



**Paul**

**A SHORT INTRODUCTION**

## 9

## ‘Christ died ... and was raised’

There is no doubt that Christ’s death and resurrection formed the central core of Paul’s gospel. ‘When I came to you’, he writes to the Corinthians, ‘I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ – and him crucified’ (1 Cor. 2:1–2). Yet his message certainly included the resurrection as well, since, as he reminds them in 1 Corinthians 15:17, ‘if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile’. Later theological interpretation of the Christian doctrine of the atonement has often tended to concentrate on Christ’s death, as though that alone were important. But Paul insists that ‘if Christ has not been raised ... you are still in your sins’. If Christ had not been raised, he would not have been declared righteous and acknowledged as Lord, and there would be no new life for Christians to share.

## THE CORE OF THE GOSPEL

Precisely because Christ’s death and resurrection are the core theme of his gospel, Paul has no need to begin with them when writing to his churches. He has already preached his gospel to these people, and what is needed in the letters is encouragement and advice, explanation when things have been misunderstood, and rebuke when he believes that his readers have made mistakes. Only in Romans, where Paul sets out to explain his understanding of the implications of the gospel to a congregation which has not heard his gospel before, does he begin at the beginning, and explain *why* Christ’s death was necessary.

Nevertheless, Paul’s message of Christ crucified and raised underlies *all* his letters. This alone is why he has been called to be an apostle. This alone is why there is a community of believers who live ‘in Christ’. This alone is why they believe, why they have hope for the future, and why they are all called to live in love with one another. His letters are therefore full of reminders of the central theme of the gospel. Are the Thessalonians worried about what will happen on the Day of Judgement? Paul assures them that they have no need to be, since the Lord Jesus Christ died for them in order that they might live with him (1 Thess. 5:10). How, he protests, could the Galatians think that they need the law to right them in God’s sight, when Christ crucified had been placarded before their eyes (Gal. 3:1)? The Corinthians, searching for wisdom and power, have clearly forgotten that the folly and weakness of God, seen in the cross, have overturned all human achievements (1 Cor. 1:18–25). They boast in their freedom, but need to remember that by their actions they may destroy the faith of other, weaker, Christians – men and women for whom Christ died (1 Cor. 8:11; cf. Rom. 14:15).

Paul’s own experience of suffering is described as ‘carrying within himself the dying of Jesus, in order that the life of Jesus may be seen there’ (2 Cor. 4:10). In Philippians, thinking of his own situation facing possible execution, he speaks of sharing in the sufferings of Christ and becoming like him in his death – in hope of attaining resurrection (Phil. 3:10–11). His appeal to the Philippians to obey his teaching echoes his words about Christ’s own obedience to death (2:12, 8). Their reward will be to share the glory which was given to Christ when he was exalted after death (3:20–1; 2:9–11); those who do not follow this teaching ‘live as enemies of the cross of Christ’ (3:18).

From time to time, in the course of his letters, these ‘reminders’ are given in pithy, memorable summaries of the gospel. Among these are many of the summaries that scholars tend to assume are ‘pre-Pauline’. It seems more likely that they are summaries of Paul’s own teaching. Whatever their origin, they are important indications of Paul’s core beliefs.

Perhaps the earliest of these summaries is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:10. Paul here reminds the Thessalonians that they are destined for salvation, and not for wrath. The grounds for this belief have already been touched on in 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10, where Paul has reminded them of their initial response to his preaching. They had, he says, ‘turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven – Jesus, whom he raised from the dead, and who rescues us from the coming wrath’.

What Paul says about the gospel in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 is brief – he refers to the resurrection and to Christians' future salvation from wrath, but says nothing about the manner of Christ's death or what that meant. That is because the Thessalonians were clearly concerned about whether or not they would come under divine wrath. So at the very beginning of his letter, Paul reminds them of the implications of their faith; since God has raised Jesus from the dead, they can be sure of their own future salvation. In 5:10, he assures them again that they will be saved from wrath 'through our Lord Jesus Christ',

who died for us  
in order that (whether we are awake or asleep) we may live with  
him.

