

The fact that Christians' resurrection is their participation in Jesus' resurrection life helps to explain how their resurrection can be a present reality – *especially in the context of their mortality and corruption*. If a person's resurrection were a unique event localized in himself, it would be hard to imagine how one could be raised from the dead while still mortal and so advancing toward death and the grave. Existence beset by physical corruption and decay is hardly the context for considering oneself "raised to newness of life."

Thus many Christians conclude that Paul was speaking proleptically (i.e., representing future realities as if they exist in the present) when he described believers' present share in Jesus' resurrection (ref. again Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2:1-6; Colossians 3:1-4). (So John Murray used the expression, *projected eschatology*, to describe the present state of believers.) Indeed, an argument can be made that one reason so many Christians don't think in terms of their *present* resurrection life is that they view their resurrection as a uniquely personal event related to Jesus' resurrection only in the sense that their resurrection is grounded in the atonement for sin which His resurrection attested.

But if resurrection life is sharing in Christ's own life by His indwelling Spirit, then it becomes entirely comprehensible that one's *spirit* can be raised to newness of life – life which is incorruptible and imperishable – while one's *body* remains dead in its corruption, awaiting its own resurrection as the fullness of participation in Jesus' resurrection (Romans 8:9-23; Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Corinthians 5:1-5).

Given the Jewish eschatology of his day, this understanding of resurrection was a radical departure for Paul. As a Pharisee, Paul upheld the doctrine of resurrection – specifically, *a resurrection of the righteous (i.e., faithful Jews) occurring at the end of the age in connection with the coming of the messianic kingdom* (cf. John 11:21-24). These particular points of doctrinal conviction weren't wrong in and of themselves; the problem was the way in which they were understood.

- Paul was right to expect the resurrection of Yahweh's people and His restorative work at the end of the age; the Scriptures taught as much.
- At the same time, Paul didn't understand (prior to his encounter with the risen Christ) the exact nature and ground of this resurrection and the relationship it has with the biblical concept of the end of the age.

Paul was awaiting the resurrection and renewal promised in the Old Testament, but he couldn't know – because those Scriptures don't reveal – that the resurrection of the righteous was to be a *sharing in the Messiah's own resurrection life*. True, they speak of the messianic Servant's vicarious atonement as the basis for men's restoration to God, but they don't clarify the nature of that restoration or how it was to be effected. They speak of renewal and restoration *because* of Him, but don't make clear that they result from being *in* Him. This was a mystery yet to be revealed (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; Philippians 3:1-12).

So also the Scriptures promised the elimination of the curse and the renewal of the creation (ref. Isaiah 11, 35, 65-66; Hosea 1-2; Zechariah 14), with the human creature being the centerpiece of that recovery; what they don't make clear is that this was to involve the creation of a *new humanity* – in Paul's words, the creating of one new man in Messiah Jesus. This revelation awaited the christological fulfillment accompanying the fullness of the times (Ephesians 2:1-3:11).

- c. Christians presently share in Jesus' resurrection because they participate in His life. But what exactly is the nature and extent of their "sharing" in Him? Paul's answer to that question is that they share in Him as a *new Adam* (15:21-22; cf. 15:45-49 and Romans 5:12-21). This "Adamic" relationship between Jesus and those belonging to Him has been debated for centuries and the Church has never been able to arrive at a complete consensus regarding it. Entering fully into that debate at this time would distract from the matter at hand and so be counterproductive; however, there are matters pertaining to Jesus as a new Adam which are critical to Paul's argument here and so need to be examined.

The first thing to consider is that the Corinthians must have been familiar with the Adam account recorded in Genesis 1-3. This is important to note because it indicates that Paul had preached Christ to them from the biblical storyline: Adhering to the pattern established by the Lord Himself, Paul followed the apostolic practice of testifying to Jesus – whether in oral proclamation or written record – by demonstrating that He is the Messiah revealed and promised in all the Scriptures of the Old Testament (cf. Luke 24:24-27, 44-48 and John 5:36-47 with Matthew 1:18-23, 2:1-18, 3:1-15, 4:1-17, 5:1-48, 8:1-17, 11:1-15, 13:34-35, 21:1-5, 26:45-56, 27:1-10; Luke 18:31-33; John 19:31-36; cf. also Acts 2:14-36, 7:1-52, 13:14-41, 17:1-3).

