

Paul and the Person of Christ

No. 1 Introduction – Why study what Paul wrote about Christ?

“Who are you, Lord?” asked rabbi Saul as he was engulfed by a light from heaven, brighter than the radiance of the Sun (Acts 9:3-6; 26:12-18). The revelation he received by way of answer ignited a consuming passion in him. Writing about thirty years later, he declared, “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:7).

Over the next several months we will, God willing, think about the witness of Paul to the person of Christ.

1. Why study what Paul wrote about Christ?

Why study what *Paul* wrote about Christ?

It must be born in mind that Paul was not simply a private person – he was an apostle of Christ. In fact, it's not too much to say that next to the redemptive life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the appearance of the risen Christ to Paul was possibly the most important event in the New Testament era. Paul saw behind the appearance of the Son of God to him two facts:

- that God had set him apart from before his birth for a special purpose;
- and that this special purpose was to carry the light of the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15-16; c.f. Acts 13:47).

Paul's writings, therefore, do not simply provide us with another perspective on the Christ – they are the revelation which God has especially appointed for the Gentiles, so that we might know Christ.

2. What is the profit of studying Paul's writings about Christ?

What, then, can we hope to gain from studying what Paul wrote about Christ?

(a) A better understanding of the gospel

Robert Reymond says, “when we consider Paul's Christology, we are addressing what for him was essential to everything else in his thought.” In other words, a study of what Paul wrote about Christ will lead us to a study of what Paul wrote about God, man, redemption, the church, and the Christian hope.

(b) A greater confidence in Christ

It's essential that we don't lose sight of Paul's personal relationship to Christ. “The personal relation to Christ dominates every department of the apostle's life”

(Machen). Shortly before his execution he wrote to Timothy, “I suffer... but I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed” (2 Tim. 1:12).

We may expect that Paul’s personal confidence in Christ will rub off on us as we study the Christ Paul knew, loved, obeyed and relied upon.

(c) *A more transforming knowledge of God*

In 2 Corinthians 3-4 Paul contrasts the glory of the ministry of Moses with the glory of the ministry of Christ. Moses’ face was veiled (3:13) – he was not the “revealer” of God. But Christ is the image of God (4:4) – and we receive “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (4:6).

To know Christ – to “behold the glory of the Lord” (3:18a) – is therefore to be “transformed... from one degree of glory to another” (3:18b).

(d) *A more humble willingness to serve*

When Paul tells the Philippian Christians about the humility and the exaltation of Christ (Philippians 2:6-11), his purpose was to motivate them to emulate Christ’s willingness to humble himself and to serve others (Philippians 2:1-5). We have not really understood Paul’s witness to the Christ if our study puffs us up. A true understanding of Christ will make us servants.

I hope that it is apparent that we cannot overestimate the importance of this subject.

3. How will we study what Paul wrote about Christ?

The subject of “Paul and the Person of Christ” is massive. We need to organize it so that it is manageable.

Ben Witherington suggests that an “adequate approach to Paul’s Christology recognizes its narrative shape.” Following his suggestion, these studies will be structured around the classic text of Philippians 2:5-11, i.e.

- (a) Paul’s doctrine of the pre-existent Son of God;
- (b) Paul’s knowledge of the historical man Jesus;
- (c) Paul’s faith in Christ the risen, exalted Lord.

These are not neat, watertight categories, e.g. the Son of God was born of a woman (points (a) and (b)); and the last Adam is a life-giving spirit (points (b) and (c)). The wonder of Christ is that in his person is the union of these three themes.

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No. 2 How did Paul know Christ?

“What is really most significant in the Pauline Epistles... is the complete absence of any defence of the Pauline doctrine of Christ, the complete absence, indeed, of any systematic presentation of that doctrine. The Pauline view of Christ is everywhere presupposed, but nowhere defended” (Machen).

In other words, Paul's teaching about the person of Christ was uncontroversial in the early Church – it was what all the apostles taught.

Nevertheless, Paul couldn't say with the other apostles that he was an eyewitness of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus, that he had been present at the crucifixion, or that he had enjoyed table fellowship with the risen Lord. So how did Paul come to write so much about Christ that the Jerusalem apostles found unexceptionable? How did Paul's know Christ?

1. Revelation

Paul claims that his knowledge of Christ began with the revelation he received at his conversion, and he places this revelation on a par with the appearances of Christ to Peter and the other apostles (1 Cor. 15:8). Paul appeals to his seeing the Lord as proof of his apostolic office (1 Cor. 9:1; 2 Cor. 4:6).

Galatians 1:11-23 is the earliest statement of Paul about his conversion and its consequences. He asserts that his gospel was not of human origin and that he had not been taught it by men, but that it came directly by revelation from God.

2. Tradition

Although Paul was careful to claim that the revelation he received of Jesus Christ was independent of the Jerusalem apostles, that doesn't mean he had no interest in the eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life.

Paul probably become acquainted with the facts about Jesus before his conversion. He was raised in Jerusalem as a young man – he was present at Stephen's trial – and he was familiar enough with the message about the resurrection of Jesus to understand its implications. When the risen Lord arrested Paul on the road to Damascus, Paul didn't receive new *information* about the life and death of Jesus – instead, he received a demonstration that his estimate of who Jesus was had been entirely wrong, and that the implications of the resurrection of Jesus were inescapable.

