

The Gospel According To Paul: Romans

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Treatise on the Death of Christ

Paul's "Adam/Christ" Typology (5:1-21)

The concluding lines of the previous "treatise on faith" serve as a transition into this second of Paul's treatises here in this section on Messianic deliverance. In 4:24-25 Paul states, "It [righteousness/justification] will be reckoned (acknowledged) to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification."

As he concludes this theological piece on "faith," he connects belief in the resurrection of Jesus from death to Abraham's belief in God's power to bring life out of death. The point for his readers is that if Abraham's belief in God's power to bring life out of death reckoned him as righteous, the same belief would reckon us as righteous. Then, with the introduction of the death and resurrection motif, he moves into a discussion of the meaning and significance of the cross as a means of deliverance for the human race.

The question that immediately confronts us is how Paul could have possibly thought of Christ's death as a redemptive event. What kind of "deliverer" delivers others by being executed or crucified? This looks more like defeat and destruction rather than conquest and deliverance. What kind of Messiah liberates his people from enslavement by dying at the hands of the very powers of enslavement he came to destroy? This must have been the very question Saul of Tarsus, before his conversion, had asked himself

over and over again.

In his discovery of the answer to this question, "Saul of Tarsus" had become "Paul the apostle of Christ." Seeing this "Crucified Messiah" as a "Risen Lord" was for Paul a life-transforming event. He was so filled with belief in who Jesus of Nazareth was that a complete change took place in him with reference to who he was. Saul of Tarsus buried his old existence "in Adam" in the waters of baptism and was raised out of those waters into new existence "in Christ," as Paul the apostle of Christ. He yet had the old body and passions of Adam (*sarx/flesh*), but spiritually he had become a "new creation." The old man of disbelief, whose moral character had been distorted by sin, died and out of that death emerged a new spiritual being. He had been translated out of an existence characterized by the power of sin, into an existence characterized by the power of grace. He had been translated out of death into life - and all of this was effected by his conversion to Christ (cf. Gal 2:20; 2 Cor 5:17; Rom 6:3-6; 1 Cor 15:20-22, 51-57).

Here in this treatise (5:1-21) Paul develops what may be called his "theology of the cross," a theme he has already introduced in 3:21-26.

***(1) Through Our Belief in the Death and Resurrection of Christ,
We Have Gained Access into the Grace of God (5:1-5)***

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through 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. ³Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Just as Abraham's belief in God's power to bring life out of death reckoned him as righteous, so does our belief in God's power to bring life out of death by means of his resurrection reckon us as righteous (cf. 4:23-5:1). Although the death and resurrection theme is a critical part of Paul's development of thought here, it is his use of the theme of "grace" that captures our greatest attention.

What does Paul mean by the expression, "we have gained access into this grace" (5:2)? Grace here is portrayed as something into which one may gain access (e.g., a state of being, a realm of existence, etc.). What Paul has in view is a realm of existence characterized by grace - a realm of existence wherein grace reigns. This is precisely the way he uses the term in 5:20-21 where he portrays grace as a reigning power set over against sin as a reigning power.

*But where **sin** increased, **grace** increased all the more,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 (Rom 5:20-21).*

The word translated "grace" in the Greek New Testament is *charis*. This term is so dominant in Paul's writings that a special excursus on it would be fully justified. For the present, we will simply say that *charis*, as portrayed in the writings of Paul, is a somewhat multicolored concept. The typical understanding of *charis* is that of unmerited or undeserved favor bestowed upon someone (e.g., as a king would show grace/favor to a subject). *Charis*, in this sense, is an emotional disposition toward. Paul uses *charis* in this sense in numerous occurrences in his writings.

In other texts, however, Paul appears to be using this Greek term in a very special sense, which goes beyond the concept of good will toward. In fact, this word *charis* is used in a very unique way in certain religious writings of this period. In these writings *charis* is spoken of as 'a special power' given someone by a deity to assist that one in his/her service to that deity. An example of this can be seen in the *Corpus Hermetica*, a collection of writings believed to be from the god Hermes. In the first tractate the author, Poimandres, who has received an inspired message from Hermes, prays to Hermes:

I pray that I may never fall away from that knowledge of you which matches with our being; grant this my prayer. And put power (*dunamis*) into me, that so, having obtained this grace (*charis* [gift of empowerment-mw]), I may enlighten those of my race who are in ignorance, my brothers and your sons (*Corpus Hermetica*, 1.32).

Here the power of inspiration the author prays for is called both "power/ *dunamis*" and a "grace/*charis*." *Charis* here is to be understood as a

"gift" - a divine gift given by the deity to empower the believer. Throughout this collection of writings the term *dynamis* is used for the power of the deity of the cult, but the term *charis* is used in several occurrences to describe this power/*dunamis* when it is imparted to the believer as a gift (cf. Poimandres 1.32; 12.12; Asclepius, Epilogue 41b [Greek text]). The verb form of *charis* [*charizomai*] is found repeatedly to describe the bestowing of gifts of grace.

