

STUDY 10

Adam and Christ

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What does it mean to speak of the salvation which God worked for us ‘in Christ’? The phrase ‘in Christ’ is instructive for us and should be examined as it is so often used lightly in Christian circles. It is instructive because it stands in such strong contrast with the phrase ‘in Adam’. (We have already had two papers which dealt with some of the implications of this, so this will focus on Christ himself as he is contrasted with Adam.)

This contrast appears in a number of places in the New Testament, but most simply in 1 Corinthians 15:22: ‘as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ’.¹ Attempts to avoid a hint of universalism usually intrude quickly, as we try to see what Paul meant by ‘all’, but I suggest we let the word stand for a moment, because whatever ‘all’ meant in the case of Adam, it means in the case of Christ. This is seen in the verses which follow:

But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.²⁴ Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every rule and every authority and power.²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.²⁷ For ‘God has put all things in subjection under his feet.’ But when it says, ‘All things are put in subjection,’ it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him.²⁸ When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:23–28).

Paul’s stress is on Christ reigning ‘*until* he has put all his enemies under his feet’. In other words, Christ’s reign has a goal. In discussing the reigns of David and Solomon, Donald Robinson² makes the following suggestion:

In the case of both, the earthly king is the [vice-regent] or deputy of the heavenly king. Here is the foreshadowing of the distinction we find in Paul between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Christ. The anointed king, the Messiah, reigns for God, eventually delivering the kingdom to God the Father that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:24, 28).

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version or are my own translation.

² Donald Robinson, *Faith’s Framework: The Structure of New Testament Theology*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1996 (1985), pp. 82f., 85f.

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He then notes:

... the distinction which Paul appears to make between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Christ. Generally, Paul speaks of the kingdom of God as future, the realm of God where God's blessing and salvation is yet to appear finally and therefore a kingdom to be inherited. C. E. B. Cranfield, following Ernst Käsemann, considers that in the two instances where Paul speaks of the kingdom of God as present—the kingdom of God being not in word but in power (1 Corinthians 4:20), and the kingdom of God being not meat and drink but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17)—Paul is actually referring to the kingdom of *Christ*, the present exercise of God's rule through Christ . . .

We have referred to Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 15 that, when Christ has destroyed every rule, authority and power and has subdued all things, even death, under his feet, then he will deliver the kingdom to God the Father. This may depend on Psalm 110:1, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool', with its implication of a terminus when all Messiah's enemies will have been subdued and his rule accomplished.

But while the language may have a reference to David and Solomon, the principle applies to Christ because it first applied to Adam. This is seen in the quotation in 1 Corinthians 15:27, which is from Psalm 8:6 and which refers to Adam.

WHO IS CHRIST?³

It should be obvious to us that 'Christ' is not a surname. It is true that within the New Testament Jesus Christ is referred to by the word Christ and in that way it has been adopted as a name in much Christian writing and use. But the word 'Christ' is actually an adjective, *χριστός* (*christos*), from the verb *χρίω* (*chriō*), 'to anoint'. As such, the word 'Christ' used in English tells us very little, since it is only a transliteration of the original, not a translation. It is plain that using the phrase 'Jesus the anointed one' will hardly be satisfactory, though we should note attempts to get around this by using the Hebrew equivalent, 'Messiah' in some translations.

As a Hebrew title, 'Messiah' specifically refers to anyone anointed for a purpose, usually as king or high priest.⁴ The typical 'Messiah' was David (see Ps. 2:2) and his place in Israel's life established the function of the Messiah. The chief expression of this would be the anointing of David by Samuel in 1 Samuel 16:13:

Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed [the verb is מָשַׁח] 'messiahed' him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward.

The significance of this event is then demonstrated in the story of David's defeating Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. As the Lord's anointed he opposed the enemies of Israel (see 1 Sam. 17:45). In this conflict he represents all Israel. The role of Messiah is being demonstrated. This is hardly a paradigm for our own fight of faith; it is the anticipation of the one who defeats all the enemies which oppose the purposes of God. The Messiah is a representative figure. His triumphs are vicarious.

³ For fuller detail see my paper, 'Jesus the Messiah: Messianic Truth' in *The Apostolic Faith in Today's World*, NCTM Pastors' School, 1998, pp. 63ff.

⁴ The wider use of the word is seen in Isa. 44:28–45:1 where Cyrus the Mede is the Lord's anointed, in order that he might be shepherd, a euphemism for king in the Ancient Near East.

