

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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THE APOSTLE PAUL ON THE TWO ADAMS

From time to time you have heard me make reference to the folks at BioLogos who are attempting to convince their fellow evangelicals to embrace Darwinian evolution - and all that it entails. Karl W. Gibberson, vice president of the BioLogos Foundation, wrote an article entitled *My Take: Jesus would believe in evolution and so should you*. His basic premise is: “[W]hen it comes to the truth of evolution, many Christians feel compelled to look the other way. They hold on to a particular interpretation of an ancient story in Genesis that they have fashioned into a modern account of origins – a story that began as an oral tradition for a wandering tribe of Jews thousands of years ago. For more than two centuries, careful scientific research, much of it done by Christians, has demonstrated clearly that the earth is billions years old, not mere thousands, as many creationists argue. We now know that the human race began millions of years ago in Africa – not thousands of years ago in the Middle East, as the story in Genesis suggests. And all life forms are related to each other through evolution. These are important truths that science has discovered through careful research. They are not “opinions” that can be set aside if you don’t like them. Anyone who values truth must take these ideas seriously, for they have been established as true beyond any reasonable doubt. Christians must come to welcome – rather than fear – the ideas of evolution. Truths about Nature are sacred, for they speak of our Creator. Such truths constitute “God’s second book” for Christians to read alongside the Bible. Evolution does not contradict the Bible unless you force an unreasonable interpretation on that ancient book. To these questions we should add “What would Jesus believe about origins?” And the answer? Jesus would believe evolution, of course. He cares for the Truth. In summary, BioLogos is a group of scholars who believe that “evolution need not be a stumbling block to faith”, that Adam and Eve did not really exist in the way Genesis describes, that the Flood was not worldwide, that Jesus would believe in evolution, and that Scripture is best interpreted through the lens of evolutionary scientific thought.¹ Other articles at BioLogos go so far as to suggest that the Apostle Paul was simply wrong to believe that Adam was an historical person. A recent BioLogos essay argues that Adam and Eve were likely “a couple of Neolithic farmers in the Near East” to whom God revealed himself “in a special way.” There is a consistent denial of any possibility that Adam and Eve are genetic parents of the entire human race. The BioLogos approach also denies that historical nature of the Fall with all of its cosmic consequences. BioLogos has published explicit calls to deny the inerrancy of the Bible. They candidly admit that “the historicity of Adam seems to be assumed by the apostle Paul in Romans 5 (and somewhat in 1 Corinthians 15), Paul draws an analogy between Adam and Jesus, both of whom are representative of humanity, but in different senses: Adam brings death to all, whereas Jesus brings life; Adam was disobedient, Jesus was obedient: Adams’ disobedience affects all, whereas Jesus’ obedience affects “all”. Since Jesus is an historical figure, it is argued that Adam, too, must be an historical figure in the very same sense. You cannot have one part of the analogy be symbolic and the other historical. Plus, if Paul believed in an historical Adam as the first human, Christians should, too. The difficulty with this understanding of Paul, however, is that it is difficult to reconcile with the scientific data.”² This last statement is key. As one of their members declared that whenever the Bible and Darwinian Evolution conflict, “Science trumps revealed truth about the world.”³ Michael Peeves recently addressed the importance of the historicity of Adam, Eve and the Fall. Evangelical Christians, he writes, have generally resisted the demythologization of the events of the Gospels, whereby, for example, the resurrection of Jesus is interpreted as a mythical portrayal of the principle of new life. Indeed, they have argued strongly that it is the very historicity of the resurrection event that is so vital. However, when it comes to the biblical figures of Adam and Eve, there has been a far greater willingness to interpret them as mythical or symbolic. The simple aim of this chapter is to show, in sketch, that, far from being a peripheral matter for fussy literalists, it is biblically and theologically necessary for Christians to believe in Adam as first, a historical person who second, fathered the entire human race. The early chapters of Genesis sometimes use the word ‘adam’ to mean ‘humankind’ (Gen 1:26-27, for example), and since there is clearly a literary structure to those chapters, some have seen the figure of Adam there as a literary device, rather than a historical individual. Already a question arises: must we choose literary devices used to present historical material; think of Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night, or the emphasis in the Gospels on Jesus’ death at the time of the Passover. Most commentators would happily acknowledge that here are literary devices being employed to draw our attention to the theological significance of the historical events being recounted. The ‘literary’ need not exclude the ‘literal’. The next question then must be: does the ‘literary’ exclude the ‘literal’ in the case of Adam? Not according to those other parts of the Bible that refer back to Adam. The genealogies of Genesis 5, 1 Chronicles 1 and Luke 3 all find their first parent in Adam, and while biblical genealogies

