

Acts 20:28

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood."

The Trinitarian Claim

Trinitarians claim this verse shows that "Jesus is God" because it was Jesus who bought the church with his own blood and the passage says God bought the church with his own blood.

The Claim vs. The Facts

The facts show us that this Trinitarian claim is based on manuscript cherry picking and questionable translation practices. The facts also show us what Luke really intended.

The Problems with the Claim

Acts 20:28 is yet another passage which is disingenuously abused by Trinitarians apologists. Here we have a passage where Trinitarians claim that Jesus must be the one called "God" since the church was purchased with God's own blood and Jesus is therefore being identified as God. Like all the other passages in the Trinitarian's apologetic box, this passage is plagued with many critical issues which Trinitarian apologists conveniently forget to inform you about.

1. Manuscript Variations of Various Kinds

It is a well known academic fact that very important early manuscripts do not read "Church of God" but instead have "Church of the Lord." The fact that we have variant readings of this verse shows us that someone corrupted this verse. And that is not the end of the manuscript problem either. There are further discrepancies between manuscripts concerning this verse which affect its intended meaning here. And that results in problem upon problem, building a house upon the sand. And there is yet an even further problem of translation. In short, Trinitarians have no proof of what Luke actually wrote.

2. God's Blood: The Flavour of Luke's Writings

Luke wrote the Book of Acts. Let us first consider the flavour of Luke's writings. Have you ever noticed the conspicuous absence of Luke's writings in Trinitarian apologetics "proof-texts"? Just take a look at the common proof-texts listed by Trinitarians and see how many quotations come from Luke. For this reason, it is common knowledge that Trinitarian commentators often remark that Luke stresses Jesus' humanity, or some similar sentiment. This is the first fact that makes the Trinitarian claim highly unlikely.

You, the reader, should be able to see that something is very wrong with the Trinitarian claim even on the face of it. God's blood? With manuscripts variations staring us in the face, we are expected by Trinitarians to contend with the highly unlikely hypothesis that Luke wrote about God's blood. It immediately strikes everyone as an weird, incongruous, out of place, and unlikely to any reasonable person. It further necessitates the unbiblical Trinitarian notion that "Jesus according to his human nature." is "God according to his human nature." It is in this respect, that Trinitarians want to believe that God did have blood. Are we really expected to believe it is ever going to be reasonable to refer to God's human blood?

3. "The Most Difficult Manuscript Reading is the Best" Farce

Unbelievably, there are some who love to ride this crippled hobby horse. Whenever we have a situation where variations exist in the manuscripts, this notion basically states, "what appears to you to be wrong is most likely right." Really? The insanity of this claim is also based on the extremely naive premise that such manuscript corruptions necessarily involve a well-intentioned scribe attempting to correct a perceived mistake in the original copy.

With some variations from one scholar to the next, the idea here is essentially what follows. We are to imagine an ancient scribe is copying the book of Acts and when he comes to Acts 20:28 it appears to him that Luke is referring to "God's blood." And since this most certainly "looks wrong" to the scribe, he supposes this most certainly must be a mistake. And although he is well-intentioned, he naively sets out to correct the mistake and changes the word "God" to "Lord."

First, let us observe that a pinch of arrogance is required for this claim. We must assume that this scribe could not possibly be anywhere near as insightful as textual critics who know the Scripture contains "difficult sayings." Should we really suppose that the scribe in question would be that naive? Little children know the Bible contains difficult sayings. How much more a scribe? Knowing these basic facts, we should be able to see that it is not very likely that a scribe would come across a "difficult saying" and immediately assume it is a scribal mistake and correct it. Of course it could happen but it is not likely. And that is not the end of the problem.

Note how this scenario is also contrived up by the human imagination in order to justify the manuscript reading they want to believe is authentic. Strangely, some scholars and commentators pridefully think this idea is very insightful. It is ridiculous. We have absolutely no idea whatsoever how this corruption occurred. Some scribe corrupted this passage in one direction or the other. There are dozens of ways this corruption could have happened. That a well-intentioned scribe was trying to correct a perceived error is only one hypothetical possibility out of many possibilities.

