many other modern versions this testimony to the Saviour’s Deity is completely removed by a change in the punctuation—“To them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen.” In this rendering only the human descent of the Messiah is asserted, and this is followed by a separate “doxology” in praise of “God who is over all.” The alternative rendering asserting that Christ Himself is God is relegated to a footnote—“Or *Christ, who is God over all, blessed for ever.*”

Roman Catholic Versions

In the treatment of this verse the Roman Catholic edition of the RSV is better than the “Protestant” version, for it reinstates the correct rendering in the text—“the Christ, who is God over all, blessed for ever,” and places the weaker RSV rendering in the margin. The RSV “*Common Bible*” edition, approved by the Roman Catholic Cardinal Koenig, retains the weaker rendering in the text and leaves the correct rendering in the margin. The Roman Catholic authorities have thus approved for general reading one edition asserting the Deity of Christ in this text, and another edition asserting only His humanity.

Some other Roman Catholic modern versions are more accurate than the liberal “Protestant” modern versions in the translation of this verse. Ronald Knox’s version published in 1954 reads—“Theirs is the human stock from which Christ came; Christ, who rules as God over all things, blessed for ever. Amen.” In a note he adds, “Some would translate—*Blessed be God who is above all things, for ever*, making this a distinct sentence, but they have not been able to suggest any plausible grounds for the intrusion of this irrelevant apostrophe, and the order of the words in the Greek makes it almost impossible.” This version was authorised by the “Hierarchies” of England and Wales and Scotland.

The Jerusalem Bible also renders this verse correctly—“Christ who is above all, God for ever blessed! Amen.” A note in this version reads, “Both the context and the internal development of the sentence imply that this doxology is addressed to Christ.” A similar wording is found in the New Jerusalem Bible.

The New American Bible, however, translated by members of the Catholic Biblical Association of America and sponsored by the Bishops’ Committee of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine in 1970, completely banishes the affirmation of Christ’s Deity from this verse, which it renders—“Theirs were the patriarchs, and from them came the Messiah (I speak of human origins). Blessed forever be God who is over all! Amen.”

Other modern versions

Among the other modern versions some render the verse so as to preserve the clear testimony to the Deity of Christ as in the Authorised Version. In this respect the Basic English, the New Berkeley, Phillips, the New American Standard Version and the New King James Bible are to be preferred to the New English Bible and Good News Bible. The NEB reads—"From them, in natural descent, sprang the Messiah. May God, supreme over all, be blessed for ever! Amen" and the GNB has—"and Christ, as a human being, belongs to their race. May God, who rules over all, be praised for ever! Amen." The footnotes in the NEB and GNB offer two alternative renderings, one of which is similar to the AV. The New International Version, in common with several other modern versions, has an acceptable rendering in the text and two unacceptable alternatives in the margin. The text reads—"From them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen." The footnotes introduce the element of doubt—"Or Christ, who is over all. God be for ever praised! Or Christ. God who is over all be forever praised!" Neither of these renderings asserts the Godhead of Christ, and the reader is left with the impression that the testimony of this Scripture is uncertain.

It would be possible to compare the renderings of this verse in a hundred or more English versions, but the examples quoted are a sufficient indication of the confusion and uncertainty in the minds of translators, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant. The same disagreement is found in the versions published by "Jehovah's Witnesses". Their "New World Translation" has—"from whom (sprang) Christ according to the flesh; God, who is over all, (be) blessed forever. Amen." Their edition of Wilson's "*Diaglott*" has the interlinear literal rendering—"he being over all God worthy of praise into the ages," and the accompanying translation—"He who is over all, God blessed to the ages." Their "*Bible in Living English*" by S.T. Byington reads—"Christ, he who is over everything, God blessed forever—Amen!"

Translations in other languages

In translating this verse into foreign languages many translators are likely to be influenced by "*The Translator's New Testament*" published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1973. This was originally intended for the Bible translator for whom English is a second language, and it has already been used in many lands. It was prepared originally for the translator who has no access to the Greek text or a limited command of that language. The translation is based on the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament. The preface states that there was consultation with translators in many parts of the world, hundreds of whom have used the translation in draft form in the making of their own vernacular translations. The rendering presented in this version is—"Theirs are the patriarchs and from them on the human side comes the Messiah. May he who is God over all be praised for ever! Amen."

The reader is referred to a note at the end of the book—"This is the translation adopted by most modern translators, but possible alternatives should be noted. (1) The Words here treated as a doxology may in fact be a continuation of the previous sentence, in which case they would refer

to Christ, not God the Father, and the meaning would be, “. . . *from them on the human side comes the Messiah who is God over all. May he be praised for ever!*” The impression given to the reader is that the rendering in the text has a stronger authentication in the manuscripts and on the part of Greek scholars, but this is far from being the case.

