

## THE IMAGE OF ADAM: DEATH IN PAUL AND GENESIS 1-5

JOHN W. YATES III<sup>1</sup>

Judy S. was in the front yard playing with her grandchildren's exuberant puppy when she became entangled in the dog's leash and fell. She hit her head on the ground and soon began showing signs of what appeared to be a concussion. Only it was not a concussion. Within hours she was dead from a massive hemorrhage. Death struck swiftly, cruelly and almost mockingly. Judy had beaten breast cancer several years prior and was enjoying the best health she had experienced in over a decade. But, as the on-call neurosurgeon explained in the dreary confines of the surgical waiting room, radiation can weaken the structure of blood vessels, making them brittle. That was how a simple fall in the grass resulted in catastrophic injury.

Almost everyone can tell a similar story of death without warning. Each one reminds us of the cruel tyranny of death and the frailty of our human existence. Death is an essential part of our humanity, and yet it is undeniably foreign. In most cases we fight against it with every fiber of our mortal being. This tension between the inevitability of death and our rebellion against it reflects a biblical truth rooted in the story of creation and expressed in the life and death of Adam.

The creation of Adam and Eve in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28) has long been a touchstone of biblical and systematic theology. When it comes to discussing the nature of human identity we start here, and for good reason. Here our vocation is apparent, our natural endowments discovered and our unique glory affirmed. But this is not the only image that we bear. In an extended reflection on the contrast between Adam and Christ in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul writes that we also, "have borne the image of the man of dust." We have been created in the image of God, but we bear the image of Adam. While the one imparts glory, the other brings death.

My interest in this paper is to demonstrate that when Paul alludes to the image of Adam he is interested principally in death. This connection is not new to Paul, but rooted in the early chapters of Genesis, particularly Genesis 5, the only other Biblical text to speak explicitly of the image of Adam. While this exploration breaks little new ground, exegetically speaking, it leads to reflection on the nature of Adam, the meaning of death and the increasingly complex discussion of the "historical Adam."

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<sup>1</sup> John Yates is the Rector of Holy Trinity Church, Anglican, in Raleigh, North Carolina.

I. THE IMAGE OF THE EARTHLY MAN  
IN 1 CORINTHIANS 15

Paul's purpose in the final and climactic chapter of 1 Corinthians is to affirm the resurrection of Christ and its importance for the life of the Christian. As he says in vv.3–4, "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures..." Arguing against those who believe resurrection to be impossible, he says, "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (vv.17–18).

At verse 20, having affirmed Christ's resurrection, Paul turns from his opening argument to a reflection on the origin and ordering of fallen humanity contrasted with that of redeemed humanity. He writes, "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."<sup>2</sup> This leads to a glorious consideration of the future reign of Christ, in which the final enemy—death—is defeated and all things come under the rule and authority of God the Father.

The latter half of the chapter begins with a rhetorical question in v.35, "But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?'" Paul appears to enter into an ongoing argument with the Corinthians at this point, the details of which are hidden from us. The basic contrast, however, is between present life, ending in death, and future, resurrected life.

<sup>42</sup>So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; <sup>43</sup>it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; <sup>44</sup>it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. <sup>45</sup>So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being;" the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup>The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. <sup>47</sup>The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. <sup>48</sup>As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. <sup>49</sup>And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

The Adam-Christ typology introduced in v.22 and repeated in v.45 is the governing idea behind 15:42–49, which climaxes in Paul's *midrash* on Gen. 2:7 in vv.45 and 47, and is developed in his re-orientation of the concept of "image" in vv.48–49. We will return to this momentarily.

<sup>2</sup> We have already encountered Adam in 11:7–9, though not by name. Here his function is representative of all men, described as "the image and glory of God."