do sometimes omit names for various reasons, they are not known to add in fictional or mythological figures. When Jesus taught on marriage in Matthew 19:4-6, and when Jude referred to Adam in Jude 14, they used no caveats or anything to suggest that they doubted Adam's historical reality or thought of him in any way differently to how they thought of other Old Testament characters. And when Paul spoke of Adam being formed first, and the woman coming from him (1 Cor. 11:8-9; 1 Tim. 2:11-14) he had to be assuming a historical account in Genesis 2. Paul's argument would collapse into nonsense if he meant that Adam and Eve were mere mythological symbols of the timeless truth that men pre-exist women. We can think of the passages cited above as circumstantial evidence that the biblical authors thought of Adam as a real person in history. Circumstantial evidence is useful and important, but we have something more conclusive. That is the role Adam plays in Paul's theology makes Adam's historical reality integral to the basic storyline of Paul's gospel. And if that is in fact the case, then the historicity of Adam cannot be a side issue, but must be part and parcel of the foundations of Christian belief. The first exhibit is Romans 5:12-21, where Paul contrasts the sin of 'the one man', Adam, with the righteousness of 'the one man', Christ. Paul is the apostle who, in Galatians 3:16, felt it necessary to make the apparently minute distinction between a singular 'seed' and plural 'seeds', so it is probably safe here to assume that he was not being thoughtless, meaning 'men' when speaking of 'the one man'. Indeed, 'the one man' is repeatedly contrasted with the many human beings, and the 'oneness' underpins Paul's very argument, which is about the overthrow of the one sin of the one man (Adam) by the one salvation of the one man (Christ). Throughout the passage, Paul speaks of Adam in just the same way as he speaks of Christ (his language of death coming 'through' Adam is also similar to how he speaks of blessing coming 'through' Abraham in Gal 3). He is able to speak of a time before this one man's trespass, when there was no sin or death, and he is able to speak of a time after it, a period of time that, he says, stretched from Adam to Moses. Paul could hardly have been clearer that he supposed Adam was a real and historical figure as Christ and Moses (and Abraham). Yet it is not just Paul's language that suggests he believed in a historical Adam; his whole argument depends on it. His logic would fall apart if he was comparing a historical man (Christ) to a mythical or symbolic one (Adam). If Adam and his sin were mere symbols, then there would be no need for a historical atonement; a mythical atonement would be necessary to undo a mythical fall. With a mythical Adam, then, Christ might as well be – in fact, would do better to be – a symbol of divine forgiveness and new life. Instead, the story Paul tells is of a historical problem of sin, guilt and death being introduced into the creation, a problem that required a historical solution. To remove that historical problem of the one man Adam's sin would not only remove the rationale for the historical solution of the cross and resurrection, it would transform Paul's gospel beyond all recognition. For where, then, did sin and evil come from? If they were not the result of one man's act of disobedience, then there seem to be only two options; either sin was there beforehand and evil is an integral part of God's creation, or sin is an individualistic thing, brought into the world almost ex nihilo by each person. The former is blatantly non-Christian in its monist or dualist denial of a good Creator and his good creation; the latter looks like Pelagianism, with good individuals becoming sinful by copying Adam (and so presumably, becoming righteous by copying Christ).⁴

I. PAUL'S ARGUMENTATION

With *a fortiori* arguments, arguments characterized the Pauline "much more's," the author of the Epistle to the Romans has set forth the grace of God that abounds and reigns over sin through the righteous act of the sinner's representative, the Lord Jesus Christ. At least five times in the chapter, the apostle has used the expression, "much more" (cf. vv. 9, 10, 15, 17, 20). The concept expounded by Paul reaches its climax in the statement of verse twenty, "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Paul has traced man's fall to the one sinning act of Adam, the first man. As a direct result of Adam's transgression **four** things have come to pass:

- A. In the first place, Adam's sin was imputed immediately to every member of his posterity, that is, to every member of the human race. Thus, every individual became guilty of Adam's sin and, therefore, of condemnation and death, (cf. Rom. 5:12).
- B. In the second place, Adam's nature became corrupted, and he passed on his corrupt nature to every member of the race. After Adam, all men are born in sin (cf. Eph. 2:1-3), inheriting a corrupt nature from the first man.
- C. In the third place, as a consequence of Adam's fall, all men are unable to respond savingly to the Word of God and the gospel (cf. Rom. 8:7-8; 1 Cor. 2:14).
- D. Finally, eternal punishment has come as the consequence of Adam's sin (cf. Gen. 3:17-19; 2:16-17). Man is now "under foreign domination." Yet, Paul says, Adam is a type of Christ. As one reads the chapter it, becomes evident that Adam is a type primarily by contrast. The master-thought of the section is the unity of the many in the one. In Adam's case, it is the unity of the many in a representative who fell. In Christ's case, it is the unity of the many in a representative Who overcame, including in His victory all who are in Him.

II. THE EPIC CONTRAST BETWEEN THE TWO REPRESENTATIVE MEN

In the preceding clause, the final one of verse fourteen, when Paul said that Adam was a type of Christ, it might have been expected that he would introduce a comparison of the two men. The "but" of verse fifteen indicates that

he is to stress the contrast between the two. On notes the negative way in which he does this, using the pattern of “not. . . so” (cf. vv. 15, 16). The first thing he says is that the offence of Adam is not like the free gift of righteousness (cf. vv. 17, 18, 20, 21). In Adam’s case, the one offence has resulted in the death of many. In Christ’s case, however, the one individual is responsible for the gracious gift of righteousness from God. The “much more” of the verse may have a further significance. It is possible that Paul intends to indicate by its use that the work of Christ does not merely restore that which was lost by Adam. It provides more. The offence of Adam is called *a falling beside* (PARAPTOMA, lit. to slip, to fall to one side). It is very fitting for a description of the *fall* of Adam in the Garden of Eden. The “much more” and the “abounded” support the idea that Christ has done more than restore man to Adam’s relation of God in the Garden. The “many” who died and the “many” who have received grace are not co-extensive, otherwise we should have the apostle teaching universalism. The many who receive grace are the people of God, the company for which Christ as a representative stood. The “for” of verse seventeen introduces an explanation, which is probably primarily related to the first part of verse sixteen rather than the last part. There is again on Adam’s side one offence, followed by the reign of death (cf. v. 14). On Christ’s side there is the one man, Christ, but it is through Him that those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life. As one can see, there is an important new fact added in this reiteration of the principal thought of the section. The apostle refers to those “who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life. As one can see, there is an important new fact added in this reiteration of the principal thought of the section. The apostle refers to those “who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness.” In the words there is a hint of how the work becomes the possession of those for whom it was intended. They are the “receive” it. In other words, it becomes theirs by the appropriation of faith. The faith, we learn in other passages of the Word of God, is also won by the one act of atonement on the cross (cf. Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 1:29, etc.). Incidentally, the expression, “the gift of righteousness,” makes it quite clear that justification is something that becomes ours by grace. It is not the product of works (cf. 4:5). The expressions in the Greek test, *through the one* (Adam) and *through the one, Jesus Christ*, give added emphasis to what is the one real point of comparison between Adam and Christ, namely, the fact that each man’s action is determinative for the life of the many to whom they are related. One other thing should be noted in the seventeenth verse. The one offence of Adam led to a reign of death, that is, all men died. The act of Christ, however, does not merely restore the pristine condition. Those who receive the gospel, (justification by faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone) shall become kings in life themselves.

