

Does the Son of God Receive Worship?

When Satan offered Christ the kingdoms of the whole world, saying, “All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me[,] [t]hen saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matthew 4:9-10; cf. Luke 4:7-8). Worship is only to be directed to the true God, Jehovah. To worship any created being is abominable idolatry. An examination of the words for worship in the New Testament demonstrate that the Lord Jesus Christ received worship, just as the Father did. This is clear and powerful evidence for His true Deity.

Satan asked for Christ’s worship in Matthew 4:9-10 employing the standard Greek word for *worship*,¹ which appears 60 times² in the New Testament. His request was scornfully rejected, the Lord Jesus affirming that God is the One who deserves worship. The New Testament indicates that when people worshipped idols, God judged them severely (Acts 7:43), promising those who worship false gods the lake of fire (Revelation 14:9-11; 21:8). When Cornelius met the apostle Peter, “and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him[,] [then] Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man” (Acts 10:25-26). Peter did not receive worship—he was but a man, a created being. The apostle John, overwhelmed at the glory presented to him in the book of Revelation, records, “I John saw these things, and heard *them*. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See *thou do it* not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God. . . . I fell at [the] feet [of the angel that had given him the vision] to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God” (Revelation 22:8-9; 19:10).

While worship of created beings is severely forbidden, both God and the particular Person of the Father receive worship: “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh

¹ The verb προσκυνέω. καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ, Ταῦτα πάντα σοι δώσω, ἐὰν πεσὼν προσκυνήσῃς μοι. τότε λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ὑπαγε, Σατανᾶ γέγραπται γάρ, Κύριον τὸν Θεὸν σου προσκυνήσεις, καὶ αὐτῷ μόνῳ λατρεύσεις (Matthew 4:9-10).

² The complete list of references is: Matthew 2:2, 8, 11; 4:9-10; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 18:26; 20:20; 28:9, 17; Mark 5:6; 15:19; Luke 4:7-8; 24:52; John 4:20-24; 9:38; 12:20; Acts 7:43; 8:27; 10:25; 24:11; 1Cor 14:25; Hebrews 1:6; 11:21; Revelation 3:9; 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 9:20; 11:1, 16; 13:4, 8, 12, 15; 14:7, 9, 11; 15:4; 16:2; 19:4, 10, 20; 20:4; 22:8-9. It should be noted that while the English of the KJV may be confusing in Luke 14:10, no Greek word for the worship of God (προσκυνέω, λατρεύω, σέβω, etc.) is found in the passage; the verse simply states that the humble man will receive δόξα.

such to worship him” (John 4:23; cf. vv. 20-24).³ In what should very deeply trouble the Arian, the Lord Jesus Christ regularly receives worship in the New Testament. Indeed, references to the worship of Him outnumber references to the worship of the Father! Passages that specify the worship of Jesus Christ include:⁴

Matthew 2:2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to **worship** him.

Matt. 2:11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and **worshipped** him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

³ In John 12:20; Acts 24:11; 1 Corinthians 14:25; Hebrews 11:21, the true God, without further specification, receives worship. Matthew 18:26 also falls in the category of the worship of God, and specifically the Father, for although here the “master” in the Lord Jesus’ parable receives worship, he represents the “heavenly Father” (18:35) to whom sinners owe an immense sin debt greater than any possibility of payment (18:24). While Revelation 3:9 would be the best attempt to affirm that προσκυνέω does not necessarily refer to genuine worship peculiar to God alone in the New Testament, and the syntax of the verse is comparable to Luke 4:7 and Revelation 15:4 (cf. also Isaiah 45:14; 49:23; 60:14), a strong argument, it is possible that the verse speaks about the ungodly falling down to offer genuine worship to God “before,” that is, in the presence of, the church. The word “before” (ἐνώπιον) can “pertain to a position in front of an entity, before someone or something” or pertain “to being present or in view, in the sight of, in the presence of, among” someone or something (BDAG). Neither the first, nor especially the second of these common significations (which is found elsewhere in Revelation; cf. 7:11, 15; 13:13; 14:3, 10) for this preposition require that the church itself be the recipient of worship, rather than God in the presence of the assembly. On this view, “I will make them to come and worship before thy feet” (προσκυνήσωσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου) does not mean that the church itself received the worship, but that the ungodly will be compelled to come and worship God in the presence of these Christians in the eschatological judgment (Philippians 2:9-11) if they do not repent of their persecuting actions, fall down before them, and worship God in this life (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:24-25; cf. also the historical interaction of the church at Philadelphia with Judaism as recorded in Ignatius’ epistle to the Philadelphians 6:1; also note the different preposition in Revelation 22:8, where what is forbidden is John’s action when he ἔπεσα προσκυνῆσαι ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ποδῶν τοῦ ἀγγέλου). Compare also Revelation 3:9 to 2 Kings 18:22 (LXX), καὶ ὅτι εἶπας πρὸς με ἐπὶ κύριον θεὸν πεποιθήμεν οὐχὶ αὐτὸς οὗτος οὐ ἀπέστησεν Εζεκίας τὰ ὑψηλὰ αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰ θυσιαστήρια αὐτοῦ καὶ εἶπεν τῷ Ιουδα καὶ τῇ Ιερουσαλημ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τούτου προσκυνήσετε ἐν Ιερουσαλημ, “And whereas thou hast said to me, We trust on the Lord God: is not this he, whose high places and altars Ezekias has removed, and has said to Juda and Jerusalem, Ye shall *worship before this altar* in Jerusalem?” Here the altar is not worshipped, but God is “before” the altar. Just as “before” does not of itself necessitate that the church itself receives the worship, so the connection of “worship” and the “feet” in Revelation 3:9 does not require this position. In Psalm 98:5, LXX, “worship the footstool of His feet” does not mean that the footstool itself is worshipped, but God is worshipped at the place where His “feet” are (cf. Psalm 131:7, LXX); God, not the footstool for the feet, receives the worship.