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Yet 'Messiah' is also the title for a human being. Jesus Christ, is Jesus the Jewish Messiah, the man who represents Israel in the purposes of God for all creation. So being 'chosen in Christ' (Eph. 1:4) demands that we ask what it means for us all, as Jews and Gentiles, to be chosen before the foundation of the world in the Jewish Messiah.⁵

There is one further item to be stressed, and that is that 'Jesus' is also the name of a human being. Jesus did not come down from heaven to earth, however much the eternal Word did become incarnate. There was no 'Jesus' prior to the incarnation. Wherever the phrase 'Jesus Christ' or 'Christ Jesus' occurs it refers to a human being, albeit he remained the eternal Word who had become flesh.⁶ Hebrews 2:14 puts it:

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.

It was necessary that the Word should assume full humanity in order that there should be full redemption. As Athanasius put it:

And what is this but that He who existed in form of God, the Son of a noble Father, humbled Himself and became a servant instead of us and in our behalf? For if the Lord had not become man, we had not been redeemed from sins, not raised from the dead, but remaining dead under the earth; not exalted into heaven, but lying in Hades. Because of us then and in our behalf are the words, 'highly exalted' and 'given'.⁷

PSALM 8

'Adam' is the name of a person,⁸ though probably not specifically so until Genesis 5:3, where 'Adam . . . lived one hundred thirty years'. Prior to that the word could easily and correctly be translated as 'man',⁹ especially if the author's purpose is theological, intending to describe the history of humanity. Robinson notes the reference to Psalm 110, but given the quotation from Psalm 8 in 1 Corinthians 15:27, we might also see that Jesus stands, as did the first man, as representative man who is intended to reign over all things:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;

⁵ See my 'Chosen in Christ' in *Christ's Gospel to God's World*, NCTM Ministry School, 2001, pp. 14ff.

⁶ My strong suggestion is that the New Testament stresses Jesus' humanity while assuming his deity. That would go towards explaining the relative paucity of explicit statements concerning the deity of Jesus Christ. There are, however, many places where the deity of Jesus is consciously or unconsciously implied.

⁷ Athanasius, 'Against the Arians': discourse 1, ch. 11, s. 43, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, 'Athanasius: Select Works and Letters, second series' (eds Philip Schaff & Henry Wace, Hendrickson, Peabody, 1995), p. 331.

⁸ Or a place, as in Josh. 3:16 and probably Hosea 6:7.

⁹ Brevard Childs, 'Adam' in G. A. Buttrick (ed.), *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 1 (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1962), says on p. 42:

The word אָדָם [*adam*] occurs well over five hundred times in the OT with the meaning 'man' or 'mankind'. This generic term is used only rarely as a proper name for the first man. Outside Gen. 1–5 the only unambiguous occurrence of the proper name in the OT is in I Chr. 1:1, where it appears at the head of a genealogy . . . The term אָדָם fluctuates between a generic usage and a proper name in Gen. 1–5.

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- ⁴ what is man [אִנוֹשׁ, *enosh*] that you are mindful of him,
the son of man [בֶּן אָדָם, *ben adam*] that you care for him?
⁵ Yet you have made him a little lower than God,
and crowned him with glory and honor.
⁶ You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet (Ps. 8:3–6).

The two Hebrew words used for ‘man’¹⁰ are virtually synonymous and occur often in this parallelism. Both imply man in distinction to God, with a sense of man’s innate inadequacy, which is of course the paradoxical point being made. It was insignificant man (cf. Ps. 144:3–4) who was given dominion over all of creation and upon whom God lavishes his own glory.

The first man was to subdue the earth (Gen. 1:26), which I suggest implied a process to be carried out. It was not that man must bring a rebellious creation to heel but that creation, which was not intended to be a chaos (Isa. 45:18; cf. Gen. 1:2), should be brought to its intended harmony. The dominion of man was not static but active in all this. Even before the presence of sin he was to ‘edenise the earth’. This was the goal for man. Likewise, but with the presence of moral enemies to be considered, Paul’s observation is that Christ is working out the process of subduing all things: that is *his* present reign.

Ephesians 1:22–23 contains a quotation from Psalm 8, where Christ’s body is declared to be the fullness of him who fills all in all. The notion of Christ filling all in all would seem to be the goal of the process to which I have referred. He will fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of God (Hab. 2:14; cf. 2 Cor. 4:6), not just in some cognitive way, but as true man crowned with glory and honour. He with his Bride will fill all creation.

