

A Brief User's Guide to Paul's Letters (Part 2)

Five Theological Themes in Paul's Letters¹

- The Decisive Event of Jesus Christ
- The Character of God
- The Old Life and the New
- The New Community
- Embodying the Gospel

The Decisive Event of Jesus Christ

- Inaugurates a new era
- New era will be fulfilled when Christ returns
- Readers invited to adopt perspective of new era
- “Knowing Christ” > “knowing about Christ”
- The risen Christ is still the crucified Christ

The Character of God

- The gospel raises questions about the character of God
 - What is God's fundamental nature?
 - Can God be trusted?
 - What about the promises to Israel?
- Fundamental nature is love; Christ event brings fuller understanding
- God's promises have always been for all humanity and remain in effect
- God's grace is surprising in its mode and expanse, but not out of character

The Old Life and the New

- Sin is a force of being that enslaves and estranges humanity
- Preeminent power of the Old Age
- The Law is contaminated by sin
- Four Atonement Metaphors
 - Justification
 - Redemption
 - Expiation
 - Reconciliation
- Christ represents us and we participate with him

¹ *The Letters of Paul*, “Interpreting Biblical Texts” series, Charles B. Cousar, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN 1996

The problem of *pistis Christou*

- “(our) faith in Christ” or “faith(fulness) of Christ”
- Faithfulness of Christ is the more important
- Divine activity is always centered
- Our belief and trust is a response
- Belief is not a work we can boast in

Radical Reorientation

- Justifying faith is Christ’s, not ours
- We participate in the obedience of Christ
- Active, aggressive, radical love, not passive assent to theological propositions
- Grace avoids both hubris and despair

The New Community

- Ecclesiology grows out of the gospel
- External status markers are meaningless
- Communal life conformed to example of Christ
- Distinctively different, grounded in the here and now

Embodying the Gospel

- Individual and community are intertwined with each other and with Christ
- Gospel and response are inextricably linked
- Discernment is key
- Christ is the model to be measured by