

AN IN-DEPTH BIBLE STUDY

THE FIRST AND LAST ADAM

One Man's Disobedience, One Man's Obedience, and Paul's Explicit Typology

Genesis 1-3 · Romans 5 · 1 Corinthians 15

A journey through history, biblical languages, and Paul's own explicit comparison

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Introduction: Paul's Explicit Typology

Throughout this study series, careful attention has been given to distinguishing explicit New Testament typology from well-supported but inferential pattern recognition — Melchizedek explicitly called a type, Joseph never so designated, the bronze serpent explicitly cited by Jesus himself, the two goats of Yom Kippur left largely undeveloped by name. Adam belongs unambiguously to the first category. Romans 5:14 states directly, using the Greek technical term for typology itself: Adam 'is the figure (τύπος, *typos*) of him that was to come.' This is Paul's own explicit statement, not a pattern this study infers from narrative resonance.

This study examines Paul's two extended treatments of Adam and Christ — Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:20-49 — in full theological depth: Adam's original commission and fall, the specific mechanism by which Paul says sin and death 'passed upon all men,' the deliberate asymmetry Paul draws between the scope of Adam's condemnation and the greater scope of Christ's grace, the meaning of 'the last Adam' and 'quickening spirit,' the difference between a 'natural body' and a 'spiritual body,' and the substantial, centuries-long theological debate over exactly how Adam's sin and Christ's righteousness are transmitted to those who are 'in' each of them respectively — a debate this study treats with the seriousness and honesty it deserves, since faithful Christians across major traditions genuinely disagree on this question's precise mechanics.

As with the other studies in this series, this study distinguishes what Paul states explicitly from long-standing, substantial theological debate over how best to systematize what he states.

Did You Know?

Romans 5:12-21 is widely regarded by New Testament scholars as containing some of the most syntactically complex Greek in all of Paul's letters — verse 12 famously begins a comparison ('as by one man sin entered into the world') that Paul does not complete with its expected matching clause until verse 18, after an extended six-verse theological digression, a feature of the passage's grammar itself that has shaped centuries of exegetical discussion, independent of the theological content those verses convey.

How to Use This Study

Each chapter includes: (1) the central biblical text; (2) historical and linguistic context; (3) explanations of Greek terms; (4) cross references; (5) 'Did You Know?' boxes with historical background; (6) suggestions for illustrations for those teaching this material in a classroom or small group; and (7) questions for personal or group reflection. At the end, you will find a consolidated summary of the main points, a list of further reading organized by theme, and a recommended bibliography for deeper study.

Suggested Illustration

Opening page with a simple two-column diagram: 'The First Adam' (disobedience, condemnation, death, natural body) alongside 'The Last Adam' (obedience, justification, life, spiritual body) — visually establishing the structural comparison this entire study will examine in depth.

Chapter 1 — Genesis 1-2: The First Adam's Original Commission

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth... Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion."
— Genesis 1:26-28

A Commission of Representative Rule

Before any comparison to Christ can be made, it is worth recovering what Adam's original position actually was. Genesis 1:26-28 presents humanity, made in God's 'image' and 'likeness,' commissioned with dominion — representative rule over creation on God's behalf. This is not a minor or incidental detail for this study's later chapters; Paul's entire argument in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 depends on Adam having functioned as a real representative figure, whose actions had consequences extending beyond himself to those he represented.

A Single, Specific Command

Genesis 2:16-17 narrows this broad commission to a single, specific test: freedom to eat from every tree in the garden except one, 'the tree of knowledge of good and evil,' with an explicit, stated consequence for disobedience: 'for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.' This detail matters for Chapter 3's examination of how death entered through this specific transgression.

A Position of Genuine Blessing, Not Mere Testing

It is worth resisting any reading that treats Adam's original position as merely a trap or an arbitrary hurdle; Genesis 1-2 presents humanity's original condition as one of genuine blessing, purpose, and intimate relationship with God ('the LORD God...walking in the garden,' Genesis 3:8, implying an established pattern of divine fellowship) — a real, good beginning whose loss Paul's later argument treats as a genuine tragedy, not simply the inevitable outcome of an unfair or impossible test.

Did You Know?

The Hebrew word for 'man' in Genesis 1-2, אָדָם (adam), is closely related to אֲדָמָה (adamah), 'ground' or 'earth' — a wordplay reflected directly in Genesis 2:7's account of man's formation 'of the dust of the ground,' and one Paul appears to draw on directly in 1 Corinthians 15:47's description of 'the first man' as 'of the earth, earthy,' examined at length in Chapter 6.

