

Christ

the Centre and Circumference of Paul's Ministry

Suggested outline study
of the fourteen epistles of Paul
with the thought offered
that He is both

‘Centre and Circumference’

by

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CHRIST, the CENTRE and CIRCUMFERENCE of Paul's ministry

Exhibited by selections from his epistles.

At the time of our Lord's earthly ministry, the Scriptures then in use were those books known to us as the Old Testament, and one outstanding fact in connection with our Lord's use of these same Scriptures was His affirmation that they testified of Him.

This is and ever must be a delightful study to follow the lead of type and shadow, prophecy and biography and ponder the miracle of 'Christ in All the Scriptures'. Such a task is not our immediate project, but one though more limited in scope, yet precious in the extreme, namely:

'The Place which Christ occupies in the epistles and life of the apostle Paul'.

Before Paul was converted he had been a student of the Scriptures, and at his conversion we can see the transition from the shadows of the law, which as a Pharisee he venerated, to the reality of Christ, which became the core and touchstone of his after life and ministry.

First let us consider his testimony following his conversion. While we read of his actual conversion in Acts 9, we also are conscious by reading the opening verses that he was already a very perplexed and troubled man. The seeds had been sown by the martyr Stephen. Saul of Tarsus had followed only too closely Stephen's pointed exposition of Israel's history, focusing attention on two points:

- (1) The rejection of Joseph by his brethren, but their recognition of him 'the second time' (Acts 7:13).
- (2) The parallel rejection of Moses at the first, but his acceptance after forty years exile (Acts 7:35),

and then gathering all up in that searching application:

'As your fathers did, so do ye' (Acts 7:51).

Saul had to screw himself up to side with blasphemers and murderers, and condemn one who prayed for his enemies, who also said 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit'.

On the road to Damascus, in a sudden and supernatural blaze of light, Saul heard a voice saying unto him:

'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?'

and replied while prone upon the earth:

'Who art Thou, Lord?' (Acts 9:4,5).

The man who thus spoke was of the straitest sect of his religion, a Pharisee. He was an Hebrew of the Hebrews, and as such would never, even at the cost of life itself, have used the sacred name 'Lord' of any but of Israel's God. Whereas Elohim could be used of 'gods' as well as of 'God', Jehovah is a proper name, and is never used otherwise. To Saul, the Hebrew and the Pharisee, the name 'Lord' was sacred. Who, but 'the Lord' could thus speak from such glory as struck him down on the road to Damascus? The answer from that radiant glory was epoch making. It turned a persecuting Pharisee into a zealous and faithful witness. That answer was 'I am Jesus' (Acts 9:5) and to him, 'Jesus of Nazareth', this stricken, yet emancipated soul gave the sacred name, 'Lord':

'And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city' (Acts 9:6).

Ananias confirmed Paul's new born faith saying:

'The Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way' (Acts 9:17).

Without training or long preparation, this converted Pharisee 'straightway preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God', 'and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ' (Acts 9:19-22). Barnabas also, who would never use the sacred name lightly, told the gathering at Jerusalem how Paul 'had seen the Lord in the way' (Acts 9:27).

Do we find that upon reflection, this same Paul retracted and gave a lower place to the Saviour than he, in his untaught enthusiasm, had at first acknowledged?

To answer that question and to exhibit the place that the Lord Jesus occupied in the life and testimony of this apostle to the Gentiles we propose to devote the remaining pages of this booklet, praying that any whose second name may happen to be 'Thomas' may be led at length to the full unrestricted confession of this Saviour and say:

'My Lord and my God' (John 20:28).

CHRIST, in the Epistles of Paul.

GALATIANS

We have set forth our reasons for believing that Galatians was Paul's first epistle, in *The Berean Expositor*, in *The Apostle of the Reconciliation*, and in Part One of *An Alphabetical Analysis* under the heading *Chronology*. An examination of this challenging epistle will show us how far the Person and Work of Christ dominated the teaching and claimed the undivided loyalty of the apostle Paul.