To suppose no scribe would intentionally corrupt the Scriptures is equally naive. It supposes a strange Eutopian reality where not a single scribe existed who would ever conspire in their heart to do anything wrong. It is a ridiculous proposition. Did we not learn this when we read about the scribes of the Gospels? Doesn't Jeremiah 8:8 ever enter the picture? It is a well known fact that second century Christians mention how their manuscripts were being intentionally corrupted.

There are endless hypothetical scenarios that could have caused corruptions and we should be able to see how it is absolutely preposterous to claim it was most likely a corruption of a certain kind. What appears to be wrong is most likely right? Think about the absurdity of this claim. But even more than its absurdity is the implicit admission that the "God's blood" reading certainly **appears to be wrong** and that is why it must be right! Let the reader see the absurdity of this claim.

4. Trinitarian Translation Inconsistencies: A cursory Look at the Problem

A review of various Trinitarian translations illustrates the problem. Notice how *Trinitarian* scholars themselves have translated this passage:

the church of **the Lord** which he purchased with his own blood. (ASV).

the assembly of God, which he has purchased with **the blood of his own**. (Darby).

the church of God which he bought with **the blood of his own Son**. (JB).

the church of God which he obtained with **the blood of his own Son**. (RSV)

the church of God that he obtained with **the blood of his own Son**. (NET).

Now how can we accept this passage as "evidence" for their doctrine when Trinitarian scholars themselves do not agree that Jesus is identified as "God" in this passage? How do they expect anyone to rest their faith upon such doubtful evidence?

Some Trinitarian scholars believe it said "church of the Lord" while others have "church of God" and among those who believe it said "church of God" are those who insist it means "church of God which He bought with the blood of His own Son."

5. The Manuscripts

Important early manuscript evidence, such as Codex Alexandrinus, Ephraemi Rescriptus, and Bezae Cantabrigensis, Sahidic Coptic, read "church of **the Lord**" and not "church of God."

Note to the Reader: I have not yet taken the time to list out the various manuscript readings of this verse on this page. In the meantime, you can do a quick search to quickly discover that there are several variations of this verse in the early manuscripts.

6. Early Church Testimony

We do not have the original manuscripts of the books written in the Bible. Our earliest manuscripts are copies prepared centuries after they were originally written. Some manuscripts read "church of God" while many others read "church of the Lord." Our first witness who can testify what the earliest manuscripts did say is the early Christian Irenaeus who wrote *Against Heresies* around 180-185 A.D. This is the earliest known version of this verse. He writes:

"Take heed, therefore, both to yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has placed you as bishops, to rule the **Church of the Lord**, which He has acquired for Himself through His own blood." (Book III, 14).

Obviously, Irenaeus was quoting from a very early version of Acts which read "Church of the Lord" and not "Church of God." Irenaeus was also extremely adamant about teaching the true teachings passed down by the apostles, and in fact, that just happens to be the topic under discussion when he makes this quotation. While that fact in itself does not prove his reading is correct, we must at least take it into honest consideration. The point here is that his quotation demonstrates that very early manuscripts did indeed indeed read as "Church of the Lord" at Acts 20:28. While it is theoretically possible that other manuscripts were also circulating at that time which showed "church of God," the fact that Irenaeus quotes it as "church of the Lord" is enough to completely render the Trinitarian claim null and void. It is downright irresponsible to appeal to the "church of God" rendering of this verse and suggestively imply it is certain that this is what Luke wrote, when that is most certainly not the case. We are not certain what he actually wrote. We do have important manuscripts which read "church of the Lord" and this evidence from Irenaeus suggests a very strong indication that this certainly may have been what Luke actually wrote at Acts 20:28. Unless a Trinitarian can undeniably prove otherwise, he has no business using Acts 20:28 as Scriptural evidence for his doctrine. But let us not stop here. Even if we suppose Luke did write "church of God" let us also see how the problem does not end there for the Trinitarian apologist.

7. The Purchaser

Another problem associated with the Trinitarian claim is that it has God purchasing the Church. This obviously means those who comprise the church were purchased from among men. However, it leaves us with a serious problem. It forces the question: God purchased these people from whom? God is the Creator of everything. It doesn't make any sense to say that He would need to purchase His own creation. "The earth is God's and everything in it; the world and all its inhabitants." (Psalm 24:1; cf. 1 Cor 10:26). How then does it make sense to suggest God purchased men from someone else? It simply doesn't. Something is obviously wrong with the Trinitarian claim.

