

## § 9. Excursus on Creation of Life and Biological Diversity

### Lecture 26

#### Paul's Use of Adam in Romans 5

Last time I argued that in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul may be moving beyond the parameters of the merely literary Adam to touch the historical Adam. He seems to say that in Adam we all die in the sense that we share a common mortal human nature with the man in the story. But insofar as he thinks of that man as chronologically prior to Christ he's placing him within real history. I think that we'll see that implication is confirmed as we turn now to the second crucial New Testament passage on Adam – Romans 5:12-21. Let's read this passage aloud together.

Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned— sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the effect of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings 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.

Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous. Law came in, to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In this key passage, Paul extends his typology of Christ as the eschatological or endtime Adam from 1 Corinthians 15. Now, our interest in interpreting this theologically rich passage, perversely perhaps, is not in the benefits won for mankind by Jesus Christ through his obedience and death, but rather in what Paul asserts concerning Adam. In the series of contrasts drawn between Adam and Christ, our focus is in each case on the initial clause of the relevant sentence.

There has, of course, been enormous theological controversy about how to understand such expressions as “many died through one man's trespass” (verse 15), “the judgment

following one trespass brought condemnation” (verse 16), “because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man” (verse 17), “one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men” (verse 18), and “by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners” (verse 19).

Paul does not explain just how Adam’s sin is transmitted to his progeny. On the one hand Paul may mean that in virtue of Adam’s representative status or our corporate solidarity with Adam or some such notion, Adam’s sin in the Garden is imputed to each of us his progeny. That is to say, we are guilty before God in virtue of Adam’s wrongdoing and so under the condemnation of death. Whether the notion of imputation of sin is palatable to modern sensibilities is irrelevant to the interpretive question concerning this passage.

Now it is evident that if this interpretation of Paul’s teaching is correct, then the historicity of Adam and his fall immediately follow. For the sin of a non-existent person cannot be imputed to me such that I am held objectively guilty before God and liable to damnation. The sin of a purely literary Adam can have no effect on the world outside the fiction. The prominent commentator on the book of Romans, Douglas Moo, has rightly argued as follows:

The effects of Adam’s act in history (universal sinfulness and death) would seem to demand an Adam who sinned in history. I might, for instance, compare or contrast Aslan (from Chronicles of Narnia) with Christ to make a general theological point (as Aslan died for Edmund on the stone table, Christ died for us on the cross), but my listeners would be quite confused if I claimed that the White Witch introduced into our world a condition that Christ has saved us from. And the confusion would be quite natural: I would be positing events in our history caused by, respectively, a fictional character and a real character. Adam, as Paul makes clear, functions on the same historical plane as Moses, the law, and Christ (of whom he is the ‘type’).<sup>1</sup>

The imputation of Adam’s sin to his posterity requires, then, I think, a historical Adam. If Paul’s doctrine involves such imputation, then it follows that he is teaching the historicity of Adam and his fall into sin.

But is that in fact Paul’s doctrine? Perhaps; but there is plenty of room for doubt that it is. The question is how to relate verse 12cd “as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned” to verse 18a “one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men.” Moo rightly insists that some explanation is needed for why “people so consistently turn from good to evil of all kinds.”<sup>2</sup> Nobody thinks that everybody sins simply by sheer coincidence. Moo says,

<sup>1</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 2d ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2018), p. 355.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356.

“Paul affirms in this passage that human solidarity in the sin of Adam is the explanation – and whether we explain this solidarity in terms of sinning in and with Adam or because of a corrupt nature inherited from him does not matter at this point.”<sup>3</sup> I disagree with Moo on this. It seems to me that it is crucial that we understand that the first alternative (the imputation of Adam’s sin to us) in fact does nothing to explain why people consistently turn from good to evil and consistently sin, for imputation is purely a legal or forensic notion which has no effect whatever upon a person’s moral character. Moo himself later explains, “Paul is insisting that people were really ‘made’ sinners through Adam’s act of disobedience just as they are really ‘made righteous’ through Christ’s obedience. But this ‘making righteous’. . . means not to become ‘morally righteous’ people but to become ‘judicially righteous’ – to be judged acquitted, cleared of all charges.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, he says, “People can be ‘made’ sinners in the sense that God considers them to be such by regarding Adam’s act as, at the same time, their act. . . . It seems fair, then, . . . to speak of imputation here.”<sup>5</sup> So he says, “We are dealing with a real, though forensic, situation: people actually become sinners in solidarity with Adam—by God’s decision; people actually become ‘righteous’ in solidarity with Christ—again, by God’s decision.”<sup>6</sup> Such forensic (or judicial) transactions cannot explain why people consistently turn from good to evil. Just as the pardon of a condemned criminal does nothing to make him suddenly into a morally virtuous person but simply renders him no longer legally guilty, so also the imputation of legal guilt from Adam to us does not transform the moral character of an otherwise blameless person. So I don’t think that the doctrine of imputation suffices to answer Moo’s question as to why people consistently sin.