The conclusion that the worship of Revelation 3:9 is directed to God in the presence of the church is syntactically defensible. Since Revelation 19:10; 22:9, specifically forbid worship (προσκυνέω) of the created order, and the command is given to only “worship God,” it would seem out of place to conclude that worship is given to humans in Revelation 3:9. Thus, the conclusion that 3:9 refers to the worship of God in the presence of the members of the church, thus vindicating their faith, is to be preferred, and no exception to the rule that worship with προσκυνέω is properly rendered to God alone is found in the New Testament.

⁴ Note also Matthew 2:8; 28:17; Mark 5:6; 15:19; and the further passages mentioned below.

Matt. 8:2 And, behold, there came a leper and **worshipped** him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

Matt. 9:18 While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and **worshipped** him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.

Matt. 15:25 Then came she and **worshipped** him, saying, Lord, help me.

Matt. 20:20 Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, **worshipping** *him*, and desiring a certain thing of him.

Matt. 28:9 And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and **worshipped** him.

Luke 24:52 And they **worshipped** him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy:

John 9:38 And he said, Lord, I believe. And he **worshipped** him.

Many individuals, and the disciples both before and after Christ's resurrection, worshipped Him. They did so because they recognized that, as true Son of the Father, He possessed the identical Divine nature, and was equal Deity to He who begat Him: "Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God" (Matthew 14:33). Nor can the disciples somehow all have been mistaken, and somehow worshipped the Lord Jesus over and over again by mistake, because He never rebuked them for their worship, but accepted it as entirely proper and appropriate to Him—which, had He not been true God, would have constituted a terrible sin (cf. Acts 10:25-26; Revelation 22:8-9). Furthermore, God the Father specifically commanded that His Son receive worship—indeed, all the angels⁵ were commanded to worship Jesus, even when He was still a baby in Mary's womb: "And again, when [the Father] bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him" (Hebrews 1:6; cf. Luke 2:12-15). Not only do believers on earth, and all the angels, worship the Lord Jesus Christ, but worship of the Son, equal to the worship of the Father, will be the joy of the saints in heaven. As "all the angels stood round about the throne, and *about* the elders [representing believers] and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God" (Revelation 7:11; 11:16; 15:4; 19:4), and as believers "fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power" (Revelation 4:10-11), so do they offer the same worship to Christ. The apostle John seeing, in his vision of heaven, "in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders . . . a Lamb as it had been slain [Jesus Christ] . . . the elders [representing believers] fell down before the Lamb,

⁵ How the Lord Jesus Christ could be the angel Michael, as affirmed by the Watchtower, when Michael was, with all the other angels, worshipping Christ, is a great conundrum for defenders of the Watchtower heresy.

having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints [prayer and worship offered to Christ, as to God]. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, *be* unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four *and* twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever” (Revelation 5:6-14). As believers fall down and worship God the Father, and offer Him praise and adoration (4:10-11), so do they fall down⁶ before (5:6, 8) and worship, pray to and praise, and adore the Son (5:8-14).⁷ Indeed, the entire created order, “every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them,”

⁶ Furthermore, in the book of Revelation, to prostrate oneself or *fall down* (πίπτω) before a person is always connected to worship, yet both Father and Son are regularly fallen before and thus worshipped in the book (Revelation 1:17; 4:10; 5:8, 14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4; contrast Revelation 19:10; 22:8; cf. Esther 3:5). This is consistent with the rest of the New Testament, where godly people only fall down before God—but regularly do so before the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 2:11; 4:9; 17:6; 18:26, 29; 26:39; Mark 5:22; 9:20; 14:35; Luke 5:12; 8:41; 17:16; John 11:32; 18:6; Acts 5:5, 10; 9:4; 10:25; 22:7; 1 Corinthians 14:25; Revelation 1:17; 4:10; 5:8, 14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4, 10; 22:8).

⁷ Note that while Revelation identifies the true God, the sole fit object of worship, as the One who lives for ever and ever (ζάω + εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων; 4:9, 10; 5:14; 10:6; 15:7), the Son is the Living One who lives for ever and ever, employing the same Greek phrase (ὁ ζῶν . . . καὶ ἰδοὺ, ζῶν εἰμὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, ἀμήν. 1:18). Worship of He who lives for ever and ever is not only the worship of the Father, but also of the Son. Indeed, Revelation first identifies the Son as He who is the Living One, the Possessor of self-existent life, before identifying the God whom all creation worships as He who possesses this attribute and title.

