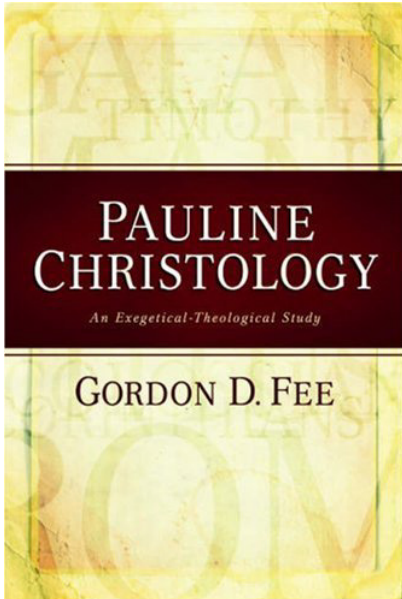


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Fee, Gordon D.

Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study

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Whenever Gordon Fee, Professor Emeritus of New Testament at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, publishes anything, it is an event. It is little wonder, then, that a volume the breadth and scope of *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* should garner the attention that it has. Fee, given his previous works on Paul and his letters, especially the landmark Pauline pneumatology *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (1994), provides us with another exegetical feast with his latest effort, this time addressing Paul's view of Christ, filling a surprising void in Pauline scholarship.

Fee begins by defining the meaning of Pauline Christology (1–27). First, he notes the admittedly artificial distinction between “*who* Christ *was/is*, in distinction to the *work* of Christ—*what* Christ did for us as Savior (soteriology)” (1, emphasizes original). This distinction is not one that Paul makes, as Fee notes: “If Christ is the singular passion of Paul's life, the focus of that passion is on the saving work of Christ” (1–2). Fee realizes that the bifurcation of Christology and soteriology leads to other obstacles in producing a study of Paul's Christology, in that only Col 1:15–17 can be described as “intentionally christological” in the whole of the Pauline corpus (2). Another difficulty is due to the contingent nature of Paul's letters: “his ‘theology’ emerges by way of presupposition or affirmation but not by explication”(2). Yet another problem is the presuppositions that

the author himself brings to the texts. Fee writes, “The difficulty lies in recognizing one’s own presuppositions and asking in every case whether our reading of Paul is based on what Paul himself believed or on what we have long assumed he believed” (4). Fee continues to define his terms by describing what he means by “Pauline” (i.e., the “canonical Paul” [5]) and noting that he approaches Paul’s letters in “an assumed chronological order,” with an eye toward the “possibilities of development” in his latter letters (6). If the aforementioned provide Fee with methodological difficulties, he next turns to the theological difficulties that Paul’s Christology present. First, Paul was an “avid monotheist” (7). Second, “the primary focus in all the Pauline letters is on *salvation* in Christ, ... but in the process, Paul regularly speaks of Christ in ways that indicate that ‘the Son of God’ is also included in the divine identity” (7, emphasis original). Indeed, “The attempt to extract Christology from Paul’s letters apart from soteriology is like asking a devout Jew of Paul’s era to talk about God in the abstract, without mentioning his mighty deeds of creation and redemption” (8). Nevertheless, due to Paul’s encounter with the risen Jesus, Paul’s worldview is now entirely christocentric, replacing his former theocentric view. Fee states, “God the Father is always the ‘first cause’ of everything and thus always appears in the primary position as the ‘prime mover’; nonetheless, the focus of Paul’s life is on Christ himself” (9). Fee leaves aside the issues of Chalcedon and Nicaea because they lie “beyond Paul’s expressed concerns”(9). Rather, the issue of this book is “the singular concern to investigate the Pauline data regarding the person of Christ in terms of whom Paul understood him to be and how he viewed the relationship between Christ, as the Son of God and Lord, and the one God, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is therefore now revealed as our Lord as well” (9). Fee is convinced that Paul had a high Christology, due to the issue of the Son’s preexistence, sharing in common much with the Gospel of John and the author of Hebrews (9–10).