About three years after his conversion, Paul met the apostles in Jerusalem (Gal. 1:17-18; Acts 9:27-28). AT that time he may have received from them many details of incidents in which Jesus and the disciples had been involved. In this way Paul

came into possession of a tradition which had its origin with Jesus (1 Cor. 11:23) and the apostolic eyewitnesses (1 Cor. 15:3-7). That is why Paul:

- appeals in his letters to the words of Jesus (1 Cor. 7:10; 9:14; 1 Thess. 4:15-17), including the institution of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-25);
- summaries the Christian message in a formula that is generally accepted as pre-Pauline and that he received from the Jerusalem apostles (1 Cor. 15:3-7);
- passes on regulations for practical Christian conduct (1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 3:6) which he calls "traditions".

3. The Scriptures

To what extent are the Old Testament Scriptures a source of Paul's knowledge of the person of Christ? There is no doubt that Paul brings the Old Testament revelation of Christ and the person of Christ into relation with one another. But does Paul know Christ through the Old Testament scriptures, or does he interpret the Old Testament through his knowledge of Christ?

Paul quoted from the Old Testament frequently, but his primary concern in using the Old Testament is not to gain Biblical authority for specific doctrines but rather *to demonstrate that the redemption in Christ is in continuity with the revelation of the Old Testament and is indeed, the fulfilment of it.*

Paul does not endeavour to demonstrate a one-to-one equivalence between prophecy and fulfilment, but he places the redemptive events of the appearing of Jesus Christ in the stream of Old Testament redemptive history.

This leads Paul to applications of the Old Testament that are not readily obvious – the illumination of the Holy Spirit is essential if they are to be understood. So, although the glory of God shines forth in Jesus Christ even in the Old Testament, the glory is veiled to the unbelieving mind (2 Cor. 3:15).

This does not mean that the Holy Spirit introduces the initiated into an esoteric meaning in the Old Testament Scriptures; rather, the Holy Spirit enables the believer to understand from the Old Testament the meaning of the redemptive event wrought in the history of Jesus Christ. Thus, although Christ is to be understood against the Old Testament background which he came to fulfil, the new understanding of the Old Testament is controlled by Jesus Christ himself.

In other words, Paul models for us how we are to approach the Old Testament – reading it through the lens of Christ. It is the coming of Christ that floods the Old Testament with meaning. Indeed, the Old Testament, being the record of redemptive history, was necessarily written for the sake of those who in the new era would come to believe in Christ (Rom. 15:4).

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No. 3 *He is the Son of God, Part 1*

Remember, these studies are structured by Philippians 2:5-11, i.e.

- (a) Paul's doctrine of the pre-existent Son of God;
- (b) Paul's knowledge of the historical man Jesus;
- (c) Paul's faith in Christ the risen, exalted Lord.

In this study we want to look broadly at the extent to which Paul's conviction regarding Christ's deity is expressed in his preaching and letters. In further studies we will look at some texts in more details.

1. "He is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20)

Paul's doctrine of the deity of Christ was not the result of many years of reflection. Rather, as soon as Paul was converted he began to teach that Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 9:20).

The language in which Paul describes his call and commission ("But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me..." Gal. 1:15-16) suggests that an appreciation of Jesus as the Son of God was inherent in his conversion experience.

This was an astonishing thing for a monotheistic Jew to proclaim, but it wasn't original to Paul. It can be traced back to:

- the apostolic witness of the gospels (e.g. Mark 1:1; John 20:31);
- the disciples' experience of the risen Christ (e.g. Matt. 28:19);
- the basic fact of the self-revelation of Jesus' super-human, absolute person, as presented in the Gospels (e.g. Matt. 16:16-17; John 3:16).

Paul teaches that Jesus is nothing less than God (Rom. 9:5; Tit. 2:13). But he is not God in an undifferentiated sense:

- He is in "the form of God" (Phil. 2:6) as one who is clothed in garments of divine majesty and splendour, possessing inwardly and displaying outwardly the very nature of God himself;
- He is the living image of the invisible God who makes God known (Col. 1:15a);
- He is firstborn of the Father, heir of all that is God's (Col. 1:15b).
- He is the very embodiment of deity, God "manifested in the flesh" (Col. 2:9).

For Paul, Jesus is essentially God's Son. It was as "Son of God" that he was sent into the world (Gal. 4:4).

Jesus' sonship is unique – he is God's own Son (Rom. 8:3, 31) and the Son of God's love (Col. 1:13).

2. Paul's witness to Christ's divinity

Paul very rarely wrote of Christ as God. This is not because Paul did not believe that Christ is God – far from it! Rather:

- God by any other name (including the designation *Christ*) is still God.
- Paul uses the word “God” almost exclusively to designate the Father.
- Paul uses the word “Lord” both to affirm the deity of Christ, since “Lord” (*kurios* in Greek) was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to translate the *Tetragrammaton* (YHWH).
- Paul uses “Lord” to refer to the incarnate, risen and glorified Son of God, and thus to distinguish between the first and second persons of the Godhead.
- Paul does indeed use the word “God” of Christ, e.g. Rom. 9:5; Tit. 2:13.

Moreover, Paul's “casual” references to Christ are telling. For example:

- Paul prayed to Christ (2 Cor. 12:8; 2 Thess. 3:5) – but prayer is properly offered only to God.
- Paul said that to believe in Jesus is to behold “the glory of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18), and this is a greater revelation than the divine glory shining on the face of Moses.
- Paul assigned to Christ the role of Creator (Col. 1:16-17).
- Paul taught that “the day of the Lord” – the day of God's vindication – is also “the day of Christ” (1 Cor. 1:8; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2).
- Again and again Paul names the Lord Jesus Christ alongside God the Father as the source of grace and peace in his greetings to the churches (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:2).

There can be absolutely no doubt that Paul regarded Jesus as God.