## **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* The way I understand this is because of Adam’s sin, we are born without a relationship with God – we are born separated. So we have a predisposition to sin. Then when we become a responsible moral agent (when and if) we commit acts of sin and then the sin is imputed to us. When we receive Christ that imputation is removed.

*Dr. Craig:* I think that the alternative you are expressing is fairly close to the second one that we’ll talk about in a moment. The idea that we have inherited from Adam a corrupted human nature. We’ll look at that in a moment and you can see whether or not that expresses what you are saying. But you are offering a different perspective than imputation. You are not saying that it is in virtue of Adam’s sin being imputed to us

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Since Moo argues against the postulation of a corrupted human nature, I take it that “by this point” he must mean v12, for later in the passage that option will be disfavored.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 372. The proper legal notion here is not acquittal, but rather pardon. God’s guilty verdict is not overturned, as though there had been a miscarriage of justice; rather we are graciously given a divine pardon for our crimes.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

(including infants) that that is why everybody then consistently sins. You are offering a different suggestion.

## **END DISCUSSION**

Because of this problem, the traditional doctrine of Original Sin postulates minimally a corrupted character inherited from Adam, not just imputed guilt.<sup>7</sup> Now the postulation of a corrupted human nature inherited from Adam would explain why people consistently sin – they have a corrupt and fallen nature that they have inherited from Adam. In such an interpretation of Romans 5 requires a historical Adam just as certainly as does the doctrine of imputation. Because if we have a corrupted human nature inherited from Adam then Adam has had real world effects and therefore cannot be simply a fictional or literary character. So if this interpretation is correct – if this is Paul’s doctrine – then his teaching implies the existence of a historical Adam.

I hope you're grasping the alternatives. The one is that Adam's sin is legally imputed to me so that I am reckoned to be guilty and liable to punishment because of what Adam did. The other alternative says, no, no, it's not necessarily imputation; rather, when Adam sinned he bestowed upon all of his descendants a corrupt nature so that they have a propensity to sin and that explains why sinning is universal throughout the human race. The traditional doctrine of Original Sin weds both of these alternatives together – that there is both the imputation of sin and guilt coupled with the inheritance of a corrupted nature.

## **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* One verse comes to mind. I wonder if you would view it as being related. It is Hebrews 7:9 when it's talking about Abraham tithing to Melchizedek. The writer of Hebrews says, *And in a sense Levi himself who receives the tenth has paid a tenth through Abraham for he was still within his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.* So it's almost as if the good deed of giving the tithe to Melchizedek was imputed to Levi, Abraham's ancestor, and in a similar way is Adam's sin imputed to us because we are still within our ancestor.

*Dr. Craig:* You'll remember, I think, Moo said that we can think of this either in terms of Adam's being our representative (he acts on our behalf before God and therefore his acts are our acts) or the alternative was what you just mentioned – a peculiarly Hebrew idea of a kind of corporate solidarity with Adam. As it says there, he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him. Is there some kind of corporate solidarity of all Adam's descendants with Adam himself in virtue of which they can be reckoned to be sinners? That would be two ways of trying to understand how we are in Adam in such a way that his sin could be imputed to us.

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<sup>7</sup> Catholic doctrine affirms both elements; Orthodoxy only the corrupted character.

*Student:* I know in other scriptural passages there are references to our sin nature. It seems to me that is the very core of our being, not imputed as such but that is our nature – a sinful nature. It seems that would support the second alternative.

*Dr. Craig:* I think that those would be passages that you would use to try to support the second alternative. I would just resist saying things like that it is (I forget how you put it) something like the very core of our being or the core of our nature. Because when we're redeemed in Christ and the sin nature is eliminated it's not as though we are going to cease to be human or cease to exist. Sin is an intruder. It's a perversion and a distortion of our true natures which are reflections of the image of God and therefore good.

*Student:* But that would be our fallen nature.

*Dr. Craig:* Yes. That is this alternative – that there is a kind of fallenness in our nature inherited from Adam. Yes.

*Student:* It seems like, from what you just said, that it fits real well with this verse 1 Corinthians 15:49 where it says, *And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.* It seems like that would be more like the second alternative – that this isn't our true selves but we've had this image of sin that we are born with from Adam but we're going to have the image of sinlessness with Jesus.

*Dr. Craig:* You weren't here last week, were you?

*Student:* I was not.