Next Fee provides a brief review of the secondary literature on Pauline Christology in the twentieth century (10–15). Fee admits to being influenced by Larry Hurtado (*Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, 2003) and Richard Bauckham (*God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament*, 1998). Fee then tackles the issue of Paul’s use of the Septuagint (LXX), particularly with regard to the assertion that for Paul κύριος equals *Adonai* equals Yahweh of the LXX. The questions raised in this issue are: Did “Paul know and use a form of the Greek Bible similar to the manuscripts that come three centuries after Paul wrote his letters?”; and (2) “would Paul’s readers understand the significance of applying κύριος to Christ?” (20). Regarding the form of Greek Bible Paul used, Fee correctly states that in some instances the wording Paul cites is “verbally identical” to the form(s) of LXX known to us (20). In cases where the wording is different, Paul exercises “freedom” in citation, while in yet others Paul “echoes the language of the Septuagint with enough precision to give one confidence in the ultimate

source of his own language” (20–21). To answer the audience-reception question, Fee cites two reasons for his positive evaluation of Paul’s readers: (1) the volume of citations and echoes of the Old Testament that are found throughout Paul’s letters; and (2) rather than viewing limited literacy in the ancient world (15 percent) as a hindrance to Paul’s audience in detecting scriptural allusions and echoes (see Stanley), Fee stresses that the oral/aural culture of Paul’s time would have taken on a different sort of literacy akin to the echoes of the KJV that are found in English literature of the seventeenth to nineteenth century. Fee also cites two more recent examples, Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address and Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, stating that many in his own generation would understand the referents, even though many in the next generation would not (24). In the final section of Fee’s introduction he provides a numerical analysis chart where the singular and combinational uses of κύριος, Ἰησοῦς, Χριστός, υἱός, and θεός are used with respect to the Pauline canon (26–27).

After the introduction, Fee analyzes the Christology of each letter in its chronological order (chs. 2–10), beginning with the Thessalonian correspondence (31–83), 1 Corinthians (84–159), 2 Corinthians (160–206), Galatians (207–36), Romans (237–88), Colossians and Philemon (289–338), Ephesians (339–69), Philippians (370–417), and the Pastoral Epistles (418–78). What makes these chapters helpful is that Fee includes a general overview of each letter’s dating and preliminary data for analyzing the breakdown of κύριος and θεός language. These are followed by subsections where each relevant passage is discussed. Under each heading, Fee provides the passage in Greek and his own translation of it. References to Christ are in bold and references to God the Father are underlined, helping readers further delineate Paul’s argumentation. Following Fee’s analyses of the relevant texts, he provides an appendix at the end of each chapter of all verses with christological import and a subsequent statistical appendix complete with a textual apparatus discussing the combinations of titles/names that are located in each Pauline letter.

In order to make this review manageable, I will restrict myself to a few remarks on Fee’s more substantial insights before proceeding to his synthesis (481–593). As Fee mentions in his introduction (16–20), there are three key texts (1 Cor 8:6, Col 1:13–17; Phil 2:6–11) that put forward most of the christological data to be discussed in the exegetical chapters. First, 1 Cor 8:6, a restatement of the Shema (Deut 6:4), is part of a larger section (8:1–11:1) that deals with the insistence of the Corinthians on their perceived right to attend festive meals in pagan temples. As Fee correctly observes, Paul has expanded the Shema by dividing it into two parts while keeping “one” intact (90). Θεός now refers to the Father, while κύριος refers to Jesus Christ the Son (90). For Paul, the Shema asserts that the one God “stands over all pagan deities” in two crucial aspects, as Creator and Ruler (90). Furthermore, and more surprisingly, Jesus Christ as Lord is the effective agent of creation. Fee remarks: “Thus the Father has created all things through the agency of the

Son, who as the one Lord is also—and now Paul’s second point is established—the agent of their redemption” (90–91). Paul also presupposes Christ’s preexistence as the Son of God due to the assertion that “‘through him are τὰ πάντα [all things],’ with creation in view, and *Son of God*, because of Paul’s identity of the ‘one God’ as ‘the Father’” (91; emphasis original). Lastly, Fee states emphatically that Christ is not to be identified with personified Wisdom, a point he returns to later in this study (93; see appendix A).

