

Reversing the Curse

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*Wherefore, as **by one man sin entered into the world**, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned (Rom 5:12).*

In Romans 5, Paul affirms that the curse of death is the result of sin, and the deliverance of God is the result of Christ reversal of this curse through his death and his resurrection from death into a new existence. Those who are "in Christ" are no longer defined by their existence "in Adam," but are now beings of a new existence "in Christ." They are beings of thisworldly existence in that they are yet Adamic beings in terms of the dust from which man came, but they have a spirit of an eschatological promise, they may experience life in an eternal sense in the now world of space and time.

Here we have one of the best examples of Paul's concept of divine reversal. What happened to all men because of the sin of Adam has been reversed because of the incarnation of God in Christ, who was "in Christ, reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor 5:19). "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive," (1 Cor 15:22), that's divine reversal. But how did that happen? If a curse of death was set in place by God because of Adam's disbelief, then what has happened to cause the curse to be no longer applicable to all men? It would appear that the curse, of which *HaSatan* has inserted himself as the executor (i.e. the one who carries out the terms of the covenant), has in some way been nullified. How could that have been accomplished?

The death of Jesus of Nazareth resulted from the malignant,

violent, and sinful behavior of his fellow sons of Adam who had become subject to the power of sin, in which resides the power of death. But, Jesus could not be claimed by death and could consequently be returned to life - a reversal of the curse of mortality. The death he experienced had come as a result of the mortality of his Adamic existence, and as a being of an existence other than that in which the curse was enforceable; death was no longer held amenability to him. His new existence would no longer be amenable to the curse of Gen 2:17. His life was not a resuscitation of his life as an Adamic being, which was amenable to the curse of death or mortality; rather, it was a resurrection from the death of his Adamic existence into a new existence, an eschatological or endtime existence.

If Satan was allowed to hold God to his word as suggested in Job 1:6-12, and consequently seize every soul that sinned in death, then what would be the consequence of Satan trying to claim the soul of a human being of accountable age who had no sin? Would he not have to forfeit his claim on this life, and yield to the reversal the effects of the curse?

The Death of Death

The conclusion that must follow from this is that if Satan had claimed the soul of Jesus by virtue of the word of God to Adam in the prohibition not to partake of the forbidden fruit, then he had violated the terms of the covenant by attempting to claim Jesus in death. He may lay claim to this son of Adam, but not the Son of God. In effect, Satan had no claim on Jesus beyond the fact that Jesus was an offspring of Adam. Even though all the offspring of Adam had sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23), Jesus was the one Adamic man who had no sin. In effect, Jesus brought about the death of death in that it has no amenability in the new existence Christ brought into being through his resurrection. In the reasoning of Paul this nullification of the curse was applicable to all those who embrace this new existence through new creation.

A very powerful piece of imagery is found in the book of Revelation, which pulls from this reality. In the vision given to John

sees someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet, and John falls at his feet and hears him say; "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades," (Rev 1:12-18). This was the death of death in that those who share new existence with Jesus need have no fear of death because Jesus has opened that door for those who wear his name and become one with him through new existence in Christ.

In 2 Cor 5:17, Paul writes, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation (*kaine ktisis*); old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." In Eph 4:20-22 Paul refers to this phenomenon as a conversion followed by an ongoing process of renewal,

. . . put off your former manner of life, the old man, the one being corrupted by deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind 24 and that you put on the new man (ton kainon anthropon), according to God having been created in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:22-24).

He repeats this imagery in Col 3:8-10,

But now you yourselves put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man (palaion anthropon) with his practices, 10 and have put on the new (neon), the one being renewed (anakainoumenon – to be made new again) in knowledge in accordance with the image (eikona) of one having created (ktisantos) him," (Col 3:8-10 – my translation).

Paul's most developed imagery of this renewal process is found in Rom 6:3-4,

What then shall we say? Shall we continue in sin that grace may increase? 2 May it not be! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 3 Or do you not know that as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we were buried

with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we may walk in newness of life (Rom 6:1-4; cf. also Rom 8:29-30).