## A. A PRE-FALL ADAM?

Paul's *midrash* on Gen. 2:7 in vv.45 and 47 explicitly introduces what has up until then only been implied: that Adam's creation stands in contrast to Christ's resurrection. The Adam described here is under the reign of sin and death. However, because the reference to Gen. 2:7 in v.45 is to Adam before his sin, some scholars argue that references to Adam in this part of Paul's argument (vv.35-49), and hence references to the *σῶμα ψυχικόν*, refer to Adam in his original state prior to sin and death.<sup>3</sup> This is a tantalizing possibility with potentially fascinating implications for discussions about the "historical Adam," but it imports a distinction between two Adams (pre- and post-fall) that Paul never seems to make.<sup>4</sup>

That Adam's fall is assumed in the logic of the chapter is evident in several places: 1) The connection between sin and death in vv.16-17 and v.56, 2) Adam's role as the bringer of death to humanity in vv.21-22, and 3) The antitheses in vv.42-44a which portray the *σῶμα ψυχικόν* in terms which are not easily reconciled with the "goodness" of God's creation.<sup>5</sup> In vv.42-43, that which is sown is described as being sown in *φθορᾶ*, *ἀτιμία* and *ἀσθενεία* as a *σῶμα ψυχικόν*. The latter two descriptions could arguably be classed as neutral; these do not necessarily imply a cursed or fallen humanity. It would be difficult for Paul to argue, however, that the first human was created *ἐν φθορᾷ*, "perishable" (with a connotation of physical corruption) when elsewhere in the chapter death is portrayed as a foreign enemy (v.26), as introduced to the human race by Adam, not God (vv.21-22), and as a force over which man will have ultimate victory through Christ in the eschaton (vv.54-55).<sup>6</sup> It seems equally implausible that Paul would describe God's creation as an object without honor (*ἀτιμία*).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See Andrew Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet: Studies in the Role of the Heavenly Dimension in Paul's Thought with Special Reference to his Eschatology*, SNTSMS 43 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 42; following G. Vos and H. Ridderbos. This train of thought is followed extensively in much of the scholarly literature.

<sup>4</sup> Of the various other texts in which scholars find Adamic references (explicitly in Rom. 5:12-21 and 1 Tim. 2:13-14, and by allusion in Rom. 1:18-32; 3:23; 7:7-13; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20) only Rom. 7:9 might conceivably refer to Adam's sinless existence prior to his fall. While the ongoing dispute regarding the nature of the first person singular in Rom. 7 makes it impossible to say to whom this verse refers the point of the verse is to demonstrate that sin leads to death. If Adam is the referent then this fits clearly with Rom. 5 and 1 Cor. 15. Taken in conjunction with the indisputable and highly similar portrayals of Adam in Rom. 5 and 1 Cor. 15, the likelihood of any kind of pre-fall description focused on Adam's initial splendor becomes even slimmer.

<sup>5</sup> Lincoln and Penna both avoid the problems caused by these verses for their view of Adam by claiming that a new argument begins in v.44b/v.45, where Paul's view of Adam is not connected to his depiction of bodies in the previous argument. That a significant change in context or argument occurs between v.44a and v.44b remains to be adequately demonstrated. See Lincoln *Paradise*, 42; cf., Romano Penna, "Adamic Christology and Anthropological Optimism in 1 Corinthians 15:45-49," in *Paul the Apostle, Volume One: Jew and Greek Alike*, 206-231 (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1996), 208.

<sup>6</sup> See also Rom. 8:21 where creation is described as being in bondage to *φθορᾶ*.

<sup>7</sup> Greg Beale has argued, in personal conversation, that *ἀτιμία* is used by Paul in comparative contexts where the negative sense of the term is limited to the contrast, appearing in light only of the better, more honorable alternative. The implication of this argument is

The point of v.47 is to demonstrate that Adam and Christ stand as signifiers for the two creations that they represent.<sup>8</sup> The comparison highlights the differences between two orders of existence, two distinct ages, two creations.<sup>9</sup> This is in evidence as far back as vv.23–38 in which Paul adopts the language of Psalms 8 and 110 in order to show Christ's supremacy over all creation. This is the language of ruling kingdoms, and initiating epochs. There is no pristine Adam in view in this chapter.