One should also note that the statement that the “elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints,” is not just an indication that the Son is the fit object of prayer, indicating His omniscience, omnipotence, and Deity, but also a very explicit statement of worship. This incense . . . [from the] golden censer . . . [was] offer[ed] . . . with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, *which came* with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God” (Revelation 8:3-4; cf. Psalm 141:1-2). The incense of prayer is offered to Christ, but it is offered to God, because Christ is God. The image comes from the altar of incense in the tabernacle, where the incense is offered “before the LORD” (Leviticus 4:7; 16:12; Deuteronomy 33:10; etc.). As the incense at the OT typical altar was offered to Jehovah, so the incense of prayer offered in the NT antitype to Christ is offered to Jehovah, for the Son is true God. As physical sacrifices under Moses were offered to God alone, so the spiritual sacrifice of prayer, being made to both Father and Son, is nonetheless made to only the true God.

ascribe equal “blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, [to] him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever” (5:13).⁸

In accordance with the fact that the New Testament restricts the proper use of the Greek verb *proskuneo*, to worship, to the true God, but nonetheless offers very numerous examples of worship of the Lord Jesus Christ, so the earliest patristic writers likewise restrict worship (*proskuneo*) to the true God, explicitly stating that no one and nothing else should receive worship.⁹ God alone receives *worship*, while kings, magistrates, and similar lesser rulers, as created beings, receive simply *honor*.¹⁰ “Therefore I will rather honor the king, not, indeed, worshipping him, but praying for him. But God, the living and true God, I worship, knowing that the king is made by Him. You will say, then, to me, ‘Why do you not worship the king?’ Because he is not made to be worshipped, but to be revered with lawful honor, for he is not a god, but a man appointed by God, not to be worshipped, but to judge justly.”¹¹ Nonetheless, the earliest Christian writings testify that worship is offered equally to the Father and the Son. Consider the following examples:

1.) We will never be able either to abandon the Christ who suffered for the salvation of the whole world of those who are saved, the blameless on behalf of sinners, or to **worship** any one else. For this one, who is the Son of God, we **worship**, but the martyrs we love as disciples and imitators of the Lord, as they deserve, on account of their matchless devotion to their own King and Teacher. May we also become their partners and fellow-disciples! (Martyrdom of Polycarp 17:2-3)¹²

⁸ It should be noted that the proof for the worship of Christ from the book of Revelation stands even independently of the question of the New Testament significance of *προσκυνέω*, *λατρεύω*, or any other individual Greek word. Even if one were to successfully demonstrate that none of the verbs ascribing worship to the Son were sufficient to establish the doctrine that He receives worship—which cannot be done—the variegated ascriptions of equal glory and honor to the Father and Son in Revelation would establish the propriety of the worship of Christ.

⁹ 2 Clement 1:6; 3:1; Martyrdom of Polycarp 3:1; Diognetes 2:4-5; Athenagoras, Plea for the Christians 16; Theophilus of Antioch to Autolycus, 1:11; 2:35; etc. Dialogue with Trypho 52, 56 are not exceptions, for they clearly also speak of Christ as the object of worship in context.

¹⁰ Cf. also Athenagoras, *Plea for Christians* 16, for the worship/honor (*προσκυνέω/θεραπεύω*, *τιμάω* etc.) distinction, similar to the Biblical truth confirmed by a comparison of Romans 13:7 and Matthew 4:10; kings receive “honor,” God receives “worship.”

¹¹ *Theophilus of Antioch to Autolycus* 1:11: οἴγαροῦν μᾶλλον τιμήσω τὸν βασιλέα, οὐ προσκυνῶν αὐτῷ, ἀλλὰ εὐχόμενος ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ. Θεῷ δὲ τῷ ὄντως Θεῷ καὶ ἀληθεῖ προσκυνῶ, εἰδώς, ὅτι ὁ βασιλεὺς ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ γέγονεν. Ἐρεῖς οὖν μοι Διὰ τί οὐ προσκυνεῖς τὸν βασιλέα; Ὅτι οὐκ εἰς τὸ προσκυνεῖσθαι γέγονεν, ἀλλὰ εἰς τὸ τιμᾶσθαι τῇ νομίμῳ τιμῇ· θεὸς γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν, ἀλλὰ ἄνθρωπος ὑπὸ Θεοῦ τεταγμένος, οὐκ εἰς τὸ προσκυνεῖσθαι, ἀλλὰ εἰς τὸ δικαίως κρίνειν.