The clause that we have put in brackets has been included by Paul because the Thessalonians have been disturbed by the death of some of their number, and he is anxious to assure them that these people will nevertheless be included in the coming salvation from wrath. Without it, we have a two-line couplet:

who died for us  
in order that we may live with him.

Paul's stark comment that Christ died 'for us' is balanced by an assurance that we will share his resurrection. Remarkably, however, though Christ's resurrection is clearly implied in the 'with him', we have no 'who rose' to match the 'who died'; instead, we have a purpose clause, introduced by the Greek word *hina*, meaning 'in order that'. We shall discover that Paul is fond of this particular construction.

'Christ died for us'. What does Paul mean by this? Some commentators assume that Paul is thinking of Christ's death as substitutionary: they assume, that is, that Christ dies *in our place*.<sup>1</sup> This does not seem to be an appropriate description of his teaching, however, for Christ's death does not mean that Christians do not face physical death.<sup>2</sup> It is possible that the Thessalonians had assumed that this was the case, and that this is why they were disturbed by the fact that some of their number had already died (1 Thess. 4:13). If so, they had misunderstood Paul's gospel: Christ's death does not put a stop to physical death *in this age*.

1. E.g. L. Morris, *The Cross in the Pauline Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965); E. K. Parzenoster, 1976), p. 225.  
2. 'Death to sin', also, as we shall see, is something which Christians have to share with Christ.

Christians may be 'awake or asleep' – alive or dead – when, as Paul expected would happen soon, the Day of Judgement came.

Had Paul been thinking of Christ's death as substitutionary, he would have written simply 'Christ died for us, in order that we might live'. In physical terms, such substitutions are possible. A famous, fictional, example occurs at the end of Dickens' novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, when Sydney Carton takes Charles Darnay's place at the guillotine. But such events are not always fictions. A friend of mine dived under a Calcutta tram to save a child who had fallen beneath it, and died as a result. Her death could truly be described as substitutionary, since she died in order that the child might live.

#### CHRIST OUR REPRESENTATIVE

Paul, however, is using a different concept: 'Christ died', he wrote, 'in order that we might live *with him*'. He sees Christians as *sharing* the life of Christ. This is the idea that we find him spelling out in Romans 6: 'Christ died for us' does not mean that we escape death, but that he dies as our representative – the representative of humanity – and those who in turn share his death (to sin) will also share his resurrection. Living with Christ, therefore, implies also *dying* with him.

A similar idea is expressed in another of Paul's early letters – this time in very personal terms. In Galatians 2:19–21, Paul exclaims, 'I have died to law, *in order that* I might live to God'. How has this death taken place? It was by being 'crucified with Christ', so that it is now *Christ* who lives in Paul. Once again, Christ's resurrection is implied, not spelt out. This new life derives from the fact that the Son of God 'loved me and gave himself *for me*'. Reverse the order of the sentences, and we see the parallel with 1 Thessalonians 5:10:

The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me,  
(and I have died to the law)  
in order that I might live to God;  
(I have been crucified with Christ)  
and it is no longer I who live,  
but Christ who lives in me.

Galatians 2 fills out what is said in 1 Thessalonians 5:10, reminding us that Christ's death on behalf of others has to be appropriated: it is those who share his death to life in the old age who will share his resurrection life.

In other summaries, Christ's death is linked specifically with sins. In Galatians 1:4, the Galatians are reminded that

Christ gave himself *for our sins*,  
that he might set us free from this present evil age.

We have seen already that 'this age' is dominated by the power of sin.<sup>3</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 15:3, we are again told that 'Christ died *for our sins*', but this time, Paul notes that this was 'according to the scriptures'. Unfortunately he does not tell us *which* scriptures! One possibility is that he was thinking of Isaiah 53, a passage which came to be interpreted of Christ. It is unclear whether or not it was understood in this way in Paul's day, though it certainly was by the time that 1 Peter 2:21–25 was written. Nor is it clear whether he is linking the phrase with the fact of Christ's death or with its purpose, to deal with sin. Perhaps, like the phrase 'witnessed to by the law and the prophets' in Romans 3:21, it is meant to refer to the scriptures in general.