 **Further Reading:** Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 2:7-9, 15-17; Genesis 3:8.

Reflection Questions

1. How does recovering Adam's original position of genuine blessing and representative commission shape the weight you give to what was subsequently lost?

2. Why does it matter for Paul's later argument that Adam functioned as a real representative, not merely as an isolated individual?

Chapter 2 — One Man's Disobedience: Romans 5:12-14 and the Entrance of Death

"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." — **Romans 5:12**

A Sentence Paul Never Grammatically Finishes

As this study's introduction noted, Romans 5:12 begins a comparison ('as by one man...') that Paul does not complete with its expected 'so also by one man...' clause until verse 18, after an extended digression. This is a genuine, recognized feature of the passage's Greek grammar (an anacoluthon, a sentence that changes construction partway through), not a translation artifact — Paul's thought moves faster than his sentence structure can immediately accommodate, requiring the reader to hold the initial comparison in suspension across several intervening verses.

A Famous, Genuinely Disputed Phrase: "For That All Have Sinned"

The Greek phrase behind 'for that' (ἐφ' ᾧ, eph' ho) is one of the most extensively debated short phrases in the entire New Testament, directly bearing on how Adam's sin relates to the rest of humanity's own sin and guilt. This study addresses the debate directly rather than passing over it, examining it at length in Chapter 9, since responsible treatment of this passage requires acknowledging this genuine grammatical and theological crux rather than assuming a single, uncontested reading.

Death as the Stated Consequence, Sin as Its Cause

Whatever the precise mechanism eph' ho describes, the verse's basic causal chain is clearly stated: sin entered through one man, death followed as sin's consequence, and death 'passed upon all men' — establishing, at minimum, that humanity's universal experience of death is directly and causally connected to Adam's original sin, a foundational claim this study's later chapters build upon regardless of how the disputed phrase is ultimately resolved.

Did You Know?

The Latin Vulgate, the dominant Bible translation in the Western church for over a thousand years, rendered eph' ho as 'in quo,' meaning 'in whom' — a translation many modern Greek scholars consider grammatically strained, but one that decisively shaped Augustine's highly influential reading of this passage (all humanity sinning 'in' Adam, present within him in some real sense) for the entire subsequent history of Western Christian theology, a point examined further in Chapter 9.

 **Further Reading:** *Romans 5:12-14; Genesis 2:17; Genesis 3:1-19.*

Reflection Questions

1. How does recognizing this verse's suspended grammatical structure change the way you read the surrounding chapter?
2. Why might it matter, for later theological history, that the Latin translation available to most of the Western church for centuries rendered this disputed phrase in a particular, contestable way?

Chapter 3 — Death's Reign "Even Over Them That Had Not Sinned"

"For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come." — Romans 5:13-14

A Specific Historical Argument

Paul makes a precise historical point in these verses: death reigned throughout the period between Adam and Moses (before the Mosaic law was given), even over people who had not violated an explicit divine command in the specific way Adam had ('after the similitude of Adam's transgression' — meaning a direct, known, explicit command knowingly transgressed, the way Adam had transgressed a direct command from God). This detail matters because it demonstrates death's universal reign cannot be fully explained merely by each individual's own conscious violation of an explicit divine law (since the Mosaic law did not yet exist for most of this period), pointing instead toward some deeper, more foundational connection to Adam's original transgression specifically.

The Explicit Naming of the Type

This passage contains the explicit statement this study's introduction highlighted: Adam 'is the figure (typos) of him that was to come.' This is worth pausing on directly. The Greek word typos, from which the English 'type' derives, describes a pattern, model, or impression left by a stamp, later used technically in Christian theology for a person, event, or institution in the Old Testament that anticipates and is fulfilled by a later, greater New Testament reality. Paul's use of this specific term here provides the biblical warrant this entire study series has referenced whenever discussing 'type' language for other figures examined throughout this series.

A Type by Contrast, Not Only by Correspondence

It is worth noting something distinctive about how Adam functions as a type of Christ compared to some of this series' other studies: Adam does not correspond to Christ through similarity of action (as, for example, the bronze serpent corresponds to Christ through shared visual form and shared function as an object of saving faith); Adam corresponds to Christ through structural parallel combined with near-total contrast of outcome — one man's disobedience bringing condemnation, the other man's obedience bringing justification. Paul's own language in the verses immediately following (Chapter 4) makes this contrast, not mere similarity, the entire point of the comparison.