The same inroad into the purity of the faith that is made evident in Acts 15:1,5 is challenged, exposed and disarmed in this epistle.

The basic doctrine namely 'justification by faith apart from works of law' that was announced in Acts 13:38,39 is summed up in Galatians 1:6 and 7 as 'The grace of Christ', or 'The gospel of Christ', and, said the apostle, if I were to allow myself to tolerate the preaching of any other gospel 'I should not be the servant of Christ', for, among other reasons, Paul certified the Galatians that the gospel preached of him, was 'not after man', for he neither received it of man, neither was he taught it, 'but by the revelation of Jesus Christ' (Gal. 1:10-12). He follows this ultimatum with a reasoned statement going back to his early life, and asking 'Could such a man with such a

background, have evolved such a gospel as has been entrusted to, and preached by me?’

‘You know the story of my past career in Judaism; you know how furiously I persecuted the church of God and harried it, and how I outstripped many of my own age and race in my special ardour for the ancestral traditions of my house. But the God who had set me apart from my very birth called me by His grace, and when He chose to reveal His Son to me, that I might preach Him to the Gentiles, ... ’ (Gal. 1:13-16 Moffatt).

We do not suggest that the A.V. translation of Galatians 1:13-16 is defective, we simply quote Moffatt in order to break the deadening effect that familiarity with our venerable version sometimes induces.

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus is summed up in the words:

‘To reveal His Son in me’ (Gal. 1:16).

The commission given to Saul of Tarsus is summed up in the words:

‘That I might preach HIM’ (Gal. 1:16).

Fourteen years after this most wonderful conversion and commission, Paul, by the same ‘revelation’ that had rendered him independent of ‘man’ or ‘teaching’ (Gal. 1:11,12), went up to Jerusalem

‘And communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles’ (Gal. 2:2).

In verse 4 Paul makes it evident that the liberty that the believer has in Christ Jesus was in jeopardy, and in verse 5 makes it clear that his refusal to be subjected, even for an hour, was because ‘the truth of the gospel’ was at stake (Gal. 2:5). It was for this self same concern for the truth of the gospel that Peter was withstood (Gal. 2:14).

Toward the close of Galatians 2 Paul gives us the gist of his stand against Peter’s dissimulation, which is crystallized in verse 16 as ‘the faith of Christ’ and is given his personal allegiance in the trenchant words of Galatians 2:20.

'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me' (Gal. 2:20).

His final condemnation of the legalistic gospel is:

'I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, THEN CHRIST IS DEAD IN VAIN' (Gal. 2:21).

The opening verse of Galatians 3 shows that Paul did indeed 'preach Him' among the heathen for he says:

'O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?' (Gal. 3:1).

Paul's preaching of 'Jesus Christ and Him crucified' must have been vivid, as we can well believe. He uses a figure borrowed from the hustings, for the words 'evidently set forth', *prographo*, refer to the exhibition of placards which modern though it may sound, was a practice in common use at the time of the apostle.

This emphasis upon the supremacy of Christ in the Gospel is pursued throughout this epistle to the end.

The curse of the law is removed for He was made a curse for us (Gal. 3:13).

All promises focus in Christ:

'Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, Which is Christ' (Gal. 3:16 see also 17,22).

The goal and purpose of the law was to lead us to Christ. Those who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ:

'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise' (Gal. 3:28-29).

God's answer to the groan of creation in the bondage of law, was, when the fulness of the time was come, that He sent forth His Son, and they who are redeemed are sons,

not slaves, and in the spirit of sonship cry 'Abba, Father' (Gal. 4:6).

How does Paul set about the re-establishment of grace and the deliverance of these Galatians from the yoke of bondage?

He tells them that he travails in birth again until 'Christ be formed in you' (Gal. 4:19), and bids them:

'Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free' (Gal. 5:1),

for 'Christ shall profit you nothing' if you submit to the rite of circumcision, and 'Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law'. 'They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh' (Gal. 5:2,4,24).

