

Last Adam's Greater Work

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Part 3 of a 3-part series of FAQs:

1. The Doctrine of Inclusion: Why it Appeals, How it Misleads
2. Was Humanity Raised With Christ?
3. Last Adam's Greater Work

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Those who preach ultimate reconciliation (all will be saved in the future) or historical reconciliation (all were saved at the cross) base much of their argument on Romans 5:12-21. Their argument runs as follows: if Adam's disobedience brought condemnation and death, to everyone – whether they believe it or not – then Christ's obedience brought life to all and made everyone righteous – whether they believe it or not. Their conclusion is either that all *will be* saved or all *have already been* saved. If you tend to disagree with their conclusion, they will dismiss you as elevating the work of Adam above the work of Jesus.

In Part 1 of this series, "The Doctrine of Inclusion," I addressed those scriptures that have been used to support historical reconciliation. My conclusion there is that the entire human race was *not* saved at the cross. Light has come into the world but some men prefer the darkness. In Part 2 of this series, "Was Humanity Raised with Christ," I answered in the negative. My view is that not everyone is saved, raised, and seated with Christ. So if I claim that unbelievers remain dead in their sins and trespasses, am I not elevating the work of Adam above Jesus? What exactly was Last Adam's greater work? In this note we will endeavor to find out. It will help if you reacquaint yourself with the ten verses of Romans 5:12-21:

- Rom 5:12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—
- Rom 5:13 for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law.
- Rom 5:14 Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.
- Rom 5:15 But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!
- Rom 5:16 Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.
- Rom 5:17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.
- Rom 5:18 Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.
- Rom 5:19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.
- Rom 5:20 The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more,
- Rom 5:21 so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

How was Adam a pattern of the one to come?

Rom 5:14 Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.

Adam was the source of sin; Jesus is the source of righteousness. Just as Adam's trespass brought death (12,15) and condemnation (16,18) to all men, so Jesus' one act of righteousness brings life to all men (18).¹ Just as the many were made sinners through the disobedience of first Adam, so will the many be made righteous through the obedience of last Adam (19). Both men did one thing that affected all men.

What is the significance of the phrase "all men"?

Rom 5:18 Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.

To the extent that Adam's trespass reaches all men, so does Christ's gift. So before we talk about how the gift is much better than the trespass, we need to understand how the gift corresponds to the trespass.

In Romans 4 Paul defines the descendents of Abraham to include all men *who believe* (4:11). Now if you're a Jew and you find that notion objectionable – *the Gentiles are not Abraham's descendents and never will be!* – then in chapter 5 Paul comes at you from another angle. He says that if the consequences of Adam's sin are for all men (not just Jews), then so are the consequences of Jesus' one act of obedience. You may argue with Paul in chapter 4 but you can't argue with him in chapter 5. Since everyone is related to Adam, everyone is affected, Jew and non-Jew alike.

For over a thousand years the Jews had understood that they were the special focus of God's love and attention. Paul writes to reveal God's love for the whole world. Since Adam is a pattern of the one to come, the universal reach of Adam's sin can be compared with the universal reach of Christ's obedience. Just as the first man's act of disobedience man has consequences for *all men*, so does the second man's act of obedience bring life to *all men*. Paul's is saying that grace is for everyone, not just the biological descendents of Abraham. Jesus is not merely the Jew's Messiah, He is the Savior of the whole world.

Does Paul say that all men will be given new life?

When Paul makes explicit comparisons between the trespass and the gift, he frames it like this...

	Affected by Adam	Affected by Jesus
v. 15	The many	The many
v. 18	All men	All men
v. 19	The many	The many

Who died as a result of one man's trespass? "The many." To whom does grace now overflow? "The many" (see v.15). And again, who were made sinners as a result of Adam? "The many." And who will be made righteous on account of Jesus? "The many" (see v.19). It's the middle verse – verse 18 – that is the source of contention. Here is how different people read it:

Universalists: "All men will live – none will die."

Trinitarians: "All men do live – though some may yet die."