Colossians 1:13–17 provides Fee with his next key text. Here Fee actually begins at verse 12, which celebrates Gentile inclusion (293). In “The Messianic Son of God” section (1:12–14), Fee lists six elements that constitute the Old Testament story: (1) creation; (2) Abraham (with the promise of Gentile inclusion); (3) the exodus (deliverance from bondage and gaining the inherited land); (4) the giving of the law (esp. Deuteronomy, with its anticipation of Israel’s failure regarding the law); (5) the Davidic kingship; and (6) exile and the promised restoration (the eschatological consummation). All these elements with the exception of the fourth are picked up in Col 1:12–17. For verses 12–14, elements three and five are directly put into play through citation of and allusion to the Old Testament. In addition, Paul celebrates Gentile inclusion with the echoing of both dimensions of the exodus. In “The Eternal Son of God, Creator and Lord of All” section (1:15–17), the Son is referred to as the εἰκὼν (“image,” 1:15) of the invisible God, echoing Gen 1:1, and as the πρωτότοκος (“firstborn”), echoing what Yahweh says about the “Davidic scion” (Ps 89:27 [88:28 LXX]). This latter term for Fee means that the Son is “heir and sovereign with regard to creation” (301). Much more could be said about these verses (302–3), but as Fee notes: “A higher Christology does not exist in the NT. Indeed, what is said here by Paul as something that the Colossians should be in tune with, one has to assume that such a Christology existed in the church from a very early time” (303).

The last of Fee’s main passages (Phil 2:6–11) is what he refers to as “the Christ story” (374). Here Fee is at his exegetical finest as he denies any verbal link to those who hold to an Adamic christological understanding of this passage. First, with the phrase ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων (“who being in the form of God”), the participial “who being” implies that Christ was always in the form of God, standing in temporal contrast with the phrase “he emptied himself (2:7a). This also makes best sense of the final participle of this sentence, “having come in the likeness of human beings”(2:7b). Second, concerning the word μορφή (“form”) Fee rightly suggests that this metaphorical term was

precisely the right word for this dual usage, to characterize both the reality (his being God) and the metaphor (his taking the role of a slave) since it denotes “form” or “shape” not usually in terms of the external features by which something is recognized but of those characteristics and qualities that are essential to it. Hence it means *that which truly characterizes a given reality*. (378, emphasis original)

Thus, those who push for a semantic overlap between εἰκῶν and μορφή have a nearly impossible task in that “there is not a single verbal connection of any kind between this passage and the Septuagint of Gen 1–3” (379). After reflecting further, Fee rules out any conceptual linkage to the second Adam theory, noting that “the intended contrast in the ‘not/but’ clause seems far more likely to be a deliberate confrontation with the emperor and the capricious ‘gods’ of the Greco-Roman pantheon” (383).

One area of Fee’s study sure to cause a stir is his insistence that Rom 9:5 and Titus 2:13 do not refer to Christ as “God.” Concerning the former passage (272–77), Fee opts for the reading “the Messiah as to his earthly life. May God who is over all things be blessed forever” (273). The reading that most NT scholars favor is “the Messiah as to his earthly life, who is God over all, blessed forever” (273). The reason for the controversy is the ambiguity in punctuation. Fee bases his reasoning for denying that “Christ” refers to “God” on a number of points: (1) the restatement of the Shema in 1 Cor 8:6, where Paul makes the distinction between “one God” and “one Lord” (2); Paul’s doxological use of εὐλογητός especially in Rom 1:25, where the “Creator” refers back to God (cf. 2 Cor 11:31); (3) the theocentric nature of Romans as a whole, which supports regarding the Messiah as the climactic moment of Israel’s God-given privileges; (4) the titular use of ὁ Χριστός, which casts doubt on the possibility that ὁ ὢν ... θεὸς stands in apposition with “the Messiah”; (5a) the use of ὁ ὢν here and 2 Cor 11:31 probably further identifies “our God and Father,” not “our Lord Jesus”; and (5b) Paul’s use of the “enclosed word order” where the preposition “over all things” occurs between ὁ ὢν and its noun θεὸς probably picks up what is said in Rom 1:25 (i.e., “the blessing” where the emphasis is on God as Creator). Thus a full stop must take place after “earthly life.”