Turning in conclusion to the relationship of believer to believer, he said: 'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ' (Gal. 6:2), and assures all that 'In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature' (Gal. 6:15). His final and extremely personal word apart from the doxology being 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus' (Gal. 6:17).

The reader must bear in mind that we have a simple purpose before us in this series. We make no attempt to deal with the epistle as a whole. We pass by without comment, problems and difficulties either of translation or exposition, and focus attention on one matter only 'The place of Christ, in the ministry of Paul'.

It will not however be out of place to advise the interested reader, that a careful and fairly full exposition of Galatians, with complete structural outlines, will be found in *The Berean Expositor*, Volumes 37, 38 and 39. Also it is given an exposition in *The Apostle of the Reconciliation*, and in *An Alphabetical Analysis Part Two*.

We therefore leave this exhibition of the place that Christ occupies in the epistle to the Galatians, to pursue the same line of investigation in the epistle to the Corinthians.

CHRIST, in the Epistles of Paul

1 CORINTHIANS

While the Scriptures are for all time, nevertheless they all have had a primary and individual origin. Galatians as we can see was written to rescue these new converts to the faith from the snare of legalism and ceremony. Then, in a sense which the apostle may not have conceived, it has and should minister as the Word of God to each succeeding generation in this age of grace.

So, when we read the epistle to the Corinthians, we are conscious that 'the house of Chloe', and those who ranged themselves under the names of Paul, Apollos or Cephas, and such as were baptized like Crispus and Gaius and Stephanas, were all historic individual members of the Church at Corinth, a literal seaport of Greece. Nevertheless the problems that beset this early company, and the solutions given by the apostle have been repeated, and will be repeated, until these frail bodies of our humiliation are transfigured into the likeness of the Lord's own body of glory, and the limited vision, seen by means of a mirror enigmatically, and partial knowledge, give place to that which is full and complete (1 Cor. 13:12).

If law, misunderstood and misapplied, emptied the cross of Christ of its intrinsic value to Galatians; philosophy was doing the same thing in Greek-speaking Corinth and Colosse.

Consequently, 'wisdom of words', 'wisdom', 'foolishness', 'enticing words of man's wisdom', 'the wisdom of God in a mystery', meet us as we read chapters 1 and 2.

'For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect' (1 Cor. 1:17).

Paul uses the word *logos* 'word' more times than the Authorized Version reveals. Let us see for ourselves:

LOGOS

'Not with wisdom of *words*' (1 Cor. 1:17).

'The *preaching* of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God' (1 Cor. 1:18).

'Not with excellency of *speech*' (1 Cor. 2:1).

'*My speech* ... was not with enticing *words*' (1 Cor. 2:4).

'Not in the *words* ... man's wisdom' (1 Cor. 2:13).

'But which (ref. to *logos*) the Holy Ghost teacheth' (1 Cor. 2:13).

The apostle Paul, possibly knowing the addiction these Corinthians had to juggle with words, uses a startling figure of speech, known to the Greeks as *Catachresis* or Incongruity; and speaks of the 'foolishness' of God as being wiser than men, and of the 'weakness' of God as being stronger than men, and in contrast to all attempts to boast in the flesh, he places the completeness that is found alone in Christ. There is, in verse 30, a small particle *te* translated 'both' in 1 Corinthians 1:2 which is not expressed in the translation of the A.V. and which, by taking a small liberty with the idiom, would be rendered quite plain and pointed, as in the following paraphrase:

'But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification AS WELL AS initial redemption'

which sentiment is again found at the close of chapter 3,

'Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours;
 WHETHER
 Paul, or
 Apollos, or
 Cephas, or
 The World, or Life, or
 Death, or
 Things present, or Things to come;
 ALL ARE YOURS; and
 YE ARE CHRIST'S; and
 CHRIST IS GOD'S' (1 Cor. 3:21-23).

