

The Wednesday Word, November 11, 2021: Whom Exactly did Paul Blaspheme?

“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious (1 Timothy 1:12-13).

Paul’s statement in 1 Timothy 1:12-13 provides a very important reference to the Deity of Christ. The apostle, speaking of his life as a Pharisee, calls himself a blasphemer. So, when was Paul ever a blasphemer? In case you are not aware, by definition, blasphemy is the act of insulting or attacking God or the act of claiming the attributes of deity. We can discount the second part of the definition in Paul’s case for we have no record whatsoever of him ever claiming to possess the attributes of Deity within himself. Of all the charges leveled against the apostle this is not one of them!

So, according to Paul, he was an insulter and attacker of God. He was a blasphemer.

But when did this blasphemy happen? He had been raised as a strict Jew and was a dedicated Pharisee. No Pharisee in his right mind would ever have blasphemed Yahweh. Paul, as you remember, was famous for his defense of and zeal for the Jewish faith. He would, therefore, never knowingly have blasphemed the name or person of God.

So, when and whom did Paul blaspheme? Paul gives us the answer quite plainly. In Acts, when speaking to King Agrippa, he says,

“I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. Acts 26:9-11

In Paul’s mind, his previous attacks on Christians and compelling them to deny Christ was in fact causing them to blaspheme. This means that, in Paul’s mind, Christ Jesus was God.

If Paul had thought of Christ as a mere man, he could not possibly have reckoned

himself as having forced people to blaspheme! Why not? Because attacks against men are never reckoned as blasphemous. Likewise, if Paul viewed Christ Jesus as an angel or a second in command to God the attack on His person would not constitute an act of blasphemy.

Paul had been a blasphemer and he also forced Christians to blaspheme...to renounce Jesus as God.

But after his conversion, Paul knew very clearly that Christ Jesus was indeed God. Conversion had dispelled his ignorance and unbelief (1 Timothy 1:13). For people, therefore, to claim to be Christians and yet say Jesus is not God suggests that they are still unbelievers!

And that's the Gospel Truth!