*Dr. Craig:* OK. That's what I thought. That passage we discussed last week. I think that verse, which we discussed, taken out of context or read in light of Romans 5 would bear very much the interpretation you gave it. But what I argued last week is that when you read the passage and the verse in context, what Paul is talking about there is not condemnation versus justification as he is in Romans 5. Rather it's talking about physical mortality versus resurrection life – that we will exchange this corruptible, mortal, dishonorable body for a glorious, immortal, spiritual body. So the contrast in 1 Corinthians 15 is not the same contrast that is laid out in Romans 5 that we're just looking at.

*Student:* So it's really more the body that that's talking about it?

*Dr. Craig:* Yes. Exactly. 1 Corinthians 15 is about your physical body. It's not about your true self or spiritual identity that you have in Romans 5, I think. Look at the transcript from last week and see if you're persuaded or not of this view.

*Student:* I would think the first explanation of imputation of actual sin goes against Jeremiah where they were saying the son's teeth are on edge because the fathers have

eaten sour grapes. God said, *I'll banish this saying from you because everybody bears their own sin* – you don't inherit this from . . .

*Dr. Craig:* Yes, there are similar verses in Ezekiel isn't there? The soul that sins shall die, and don't utter this proverb anymore. As I say, these passages have been enormously controversial theologically pitting, for example, Reformed and Catholic theologians who believe in imputation of sin and our being held guilty for Adam's sin, versus, say, Methodist or Wesleyan or other Armenian theologians who would tend to interpret it more in line with the corrupted nature rather than with the imputation of sin. They've often appealed to the sort of verses you just mentioned. I'm not going to try to settle that controversy now. When we get to the doctrine of sin we can talk about that more. What I simply want to do is to show that, whether you adopt the view of the imputation of sin or you adopt the view of corrupted nature, both of them imply that Paul taught the historicity of Adam. He was teaching that there was an actual historical individual.

### **END DISCUSSION**

The question is: does Paul, though, teach that we have inherited a corrupted human nature from Adam? As Professor Moo observes, the doctrine is, perhaps surprisingly, nowhere to be found in Romans 5:12-21. We tend to read it there, but in fact when you look at the passage it is nowhere to be found in that passage. That occasions the question: is there no other third alternative to imputation or corrupted nature for explaining why sin is so universal among the human race?

Of course there is another alternative! Our inherent self-seeking animal nature in combination with the web of corruption in which we are born and raised suffices to explain why sin is universal among humanity. That explains why all have sinned. It is worth noting in passing that when in Romans 1-3 Paul develops his doctrine of the universality of sin and condemnation of all men before God, he makes no appeal at all to the doctrine of Original Sin in any form. In Romans 5:12-21, then, Paul is, on this view, describing how the sin of Adam unleashes the power that results in all persons' sinning, with the result that they are condemned to a spiritual death.

A moment's reflection reveals that this interpretation of Paul's Adam Christology also requires that Adam be a historical person. For sin and spiritual death are said to enter the world through him and to affect in turn all his descendants, including us. Paul's expressions "before the law was given" and "from Adam to Moses" show that he is denominating real epochs of human history as affected by Adam's act. An action that is wholly internal to a fiction cannot have effects outside the fiction; only an action that is external to the fiction can have real world effects. It follows that Adam and his sin are, not just believed by Paul to be historical, but are actually asserted by Paul to be historical.

He is saying that Adam opened the floodgate through which sin came into the world and then spread to all men.

### **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* Do we have any sense of what the original hearers, or maybe the audience, would have . . . did they wrestle with these kinds of questions?

*Dr. Craig:* Surely they must have! I mean, the book of Romans is so rich. Surely as Paul's Roman readers (who included both Gentiles and Jews) heard this letter read aloud to them in their worship gathering, they must have scratched their heads and said, *What does he mean?*

*Student:* In contemporary Jewish culture, the distinction you made between belief and asserting that it's a historical act, did a lot of Jewish believers you think (or early Christian believers) not think that that was . . .

*Dr. Craig:* No, no. On the contrary, when you read the intertestamental Jewish literature between the close of the Old Testament canon and the advent of Jesus, during those centuries there is widespread Jewish literature that's called pseudepigrapha (that is to say, they were written under pseudonyms – things like 4 Ezra and 1 Enoch and Wisdom of Solomon – and then there are apocryphal Jewish books as well (like 1 and 2 Maccabees and things of that sort). When you read this Jewish pseudepigraphal and apocryphal literature, none of those treatments of Adam (and they talk about Adam a lot), none of them denies that he was a historical person. They put him to different theological uses. These intertestamental Jewish books will use the literary Adam as a sort of example or mouthpiece for many different sorts of things, but they all take it for granted that he actually existed and was the original person from whom the human race descended.

*Student:* So his assertion that it was historical wasn't some big challenge to a competing . . .

*Dr. Craig:* No, no. Not at all. It would have been right in line with what was thought among Jews at that time.

