

Christ as Representative

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Sunday 5 October 2014

Readings: Romans 6:1-11 Galatians 2:15-21

In Gal 2:19-20 Paul writes:

'I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.'

How can Paul say 'I have been crucified with Christ'? He doesn't mean this literally – he's very much still alive as he writes! So what does he mean?

Or take 2 Cor 5:14: 'For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died.'

One has died for all; therefore all have died ...

I want to suggest that Paul sees Christ as a representative and that this is crucial for understanding him. So I have been crucified with Christ – when Christ was crucified, he represented me – and so I died too! And one has died for all – therefore all have died.

So what does it mean to say that Christ is a *representative*? And a representative of all people. We're not very used to this way of thinking.

Let me talk a bit about the idea of someone being a representative person. It came naturally to the people of Israel. After all, the name of the nation – Israel – is the name of one person – Jacob, who was renamed 'Israel':

Gen 32:28: Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed."

Israel means 'The one who strives with God' – so Jacob's name was changed to Israel. But this became the name of the whole nation. One man's name could be used for the whole nation. The one man represented all the people.

And then the twelve tribes of Israel were named after the 12 sons of Jacob/ Israel. Benjamin and Manasseh and Reuben and so on – were individuals – but these also became the names of tribes. And these twelve sons of Israel became representative ‘heads’ of the tribes.

Or another representative person was the High Priest – offering a sacrifice for his own sins, and for the sins of the people on the Day of Atonement – he was a representative of the nation.

So the idea of a representative summing up a large group of people was common in Israel. Its sometimes spoken of as corporate solidarity. Its this way of thinking that Paul shows here. When Christ died, he represented us all – and I died too.

This way of thinking about a representative of us all is not so common among us! We’re rugged individualists. Example of planes – all watching our own individual screens! We are individualists! But there are a few examples of corporate thinking! They come mainly in Sport!

You didn’t know I’d won the Rugby World Cup did you! When NZ won the world cup in 2011 – we all won! Some of us, at least, do feel ‘represented’ by Sports teams. They are not just 15 guys – but they represent New Zealand. So when 15 guys are playing on a sports field – its New Zealand that is playing. They fully represent us!

‘What happens to them happens to me’ – that’s the essence of being represented by someone.

America’s Cup – that was us that almost won!

Normally Americans don’t represent me - Barack Obama is a good guy – but I wouldn’t see him as representing me. But there is one American who did – Neil Amstrong.

A number of contemporary cultures have a much stronger sense of ‘us’, or being represented by a person. Maori often speak of ‘we’ – and many have a strong sense of ancestors who represented them ... Or the Xhosa proverb – ‘I am because we are’.

In Jewish thought, as I’ve said, this idea of representation is really strong. In fact, Paul can twice talk about all people being ‘in Adam’.

In 1 Cor 15:21-22 he writes: ‘For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of

the dead has also come through a human being; for as *all die in Adam*, so all will be made alive in Christ.'

So all of humanity can be seen as 'in Adam'. Circle with 'Adam' as the head.

And note how Paul speaks. Death came through a human being – Adam. But resurrection has also come through a human being – Jesus. There are two ways of being human – the Adam way, and the Jesus way. One leads to death, the other to life. They are representatives of two ways of being human.

This explains why Jesus *became human* to deal with sin. Ever wondered why God didn't just say 'I forgive you'? and that would be enough? Why send Jesus? Why did Jesus become a human and die for our sins? There's a whole lot of reasons, but this is one key one.

If Jesus was to be *our representative* – he had to become one of us.
He had to be inside the circle.

If he was outside – how would it affect me? If he was to live as 'the representative human being' and die as this, and then conquer death and come back to life in resurrection, then he needed to be one of us!! To be our representative, and to start a new way of being human, he needed to be one of us!

If the essence of being a representative is 'what happens to him happens to me' – then he had to enter into our life, to be one of us!

So he needed to become a human being for his solution to human death to reach us – and for his new life to reach us too. To start a new humanity, he needed to be human. To be our representative he needed to be one of us.

Of course Jesus can only be the Representative Human – and start a new way of being human, because he is the Son of God, God come in the flesh – and so can break the mould, resist sin, live a perfect life, be the perfect sacrifice and create a new way of being human.

Note what Paul says in Rom 6:5-9:

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that *our old self was crucified with him* so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ *For whoever has died* is freed from sin. ⁸ *But if we have died with Christ*, we believe that we will also live with him.