¹² ὅτι οὔτε τὸν Χριστὸν ποτε καταλιπεῖν δυνησόμεθα, τὸν ὑπὲρ τῆς τοῦ παντὸς κόσμου τῶν σωζομένων σωτηρίας παθόντα, ἄμωμον ὑπὲρ ἁμαρτωλῶν, οὔτε ἕτερόν τινα σέβεσθαι. τοῦτον μὲν γὰρ υἱὸν ὄντα τοῦ θεοῦ προσκυνοῦμεν, τοὺς δὲ μάρτυρας ὡς μαθητὰς

2.) Whence to God alone we render **worship** . . . next to God, we **worship** and love the Word who is from the unbegotten and ineffable God, since also He became man for our sakes, that becoming a partaker of our sufferings, He might also bring us healing. (Apology of Justin 1:17; 2:13).¹³

3.) “[W]e confess . . . the Father of righteousness and temperance and the other virtues . . . [and] both Him, and the Son . . . and the prophetic Spirit, we **worship** and adore,¹⁴ knowing them in reason and truth, and declaring without grudging to every one who wishes to learn, as we have been taught” (Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1:6).¹⁵

4.) You shall **worship** the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve. . . . [A]t the time of [Christ’s] birth, Magi who came from Arabia **worshipped** Him . . . Now this king Herod, at the time when the Magi came to him from Arabia, and said they knew from a star which appeared in the heavens that a King had been

καὶ μιμητὰς τοῦ κυρίου ἀγαπῶμεν ἀξίως ἕνεκεν εὐνοίας ἀνυπερβλήτου τῆς εἰς τὸν ἴδιον βασιλέα καὶ διδάσκαλον ὧν γένοιτο καὶ ἡμᾶς συγκοινωνοὺς τε καὶ συμμαθητὰς γενέσθαι.

¹³ “Ὅθεν Θεὸν μὲν μόνον προσκυνούμεν . . . Τὸν γὰρ ἀπὸ ἀγεννήτου καὶ ἀρρήτου Θεοῦ Λόγον μετὰ τὸν Θεὸν προσκυνούμεν καὶ ἀγαπῶμεν, ἐπειδὴ καὶ δι’ ἡμᾶς ἄνθρωπος γέγονεν, ὅπως καὶ τῶν παθῶν τῶν ἡμετέρων συμμετοχος γενόμενος, καὶ ἴασις ποιήσεται.

¹⁴ The verb rendered “adore,” σέβω, is also used in the New Testament exclusively for the worship of God (or for the condemned worship of idolators who falsely believe they are worshipping God, cf. Acts 19:27—what is excluded is any use of σέβω in the New Testament for honor appropriate and Scripturally acceptable for created beings, for anyone less than the one true God), although, like λατρεύω, it is much less common than the standard verb προσκυνέω. The verb appears in Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7; Acts 13:43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7, 13; 19:27; ten NT uses. The closely related verb σεβάζομαι is found once (Romans 1:25). The worship or adoring reverence of σέβω emphasizes the ceremonial or ritual aspects of worship. This NT exclusivity of worship in of God is also maintained in the LXX in every instance, both in the canonical books (Joshua 4:24; 22:25; Job 1:9; Jonah 1:9; Isaiah 29:13; 66:14) and in later apocryphal additions (Joshua 24:33; 2 Maccabees 1:3; 3 Maccabees 3:4; 4 Maccabees 5:24; 8:14; Ode 7:33; Wisdom 15:6, 18; Jonah 1:9; Daniel 3:33, 90; 14:3-5, 23, 27), a total of 21 instances of the verb. Josephus expresses what appears to be the traditional Jewish view that “The first commandment teaches us that there is but one God, and that we ought to worship [σέβω] him only;—the second commands us not to make the image of any living creature to worship [προσκυνέω] it” (*Antiquities* 3:91; Διδάσκει μὲν οὖν ἡμᾶς ὁ πρῶτος λόγος ὅτι θεὸς ἐστὶν εἷς καὶ τοῦτον δεῖ σεβέσθαι μόνον ὁ δὲ δεῦτερος κελεύει μηδενὸς εἰκόνα ζῶου ποιήσαντας προσκυνεῖν). However, the New Testament does not contain a specific statement prohibiting the offering of σέβω to created beings, as it prohibits the worship of προσκυνέω and λατρεύω in Matthew 4:10; this can explain the use of the word in *Shepherd of Hermas* 4:10 (cf. Philo, *On the Special Laws* 4:33) for human reverence. Even without an explicit NT prohibition of offering σέβω to creatures, the standard early Christian attitude appears to follow the Jewish attitude expressed by Josephus in condemning as those “with whom we have nothing in common, since we know them to be atheists, atheists, impious, unrighteous, and sinful, [who are] confessors of Jesus in name only, instead of worshippers of Him” (*Dialogue with Trypho* 35; ὧν οὐδενὶ κοινωνοῦμεν, οἱ γνωρίζοντες ἀθέους καὶ ἀσεβεῖς καὶ ἀδίκους καὶ ἀνόμους αὐτοὺς ὑπάρχοντας, καὶ ἀντὶ τοῦ τὸν Ἰησοῦν σεβεῖν, ὀνόματι μόνον ὁμολογεῖν). In the New Testament (John 9:31), LXX, early patristics, Josephus, Philo, and extant OT and NT pseudepigrapha, the related word θεοσεβής is used like σέβω of worship, adoration, and reverence for the true God, without the slightest hint of some sort of reference to a sort of respect for a quasi-deity, as Ariens blasphemously make of the Lord Jesus. The like is true in the same cross-section of the New Testament and related literature for the words θεοσεβέω, θεοσεβεία (1 Timothy 2:10), σεβάζομαι, etc.