To summarize: Paul is not concerned with Adam apart from how he serves to explain the existence of sin and death, and stands in contrast to Christ. There is no thought of a return to Adam's pre-fallen state in this chapter. As Anthony Thiselton has said of Adam's role in vv.45–46, "Adam is no archetypal model who represents Ideal Humanity; he stands for all that is fallen and destructive...the resurrection carries with it no "myth of eternal return" but the promise of new creation."<sup>10</sup>

#### B. THE ICON OF ADAM IN 1 CORINTHIANS 15:49

In v.49 Paul continues to use the language of vv.47–48, bringing it to a climax by applying the condition of the "earthly" man and the condition of the "heavenly" man to humanity in its two distinct spheres (creation and new creation). Paul describes himself and his Corinthian correspondents as bearing τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ χοϊκοῦ while longing to bear τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ ἐπουρανίου. What, however, does Paul mean by ἡ εἰκὼν τοῦ χοϊκοῦ? The term χοϊκός is rare, possibly coined by Paul himself. It links back to the LXX of Gen. 2:7 where the noun χοῦς is used to describe the dust out of which Adam is formed. Dust is indicative of mortality, a reminder that all life eventually turns to dust under foot.

The existential and theological problem that lies behind 1 Corinthians 15 is the problem of death. This has led at least one scholar to declare that "death itself is the focal issue" in 1 Cor. 15.<sup>11</sup> Emphasis on the death of

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that ἀτιμία can be used rhetorically to describe the movement from lesser to greater without making a substantive claim as to the nature of the object in question. This is possibly true of the use of the term in Rom. 9:21; 2 Cor. 6:8; 11:21 and 2 Tim. 2:20. However, in both 1 Cor. 11:14 and Rom. 1:26 the term is used in regards to activities that are specifically described as contrary to nature. Given this fact it seems impossible that Paul would turn around and use the term in 15:42 to describe Adam in a pre-fallen, sinless state set in contrast to future, eschatological perfection along an axis of movement from lesser to greater.

<sup>8</sup> To speak of Christ's origin is not a reference to pre-existence, but to his return. As James Dunn says, "To interpret the 'man from heaven' as a reference to pre-existence mistakes the eschatological character of Christ's last-Adam-ness." See, James Dunn, *Christology in the Making: An Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London: SCM Press, 1989, 2nd ed.), 308, fn.41. Cf., 1 Thess. 4:16–17.

<sup>9</sup> See Lincoln, *Paradise*, 46, and Dunn, *Christology*, 107.

<sup>10</sup> Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1284, italics original.

<sup>11</sup> Martinus de Boer, *The Defeat of Death: Apocalyptic Eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5*, JSNTSup 22 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 114, fn.16. Cf., Christopher M. Tuckett, "The Corinthians Who Say 'There is No Resurrection of the Dead' (1 Cor 15,12)," in *The Corinthian Correspondence*, ed., R. Bieringer (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 247–275; at 263–264.

Christ in vv.1–11 points to this cosmic problem of death, a theme which is re-emphasized in vv.25–28 where the future destruction of death serves to remind the letter's recipients that it remains a problem for them in the present, even while its future annihilation is assured. The theme of death and its destruction is repeated as the denouement of the chapter in vv.54–57, where the prophecies of Isaiah and Hosea are fulfilled in the promised final destruction of death.

The sheer repetition of the vocabulary of death in this chapter gives some indication of the centrality of the theme. The noun νεκρός occurs 13 times between vv.12 and 52 alone. The verb ἀποθνήσκω occurs 5 times throughout the chapter, and κοιμάω, as a reference to death, is found on 4 occasions. Furthermore, the contrast between perishable and imperishable, which is first articulated in v. 42a, is repeated four times.<sup>12</sup>