Paul and the Person of Christ

No. 4 *He is the Son of God, Part 2*

We saw previously the extent of the testimony of Paul to the divinity of Christ:

- it was the message he proclaimed as soon as he was converted;
- it is the presupposition of his presentation of the gospel;
- and it is evidenced by the very incidental manner in which he ascribes Godhood to Jesus.

In this study we will begin to look at some specific texts in a little more detail.

1. “The Christ who is God over all, blessed forever” (Romans 9:5)

The proper exegesis of Romans 9:5 has been the subject of great dispute.

- Should we follow readings like that of the RSV – “and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed forever. Amen”?
- Or should we prefer the rendering of, for example, the ESV – “To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen”?

The difference is very significant. The latter, but not the former, unambiguously ascribes deity to Christ.

Several reasons have been advanced for accepting the latter wording.

- Who is the “who is” (literally “who being”) which begins the second half of the verse? Does it refer to God or to Christ? The most natural reading is to regard it as introducing a *relative clause* which expands upon the subject of the first half of the verse. But “the Christ” is the subject of the first half of the verse. Therefore the *whole* verse speaks of Christ – the first half speaks of him as man (“according to the flesh”) and the second half calls him God.
- The participle “being” would be superfluous if the concluding words were a doxology to God, but not if they refer to the Christ, e.g. “who being over all things is God blessed for ever.”
- The phrase “according to the flesh” attached to “the Christ” begs the question, *In what sense is the Christ not from the patriarchs?* The answer is, *In the sense that he is also God over all, blessed forever.*
- A concluding doxology would be phrased “blessed be God”, not “God blessed”.
- If the doxology applied to God, this would involve an abrupt change of subject.

In summary, in Romans 9:5 Paul calls Christ “God over all, blessed forever”.

2. “Our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13)

The proper translation of Titus 2:13 (literally “the great God and Saviour ours Jesus Christ”) is disputed because it can be rendered to suggest either one or two subjects, i.e.

- *One subject*: “our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ”;
- *Two subjects*: “the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ”.

Robert Reymond suggests several reasons for preferring the former, and finds here a clear ascription of deity to Christ:

- “Our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ” is the most natural way to read the phrase.
- According to the rule of Grenville Sharp, “when two nouns of the same case are connected by ‘and’, and a single article precedes the first noun, then they form a conceptual unit; whereas repetition of the article denotes particularity”. The former conditions obtain in this case, and so “God and Saviour” denote one subject.
- Had Paul wanted to separate “our great God” from “our Saviour Jesus Christ” he would have inserted a second article, i.e. “the great God and the Saviour ours Jesus Christ.”
- Paul consistently applies the concept of “appearing” to Christ, but not to God the Father.
- The phrase “god and saviour” was not novel, being applied in the second and first centuries BC to the defied kings.

3. “Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God” (Philippians 2:6)

The relative pronoun “who” links and identifies the historical Jesus with the one who existed prior to the incarnation.

“In the form of God” is the key phrase, standing at the head of the passage.

- The preposition “in” suggests that Christ was *in* the form of God “as though the form of God was a sphere in which he existed or a garment in which he was clothed.”
- “Form” refers to that which truly and fully expresses the being that underlies it.

The phrase “in the form of God” is best interpreted against the Old Testament background of the glory of God, the shining light in which God was pictured. The expression depicts the pre-existent Christ as clothed in garments of divine majesty and splendour. He was in the form of God, sharing God’s glory (c.f. John 17:5; Heb. 1:3). Thus Motyer can write of “the one who possessed inwardly and displayed outwardly the very nature of God himself”.

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No. 5 He is the Son of God, Part 3

We have seen previously that Romans 9:5 (“the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever”), Titus 2:13 (“our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ”) and Philippians 2:6 (“Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God”) ascribe deity to Christ.

In this study we will consider two more key texts, Colossians 1:15 and 2:9.

1. “The image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15a)

Paul calls Christ the image (the “icon”) of God and the “firstborn” of all creation.

Bauer, Danker, Arndt and Gingrich (BDAG) define the Greek word “icon” in this context as “that which has the same form as something else”. They differentiate this from a crafted object and further specify it as a living image.

The phrase “image of the invisible God” suggests that it is as the living image of God that Christ makes God known. This is consistent with other Scripture witness to the deity of Christ as distinct from God and yet one with God, e.g.

- “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (John 1:18).
- “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Hebrews 1:3).

2. “Firstborn of all creation” (Col. 1:15b)

“Firstborn” can indicate either priority in time or rank. Consider David – he was the last of eight sons (last in time), but is called “firstborn” in Ps. 89:27 (i.e. first in rank). It is in the latter sense that Christ is called firstborn.

As firstborn, Christ is heir of all that belongs to God.

Moreover, “firstborn” begs the question “firstborn of whom”? Paul has already used the terms “Father” (vv. 2, 3, 12) and “Son” (v. 13). It seems natural to assume that he means “firstborn of the Father”.

Thus there is here evidence not of the Son’s preeminent “creatureliness” (i.e. firstborn creature), but of his essential divinity (i.e. Son of God).

It should be added that in verses 16-17 Paul ascribes to Christ the central role in creation: all things were created in him, through him and for him. The Son existed before all things. And all things are dependent on the Son for their continued existence. These are roles that belong only to God.

3. “In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col. 2:9)

The important words here are “fullness” and “deity”.

In the context of Col. 2:9, BDAG defines “fullness” as “that which is brought to fullness or completion; sum total, fullness”.

BDAG defines “deity” as “the state of being God; divine character/nature, deity, divinity; used as an abstract noun for ‘god’”.