What Paul actually said: "Life has come and is now freely available for all men."

¹ Numbers in brackets (e.g., (12,15)) refer to verses in the ten verse stanza (e.g., Rom 5:12 and Rom 5:15).

Read v.18 in context and you will see that Paul never says anything that could point to universal salvation. Indeed, Paul is very careful to avoid this conclusion. He consistently preaches about the good news of new life that is offered to all through Christ. Because Jesus was raised, “we too *may* walk in new life” (Rom 6:4). If life had come to all men, then Paul is in error by saying that only “many” are the beneficiaries of grace in v.15 or that only “many” have been made righteous in v.19. But if Paul is correct in those verses, then those who claim “all live” are in error.

The facts are these: The true light that gives light to every man has come into the world, but some men prefer the darkness. (Joh 1:9, 3:19). Jesus, who is the source of Life, observed that there were some who “refuse to come to me to have life” (Joh 5:40). When do we cross over from death to life? When we put our faith in Jesus (Joh 5:24). Paul preached the same message that Jesus preached: Life is only available to them that believe:

1 Tim 1:16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

If Jesus’ act of obedience only benefits those “who believe”, why doesn’t Paul say so?

He does! By the time we reach Romans 5:18, Paul has just spent several chapters hammering the truth that righteousness, and hence life, is a gift that is received by faith:

- Rom 1:17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last,
Rom 3:22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.
Rom 3:26 (God is) the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.
Rom 3:28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.
Rom 3:30 since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.
Rom 4:5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.
Rom 4:9 Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness.
Rom 4:11 Abraham is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.
Rom 4:12 And he is also the father of the circumcised... who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.
Rom 4:13 ... the righteousness that comes by faith.
Rom 4:16 Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.
Rom 4:24 but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.
Rom 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
Rom 5:2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Paul emphasizes the need for faith at least a dozen times prior to Romans chapter 5. Then at the start of chapter 5 he says it twice more just to make sure the latecomers didn’t miss it. *Have faith in God!* Then, one final time, smack in the middle of his Adam-Jesus comparison, Paul says it again just in case we had forgotten about the other fourteen occasions:

Rom 5:17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Who reigns in life? It is those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness. Paul never, ever preaches salvation or eternal life apart from faith. Neither does he limit faith to “the faith of Christ.” According to his gospel (which is the only gospel there is), dead men are raised to new life when they put their trust in the God who gives

life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. In his own words, it is “those who believe on him (who) receive eternal life” (1 Tim 1:16).

Why do we say that last Adam did a greater work than first Adam?

Because Paul says these four things:

1. “The gift is not like the trespass – it overflows to the many” (v.15). The remedy is greater than the disease.
2. “Judgment followed one sin; the gift followed many trespasses” (v.16). Adam dropped the ball and brought condemnation for all men (v.18). Grace remedies not just Adam's original sin but all the sin-copies made by us. Many are now declared righteous (v.19).
3. “How much more will those who receive... reign” (v.17). Under sin, you're a slave; in Christ, you're a king!
4. “Where sin increased, grace increased all the more” (v.20). Sin may seem powerful but it is no match for God's awesome grace.

In what sense did last Adam do a greater work than first Adam?

First, here is the wrong answer: *Everyone has been made alive*. Universalists and others conclude that if Adam killed everyone (including those who don't believe in Adam), then Jesus must have raised everyone to life (including those who don't believe in Jesus). There are at least four things wrong with this conclusion:

- (1) If Jesus simply raised those who had been killed by sin, then His is not a greater work; it is a *comparable* work. All He has done is reverse Adam's trespass and we are left exactly where we started. There is nothing “how much more” about this interpretation.
- (2) By focusing on the “all men” of verse 18, this conclusion ignores “the many” of verses 15 and 19. Paul never says all have been made alive.
- (3) This conclusion also ignores the “prerequisites” for life that Paul stipulates in the preceding verse, namely, receiving God's abundant provision of grace (Rom 5:17). Since grace is accessed through faith, unbelievers have not crossed over from death to life (Joh 5:24). If you refuse to come to Jesus to have life (Joh 5:40), how can you have life?
- (4) Those who claim that last Adam has made all alive are assuming that people are dying on account of first Adam's sin. Thus, they miss the significance of the cross. No one is condemned for Adam's sin. His sin, along with yours and mine, were done away with at the cross. God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to condemn sin in the flesh (Rom 8:3). Since sin itself has been condemned, no one can be condemned for Adam's sin. Every single one of us faces the same choice Adam had; either we will receive the life that God offers us or we will condemn ourselves through unbelief. No one is lost through Adam's unbelief but their own.

Are there any Bible translations that suggest all are now alive/righteous?

As far as I know, there are no literal or dynamic equivalent translations that claim “all are alive” or “all men are righteous,” but there is at least one paraphrase translation that does so; the Mirror Bible:

Rom 5:18-19 The conclusion is clear: it took just one offence to condemn mankind; one act of righteousness declares the same mankind innocent. The disobedience of the one man exhibits humanity as sinners, the obedience of another man exhibits humanity as righteous. (Mirror)

According to the Mirror, the human race has been declared innocent and exhibited righteous on account of Jesus. All have crossed over from death to life whether they believe it or not.² But what about Paul’s qualifier in verse 17? What about the bit where he says we must receive God’s abundant provision of grace? The Mirror doesn’t mention it:

Rom 5:17 If (*spiritual*) death saw the gap in one sin, and grabbed the opportunity to dominate mankind because of one man, how much more may we now seize the advantage to reign in righteousness in this life through that one act of Christ, who declared us innocent by his grace. Grace is out of all proportion in superiority to the transgression. (Mirror)

There is no hint in this verse that grace comes to us through faith. Grace is not an invitation to new life; it is a *fait accompli*. You can decide for yourself whether this is a fair translation but before you do, consider how verse 17 appears in the Phillips Translation:

Rom 5:17 For if one man’s offence meant that men should be slaves to death all their lives, it is a far greater thing that through another man, Jesus Christ, men by their acceptance of his more than sufficient grace and righteousness, should live all their lives like kings! (Phillips³)

Do you see the difference? The Phillips translation, and just about every other, stipulates that grace must be accepted. This is the drumbeat of Paul’s message: “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith” (Eph 2:8). Grace without faith is worthless. It doesn’t benefit you (Heb 4:2). If you spurn the grace that God offers you – if you don’t believe that Jesus is who He says He is – then you reject the gift of His righteousness that would bring you new life. The Mirror Bible says all mankind is innocent, but Paul said “there is no one righteous” and “all have turned away” (Rom 3:10,12). True, God has condemned sin and forgiven the world, but that doesn’t make you righteous. The gospel doesn’t declare humanity is righteous. Rather, it reveals the gift of God’s righteousness that is by faith from first to last.

Need a break? I didn’t write this note to find fault with poor theology and I generally love the Mirror paraphrase. But when some say that “all are now alive or righteous because of Jesus,” I can’t help but go, *Really? This is it? This is as good as it gets? I’m a little disappointed*. Happily, Paul’s description of the greater work of Last Adam is much better than universal CPR! So pause, clear your head, then get ready to be blown away by his revelation. Here it comes...

How is the gift superior to the trespass?

Paul makes several distinctions between Adam’s trespass and Jesus’ gift:

Verse	Adam and the Trespass	Jesus and the Gift
15	as a result of one many died	as a result of the other many received grace
16	one was the result of one man’s sin	the other followed many trespasses
16	one brought condemnation	the other brought justification
17	as a result of one, death reigned	as a result of the other, we reign
18	one brought condemnation for all men	the other brings (<i>zoe</i>) life for all men
19	many were made sinners	many will be made righteous
21	as a result of one, sin reigned in death	as a result of the other, grace reigns through righteousness bringing eternal life

Take a close look at these comparisons and it will be immediately obvious how much better the gift is than the trespass. To the degree that...

