

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

## St. Paul's Conception of Christ.

BY THE REV. H. T. DIXON, M.A., D.D.,  
*Vicar of St. James's, Taunton.*

### I.

CHRIST was to St. Paul the centre of his life and the supreme object of his thoughts—"for him to live was Christ." It was this devotion and self-surrender to Christ that made him one of the chief thinkers as well as one of the chief founders of Christianity. It enabled him to tell men what Christ in His real nature was, and what was the significance of His life and death for mankind. He does not interpret Christ's words for us; he does not record His wonderful deeds. He is an interpreter of Christ Himself and of the relation of His death and risen life to the religious needs of men. For the most part he is concerned with Christ in His relation to men, but later, when time and circumstances develop his theology, he shows to us as well Christ in His relation to the Universe and to God.

The origin of St. Paul's gospel is to be found in his conversion. The vision of the Risen and Exalted Christ on the road near Damascus effected a profound crisis in his life. It meant the destruction of his cherished hopes and plans, a decisive break with the past and the complete surrender of his life to Christ whom he was persecuting. No wonder that he afterwards wrote, "No man can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Spirit." From this time he became conscious of a new mysterious power within himself. Christ was the principle of his life, and from the strange and marvellous life of Christ infused into his own, we have the genesis of his conception of Christ. It is the Christ of his experience whom the Apostle preaches: he feels Christ's life within, and this mysterious life he endeavours to interpret.

The Christ of St. Paul is, however, no mere abstraction or vision which simply existed in his own mind. He connects the Christ of his experience with the historic Christ. The appear-

ance of Christ was more than the birth of Christ in his soul : it was also the illumination of his mind. His eyes were opened, and in Christ, the Victim of Calvary, he perceived the long promised Messiah whom his nation was anxiously expecting, and the cross which previously was a stumbling-block became the object of his veneration and his love. "It is God . . . who shined into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." At once he transfers to Christ all the ideas of lordship and sovereignty which the Jews associated with the Messiah : immediately he accepts as true the accounts of Christ's life which he had heard from his contemporaries and from the Christian Martyrs : henceforth Christ was to him the Messiah and his great exemplar whose life he strove to imitate. "Be ye imitators of me as I of Christ" : and though he does not narrate much of Christ's work and His teaching, the frequent references to Christ's commands, the similarity of his teaching, and the complete harmony of the picture of Christ which is found in his Epistles, with that of the Gospel narrative, sufficiently prove that he regarded the historic Christ as the Christ of his own inner life.

St. Paul's Christology begins with his doctrine of redemption. Jesus was for him the Lord because he found in Him his Saviour ; and this Saviour he identifies with Jesus Christ of the Gospels and the Messiah of the Old Testament. "The inward revelation, while it irradiated his soul, lighted up at the same time the historic life of Christ : so far from being contradictory, the revelation and the external knowledge of Christ lent mutual confirmation : each was necessary" : and, from this identification of the Christ of his experience with the Christ of history and its effect upon St. Paul's own nature, his conception of Christ is largely shaped and moulded.

It might be said that St. Paul works up from man to God. It was as risen man that he first became personally acquainted with Christ—"Last of all He appeared to me" : to him, His humanity was of supreme importance, because he felt that Christ could only save humanity by partaking of its nature, and

becoming a member thereof; and that only by virtue of His manhood could He be our Mediator and our Intercessor with the Father, "for there is one God, one Mediator also between God and men, Himself man, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all." Never, therefore, does St. Paul lose sight of Christ's humanity, and even in his metaphysical form of teaching it is never set aside: in His full Godhead He still retains the features of His glorified humanity. He is the God-man. St. Paul does not attempt to teach how the two natures were blended: he is content to say that Christ laid aside His glory, and took upon Himself the form of servant: so that while He does not cease to be Son of God, He was truly man.

To St. Paul, then, Christ was man. "He was manifest in the flesh and seen of angels." "He was sent into the world made of a woman": "He was born according to the flesh": concerning flesh He was of the Israelites, and "born of the seed of David." "God sent His Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin": He was "found in fashion as a man." He was truly man, not apparently man. There is no room for a docetic Christ in Paul's theology, \*for *μορφὴν δούλου λαβὼν* asserts the reality of Christ's human nature: and St. Paul is careful not to write *ἐν ὁμοιώματι σάρκος* which might have proved the conception of a docetic Christ, but *ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων*—notifying that though He was really man, yet in some respects He was not like man. "We are soul and body, but He is God, soul and man." And in his Epistle to the Colossians he writes: "The fulness of the Godhead dwelt in Him in bodily wise"—*σωματικῶς* can only mean Christ's human body, and is almost equivalent to St. John's statement "the Word became flesh." There are, moreover, other expressions which leave no doubt of his firm conviction of the true manhood of Christ. He writes of Christ that He lived under the law and conformed to its restrictions; He suffered as other men—"in patient enduring of the sufferings which we also suffer"; He was betrayed—"who in the same night that He was betrayed"; He was crucified—"for our Pass-over also hath been sacrificed, even Christ." He died and also

was buried—"I have received how that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried."

