

*MIN 7012 W8 L2*  
*Dying and Living in Christ*

© 2016 South University

## ***Dying and Living in Christ***

Paul's doctrine of humanity is only a part of his total thought and subservient to his doctrine of Christ, for in Paul's view, man can be truly understood and life truly authentic only in relation to Jesus Christ. Paul's theology is not even a theology in the narrow sense of that term. While accepting all that the Old Testament teaches about God the Father, Paul's proclamation that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5:19) in context indicates that the focus has shifted for Paul from the first to the second Person of the Trinity. Nor can Paul's thought be described principally in terms of soteriology, ecclesiology, or eschatology (many people's favorite central concepts to explain early Christian thought). All of these were subjected by the apostle to his overruling and central theme—salvation is salvation "in Christ," the Church exists as the "Body of Christ" because believers are first of all "in Christ," and the future holds promise because history has been anchored and reconstituted at a point of time "in Christ."

The central motif in the Pauline message is that the divine plan of redemption has its focal point in human history in the person and work of Jesus Christ. "When the time had fully come," the apostle proclaims, "God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4, 5).

The work of Christ in Paul's teaching is presented primarily in relation to the law. In coming "under the law," Christ has taken both the curse and the obligations of the law upon Himself, bearing both on behalf of those unable to bear either and thereby reconciling us to the Father. Christ, in His death, "redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13); was made to sin for us "so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21); "canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross" (Col. 2:14); and reconciled us "in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present [us as] holy and blameless and irreproachable before him" (Col. 1:22). But the act of Calvary is not the whole story for Paul, important as it is. The apostle does not proclaim a redemption that merely obliterates the curse of the law, presenting the individual to God as neutral. He also insists that Christ has fulfilled the legal demands of the contractual obligation established in the Mosaic covenant, thus presenting before the Father a positive righteousness for all those who are "in Him."

This thought seems to be likewise involved in Paul's repeated emphasis on righteousness as based not upon "the works of the law" but upon "the *faithfulness* of Jesus Christ" and given to all who respond to Him by faith (Rom. 3:22; Gal. 2:16, 3:22; Eph. 3:12; Phil. 3:9). That which the contractual obligation of the law demanded, Christ has provided. He stood for mankind in offering the perfect righteousness so that all who stand "in Him" stand before the Father not in their own righteousness but robed in His. As James Denney once said: "It is the voice of God, no less than that of the sinner, which says, 'Thou, O Christ, art all I want; more than all in Thee I find.'" And it is because in His sacrifice He redeemed from the curse of the law *and* by His perfect obedience He fulfilled the obligations of the law that Paul can assert: "Christ is the end of the law in its connection with righteousness to all who believe" (Rom. 10:4). The sacrifice and the obedience of Christ are corollaries that in Paul's mind could never truly be separated, validated both by His resurrection and by His living presence.