Paul's mention of Adam affirms that the Corinthians had an understanding of the opening chapters of Genesis. But his statement also shows that their knowledge of Adam went beyond the account of his life recorded in Genesis 1-3. Paul would not have said what he did about Adam if he wasn't confident the Corinthians had some grasp of Adam's role and significance in the salvation history. And he had this confidence because of what he had taught them.

The account of Adam's life is recorded in the first three chapters of Genesis. Those chapters recount his creation, nature, role and fall, but say nothing about the impact of his sin on the human race. The obvious reason is that there was, at that time, no human race to be impacted; Adam and Eve were yet childless at the time of their disobedience and expulsion from Eden (ref. Genesis 4:1-2). But Paul's statement speaks to Adam, not merely as a fallen individual, but as the source and basis for the *death* that plagues all of his descendants: "*since by a man came death*" and "*in Adam all die.*" Adam's transgression incurred the penalty of death (that is, alienation from God together with all of the consequences that proceed from it) (cf. Genesis 2:15-17, 3:8-10, 14-24), but not merely for himself, but for all his offspring – all those who share in him.

It's not until the fourth chapter of Genesis that offspring enter the story, but the moment they do the text highlights the fact that Adam's estrangement – his *death* – had indeed passed to his descendents. The fear, self-centeredness and corruption which are intrinsic to man's estrangement had become the hallmark of human existence; from the point of Cain's murder of his brother, the human story – chronicled in the scriptural storyline – remains entirely consistent and unaltered: Corruption, defilement, disintegration and death are the uniform lot of the human race; all men recognize this to be true, but Paul understood the reason for it and preached it as part of his gospel proclamation: "*In Adam, all die.*"

Paul's assertion is that all men die "in Adam," *but why, and in what sense, is that the case?* In general, this question is answered with some form or variation of the following three views:

- 1) The first is that all men die like Adam did because all men sin. *Personal sin is the reason for personal death, and every person commits sin.* Some attribute the universality of sin to the inheritance of a sinful nature (i.e., "original sin," with this inherent corruption variously defined along the spectrum ranging from the total depraving of man's nature at the one extreme to the mere weakening of it at the other). Others attribute sin's universality to the power of bad example and the susceptibility of human beings to it. Either way, this view holds that a person's guilt and death don't result from Adam's sin; Adam's violation was his own and there is no imputation of his sin, guilt or death to his descendents.
- 2) The second view stands upon the *natural, biological relation* between Adam and his progeny. It holds that all men die in Adam because every human being was bound up in him when he sinned and incurred the penalty of death. The critical issue here is that all men are implicated in *Adam's* sin and the guilt and death it incurred because they participated in his sin by virtue of being "in" him (cf. Hebrews 7:4-9). This doesn't deny that they themselves sin and incur their own personal guilt and condemnation; it only affirms that, in the first instance, all of Adam's descendents are guilty of his transgression and so share in his death, even if they were to live sinless lives in their own right.
- 3) The third view arrives at the same conclusion of imputed sin and guilt (that is, all men sharing in Adam's transgression and its consequence), but it arrives at it through a purported *representative relation* between Adam and his progeny. This view doesn't deny the natural relation between Adam and the rest of humanity and it, too, acknowledges the fact of personal sin and transgression. But it argues that human guilt – and thus death – passes from Adam to men specifically because he represented the human race as its "federal head." Divinely-ordained representation, not biological descent, determined that Adam's sin was the sin of his progeny.