Did You Know?

This is one of only two places in the entire New Testament where a specific Old Testament individual is explicitly called a typos of Christ using this precise technical vocabulary (the other being a debated, less

certain application in some manuscript traditions), making Adam's designation here unusually secure and explicit compared to many other typological readings this series has examined with greater caution.

 **Further Reading:** *Romans 5:13-14; Romans 5:15-19 (the fuller development of the contrast, examined in Chapters 4-5).*

Reflection Questions

1. How does Paul's specific historical argument (death reigning even before the Mosaic law existed) strengthen his broader claim about Adam's universal effect on humanity?
2. Why is it significant that Adam functions as a type of Christ primarily through contrast rather than through positive similarity of action?

Chapter 4 — The Asymmetry of Grace: "Much More"

"But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many... For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." — **Romans 5:15-17**

Not a Simple, Equal Comparison

Paul is emphatic, in these verses, that the comparison between Adam and Christ is not one of equal, symmetrical scale: 'not as the offence, so also is the free gift.' Three times in this short span, Paul uses the phrase 'much more' (πολλῷ μᾶλλον, pollo mallon) to insist that grace's effect exceeds sin's effect, not merely matches or reverses it in equal measure.

A Single Sin Versus Many Offenses Forgiven

Romans 5:16 adds a further, specific point of asymmetry: 'the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification' — meaning Christ's grace addresses not merely Adam's single original transgression, but the accumulated 'many offences' of all subsequent human sin, a scope of forgiveness explicitly described as exceeding the scope of the original problem it addresses.

Reigning in Life, Not Merely Escaping Death

Verse 17's conclusion moves beyond simple rescue to active reign: 'they which receive abundance of grace...shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ' — language of positive, active kingship and flourishing, not merely a return to a neutral or previously lost condition. Grace's 'much more' extends beyond correcting Adam's damage to establishing something greater than what was originally lost.

Did You Know?

This 'much more' argument appears elsewhere in Romans as a recognizable rhetorical and theological pattern Paul favors (compare Romans 5:9-10's 'much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him... much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life'), suggesting this asymmetrical, superabundant framing of grace's effect relative to sin's effect is a settled, deliberate feature of Paul's broader theological argument throughout this section of the letter, not an isolated rhetorical flourish specific to the Adam-Christ comparison alone.

 **Further Reading:** *Romans 5:9-11, 15-17; Romans 5:20 ('where sin abounded, grace did much more abound').*

Reflection Questions

1. How does Paul's insistence on asymmetry — grace exceeding sin's effect, not merely matching it — deepen your understanding of what Christ's work accomplished?

2. What does 'reigning in life,' rather than merely escaping condemnation, suggest about the fullness of what believers receive through Christ?

Chapter 5 — Condemnation and Justification: The Completed Comparison

"Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." — **Romans 5:18-19**

The Sentence Finally Completed

Verse 18 finally supplies the matching clause Paul's grammar left suspended since verse 12 (examined in Chapter 2): 'as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.' The parallel structure is now complete and explicit: one offense, condemnation for all; one act of righteousness, justification for all who receive it.

"Made Sinners" and "Made Righteous": A Parallel Verb

Verse 19 uses the same Greek verb (καθίστημι, *kathistemi*, 'to constitute,' 'to appoint,' or 'to make/render') for both halves of its comparison: 'by one man's disobedience many were made (*kathistemi*) sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made (*kathistemi*) righteous.' This grammatical parallel reinforces that whatever mechanism 'constitutes' humanity as sinners through Adam operates structurally the same way that Christ's obedience 'constitutes' believers as righteous — a parallel this study will return to directly in Chapter 9's discussion of the theological debate over exactly how this constitution or reckoning functions.

Obedience as the Specific Contrasting Virtue

Where Adam's failure is described as 'disobedience' (παράκοή, *parakoe*, literally a 'failure to hear' or 'mishearing'), Christ's contrasting act is specifically named 'obedience' (ὕπακοή, *hypakoe*) — a term Paul uses elsewhere for Christ's entire redemptive work (compare Philippians 2:8, 'he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death'), framing the entire gospel, in this specific passage, fundamentally in terms of one man's failure to obey a command and another man's complete, successful obedience.