V5: 'For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.'

Remember this is the language of representation. I really won the world cup! I also really died in Christ's death! He died as our representative – so we, through faith 'have been united with him in a death like his'.

And he goes on:

⁶We know that *our old self was crucified with him* so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For whoever has died is freed from sin. ⁸But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him

When was 'our old self crucified with him'?? On the cross.

And v8 'if we have died with Christ' When? When he died. And as one who has died – through Christ – the power of sin has been broken – 'for whoever has died is freed from sin'.

Recall too Rom 6:23:

'For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

I am a sinner – what is the result of that – death. The 'wages', the return, that sin pays, is death. But *I have already died that death!* When Christ died as my representative, bearing the results of sin, and the penalty of sin I died too! Its not that he died and I got off – no, he died and I died too! He is my representative. I have decisively died to sin when Christ died. Now of course I can go on sinning – but the power of sin over my life has been broken. The call of discipleship is to live that out day by day in the power of the Spirit – to life for Christ, and to daily turn my back on sin – but I *can do so* because I have died with Christ.

Sin is like a terrible virus – its leads to death. But Jesus has let that virus of sin do its worst in him – and it led to his crucifixion, his death. But he did this as *our representative!* So that was my death too! I deserved to die because of my sin – and I have actually died – I shared in Christ's death on the cross. We share in Christ's death to sin ...and in his release from the power of sin. He died as my representative, breaking the power and penalty of sin – for me. And so Paul can say: 'I have been crucified with Christ...' (Gal 2:20). Our old self was crucified – so we might no longer be enslaved to sin.

But of course Christ was raised! So I share in his resurrection too! Rom 6:8. ⁸‘But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him’

So Christ as our representative has done amazing things – and we share in those.

Tuvalu – average height is 2m above sea level – most effected by climate change

Imagine the Prime Minister of Tuvalu – Enele Sopoaga is his name - negotiated for them all to be NZers! He would do so as their representative. But they would all benefit from what he did!

Christ as our representative has done more than negotiate! Has conquered death, defeated sin, risen to new life! We share this.

Death and resurrection:

Rom 6:8. ⁸‘But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him’

Now here it gets a bit trickier. Of course, Jesus has experienced bodily resurrection – in full. I have not yet!!!

So I am living in this ‘in-between’ stage. I have died – in Jesus’ death, made real for me in baptism, when I died personally. And I share in his resurrection life – but my own *physical death and then resurrection are ahead* – that is my hope.

So Rom 6 again:

⁴ Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ... ⁸ But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

So we have died to sin – and so we are free from its bondage.

But it is a bit different with resurrection – Christ has been raised – v4. But v5 ‘*we will certainly* – future - be united with him in a resurrection like his.’ And v8 - ‘we believe that we will live – in the future - with him’ – this is future hope!

But in the mean time we do share in Christ’s risen life – v4 ‘so we too might walk in newness of life.’ Christ’s new life – the new way of being human – has invaded our human lives – and we too share in that.

So the two circles. Where are we?

This explains the tensions of the Christian life. The two circles.

We can sin, yet we also share in newness of life. We are part of 'Adam's world'. Yet we are also 'in Christ'. We share in the fallen-ness and decay of Adam's world – and so suffering is a reality. And yet we have hope. It explains why the Christian life is one of tension, or struggle, or perseverance. It explains why life in the church can be a struggle – we are all living in this tension between dying to sin and sharing to some extent in new life, and not yet fully sharing in resurrection.

So to sum up. Christ is our Representative. He represents us in his death! Because he is our representative, we share in his death. What happened to him, happens to us. We really have died! Sin has done its worst to him – and brought death – and we have shared in that death. 'I have been crucified with Christ!' I am dead to that old life, and sin's consequences, sin's penalty, has been paid. I have died to the old order, the way of Adam, the way of sin.

And Christ has created a new way of being human – for those who through faith in him are part of him, are represented by him. For those who share in Christ's death share also –now - in his newness of life – his life free from bondage to sin and death. We *can* sin but we are free from slavery to sin. Now we share in his newness of life through the Spirit! This life continues to be in this world, marked by suffering, the possibility of sin, and it even has a cross-shaped form.

And our sure and steadfast hope is that we will also share fully in Christ's resurrection - for the one who is my representative has gone there before me! And he who calls is faithful and he will do it! Amen.