

Life and Teachings of Paul

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New Creation in Christ

Paul sees the whole of humankind as having destroyed itself through sin (cf. Rom 3:9, 23). In Paul's thinking sin is more than a specific transgression or violation of a command of God. In 1 John 3:4, John identifies sin as a transgression of the Law; however, this is not the full extent of the meaning of the Hebrew *hata* or the Greek *hamartia*, the terms for sin in the OT and NT respectively.

Sin in Paul is much more than a transgression of the Law, to Paul it is a malevolent power or a malignant force that has enslaved man and now reigns over the whole of the human race (cf. Rom 5:21; 6:5-7, 12, 14, 16-18, 20; see also Eph 2:2; 6:12; Col 2:13). According to Paul this enslaving power culminates in human death for every man and woman who is an offspring of Adam (cf. Rom 5:21; 6:20-23). In fact, to be enslaved to sin is to be pronounced dead already (cf. Eph 2:1, 5; Col 2:13). From Adam to the present time, sin has manifested itself in disbelief and rebellion against the will of God, resulting in death (Gen 2:17; 3:17-19). Through disbelief man becomes a victim of sin (i.e. falls under its power), as was the case with the first man (Adam) and woman (Eve); and so with all descendants of Adam (**adamic** mankind) living today (cf. Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:21-22, 45-49).

The Gospel According to Paul

The message of great news (or gospel - *euangelion*) to Paul is that through belief, the human race may escape this enslavement; i.e. the power fed by disbelief. The story of Adam's in Gen 3, has become our story. The choice to disbelieve of what God has said brings us the same consequent as

that of Adam, estrangement from God and human death. It is "disbelief" that empowers sin and it is "belief" that delivers man from the enslavement of sin. Belief is that powerful, as is disbelief.

The key to understanding how belief can deliver one from the enslaving power of sin is found in the theme of "divine reversal." In Jesus of Nazareth, God entered into human history through Jesus of Nazareth, and through death and resurrection reversed the curse of death passed upon all men through Adam. According to Paul, "in Adam" all men die (through disbelief), but "in Christ" all shall be made alive (through belief). If Adam's disbelief could result in death for him, and also for all his descendants through their disbelief, so also can Christ's belief lead to eternal life for him, and also for all those who follow his example of belief. Belief is that powerful, and so also is disbelief. If disbelief is powerful enough to bring death to Adam and all those "in Adam," so also is belief powerful enough to bring life all those "in Christ," (1 Cor 15:22).

This whole *schema* works itself out in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, which is defined by Paul in 1 Cor 15:1-4 as "the gospel." Christ's death was the means by which God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth entered into conflict with Satan within the arena of his activity, where he reigns over man in death and Hell, and there destroyed the power of death to hold one within the realm of death. God, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, reversed the curse of death by recreating him through his resurrection into new existence, not just a temporary escape from death as with Lazarus, but a conquest over death into an existence wherein death or Satan has no presence (cf. Rev 1:13-18; Heb 2:14; 1 Cor 15:45-49 and 51-57; Rom 5:12-21; 10:9-10).

What must one do to receive this deliverance or salvation? Believe that such a wonder is a reality and become with that reality through belief. As one acts out of his disbelief and thus becomes one with his disbelief so can one act out of his belief and become one with his belief. Adam stands as the representative head of the race of man condemned by his disbelief. According to Paul, Christ is a new Adam (1 Cor 15:45-49), the representative head of a new race of humankind, a recreated or regenerated human race of whom Jesus is the first fruit (1 Cor 15:22-23). Through reenactment of Adam's story (disbelief of God's word), we enter

into the curse of death, through re-enactment of the story of Jesus of Nazareth (belief of God's word), we enter into the promise of life. One is either "in Adam" (the old man) or "in Christ" (the new man), to use the language of Paul (1 Cor 5:17; Rom 6:6; Eph 4:22, 24; Col 3:9-10; Gal 1:23; 6:15; Eph 2:15; Rom 6:4).

The Mystery of Redemption: New Creation

All of us are born as offspring's of Adam, because we are human beings (**adamic** men), who have descended from Adam. We must die to this existence and experience new creation by God in order to become new beings in Christ. New creation existence is a concept critical to Paul's thinking of how God has accomplished the salvation of the human race. It is developed throughout his letters, especially in Romans 6, and in his letter to the Ephesians, where he presents this whole concept as "the mystery of redemption" revealed to him by God. This mystery (*musterion* – that which was hidden and is now made known) is a revelation of God's recreation of man, the creation of a new humanity "in Christ," that will survive the old humanity "in Adam" that has destroyed itself through disbelief and resulting sin.

