

The Confession of Thomas—John 20:28 **By Patrick Navas (2011)**

In reference to Thomas addressing Jesus as his “Lord” and his “God” in John 20:28, one question traditional interpreters may want to ask themselves is, is it likely, or even possible, that Thomas had in mind “God” in the sense of “God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity”?

Another point to keep in mind is that the word “G/god” had a much broader application in the Bible than many are often inclined to think. In this way the word “God” is very similar to the word “Father” and the word “Lord” or “Savior.” Although these terms are used in the highest possible sense in reference to the Almighty God, the terms are also clearly used of others who are not God.

For example, most would agree that God is the “Father” in the highest possible sense (being the very giver of life and creator of all things). On one occasion, the Jews who were disputing with Jesus in John chapter 8 told him, “**we have one Father, God**” (John 8:41; Compare Malachi 2:10: ‘**Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?**’). But just two verses earlier they told Jesus, “**Abraham is our father**” (John 8:39). Of course, this was not a contradiction on their part, nor did they mean to imply that Abraham was God. The Jews could claim that God was their “one Father” and still describe Abraham as their “father” because they believed that each was a “father” to them on a different level, in a different sense. To the Jews God was their Father in the highest possible sense (the creator of life and the founder of their nation), but they were still able to recognize Abraham as their “father” in the fleshly sense since they were his literal, physical descendants. In the same essential way, although God is regarded in the Scriptures as the “one Father,” or “Father” in the highest possible sense, others are still rightly called “fathers” without compromising the unique Fatherhood of the one God.

Of course all of us still have a human “father.” For Christians (whether Jew or Gentile), God is our “Father,” but Abraham is also our spiritual or metaphorical “father”—“the father of all those having faith,” according to Paul (Rom. 4:11, 16; Gal. 3:7). The apostle Paul said that he himself had become a “father” to the Corinthian Christians “in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (1 Cor. 4:15). Even Satan is appropriately described as a “father” in the Scriptures. According to Jesus, he is the “father” of the Jews who were trying to kill him and the “father of lies” (John 8:44). In fact the Messiah is prophetically described as “everlasting father” in Isaiah 9:6, and even

Trinitarians recognize that this does not mean that he is “*the* Father,” as in “God the Father.”

Thus, the biblical usage of the term “father” helps to illustrate how certain terms can be applied to God in the highest possible sense and yet still be used of others without any problem or confusion resulting. The same principle holds true in reference to the term “God.” Just as there are varying levels and degrees of Fatherhood, there are likewise varying degrees of Godhood or Godship allowed in the biblical worldview. That is to say, although Jehovah is described as the “Most High God” (Dan. 3:26), the “one God” (1 Tim. 2:5; 1 Cor. 8:6) and as “the only true God” (Jn. 17:3), the Bible still allows for others who are not Jehovah to positively bear the term “God,” only on another level, in a different sense (the same point applies to the term ‘savior’ as well; Compare Is. 43:11 with Jdgs. 3:15; Ob. 1:21; Neh. 9:27).

According to Exodus 7:1, Moses was “God” to pharaoh. The angels are likewise referred to as “gods” (*elohim*) in the Bible (Psalm 8:5; Compare Heb. 2:7; Ps. 97:7; 138:1). According to Jesus and Psalm 82:6, God called the ancient judges of Israel (possibly angels) “gods” and “the Scripture can’t be broken” (Jn. 10:34-35). Satan himself is called the “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4), evidently, because the “whole world” lies in his “power” (1 Jn. 5:19; Compare Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

It is therefore no surprise at all, given these biblical precedents, that the Messiah would be given the honorific title “God” in the Bible. In fact, it would have been inconsistent and even surprising for the Bible to have *not* positively ascribed him with such an honor. After all, if the angels were rightly called “gods,” how much more worthy is the one who became “far superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs”? (Heb. 1:4). As God’s beloved Son and as the supremely-exalted Messiah who was enthroned at the right hand of God and “given all authority in heaven and on earth,” Jesus Christ is far more worthy to bear the dignified “God” status than any who came before him. But contrary to prevailing opinion, he cannot be “God” in the unqualified or highest possible sense. Why not? Because the Father, the Most High, *is God to or above him* (Jn. 20:17; Heb. 1:9; Rev. 3:12). The Most High God does not and could never have a God to or above him. That’s what makes him the Most High God. The Godship possessed by the Messiah (as lofty and exalted as it is), however, is the kind that allows him to have one who is God to him. In fact, we know for sure that, even in Jesus’ “God” status (Heb. 1:8), the Father is still the God of Jesus (Heb. 1:9).

Thus, as Christians, we can accept that Thomas called Jesus his Lord and his God, knowing that the Father is *his* God, and knowing that the honorific status Jesus rightly possesses and deserves as God's obedient Son was graciously "given" to him by his loving Father (Matt. 11:27; 20:18; Phil. 2:9).