Opinions of three distinguished Greek scholars

Professor A.T. Robertson in his “*Word Pictures in the New Testament*” (Vol. 4 page 381) wrote on this verse—“A clear statement of the deity of Christ following the remark about His humanity. This is the natural and obvious way of punctuating the sentence. To make a full stop after SARKA (flesh), or a colon, and start a new sentence for the doxology is very abrupt and awkward. See Acts 20.28 and Titus 2.13 for Paul’s use of THEOS (God) applied to Jesus Christ.”

Dr. Christopher Wordsworth’s commentary on the New Testament in the original Greek (1871 edition) marshals an imposing array of evidence for the reliability of the rendering given in the Authorised Version. His arguments, adapted where necessary, are as follows:

“There is a special emphasis on HO $\bar{\text{O}}\text{N}$ —He that *is*; (He who is the *being One*; JEHOVAH. See John 1.18, Revelation 1.4, 8; 4.8; 11.17; 16.5; compared with Exodus 3.14—“I AM THAT I AM”. The words contain a distinct truth and assert the eternal pre-existence of Christ, and are very appropriately added after the mention of His incarnation. He who came of the Jews, according to the *flesh*, is no other than HO $\bar{\text{O}}\text{N}$, the BEING ONE, JEHOVAH. Compare our Lord’s words in John 8.58 —“Before Abraham was, I AM.”

“The addition of “over all” marks Christ’s *supremacy* as co-equal with the Father. Compare with Colossians 1.15-20, the best exposition of this text. Therefore we have in this passage five distinct assertions concerning our Blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ:— (1) His *Incarnation* “according to the flesh;” (2) His *existence* from everlasting “the Being One;” (3) His *supremacy* “over all;” (4) His *Divinity*—THEOS, God; (5) His claim to be called “the Blessed One”—see Mark 14.61.

“Thus the Holy Spirit ascribes to Christ the incommunicable titles of *Jehovah* and *Elohim* in the highest sense of the words, and so provides a safeguard, not only against Socinianism and Arianism, but also against Nestorianism, by declaring that God and Man are one Christ.

“It has been said by some in modern days that the passage may be regarded simply as a *Doxology* to God, and it has been said that it was not quoted in early times against the *Arian* heresy, as it would have been if it had been anciently applied to Christ. But this is an error. *It was* adduced against the Arians by Athanasius (Oration against the Arians, i. para 24 p. 338) where he says—“No one can patiently listen to them who allege that God was not *always a Father*, but *became* a Father, in order that they may pretend that there was a time when the *Word of God* did not exist. No one can listen to them when they say this, since John affirms that the Word was in the beginning (John 1.1), and Paul asserts that He is the splendour of His Father’s Glory (Hebrews 1.1), and is the Being One, over all, God blessed for ever (Romans 9.5).”

“Gregory, Cyril, Origen, Cyprian, Epiphanius, Chrysostom and others agree in applying these words to Christ. They who regard them merely as an ascription of praise to God, do violence to the natural sequence and flow of the words of the Apostle, and desert the consentient judgment of ancient interpreters for an invention of modern times.”

From more recent authorities Wordsworth quotes from Pearson’s great work on the Creed—“As therefore the Apostle speaketh of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore (2 Corinthians 11.31); of the Creator who is blessed for ever, Amen. (Romans 1.25); and thereby doth signify the supreme Deity, which was so glorified by the Israelites; and doth also testify that we worship the same God under the Gospel which they did under the Law, so doth he speak of Christ in as sublime a style—“*Who is over all, God Blessed for ever, Amen*” (Romans 9.5), and thereby doth testify the equality, or rather identity, of His Deity.”

Commenting on this same passage in Romans, Dean Alford remarks that among the manuscripts and other ancient authorities there are no various readings here worthy of note, and he continues—“The rendering given above (as in the AV) is then not only that most agreeable to the usage of the Apostle, *but the only one admissible by the rules of grammar and arrangement.* It also admirably suits the context: for, having enumerated the historic advantages of the Jewish people, he concludes by stating one which ranks far higher than all,—that from them sprung, according to the flesh, He who is God over all, blessed for ever.”

* * * * *

This verse is one of several clear testimonies to the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ which have been weakened or eliminated in many of the modern versions without sufficient evidence from the Greek manuscripts, without sufficient support from ancient versions and ancient writers, and against the counsel of some of the most distinguished scholars. The verse as rendered in the English Authorised Version is very well authenticated and the reader need have no doubt that in this passage the text has been preserved and transmitted in its purity and accurately translated into our tongue, setting forth the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the glorious Deity of the Redeemer, recorded by the Apostle—“not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.”

It is not a sufficient answer to assert that the truth is taught in other places, for this essential truth is taught here in this verse, and those translations which eliminate this inspired testimony to Christ’s Godhead, or relegate it to a secondary place in the margin, or question its authenticity in a marginal note, should be rejected as untrustworthy.

Further information literature is available on request.

TRINITARIAN BIBLE SOCIETY
217 Kingston Road, London, SW19 3NN, England