¹⁵ ὁμολογοῦμεν . . . πατρὸς δικαιοσύνης καὶ σωφροσύνης, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀρετῶν. . . καὶ τὸν . . . Υἱὸν . . . καὶ τὸν . . . Πνευμά τε τὸ προφητικὸν σεβόμεθα, καὶ προσκυνούμεν, λόγῳ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ τιμῶντες, καὶ παντὶ βουλομένῳ μαθεῖν, ὡς ἐδιδάχθημεν, ἀφθόνως παραδιδόντες.

born in your country, and that they had come to **worship** Him, learned from the elders of your people that it was thus written regarding Bethlehem in the prophet: ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the princes of Judah; for out of you shall go forth the leader who shall feed my people.’ Accordingly the Magi from Arabia came to Bethlehem and **worshipped** the Child, and presented Him with gifts, gold and frankincense, and myrrh; but returned not to Herod, being warned in a revelation after **worshipping** the Child in Bethlehem. . . . As soon as the Child was born [they] came to **worship** Him, for even at His birth He was in possession of His power. . . . Accordingly, when a star rose in heaven at the time of His birth, as is recorded in the memoirs of His apostles, the Magi from Arabia, recognizing the sign by this, came and **worshipped** Him. . . . And that Christ being Lord, and God the Son of God, and appearing formerly . . . in the glory of fire as at the bush . . . let all the angels of God **worship** Him (*Dialogue with Trypho* 103, 77-78, 106, 128, 130).¹⁶

The earliest post-apostolic writings in the Christian realm perpetuated the New Testament practice of restricting worship (*proskuneo*) to the one true God—and they perpetuated the New Testament practice of worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁷ They thus clearly evidenced their belief in the plain teaching of the New Testament that Jesus Christ is

¹⁶ Κύριον τὸν Θεὸν σου προσκυνήσεις, καὶ αὐτῷ μόνῳ λατρεύσεις. . . . Ἄμα γὰρ τῷ γεννηθῆναι αὐτόν, μάγοι, ἀπὸ Ἀραβίας παραγενόμενοι, προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ . . . Καὶ γὰρ οὗτος ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἡρώδης, μαθὼν παρὰ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων τοῦ λαοῦ ὑμῶν, τότε ἐλθόντων πρὸς αὐτόν τῶν ἀπὸ Ἀραβίας μάγων, καὶ εἰπόντων, ἕξ ἀστέρος τοῦ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ φανέντος ἐγνωκέναι ὅτι βασιλεὺς γεγένηται ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ ὑμῶν, καὶ ἤλθομεν προσκυνῆσαι αὐτόν καὶ ἐν Βηθλεὲμ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων εἰπόντων, ὅτι γέγραπται ἐν τῷ προφήτῃ οὕτως: “Καὶ σὺ Βηθλεὲμ γῆ Ἰουδα, οὐδαμῶς ἐλαχίστη εἶ ἐν τοῖς ἡγεμόσιν Ἰουδα: ἐκ σοῦ γὰρ ἐξελεύσεται ἡγούμενος, ὅστις ποιμανεῖ τὸν λαόν μου.” Τῶν ἀπὸ Ἀραβίας οὖν μάγων ἐλθόντων εἰς Βηθλεὲμ, καὶ προσκυνησάντων τὸ παιδίον, καὶ προσενεγκάντων αὐτῷ δῶρα, χρυσόν, καὶ λίβανον καὶ σμύρναν, ἔπειτα κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν μετὰ τὸ προσκυνῆσαι τὸν παῖδα ἐν Βηθλεὲμ ἐκελεύσθησαν μὴ ἐπανελθεῖν πρὸς τὸν Ἡρώδη. . . . οἵτινες ἅμα τῷ γεννηθῆναι τὸ παιδίον, ἐλθόντες προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ. Καὶ γὰρ γεννηθεὶς δύνάμιν τὴν αὐτοῦ ἔσχε: . . . ὡς γέγραπται ἐν τοῖς ἀπομνημονεύμασι τῶν ἀποστόλων αὐτοῦ. οἱ ἀπὸ Ἀραβίας μάγοι ἐκ τούτου ἐπιγνόντες, παρεγένοντο, καὶ προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ. . . . Καὶ ὅτι Κύριος ὢν ὁ Χριστός, καὶ Θεὸς Θεοῦ Υἱὸς ὑπάρχων, καὶ δυνάμει φαινόμενος πρότερον . . . καὶ ἐν πυρὸς δόξῃ, ὡς ἐν τῇ βάρῃ πέφανται . . . προσκυνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες ἄγγελοι Θεοῦ.

