

“In Adam all die... In Christ shall all be made alive”

Introduction

Someone has said: “We live in an age of individualism, a time when many know how to say ‘I’ and ‘me,’ but few understand the significance of ‘we’ and ‘us.’ Peter Lewis writes, ‘In this hyper-individualistic age we, in the Western world anyway, like to think of ourselves as self-contained units... We tend to believe that we are independent beings, each one crafting his own future or forging her own fate.’” (Beeke) Do you see yourself as someone crafting your own special future and forging your own unique fate? Are all of us really little isolated, self-contained bubbles writing our own one-of-a-kind stories?

None of us ever really escapes asking that most fundamental question: “Who am I?” So go ahead, ask yourself!—Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going? What am I about? What is my identity?” The Bible says that if you really want to know who you are as a unique individual with your own personal name, you have to see yourself first of all as a member—or a part—of the one human race. If you want to understand rightly who you are, then you have to understand what it means to be what we call “human.” You have to understand the identity that you actually share in common with every other human being that’s walking the face of this earth. That might sound a bit highfaluting, but it’s essential to understanding the Bible and even the Gospel itself.

I. What does it mean to be human? (Part I)

So, think together with me now. What are some of the things that uniquely as humans we all share in common together? Well, we all ask questions like “Who am I?” “Where did I come from?” “Where am I going?” The trees don’t ask questions like that. Neither do monkeys or apes. Only humans. The animals don’t look up at the stars and the vastness of the universe and wonder. Only we humans do that. All humans have an innate sense of morality – an inbuilt awareness of the concept of right and wrong – of “fairness,” of equity, and of justice. Only in the human race is this sense of morality to be found and nowhere else.

But now here’s a crazy question. How did the whole human race end up like this? Why aren’t there some humans who think and wonder and ask ultimate questions and some humans who never do any of these things? Why aren’t there some humans who know that infanticide is wrong and also some humans for whom, like some animals, it’s not at all wrong? At this most basic level, how did we all end up the same – all of us wondering, all of us asking the same questions, and all of us agreeing that there’s such a thing as right and wrong?

The Bible answers very simply: We’re all physically and biologically descended from a single common ancestor whose name was Adam. I know people who are really into tracing their genealogies. I think that’s pretty neat myself. If you can trace your genealogy back some six hundred years, that’s amazing. And yet if we’re “human,” then we can all know the name of the one man who stands at the very beginning of every genealogical tree. “Adam” is a personal name. The Bible teaches that in the beginning there was a real man named “Adam” and that he had a real wife named “Eve.” And every single human being in the world is ultimately

descended in a straight line from this one man, Adam. The Bible says that “Adam called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20)

Adam is a personal name, but Adam is also the Hebrew word for “Man” – for “humanity.” And so we read in Genesis chapter one, after God had created the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and the beasts on the earth:

- Genesis 1:26–27 — Then God said, “Let us make *man* [Heb. *adam*] in our image, after our likeness. And let *them* have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created *man* in his own image, in the image of God he created him; *male and female* he created *them*.

In other words, when God created Adam, He was creating “man” – He was creating, in a sense, a whole “humanity.” And so we learn in Genesis chapter two that the woman was not created separately or independently from the man (for then there would have been a sort of division in humanity), but that the woman was taken from out of the man.

- Genesis 2:21–23 — So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

We see that there’s a sense in which the whole human race was embodied in that first man – when, as yet, no one else existed. There’s a sense in which we were all “in Adam” when he was in the garden because it’s from this Adam that we’ve all descended (cf. Heb. 7:9-10). So we read again in Genesis one:

- Genesis 1:28 — God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.”

Are you beginning to see now that if you want to know who you are then you absolutely have to know who Adam was? How did we as humans all end up at the most basic level the same?—all looking up at the heavens and wondering, all looking within our own selves and wondering, and all agreeing together that there is such a thing as right and wrong? The idea that we’re all descended from different human families who all evolved separately from lower forms of life can never explain this sameness and this oneness of humanity. The only satisfying explanation is the biblical teaching that we all descended physically and biologically from one man, Adam, and so therefore we’re all, with Adam—and even in Adam, created in the “image” and the “likeness” of God.

- Genesis 1:26–27 — God said, “Let us make man **in our image, after our likeness...** So God created man **in his own image, in the image of God** he created him; male and female he created them.

Who am I? In some cultures I might respond by saying that I'm the son of Dennis and Sharmon Greene, the husband of Andrea, and the father of my children. But as a Christian, I truly begin to answer this question by saying that I'm a son of Adam and therefore a human being created with Adam in the image and likeness of God – to know God and to relate to him personally, to relate personally to my fellow “image-bearers,” to reflect God’s moral character, and to represent God in the rest of His creation. **That’s *who*** I am. That’s who ***you*** are. But if we all have this in common, then as humans we also have something else in common.