Given this context it seems clear that the ἔικων τοῦ χοίκοῦ of v. 49 refers to Adam's death as the consequence of his sin and the inheritance of humankind.<sup>13</sup> But how does Paul come to use the language of "image" in this context? Some scholars believe that the context of 15:45–49 is an underlying debate between Paul and those espousing a Philonic anthropology based on a dualistic interpretation of Gen. 1:27 and Gen. 2:7. They therefore assume that Paul is interacting with a tradition rooted in Gen. 1:27 and offering an alternative interpretation of that text.<sup>14</sup> Paul has already alluded to the creation of Adam in the image of God in 11:27, when he refers to man's status as the image and glory of God (εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ ὑπάρχων).<sup>15</sup> However, in 15:49 it is not the image of God (εἰκὼν θεοῦ) to which Paul refers, but the image of the dusty man (τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ χοίκοῦ). This very different description of the εἰκὼν born by man suggests the possibility that Paul is referring to something entirely different.

It is right to look back to the creation narrative for the answer, but one should not be limited to the narrative of Gen. 1–2. Because Paul's focus is on Adam and not merely the narrative of creation, it is quite possible that this allusion refers to another passage where Adam is mentioned, especially where the concept of "image" is discussed. If Paul is drawing on the story of Adam captured in the early chapters of Genesis, then it is more likely

<sup>12</sup> Scott Brodeur, *The Holy Spirit's Agency in the Resurrection of the Dead: An Exegetical Theological Study of 1 Corinthians 15,44b–39 and Romans 8,9–13*, TGST 14 (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1996), 28.

<sup>13</sup> See Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 794.

<sup>14</sup> James Dunn and C. K. Barrett are fairly representative. See Dunn, *Christology*, 100, and C. K. Barrett, *From First Adam to Last* (London: A&C Black, 1962), 75. Neither Barrett nor Dunn want to argue that Paul had read Philo, rather, they believe that his ideas and others like them were common currency in the Alexandrian based Judaism of Paul's day. One problem with this view of the discussion in 1 Cor. 15 is that it assumes that Paul distinguishes, like Philo, between a pre-fall and fallen Adam. As argued earlier this distinction plays no part in Paul's clear references to Adam.

<sup>15</sup> This verse proves troublesome to most commentators as Paul's reference to "image" here does not fit in with any of his other explicit descriptions of "image."

that the background to this reference is Genesis 5, which speaks of Seth's birth in the image of Adam.<sup>16</sup>

## II. GENESIS 5 AND THE IMAGE OF ADAM

Death is first mentioned in Scripture in Gen. 2:17. God says to Adam, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Use of the infinitive absolute emphasizes the starkness of the warning: "dying you shall die." In chapter 3, the woman repeats this warning, adding that to touch the tree is to bring on certain death, to which the serpent responds, "you will not surely die." Having eaten, the guilty pair is discovered and a curse pronounced in 3:19, where dust signifies death,

By the sweat of your face  
you shall eat bread,  
till you return to the ground,  
for out of it you were taken;  
for you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return.

Much has been made of the fact that the promise of instant death and the curse of death do not align. Adam and Eve do not physically die on the day of their eating.<sup>17</sup> They are very much alive in exile, enduring the pain of rebellion and passing it on to their children. But this apparent inconsistency is almost certainly overstated. We ought to take 2:17 at face value, allowing it to shape our understanding of the meaning of death, rather than the other way around. It is far more likely that Adam and Eve *do* die upon eating, but we have so narrowed down the meaning of death that we miss the full extent of its meaning. This is the first hint we have that punishment by death means more than mere mortality. It is a theme to which we will return.

In chapter 4 the curse of death is realized in the appalling violence of Abel's murder. Cain is cut-off from the generations of Adam and replaced by Seth. But even with this fresh start, there is no escaping the reality of death. Genesis 5 begins,

<sup>16</sup> Other scholars note the possibility, or likelihood of this link. See, C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, BNTC (London: A&C Black, 1971, Second edition), 377; Christian Wolff, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther*, THzNT 7 (Leipzig: Evz-Verlag, 1996), 411; David Lincicum, "Genesis in Paul," in Maarten JJ. Menken and Steve Moyise, eds., *Genesis in the New Testament*, LNTS Vol. 466 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 105; and Menahem Kister, "First Adam' and 'Second Adam' in 1 Cor. 15:45-49 in the Light of Midrashic Exegesis and Hebrew Usage" in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Literature*, 351-365, eds., Reimund Bieringer, Florentino García Martínez, Didier Pollefeft, and Peter J. Tomson (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 393.