Paul places “the whole” before “the fullness” for emphasis – not just some of the fullness, but all of the fullness of the deity dwells in Christ. “The totality of all that is essential to the divine nature” dwells in Christ.

Moreover, the present tense of “dwells” indicates that the fullness of deity continues to dwell in Christ – the incarnation it is a permanent condition.

Finally, Paul specifies the mode of the dwelling – it is “somatic”, i.e. bodily, corporeally. In Jesus we have the very embodiment of deity. Jesus is God “manifested in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16).

4. Summary

It is considerations such as these that underpin the Nicene Creed, in which the church confesses:

We believe...

...in one Lord Jesus Christ,

the only Son of God,

begotten from the Father before all ages,

God from God,

Light from Light,

true God from true God,

begotten, not made;

of the same essence as the Father.

Through him all things were made.

Paul and the Person of Christ

No. 6 *Descended from David, Part 1*

We have considered Paul's testimony to the deity of Christ – "He is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). The conviction that Jesus is "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father" comes across in both Paul's incidental comments about Christ and in his explicit ascriptions of deity to him."

In this study (and two more to come) we move on to consider Paul's testimony to the true humanity of Christ – he "was descended from David according to the flesh" (Romans 1:3).

It is enormously important that Jesus was truly and fully human. Only by being truly and fully human could he be our Saviour. "For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried."

1. Paul did not split the "Christ of faith" from the "Jesus of history"

Paul has not left us with a *Life of Jesus*.

This has led some to conclude that he was not interested in the historical Jesus. It has been claimed on the basis of 2 Corinthians 5:16 ("Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer") that Paul distinguished between the "historical Jesus" and the "exalted Christ" – between "the Christ according to the flesh" who lived in Palestine, and "the Christ according to the Spirit" who was proclaimed by Paul.

However, when Paul says "we once regarded Christ according to the flesh" he means that at one time he totally misunderstood who Jesus is, and opposed him and persecuted his people (Acts 26:9-11). But when Paul came to know Christ "according to the Spirit", there is not the slightest trace of any separation in his mind between Jesus the historic figure and Christ the divine Lord, e.g.

- the Lord of glory lived the life of a servant on earth and died on a Roman cross (1 Cor. 2:8);
- Jesus, the man from Palestine, is now worshipped by all in heaven and will be universally acclaimed as Lord (Phil. 2:10-11).

2. Paul's letters give us the earliest biography of Jesus

The occasional nature of the Pauline epistles did not lend itself to more than passing references to the life of Jesus. It is therefore significant when Paul does make reference to the earthly life of Jesus.

A life of Jesus could be constructed from allusions, quotations and incidental comments in Paul's writings. Moreover, these passing references suggest that Paul knew far more than he wrote.

Since Paul wrote most of his letters in the mid to late AD 50s, before the Gospels were composed, he is our earliest literary witness to the life and teaching of Jesus. It is very significant, therefore, that the picture of the life of Jesus we derive from Paul's letters harmonises with that of the Evangelists.

We can draw the following facts from the Pauline epistles:

- (a) Jesus belonged to Israel according to the flesh (Rom. 9:5).
- (b) Specifically, Jesus was of the line of David (Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8; cf. Luke 2:4).
- (c) Jesus was born of a woman at a specific time and in a specific condition (Gal. 4:4; cf. Luke 2:22-24).
- (d) Jesus had at least one brother, called James (Gal. 1:19; cf. Matt. 13:55).
- (e) Jesus was poor (2 Cor. 8:9; cf. Luke 9:58).
- (f) Jesus had twelve disciples (1 Cor. 15:5; cf. Mark 3:14), one of whom, Cephas, was married (1 Cor. 9:5; cf. Mark 1:30).
- (g) Jesus was betrayed, and on the night of his betrayal he instituted the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26; cf. Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20).
- (h) Jesus was tried by Pilate, before whom he made a good confession (1 Tim. 6:13; cf. Matt. 27:11-14).
- (i) Jesus was crucified (Phil 2:8; cf. John 19:18), in which death the Jewish authorities had a hand, though it was a Roman form of execution (1 Thess. 2:15; cf. Matt. 27:23, 26).
- (j) Having died, Jesus was buried, but rose again (1 Cor. 15:3-4; cf. Matt. 28:6).
- (k) Jesus' resurrection was witnessed by many people (1 Cor. 15:5-6; cf. Acts 1:3, 15).
- (l) Jesus ascended into heaven (Rom. 10:6-7; Eph. 4:9-10; 1 Tim. 3:16; cf. Acts 1:9), has been exalted above all (Phil. 2:11; Col. 3:1, cf. Matt. 26:64), and will return again (Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2 Thess. 1:7; cf. Acts 1:11).
- (m) Jesus was meek, gentle and humble (2 Cor. 10:1; Phil. 2:5-8; cf. Matt. 11:29); he was gracious in accepting poverty (2 Cor. 8:9), righteous (Rom. 5:18; cf. John 10:32), sinless (2 Cor. 5:21; cf. John 19:4, 6) and steadfast (2 Thess. 3:5; cf. Luke 9:51).

Since Paul did not know Jesus personally during Jesus' earthly ministry, we must assume that he derived some of this knowledge about Jesus' character and biography from those who had known the Lord.

Paul and the Person of Christ

No. 7 *Descended from David, Part 2*

We have previously seen that Paul did not distinguish between the “Christ of faith” and the “Jesus of history” – and that Paul’s writings contain the earliest written references to the life of Jesus of Nazareth. We turn now to pay closer attention to several texts that bear upon Paul’s teaching about the humanity of Jesus.