II. What does it mean to be human? (Part II)

All of us know that all of us sin. Not everyone calls it sin, but we all know that there’s something “wrong” with us – there’s something “wrong” with human nature. We can be selfish and vindictive, and arrogant and oppressive, and harsh and unkind. We lie, and lust, and covet, and steal, and gossip, and slander, and feel anger, and bitterness, and resentment, and envy. We have dysfunctional relationships and broken relationships and so we experience sorrow and pain. That there’s something fundamentally “wrong” with all of mankind is admitted by all honest people. It’s admitted in philosophy, in all the religions of the world, and in many of the “greatest” works of literature, but only in the Bible do we have any kind of a satisfying explanation for *what* exactly is “wrong” with us and *how it happened* that there’s something “wrong” with *all* of us.

Let’s ask the question we asked earlier: How did the whole human race end up like this? Why aren’t there some humans who are selfish and some humans who aren’t – ever? Why aren’t there some humans who lie, or lust, or gossip, or feel anger or bitterness, or envy, and some humans who never do? Why aren’t there some humans who are flawed and broken and some humans who are ideal and perfect? How are we to explain the fact that here, too, we’re all, inevitably, the same? The idea that we’re all descended from different human families who all evolved separately from lower forms of life can never explain this sameness and this oneness of humanity. For that matter, this idea can never explain the certainty we all have that there’s something “wrong” in the first place. And so we see again that the only satisfying explanation must *begin* with the Bible’s teaching that we’re all descended from one man – Adam.

We’re all individual, morally responsible beings with our own personal names. On the other hand, *in Adam* we’re also all bound together as a *single* humanity – and what this means is that Adam could truly stand at the very beginning as the head and the acting representative of the entire human race. God made Adam to be “legally” and justly our representative, so that he could act and choose in some sense on behalf of us all. It’s in this light that we have to read these verses in Genesis chapter two:

- Genesis 2:16–17 — The LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

My fellow human beings, this isn’t just the story of some far off, distant man unrelated to us. When God gave this command to Adam, He was essentially giving this command to “man” – to the whole human race represented there in the garden, in the one man, Adam, who was also the best and “fittest” person in whom we could have ever been represented. Had Adam obeyed, then

his obedience would have brought blessing and life to the whole human race – to all of his posterity, including us. So what does it mean for us—for you and for me and for all other human beings descended from Adam—when Adam disobeys and rebels against God’s command in the garden? The Apostle Paul answers:

- Romans 5:15–19 — Sin came into the world through **one** man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned... **many** died through **one** man’s trespass... the judgment following **one** trespass brought condemnation... because of **one** man’s trespass, death reigned through that **one** man... **one** trespass led to condemnation for **all men**... by the **one** man’s disobedience the **many** were made sinners.”

What does it mean for us when Adam disobeys and rebels against God’s command in the garden? It means that there, in the garden, in the very beginning, **we all** became **guilty**. Because we were all represented in Adam, God counted that first sin of Adam as *really* and *truly* our sin, and that first guilt of Adam as *really* and *truly* our guilt so that now we enter this world even as infants *already* sinners by nature, already guilty, and already under God’s righteous sentence of condemnation. Many will say that this is not fair, that this is not just, and that therefore this cannot possibly be. On the one hand while there’s mystery here that I cannot penetrate, I’m mindful of the words of Paul: “Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?” (Rom. 9:20) On the other hand, we remember that this really is the only satisfying explanation for the way things **are**. It’s because of my representative involvement in Adam’s FIRST sin that I have now inherited from Adam, through my parents, a depraved and corrupted sin nature that has inevitably resulted from the very earliest days of my life in the sins of which I have become *personally* guilty. Paul says in Ephesians 3 that we were all born into this world “**by nature** children of wrath” (2:3). And in 1 Corinthians 15 we read simply: “**In Adam ALL die**” (15:22).

Are you beginning to see that our predicament is not just that we’re partially defective or that we’ve committed more or less sins than good deeds? Our problem goes much, much deeper than this to our very identity as human beings who are all born “in Adam.” The Psalmist writes:

- Psalm 51:5 — Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

And so we see that what we need is not the power to change, for this could never be enough. The prophet Jeremiah asks:

- Jeremiah 13:23 — Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?

It’s impossible. Instead, the desperate need that we all have is to *be* changed by a power working outside of us. We need to become, as it were, brand new human beings with a totally new identity. And this can only mean that by some infinite miracle we need to find ourselves one day no longer “in Adam”—because to be in Adam is to be guilty and condemned.

III. Summary

How did we as humans all end up the same?—All looking up at the heavens and wondering, all looking within our own selves and wondering, and all agreeing together that there is such a thing

as right and wrong? The Bible answers: We're all descended from one man, and so therefore we're all, with Adam, created in the "image" and the "likeness" of God – created to know God and to relate to him personally, to relate personally to our fellow "image-bearers," to reflect God's moral character, and to represent God in the rest of His creation.

But then we have to ask again: How did we as humans all end up the same?—All guilty of sin—of selfishness and pride, of lying, lust, gossip, slander, anger, bitterness, and envy—all corrupted and depraved, all fundamentally flawed and broken? Once again, the only satisfying explanation is that we're all descended from Adam and that Adam acted and chose in the garden in some sense on behalf of us all. In Adam's first, original sin we all became guilty – we all came under the sentence of judgment and condemnation. And because of this original guilt and condemnation, we now enter this world with corrupted sin natures of our own, with the inevitability of committing personal sin, and with the total inability to do any of the "good" that God requires.