<sup>17</sup> See Jubilees 4:30, *Genesis Rabbah* 16:6 and 19:8 for early attempts to explain this apparent inconsistency.

This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. <sup>2</sup>Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. <sup>3</sup>When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. <sup>4</sup>The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were 800 years; and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>5</sup>Thus all the days that Adam lived were 930 years, and he died.

The *toledot* of Adam begins with the glory of creation. Gen. 5:1–2 recall God’s creation of man and woman in his image and likeness in 1:26–28. In v.3 Adam is depicted as fulfilling the command to be fruitful by fathering a son in his own image and likeness. He then exercises the authority of his vice-regency and the likeness he bears to God by naming his son.

Elsewhere in Genesis the idea of creation in the *εἰκων* of another is mentioned only in 1:26, 27 and 9:6. In each of these the reference is to the *εἰκων* of God. Only in Gen. 5:3 is the *εἰκων τοῦ Ἀδάμ* mentioned. Many commentators treat this simply as an echo of Gen 1:26–27, asserting that Adam passes on the image in which he was created to Seth. In other words, the “image of Adam” is the “image of God.”<sup>18</sup> However, this is not the only way to read the text. One must first ask why Seth is described as the “image of Adam,” if the writer’s intent is to say that he was born in the image of God. Would it not have been simpler to say that Seth too was born in the image of God? Second, while this interpretation of 5:3 rightly notes the mention of Adam’s creation in God’s image in 5:1 it ignores the remainder of the chapter as it develops. It is precisely in the remainder of the chapter that an alternative understanding becomes more likely.

Genesis 5:5 ends with the starkly final phrase, “and he died.” The description of each of the generations from Adam to Noah (with the notable exception of Enoch) ends in the same formulaic manner with the final verb, *ἀπέθανεν*. Prior to the eight occurrences of *ἀποθνήσκω* in Gen. 5 the term occurs only three times in the Genesis narrative, as we have already noted: in God’s warning of the penalty for eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17), in Eve’s repetition of that warning to the serpent (Gen. 3:3), and in Satan’s denial that this promised death will come (Gen. 3:4). Death is present after the eviction from the garden, as evidenced in the story of Cain and Abel described in Gen. 4, but the multi-generational reality of death is a fresh emphasis in chapter 5, echoing the earlier language of death as divine penalty.

In 5:5 the parallels with creation come to an abrupt end in the stark conclusion of Adam’s life. Death now beats a dreary rhythm throughout the chapter as the one, enduring continuity from generation to generation. Rusty Reno describes the path worn by the genealogy as it unfolds,

Seth is enrolled with Adam in the project of physical survival that brings death as its future. He cannot but live in the shadow of the first sin. The patriarchs of old live long lives, but they die in the

<sup>18</sup> See Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1987), 127; and Nahum Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989), 42.

end. Thus the genealogy flowing from Adam gives us a picture of a fresh but failed effort to escape the gravitational force of the first sin. Even as the genealogy begins anew with Seth, he and his descendants slowly but inevitably trace a declining arc toward the target of death.<sup>19</sup>

Two themes dominate Genesis 5: fruitfulness and death. The first is fulfillment of humankind's divine vocation; the second is fulfillment of the divine curse. For the author to explain that Adam "fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth," does not merely indicate a passing on of the divine image.<sup>20</sup> This is now the image of Adam, and that image is death.