### **END DISCUSSION**

It should be evident, I think, that my argument for taking Paul to assert that Adam was a real person of history is not defeated by simply distinguishing between the literary Adam of Genesis 2 and 3 and the historical Adam. For the argument is not based on Paul's contrasting Adam with Christ, a literary figure with a person of history, but rather on the real world causal effects of Adam's sin. It is impossible, for example, for Hamlet, though an individual in Shakespeare's play, to have real world effects because Hamlet does not exist in the real world but exists only in the play, that is to say, in the play (unlike, for example, Macbeth's vision of a dagger) Hamlet exists. Paul thus teaches that Adam was a



real person of history. This view accords with the genealogies that structure the primeval history in the book of Genesis, as we have seen, for the genealogies treat Adam and his descendants as real people. In that case we cannot rule out *a priori* the possibility of Paul's having some knowledge of the Adam of history on the basis of his knowledge of Genesis.

## **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* Just to clarify on that particular view – then are we saying that children are born basically blameless until they, being exposed to rampant sin, respond to it by sinning? Am I correct in that?

*Dr. Craig:* That would be true both on the corrupted nature interpretation and on the view that there is no corrupted nature but that we are born into a corrupted world so that as we grow older sinning comes very naturally. So either of those alternatives would see infants as guiltless or blameless.

*Student:* But as they age, let's say they become selfish or those kinds of things, then we're saying that's not coming so much from within as it is from observing and sensing how the world is.

*Dr. Craig:* I haven't endorsed any one of these three views. I just laid them out and said that each one of them implies the historical Adam. Now, on that third view, what you would say, I think, is that we have in virtue of having animal bodies (we have bodies that are very similar to the primates; indeed, that's a way biologists would class us) that we have within us the same innate propensity for selfish behavior because it's conducive to survival. You need to look out for your own self-interests if you're not going to be run over and destroyed. So little children will have inherently this kind of predisposition to selfishness because it's conducive to survival in the struggle to survive. When they become of age where they become morally accountable then they become morally responsible for these desires and behavior. I'm not suggesting they're determined to do evil. These propensities can be resisted. We have free will. But when you reach a certain age of accountability then these actions would become sin.

*Student:* The first thing that came to mind when you were explaining that was psychological egoism – the idea that any action that you perform is somehow done out of ego and out of self-interest. How do you think your view would accord with that? Because I know people, for example, that think even breathing is somehow . . .

*Dr. Craig:* I wouldn't buy that. What he is talking about is a sweeping generalization that there is no truly altruistic behavior that's just done out of the goodness of your heart. It's all self-seeking and self-interest. So even if you give your life for somebody else, somehow this gives you a feeling of feeling good about yourself, and so you're really



acting in self-interest. I don't see any reason to think that something like that is true. I think that especially for someone who is a Christian filled with the Spirit of God, he's not imprisoned by those sorts of selfish desires. But God can help him to act in truly generous and loving ways that are not merely self-seeking. That's not to say, of course, that our motives are often mixed and tainted. I think probably we've all felt that, where we give to some cause and, gee, we feel good about that! *I'm so generous*. So, certainly, as fallen people our motives are often mixed, but to say they're entirely selfish I think would be far too sweeping a generalization.

## **END DISCUSSION**

Well, let's wrap up now.

The several references by New Testament authors to mythological or pseudepigraphal figures caution us to avoid overly easy proofs of Old Testament historicity on the basis of New Testament authority. Such figures can be merely literary and illustratively employed. Similarly, some New Testament references to Adam and other figures and events of the primeval history may describe merely the story world of Genesis, requiring at most truth-in-the-story. But in 1 Corinthians 15 and especially I think in Romans 5 we do have clear assertions of the historicity of Adam. What is asserted of the historical Adam in these key passages does not, however, really go beyond what we have already affirmed on the basis of our genre analysis of the primeval history in Genesis 1-11, namely, that there was a progenitor of the entire human race at some time in the past through whose disobedience moral evil entered the world. I think the New Testament simply underlines or ratifies what we already learned from our study of Genesis.

Whether we understand Paul to teach that Adam's sin was imputed to every one of his descendants or that Adam's sin corrupted human nature and thus affected all of his progeny or that Adam's sin opened the floodgates to sin which then infected all who came after him, Adam is regarded by Paul as a historical person whose actions affect the course of history. We might prefer not to settle the question of just how Adam's sin affects all mankind. Since Paul did not himself seek to explain this relationship, maybe we should just refrain as well. Still, it remains the case that Adam's sin is, in Paul's thinking, in some sense the fount of the sin and spiritual death that beset our world, and that suffices for the affirmation of a historical Adam.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Total Running Time: 35:55 (Copyright © 2019 William Lane Craig)