Did You Know?

The specific pairing of *parakoe* ('disobedience,' literally mishearing) and *hypakoe* ('obedience,' literally hearing under/submitting) reflects a wordplay in the underlying Greek vocabulary of hearing and heeding — both words share the same root (*akouo*, 'to hear'), with different prefixes indicating whether the hearing results in proper submission or improper failure to heed, a linguistic nuance largely invisible in English translation but present in Paul's original word choice.

 **Further Reading:** *Romans 5:18-19; Philippians 2:5-11; 2 Corinthians 10:5-6.*

Reflection Questions

1. How does the shared Greek verb 'made/constituted' (kathistemi) for both 'made sinners' and 'made righteous' shape your understanding of how these two states are established?
2. What does the specific framing of sin as 'disobedience' and Christ's work as 'obedience' suggest about the fundamentally relational, not merely legal, nature of both the fall and redemption?

Chapter 6 — "The Last Adam": 1 Corinthians 15:45-49

"And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit... The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven." — 1 Corinthians 15:45, 47

A Direct Citation of Genesis 2:7

Paul's phrase 'the first man Adam was made a living soul' directly quotes Genesis 2:7 (in a form closely following the Septuagint's Greek translation, ψυχὴν ζῶσαν, psychen zosan, 'living soul' or 'living being'), grounding this entire passage explicitly in the original creation account examined in Chapter 1, rather than introducing new, unrelated imagery.

Two Different Titles: "Last Adam" and "Second Man"

It is worth noting that Paul uses two distinct titles for Christ within this short passage: 'the last Adam' (v. 45) and 'the second man' (v. 47) — not identical phrases, though closely related in function. 'Last Adam' emphasizes finality: there will be no third Adam, no further representative head required after Christ, in contrast to Adam's own position as merely 'the first' in an otherwise open, ongoing sequence. 'Second man' emphasizes Christ's role as the second and final representative figure in this specific two-part scheme, with 'the Lord from heaven' immediately specifying the qualitative difference in Christ's origin compared to Adam's earthly origin.

"Quickenning Spirit": A Claim About Resurrection Life

Where Adam 'was made a living soul' (receiving life, per Genesis 2:7's account of God breathing into him), Christ is described as having 'become' (the Greek verb *egeneto* again, matching 'was made' in the first half) 'a quickening spirit' (πνεῦμα ζωοποιοῦν, *pneuma zoopoion*, 'life-giving spirit') — not merely possessing life himself, but actively imparting resurrection life to others, a distinction Chapter 8 will examine further.

Did You Know?

This passage's structure — 'the first Adam... the last Adam,' 'the first man... the second man' — has led some readers to ask whether Paul is suggesting only two representative 'Adams' will ever exist in redemptive history, with Christ's finality ('last') closing this particular category permanently, a reading many scholars find consistent with Hebrews' related emphasis (examined at length in this series' study on Christ's finished priesthood) on Christ's work requiring no successor or further repetition.

 **Further Reading:** 1 Corinthians 15:45-49; Genesis 2:7; Hebrews 7:23-25 (a related emphasis on finality without succession).

Reflection Questions

1. How do the two distinct titles 'last Adam' and 'second man' each add something slightly different to your understanding of Christ's representative role?

2. What does it mean that Christ is described not merely as living, but as actively 'life-giving' to others?

Chapter 7 — Two Kinds of Body: Natural and Spiritual

"So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is natural body, and there is a spiritual body."

— 1 Corinthians 15:42-44

Continuity and Transformation, Not Replacement

Paul's extended argument in this chapter (using the image of a seed 'sown' and later emerging as a mature plant, 15:36-38) emphasizes genuine continuity between the body that dies and the body that is raised, while insisting on real, substantial transformation — corruption becoming incorruption, dishonor becoming glory, weakness becoming power. This is neither simple resuscitation of the identical former body nor a wholly different, unrelated new creation, but transformation of the same essential person into a qualitatively different mode of existence.

"Natural" Does Not Mean "Physical" Versus "Non-Physical"

It is worth clarifying a common misunderstanding directly: the Greek behind 'natural body' (σῶμα ψυχικόν, soma psychikon, literally 'soulish body') and 'spiritual body' (σῶμα πνευματικόν, soma pneumatikon) does not distinguish a physical body from a non-physical or immaterial one; both are described using the word soma, 'body,' implying genuine physicality in both states. The distinction concerns which animating principle governs and characterizes the body — the natural, soul-animated life common to all humanity descended from Adam, versus a Spirit-empowered, resurrection existence characteristic of the age to come, inaugurated in Christ's own resurrection body.