¹⁷ This was the received view for centuries, so that “the word *προσκυνεῖν* became consecrated to the highest Christian worship” (footnote #56, Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Holy Spirit, Against the Followers of Macedonius*, in *Church Fathers — The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, ed. Philip Schaff. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, elec. acc. *Accordance Bible Software*). Likewise, for centuries after the composition of the New Testament, Christianity accepted that “worship, then, which in Greek is called *λατρεία*, and in Latin *servitus* . . . is due to God only” (Augustine, *City of God*, 10:1). It is true that the so-called Seventh Ecumenical Council of A. D. 787 decreed, against the opponents of idolatry, that images were to receive *προσκυνέω*, while God alone *λατρεύω*, but this medieval distinction ran contrary to both the Bible and the practice of the earliest Christianity, and was simply a way to justify the developing apostasy and idolatry of the Catholicism of its day. It should be noted that there was a tremendous struggle, the iconoclastic controversy, even within the tremendous error of post-Constantinian Catholicism, over this acceptance of the worship (*προσκυνέω*) of anything lesser than God, and this grievous apostasy was never accepted by those adherents of true New Testament Christianity who lived in that day.

God.¹⁸

One notes that the service of God, employing the verb *latreuo* or the noun *latreia* also provides evidence for the Deity and worship of the Son of God in early Christianity. The Lord Jesus, in Matthew 4:10, affirmed, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve [*latreuo*],” thus indicating that a *latreuo* sort of service is peculiar to the true God only. Both this verb and its related noun in every instance in the New Testament refer to an act of service or worship done to one whom the worshipper recognizes as the true God.¹⁹ While within the New Testament itself these words are less common than *proskuneo*,²⁰ and are ascribed to God without distinction of Person, rather than to either the Father under that specific name²¹ or indisputably ascribed to the Son as such (but note Revelation 22:3),²² within the canonical books of the Greek OT *latreuo*

¹⁸ This conclusion is not undermined by the fact that Greek literature before the New Testament and non-Christian contemporary writings employ προσκυνέω in a wider sense in which humans can receive it (e. g. LXX: Genesis 23:7; 2 Kings 2:15; Josephus, Antiquities 1:335; War 2:336). The evidence for the Deity of Christ from προσκυνέω is derived from the specific and restricted use of the word found in the inspired New Testament, which is corroborated by the earliest post-apostolic Christian testimony. What non-Christians worshipped, or how they used the word προσκυνέω, or the limits of meaning of the word in the *Koiné* in general, does not alter this testimony.

¹⁹ In other words, both words are used for the service of the true God in the great majority of instances (Matthew 4:10; Luke 1:74; 2:37; Acts 7:7; Romans 9:4, etc.) but they are also used for people who are deceived into thinking they are worshipping God when they are not (John 16:2) and for the worship of idols, which is condemned since such do not deserve *latreuo/latreia* (Acts 7:42). The words are never used in the New Testament for acts when the one offering the service recognizes the object of his *latreia* as less than God.

²⁰ The verb λατρεύω appears in 21 verses: Matthew 4:10; Luke 1:74; 2:37; 4:8; Acts 7:7, 42; 24:14; 26:7; 27:23; Romans 1:9, 25; Philippians 3:3; 2 Timothy 1:3; Hebrews 8:5; 9:9, 14; 10:2; 12:28; 13:10; Revelation 7:15; 22:3. The noun λατρεία appears in 5 verses, John 16:2; Romans 9:4; 12:1; Hebrews 9:1, 6.

²¹ This is not to say that the Person of the Father is not worthy of λατρεύω/λατρεία (cf. Romans 1:9), but that it would be invalid to attempt to build some sort of pro-Arian argument from the lack of specific ascription of the verb or noun in connection with the word *Son*.

²² Does Revelation 22:3 specifically ascribe *latreuo* worship to the Son as well as the Father? Even apart from the question of the recipient of *latreuo* in Revelation 22:3, the fact that there is but one throne of God and the Lamb in Revelation 22:1, 3 conclusively demonstrates Christ’s Deity. The distinction between the Lamb as “in the midst” of the throne in Revelation 5:6 and the throne actually being His in Revelation 22:1, 3 relates to the cessation of the mediatorial kingdom of the Son in history at the end of the Millenium. “When the last enemy is put down by our Lord [Jesus Christ] as the mediatorial king, when even death itself is abolished and complete harmony is established, then the purpose of his mediatorial kingdom will have been fulfilled. Then the Son will deliver up his kingdom to God the Father, to be merged into the eternal kingdom, thus being perpetuated forever, but no longer as a separate entity (1 Corinthians 15:24–28). This does not mean the end of the rule of our Lord Jesus Christ. He only ceases to reign as the mediatorial King in history. But as the only begotten Son, very God of very God, He shares with the other Persons of the Triune God the throne of the eternal kingdom. In that final and eternal city of God, center of a redeemed new heaven and earth, there is but one throne. It is called ‘the throne of God and of the Lamb’ (Revelation 22:3–5)” (“The Mediatorial Kingdom from the Acts Period to the eternal State,” Alva J. McClain. *Bibliotheca Sacra* 112:448 (Oct 1955), pg. 310). One notes also that there never is at any point in

service is peculiar to one the worshipper recognizes as God in every clear instance in the text, out of 96 instances.²³ However, the Greek LXX makes the Messiah the object of

the book of Revelation a vision of two eternally different thrones, one allegedly ontologically superior throne for the Father and an ontologically inferior throne for the Son.