This is the view which predominates in Reformed Theology, and it derives from the correspondence the Scripture draws between Adam and Christ with respect to sin and righteousness (ref. esp. Romans 5:12-21). The contention is that, in this arena, Jesus' relationship with men is one of representation, and therefore the same must be true of Adam. Jesus' righteousness is imputed to men (and their sin was imputed to Him) because He represents them before His Father, not because they are His offspring. So it must be with Adam: Though all men *are* descended from Adam, his sin and guilt, along with the sentence of death, pass to them, not because of that descent, but because he is their representative head.

The Reformed premise is correct that, whatever arguments might be made in support of a given view, *the matter must finally be settled on the basis of the biblical relationship between Adam and Christ and the way each relates to the human race*. Paul's statements here make that clear (15:21-22). Moreover, the correctness of this approach is further substantiated by his later discussion in vv. 45-49 (cf. also Romans 5:12-21). Understanding what Paul meant by his assertion that "in Christ all shall be made alive" depends upon understanding the counterpart, "in Adam all die." The two assertions are mutually dependent.

Taken together, these passages show that Paul perceived a *typological* relationship between Adam and Jesus. This is most evident in the title, *Last Adam*, which he assigned to Jesus (15:45). Paul saw Adam as a "type" of Christ, which means that he was a prophetic prototype of Jesus. Though an actual person, Adam ("man" as taken from the earth) served a prophetic purpose in God's design: *His "meaning" in God's design (and so in the biblical text) is bound up in the Man to come from him – the man promised to Eve as the One who would restore life*.

Thus the most obvious (and fundamental) point of correspondence between Adam and Jesus is the fact of their common *humanity* (15:21). Jesus is man as fully as Adam was; hence His self-given title, *Son of Man* ("Son of Adam"). This title identifies Jesus as truly and fully human, but in the sense that He was born as a bona-fide descendent of Adam, *and therefore a son of Adam as fallen*: Jesus was conceived into the intrinsic corruption of the Adamic human race, having derived His humanness from Mary, a daughter of Adam through Seth (Luke 4:23-38). Should anyone question that Jesus was conceived and lived as Adamic man under the curse, the fact of His mortality and death ought to dispel all objection.

*Many Christians are ignorant of this truth and others deny it out of concern that it implies Jesus' sinfulness. But recognizing Jesus' Adamic humanity is critically important for understanding His relationship with the human race – and specifically with His people – as the Last Adam.*

Jesus was truly *one* with the human race in bearing in Himself the reality of fallen flesh. He didn't "float above the fray" of the calamity of human fallenness with its corruption, ills, suffering and pain (cf. Romans 8:3 with Hebrews 2:14ff, 4:15).

Jesus is a *new* “Adam,” not in the sense of being an entirely new kind of man, but in the sense of being a bona fide son of Adam (“Son of Man”) in whom man would at last become truly and fully human. Jesus is a new Adam in that He is Adam’s destiny and fulfillment: the Man in whom man becomes man indeed. And precisely because Jesus is man’s destiny and truth, He is the *Last* Adam. In Him the creature man has attained to the truth of his created identity and role as divine image-son. Jesus is the consummate, everlasting truth of man *in* Himself, but not *unto* Himself: As the first Adam was the progenitor of a human race in his own image – a race defined by *death* (15:21), so it is with the last Adam:

- Jesus is the progenitor of a new humanity – a humanity that is “in” Him just as Adam’s descendents were “in” him.
- But whereas Adam’s relation to his progeny was natural and “earthy,” Jesus’ relation to His “progeny” is spiritual, defined by *life* in the Spirit.

In both cases, the descendents of the two “Adams” are identified by sharing in the substance and life of their respective progenitors – *in their bodies as well as their spirits*. The difference – which is monumental and profoundly important – is that the first Adam was “earthy” and natural – of the “flesh,” *and so, therefore, are those who are of him and in him*. In contrast, the Last Adam is “heavenly” and spiritual – of the Spirit, and so also are those who are *His* “progeny” – those who are of Him and in Him (cf. John 3:1-8; Romans 8:1-9; Philippians 3:1-11).