All Things Have Become New

The key passage in all of this discussion is found in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, 2 Cor 5:17-19,

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; **the old has passed away; behold, all things have become new.** 18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*

This text connects the expression "new creation" with "reconciliation." Paul calls his service to God a ministry of reconciliation. Paul saw that the salvation of every man depended on his response to the will of God, consisting of a new way of thinking, which involved a turn from a self-willed, self-centered life to a life full of faith and obedience after the example of the life of Jesus. In his letter to the Romans Paul says, "Knowing this, that **our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be made ineffective,** that we should no longer serve sin," (Rom 6:6); and in 7:6 he reasons, "by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law (that which condemns; cf. James 2:10), so that we serve in the new way of the spirit, and not in the old way of the written code," (Rom 7:6). Then in 12:2, Paul says, "**Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,** but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Christ came into the world as the second Adam, who by his death as a son of Adam (*benAdam*) destroyed the power of death by his resurrection into new existence. Sin and death could not claim him in that he escaped death as a new creation. Because of this, sin

and death can no longer claim the spirit of the believer that has been created anew in Christ. In Adam the soul that sinned died (Ezekiel 18:4); it should be noted that the Ezekiel text says it is the “soul” (Heb *nephesh* / Gk *psuche*) that shall die rather than the spirit. The soul is the “life” that results from the union of flesh and spirit. Nowhere in Scripture is it said that the “spirit” (Heb *ruach* / Gk *pneuma*) experiences death. This is very likely because the spirit was imparted to man when God breathed into his face (Gen 2:7), and if the spirit imparted was a part of God, it cannot experience death. That the human spirit will leave the human body is clear, and when it does the life, breath or soul (Heb *nephesh* / Gk *psuche*) will cease to be; as the writer of the epistle of Hebrews says, “It is appointed to man once to die and then the judgment,” (Heb 9:27). Is this the judgment expected at the endtime or does the spirit of the man in Christ face Jesus in judgment at the moment of death? This is suggested by Paul in 2 Cor 5:8, in his desire to be, “away from the body and at home with the Lord?”

The Reversal of the Curse

At the heart of hearts of all this is Paul's doctrine of divine reversal, which is the belief underlying the whole of Paul's argument concerning God's redemption of mankind. What happened to all men because of the sin of Adam has been reversed through the incarnation of God who was "in Christ, reconciling the world to himself," (2 Cor 5:19). Paul states in 1 Cor 15:22, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive;" that's divine reversal! But how did it happen? If God activated the curse of death at the time of Adam's disbelief and transgression, what has happened to cause the curse to be no longer applicable to all men? It would appear that the curse, which *HaSatan'* - “the adversary” (one who sets himself against) seems to have appointed himself the executor of the Garden Covenant, has been nullified; initially with reference to Jesus, and in the end for all those in Christ.

This is what Paul says has happened. If the prohibition of God stated that the one who sinned would die (Gen 2:17), then would such an effect be applicable to one who did not sin? To carry this

reasoning further, what if this one was a descendent of Adam, of the age of accountability, yet had no sin, then would the curse of death be applicable to him, especially as Paul applies the curse of sin and death here in Romans 5. The fact that Jesus of Nazareth was human and subject to mortality is not what is at issue here. His death has a different meaning than that of mortality, as is suggested by the way Peter speaks of his death in Acts 2:22-28,

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves also know – 23 him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death (thanatos – death, not nekros, corpse; the distinction is that thanatos is the separation of the spirit from the body, while nekros is a dead body); 24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains (odin – the anguish) of death, because it was not possible (ouk en dunaton death was without power) that he should be held (krateo – to exercise force) by it. 25 For David says concerning him:

*I foresaw the Lord always before my face,
For he is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken
26 Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad;
Moreover my flesh (the human body) also will rest in hope.
27 For you will not leave my soul in Hades
Nor will You allow your Holy One to see corruption 28 You have
made known to me (i.e. the Messiah) the ways of life; You will make
me full of joy in your presence (the presence of God).*

Peter is speaking of the body of Jesus, which had experienced human death. Peter says, “God raised him up and delivered him from the anguish of death because it was not possible (ouk en dunaton – death had no power) that he should be held (krateo – to be kept by force) by it.” At this point in Psalms 16:8, David’s psalm becomes “a song of the Messiah,” speaking in first the person; “that I (the Messiah) may not be moved; moreover my flesh (sarx – the human body) will dwell in hope. For you will not leave my soul (psuche – here psuche is being used for “the life” of the body-spirit

union) in *Hades* (this Greek word literally means “that which is not seen”), nor will you allow your Holy One (a title used for God or one who represents God) to see corruption (*diaphthora* – to decay as with the human body). You have made known to me the ways of life (*zoe*, the life associated with eternity); you will fill me with the joy in your presence (*tou prosopou sou*); the word for presence (*prosopon*) actually means “the face.” The body of Jesus is dead *nekros* (a corpse), but the spirit Jesus committed to God from the cross is in the presence of, or before the face of, God.