Further, St. Paul's scheme of salvation demanded that Christ should not only be man, but that He should be man without sin ; otherwise His death would not have been vicarious but for Himself alone : for had He not been sinless He could not have been the sacrifice sufficient for the sins of the whole world. Christ conforms to this demand. His death, St. Paul was fully convinced, was not for His own sins. It must, then, have been for others : and so Christ was the righteous One, human but sinless ; even though as man He shared with us the weakness and frailty of human nature, " He knew no sin." He was crucified ; through weakness He was exposed to temptation. " Christ," he says, " obeyed the law of God "; there was the temptation to transgress it, yet " He was obedient unto death." In all points tempted like we are, only without the inborn tendency to sin : His flesh was like ours except that it was not sinful, "*ostendit nos quidem habuere carnem peccati, filium vero Dei similitudinem habuisse carnis peccati, non carnem peccati*"; he does not say that Christ was born *ἐν σαρκί ἁμαρτίας*, which would have asserted complete identity between Christ's humanity and man, but only *ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκός ἁμαρτίας*. Directly, then, Christ was without sin. " Is Christ a servant of sin? God forbid. He knew not sin." And yet, though sinless, He was made sin for us—" He that knew no sin was made sin for us that we might be the righteousness of God in Him." God saw in Him our sin, and in us His righteousness. And so He was treated as a sinner, being made sin for us, even though He Himself was as a Paschal Lamb, without spot and blemish.

And because of His sinlessness St. Paul traces a higher and more mysterious origin to Christ ; in his Epistle to the Romans, he writes : " Concerning His Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead, even Jesus Christ our Lord." Here

he describes Christ in His twofold nature: in His outward form of flesh He was a Jew and Son of David; in His inward spiritual nature He was of Divine descent. The flesh formed the substance of His body; the spirit of holiness, which was the very essence of the personality of the Messiah, formed the substance of His moral being. "He was the Son of God from the first, even in His weakness, because the spirit that ruled His life was the spirit of holiness, and because His life was a holy one."

And what His character declared Him to be, His resurrection showed with greater clearness—"declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead." Whilst in the flesh He was Son of God in weakness; after His resurrection He entered upon His glory, and was Son of God in power. Not only, then, was the resurrection a victory over sin and death, it was also a declaration, or rather a definition, of what Christ really in respect of His superhuman nature was and is—no less than the Son of God.

That Christ, as Son of God, was a revelation of the Father, St. Paul teaches, but not so fully as St. John. He does, however, assert that His life was a manifestation of God's love—"when the kindness of God our Saviour and His love appeared"; also that it was a revelation of His eternal wisdom—"the manifold wisdom of God according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus before time eternal." God's scheme of redemption was only fulfilled by degrees, and until Christ appeared it was almost concealed: it was a mystery which Christ's life unfolded and revealed. "*In Christo suam justitiam bonitatem, sapientiam, virtutem as denique totum Deus exhibet,*" is Calvin's comment on the verse "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

But it is the Risen and Exalted Christ in His relation to man that chiefly occupies St. Paul's mind: it was then He became perfect and His real work began. In the flesh He was

restricted, hindered, and subject to temptation and death. At His death He left behind all that impaired His activity as Son of God. This is partly why St. Paul does not refer so much to Christ's actual deeds or words. He knows Christ in His fuller and more perfect nature. "I determined to know nothing among you save Christ and Him crucified." He was now spiritual, and so able to communicate His life to others; now His reign as Redeemer begins, and He becomes by virtue of His death and resurrection the founder of a new humanity of which He is the Life and the Lord.

St. Paul looked upon Christ as the second Adam, for He was the founder of a new creation. As the first Adam's descendants inherited his fallen nature, so those in Christ share His spiritual nature. "If any man is in Christ, there is a new creation"; of this new humanity Christ Himself is the first: He is the first-born among many brethren, the foremost and the leader: the first-fruits of them that sleep, the representative and pledge of those who, like Him, should afterwards be raised to a life of glory, honour and immortality, the One in whom all Christ's people shall be made alive at His coming. "Christ the first-fruits, afterward they that are Christ's at His coming," and into whose image they shall ultimately be conformed: "As we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." The change from the old creation into the new, which takes place in those who are in Christ, St. Paul regards as a gradual process: that he was being conformed into the image of Christ he had no doubt, but that he had attained to the lofty ideal he never for a moment imagined. He had put off the old man, which is corrupt, and had put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness. And slowly he was being transformed into Christ's likeness, but only when he had laid aside his mortal body could he win the full glory which awaited those who were in Christ.