Another passage which links Christ's death with sins – or rather with trespasses (the term he uses in Romans 5) – is Romans 4:25, which refers to those who believe in Jesus our Lord,

who was handed over to death because of *our trespasses*,  
and was raised because of *our acquittal* (or 'so that we might be  
declared righteous').

This time, we have two parallel statements about Christ's death and resurrection: his death was the result of our trespasses, and his resurrection led to our acquittal. If we try to unpack their meaning, however, we realize that this is based on an understanding of Christ's resurrection similar to that which we find in 1 Thessalonians 5:10:

He was handed over to death (because of our trespasses)  
and was raised in order that we might share his acquittal  
(pronounced at his resurrection).

As we have seen, this is the idea that Paul then spells out in Romans 5, in his comparison and contrast between Adam and Christ.

The same ideas reappear in 2 Corinthians 5:14–15, where Paul writes 'One has died for all'. Once again, this sounds at first like substitution,

3. For a similar idea, see Col. 1:13–14, which describes how God 'rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins'.

Christ dying *instead* of all, but as we read on, we find that he explains that what he means is that Christ died *as our representative*. He immediately spells out the significance of this 'death for all':

One has died *for all*,  
therefore *all have died*.  
And he died *for all*  
*in order that* the living might no longer live to themselves,  
but to the one who died and was raised for them.

This time, therefore, Paul has explained what he means when he says that Christ died 'for all'. It means that they, too, have already died – not, of course, a physical death, but a spiritual one, to sin. As usual, the consequence is life – described here not, as in 1 Thessalonians, as life with Christ, but life that is centred on him, instead of on themselves. This is parallel to what he says in Galatians 2:20, where he speaks of his new life as a life centred on the Son of God.

#### SHARING IN CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

It is hardly surprising that Paul goes on, in 2 Corinthians 5:17, to explain that when someone is 'in Christ', there is in effect 'a new creation'. The old things (life lived as Adam lived it, dominated by sin and condemnation) have gone, and new things (life in Christ, and the righteousness that is found in him) have arrived. This is the fulfilment of the eschatological promise – a restoration which is in fact a new beginning.

All this, Paul explains, is from God, who has initiated the whole process of reconciliation. He did this in Christ. How? Paul explains in 5:21:

The one who knew no sin  
He made to be sin *for us*,  
*in order that* we might become the righteousness of God *in him*.

Once again we have the familiar 'for us' and 'in order that', but the idea itself is new and shocking. Instead of Christ *dying* for us, we have him being *made sin*. What does Paul mean? We should note that he does *not* say that Christ was made a *sinner*: indeed, he specifically notes that he 'knew no sin'. The idea that he was 'made sin' is in fact close to one that we have met before, in Romans 5:12–21 and 8:3. As man, 'in Adam', Christ was identified with the human predicament and shared the consequences of sin – estrangement from God. That he was 'made sin' was

demonstrated in his death, just as his resurrection demonstrated his righteousness. But Paul makes no specific reference to either his death or his resurrection. Instead, he points to the *cause* of his death – human sin – and the *result* of his resurrection – our righteousness. If Christ was ‘made sin’, Christians ‘become righteousness’, and just as being made sin signified alienation from God, so being made righteousness signifies reconciliation. But once again, it depends on that significant phrase ‘in him’. Christians share in *Christ’s* righteousness. For all Paul’s startling language, we recognize the similarities with what he says in Romans 4:25:

He was handed over to death because of our trespasses,  
And was raised that we might be declared righteous.

His death was a judgement on our sin – a judgement whose consequences he shared. His resurrection was a vindication of his righteousness – a vindication in whose consequences *we* share.

From 2 Corinthians we turn back to 1 Corinthians, where we find an ‘echo’ of 2 Corinthians 5:21. We have noted already Paul’s insistence on the importance of the message of Christ crucified (1:18–21). It is in the context of this passage that he describes what it means to be ‘in Christ Jesus’, who is for believers not only wisdom from God, but *righteousness* and sanctification and redemption as well (v. 30). Paul’s discussion of the message of the cross here has underlined its absurdity: the cross seems to be a symbol of weakness and folly. Its true meaning is now experienced by those who are united with Christ: believers share Christ’s righteousness.

