

Jessica West

Dr. Garcia

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The “Christ” in Paul’s Letters

Paul, one of the apostles of Jesus Christ, wrote many letters to various Christian communities. Throughout these letters, Paul emphasizes and centrality of Christ in Christian theology and practice. Christ is not only the focus of Paul’s teachings but also the source of his own spiritual transformation. Paul explains Christ is the source of forgiveness and redemption for Christians. In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Paul writes that Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead, thereby offering salvation to those who believe in him. For Paul, Christ’s death and resurrection are not merely historical events, but rather a transformative experience for the believer. This transformative experience is evident in Paul’s own life with the encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus led to his conversion and subsequent mission to spread the gospel.

Paul emphasizes that Christ is the head of the church and the foundation of Christian community. In Colossians 1:18, Paul writes that Christ “is also head of the body, the church and he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he himself will come to have first place in everything.” This emphasis on Christ as the foundation in Christian community has important implications for the way that Christians relate to one another, emphasizing the importance of love, unity, and self-sacrifice. Paul also goes on to speak on the role of Christ in bridging the gap

between humanity and God. In Romans 5:1-2, Paul writes that “since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into his grace in which we now stand.” Paul believed Christ was a mediator between humanity and God, offering a pathway to salvation that would be otherwise impossible for humans.

The book of Romans, specifically chapters 5-9 are sections of Paul’s theological reflection on the doctrine of salvation. These chapters highlight the importance of justification by faith, human sinfulness, and God’s grace. Romans 5 is particularly significant to understanding the salvation of the believer. Paul argues that the believer has peace with God through their faith in Jesus Christ, and they have access by faith to grace, which is the foundation of their standing before God. Paul also explains the struggle of the believer against sin. The believer seeks to obey God’s law, but sin is present within them, causing them to do what they do not want to do. The battle of spirit and flesh. Paul concludes that the answer to this struggle is in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

M. Novenson’s “Christ Passages in Paul” is a thought-provoking writing. One of the key arguments that Novenson makes is that Paul’s use of the term “Christ” serves as a means of expressing a particular Jewish understanding of God. He argues that the term “Christ” comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew word “messiah”, which in the Jewish tradition referred to the “anointed one” the king or priest. Novenson further argues that Paul’s use of the term “Christ” is not limited to Jesus’ earthly life and ministry but extends to his exaltation as a divine being. Novenson explains that for Paul, Jesus becomes the exalted “Lord” a term that is a political title, but Paul uses it to describe Jesus’ heavenly status. Paul’s theology of Christ is not only about Jesus’ earthly life, but also about his heavenly exaltation and reign.