Analysis of the Facts

1. The Greek Text

την	ἐκκλησίαν	τοῦ	θεοῦ/κυρίου	ἣν	περιεποιήσατο	διὰ	τοῦ	ἰδίου	αἵματος
the	assembly	of the	God / Lord	which	he purchased	through	the	own	blood

2. The Greek word *idios* ("own") and how it was used by Koine Greek speakers

It is not uncommon to find Trinitarian commentators and apologists jumping up and down vehemently protesting against translation scholars who have translated this passage as "blood of his own **son**" instead of "his own blood." Now let us be reminded that there are Trinitarian scholars who think it should indeed be translated as "blood of his own [Son]." But it seems that Trinitarian apologists are ignorant of inconvenient facts and claim that since the word "son" is not present in the original Greek, then it is completely unfeasible, even dishonest, to translate it as "blood of his own *son*. These Trinitarian apologists must either be very ignorant of the facts or they are being quite dishonest. The RSV, a major translation which was translated by Trinitarian scholars, does indeed translate it as "blood of his own son" and there is a very good reason they do so.

It was very common in Koine Greek to use the word "own" as we find it here in Acts 20:28 without explicitly stating an accompanying noun. The noun is implied rather than stated and there are several examples in the New Testament and even right here in Luke's very own words in the book of Acts.

Concerning this passage, Trinitarian Greek scholar J.H. Moulton tells us that it is quite normal to use the Greek word for "own" without explicitly stating the implied accompanying noun. He writes:

"Before leaving [idios] something should be said about the use of [ho idios] without a noun expressed. This occurs in Jn 1.11; 13.1; Ac 4.23; 24.23. In the papyri we find the singular used thus as a term of endearment to near relations: eg.[ho deina to idio khairein.] In Expositor... I ventured to cite this as a possible encouragement to those (including B.Weiss) who would translate Ac 20.28 'the blood of one who was his own.'" (Grammar of New Testament Greek, vol.1, Prologomena, 2nd edition, 1906, p.90).

The Evidence for this Fact is found throughout the Scriptures

Let us consider several New Testament examples where the word *idios* ("own") is used where the idea that is attached to it is not explicitly stated but is indeed implied and expected to be understood by the reader.

Verse	Literal Text	Implied Meaning
John 1:11	He came unto his own, and his own did not receive him.	He came unto his own [people] and his own [people] did not receive him.
John 13:1	having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them to the end	having loved his own [disciples] he loved them to the end
John 19:27	Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother.' And from that hour, the disciple took her to the own	Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother.' And from that hour, the disciple took her [to his own home].
John 19:27	After that, he saith to the disciple: Behold thy mother. And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own. (Douey-Rheims)	After that, he saith to the disciple: Behold thy mother. And from that hour, the disciple took her [as his own mother].
1 Timothy 5:8	But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever	But if anyone does not provide for his own [family], and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.
Acts 4:23	And being let go, they went to their own	And being let go, they went to their own [Christian brethren]
Acts 21:6	we went into the ship and they returned to their own	we went into the ship and they returned to their own [lives/families]
Acts 24:23	and to forbid none of his own from providing for him and coming to him	and to forbid none of his own [friends] from providing for him and coming to him

Acts	the church... he purchased with the blood	the church... he purchased with the blood of
20:28	of his own	his own [son]

In all the above examples, one is expected to infer what the speaker/writer is talking about since the object in question is not stated. It is only implied by the context.

The literal word for word translations shown above imply a concept that is **not** explicitly mentioned in the original Greek text but is most certainly implied. Hence, we can see quite clearly how the word "son" was implied at Acts 20:28 (if we assume the "church of God" reading is authentic). It was common in Koine Greek to use the word "own" in this respect and leave the reader to understand what is implied but not explicitly stated. The implied meaning is what the writer expects the reader to understand. We can see plainly that there is nothing unusual about first century Greek writers using the word *idios* ("own") in this manner. In fact, we can see from the above evidences in Acts that Luke himself has a habit of writing this way. He does the very same thing **four** times in this same book of Acts. In each and every case, we are left to infer what the word "own" intends to imply to us.