A few comments are in order. (1) Concerning Fee’s point regarding the reconfiguration of the Shema (1 Cor 8:6), one might ask, since both the “Father” and “Lord Jesus Christ” constitute the “one God,” is it that far of a stretch to say that Paul implies that Christ is God (see Phil 2:6; Col 1:15; 1 Cor 8:6) (2) If εὐλογητός refers to God the Father, it would be inconsistent with other doxologies to God the Father in the LXX and New Testament where εὐλογητός comes *before* references to God the Father (Gen 9:26; 14:20; 24:27; and ca. fifty additional LXX references; Luke 1:68; Rom 1:25; 9:5; 2 Cor 1:3; Eph 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3). (3) Following this point, ὁ ὢν would reference the antecedent “Christ,” in keeping with the conventions of almost all other doxologies that attach themselves to the preceding word (Rom 1:25; 2 Cor 11:31; Gal 1:5; Phil 4:20; 1 Pet 4:11; etc.) (4) Fee’s statement about the strangeness of blessing “the Messiah as God when a doxology to God for all the privileges seems to be much more fitting” (275) depends on a narrow reading of this passage, in which Paul is grieving over Israel (9:1ff). If Christ is equated with God, Paul’s grief is exacerbated, for they have not only rejected Jesus as the Messiah but have also rejected the one who shares in the divine identity with the Father (see Thomas R.

Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001], 179–80).

In the synthesis section (481–593), Fee attempts thematically to sketch out the analyses of the christological passages that came before in order to demonstrate Paul's Christology in light of his theology. Chapter 11, "Christ, the Divine Savior" (481–93), attempts to locate Christ's role in salvation and to examine the place of "Christ devotion" in Paul. With regard to "salvation in Christ," Fee concludes: "for Paul 'salvation in Christ' has the creation of a people for God's name as its goal and that this concern is especially to be seen as being in continuity with the people of God as constituted by the former covenant" (486). As far as Christ devotion is concerned, Fee makes the point that Christ as Savior is not to be relegated to as the "mediator of salvation" but additionally becomes "the object of devotion and worship in the Pauline corpus, both for Paul and his churches" (494).

Chapter 12 deals with Christ as the preexistent and incarnate Savior (500–512). Fee notes that for Paul Christ's preexistence is always "argued from" and never "argued for" (501). Fee helpfully shows what for Paul and his churches what Christ's preexistence looks like with the aid of three separate categories: (1) Christ as the agent of creation and redemption (1 Cor 8:6; 10:4,9; Col 1:15–20; Col 2:9); (2) Christ as the "impoverished" redeemer (2 Cor 8:9; Phil 2:6–8; 2 Tim 1:9–10); and (3) the Son as the "sent one" (Gal 4:4–7; Rom 8:3–4; 1 Tim 1:15; 2:5; 3:16).

In chapter 13, "Jesus as Second Adam" (513–29), Fee asserts a "middling position" where interpreters do not limit themselves to explicit references to an Adam/Christ connection but ask "what else in Paul's writings actually makes a comparison of Christ with Adam viable" (513). Fee's "middling position" is limited to two kinds of passages that echo Gen 1–2: (1) explicit contrasts between Christ and Adam, where Christ is viewed as the "progenitor of the new creation"; and (2) where Christ is viewed as the "true bearer of the divine image" (523).

The next two chapters—"Jesus: Jewish Messiah and Son of God" (530–57) and "Jesus: Jewish Messiah and Exalted Lord" (558–85)—constitute the "two primary christological emphases" while holding the "keys to Paul's answer to the question 'Who is Christ?'" (482). Fee suggests that "Son of God" and "exalted Lord" "find their roots in Jewish messianism, based on the Davidic kingship" (530). After listing the basic narrative of Israel's story (see above), Fee aims to show how Paul came to understand the "eternal Son of God" in terms of "Davidic kingship" by examining several texts (e.g., Exod 4:22–23; 2 Sam 7:13–14, 18; Pss 2:2, 7–8; 72:1) and turning once more to 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:13–15; and Phil 2:6–8. It is with regards to the latter text that Fee once again asserts that Paul understood Christ as preexistent and the eternal Son of God. Moreover, the relational

aspect between the Father and the Son plays a part in creation with the Father as “the source and goal of all things, and the Son as the divine agent of all things, including especially the creation itself” (552). Furthermore, “As Son of God he bears the image of the Father, and he did so in his humanity; and it is the same God who is re-creating a newly formed people of God back into the divine image” (552).