1. “Descended from David according to the flesh” (Romans 1:3)

Paul does not often mention Jesus’ human descent from David (e.g. Romans 15:12; 2 Timothy 2:8), although it did form an important element of his preaching among the Jews (e.g. Acts 13:22-23).

Romans 1:3 is an important exception.

At the opening of *Romans*, Paul sets before his readers the Son of God in three spheres of existence:

- God’s pre-existent Son (“...concerning his Son”);
- God’s Son in his weakness as a man descended from David (“who was descended from David according to the flesh”);
- and God’s Son raised in power (“and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead”).

When Paul tells us that the gospel of God concerns “his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh” he is careful about which verb he uses to say that Jesus was “descended from David”. He does not use the verb that means “to be born”. Nor does he use the verb that means “to be”. Instead he uses a verb which means “to become”. This verb indicates a change from one state to another.

Guthrie suggests that “it is more than a genealogy from David which is in view. It is the existence of the Son, an idea which is in harmony with...the virgin birth”.

The parallel expressions in Galatians 4:4 (“*born* of a woman, *born* under the law”) and Philippians 2:7 (“*being born* in the likeness of men”) also use this verb. The point is that Paul distinguishes the birth of Jesus from normal human birth.

Jesus’s Davidic descent was clearly important to Paul – see Acts 13:16-41. It was the fulfilment of the promise God had made to David (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Acts 13:22-23). God had bound up our salvation with the fulfilment of his promise to David (Psalm 2:7; 16:10; Isaiah 55:3; Acts 13:32-39).

It is telling that Paul limits the Davidic descent of Jesus with the expression “according to the flesh”. This expression begs the question, *in what sense is Jesus’ origin not the result of descent from David?* The answer is supplied by the preceding and following expressions.

2. “Born of woman, born under the law” (Galatians 4:4)

The sending forth of the eternal Son of God to be born of a woman is *the* epoch marking event. God carefully prepared for it – and only when “the fullness of time” had come, i.e. when everything was ready and ripe, did he send forth his Son.

Notice once again that Paul begins with the eternal Son of God. Jesus is not just a man, and his conception and birth is more than just another conception and birth. The Person who is Jesus is the very same Person who is the pre-existent Son of God. The human Jesus is not another “person” existing alongside the Son of God. Christ has two natures – one divine and the other human – but is only one Person.

The expression “born of a woman” is applicable to all humans, cf. Job 14:1 and Matthew 11:11. It has no bearing on the question whether Paul knew about the virgin birth. It may be a glance at the promise God made in Genesis 3:15 about the “seed of the woman”. But it is almost certainly an allusion to the promise made to Abraham that Sarah would bear him a son (Genesis 17:16,19; 18:10,14) – Paul refers to Abraham and the promised seed repeatedly in Galatians 3 and 4.

Notice Paul’s use of (a) the preposition ἐκ (*ek*, “out of”) rather than δια (*dia*, “through”), and (b) the expression “of a woman”. Together these indicate that the woman was not only the means of Christ’s being born, but also that he took from her everything that is proper to mankind. The Son of God became “true Man of true Man”. The Son of God took to himself a full human nature.

Moreover, the Son was also born in the same condition as men, namely, under obligation to obey the law – especially, the Jewish people to whom God gave the law as the instrument of the covenant. In other words, Jesus was not born generally under the moral law as all men are, but specifically under the Sinaitic law with all the implications of the covenantal relationship.

This is important because, as the early church fathers observed, “what he did not assume he did not heal.” In other words, the Son of God only heals those aspects of human nature which he united to himself. But he united a full human nature to himself. Therefore he has provided us with a full salvation – one that touches on every aspect of what it means for us to be human.

That is why Paul goes on to explain the purpose of the incarnation in terms of adoption: “that we might receive adoption as sons.” This is, again, an allusion to the God’s promise to Abraham that he would become the father of a multitude.

3. “The son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1)

Notice that Paul links the human nature of Jesus to the promises made to Abraham and David. This is not an accident. These are the two great promises in the Old Testament.

Paul’s focus on Jesus’s human descent from David and from Abraham can be compared with Matthew 1:1, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

Paul and the Person of Christ

No. 8 *Descended from David, Part 3*

We have seen that Paul's writings provide us with the earliest written biographical information about Jesus, and that Paul laid great emphasis on Jesus' human descent from Abraham and David.

In this study we will see that Paul also emphasised the full humanity of Jesus and the depth of the human obedience in which this involved him.

1. "Taking the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:7a)

We have already reflected on verse 6, in which Paul teaches that Christ shared the very nature of God.

What does Paul mean in verse 7 by the phrase "he emptied himself"? This is explained by the following clauses: "taking the form of a servant" and "being born in the likeness of men".

There is both similarity and contrast between the verse 6 and verse 7. Both speak of Christ as being in/taking the form of something:

- on the one hand, being in the form of God,
- but (ἀλλά, a strong disjunctive) on the other hand, taking the form of a servant.

If "being in the form of God" means that, as the eternal Son of God, Christ is everything that God is, then we must say that Christ did not merely assume the outward appearance of a slave – rather he became everything that a slave is, taking the very nature and characteristics of one.

In this way, Paul begins to emphasise the obedience of Jesus. As the eternal Son of God obedience is out of the question – there is no subordination of one Person to another in the Godhead. But as the incarnate Son, Jesus obeyed the will of his Father for our salvation – all the way to death upon the Cross.

2. "Being born in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7b)

How did Christ take the form of a servant? He did it, not by subtraction, but by addition. He "became in the likeness of man."