It seems clear that Paul’s understanding of how the death of Christ can lead to forgiveness and to righteousness depends on two central factors. Firstly, whatever happened was the work of God himself, who ‘sent’ his Son, ‘gave him up’, and ‘raised’ him from the dead. Secondly, it was achieved *through* Christ, who (as Son of God) was obedient to his will, but was also *fully human*. In order to be our representative, he had to be one with us, sharing in what it meant to be human. As we noted in looking at Romans 5, what he achieved was as ‘the one man, Jesus Christ’.

In Galatians 3:13 we find Paul using language quite as shocking as that which he uses in 2 Corinthians 5:21. This time he describes Christ as ‘a curse’. In this passage, he links the curse pronounced by the law on those who fail to obey it (Deut. 27:26) with its declaration that a criminal whose body was hung on a tree was under a curse (Deut. 21:23).

Such a person himself became a curse – a source of contamination to others. Christ’s death was the proclamation that, under the law, he was a curse; in fact he had become a source of blessing, and had ‘redeemed’ (set free) those who were under that curse. Once again, Paul links what happened to Christ and what happens to believers with the Greek word *hina*, meaning ‘in order that’:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law,  
having become a curse *for us* ...  
*in order that* the blessing of Abraham might be extended, *in*  
*Christ*, to the Gentiles,  
(and) *in order that* we might receive the promised Spirit through  
faith.

Paul’s argument here is specifically related to the role of the law, and to his fear lest the Galatian Christians should see it as necessary to salvation. Instead of speaking of sin and righteousness as in 2 Corinthians 5, therefore, he focuses on the more specific issues relating to the law, which had pronounced a curse on sinners, but had not led to the blessing promised to Abraham. As a Jew, crucified by Rome, Christ had come under this curse, but the curse had been overturned; Jews and Gentiles alike had received blessing; and proof of this was to be seen in the gift of the Holy Spirit. Once again, as in 1 Thessalonians 5:10, there is no specific reference to Christ’s resurrection, but it is the underlying assumption of his argument: there could be no blessing without it. Just as what appeared to human eyes (which see things from the point of view of the ‘flesh’) to be folly and weakness proved to be wisdom and strength (1 Cor. 1:25), so what seemed in the eyes of the law (which operated in the sphere of the ‘flesh’) to be a curse has now been demonstrated to be the true source of blessing.

We have suggested that Paul’s understanding of Christ as having become a curse, set out in Galatians 3, is linked with the fact that he was a Jew. This is an idea which Paul spells out in the following chapter, when he says that God’s Son was ‘born of a woman, born under the law’. If we read on, we discover that what Paul says here has the familiar structure, using the Greek word *hina*, meaning ‘in order that’, that we have seen in statements about Christ’s death:

God sent his Son,  
Born of a woman,  
Born under the law,  
*in order that* he might redeem those under the law,  
*in order that* we might receive adoption.

The structure is similar to that in Galatians 3:13–14, but so, too, are the ideas. What Christ did in being identified with the human (and specifically Jewish) situation was done *in order that* human beings might enjoy certain blessings. In 3:13–14, as a result of being redeemed from the curse of the law, Christians have received the promised blessing of the Spirit, and Gentiles have been included in the blessing promised to Abraham (namely, righteousness). In 4:4–5, too, Paul speaks of the redemption of those who are under the law, and of the gift of sonship – a gift that he has already said is given to those who are ‘in’ Christ, and so the offspring of Abraham (3:26, 29), and which is guaranteed by the gift of the Spirit (4:6).

If Galatians 3 and 4 offer parallel ideas, so do Galatians 4 and Romans 8. In Romans 8:3, as in Galatians 4:4, we read once more that God sent his Son – this time in the likeness of sinful flesh. Once again, we find Paul insisting that Christ shared fully in our humanity. Moreover, God condemned sin in the flesh (a condemnation that, as he has already explained, led to Christ’s death). The purpose this time (introduced once again by *hina*) is said to be that the law’s requirement of righteousness should be fulfilled in us, who live according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:4) – the Spirit of holiness who raised Christ (and us) from the dead (Rom. 1:4); when that takes place, we receive the ‘Spirit of adoption’ (8:15), and so address God as ‘Father’, as in Galatians 4:6.