The latter chapter covers the “most significant of the christological motifs that emerge in Paul’s letters and thus to the absolute heart of Pauline Christology: Jesus as ὁ κύριος (the Lord)” (558). Fee states that this “name-turned title” forces the interpreter to understand Christ as “full deity” for the following reasons: (1) the divine Lord “shares all divine prerogatives” with God the Father except for the initiation of the “saving event” (559); (2) this phenomenon occurs “within the context of absolute monotheism” (559); and (3) the Son also shares “redemptive and mediatorial roles with God the Father.” With these factors in play, “we either give up monotheism ... or find a way to include the Lord Jesus Christ within the divine identity of the one God...” (559).

From where did Paul’s understanding of Jesus as ὁ κύριος derive? Fee believes that the title that Paul uses to recount his conversion/call in defending his apostleship (1 Cor 9:1; “I saw the Lord”) came from Jesus’ own interpretation of Ps 110:1 (Mark 12:35–37), a passage that Paul draws upon no less than four times in his letters (1 Cor 15:27; Eph 1:20; Rom 8:34; Col 3:1). Nevertheless, unlike the LXX, Paul never uses κύριος as a designation for God; rather, he uses θεός. The title is also used “predominately of Christ’s present reign and anticipated coming, rarely of his earthly life” (561). For Paul, “Lord” is not a reference to Messiah but is the title by which Paul includes Christ in the divine identity.

Next Fee examines the title by means of the “Name” (562). Fee begins again with 1 Cor 8:6, noting that the reference to the “one Lord” has in view “the preexistent divine agent of creation as well as the historical agent of redemption” (563). Moreover, these themes are picked up later in 1 Cor 10:25–26, where Paul views Jesus as “the Lord of Ps 24:1, to whom the whole of creation belongs” (564). The next passage Fee turns to is Phil 2:10–11, where Jesus is vindicated by being given “the Name” (Phil 2:9b). He concludes: “So the risen Christ is not Yahweh, who is always referred to by Paul as θεός (God); rather, the preexistent Son of God returns to receive the honor of having bestowed on him the substitute name for God, which for Paul then becomes a title for Christ as ‘Lord’ ” (564). The next major section concerns the ways in which Jesus as Lord now assumes roles reserved for God alone, such as eschatological judge (568). Concerning 1 Thess 1:7–8, it is concluded “by having ‘the Name’ bestowed on him, he assumes Yahweh’s divine roles when he comes to judge” (571). Paul’s intertextual use of the LXX’s use of κύριος (= *Adonai*/Yahweh) “allows him to predicate his conviction of Christ’s full deity without calling him θεός, who is always the Father of the Son in Pauline usage” (573). Christ’s full

deity ensures his sharing in the divine prerogatives usually reserved for God alone. Concluding the chapter, Fee lists no less than eighteen shared prerogatives between “the Lord” and God (576–84).

The final chapter is entitled “Christ and the Spirit: Paul as Proto-Trinitarian” (586–93). Fee’s concerns in this chapter are twofold: What are the christological implications of Paul’s understanding of the relationship with Christ and the Spirit? Where does Paul fit “in the trajectory that caused these early thoroughgoing monotheists to speak of Christ and the Spirit and their relationship to God the Father in such a way that finally resulted in the Trinitarian resolution of the early fourth century” (586)? Paul never lets on to how a “strict monotheist” could talk about God in a triadic way (586). Fee concludes that Paul understood the Spirit as distinct from the Father and the Son, mediating the presence of the latter, all while retaining his strict monotheism (592). It is no wonder that Paul’s “economic Trinity” provided the language and thought for Nicaea (593). Lastly, Fee provides an extended discussion on the role of personified Wisdom with Christ, finding it wholly lacking (595–630), and an appendix on Paul’s usage of κύριος texts from the LXX (631–38).

To say that this work is monumental is to understate the case. Although one may have a few quibbles with some of the conclusions reached here, Fee has still managed to offer compelling readings of key texts, all the while filling a large lacuna in Pauline scholarship. He helpfully walks the reader through his exegetical decisions one text at a time and provides a synthesis that gathers all the relevant data under consideration, making this a goldmine of a reference book. Any future work on Paul’s Christology or christological studies in general will be forced to reckon with this magnificent volume for years to come.