

# Adam as Analogy: Help or Hindrance?

Larry Kreitzer

## *1. Adam in the New Testament*

The use of 'Adam' in the New Testament is by no means extensive. The name itself occurs only nine times (Luke 3:38; Romans 5:14a and b; 1 Corinthians 15:22; 45a and b; 1 Timothy 2:13 and 14; Jude 14), but in a wide variety of senses. Sometimes its use is built upon the Genesis account's portrayal of Adam as the first human creature: Adam is seen as the historic progenitor of the race. This is most clear in Jude 14 (a quote from Ethiopian Enoch 1:9), where Enoch is described as 'the seventh generation from Adam'. Here the meaning is quite straightforward. 'Adam' is simply spoken of as an historical figure. In the same way, the Lucan reference to Adam is set within the genealogical table of Jesus, beginning with Jesus himself, and running backwards until it climaxes in the first created man. By such a structure the historical relationship between Jesus and Adam is emphasized and Jesus is seen to fit within the flow of human history. We who live in the 20th century are immediately presented with a difficulty by such an emphasis upon the historical side of the Adam stories.

Fortunately, the complete meaning of 'Adam' within the New Testament is not restricted to such a narrow historical basis as we see in Jude and Luke. We do find, in some of the other passages, hints of typological significance of 'Adam'. 'Adam' as a theological category is thereby rescued and is able to have some contemporary meaning.

We see a brief indication of this when we turn to the passage in 1 Timothy 2:13–14. There the assumption of Adam as the first historical man underlies the author's point, but 'Adam' begins to take on an additional meaning as well. We see this in the way that the writer delivers his instruction concerning the submission of women to men and bases it upon the Genesis account of the creation of woman from man. Adam and Eve are called into service as historical, *and normative*, examples of how men and women should interrelate. However, here an additional problem surfaces by the way in which 'Adam' and 'Eve' are used in a manner which betrays a male-centred culture. In short, the story presented in 1 Timothy smacks of the worst kind of chauvinism. The author has interpreted the Genesis stories in such a way as to support his understanding of the natural hierarchy between the sexes. Yet even though we may not like how he uses the 'Adam' analogy, at least he has broken out of the 'historical' category.

When we turn to the Adam reference in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, we see an even more developed and complicated typological use of 'Adam'. Paul's use of 'Adam' provides us with an ideal opportunity to see how he adapts and shapes an idea so as to communicate to his audiences various insights he has concerning their heritage of experience in the Lord Jesus Christ. By looking at the image of Adam in Romans and 1 Corinthians perhaps we can come to a better understanding of the particular tension and ideas within the churches which led Paul to write; it may also throw light on Paul himself and expose one aspect of his thought. At the same time we can begin to discover the value such an 'Adam' analogy might have for us today.

## 2. Adam in 1 Corinthians 15

The chapter is a self-contained discussion of the resurrection of the dead which may be summarized thus:

- 1—11 The Resurrection of Christ as the Basis of the Gospel
- 12—34 Christ's Resurrection and our Resurrection
  - 12—19 Results of denying the Resurrection
  - 20—28 Results of accepting the Resurrection
  - 29—34 Excursus on Baptism of the Dead
- 35—57 The Resurrection Body
  - 35—44a Analogies from Nature
  - 44b—49 Analogies from Adam
  - 50—57 Victory over death: The Mystery of the Resurrection
- 58 Exhortation to Christian Living.

The first instance of Paul's Adam analogy is introduced by a statement (verse 20a), built upon the declaration of Christ's resurrection found in verses 3—5. Paul expands the tradition given in verse 3 by including the phrase 'from the dead' (as he also does in verse 12). In the second half of verse 20 the meaning of Christ's resurrection is amplified: Christ is also the 'first-fruits' of those who are asleep. Here a new point is interjected—the unity of Christ and the believers. The resurrection body of the redeemed is to correspond to and flow from Christ's resurrection body in the same way that the harvest corresponds to and flows from its first-fruits. At the same time the image is one of distinction, for Christ is the *first-fruits* of the harvest to follow. It is to further amplify and explain this relationship between Christ and his believers that the Adam/Christ analogy is used in Paul. In verses 21—22 Paul sets forth a double parallelism showing that relationship:

21a For since by a man came death,  
 21b so also by a man came the resurrection of the dead.