III. THE FORMAL COMPARISON BETWEEN THE TWO MEN

The word, “therefore” (lit., consequently, then), is used to introduce the formal comparison between Adam and Christ. The text is related to verse twelve, really forming the conclusion to the comparison that is begun there. The opening clause, “as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation,” repeats the content of the original protasis (opening clause) of the comparison in verse twelve. The expression, “the righteousness of one,” is probably incorrect. The noun (DIKAIOMATOS) should be rendered in this case as *righteous act*, giving the rendering, the *righteous act of one*, the reference being to the atoning death of Christ on the cross. What does Paul mean by saying that the free gift came “upon all men” unto justification of life? Can we really say that all men are, have been, or are to be justified? That is hardly true, going against all that Scripture teaches in many places. Can it mean that the free gift has come to all men potentially, or that it is offered to all? The context is as usual helpful in determining the meaning. In the immediately preceding verse the apostle has pointed out that they reign in life who “receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness.” In other words, the free gift comes “upon all men,” that is, upon all men who received abundance of grace. The same type of thought is found in 1 Cor. 15:22, and there, too, Paul limits the force of the “all” who are made alive by the phrase “in Christ.” In verse nineteen, another analogy is introduced by way of explanation (“for”) of the inward causes of the two facts of verse eighteen, condemnation and justification. The analogy is indicated by the words, “as . . . so.” The reference to disobedience and obedience locates the transgression and the obedience with reference to the revealed will of God. Adam disobeyed it, while Christ obeyed it. Cranfield thinks that the constitution of men as sinner by Adam’s disobedience is to be understood in the sense of men becoming sinners by inheriting sin natures and living sinful lives. Adam’s misdeed is simply the means by which sin obtained entrance into human life. On the other hand, in the case of Christ’s obedience, we receive the status of justification by the righteousness of His life. One can see that he does not see a parallel between the two men’s actions.⁵ The verse, however, surely intends the reader to see such a parallel. If that is so, as Moo and others point out,⁶ then the word “made” is to be understood forensically. Shedd, after pointing out that the verb never means *to make*, says it means, “to place in the class of,” referring to a declarative act.⁷ It is based upon causative acts of the first sin of Adam and the obedient act of Christ.

IV. THE FUNCTION OF THE LAW

- A. The statement of it (Rom. 5:20). The reason for the giving of the Law is now set out by Paul. In the words of Shedd, “The question naturally arises: If sin and death occurred in the way that has been described, *previous* to the Mosaic law, and without its use, then why its subsequent introduction?”⁸ Or, to put it in another way, a last Jewish objection might arise at this point in the argument, “Did not the Law deal with sin and righteousness? Paul, you are giving Adam and Christ as the source of both. Where does the Law fit into this

picture?” The word translated “entered” (PAREISELTHEN) in verse twenty means *to enter alongside*, like an actor, who does not occupy the front of the stage, and who appears there only to play an accessory part.⁹ The important subject is not the Law, but sin. The point is that, if sin is to be effectively dealt with in mankind, it must become manifest among men as the exceedingly vicious and wrong thing that it is. Thus, the purpose expressed here is an intermediate purpose of God, not an ultimate purpose. The manifestation of sin is for the ultimate purpose of the salvation of men. Actually the Law was given for three purposes at least, namely, that the sin of men might become fully manifest, that its inherent ungodly nature might be seen, and that it might increase in quantity, as men sought to defend themselves in their sin against the attack of the Law. “But,” the apostle says, “where sin abounded (in Israel), grace did abound much more.” The sins of the religious, to whom revelation has come, are infinitely more heinous than the sins of the irreligious, or pagans. Paul, however, may have had in mind the abounding sin of Israel in rejection of the Law in the sense of disobedience to it, and also the climax of sinfulness in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Grace, nevertheless, did much more abound, in fact, *superabound*, as the Greek intensive verb (HUPERREPERISSEUSEN) suggests, for it is by the cross that grace comes to man.

- B. The purpose of it (Rom. 5:21). The Law set in motion a purpose that leads to the reign of grace through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ, our Lord. Where sin reigned and ruined, now grace is to reign and bring to life. The phrase, “through righteousness,” is to be noted. God does forgive sin, but He does it righteously. To teach that He forgives sin because of tenderness of heart, like an indulgent grandfather forgives a grandson who has done something wrong, is to pervert the doctrine of divine grace. Nor does He pardon, as does a governor who exercises clemency. That type of pardon would detract from the work of Jesus Christ. God forgives men only because the Son, the divine Substitute, has paid the full penalty for their sin. All that God does in pardon and forgiveness is done righteously. Those who possess the pardon of God have a right to heaven, and no angel can bar us from entering. The grace of God is seen in the gift of the Son who made the righteous pardon possible.¹⁰