We move on from this most heartening emphasis upon the supreme place that Christ occupied in Paul's ministry to the fifteenth chapter, which is largely devoted to the great doctrine of Resurrection. There, in that sphere, 'Christ is All', and immediately it is seen to be impossible of attainment apart from Him. Look at verses 12-23, twelve verses in all, with twelve references to Christ:

'Now if Christ be preached ...
 'Then is Christ not risen:
 'And if Christ be not risen, ...
 'He raised up Christ:
 'Then is not Christ raised:
 'And if Christ be not raised,
 'Then they ... asleep in Christ are perished.
 'If in this life ... hope in Christ,
 'But now is Christ risen ...
 'Even so in Christ shall all be made alive.
 'Christ the firstfruits;
 'Afterward they that are Christ's at His coming'.

Here it will be seen that the whole argument for Resurrection revolves around Christ. He is the Firstfruits of them that slept. If the dead person who is in view has fallen asleep in Christ, then Christ will be the firstfruits and guarantee that he too shall rise, and the reference to Adam in verse 22, does not include every single soul who is physically descended from Adam, any more than 'All Israel' includes every one who is physically descended from Abraham (Rom. 9:6-8). The number which includes those who are 'of Adam' is larger than the children of promise, who are counted for a seed, and called 'All in Adam'.

This relation of Adam to Christ and the purpose of God is resumed in verses 42-50.

By natural birth, and because through Adam sin entered into the world and death by sin, we are sown in corruption. We have a natural body, and have borne the image of the earthly. But Christ is the last Adam and the Second Man. The first Adam was a living soul, the last Adam a quickening spirit.

'And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the Image of the Heavenly' (1 Cor. 15:49).

Victory comes through our Lord Jesus Christ, and by no other.

So full is the apostle of the love of this Christ, that before he pronounces the benediction he is moved to say:

'If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema' (1 Cor. 16:22).

Maran-atha, which follows, is Aramaic interjected by the apostle 'Our Lord, Come!'

We have not attempted to include all the references to Christ, or even to indicate the many passages that agree with the title of this booklet, enough we trust has been brought forward to fully justify our claim, that in Paul's epistle, from every aspect, 'Christ is All'.

2 CORINTHIANS

In the opening chapter of this second epistle, Paul explained to the Corinthians why there had been a change in his programme.

He had intended to visit them, to go on to Macedonia, return again to them, and then be brought on his way by them to Judea. He had evidently carefully planned this itinerary, and had been equally careful to give them full information.

'When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness?' (2 Cor. 1:17).

What does the apostle mean by 'lightness' here? The Revised Version translates the word 'fickleness'. He uses the word in a slightly different grammatical form in 2 Corinthians 4:17, when he speaks of 'our light affliction'.

As James says:

'Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:

whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow ... ye ought to say, If the Lord will' (Jas. 4:13-15).

So Paul, while he, as a prudent man made his plans, did not forget that it was not within the province of any man to say of his own purpose 'Yea Yea, and Nay Nay' not because he was fickle, or that his word was not his bond, but that all must be held under the possible cancelling or alteration of such plans by the revelation of the Will of the Lord.

But, while such must ever be the case, he immediately passed on to the message he gave them and said in effect: 'Whatever you do, do not gather from this that the message I brought you was of this character':

'For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, ... was not yea and nay, but in Him was yea. For all the promises of God in Him are YEA, and in Him AMEN, unto the glory of God by us' (2 Cor. 1:19,20).

We turn from the promises which are Yea and Amen in Christ to the covenant whose glory excelleth (2 Cor. 3) but on the way we halt for a moment to share in the triumph of the Mighty Victor. In 1 Corinthians 15:57 the apostle said:

'But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ',

and in 2 Corinthians 2:14, he again says:

'Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ',

which, as it reads in the Authorized Version is a result of our triumph in Christ. In Colossians 2:15 we meet the word 'triumph' again where it reads:

'And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it'.

In 2 Corinthians 2:14 Paul envisages a Triumphant Procession of a Conqueror, leading strings of captives in his train. The figure changes a little, to the incense bearers, 'a sweet savour', and to the fact that the captives

were divided into two groups, those who were destined to execution, and those who were to receive a pardon.