The creation of this new humanity was the result of Christ's death and resurrection. Adam's race was at enmity with God and under condemnation because of sin. Christ died instead of

the race. He became a curse for it, and was the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. "By one man's disobedience death came to all; by one man's obedience many shall be made righteous." God accepted Christ's death—"one died for all, therefore all died." And God now treats as righteous those who by faith make Christ's death their own. Thus mankind in Christ is brought into a new relation to God. "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ," and, "God sent forth His Son . . . that we might receive the adoption of sons."

But Christ's death is more than a death for sin, which secures our reconciliation: it is also a death to sin which is in us, a conquest over sin. "There is a work done for us and a work done in us." With Christ, the Christian dies to sin: with Christ, he rises into newness of life—"in that He died, He died unto sin once; in that He liveth, He liveth unto God, so likewise reckon ye yourselves dead unto sin and alive unto God." All who by faith make Christ's death and resurrection their own are born again, and receive a power which enables them to overcome sin. "It is in the fire of love to Christ that the soul of man is separated from sin as thoroughly as though it were dead to it, and made alive to God and righteousness in the power of a supernatural life of which the Risen Christ is the Source and Pattern." Such is the new creation of which Christ is the founder. He brings its members into living union with God, who becomes their Father in a richer and fuller sense, and He regenerates their nature and makes it capable of being transformed into His own image and likeness.

And because Christ supplies the power which produces this moral transformation, St. Paul regards Him as its life. To Him he attributes, as did the other Apostles, the various *χαρίσματα* which were bestowed upon the infant Church, but he also considers the Christian graces of love, humility, gentleness and the like, as His special gifts. St. Paul was the first who placed more importance upon the Christian life than upon special individual gifts; and this moral goodness was to him the best result of Christ's spirit working in the heart. Everything which



was good in his own life he imputed to Him. It was as one in Christ, and as one under His influence, that he accomplished his life's work: "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me"; it was as if the very personality of Christ had entered into his own life and used him as an organ of its expression: "It is no more I who live, but Christ who liveth in me." He does not cease to be Paul, only he finds in Christ his true self. It has been said of St. Paul that he was the most signal instance of a character that reached the very top of human greatness through the influence of Jesus Christ upon his inner life, and because of the perfect sympathy of mind and feeling with his Lord that flowed from his fellowship with Him.

In teaching Christ's presence imminent in himself, St. Paul identifies the spirit of God with the spirit of Christ: "As many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God: because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of His Son into your hearts crying, Abba, Father"; and sometimes he identifies the spirit of God with the Person of Christ: "The Lord is the Spirit"; "we are changed into the same image by the Lord the Spirit." He is led to do this because he perceives that Christ acts on men's souls with the power of God's Holy Spirit, and because he feels Christ to be the fountain of his own life of holiness and grace as well as the source of his inspiration and strength. "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me."

Christ incorporating Himself into the human race, and distributing to its members His own perfected life, was the most prominent thought in his mind. "In Christ," which expresses this favourite doctrine of oneness with Him, is an oft repeated phrase. But whilst the Divine presence of Christ within was so much to him, he never forgets Christ's separate personality. Christ was always Lord and he was His slave. *Κυριος* was his special name for Christ, because it expressed so clearly the ideas of dominion and supremacy which he associated with Christ as the Messiah; in his greeting Christ is Lord. God is *θεός*, and in the passage "To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom

are all things and we in Him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things . . .,” he applies Fatherhood to God and sovereignty to Christ.

Christ is Lord, because of His life's work upon earth—“ He died and rose again that He might be the Lord of the living and the dead ”; also because of His self-abasement—“ Wherefore God hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.” And as Lord He is enabled to carry the work which He had begun on earth to its final issue. He completes the work of redemption : He intercedes for His followers—“ Christ . . . maketh intercession for us ”: He influences and controls their hearts—“ The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God.” He cares for them and protects them. “ I am persuaded that neither death nor life can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord,” exclaims St. Paul at the thought of Christ's lordship ; and as Lord, He will come as Judge, before whom all must appear, “ that each may receive the things done in the body according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” Then when all things are put in subjection under His feet, Christ's lordship will cease and God will be all in all.

*(To be concluded.)*