The Greek word *musterion* was used in the first century Mediterranean world for something hidden that had been disclosed. It was used especially of revelation from otherworldly sources called *musterion sophia* (secret wisdom). The Greek-Oriental Mystery Religions developed out of such a concept. They claimed to possess secret wisdom (knowledge) that was known only to the initiates of the mystery cult. Paul seems to know of this usage and employs the concept to say to the world of Mediterranean antiquity, here is the true *musterion* revealed by the true Deity, God will save humankind through re-creating it. God will become the Savior of mankind by again becoming man's Creator.

The term *musterion* is found in the NT in 28 occurrences, 21 in the writings of Paul. It is effectually a Pauline term in the NT. The development of this theme in Paul is seen in: Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 1:9; 3:3-5, 8-12; Col 1:26; and 2:1-3. Paul speaks of himself as a steward or trustee of this *musterion*, sharing it with those who desire redemption from

the powers of sin and death (cf. 1 Cor 4:1; Eph 6:19-20). Paul's message of salvation is essentially a message of new creation. God will transform a man by creating him anew, giving him new existence "in Christ" (cf., 2 Cor 5:17; 1 Cor 15:21-22, 45-49 [Rom 5:12-21]; Rom 6; esp. see: Eph 2:1-15; 4:22-24; and Col 2:12-15).

New Creation "In Christ"

Of critical importance to our understanding of this whole development of Pauline thought is the expression "in Christ." Adolf Deissmann, a world-famous linguist of the ancient languages of Mediterranean culture, states that this expression was used for the concept of the union of two beings. In the Mystery Religions this was a union of a mortal and an immortal being or deity, which was experienced through the believer being absorbed into the existence of the deity in whom he or she believes and worships. This was a "symbiosis" wherein two lives became one through the nature of the relationship of the mortal being and a divine being.

According to Adolf Deissmann, this is the meaning of the expression "in Christ" and similar expressions found in the NT in over 200 occurrences; especially is this the case in the writings of Paul (cf. *The Religion of Jesus and the Faith of Paul*, "in Christ," pp 162-74, 182–89, 223-44; "in Adam," 172, 226-27).

Deissmann compares the expressions "in Christ," and "in Adam" to similar expressions as "in the flesh" as meaning "at one with, defined by or characterized by the flesh," (Rom 7:5; 8:8-9); so also "in the world" (Eph 2:12) meaning, "at one with, defined by or characterized by the world," (Deissmann, pp 172-73). It is clear that a union between Christ and the believer is what Paul is convinced happens in one's conversion to Christ. He or she becomes one with, is defined by, or is characterized by Christ. In Paul, it is through the power of belief that a person become "one" with the object of their belief. Paul was a master at communicating deep concepts in terminology and imagery that was "in the air" or "the currency of the realm."

Throughout Paul's writings we see him playing upon Greek

terminology and concepts to communicate the revelation he had received from God to the people of the Hellenistic culture, the dominant culture of the Mediterranean world. What Paul did in his use of this expression "in Christ" was to take a Hellenistic concept and give it new interpretation by filling it with meaning and content it did not have before. He did this especially with the christological titles he used to identify Jesus. The titles *kurios* (Lord), *soter* (Savior), *ho megas theos kai soterios hamon* (our Great God and Savior), were used of the ruler in the Emperor Cult of Rome. Paul adopts these titles and uses them of Jesus, the one who was truly the *Kurios* (Lord), the Savior (*Soter*), and *ho megas theos kai soterios hamon* (our Great God and Savior) as is found in Titus 2:13.

The dynamics at work in the expressions "in Christ" and "in Adam," as found in 1 Cor 15:22, has to do with a person's existence and how that existence is interpreted in relation to Adam and to Christ. Existence "in Adam" is living one's life as patterned after the existence of the first man, Adam; an existence defined by Adam's existence. Adam is the paradigm or exemplar of the life of the one "in Adam." To be "in Adam" means to be one with, in union with, or united with Adam in who we are. We are Adam; his story is our story. He is a creation of clay, a man whose life is under the influence of sin, one who destroyed himself by his disbelief, and so are we. We are all, as members of the human race, **adamic** men (i.e., men "in Adam").

