

# THE ALL-INCLUSIVE CHRIST IN 1 CORINTHIANS

BY ED MARKS

The first sentence uttered by Paul when the Lord appeared to him on his way to Damascus was a question: "Who are You, Lord?" (Acts 9:5). Paul's entire life, from this moment of miraculous conversion, became a mystical quest to answer this question. His life was a quest to know Christ and to win Christ. According to Conybeare and Howson, Paul's Epistle to the Philippians was written about twenty-six years after his conversion (832-834). This Epistle shows that after such a long time as a believer, Paul was the antithesis of a complacent or self-contented man. In this Epistle we hear him uttering his heart's desire and longing: "to know Him" and "that I may win Christ" (3:10, 8, lit.). Indeed, Paul counted everything other than Christ as refuse, dregs, filth, rubbish, dung, that he might gain Christ; his quest was to know Christ in the most intimate and personal way and to win Christ as his prize. Just before his martyrdom he was able to declare, "I know whom I have believed" (2 Tim. 1:12).

As one who had been strictly trained at the feet of the eminent Pharisee, Gamaliel, Paul was instructed in the knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures (Acts 22:3; 26:5). Once he was converted to Christ, Paul received a spirit of revelation to see that the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms, the three sections of the entire Old Testament, are an explanation of Christ and that He is their center and content (Luke 24:44). To the apostle Paul Christ was everything. Paul says in Colossians 1:17 that all things cohere in Christ. In other words, Christ is the holding center, the hub, of the entire universe. He has the first place both in the old creation and in the new, and He is the reality of every positive thing in the universe (vv. 15-18). This means that He is the all-inclusive One. Since Paul is the God-appointed pattern of the New Testament believers (1 Tim. 1:16), his quest to know this all-inclusive Christ should also be our quest. T. Austin-Sparks says,

The centrality and supremacy of Christ is the key and the pivot to all the Scriptures...When you are studying the person and the life and the work of the Lord Jesus, there must be a Divine quest in your heart, and that quest must be for those features which suggest universality. (8-9)

In the revelation presented by Paul, the all-inclusive Christ is not only the One in whom God's heart's desire is centered but also the all-inclusive solution to every problem in the fallen universe. Among all of Paul's Epistles, 1 Corinthians is unique in its unveiling of the all-inclusive Christ. Corinth was a church full of serious problems. To be called a "Corinthian" in ancient times was, and still is, deprecating.

Nevertheless, the mostly licentious and iniquitous Corinthians had been transferred out of Adam into Christ and out of darkness into light to become "the church of God" (1:2). Paul addresses them as such according to the spiritual, divine view of what they, as believers in Christ, were according to their very essence, which was Christ in them.