22a For as in Adam all die,  
 22b so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

The two verses should be taken together as the second serves to clarify the first. In verse 21a, Paul is making reference to Adam who, in Genesis 3, transgressed the command of God and brought upon himself the sentence of death of which he is warned in Genesis 2:17. This act of disobedience by Adam is the source of death's introduction into the world and becomes the subject of much speculation within Jewish pseudepigraphal literature. Two examples will help to demonstrate the point. The first is found in 4 Ezra 7:48 : 'O Adam, what have you done? Your sin was not your fall alone; it was ours also, the fall of all your descendants.' We might at this point be tempted to think that 'Adam' has a monopoly on the dubious privilege of being the originator of sin. Such is not the case, however. There are some writings which drag Eve into the picture as well. A good example is Ben Sirah 25:24 : 'From a woman did sin originate, and because of her we all must die.' It is an interesting, and often overlooked variation on the theme. (Here we can see one of the great difficulties in the 'Adam' analogy—its sexist presuppositions. If 'Adam' is going to communicate to us today this sexist barrier must be recognized and overcome. Perhaps it is time to raise up 'Eve' and point to her involvement in the Fall as well.)

To return to Paul, it is significant that what he does not tell us here is *how* Adam's sin is communicated to the rest of mankind or what is meant when he says that 'in Adam all die'. Maybe this is an indication of how unimportant the problem of sin's transmission was for Paul. We must turn to Romans 5, written later, for any further discussion along these lines.

Here, in 1 Corinthians 15:21—22, Paul is using the image of Adam, who would be understood to be the father of the human race, in order to speak of Christ as the founder of the New Humanity. He assumes the Corinthians were familiar with Adam's representative role as the father of mankind and recognized that a continuity of death existed between him and his descendants. In using the Adam image as he has, and by building upon the common beliefs he shared with the Corinthians concerning the resurrection of Christ, he is able to discuss the more immediate subject of the resurrection of the believers. In verse 22 Paul expands his statement of verse 20, emphasizing the identity of resurrection existence between Christ and his believers.

The second instance of Paul's Adam analogy in 1 Corinthians 15 is found in verses 45—49, a quotation of and commentary on Genesis 2:7. The section is founded upon Paul's statement in 44b: 'If there is a physical body there is also a spiritual body.' This statement in 44b is a summary of the preceding paragraph, which begins at verse 35, where Paul, in the style of diatribe, enters into a discussion of the nature of the resurrection body. The discussion centres upon what kind of bodies the resurrected will be given. That the question is raised at all is a reflection of the Greek-speaking world's inability to understand how the resurrection could be 'the standing up of corpses' (*anastasis nekron*).

Paul answers the question in a roundabout way by pointing first of all to various examples in nature—sowing grain and resultant plants (36—37); different types of bodies among God's creatures (38—39); and even within the cosmic order (40—41). In verse 42 Paul focuses once again upon the resurrection of the dead and through a series of contrasts (corruption/incorruption; dishonour/glory; weakness/power) arrives at the climactic antithesis of physical and spiritual bodies in verse 44. Thus Paul is able to speak of both a '*soma psuchikon*' (physical body) and a '*soma pneumatikon*' (spiritual body). It is in attempting to explain the relationship that exists between these two 'bodies' that he turns once again to the Adam/Christ analogy in verses 45—49. To the observant reader this is a sneaky way of winning the argument for it involves an expansion of the meaning of 'soma' into two groups (*psuchikon* and *pneumatikon*), a distinction which Paul maintains throughout this section of verses 45—49. In fact, Paul does not actually use the word 'soma' again in this section (it is understood), but speaks instead of the 'earthly' and the 'heavenly' (verse 48). Yet it is quite clear that he sees a connection between the two respective word-pairs (*psuchikon* = earthly and *pneumatikon* = heavenly). In effect Paul talks out of both sides of his mouth and reinterprets the meaning of the word to suit his case. One can almost see the Corinthians' mouths dropping open in amazement at this verbal sleight of hand. They have been outmanoeuvred in the rhetorical battle and there is little recourse but to concede the point.