But in Revelation 22:3, in the clauses “the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him,” is the “him” served the Father only, or both the Father and Son together, on account of their unity of essence? In favor of the position that the one receiving *latreuo* in Revelation 22:3 is the Father, one notes that the ones offering the service/worship are His “servants” (δοῦλοι), and the saints are such “servants” of the Father in 7:3; 10:7; 11:18; 15:3; 19:2, 5; 22:6. The Father’s name is said to be on the forehead of believers in 7:3; 9:4; and 14:1, and His name is mentioned as well in 11:18; 13:6; 15:4; 16:9, supporting a similar conclusion in 22:3-4. The ungodly want to flee from the “face” (πρόσωπον) of the Father in Revelation 6:16, while the saints look upon the “face” of the One worshipped in 22:3-4. In Revelation 7:15, the only other *latreuo* passage in Revelation, the Father is the recipient of the service/worship (cf. the dynamic in 7:9-17).

However, the view that the object of *latreuo* service/worship in Revelation 22:3-4 is both Father and Son can point out that Revelation likewise refers to the “servants” of the Son (Revelation 2:20), to fleeing from His “face” in Revelation 20:11, and to Christ’s “name” (Revelation 19:12-13, 16)—indeed, the “name” of both Father and Son are placed upon the believer (Revelation 3:12). The averred plurality of God and the Lamb in 22:3 as the recipients of *latreuo* service with the singular direct object *him* (“the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him”) is paralleled to the plurality of the reign of God and Christ, but singularity in *he shall reign*, in Revelation 11:15 (“The kingdoms of this world are become *the kingdoms* of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.”).

Whether or not both Father and Son are specifically recognized as the recipients of *latreuo* in Revelation 22:3, the singularity of their eternal throne in 22:1-3 clearly demonstrates the Deity of both (note that Revelation 3:21 likewise affirms the thronal unity of Father and Son in Divinity, while the saints share in the mediatorial throne of Christ as glorified Man), and the book of Revelation elsewhere clearly ascribes the same titles, honor, and glory to both. If Revelation 22:3 refers to the *latreuo* service of both Father and Son, it provides another proof of the Deity of the Son. Even if the verse does not, *latreuo* worship of the Father in one verse does not exclude the worthiness of the Son for the same worship, any more than *proskuneo* worship of the Father in one passage (John 4:23) proves that the Son is unworthy of the like worship (Matthew 14:33). The One on the eternal and unshakeable Divine throne—who is Father and Son and Spirit—is worthy of all worship.

²³ The complete list of references, totalling 97 when the Apocrypha is included, for λατρεύω is: Exodus 3:12; 4:23; 7:16, 26; 8:16; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7-8, 11, 24, 26; 12:31; 20:5; 23:24-25; Leviticus 18:21; Numbers 16:9; Deuteronomy 4:19, 28; 5:9; 6:13; 7:4, 16; 8:19; 10:12, 20; 11:13, 16, 28; 12:2; 13:3, 7, 14; 17:3; 28:14, 36, 47-48; 29:17, 25; 30:17; 31:20; Joshua 22:5, 27; 23:7, 16; 24:2, 14-16, 18-22, 24, 29; Judges 2:11, 13, 19; 3:6-7; 10:6, 10, 13, 16; 2 Samuel 15:8; 2 Kings 17:12, 16, 33, 35; 21:21; 2 Chronicles 7:19; Ezekiel 20:32; Daniel 3:12, 14, 18, 95; 4:37; 6:17, 21, 27; 7:14; 1 Esdras 1:4; 4:54; Judith 3:8; 3 Maccabees 6:6; Ode 9:75; Sirach 4:14. For λατρεία, the complete list is: Exodus 12:25-26; 13:5; Joshua 22:27; 1 Chronicles 28:13; 1 Maccabees 1:43; 2:19, 22; 3 Maccabees 4:14, nine instances, five of them in the canonical OT books. The apparent exception in Deuteronomy 28:48 is a judgment upon the ungodly Israelites who are given up to worship false gods, including men who deify themselves (cf. Deuteronomy 28:36, 64; Daniel 3:12-18); Esther 3:3-5), and in Numbers 16:9 λατρεύειν αὐτοῖς could be “to minister for them” rather than to directly offer them *latreuo*. However, it is true that the syntax of Numbers 16:9 is like that in Deuteronomy 28:14; Judges 2:19, the only other instances of λατρεύειν αὐτοῖς in the LXX, where it expresses a service of worship. Furthermore, in the indisputably non-canonical 3 Maccabees 4:14, λατρεία is used for torturous service to an idolatrous tyrant: ἀπογραφῆναι δὲ πᾶν τὸ φύλον ἐξ ὀνόματος οὐκ εἰς τὴν ἔμπροσθεν βραχεὶ προδεδηλωμένην τῶν ἔργων κατὰ πονον λατρείαν στρεβλωθέντας δὲ ταῖς παρηγγελμέναις αἰκίαις τὸ τέλος ἀφανίσαι μᾶς ὑπὸ καιρὸν ἡμέρας.