Adam and Christ as the Respective Headwaters of Each Kind of Body

This distinction directly connects to the Adam-Christ comparison this study has traced throughout: 'the first man Adam was made a living soul' (governing the natural, soul-animated body every subsequent human being since Adam has inherited by ordinary descent) while 'the last Adam' inaugurates, through his own resurrection, the spiritual body believers will one day share (1 Corinthians 15:49, 'as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly').



Did You Know?

Paul's insistence that resurrection involves genuine bodily transformation, not the shedding of a physical body for a purely spiritual, disembodied existence, stood in some tension with certain strands of Greek philosophical thought in Paul's own cultural context (which sometimes viewed the material body as something to be escaped rather than transformed and glorified), making this passage's affirmation of a genuinely embodied, transformed resurrection existence a distinctively Jewish-Christian claim within its broader Greco-Roman intellectual environment.

Further Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:35-44, 49; Philippians 3:20-21 (a related description of the resurrection body).

Reflection Questions

1. How does clarifying that 'spiritual body' does not mean 'non-physical body' change your understanding of what resurrection actually promises?
2. What does the image of a seed's genuine continuity with the plant it becomes suggest about your own future resurrection?

Chapter 8 — "Made a Quickening Spirit": What This Claim Involves

Not a Claim About Christ's Divine Nature Alone

It is worth being precise about what 1 Corinthians 15:45's description of Christ as 'a quickening spirit' does and does not claim. This is not primarily a statement about the eternal, divine nature of the Son considered apart from the incarnation (a subject addressed more directly elsewhere in the New Testament, including texts examined in this series' study on the wilderness rock and Christ's pre-existence); it is specifically a statement about the resurrected, glorified humanity of Christ, functioning, through resurrection, as the source of resurrection life for others — a claim about Christ's specific redemptive-historical role as 'the last Adam,' not a general statement of trinitarian theology.

Life-Giving as an Ongoing, Active Function

The present participle underlying 'quickenings' (ζωοποιῶν, *zoopoion*) suggests an ongoing, active function rather than a completed, past action alone — Christ does not merely possess resurrection life statically, but actively imparts or generates it in others, consistent with His own earlier statement, examined in this series' study on Lazarus, 'I am the resurrection, and the life' (John 11:25).

Connecting to the Wider New Testament Witness

This 'life-giving' function connects to broader New Testament teaching regarding the Spirit's role in applying resurrection life to believers (compare Romans 8:11, 'he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you'), suggesting Paul's description of Christ as 'quickenings spirit' in 1 Corinthians 15:45 anticipates this fuller, Spirit-mediated application of resurrection life developed at greater length elsewhere in his letters.

Did You Know?

Some ancient and modern textual variants and translation debates exist regarding the precise capitalization and reference of 'spirit' in this verse (whether Paul intends a direct identification with the Holy Spirit specifically, or a more general description of Christ's own spiritual, resurrected mode of existence) — a genuine point of ongoing scholarly discussion regarding the passage's precise pneumatological implications, which this study notes without resolving definitively, since the passage's main point (Christ's role as life-giving source, in contrast to Adam's role as recipient of natural life) holds regardless of exactly how this specific technical question is settled.

 **Further Reading:** 1 Corinthians 15:45; John 11:25-26; Romans 8:9-11.

Reflection Questions

1. How does distinguishing this claim as being about Christ's resurrected humanity specifically, rather than His eternal divine nature alone, sharpen your reading of this verse?

2. What does it mean that Christ's life-giving function is described as ongoing and active, rather than a completed action in the past alone?

Chapter 9 — How Are We "In" Adam and "In" Christ? A Genuine Theological Debate

This chapter addresses directly one of the most substantial, long-standing theological debates connected to this passage — a debate this study will not resolve, since faithful, careful Christians across major theological traditions genuinely disagree on the answer.

The Question at Stake

Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 both clearly teach that humanity is affected by Adam's sin in some corporate, representative way, and that believers benefit from Christ's righteousness in a structurally parallel way. But exactly how does this representative connection work? Several major positions have been developed across Christian history.