In any case, it is important to note not only *what* Paul does with his 'Adam' image but *why* he does it. Paul indicates by his reworking of the passage from Genesis 2:7 that he understands the resurrection of the believer to be both somatic and future. By quoting this passage from Genesis and paralleling it in terms of Christ as Second Adam, Paul is using the Adam analogy as a way of speaking about the nature of the resurrection body of the believers. However, we must not assume that *all* Paul wants to communicate through the Adam/Christ analogy at this point is that Christ is '*soma pneumatikon*'. For Paul goes on to describe Christ as the 'life-giving spirit'. In other words, Paul is not merely making an anthropological claim about Christ as Second Adam here; his meaning goes beyond that. He is also making a christological statement about the Risen Lord who has manifested himself as the regenerating Spirit within the Church. The passage in Genesis lent itself toward that purpose.

In a sense, therefore, Paul's use of the typology of Adam/Christ is not consistent. In calling Christ the 'life-giving Spirit' Paul is making a statement about the work of Christ within the Church which has no parallel in the Adamic side of the analogy. By making such exalted claims about the risen Lord Paul is immediately aware that he is in danger of having his opponents make the correspondingly exalted claim about Adam on the other side of the analogy. Indeed, they may have already done so, as verses 46—7 may indicate. Whether Paul was

anticipating such a move or responding to those within the Church at Corinth who had already done so is impossible to determine. The important point is that for Paul the relationship of Christ to the Christian is more than merely one of originator to successor. For Paul it is one which has an additional creative quality about it, a transformational tone which far exceeds the bounds of mere physical inheritance and paternity and might even be better expressed in terms of the type of relationship which exists between creator and created. The initial motivating factor in Paul's use of the analogy was undoubtedly his desire to show that a relationship exists between Christ and the believer just as a relationship exists between Adam and the rest of humanity, but the wonder of what God had done for man through Christ was so great, and Paul's experience of it so real, that the Adam/Christ analogy breaks down. It was employed insofar as it was useful in demonstrating the solidarity of the Two Adams with their respective followers, and when it could no longer communicate or contain the message about Christ's life-transforming power in the life of the Christian it was laid aside.

### 3. *Adam in Romans 5*

In Romans 5 we have a discussion of the Christian's 'life in Christ'. The chapter is easily divided into two major sections: verses 1—11 and verses 12—21. The two halves are intimately related in that within both sections the central theme is the Christian's life in Christ and the relationship the present experience of justification has with the ultimate hope of salvation. To help clarify this relationship, the Adam/Christ analogy is introduced in verses 12—21. Romans 5:12—21 may be structured thus:

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|-------|---|
| 12    | Introductory comparison between Adam and Christ   |
| 13—14 | Excursus on law and sin in relation to death  |
| 15—17 | Excursus contrasting the acts of Adam and Christ  |
| 18    | Restatement of thought of verse 12  |
| 19—21 | Expansion of the contrast in verse 18 between Adam and Christ with reference to the surpassing nature of grace. |

The introductory statement of 5:12 is most easily understood as an uncompleted sentence. It probably began in Paul's mind as a straightforward contrast between the act of Adam and the act of Christ (the 'through one man' would seem to so indicate) but the thought is never finished. Instead, Paul is sidetracked for at least five verses (13—17) in which he discusses two tributaries of his main stream of thought.