Here then, we have two statements that God sent his Son to share our humanity, in order that those who are ‘in him’ might share his status as God’s children. Paul uses the same idea elsewhere. A notable example is in Philipians, where Paul describes Jesus as being ‘in the form of God’, and yet taking ‘the form of a slave’ by taking human likeness. There could be no greater contrast than this – especially since his action led to death on a cross (Phil. 2:6–11). This passage spells out more clearly than any other what sharing the status of men and women really involved. But Paul does not explain that what Christ did was ‘for us’, and neither is there a *hina* clause to explain what his self-humiliation achieved – only a triumphant ‘Therefore’ in verse 9 which introduces an account of how God has exalted him. This time Paul seems to tell us how Christ became man, and to describe his death and resurrection (or rather, appropriately here, his *exaltation*, since Paul has been stressing Christ’s great humiliation) *without* telling us what these achieve for others. But when we turn the page and read the end of chapter 3, we find that Paul here describes how believers confidently

hope to *share Christ’s status*. Because he experienced human humiliation and death, he will enable believers to share his glory: once again then, the fact that Christ shared our status means that we shall share his. If the emphasis in this letter is rather different from that in Romans and Galatians, being concerned with future hope rather than present experience, that is hardly surprising, since when Paul wrote Philipians, he was writing from prison, facing the prospect of an imminent death-sentence. What he had in mind here was the end of the process, as described in Romans 8, when those who are already acknowledged as God’s children would be conformed to the glory of his Son.

We find a similar idea, expressed in very different language, in 2 Corinthians 8:9. Here, thrown into a discussion of what we might have supposed was a very mundane subject (the need for the Corinthians to contribute to the collection that Paul is making for the benefit of poor Christians in Jerusalem!) Paul tosses a reminder of what Christ has done for *them*:

You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: that, though he was rich, yet on your account he became poor, in order that you, by his poverty, might become rich.

The implication is obvious: if Christ did so much for you, you certainly should help those who are poorer than yourselves. Here we see Paul adapting a central theme of his understanding of what Christ has done ‘for us’, and expressing it in language which will be appropriate to a particular application of its implications. Instead of speaking of Christ being born of a woman, under law, coming in the likeness of sinful flesh, or coming in the form of a slave, he describes him as accepting ‘poverty’ instead of riches. But here, again, we find the idea that Christians share *his* status. Because he became poor, they become rich. The language is, of course, metaphorical. But it nevertheless provides a theological basis for Paul’s appeal.

With the exception of Philipians 2 and 3, these statements are parallel in structure with other statements that we have looked at which spell out the purpose of what Christ did in the form of clear contrasts. These were:

- 1 Thess. 5:10, where the result of Christ’s death for us was that we live with him;

- Gal. 3:13–14, where Christ became a curse for us, and the result was blessing (sonship and Spirit) for Gentiles as well as for Jews; and
- 2 Cor. 5:21, where Christ became sin, with the result that we became righteousness in him.

We see, then, that whether Paul is talking about what theologians later came to speak of as the doctrine of 'incarnation',<sup>4</sup> or about what they termed the doctrine of 'atonement', he uses similar formulae. Because he was fully human, Christ *shared the status* of men and women, and shared in what it meant to be human; this involved suffering the consequences of sin, including death. In raising him from the dead, God has declared him to be righteous, given him life, and initiated a new creation, and those who are in Christ *share his status*. It is because they are 'in Christ' and share his status that they have been 'righted'. It is this idea of sharing in Christ's status which a nineteenth-century hymn-writer, William Bright, was attempting to express when he prayed that God would 'only look on us as found in him'.<sup>5</sup> An early father of the church, Irenaeus, summed up the concept of mutual sharing of status even more memorably when he wrote: 'Christ became what we are, in order that we might become what he himself is'.<sup>6</sup> He became what we are – and shared in all that this means – so that we might share in what *he* is.

