

The Gospel According To Paul: Romans

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The Redemptive Effects of the Death and Resurrection of Christ

In the first section of this theological block (1:18-3:20) Paul has gone to great lengths to show that all men everywhere are under the power of sin and that, as a consequence, the whole of humankind had become a ruined, destroyed, or lost race. In the Messianic Deliverance section (3:21-8:39) Paul takes up a discussion of God's response to the lost condition of the being he created called "*adam/man*." The redemption story Paul calls "the gospel" is the good news that God himself has come into the world to effect the deliverance of his creation. He descended in the form of a *ben Adam* (a son of Adam/man), but he was also the Son of God.

The Messiah God promised to send was none other than God himself who came to us as the Son: of God and of man. In the person of Jesus of Nazareth God has been here, has walked upon this earth, has entered into conflict with the Satanic forces, and has destroyed them by his death and resurrection, thus effecting the deliverance of man from the enslaving powers of sin and death. For our purposes here, especially as relates to the occurrence of this theme in Rom 5, we need only to concern ourselves with how his death, burial and resurrection (to use Paul's language of 1 Cor 15) brought about the salvation of mankind.

Christ Died for the Ungodly

According to Rom 3:24-25, man is justified by the gift of God's grace **through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus**, whom God put forth as

an atonement by his blood. In 5:6 Paul tells us that **Christ died for the ungodly**, and in 5:8 that while we were yet sinners **Christ died for us**. In 5:9 we read that we are justified **by his blood**, and in 5:10 that we were **reconciled to God by the death of his Son**. This theme continues through chapter 5 of Romans. What does Paul mean that Christ died for our sins. He died (he experienced human death) for (with reference to/because of) our sins (our enslavement to sin or the reign of sin over the whole human race). It is not individual sin that is under consideration here (even though that is implied), rather, it is the power of sin or "sin as a power." Sin is consistently portrayed in the New Testament as an enslaving power that reigns over the human race (cf. Rom 6:5-7, 17, 20; Acts 26:16-18), which eventually consumes man in death (Rom 5:12, 21; Heb 2:14-15).

Here is where Paul's gospel becomes a redemption story. It was by means of Christ's death that he entered into conflict with Satan within his own arena (i.e., where he reigned over Hell, death, and the whole of the realm of darkness), and emerged from death in resurrection, rendering the power of death of none effect and the power of Satan destroyed. Jesus' conquest over Satan was not a conquest only for himself but for the whole of the human race, in that what he had done, by the power of belief, others could do also.

The Conquest of Death by the Power of the Resurrection

In Jesus of Nazareth, God entered into human history as a human being, and through his experience of death and his resurrection from death, he brought about the death of death. His conquest of death was accomplished by his resurrection. The resurrection of Christ was a resurrection into a realm of existence where death has neither presence nor power. His was not a resurrection back into his old Adamic existence where sin and death reign over man, but a resurrection into "new existence" where the power of grace reigns rather than the power of sin, and where death is non-existent. The power of sin, therefore, for Christ, and for all those who have become one with him through their belief, has been destroyed (cf. Heb 2:14-15 and Rev 1:18). Christ, was resurrected into new existence, he is the first-fruits of a new creation - the first being of a new spiritual realm of existence - new creation existence.

Death to Existence “in Adam” Life through Existence “in Christ”

Here is where his death, burial, and resurrection deliver us from the power of sin and death. Through our conversion to Christ we enter into spiritual existence with him by our spiritual participation in his death, burial, and resurrection. We die to our existence in Adam, are buried in the waters of baptism, and are raised out of the waters of baptism into new spiritual existence in Christ (Rom 6:3-14; 2 Cor 5:17).

This is what conversion to Christ is all about. In conversion, one experiences transformation into new existence and translation from one existence to another. He is "in Christ" rather than "in Adam" (cf. 1 Cor 15:16-26). We die to our old existence, bury that existence in the waters of baptism, and are raised out of the water into new existence in Christ - a reenactment of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ,

*For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.
¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. ²⁰But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, **the firstfruit of those who have fallen asleep.** ²¹For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²²For **as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.** ²³But each in his own turn: **Christ, the first fruits;** then, when he comes, those who belong to him. ²⁴Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶The last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Cor 15:16-26).*

The death of Christ brought death to his adamic existence, his resurrection brought new life into existence, not only in terms of his spiritual existence but in terms of his body as well. All those “in Christ” experience the new spiritual existence, even though they are yet “in Adam” in terms of their adamic bodies. In the resurrection, our bodies will experience new existences, as did Christ’s body in his resurrection. Our continuing earthly existence after conversion is filled with the conflict of our regenerated spirit with our adamic flesh and its desires. “In Christ,” however, we have the

presence and power of God's grace reigning to compete with the reigning power of sin that still lays claim to our adamic bodies during the remainder of our earthly sojourn. In the resurrection, the conquest of the spirit over the flesh will be fulfilled in the resurrection of our bodies into new existence. This is what Paul reveals to us in the 1 Cor 15 text above and in verses 42-49:

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being" (Gen 2:7); the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. ⁴⁸As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

According to Paul, Christ's resurrection was an event of cosmic proportion. His conquest of the satanic powers has universal implications (cf. 1 Cor 15:51-57; Rom 8:31-39). To those who believe this, Christ's conquest becomes their conquest (Rom 10:9-10; 1 John 5:4-5) through their identification with the second Adam rather than the first Adam. We are living out the story of Adam in our own story; in this we have no choice. Whether we are living out the story of the first Adam or the second Adam in our lives is our choice, and we make that choice every day with the internal conflicts we experience between the will of the flesh and the will of our new creation spirit.

These Pauline themes making up this redemption story will be developed more fully in the study of the later chapters of this letter. The imagery with which Paul works in the development of theology is filled with wonder and is capable of challenging our intellect and emotions in a way very few concepts can. We present them here by way of this excursus so that that we will have already been introduced to them before we come upon them in the development of the text of this letter.

MWLIII