These two excurses are in themselves quite interesting. The first is contained in 13—14 and is designed to more fully explain the relationship between sin, law and death. This is accomplished by Paul in two steps, with verse 13 showing how sin and death are related, and verse 14 showing how death is connected to law and sin. In the first excursus Paul

is concerned with answering the question (arising from his statement in 5:12) of how it is that Adam's sin is in some sense responsible for *our* sin and death. It is at this juncture that we can see the great strength of the Adam analogy, as well as its fatal weakness. Its great strength is that it offers an explanation of *our* sinfulness based upon our being physical descendants of Adam. At the same time its great weakness is exposed in that it is inherently unjust and makes *Adam's* sin responsible for *our* punishment. It is precisely this very incongruity which has occupied so much of the thought of Christian thinkers, such as Augustine of Hippo, over the centuries. The whole issue is made even more difficult for us today when we consider the question of the historicity of Adam. We find ourselves unable to resist the flight into the theological clouds which the analogy affords. At the same time we should not overlook Paul's primary reason for introducing the idea of 'Adam' in the first place.

Paul is not interested in giving us an extended discussion on the nature of sin for purely independent interest. On the contrary, the whole excursus on Adam arises because Paul is seeking to prepare the way for expounding the significance of Christ's act of righteousness and its meaning for the believer.

In verses 15–17 Paul takes another detour of thought, this time in contrasting the acts of Adam and Christ. In all three verses the argument *a minore ad maius* is present:

Verse 15: The *transgression* of Adam is contrasted with the abounding *grace and gift* of God in Christ.

Verse 16: The *judgement* coming from *one* transgression is contrasted with the *free gift* arising from *many* transgressions.

Verse 17: The *death* arising from the *one transgression* is contrasted with the *grace and righteousness* reigning in *life* in the *one* Jesus Christ.

It is not until verse 18 that Paul returns to the initial thought set forth in 5:12. In 18a, however, this thought of 5:12 is restated and then is immediately followed by the long-awaited apodosis in 18b. Verses 19–21 serve to fill out in more detail the tremendous truth concerning the surpassing of sin and its effects by God's grace.

Paul's understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ is such that when comparing Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12–21 he can only say, 'Christ! How much more ...'

#### 4. Implications

Within the New Testament the idea of Christ as Second Adam is, then, explicitly detailed only in the Pauline epistles to the churches at Rome and Corinth. When writing to these churches Paul uses the Adam/Christ analogy as a useful tool to illustrate his understanding of Jesus Christ and what Christ has done for mankind. He wishes by use of the analogy to demonstrate to the congregations at Rome and Corinth the relationship which exists between Christ and the Christian believers. Within 1 Corinthians the focus of the analogy is with Adam and Christ

as symbolic *persons* while in Romans the focus is on their respective *acts*.

In any case, the Adam/Christ analogy is by no means the rigidly defined structure in which one finds Adam and Christ strictly compared point by point. On the one hand, Adam and Christ are complemented in that both are representative figures for their followers. Both encompass humanity within themselves. Both stand as typological figures of an aeon. Both by their respective acts set the pattern for the people who follow them. On the other hand, Adam and Christ are also contrasted in that the effects of their respective acts are so dissimilar. Adam's act yielded sin and death while Christ's yielded righteousness and life. There is continuity as well as discontinuity within the analogy.

Moreover, as we have seen, Paul is quite free in his use of the figure of Adam as the antitype of Christ. When the boundaries of his Adamic thought are seen to place restrictions upon his understanding of the person and work of Christ they are crossed with no reservation. Indeed, the Adam/Christ analogy is inadequate at points, as we have noticed, and needs to be mixed with other concepts in order to express more comprehensively the significance of Christ for Paul.

A study of 'Adam' within the New Testament thus raises several key problems of interpretation. In spite of the fact that 'Adam' is obviously an important means by which Paul can communicate something of his understanding of the significance of Christ, I cannot help but feel it is a vehicle which has severe mechanical problems. No doubt it still is an invaluable analogical tool in expressing the Christian's relationship with their Lord and still contributes something on that level. At the same time it is not an all-purpose instrument and does not fit many of the conventions we take for granted. In short, it is both a help *and* a hindrance. Our task is to rely upon its strengths without becoming entangled in its weaknesses.