The word "likeness" can signify equivalence and identity or similarity and resemblance. Here the former meaning is preferable – Paul is speaking about Christ's essential identity with the human race (cf. "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things... Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect", Heb. 2:14,17).

The reality of Christ's full human nature may seem obvious to us who live in a culture dominated by naturalism, but the significance of this teaching would have been more controversial in an age in which both adoptionist and docetist Christologies were philosophical possibilities.

- Adoptionism – Jesus was only a man, whom God appointed as his Christ.
- Docetism – Jesus was not a man, but only seemed to be one.

Against both of these errors, Paul teaches that the eternal Son of God became fully human so that in his human nature he might obey God perfectly (his “active obedience) and suffer the full penalty prescribed by the law for disobedience (his “passive” obedience) – and he did this for us (*cf.* vv. 4-5).

The point that Paul is driving home is that it is truly the Son of God who truly is man and so truly suffers as man.

3. “The Last Adam... the Second Man” (1 Corinthians 15:45-47)

Paul juxtaposes Adam and Christ three times (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:20-22; 45-49). The Adam-Christ motif is of great significance to Paul.

James Dunn writes that Paul “deliberately sets Jesus alongside Adam...Adam is clearly understood in some sort of representative capacity. Adam is humankind, an individual who embodies or represents a whole race of people...so also does Christ. Adam is ‘the type of the One to come’ (Rom. 5:14)... the eschatological counterpart of the primeval Adam... Each begins an epoch, and the character of each epoch is established by their action.”

In 1 Corinthians 15:45-47 Paul teaches that Christ is more, not less, than Adam:

- The first man became a life-receiving soul when God breathed the spirit of life into him (Genesis 2:7) – the last Adam became the life-giving spirit by his resurrection from the dead.
- The first man was a man of dust, whose life was characterised by weakness, and terminated in death and decay (Genesis 3:19) – the second man, by virtue of his death and resurrection, is possessed of a life characterised by an different order, one that is heavenly and subject to no termination.

4. Summary

It is considerations such as these that underpin the Nicene Creed, in which the church confesses:

We believe...

...in one Lord Jesus Christ,

the only Son of God...

...For us and for our salvation

he came down from heaven;

he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and was made human.

He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;

he suffered and was buried.

Paul and the Person of Christ

No. 9 He whom God Raised Up, Part 1

First we considered Paul's testimony to the pre-incarnate deity of Christ – "He is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). Then we considered Paul's testimony to the true humanity of Christ – Jesus "was descended from David according to the flesh" (Romans 1:3). Finally, we come to Paul's testimony concerning the exaltation of Christ – Christ is he whom "God raised up" (Acts 13:37; Ephesians 1:20). The Jesus who died upon a Roman cross and whose body was laid in a borrowed tomb is also the risen Christ, the exalted eschatological figure who is the source of heavenly life for his people.

In subsequent studies we are going to consider the titles *Lord* and *Mediator* which belong to Jesus as the one whom God raised and exalted. In this study our attention is turned to the title *Christ* – and for the sake of an anchor point we will use 2 Corinthians 4:4, "The gospel of the glory of Christ."

1. *Christ* is an eschatological title

Christ (in Greek) = *Messiah* (in Hebrew). Both are titles which mean "anointed one". In the Old Testament period, anointing marked out the priest and the king as especially appointed by and belonging to God.

Christ is not, strictly speaking, a title that applies to the second Person of the Trinity in his pre-incarnate state – he is God's Son, not God's Christ.

Christ was not a title which Jesus used openly during his earthly ministry. It was a cause of confusion (among the ordinary Jewish population), controversy (with the Jewish leaders), and confession (by the followers of Jesus during the latter period of his earthly ministry).

The open, public confession that Jesus is the Christ belongs to the period after his resurrection and ascension. It is an eschatological title, i.e. it is a term whose significance can only be understood in the light of the finished work of Jesus, especially his death and resurrection and the promise of his return in glory (the *Parousia*).

2. *Christ* is virtually a proper name

Paul uses the term *Christ* just over 380 times (the New Testament total is about 530, of which 54 occurrences are in the Gospels).

The frequency and manner of Paul's use of the term *Christ* cannot be explained by either Jewish or Greek backgrounds:

- It could not be derived simply from a Jewish background because the Jews did not speak of Messiah as God (*cf.* Luke 20:41-44), and to them the idea of a crucified Messiah was scandalous (1 Cor. 1:23).

- Neither could Paul's use of the term *Christ* derive from a Greek background because to the pagan world a crucified saviour was foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23).

George Ladd says that in Paul's writings the term *Christ* has a titular significance only in Romans 9:5; 10:6; 1 Corinthians 10:4, 15, 22; and 2 Corinthians 4:4; 5:10. Otherwise, *Christ* is used by Paul virtually as a proper name.

The conversion of the title *Christ* into a proper name probably occurred in the Greek churches for which the title would have lacked the religious significance so important to the Jews.

3. *Christ* is the designation of the Redeemer

Ben Witherington shows that it is especially the climactic redemptive events at the close of Jesus' life and the application of the blessings of salvation that cause Paul to call Jesus *Christ*, i.e.

- Christ came in the context of the redemptive history of Israel (Romans 9:5);
- Christ fulfilled the promises made by the prophets (Romans 1:2), accomplished his mission in accordance with what was written (1 Corinthians 15:3);
- Christ's resurrection marked the commencement of a new epoch in which he reigns (1 Corinthians 15:20-25);
- Christ is the locus of our experience of salvation, i.e. election (Ephesians 1:4), justification (Romans 3:26), adoption (Ephesians 1:5), sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:30), resurrection (Romans 6:5);
- Christ is the focus of God's redemptive plan for the whole of creation (Ephesians 1:9-10);
- Christ will appear again to establish his kingdom (2 Timothy 4:1).