This subject will be examined in greater depth and detail in the subsequent section (15:35-50), but it’s important to take note of it at this point because it shows how Paul understood the relation between the two “Adams” and their “descendents,” and therefore between the two “Adams” themselves.

The first outcome of this understanding is that it answers the “federal representation” view which rightly seeks a relationship between Christ and men that doesn’t depend on natural relations. The problem is evident: Adam is the natural (biological) head of the human race, whereas Jesus is not. However, the above treatment shows that Jesus *is* the natural head of the human race in the sense that He bound up human nature – Adamic nature – in Himself and transformed it so that He is the origin and originator of a new, true human race just as Adam was of the original human race. *This new humanity is “in” Jesus and shares in His nature and substance just as thoroughly as the first humanity does with Adam*. Recognizing this ontological relation between Jesus and His “progeny” eliminates the need for a representative, “federal” relation.

These relationships also show why Paul’s statement – “*in Christ all shall be made alive*” – cannot be construed in terms of *universal* salvation. Oftentimes this dilemma is resolved by simply reading the parallel prepositional phrases, “in Adam” and “in Christ” a particular way. By having them modify the adjective “all,” it follows that all those *in Christ*, rather than all *men*, will be made alive.

This reading is perfectly allowable, but unconvincing in itself because Paul's statement doesn't have to be treated this way; it *can* be interpreted universally as indicating that all men – every human being – will be made alive in Christ. The statement is inherently ambiguous and so looks to other considerations to determine the way it ought to be understood. Those considerations obviously include the immediate context, but must also extend to Paul's overall teaching as well as the witness of the New Testament.

The *immediate context* argues against universalism in a couple of different ways. First of all, it's clear that the "all" who are made alive in Christ at His coming are those who share in His bodily resurrection. For Paul wasn't here talking about the new birth (regeneration), but the resurrection of the body; he was referring to a person's physical body sharing in the resurrection life of Jesus' own body. This is what he meant by the expression, "made alive." Those who share in Jesus' bodily resurrection are the "fullness of the harvest" of which He is the first fruits.

Moreover, their resurrection is *His* resurrection because they *are His* (15:23), having been joined to Him by His Spirit such that the Spirit is perfecting His life in them (Romans 6:1ff; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:1-4). Jesus' resurrection life – which Christians now possess in the *inner man* – is thus destined for completion in their *physical bodies*. This is why Paul referred to the present life in the Spirit as itself a "first fruit" (Romans 8:23; note especially the surrounding context). The believer's present experience of Jesus' resurrection life is the first fruit of his "spiritual" life (life in the Spirit) to be consummated in fullness with his resurrection to share in Christ's "spiritual" body (15:42ff; cf. Romans 8:9-11; 2 Corinthians 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14; Philippians 3:18ff).

The obvious implication of these truths is that an assertion of universalism in Paul's statement is the assertion of universal participation in Christ's bodily resurrection at the Parousia. *But those who share in that resurrection are those who already participate in Jesus' resurrection life in the present:* The resurrection of their bodies is only the fullness of the resurrection they presently experience. In other words, those who are "made alive at Jesus' coming" are those who have already been made alive in their spirits. *Thus the only way to argue for a universal bodily resurrection at the Parousia is to argue for universal participation in Jesus' resurrection life in the here and now.*

Aside from the present context, Paul's overall instruction (and that of the New Testament) will not permit that assertion. Paul was clear in his writings that some men will indeed die in their unbelief; they die as men "in the flesh," governed by the flesh and the principle of "death." This is true of those who reject Christ, but it's also true of some who associate themselves with Christ and His Church (cf. Philippians 3:17-19; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; 2 Timothy 2:8-19; also Matthew 25:31ff; John 5:28-29; Hebrews 6:1-8; Jude 5-13). And dying in this way devoid of the *first fruits* of resurrection life, there can be no *completion* of resurrection for them. The fullness of a harvest necessarily follows upon the first fruits.