There may be some very informing veins of ore here; especially as relates to what happened to Jesus following his death. We are told that the body or flesh of Jesus was in *Hades*, the unseen realm in Greek mythology, used in the Greek Septuagint to translate *sheol*. But the realm of the dead did not have the power to hold him by force, that his flesh (the body of Jesus) would dwell in hope because his life (*psuche* – the life force or breath of life), would not dwell in *Hades* (the unseen realm), nor would God allow his Holy One to see corruption or decay, because God made known the way of life (*zoe* – the Greek word for life in the expression *aiionios zoe* – eternal life) and fill him with the joy of the presence (face) of God. There are other text that leads one to believe that death is not beyond God’s deliverance: Job 14:14; 26:6; Psalms 23:4; 56:13; 68:20; 116:8,15; Proverbs 10:2; 13:42; 15:11; Eccl 7:1; Isaiah 25:8; 53:9-12; 57:2; Hosea 13:14. The application of the curse of death to Jesus had a subduing effect on *HaSatan*. Jesus’ Adamic body could not be held by death in that death did not have the power to hold his body or bring decay upon it.

Jesus was without sin and even though he was beyond the age of innocence and was mortal he was more than a mortal Adamic man. In a mysterious and wondrous way God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor 5:19). However, his innocence of sin was not due to his identity with God; he was tempted in all points just as we are (*kathos* – just as in the same manner as) yet was without sin (Heb 4:12). The “curse” of the Garden Covenant was applicable to Jesus, only through the flesh of Mary, his mother. As mentioned above, it appears that *HaSatan*’ – “the adversary” is in some way functioning, or has appointed himself, the executor of the

Garden Covenant. Curiously, there is an account of Satan debating Michael, the archangel, over the body of Moses, found in Jude 9, which must have been an oral tradition in first century Judaism. Even though God buried him on Mt Sinai (Deut 32:50), Satan was making a claim for his body; but, we have Moses, or the spirit of Moses, appearing with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration. Did a similar situation occur concerning Satan's claims on the body of Jesus?

The death of Jesus of Nazareth was the same experience common to all men in Adam, but Jesus could not be held by death and was consequently free to enter into a newly created existence other than existence in Adam, which was under a curse of death. Jesus' death had been a consequence of his Adamic existence, to which he was no longer amenable. His life was not a resuscitation of his Adamic life, as was the case with the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17), Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:40-56), and Lazarus (John 11:17-44). The resurrection of Jesus was a resurrection from death, which was the result of man's Adamic existence, into an altogether new existence, as an existence of another world or dimension of existence of which he was the first being or firstfruit.

New Existence through New Creation

The conclusion that must follow from all this is that if Satan had claimed the soul of Jesus by virtue of the curse of death imposed upon Adam, then Satan had no grounds for holding him in death. Jesus' innocence would have nullified any claim beyond the experience of the death of his Adamic existence. For Jesus this brought about the death of death as related to the covenant clause of mortal death for the offspring of Adam. Death could claim the body, but not the spirit. In the reasoning of Paul this nullification of the curse of death was applicable to all those who would become new creations with Christ in the same manner as men became one with the offspring of Adam, through birth, but now it is new birth or re-generation, or new creation.

Those who would become new creations "in Christ" through

spiritual union with him would do so through regeneration (*palinge'nesias*) or renewal (*anakaino'seos*) as Paul reasons in Titus 3:5; or "new creations," as he explains in 2 Cor 5:17 (*kaine'kti'sis*), and 4:16 (*anakainou'tai* - being renewed); so also Eph 2:10 (*ktisthen'tes en christo* - created in Christ), 2:15 (that he might create [*ktizo*] in himself one new man), 4:24 (a new man having been created [*ktizo*] in righteousness), and Col 3:10 (the new man, the one renewed [*anakainoumenon*] in accordance with the one having created [*kti'santos*] him).