In that light, consider 2 Corinthians 4:4-6.

- Two eras and two dominions run in parallel, for the time being – on the one hand, the god of this world who maintains his kingdom by blinding men; on the other hand, the true God who extends his kingdom by shining light into men's hearts and giving them knowledge.
- At the heart of this conflict is Christ who is himself the outshining of the glory of God. God's glory has entered the creation through the incarnation, but especially through the resurrection and exaltation of Christ.
- This glory is contained in and displayed by the gospel of Christ; it is Christ's own glory that is proclaimed in the gospel, and it is the gospel that causes illumination. Thus, the exalted Christ remains the active agent in the spoiling of the kingdom of Satan and the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

The preaching of the gospel is, therefore, necessarily the preaching of Jesus as the Christ because the preaching of Christ means the declaration that in him the old has passed and the new has come.

Paul and the Person of Christ

No. 10 He whom God Raised Up, Part 2

We have seen that the term *Christ* is especially associated with the finished redemptive work of Jesus and its application through the preaching of the gospel – the preaching of the gospel is necessarily the proclamation that Jesus is the Christ because this is the declaration that in Jesus the old era has passed and the new era has come.

In this study we turn our attention to the proclamation that Jesus is Lord. In Philippians 2:9-11 Paul proclaims that God's super-exaltation of Jesus reaches its zenith in the bestowal on Jesus of "the name that is above every name", with the result that every tongue will confess that he "is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

1. Paul's use of the ascription "Lord"

Paul simply calls Jesus "Lord" 145 times (not combined with any other name or title). There are a further 80+ occurrences of the title "Lord" in combination with other names (22 times Lord Jesus; 50 times Lord Jesus Christ; 4 times Jesus Christ our Lord; 7 times Christ Jesus our Lord). Whenever we read "Lord" in the letters of Paul, the presumption is that he is referring to Jesus Christ.

Lord was the most adequate term for expressing what Paul had come to understand and appreciate of Jesus' person and his present decisive role in the outworking of God's purpose. The Lordship of Christ lay at the heart of the proclamation of Paul.

The sincere confession that "Jesus is Lord" is the confession of those who are saved (Rom. 10:9). This confession is a demonstration that the speaker is under the influence of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). The confessor recognises only one final authority in his life (1 Cor. 8:5-6). This is not merely a profession of personal devotion – it is rather a confession of the universal Lordship of Christ, i.e. that by virtue of his life, death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has been exalted to the place of authority over all (Phil. 2:6-11, cf. Eph. 1:20-22).

2. The ascription of the title "Lord" to Jesus

The word "lord" (*kurios*, κυριος) was used throughout the Greek-speaking world of the first century as a title of courtesy to a superior, and it might be rendered "sir". This is sometime its significance in the Gospels, i.e. when people approached Jesus and called him "lord" it was sometimes nothing more than a polite form of address.

However, among Jews "kurios" carried further significance as it was the word used in the LXX to translate two of the names of God, namely, Yahweh and Adonai. The classic example of this is in Psalm 110:1 which says, "The Lord (Hebrew Yahweh; Greek *kurios*) said to my Lord (Hebrew Adonai; Greek *kurios*)..." Thus, among the Jews the word "kurios/Lord" could be used of God as well as men.

This illuminates our understanding of the use of the title “Lord” by Paul.

The basic significance of the title *Lord* is that it ascribes to Jesus the functions of deity:

- (a) Jesus the Lord saves all who call upon his name (Rom. 10:9-13) – but it is all who call on the name of Yahweh who are saved (Joel 2:32).
- (b) History is oriented towards the “day of the Lord” (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2), the “day of the Lord Jesus” (2 Cor. 1:14), the “day of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:8), and the “day of Christ” (Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16) – but this is also the Day of Yahweh (Isa. 13:6; Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 30:3; Joel 3:14).
- (c) The Lord Jesus is the righteous judge (2 Tim. 4:8) – but Yahweh is the Judge of all the earth does what is right (Gen. 18:25). Judgement is a co-work of the Lord Jesus and of God (1 Cor. 4:5).
- (d) It is “at the name of Jesus that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:10-11) – but it is to Yahweh that “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess allegiance” (Isa. 45:23).

3. “Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”

We turn our attention now to Phil. 2:9-11. Paul has directed our attention first to the pre-existent deity of Jesus (“he was in the form of God” and equal with God, v. 6). Then he directed our attention to the incarnation of Jesus (“he made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant...becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”, vv. 7-8). He finally turns to the exaltation of Jesus (“Therefore God has highly exalted him...”). The emphasis in this ascription of exaltation is on the “name” bestowed on Jesus – “Jesus Christ is Lord.”

This is the climax of the whole passage. In the penultimate phrase the emphasis is made to fall on the word *Lord*, i.e. “Jesus Christ is Lord” rather than “Jesus Christ is Lord.”

The confession that Jesus Christ is Lord is striking in the light of the exclusive statements of Isaiah 42:8; 43:11; 45:5-6,18; 49:26, and the whole is clearly an adaptation of Isaiah 45:22-25.

In Jewish thought “name = person/fame/reputation”. Names have been significant since the beginning. Consider Genesis 11:4 (the men of Babel: “Let us make a name for ourselves”) and Genesis 12:2 (the LORD to Abram: “I will bless you and make your name great”). God has now exalted Jesus and bestowed on him the “name that is above every name”.

