CHAPTER SEVEN

ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ IN I COR 10:4, 9

The use of Χριστός at I Cor 10:4, 9 raises a number of theological issues, among which are the term’s personal or titular connotation and its theological implications for Christ’s pre-existence and for his identification with the divine attribute of wisdom. Usually in Paul’s writings ‘Christ’ refers to the person.1 Even when titular connotations are prominent as at Rom 9:5, the qualified form, Χριστός κατὰ σάρκα, shows that the term carried broader implications. So also at I Cor 10:4, 9 it is not limited in its meaning to the eschatological figure ‘from the seed of David’ (Rom 1:3) but refers inclusively to the person of Jesus whether in his eschatological or, as we hope to show, in his pre-existent being. But does not the typological context of I Cor 10 preclude a reference to a pre-existent person?2

The Pre-Existent Christ

I Cor 10:1–13 is a midrash on certain Pentateuchal texts that is probably preformed3 and that is here applied to the situation in Paul’s church at Corinth. It exhibits the following pattern:

---


1a Introductory formula
1b–5 Opening ‘texts’ = interpretive summary of biblical texts (Exod 13–17; Num 14:29)†
6–7a Commentary/application
7b Supplementary text (Exod 32:6)
8–13 Commentary/application

An extended application (14–22, 23–31) concludes (31) with an allusion to I Cor 10:1b–5. The passage explicitly identifies the Exodus events of redemption and judgment as ‘types (τύποι) for us,’ as happening ‘typically’ (τυπικῶς) and ‘written for our admonition’ (10:6, 11). It uses the terms ‘technically [as an] “advance presentation” intimating eschatological events.’ Does it, however, place Christ only on the eschatological side of this typology? If so, at I Cor 10:9 it should read, ‘Neither let us tempt Christ (Χριστόν) as some of them [at the Exodus] tempted Yahweh.’ But, in fact, the verse reads, ‘Neither let us tempt Christ (Χριστόν) as some of them tempted him.’ It leaves the term, ‘him,’ unexpressed but clearly implied and thus places Christ both at the Exodus and in the (present) eschatological reality at Corinth.

This understanding of I Cor 10:9 illumines the meaning of 10:4bc:

For they were drinking from the spiritual following rock
And the rock was Christ.

Among the later rabbis ‘the following rock’ became an elaborate legend that may be derived in part from a word-play of the Targum⁷ and in part from interpretations of Exod 15–17 and Num 20–21 in

---