Federal (Covenantal) Headship

Associated especially with Reformed theological tradition, this view holds that God appointed Adam as humanity's covenantal representative head by divine institution — similar to how a nation's elected representative can bind the nation to a treaty's terms even though most citizens never personally negotiated it. Adam's guilt is imputed (legally credited) to his descendants because of this appointed representative role, not because each individual descendant was literally, physically present in Adam. This view emphasizes the parallel structure Paul draws with Christ, whose righteousness is likewise imputed to believers through a comparable covenantal/representative headship, rather than through their own personal moral performance.

Augustinian Realism

Associated with Augustine's highly influential reading (partly shaped by the Latin Vulgate's 'in quo' translation discussed in Chapter 2), this view holds that all humanity was, in some real and not merely legal or representative sense, seminally or really present within Adam at the time of his sin — meaning humanity does not merely have Adam's guilt legally credited to it, but actually, in some sense, sinned in and with Adam because all human nature was concentrated within him at that point in history.

Mediate Imputation and Other Mediating Positions

Other theologians, including some within the Reformed tradition itself (notably Josué de la Place, known as Placaeus, in the seventeenth century), have proposed mediating positions: humanity inherits a corrupted nature from Adam (rather than direct legal guilt for his specific act), and each individual becomes personally guilty through their own actual sins arising from that corrupted nature, rather than being held legally responsible for Adam's specific, personal transgression itself.

Position	Core Claim	Associated Tradition
Federal/Covenantal Headship	Adam's guilt imputed by divine covenantal appointment, not physical presence	Historic Reformed theology
Augustinian Realism	Humanity really, seminally present in and with Adam at his sin	Historic Roman Catholic and much broader Western tradition, following Augustine
Mediate Imputation	Corrupted nature inherited; guilt arises from one's own resulting sins	Some later Reformed theologians (e.g., Placaeus) and others

Why This Study Does Not Adjudicate the Debate

This study presents these three positions (among others not detailed here) as the major, historically significant proposals for explaining the mechanism Paul's passages describe, without asserting that Scripture itself explicitly settles which mechanism is correct. Paul states the effect (Adam's sin resulting in condemnation and death for all; Christ's righteousness resulting in justification and life for those united to Him) with full clarity; the precise metaphysical or legal mechanism by which this occurs has been debated by careful, faithful theologians for over a millennium, and this study holds that responsible teaching should acknowledge this range of views rather than presenting one as the obvious, uncontested reading of the text.

Did You Know?

The Pelagian controversy of the early fifth century, in which the British theologian Pelagius argued against Augustine that each person sins entirely on their own account (following Adam's bad example rather than inheriting any transmitted guilt or corruption from him), was formally condemned by several church councils, establishing some form of inherited corruption or guilt from Adam as broadly settled, mainstream Christian doctrine across nearly all subsequent traditions — even though, as this chapter has shown, substantial disagreement remains among non-Pelagian positions regarding the precise mechanism of that inheritance.

 **Further Reading:** *Romans 5:12-19; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45-49; the Council of Carthage (A.D. 418, condemning Pelagianism).*

Reflection Questions

1. Which of these three positions (or another you may already hold) do you find most compelling, and why?
2. How does recognizing this as a genuine, long-standing debate among faithful Christians shape the way you might discuss this doctrine with someone from a different theological tradition?

Chapter 10 — Common Questions and Interpretive Caution

Given the theological weight and genuine debate this study has engaged, this chapter addresses several further common questions.

"Does Romans 5:12's disputed grammar (eph' ho) favor one theological position discussed in Chapter 9 over another?"

Contemporary Greek scholarship generally favors reading eph' ho as roughly equivalent to 'because' (all people are condemned because, in some sense, all sinned), rather than the Vulgate's stronger 'in whom' (favoring the realist reading more directly). However, most scholars across the theological spectrum agree that this single disputed phrase cannot, by itself, definitively settle the larger question of exactly how Adam's sin and humanity's own sin relate, since Paul's broader argument (the parallel structure with Christ's imputed righteousness, examined throughout this study) provides evidence relevant to this question independent of this specific grammatical crux. This study presents the grammatical debate honestly without treating its resolution as automatically deciding the larger theological question.

"Is belief in some form of inherited sin from Adam essential to Christian orthodoxy?"

As Chapter 9 noted, the outright denial that Adam's sin has any transmitted effect on humanity (the Pelagian position) was formally rejected by the broad, mainstream Christian tradition across many centuries and denominational lines. However, considerable, legitimate diversity of view exists regarding the precise mechanism among those who affirm some meaningful connection between Adam's sin and humanity's condition, as Chapter 9's comparison table demonstrated.