Jesus receives universal acclamation. Paul specifies the three cosmic spheres – everything in heaven, everything on earth and everything beneath the earth.

Finally, the universal acclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord both reveals and serves the divine glory. The universal confession is in principle “already” but it belongs to the realm of the “not yet”; on the day of Jesus Christ, when the “not yet” is past, then the glory of God will shine forth and God will be all in all (*cf.* 1 Cor. 15:27-28).

Paul and the Person of Christ

No. 11 He whom God Raised Up, Part 3

The gospel is the proclamation that Jesus is the Christ, i.e. that he is the focus of God's redemptive purpose for the whole of creation. To believe the gospel is to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, and to call upon his name for salvation.

Finally, Paul calls the Lord Jesus Christ the "one mediator between God and man" (1 Tim. 2:5). It is in Christ the Mediator that we enjoy all the blessings of salvation.

1. "One mediator...the man Christ Jesus," (1 Tim. 2:5)

Paul uses the term *Mediator* of Christ only in 1 Timothy 2:5 and Galatians 3:20. Yet the term might be taken as signifying all that we have learned about the person of Christ from the writings of Paul.

(a) The Mediator is the *God-Man*.

- As God, he is the One who possesses inwardly and expresses outwardly the very nature of God himself; he is the outshining of the glory of God.
- But he is also true Man – possessed of a complete human nature, a traceable human ancestry, a demonstrable human biography.
- Only the One who stands *truly* in these two spheres can act as the Mediator and draw the whole of creation, but especially men and women, to God.
- This Mediator, this Christ Jesus is everything to Paul – his incarnation simultaneously reveals the *immanence* of God and demonstrates that God *transcends* his creation.
- By his incarnation, death and resurrection, Christ has brought the old epoch ("the present evil age") to an end, introduced the new epoch ("the age to come").
- The super-exaltation of Christ draws all of creation to the end decreed for it by God, namely his own glory.

(b) The Mediator mediates between God and man. And astonishingly, he does this by uniting men and women to himself! It is to this aspect of Paul's teaching about the person of Christ that we turn in closing.

2. "In Christ...a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Christ is not a private person – he is the first of a new order of life (1 Cor. 15:45-47), whose resurrection life is bringing the old order to an end (2 Cor. 4:4), and who draws together everything in creation to a single goal (Phil 2:10-11).

In other words, Christ is a *cosmic* person.

But Christ is also a *public*, or a *corporate* person, in whom his people share in the resurrection life, inherit the new creation and willingly participate in the goal of the glory of God.

Paul expresses this fact by speaking about being “in Christ” (about 85 times).

Paul uses the phrase “in Christ” in three ways:

(a) Sometimes “in Christ” concerns God working through Christ, e.g. Paul writes of God’s purpose set forth and realised *in Christ*, or God’s promises *in Christ*, or simply “God *in Christ*”.

(b) Sometimes “in Christ” describes a quality of the action of people, e.g. Paul “speaks the truth *in Christ*”, or writes about believing/hoping/glorying *in Christ*, or of being encouraged *in Christ*.

(c) But most often “in Christ” expresses the living relationship between Christ and his people. It is these to which we turn our attention here:

- Christ’s people are alive and free *in Christ* (1 Cor. 15:22; Rom. 8:2; Gal. 2:4).
- There is no condemnation for those who are *in Christ* and *in Christ* they are justified and their sins are forgiven (Rom. 8:1; Gal. 2:17; Eph. 4:32).
- They are approved and sanctified *in Christ* (Rom. 16:10; 1 Cor. 1:2).
- Blessings, grace, faith and love abound to them *in Christ* (Eph. 1:3 ; 1 Cor. 1:4; 1 Tim. 1:14; 2 Tim. 1:13), to the end that they become both mature and wise *in Christ* (Col. 1:28; 1 Cor. 1:30).
- They are one body and all one *in Christ* (Rom. 12:5; Gal. 3:28).
- When they die they are asleep *in Christ* and are called “the dead *in Christ*” (1 Cor. 15:18; 1 Thess. 4:16).
- They are created, brought near, seated, established and kept *in Christ* (Eph. 2:10; Eph. 2:14; Eph. 2:6; 2 Cor. 1:21; Phil. 4:7).
- Above all they are simply *in Christ* (Rom. 16:7; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2).

To be in Christ is to be in a new condition, to belong to the new epoch, to participate already in the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). But the participation is also “not yet”. There is still an element of “hiddenness” about the new creation in Christ, and in expressing this Paul reverses the “in Christ” relationship: “To [his saints] God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is *Christ in you*, the hope of glory,” (Col. 1:27). The content of this mystery is “Christ in you, the hope of glory”. Christ is at the centre of God’s mystery. The mystery focuses on him as its content. The mystery has been proclaimed *among* the Gentiles but it had been believed by the Colossians. Christ therefore was “in them”.

3. Summary

It is considerations such as these that underpin the creeds of the church.

(a) *The Nicene Creed*

We believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God from God,
Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made;
of the same essence as the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and was made human.
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered and was buried.
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again with glory
to judge the living and the dead.
His kingdom will never end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life.
He proceeds from the Father and the Son,
and with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified.
He spoke through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,
and to life in the world to come.

Amen.

(b) *The Chalcedonian Definition*

“We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; *consubstantial [coessential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood*; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in *two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably*; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather *the property of each nature being preserved*, and concurring in *one Person and one Subsistence*, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only begotten, God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has been handed down to us.”