‘Here though the details of the metaphor are intricately involved, the general conception which was in the thoughts of the apostle, and swayed his expression, is derived from the customs of a Roman triumph’ (Farrar — *Life and work of St. Paul*).

Should the reader wish to be acquainted more particularly with what comprised a Roman triumph, he will find a fairly full description in *Claudius, the God*, chapter 22, by Robert Graves.

Turning now to chapter 3 we find the expansion of the relative values of the old and new Covenants focused upon two faces. The face of Moses, and the face of Jesus Christ.

‘But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold THE FACE of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away ... And not as Moses, which put a vail over HIS FACE, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished’ (2 Cor. 3:7,13).

‘But if our gospel be veiled (not hid as A.V.), it is veiled to them that are lost ... For God ... hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in THE FACE of Jesus Christ’ (2 Cor. 4:3,6).

A great deal of speculation has been occasioned by endeavouring to explain the words ‘From glory to glory’ (2 Cor. 3:18), but the context makes it clear, that:

‘We all, with UNVAILED FACE beholding as in a glass (mirror) the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image’ (see 2 Cor. 4:4).

FROM THE GLORY of the old covenant which was to be done away, TO THE GLORY of the new covenant which was established in Christ.

Comparable in measure with this contrast between Old and New, is the apostle’s attitude between ‘the word of the beginning of Christ’ (Heb. 6:1) i.e. the Gospels, and the fuller revelation contained in the subsequent revelation of the Ascended Christ, in the epistles:

'Wherefore (i.e. consequent upon His resurrection) henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new (or new things have come into being). And all (these new) things are of God, Who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ' (2 Cor. 5:16-18).

In this ministry of reconciliation, God is seen on the one hand 'In Christ' reconciling the world unto Himself, and the apostles were 'In Christ's stead' urging men to be reconciled to God.

So the witness of the apostle continues, every phase of grace and glory, of experience and doctrine, is centred in Christ, but we are conscious that in condensing this, only a selection from the fourteen epistles of this witness to Christ is possible.

'CHRIST IS ALL'

A suggested study for 'Bereans' to round off this attempt to exhibit the essential place that Christ occupies in the epistles of Paul, and which should also be true of all who confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

GALATIANS

'The liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free' (Gal. 5:1).

1 and 2 THESSALONIANS 'Comfort'

'Wherefore comfort one another with these words' (1 Thess. 4:18).

'Good hope through grace, comfort your hearts' (2 Thess. 2:16,17).

1 and 2 CORINTHIANS

'Christ the firstfruits' (1 Cor. 15:20,23).

'That mortality might be swallowed up of life' (2 Cor. 5:4).

HEBREWS 'Better'

Better hope, covenant, promises, sacrifice. (Heb. 7:19; 8:6; 9:23).

ROMANS

'Christ ... the end of the law for righteousness' (Rom. 10:4).

'Redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood ... that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus' (Rom. 3:24-26).

ACTS TWENTY-EIGHT COMES HERE
EPHESIANS

'Head over all things to the church, which is His body' (Eph. 1:22,23).

'The unsearchable riches of Christ' (Eph. 3:8).

PHILIPPIANS

'This mind ... which was also in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 2:5).

COLOSSIANS

'Christ is all, and in all' (Col. 3:11).

'Firstborn ... Pre-eminence ... Fulness ... all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God ... Christ (Col. 1:18,19; 2:2).

PHILEMON

'For love's sake I rather beseech' (Philemon 9).

1 TIMOTHY

'A pillar and ground of truth and confessedly great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh' (1 Tim. 3:15,16).

'There is ... one Mediator' (1 Tim. 2:5).

TITUS

God our Saviour (Titus 1:3,4; 2:10,13; 3:4,6).

The grace that saved us ... teaches us ... that we should live looking (Titus 2:11-14).

2 TIMOTHY

The testimony of the Lord and of me His prisoner

'Hold fast the form of sound words'

'FINISHED' (2 Tim. 1:8,13; 4:7).

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