"Does this passage teach that everyone will ultimately be saved, since it says Christ's righteousness came 'upon all men unto justification of life' (Romans 5:18), matching the universal scope of Adam's condemnation?"

This is a fair question given the passage's parallel language, and thoughtful interpreters have addressed it in various ways — some noting that the 'all' in each half of the parallel may refer to 'all who are in Adam' and 'all who are in Christ' respectively (i.e., all within each respective federal head, not a claim that literally every human individual will be saved regardless of faith), a reading consistent with Paul's repeated emphasis elsewhere on the necessity of faith and union with Christ specifically (compare Romans 5:17's qualifying phrase, 'they which receive abundance of grace'). This study holds this qualified reading as the most contextually coherent, while acknowledging the passage's parallel language has generated ongoing discussion.



Did You Know?

This pattern of acknowledging genuine grammatical, theological, and doctrinal complexity — rather than flattening Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 into an artificially simple summary — reflects the same discipline applied consistently throughout this entire study series, particularly appropriate here given how much serious, centuries-long theological reflection these specific passages have generated across the whole history of the church.

 **Further Reading:** *Romans 5:12-18; 1 Corinthians 15:22-23.*

Reflection Questions

1. How does encountering the genuine scholarly debate over Romans 5:12's grammar affect your confidence in the passage's overall, clearly stated theological claims?
2. How would you explain the 'qualified all' reading of Romans 5:18 to someone who raised the universalism question?

Chapter 11 — Practical Applications for the Christian Life

Paul's extended comparison of the first and last Adam carries direct, significant implications for how believers understand their own identity, hope, and standing before God.

1. Your Standing Before God Rests on Representation, Not Merely Personal Performance

Whichever specific mechanism (Chapter 9) one holds regarding how Adam's and Christ's actions are transmitted to their respective descendants, the basic structure Paul describes — standing determined by union with a representative head, not solely by one's own accumulated personal record — offers believers profound assurance: justification rests on Christ's obedience credited to those united to Him, not on the believer's own moral achievement matching or exceeding some abstract standard alone.

2. Grace Genuinely Exceeds, Not Merely Matches, Sin's Damage

The repeated 'much more' language of Romans 5 (Chapter 4) offers believers real comfort regarding the depth and completeness of their forgiveness: grace is explicitly described as abounding beyond sin's damage, not merely providing an equal, precisely calibrated counterbalance to it.

3. Resurrection Hope Involves Genuine Bodily Transformation

The natural body/spiritual body distinction (Chapter 7) grounds believers' hope in a concrete, embodied future — not an escape from physicality into a vague spiritual existence, but a genuine transformation of the same body into an incorruptible, glorified mode of existence, following the pattern already established in Christ's own resurrection.

4. Christ's Life-Giving Work Continues Actively Today

Understanding Christ as an ongoing 'quickening spirit' (Chapter 8), not merely a historical figure who once lived and rose, reminds believers that the same life-giving power that raised Christ continues to be actively at work, through the Spirit, in believers' present lives (Romans 8:11).

5. Genuine Theological Humility Strengthens, Rather Than Weakens, Conviction

This study's direct treatment of the federal headship/realism/mediate imputation debate (Chapter 9) models a mature theological posture: holding firm, confident conviction about what Scripture clearly teaches (the reality and universality of both Adam's effect and Christ's greater effect) while maintaining appropriate humility about questions where faithful, careful believers have long and legitimately disagreed.



The doctrine traced throughout this study — humanity's fall in Adam and its reversal in Christ — has functioned as one of the most foundational, load-bearing structures in the entire history of Christian theology, shaping virtually every major subsequent doctrinal system's account of sin, salvation, and human nature, making Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15:20-49 among the most consequential passages for systematic theology in the whole of Paul's writings.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of these five applications feels most relevant to your own current understanding of your standing before God or your hope for the future?
2. How does holding firm conviction about what Scripture clearly states, alongside humility about genuinely disputed mechanics, shape the way you engage with other Christians who hold different views on this doctrine?

A Closing Reflection: Two Men, One Question

Every human being who has ever lived stands, according to Paul, in one of two possible relationships: represented by the man who disobeyed in a garden, or represented by the man who obeyed all the way to a cross. There is no third category, no neutral ground, no purely individual reckoning that escapes union with one head or the other. That is a sobering claim, and this study has tried not to soften it.