- Romans 8:7–8 — The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.
- Romans 3:9–12 — We have already charged that **all**, both Jews and Greeks, **are under sin**, as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."
- Mark 7:21–23 — For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.

"Original sin, however mysterious its nature may be, tells us that the reality of sin is something far deeper than the mere outward commission of sinful deeds....It tells us that [from the very moment of our conception] there is an inner root of sinfulness which corrupts man's... nature and from which his sinful deeds spring. Like a deadly poison, sin has penetrated to and infected the very center of man's being." (Hughes; quoted in Hoekema, p. 154)

"In Adam all die."

IV. The remedy required

It's only in light of this—it's only when we see the true hopelessness of our situation that we can begin to comprehend the remedy that must be required. Jesus said in John chapter three:

- John 3:3 — Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is *born again* [or, "*born from above*"] he cannot see the kingdom of God.

If our problem goes to our identity as human beings who are all born "in Adam," then what's the only hope left to us? We must be born **again**; we must be born into an entirely new existence no longer "in Adam," but in another. You see why it has to be "in **another**" don't you? Because unless and until we're found "in another," we will always be, by default, still "in Adam." But if

all are born into this world already guilty and condemned in Adam, then who could ever qualify to be the head and representative of a new humanity – a humanity no longer guilty and no longer condemned, no longer wholly corrupted and depraved, no longer incapable of any true spiritual good; a people recreated and remade from the inside out? Christmas is not a feel-good fairy tale. It's not just a warm and sentimental emotion. It's the real joy of a final solution to this problem in history. And so we read in Luke chapter one:

- Luke 1:26–35 — In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered her, "**The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called HOLY—the Son of God.**"

Jesus was born of Mary, and so He, too, is a son of Adam, human, just like us (cf. Gal. 4:4). And yet because Jesus was conceived in the virgin Mary when the Holy Spirit came upon her, and the power of the Most High overshadowed her, when He was born He was also called "*holy—the Son of God.*" Though He was a son of Adam and made in every other way like us, yet *He—alone* of all humanity—was born wholly free from the guilt and condemnation of Adam's sin. He alone, even from His conception in the womb, was holy and pure, uncorrupted and without sin – a true son of Adam—made like us—and yet also the holy Son of God. And so we read in Matthew's Gospel:

- Matthew 1:18–21 — Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, **for he will save his people from their sins.**"

Jesus came into this world wholly free from the guilt and condemnation of Adam's sin. And then when Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry and then tempted in the garden just before His crucifixion, He passed the test where Adam failed. The Bible tells us that "He learned obedience through what He suffered" (Heb. 5:8; cf. 4:15; Jn. 8:46; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 Jn. 3:5).

- Philippians 2:8 — He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus whole life was the perfect expression of this prayer:

- Hebrews 10:5–7 (cf. Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:29) — When Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”

And so Jesus, alone of all the billions of people who have ever been born, is qualified to be the head and representative of a new humanity – a re-created people with a whole new identity no longer in Adam, but now in Christ. Listen again to the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter five:

- Romans 5:15–19 — If many died through **one man’s** trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that **one man** Jesus Christ abounded for many... the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification... If, because of **one man’s** trespass, death reigned through that **one man**, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the **one man** Jesus Christ. Therefore, as **one trespass** led to condemnation for all men, so **one act of righteousness** leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the **one man’s** disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the **one man’s** obedience the many will be made righteous.

If God counts to those who are in Adam the guilt and condemnation of Adam’s sin, then *how much more* will he count to those who are in Christ the perfect righteousness of Christ’s obedience as well as the cleansing and forgiveness of His shed blood on the cross? If in Adam we’re now born with a wholly corrupted and depraved sin nature, then *how much more* in Christ will we be made a wholly new creation – walking in true repentance and obedience, in newness of life? If in Adam all die, then *how much more* in Christ will all be made alive (1 Cor. 15:22)?

Conclusion

None of us are truly isolated, self-contained bubbles writing our own one-of-a-kind story. We’re all either in Adam or in Christ. So go ahead and ask yourself: Am I still in Adam, guilty and condemned? Or am I in Christ, forgiven and counted righteous?

- Romans 8:1 — There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- 2 Corinthians 5:17, 20–21 (cf. Rom. 4:5) — If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come... Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

How then, can we be found “in Him”? Jesus said, “You must be born again” – but this is the work of God that He accomplishes *through* faith. And so we have only to ask ourselves: “Have I repented of my sin and placed all of my trust, all of my faith, all of my hope in Christ alone? Can we say with the Apostle Paul:

- Philippians 3:7–9 (cf. Rom. 4:22-25) — Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

Today, are you found still in Adam, or are you found in Christ? There is no other alternative.

This morning, let us close with the angel’s words to the shepherds, and by God’s grace may we all rejoice together.

- Luke 2:10–14 — The angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”