#### 'INTERCHANGE IN CHRIST'

This idea of mutual sharing seems to lie at the heart of Paul's understanding of how the human race has been reconciled to God. In trying to describe what takes place, I have adopted the term 'interchange' – a word that I have used in an attempt to convey the mutuality of experience involved.<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that it is *not* an 'exchange' between Christ and the believer. An exchange would imply substitution, of the kind illustrated in Charles Dickens' story.<sup>8</sup> What Paul is describing is God's Son sharing fully in our humanity, and suffering the consequences

of so doing, so that he shares our human death. Yet he refused to succumb to sin (2 Cor. 5:21) and was obedient to God (Rom. 5:19). Therefore God raised him from death, and vindicated him. Because he shared our humanity, he is able to act as our representative. He died to sin on our behalf, and has been raised to a life in which we, too, may share. But in order to share this new life, Paul insists that believers have to be baptized into Christ – and so, symbolically, into his death – acknowledging God's judgement on sin. Thus Christ *shares* our physical death and we *share* his death to sin and his life. This is no simple exchange! But for believers, there is certainly *an exchange of experience*: instead of sin, they have righteousness, instead of slavery, freedom, instead of death, life – and all because they now share the status of the Son of God, and acknowledge God himself as 'Father'.

From time to time, Paul uses various images to convey what Christ's death achieves. In Galatians 3:13 and 4:5, as we have seen, he uses a word which means 'to redeem' or 'to buy back' – the word used in 'redeeming' a slave – and in 1 Corinthians 6:20 and 7:23 he uses the simple verb 'to buy' in order to remind the Corinthians that they belong to God (cf. the similar argument in Rom. 6:15–23). Earlier, in 1 Corinthians 5:7, he refers to Christ as the passover lamb, sacrificed for us, a reminder that the blood of the passover lamb played a crucial part in God's rescue of Israel from Egypt, and became a symbol for God's redemption of his people. And we have seen how, in Romans, Paul made use of two other Old Testament images, with what appears to be an allusion to the mercy-seat in 3:23, and a possible reference to the sin-offering in Romans 8:3.

There is nothing surprising in Paul's use of these images. He has maintained that what the law and the prophets promised had been fulfilled in Christ, and there seems no reason to suppose that Paul is using ideas that he has 'borrowed' from others, or which do not fit with his own understanding of what the death of Jesus achieved. Sin had to be dealt with, and sacrificial imagery was appropriate to explain what had been done. When the original passover lambs were killed, the result was freedom for Israel; the sacrifice of a sin-offering had symbolized the removal of sins; the 'mercy-seat' was the place where God and his people were reconciled, through the death of an animal. But it was no longer an animal that had been sacrificed; instead it was the 'one man' who was able to bring God and man together whose death had finally dealt with sin.

4. Lit. 'being made flesh' – i.e. the taking on of human nature.

5. William Bright, 1824–1901, in the hymn 'And now, O Father, mindful of the love'.

6. *Ada, Haer. V. praef.*

7. Cf. M. D. Hooker, *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), chapters 1–4. The phrase 'interchange' was first used in this sense by R. P. C. Hanson, in connection with what he referred to as the 'interchange between opposites experienced by Christians in 2 Cor. 1: 1–7'; see his *II Corinthians* (Torch Commentary) (London: SCM, 1954), pp. 32–5.

8. See above, p. 93.

What we have discovered, in looking at Paul's teaching about how Christ's death affects the human race, is firstly, that he insists that the initiative is with God. It is *God* who reconciles (2 Cor. 5:18–20; Rom. 5:10–11), *God* who sends his Son (Rom. 8:3; Gal. 4:4), *God* who gives him up (Rom. 4:25; 8:32), *God* whose grace is seen in what Christ does for us (Rom. 5:15–17). Secondly, we have seen that Christ shares fully in our status, and that as a result, Christ dies *for us*, not as our substitute but as our representative. Thirdly, we have seen that he is our representative not only in his death but in his resurrection also: because he has shared our status, we are enabled to share his. What Paul understands this interchange of experience to mean for the life of a Christian is the topic that we must explore next.