It is also, on Paul's own telling, the most hopeful claim available to anyone who has ever failed. The very structure that made Adam's single sin sufficient to condemn 'many' is the same structure that makes Christ's single act of obedience sufficient to justify everyone found in him — and Paul insists, three times over, that the second exceeds the first. Whatever remains genuinely debated about the exact mechanics of how either man's act reaches the rest of humanity, the outcome Paul describes is not in question: where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. The last Adam did not merely undo what the first Adam broke. He built something greater than what was ever lost.

 **Further Reading:** *Romans 5:20-21; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45.*

Summary of Key Points

- Genesis 1-2 presents Adam's original position as one of genuine blessing, representative commission, and intimate divine fellowship, a real and good beginning whose loss Paul's later argument treats as genuine tragedy.
- Romans 5:12 begins a grammatical comparison Paul does not complete until verse 18, and contains a genuinely disputed Greek phrase (eph' ho, 'for that'/'because'/'in whom') whose precise meaning has shaped centuries of theological debate, examined honestly in Chapter 9.
- Romans 5:14 explicitly and directly calls Adam a typos ('figure' or 'type') of Christ, one of the clearest, most secure typological designations anywhere in the New Testament.
- Paul insists repeatedly ('much more,' Romans 5:15-17, 20) that grace's effect exceeds, rather than merely matches, sin's damage, extending to 'many offences' rather than only Adam's single original transgression.
- Romans 5:18-19 completes the suspended comparison, using the same Greek verb (kathistemi, 'constituted' or 'made') for both humanity being 'made sinners' through Adam and believers being 'made righteous' through Christ's obedience.
- 1 Corinthians 15:45-49 directly cites Genesis 2:7 and contrasts Adam ('a living soul') with Christ ('the last Adam,' 'a quickening spirit'), using two related but distinct titles ('last Adam' and 'second man') to describe Christ's finality and heavenly origin.
- The distinction between 'natural body' and 'spiritual body' (1 Corinthians 15:42-44) does not distinguish physical from non-physical existence, but rather two different animating principles governing genuinely embodied life, before and after resurrection transformation.
- The precise mechanism by which Adam's sin and Christ's righteousness are transmitted to their respective descendants remains a genuine, substantial, long-standing theological debate (federal/covenantal headship, Augustinian realism, mediate imputation, and other positions), which this study presents without adjudicating.
- Practically, this study grounds assurance that justification rests on representative union with Christ rather than personal performance alone, confidence in grace's superabundance, hope in genuine bodily resurrection, confidence in Christ's ongoing life-giving work, and a model of firm conviction paired with theological humility on genuinely disputed questions.

Further Reading by Theme

On Genesis 1-3 and Humanity's Original Commission

Genesis 1:26-31; Genesis 2:4-25; Genesis 3:1-24.

On Romans 5 in Full

Romans 5:1-21 (best read in its entirety alongside this study).

On 1 Corinthians 15 in Full

1 Corinthians 15:1-58 (the full chapter, addressing resurrection at length).

On the History of the Doctrine of Original Sin

Augustine, Confessions, Book 8 (for background on his theological development); the Canons of the Council of Carthage (A.D. 418).

On Union With Christ and Its Benefits

Romans 6:1-14; Ephesians 2:1-10; Colossians 3:1-4; Philippians 2:5-11.

Bibliography and Recommended References

The works below are recommended for readers who wish to go further than this introductory study, whether through academic commentaries or accessible reference resources.

Commentaries on Romans

- MOO, Douglas J. The Epistle to the Romans. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- CRANFIELD, C. E. B. The Epistle to the Romans. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.
- SCHREINER, Thomas R. Romans. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

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- FEE, Gordon D. The First Epistle to the Corinthians. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
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- MCFARLAND, Ian A. In Adam's Fall: A Meditation on the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.

On Federal Theology and Covenant Headship

- HORTON, Michael. Introducing Covenant Theology. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.
- MURRAY, John. The Imputation of Adam's Sin. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Dictionaries and Original-Language Tools

- KITTEL, Gerhard (ed.). Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT), entries on typos, hamartia, and dikaioo.
- ARNDT, William; DANKER, Frederick W.; BAUER, Walter. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (BDAG).
- VINE, W. E. Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words.

— End of Study —