2. Terms of Endearment: One's OWN Beloved

Notice a common theme in the examples above. In each and every case the possessive "own" refers to dear or loved ones. We happen to do the very same thing in English when we say we "take care of our own." Our own what? Our own loved ones and our own beloved things which are dear to us. These loved ones or things are not stated explicitly but implied in the expression. We are endeared to the things we own; that is why we own them. The term *ho idios* is also found in Greek papyri as a term of endearment for relatives. In the present sense *idios* is the equivalent of Hebrew YAHID, "only," "well-beloved," otherwise rendered *beloved*, *chosen* only-begotten (See F.F.Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 3rd ed., p. 434. See J.H. Moulton, *MHTI*, p. 90).

Note how this concept is clearly presented by Jesus in the Gospel of John.

If you were of the world, the world would love **its own** (*ho idios*) but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.

What is meant here is not stated by expected to be understood by the reader. In the same way, what is meant at Acts 20:28 is not stated explicitly but expected to be understood by the reader, "the church of God which he bought with the blood of his own **Beloved Son**."

3. Trinitarian Greek Scholars

Even if one assumes the "church of God" variant is authentic, Trinitarians still have more problems to overcome. Due to the above evidence, there are numerous well known **Trinitarian** Greek scholars who believe the passage is intended to mean "blood of his own *son*, including Bruce, Fitzmeyer, Knapp, Pesch, Weiser. This in itself reveals the passage does not support Trinitarian dogma as Trinitarian apologists like to pretend. Fitzmeyer writes:

"The mention of blood" must refer to the vicarious shedding of the blood of Jesus, the Son. Through his blood the Christian community has become God's own possession, the people acquired for his renewed covenant. Cf. Eph 1:14; Heb 9: 12; 1 Pet 2:9-10, which speak of God acquiring a people, echoing an OT motif (1Sa 43:21; Ps 74:2j. Luke may be thinking of the action of God the Father and the Son as so closely related that his mode of speaking slips from one to the other; if so, it resembles the speech patterns of the Johannine Gospel."

Krodel writes:

"...he has 'purchased' or obtained it with the blood of his own Son. This translation of v. 28 in the second edition of the RSV is better than that found in the first edition, The Greek text does not contain the word Son, but reads 'his own.' Like 'the Beloved'. (Eph. 1:6), so "his own" refers to the Son of God. Only once in Acts does Luke speak of the saving efficacy of the death of Jesus (cf. Rom. 3:25; 1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Peter 2:24; 3: 18) by using a traditional formulation. God redeemed his people, the church, through the atoning death of his Son, Therefore the church is God's possession."

Conclusion

There are several determining factors:

- The text appealed to by Trinitarians is highly questionable concerning its authenticity. Important manuscripts read "church of the Lord" and others read "church of God."
- Even if the "church of God" is assumed to be authentic, there is still a significant translation issue which is reflected by comparing several Trinitarian translations.
- Irenaeus, an early Christian deeply concerned with preaching the apostolic tradition, quotes this verse as "church of the Lord," and this is the earliest evidence we have for the authenticity of this verse.
- It was quite common in the Bible, and especially in Luke's writings, to use the word "own" in this manner expecting the reader to infer whatever beloved thing is implied. The RSV, a Trinitarian translation, reflects this fact by translating the passage as "blood of his own son."
- It is also known that the ancient Greeks spoke in this manner using this kind of terminology to refer to their beloved possessions, especially their families. And indeed we know that Jesus was God the Father's beloved and the Scriptures routinely refer to Jesus in this manner.
- Given the forceful nature of the evidence, Trinitarians have no grounds for objecting to a "blood of his own son" translation.

If nothing else, Acts 20:28 is plagued with so many difficulties that it renders the passage completely useless as evidence and it is dishonestly irresponsible to suggest to others the Trinitarian cherry picked manuscript reading and translation amounts to factual evidence. Luke may not have even wrote "Church of God" but instead wrote "Church of the Lord" as Irenaeus' early quotation indicates. Either way, any reasonable person can see that the Trinitarian claim is obviously the most unlikely of Luke's intentions. The reasonable person can also see that "God's blood" stands weirdly out of place in the Scriptures. And even if the passage was written by Luke to say "church of God", we can see clearly that it was common to use the term "own" in this manner with the expectation the reader would understand the implied inference to God's beloved son. The implication is not hard to figure out since we are all expected to know it was God's son who shed his blood. No matter how you slice it and dice it, this Trinitarian claim is based on nothing but his own personal desires to have it as he would like.

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