Likewise, existence "in Christ" is existence defined by his existence. Our existence is, by spiritual transformation, an experiencing of his existence. To be "in Christ" means: to be one with, in union with, or united with Christ in who we are. We are in union with Christ by means of our beliefs; i.e., we believe so deeply that we become one with what we believe. His story becomes our story; we suffer with him, we experience death (are crucified) with him, we are buried with him, raised with him - we are created anew (symbolically actualized by resurrection out of the waters of baptism), from our old existence "in Adam" to new existence "in Christ." This is Paul's doctrine of "new creation," as developed in 2 Cor 5:17 and Rom 6.

In the theology of Paul, to be saved by Christ was to be delivered from the power of sin through new creation. This occurs by becoming one

with Christ; thus Paul says, “count yourselves **dead** to sin but **alive** to God “in Christ Jesus,” (Rom 6:11); or in 6:23, “the wages of sin is **death**, but the gift of God is **eternal life** “in Christ Jesus our Lord.” In Rom 8:1 he writes, “there is now no condemnation for those who are “in Christ Jesus,” (Rom 8:1); or “I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is “in Christ Jesus,” with eternal glory (2 Tim 2:10).

From the time of the fall of man God intended his redemption by creating him anew. In his letter to the Ephesians Paul states that God,

*. . . made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed **in Christ**, 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. 11 In him we were also chosen [i.e. those recreated “in Christ”], having been predestined [that which was decided beforehand] according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to hope **in Christ**, might be for the praise of his glory. 13 And you also were included **in Christ** when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation (Eph 1:9-13).*

In verse 4, Paul says, “he chose us “**in him**” before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight (Eph 1:4). Further, he says,

*. . . it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus** to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph 2:8-10).*

Paul believed that God had revealed this mystery of salvation to him and that he was entrusted with the mission of making known to the human race that God had come into the world to redeem those he had created in his image,

. . . and to make plain to everyone the stewardship of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to

his eternal purpose which he accomplished "in Christ Jesus our Lord," (Eph 3:9-11).

Man who was created in the image of God, had destroyed himself through disbelief and disobedience and had brought the curse of death upon all his descendents – the human race. Paul's great revelation was that, in Christ God had recreated man. As he writes in 1 Cor 15:22, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ, all will be made alive."

Paul's concept of union with Christ is inseparably linked to his concept of new creation. In the theology of Paul, to be in Christ is to experience "new creation,"

*. . . if anyone is in Christ, **he is a new creation**; the old has gone, the new has come. 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that **God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ**, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that **in him** we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:17-21).*

"For we are God's workmanship," Paul says, "**created "in Christ Jesus"** to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do," (Eph 2:10); and further he says, "there is now no condemnation for **those who are in Christ Jesus**," Paul writes, "because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:1-2). "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus," he says in Gal 3:26.

Conclusion

In his speech to the elders of the Areopagus in Athens, Paul informed them that:

The God, the one having created the world and all things in it, this one, being Lord of heaven and earth does not dwell in temples made with

hands, 25 neither is he served by the hands of men [as if] needing anything. He gives to all life, breath, and all things. He made from one man every nation of mankind, to dwell upon all the face of the earth, having set in place and ordered seasons, and the boundaries of their habitations 27 to seek God, if perhaps they might feel after him and find him though he is not far from each one of us. 28 For in him we live, move about, and have being/exist; as also certain of your poets have said: "For of him we are offspring. 29 `Being, therefore, the offspring of God, we ought not to think that by the skill or ingenuity of man, with gold, or silver, or stone we may form an image of Deity. So, the times of ignorance God having overlooked, does now command all men everywhere to repent, 31 in as much as he has set a day in which he is going to judge the world in righteousness, by a man whom he appointed and gave evidence to all, having raised him from the dead (Acts 17:26-31, author's translation).

The ignorance of man concerning his Creator was no longer to be overlooked. The Creator had come into the world to restore man to his original state of being as one created in the image of God, and the one in whom God had come into the world was the one through whom new creation had been accomplished. None of this had been the accomplishment of man. Man's accomplished was the destruction of what God had created, but God was involved in the recreation of man, not the old man "in Adam" or after the likeness of Adam, but after the likeness of the one who had saved them from that to which they had enslaved themselves; the one who was himself the very image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15).

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