CONCLUSION: Robert Strimple, one of my professors of theology, made these important points about our text. It is important to notice where Romans 5:12-19 comes in the argument of Paul’s letter to the Romans. This passage comes as the conclusion of Paul’s extended presentation of the good news of justification by faith in Christ, by faith alone and not by works, just before he enters into the truth of sanctification in Christ – and indeed this passage comes as the climax, the “clincher” of his argument for the justification of sinners on the ground of the righteous obedience of Christ imputed to them who trust in Him. Thus this passage is no way a strange intrusion into the flow of the letter, as some have suggested, but really is the heart and center of the letter. Kuitert is quite correct in saying that Paul’s interest is in Jesus Christ and the good news of justification in Him, and in saying that Paul bring Adam into the picture in order to teach us the truth about Christ and our salvation in Him. Adam and Christ are not placed next to each other on the same level, so to speak, as equals. Christ as “the one” towers far above Adam as “the one.” But to say that is one thing. To say that therefore Adam is to be understood as nothing more than a preacher’s illustration, a story which conveys its message whether or not it is historically true, is to say quite another thing. The fact is, as I have already stressed, that unless we really stand guilty, condemned to death on the basis of the disobedience of Adam, there is no reason to believe that we are justified, declared to be righteous, on the basis of the obedience of the Second Adam, Christ. Despite the great difference between Adam and Christ, Paul points to the all-important redemptive-historical analogy between them. Paul sums up all of God’s dealings with men under two great Representative Heads: Adam and Christ. As he says in 1 Corinthians 15, there is none before Adam, for Adam is the first man. And in terms of covenantal Headship there is none between Adam and Christ, for Christ is the second man. And there is none after Christ, for Christ is the last man. Adam and Christ sustain unique relationships to men. In each case the covenant response of the Representative Head, whether of disobedience or of obedience, is not merely illustrative of the condition of those in union with him but determinative of the condition of those in union with him. If Adam is merely a symbol that stands for the truth about us, then perhaps Christ is merely another symbol that stands for another truth about us. And lest you think that my saying that is merely a “scare tactic” on the part of a cranky conservative Christian, let me point out that that is precisely the conclusion reached by Karl Barth. I have said that for one like Barth, Adam is merely the symbol we use for the truth about all men, that they are sinners. The more we study Barth, however, the more clear it becomes that Christ is the symbol we use for that which is also true for all men. For just as sin in Barth’s theology is “built-in” sin, and goes along with our humanity, just so is grace “built-in” grace. And as such it is the final truth about all men who have ever lived. Now that may be called a doctrine of Universal Salvation and that can sound great; but is it a doctrine of salvation at all? There is not true guilt in that theology, but there is no true forgiveness either. The reality of eternal death in Adam may be suppressed in that theology, but the glorious reality of resurrection life fades in the mists of allegory as well. And don’t think that that is the conclusion of Barth alone. I submit that that is the ultimate direction of contemporary theology in general in our day, both Protestant and Roman Catholic. If we deny the historicity of Adam, “then the question will never allow itself to be finally suppressed: Is not Christ in his resurrection also a ‘teaching model’...?” If the historicity of the first Adam is considered irrelevant to us, why then should the historicity of the second Adam not also be irrelevant to us? To conclude: Our understanding of the reality of Adam affects our understanding of sin, of redemption, and of the Redeemer. The one who rejects the Biblical teaching regarding the historical Adam and the historical Fall will find no firm basis for accepting the Biblical teaching regarding the historical Incarnate Redeemer.¹¹ Darwinian evolution is

incompatible with the teaching of Christ and His apostles. The only way to harmonize the two is by reconfiguring Christianity so that it ceases to be Christianity. In the final analysis, as Steven Waldman pointed out, Darwinian evolution is really a challenge against Biblical revelation.¹²

ENDNOTES

¹ As listed at <http://www.weswhite.net/2011/04/the-biologos-foundation/>

² <http://biologos.org/questions/evolution-and-the-fall>

³ As cited by Albert Mohler. <http://www.albertmohler.com/2011/04/19/throwing-the-bible-under-the-bus/>

⁴ <http://www.reformation21.org/articles/adam-and-eve.php>

⁵ C.E.B. Cranfield *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans I* (T. & T. Clark, 1979) p. 289. More recently T.R. Schreiner has adopted this position, cf. his *Romans: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Baker, 1998) p. 289.

⁶ Douglas Moo, *Romans 1-8: The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary* (Moody, 1991) p. 359

⁷ W. G. T. Shedd, *A Critical and Doctrinal Commentary Upon the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1977) p. 139.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 143

⁹ F. Rienecker and C. Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Zondervan, 1982) p. 360.

¹⁰ S. Lewis Johnson, "Romans 5:12 – An Exercise In Exegesis and Theology" in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study* eds. R. Longenecker and M.C. Tenney (Zondervan, 1975) p. 316

¹¹ <http://wscal.edu/resource-center/resource/was-adam-historical>

¹² <http://blog.beliefnet.com/stevenwaldman/2009/02/evolution-darwin-god-and-scien.html>