The major use of Psalm 8 (vv. 4–6) in the New Testament is in Hebrews 2:6–9. Here the contrast is sharply drawn between the exaltation of created mankind and the exaltation of Jesus. We note also that, in Hebrews 1:13–14, the same goal-directed framework is also directed by the use of Psalm 110:1 (cf. Eph. 1:20; 1 Cor. 15:25):

- ... someone has testified somewhere,
‘What are human beings that you are mindful of them,
or mortals, that you care for them?
⁷ You have made them for a little while lower than the angels;
you have crowned them with glory and honor,
⁸ subjecting all things under their feet.’

Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them,⁹ but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone (Heb. 2:6–9).

Here the NRSV has chosen the generic meaning of ‘man’, even if the resulting translation is clumsy and obscures aspects of the original text.¹¹ What is ‘man’? There

¹⁰ Two other Hebrew words are used in the Old Testament for ‘man’, אִישׁ (*ish*) and גֵּבֶר (*gever*). For an older discussion of the four words, see Robert R. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1978 [1897]), pp. 45–54.

¹¹ The use of ‘angels’ rather than ‘God’ in verse 7, is due to the writer’s use of the LXX, which in turn had chosen to use ‘angels’ to translate the plural word אֱלֹהִים (*elohim*), although it is also the usual word for the singular ‘god’. Also the phrase, ‘for a little while lower than the angels’ in verses 7 and 9 should be understood to

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was not one thing in all creation left outside his control (v. 8). But we do not see ‘man’ in control of all things, rather we see him in lifelong bondage (Heb. 2:14–15). But we do see Jesus. In other words, while all of humanity, exemplified by the story in Genesis 3, has been degraded from their exalted position, there is now a man who fulfils all that the first man had and then lost.

Jesus was crowned with glory and honour. That is his humanity (so Ps. 8:5). There is no doubt that all ‘the ages’ (τοὺς αἰῶνας, *tous aiōnas*) were made through the Son, but that by no means minimised his position as firstborn of all creation (Col. 1:15), the one to whom all creation belongs by birthright. All things are now to be under *his* feet (‘until’ in Heb. 1:13).

At last there is a man who fulfils the purpose of God, so that the plan of God can now be carried out. But this involves him being fully human *in order that* as man he may experience the suffering of death, so that he might taste death for everyone. It is not spelled out until later but then, in Hebrews 9:27f., we see that this is him engaging fully with ‘the judgment’ necessitated by ‘the sins of many’.

ROMANS 5:12–21

This passage commences a section in Romans which explains how it is that faith in Christ Jesus is effective for *our* salvation. First we are shown that there are two men, Adam (v. 14) and Jesus Christ (vv. 15, 17). Then we are shown that it is not simply ‘faith’ as an intellectual acceptance of certain premises that is effective, but faith as *participation* in Christ Jesus: we were baptised into him. But participation in him is significant because of what he has accomplished. And it is vital because unless we participate in him then we remain participants in the other man, the old man.

(This ‘old man’/‘new man’ contrast is also made in Eph. 2:15 and especially 4:17–24, but the distinction is again obscured by modern translators who prefer ‘self’ instead of ‘man’. See also Col. 3:9–10.)

One man brought death into the world through his sin. Paul is clearly writing with Genesis 2:17 and 3:1–7 in his mind. Set to eat freely from the tree of life, man’s sin has brought him death. Plainly this is not referring to physical death, or at least not only to physical death (Adam did *not* die physically on the day that he ate, and Gen. 5:5 indicates that he died at age 930, meaning he lived even longer than his son Seth at 912, or Enosh at 905, and so on). The New Testament stress is on the moral aspect of death: ‘We are slaves of fear, not because we have to die, but because we deserve to die!’¹² The issue is not on physical death but on the judgement necessitated by sin (Heb. 9:27, above). Now death reigns (Rom. 5:14, 17) in a most sinister way.

Paul’s description of the way death reigns is not that it is simply the lot of those in Adam, but of those who are one with Adam in his sin. Emil Brunner comments:

The stream of death has its origin in the fall of the first man. His fall is the fall of all, his death the death of all. Mankind is a unity, and over humanity rules the inexorable law of God that death is

indicate that ‘man’ is ‘to judge angels’ (1 Cor. 6:3), but not yet; that is a feature of the goal toward which creation is moving.