The semantic range of λατρεύω/λατρεία in the wider *Koiné* does, of course, go beyond worship of the true God. Note, e. g., Philo, *On the Sacrifices of Abel and Cain* 84; *On the Special Laws* 2:167; 3:201, where it is used for of non-divine service, such as a servant gives a master, or a tooth to the one in

latreuo service, affirming that the One “coming with the clouds of heaven as the Son of man . . . was given the dominion, and the honour, and the kingdom; and all nations, tribes, and languages, shall serve [*latreuo*] him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14).²⁴

Similarly, the earliest post-Christian writings ascribe *latreuo* worship to the Son of God:

Therefore prepare for action and serve God in fear and truth, leaving behind the empty and meaningless talk and the error of the crowd, and believing in him who raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and gave him glory and a throne at His right hand; to whom all things in heaven and on earth were subjected, whom every breathing creature serves [*latreuo*], who is coming as Judge of the living and the dead, for whose blood God will hold responsible those who disobey him. (*Polycarp to the Philippians* 2:1, c. A. D. 110-120)²⁵

[B]ehold, one like the Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven; and He came to the Ancient of days, and stood before Him. And they who stood by brought Him near; and there were given Him power and kingly honor, and all nations of the earth by their families, and all glory, serve [*latreuo*] Him. And His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not be taken away; and His kingdom shall not be destroyed. (*Dialogue with Trypo* 31, c. A. D. 140-165)²⁶

While the earliest Christian writings ascribe *latreuo* worship to the Lord Jesus Christ, they follow the New Testament in affirming that such worship befits only the true God, even affirming that offering the true God alone the worship of *proskuneo* and of *latreuo* is part of the greatest of all commandments: “And that we ought to worship [*proskuneo*] God alone, He thus persuaded us: “The greatest commandment is, You shall worship [*proskuneo*] the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve [*latreuo*], with all your

whose mouth it is (yet note *On the Migration of Abraham* 132); or see *Sibylline Oracles* 2:31; 4:104; 11:64, 65; 13:94; Pseudo-Phocylides 121, 200.

²⁴ ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἦρχετο . . . καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἐξουσία καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τῆς γῆς κατὰ γένη καὶ πᾶσα δόξα αὐτῷ λατρεύουσα καὶ ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτοῦ ἐξουσία αἰώνιος ἥτις οὐ μὴ ἀρθῆ καὶ ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ ἥτις οὐ μὴ φθαρῆ.

²⁵ Διὸ ἀναζωσάμενοι τὰς ὀσφύας δουλεύσατε τῷ θεῷ ἐν φόβῳ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ, ἀπολιπόντες τὴν κενὴν ματαιολογίαν καὶ τὴν τῶν πολλῶν πλάνην, πιστεύσαντες εἰς τὸν ἐγείραντα τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν καὶ δόντα αὐτῷ δόξαν καὶ θρόνον ἐκ δεξιῶν αὐτοῦ· ᾧ ὑπετάγη τὰ πάντα ἐπουράνια καὶ ἐπίγεια, ᾧ πᾶσα πνοὴ λατρεύει, ὃς ἔρχεται κριτῆς ζώντων καὶ νεκρῶν, οὗ τὸ αἷμα ἐκζητήσῃ ὁ θεὸς ἀπὸ τῶν ἀπειθούντων αὐτῷ.

²⁶ ἰδοὺ μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὡς Υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενος· καὶ ἦλθεν ἕως τοῦ Παλαιοῦ τῶν ἡμερῶν, καὶ παρῆν ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ· καὶ οἱ παρεστηκότες προσήγαγον αὐτόν· καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἐξουσία καὶ τιμὴ βασιλική, καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τῆς γῆς κατὰ γένη, καὶ πᾶσα δόξα λατρεύουσα. Καὶ ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτοῦ, ἐξουσία αἰώνιος, ἥτις οὐ μὴ ἀρθῆ· καὶ ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ οὐ μὴ φθαρῆ. Note that reference is made to the ascription of *latreuo* worship/service to the Messiah in the Greek Old Testament in Daniel 7:13-14.

heart, and with all your strength, the Lord God that made you” (*Apology of Justin* 1:16; cf. *Dialogue with Trypho* 103; 125; *Theophilus of Antioch to Autolycus* 2:34-35; 3:9).²⁷

Jehovah states, “my glory will I not give unto another” (Isaiah 42:8; 48:11)—yet He commands that His Son be worshipped as He is. This is the practice of the New Testament and the earliest Christianity. Indeed, “all *men* should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him” (John 5:23). Why? The Lord Jesus is true God, absolutely equal in nature to His Father.

²⁷ Ὡς δὲ καὶ τὸν Θεὸν μόνον δεῖ προσκυνεῖν, οὕτως ἔπεισεν, εἰπὼν· “Μεγίστη ἐντολὴ ἐστὶ· Κύριον τὸν Θεὸν σου προσκυνήσεις, καὶ αὐτῷ μόνῳ λατρεύσεις ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας σου, καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ἰσχύος σου, Κύριον τὸν Θεὸν τὸν ποιήσαντά σε.”