In the Greek magical scrolls (*The Greek Magical Papyri*) *charis* was one of the words used for magical spells. This same usage can be found in other writers such as Pindar, Euripides, Hippolytus, and Sophocles. One NT scholar concludes from his research on this Greek term:

'*Charis*' had been associated with supernatural power or aid. Partly this was derived from the sense of 'spell,' which occurs as early as the Attic dramatist. This meaning of mystical or magical influence was derived from the sense of '*charis*' as power in the religious or semi-religious sphere. (James Moffatt, *Grace in the New Testament*, p. 28.)

What may we conclude from this data? Just this, there are dimensions of this word *charis* we may not have tapped into in our interpretation of Paul's use of the term in his writings. In Paul *charis* is used in both senses discussed above. It is unmerited favor freely bestowed upon the recipient (Rom 1:7; 3:24; 4:16; Gal 3:18; 5:4; Eph 1:6; 2:8), but it is also a power or empowering gift. God's power for good sent into the world as a divine gift. As we may see from the Rom 5 text, it is a competing power set over against the power of sin. Where sin is the malevolent power of Satan at work in the world, grace is the benevolent power of God at work in the world; we may be influenced by one or the other. This understanding of grace/*charis* lends significantly to our understanding of Paul's words of Rom 5:2 and 20-21.

Through Christ we have gained access into this reign of grace, or this realm of existence (i.e., existence "in Christ") wherein grace reigns. As sin reigns in our lives "in Adam," and this reigning power results in destruction and death, grace reigns in our lives "in Christ," and this reigning power results in recreation and eternal life. This gift of *charis*/grace is found only "in Christ." This is one of the major differences between existence "in Adam" and existence "in Christ." In Adam you are one your own, in Christ you are never alone; the empowering presence of Christ is always there. As Paul says in Phil 4:5, "the Lord is near, don't be anxious about anything." The death of our existence "in Adam" is Paul's next movement of thought.

**(2) Christ Died in Order to Deliver Adamic Mankind
from the Enslaving Power of Sin (5:6-11)**

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Christ died in order to deliver adamic mankind from the enslaving power of sin. His death was a death to adamic existence, an existence characterized by sin as a reigning power. His resurrection was a resurrection into new existence where grace rather than sin is the reigning power. Christ's death was, for him, a death to adamic existence; and his resurrection was a resurrection into new existence. Paul calls him "the firstfruit" of this new existence.

Verses 8-10 may be seen as the key verses of this text. While we were yet sinners (*hamartolos* - one whose life is characterized by *hamartia* - sin), Christ died concerning us (the Greek preposition here is *huper* – with reference to). He died concerning or, with reference to, our enslavement to sin. The concept of substitution, satisfaction, or appeasement, as found in some atonement theologies, is not conveyed by Paul's words here. We are reconciled to God by means of Christ's blood (a word picture or metaphor for his "violent death"), and are saved, delivered, or liberated by his life (i.e., his resurrection). In Paul's theology of the cross, the death of Christ is to be understood as his participation with man in the ultimate event in the life of Adamic man - human death. His resurrection from that experience is what accomplished the salvation of the human race.

To suggest that Paul believed that Christ's death, apart from his resurrection, is what affected the salvation of mankind, is to completely misunderstand him. He makes this clear in 1 Cor 15:17, "If Christ has not

been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." If Paul believed that Christ's death paid a debt owed to God by man and thus freed him of that debt, why would he say that Christ's death was powerless to save man apart from the resurrection? The whole concept of satisfaction, substitution, and appeasement assumes that a debt for sin was paid to God by Christ in the imagery the sin offering of the Day of Atonement. If this was the case, then the sin of man would have been removed the moment Jesus died on the cross. Paul's words here clearly indicate that he did not believe that Jesus' death removed man's sin or cancelled a debt owed for those sins. Rather, Paul argues that it was the resurrection of Christ that brought about the reconciliation of man to God. "If Christ has not been raised," says Paul, "your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." The theology of substitution, satisfaction, and appeasement as relates to the death of Christ finds its origins in church theologians such as Anselm of Canterbury, a church theologian of the 11th century, more so than in the teaching of the Apostle Paul.

Paul often speaks of Christ's death as a part of the redemption event, but by his use of such terms as death, blood, and the cross, the context in which he uses these terms indicates that he is speaking of "the cross event," which stands at the heart of his gospel. It is in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection from the death, that he removed that which stood between man and God (Isa 59:2), and rendered sin powerless as a controlling force for those who are "in Christ."