Paul's most expressive image of this renewal is found in Rom 6:3-4 and in Rom 8:29-30. One must also remember that this is the very imagery used by Jesus in his conversation with the rabbi Nicodemus in John 3:3-5 - in order for one to enter into the reign of God (a realm wherein grace reigns - Rom 5:21; 2 Tim 2:1;), he must be born anew (*gennethe'anothen*).

In the book of Revelation there is a passage that pulls together this whole scenario of new creation and its connection with the end of time. At the conclusion of this apocalyptic drama John receives a vision of the events to occur with the conquest of the dark forces of Satan by God. Of this vision John says,

*I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God [he skene tou theou - **the dwelling God**] is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people. **God himself will be with them and be their God.** 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; **there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.**" 5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "**Behold, I make all things new,**" (Rev 21:3-5).*

The whole of humanity as descendants of Adam and Eve has been given a way or means of experiencing new creation; however, only those who come to faith and avail themselves of this gift of God shall through divine reversal experience new existence in Christ. What one must do to become a part of this new humanity is addressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 (the whole chapter), as well as

Romans 5:12-21 and 6:1-14. This story of redemption was Paul's message to the Mediterranean world. This good news (gospel) must be believed and become "the story" of the believers life, so much so that the believer is transformed by that belief.

As one can act out of his disbelief and become one with his disbelief, so also can one act out of his belief and become one with that belief. Adam stands as the representative head of the race of man condemned by disbelief. According to Paul, Christ is the new Adam (1 Cor 15:45-49), the representative head of a new race of humankind, a recreated or regenerated human race of which Jesus is the first fruit (1 Cor 15:22-23). Through reenactment of Adam's story characterized by "a will to follow one's own will," we enter into the curse of death; however, through reenactment of Christ's story characterized by one whose will becomes one with God's will, we enter into the promise of life, receiving a foretaste of eternal life through the renewal of the spirit here and now and in the endtime the recreation of the body and spirit in the resurrection.

In Romans 7 Paul makes an argument concerning man's freedom from the Law of Moses (*Torah*, oral and written) "But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what held us in captivity, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter (*Torah*)," (Rom 7:6). That oldness of the letter contained repeated references to the curse of death to the one that sins (Exodus 21; Lev 20; 24:16-17; Num 35:16-21; Deut 17:5-7; 21:21-22; 22:21-24; 24:16; 32:39; Prov 11:19; 27:20; Jer 31:30; Ezek 3:20; 18:4; 17-26; Hab 2:5). As Paul argued in Romans 3, no one is free from the curse of death because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom 3:19-20). As James argues in his epistle, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it," (James 2:10).

Conclusion

Paul spends much ink in his letters informing his readers that they are no longer of this world; they are a part of another realm of existence, even though they are locked into this realm by their Adamic bodies. When one is converted to Christ, he or she is

changed from existence “in Adam,” in which Adam is the exemplar or representative being of this existence, to a new existence “in Christ,” in which Christ is the exemplar or representative being of that existence.

Man’s existence “in Adam” is characterized by the life of Adam; specifically, his choices and the consequences of those choices. The most significant choice for Paul’s purposes here is Adam’s choice of disbelief of God’s word and disobedience of God’s will, the consequence of his disbelief resulting in sin, death, and his expulsion from Eden.

Man’s existence “in Christ” is characterized by the life of Jesus; specifically, his choices and the consequences of those choices. The most significant choice for Christ, for Paul’s purposes, was that of his belief of God’s word and obedience to God’s will, the consequences of which resulted in righteousness, life, and eternal life with God.

Paul informs us that Jesus was “a type” of the original Adam, who was an “antitype” of Jesus. As the second or last Adam, Jesus was here to rewrite the story of the original Adam by giving it a different ending, and reverse the consequences of Adams choices by making different choices. Where Adam chose disbelief and the exercise of self-will, Jesus chose belief and exercise of the will of God. Where Adam chose to yield to the temptations presented by the satanic influence, Jesus chose to resist those same temptations. At the beginning of his messianic ministry and at the end of it, he resisted the desires of the flesh and its attachment to this world, the desires of the eyes, and the self-willed pride of life so common to man “in Adam.”

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