Title: “Christ Died for All:” 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 in Paul’s theology of the atonement

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Abstract:

The meaning of hyper in 2 Cor 5:14-15 poses an endless debate among Bible scholars. Hyper has been interpreted in at least three ways: Christ died as a substitute for all, Christ died on behalf of all, or Christ participated in death for all.

The purpose of this study was to determine, by an exegesis in context, what Paul meant by the use of hyper in 2 Cor 5:14-15. Such an approach provides a firm basis for defining the meaning of the text, intended by Paul.

Chapter 2 documents that the use of hyper in the Bible is essentially the same as the use of the term in the extra-biblical sources. Hyper with the genitive of advantage is more commonly used than any of the other forms of the second inflection of hyper. The polysemic nature necessitates that the meaning of a term in any passage should depend on the literary context.

The exegesis of 2 Cor 5:14-15 and its context reveals that the passage is dominated by the defense of Paul’s apostleship against the false apostles. Paul began his defense by proclaiming himself as the “aroma of Christ,” in the sense that not only his message but also his life witnessed to the wisdom which God has revealed in Christ. Paul showed that his weakness and sufferings were not an evidence of a lack of apostolic authority. Rather, he declared that these
attribute manifested an authority which was derived from a suffering Lord, and had the ultimate purpose of bringing glory to God.

The analysis of 2 Cor 5:11-6:10 shows that Paul focused on the fact that God’s work in the death of Christ provided a motivation for him and his followers. In 5:11-13, Paul faced the task of holding in tension the theme of boasting explicit in the epistle. On the hand, he did not want to make his defense a matter of personal boasting, and on the other hand, he avoided the necessity of boasting in the gospel.

In 2 Cor 5:14-15, Paul turned to the theological basis of his apostolate. In the Christological statements of the text, *hyper* was used in two related senses; “instead of” in 5:14-15a, and “in their behalf” in 5:15b. In the death of Christ, Paul saw exemplified the principle of self-renunciation. Furthermore, Christ’s death and resurrection provide an avenue for mankind to assess humanity according to a divine standard.

Paul concluded the section (2 Cor 5; 11-6:10) with an appeal to the Corinthians to participate in the ministry of reconciliation which Christ himself inaugurated at his death. As the climax of the appeal, Paul turned to a series of the credentials (vicissitudes) with which his apostolate operated (6:4-10).

In the three occurrences of *hyper* in 2 Cor 5:14-15, the term was used in two senses. In 2 Cor 5:14 and 15a, the sense of “instead of” is obvious, but in v. 15b *hyper* has the sense of “on behalf of.” Therefore *hyper* has both the sense of substitution and representation.