...receiving grace is better than receiving death, the gift is superior than the trespass!

...grace superabounds in the face of sin and follows many trespasses, the gift is superior than the trespass!

² In his introductory note to Romans, the author of the Mirror states, “we are all co-included in His death and triumphant resurrection.” Source: <http://mirror.scripturetext.com/godbelievesinyou/39.htm>

³ <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom%205&version=PHILLIPS>

- ...justification is better than condemnation, the gift is superior than the trespass!
- ...reigning in life is better than be subject to death, the gift is superior than the trespass!
- ...life is now freely available for all men is better than living on death row, the gift is superior than the trespass!
- ...being counted righteous is better than being numbered with the sinners, the gift is superior than the trespass!
- ...resurrection life is better than death, the gift is superior than the trespass!
- ...eternal life through Jesus Christ is superior to being a mortal slave of sin, the gift is superior than the trespass!

With this solid foundation, we're now ready to get to the punch-line of this study.

What was Last Adam's greater work?

Jesus did a greater work than Adam at least three ways:

1. Redemption: The guilty verdict has been over-turned. In Adam we were branded sinners but in Christ we are declared righteous. We are no longer counted with the condemned but we are numbered with the justified. Satan has nothing to accuse us of and God remembers our sins no more. Happy is the man whose sin the Lord never counts against him (Ps 32:2). If you would know how much better the gift is than the trespass, then go ask someone on death row whether they would prefer freedom to captivity.

How did He do it? When you put your trust in Christ, He gave you a glorious new past – *His* past. You were included in His death on the cross severing all ties with your old man (Rom 6:6). The person you used to be is dead and gone along with your sin and any relationship you had with the law (Ps 103:12, Rom 7:6). The world as you knew it is no more (Gal 6:14). Your old sources of identity and security have been replaced with something infinitely better and your past has never looked so good!

2. Resurrection: You have been raised to new life. This is not more of the same; it is brand new *zoe*-life. Christ is your life (Col 3:4).

How did He do it? If we died with Him we shall live with Him. He has given us His life which includes His acceptance (Eph 1:6), His faith (Gal 2:20), His Spirit (Rom 8:11), His righteousness (Rms 1:17), His holiness (1 Cor 1:3), indeed, His eternal perfection (Heb 10:4). As He is so are you in this world (1 Jn 4:17), so obviously you do not have a sinful nature. You are not one person on Sunday and another on Monday. Sure, you can still walk after the flesh and reap corruption, but you are not defined by what you do. And when you do sin, you have a mighty Advocate who speaks to the Father on your behalf (1 Jn 2:1).

3. Reigning: The grace cure is greater than the disease. One sin cell infected the entire human race with the fatal condition of sinfulness; grace not only cures us it inoculates us against re-infection. We have been made new. We have been rewired to resist sin and please the Father. Grace doesn't just remove all traces of past sins, it empowers us to sin no more! Grace is both favor and divine influence through the Holy Spirit. We're not just freed captives; we're kings and priests called to reign with Him. This is not some reference to the hereafter for Paul says we will "reign in life" (v.17) meaning here and now. Through the power of the Spirit we can reign over forms of death such as sickness and all the things that lead to sickness (e.g., bitterness, unforgiveness). We are no longer victims; we are more than conquerors through Him who called us.

How did He do it? Jesus has not returned us to the Garden, He has taken us to heaven (Eph 2:6)! From the position of rest we rule and reign with Him here on earth.

Jesus did a complete number on us. His act of obedience has dealt with our past (redemption), our present (resurrection) and our future (reigning with Him). If anyone is in Christ, he is a completely new creature. The old Adamic way of life has gone. Since redemption always leaves you better than you started, the brand new *zoe*-life we now have in Christ is infinitely superior to the lonely and unaided life experienced by unfallen Adam. This is the greater work Jesus has done. Unfallen Adam tried to rule alone and failed. We get to reign with Christ forever and ever.