(3) The Divine Reversal of The Curse of Adam (5:12-17)

*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--** ¹³for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. ¹⁴Nevertheless, 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.** ¹⁵But 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!** ¹⁶Again, 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. ¹⁷For 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.

Sin and death entered into the world through the disbelief and self-willed action of the first Adam, grace and the free gift of righteousness overflowed into the world through the belief and God willed action of the second Adam (5:12-17)

Here Paul enters into a typological play between Adam and Christ. This same typological play is found in 1 Cor 15:20-22, 42-49. In each piece of typology the original Adam of Gen 2-3 is portrayed as the representative figure of the old human race characterized by sin and death and Christ is portrayed as a second Adam who is the representative figure of a new human race characterized by grace and eternal life.

Paul's argument is, in essence, that death reigns over the whole human race (adamic man) through the power of sin which was brought into the world by the sin of Adam. Adam's act of self will set against the will of God resulted in his *chattath* (Hebrew) or *hamartia* (Greek), which are both translated "sin" in Scripture. Both terms mean, literally, "missing the mark" or "failing to hit the mark.." Adam's sin was his failure to act in concert with the will of his Creator. As a being created in the image of God, his will was to be one with the will of the Creator; his failure was to set his will against the will of God. This has been the ongoing problem of the human race. Self-will, set against the will of God, has resulted in the estrangement of man from his Creator.

The redemption drama is, essentially, a story of divine reversal. The story of the first Adam has been reenacted by the second Adam, but this time with a different conclusion. The same choice given the first Adam was given the second Adam. The first Adam chose to believe that God's word was a lie and willed to do contrary to God's will. The second Adam chose to believe that God's word was true and willed to do the will of the Creator. What occurred in a garden was reenacted in a garden. In the Garden of Eden, Adam chose to set his will against the will of God. In the Garden of Gethsemane, the second Adam's choice was, "not my will but your will be done" (Matt 26:39; Mk 14:36). According to the writer of Hebrews, Jesus' obedience to the will of the Father resulted in the salvation of all those who follow his example of obedience to the will of the Father. Translated very

literally from the Greek text, this passage reads:

Although being a Son, he learned from the things he suffered, obedience. And having been made complete, he became to all the ones obeying him, the author of eternal salvation (Heb 5:8-9).

The garden event of the first Adam was reversed by the reenactment of that event by the second Adam. By means of his death and burial, Christ's adamic existence was given over to the realm of sin, darkness, and death. By his resurrection into new existence - not back into his adamic existence - a new existence was brought into being. The power of sin and death are only applicable to those of adamic existence. Death for Christ, and those who become one with him, has been conquered and destroyed through his experience of human death and his resurrection out of the death associated with that existence, into new existence. The second Adam has, in effect, retraced the steps of the first Adam, this time conquering the power of sin, which centered in Adam's self will, thus setting in motion a new set of powers to compete with the powers set in motion by the sin of the original man.

(4) Summary Statement (5:18-21)

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. ¹⁹For 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. ²⁰The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, ²¹so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul reasons that just as the disobedience of the one man (the first Adam) introduced sin into the world, the obedience of the second Adam introduced grace into the world. As mentioned above, Paul's line of thought here in Rom 5 is further developed in 1 Cor 15:20-22, 42-49, where he portrays Christ as an Adam figure who is the first being to enjoy resurrection existence. There Christ is spoken of as "a heavenly man" having a spiritual body in contrast to the first Adam, who is a being of dust or clay, whose end is to return to the dust from which he came. Where the one man (Christ)

stands as a representative figure of all those who will transcend this existence into the spiritual realm of eternal life, the other man (Adam) stands as a representative figure of all those who are destined, as beings whose existence centers in the flesh (the dirt), to return to the dust in death.

What Paul is driving to establish throughout this text is that there are two different realms of existence currently in existence within the present order. The one is existence "in Adam" (existence centered in the flesh) the other is existence "in Christ" (existence centered in the spirit). Existence "in Adam" is existence characterized by sin and the Satanic conquest of man through sin; existence "in Christ" is characterized by grace and the conquest of Satan by Christ's resurrection into new existence.

According to Paul, it is through faith that man gains access into this benevolent and saving power of God called "*charis/grace*" (Rom 5:1-2). Further, it is "in Christ" that one receives salvation from the power of sin, and it is "in Christ" (rather than "in Adam") that this *charis* of God becomes a manifest reality and redeeming power in one's life. This *charis* broke in upon us with the entrance of God himself into our realm of existence in the person of Jesus of Nazareth (Titus 2:11). This "grace" is now a reigning power, a manifestation of the presence and power of God's benevolence in our world. It is for those "in Christ" a continuing and abiding presence working in the lives to bring about an ongoing deliverance from the power of sin.

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