¹² Paul Tillich, ‘The Destruction of Death’ in *The Shaking of the Foundations*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1949, p. 172.

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part of sin . . . Death is God's destroying power of wrath and the destined punishment for sin. This power of death has now entered the world like a murderous plague seizing every individual human being.

Adam's descendants are not blamelessly seized by this destructive power, but all perish 'because they have sinned' . . . since Adam a doom of 'death' lies over mankind, over the whole of history; a hostile destructive power has penetrated it, a current that carries off every individual man, leading him towards ruin. No man possesses the strength of himself to flee from this necessity of sinning; everyone shares in this compulsion . . . They are unable not to sin . . .

What he wishes to show is the unity of the human race in sin and the subjection of every individual to this terrible compulsion which he receives into his will. Seen from Adam, outside Christ, in its natural historical context, mankind is one in sinning and in subjugation to the power of corruption.¹³

Over against this is the work of one man, Jesus Christ. And he is one man as Adam was one man, meaning that he is the one man in whom all men find themselves in their representative. Adam sinned and all participated in his sin, and now all participate in one man's 'act of righteousness' (cf. Rom. 8:4), and so all have righteousness and life (Rom. 5:18).

Paul evidently does not have a problem with the word 'all'. Nor would he be concerned, as many are, to explain the word as 'all in Adam' in contrast with 'all in Christ'. We see in Romans 9:6ff. that he is fully aware that not all are children of promise, but were we to come from another direction and ask concerning the goal of history and the plan of God, when creation is free from its bondage to decay, we may find it simpler to say that at the telos *all* will be pure, *all* will be justified and sanctified because of one man's act of righteousness.

Adam is dead (Rom. 6:6)! Christ's act of righteousness was not simply his doing as he was told, true as that is, but it was his taking Adam into himself on the cross and bearing the total destruction of the old man as an effective element in creation. Adam may still be a presence, but not an effective presence.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:42–49

The contrast between Adam and Christ continues into the discussion of our hope. Just as Paul longed for the redemption of the body in Romans 7:24 and 8:23, so here he deals with the nature of the resurrection body:

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable.⁴³ It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.⁴⁴ It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.⁴⁵ Thus it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.⁴⁶ But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual.⁴⁷ The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.⁴⁸ As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven.⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven (1 Cor. 15:42–49).

¹³ Emil Brunner, *The Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1961, pp. 44f.

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‘The first man, Adam, became a living being’, but then he died, along with all in him (1 Cor. 15:22). ‘The last Adam’, on the other hand, ‘became a life-giving spirit’ (v. 45). There are complexities in the passage which are not easily exploited in English translations, such as the use of the same words ‘physical’ and ‘spiritual’ in verse 44 as are used earlier in chapter 2 verses 13 and 14, which seems to be Paul deliberately using words which were understood by the Corinthian church.¹⁴

For Christ to become a life-giving spirit does not mean he ceased to have a body. That was part of the discussion in the previous paragraph. It does mean though that now, far from passing death on to those in him, as the resurrected man Jesus is now present and known through the Spirit he has poured out (Acts 2:33; Gal. 3:5) and he gives life to all in him.

There is another contrast which Paul makes in verses 47–49. It is between the first man, ‘the man of dust’ and the second man who is ‘from heaven’. It is possible that Paul is not referring to Adam passing death on to those in him but that Adam’s whole existence is characterised by dust. It is earthly. The point is not that Adam comes from the earth but that he is characterised by it. It follows that Christ’s body is not one which has come ‘from heaven’ but that his *present* humanity is heavenly—that is, ‘of heaven’ (v. 48)—as ours will be at our resurrection. So verse 49, ‘Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven’. This is borne out by a well-attested variant reading in verse 49 which, instead of ‘we will bear’ (φορέσομεν, *phoresomen*), has ‘let us bear’ (φορέσωμεν, *phoresōmen*), implying: ‘Let us bear now the image of the man of heaven; let us prepare now for what we will be’.

¹⁴ See Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1987), pp. 788ff.; and James D. G. Dunn, ‘1 Corinthians 15:45—Last Adam, Life-Giving Spirit’ in *The Christ and the Spirit: Collected Essays of James D. G. Dunn*, vol. 1—Christology (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1998), pp. 154–66.