This interpretation of the image of Adam finds limited support in other Jewish literature.<sup>21</sup> *2 Baruch* 17:2–3 points to Genesis 5, noting that Adam's life, though long, ended in death and led to death for others. There is no mention of Adam's image, but the writer recognizes that Adam's death is the root cause of the death of his descendants based on his reading of Genesis 5. In a text that relates indirectly, *Wisdom of Solomon* 2:23 links the image of God in man to immortality. This is one of the few passages in the LXX that uses the term εἴκων in reference to man's creation as the image of God.<sup>22</sup> In v.24 this eternal image stands in contrast to death, which has been brought into the world by the devil and is reserved for those who take his side. James Dunn notes the confluence in thought between this passage in *Wisdom of Solomon* and the Pauline writings, and goes so far as to say that "the vocabulary and ideas here form an echo chamber for several of Paul's own theological assertions in this area...we can be confident that Paul was aware of such theological reflection and probably drew on it."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> R. R. Reno, *Genesis*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), 111–12.

<sup>20</sup> *Contra* Sarna, 42

<sup>21</sup> In addition to the works briefly cited here, one must consider the astonishing parallelism of a passage in the *Sifra* (*Sifra Hova*, *parasha* 12:12), with Romans 5:12–21, in which the sin of Adam leads to the condemnation of all men. This work is discussed at length in, Menahem Kister "Romans 5:12–21 against the background of Torah-Theology and Hebrew Usage," in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 100, No. 4 (2007): 391–424. Kister argues that the *Sifra* passage depends on earlier Jewish traditions that Paul was likely to have known. See also a saying attributed to Rabbi Yehuda in *Sifra Deuteronomy* 323, commenting on Dt. 32:32; and *4 Ezra* 4.31–32 which has overtones of Rom. 5:16. Both appear to link Adam's death with that of his descendants.

<sup>22</sup> Levison concurs that the sage's understanding of the "content of the image is immortality," although he specifies that this is an immortality of the soul, which he points out may be quite a different understanding of immortality than that presented by Paul (See John R. Levison, *Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism: From Sirach to 2 Baruch*, JSPSS 1 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 50–51 and 293, n.31.

<sup>23</sup> James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 86. See also *Sirach* 17:3. However, a nearly opposite perspective on human mortality is found in *Sirach* 33:7–13, where the author argues that humankind is mortal from birth due to our formation from the dust. This mortality is in no way linked to the divine image, but neither is it linked to Adam's fall. As Levison has said, for *Sirach* "death is part of God's ordering of the cosmos...not a later aberrance in the cosmos; it has the purpose of punishing the wicked and bringing release from the burdens of life" (see Levison, *Portraits*, 43).



Peter Enns claims that “what is missing from the Old Testament is any indication that Adam’s disobedience is the cause of universal sin, death, and condemnation, as Paul seems to argue.”<sup>24</sup> While Enns is right to point out the paucity of Adamic references in the Old Testament, his claim here seems at odds with Genesis 5. Add to this the likelihood that Paul is drawing on Genesis 5 in 1 Corinthians 15 and we see that Paul’s understanding of Adam’s sin and death are in fact dependent on a close reading of the Hebrew Scriptures. Enns claims that, “Paul’s understanding of Adam is shaped by Jesus, not the other way around.”<sup>25</sup> There is truth to this, but it is overstated. Paul has an understanding of Adam’s role that is consistent with other strands of Jewish tradition and rooted in Genesis 3 and 5.

One final speculation regarding Genesis 5 is worth indulging. In treatments of Gen. 1:26–28 commentators refer to the practice of kings in the Ancient Near East who placed images of themselves at the border of their territories in order to denote the place of their rule. This practice, if it was indeed well-known, has implications for our understanding of the language of Genesis 5 in addition to Genesis 1. When Adam fathers Seth in his image is there not an implication that Adam’s image stands over Seth and his descendants as a symbolic power? If that image is death, then it stands cruelly over humanity in the land east of Eden.

### III. THE REIGN OF DEATH IN ROMANS 5

The only other place in the undisputed letters in which Paul refers to Adam by name is Rom. 5:12–21 (cf., 1 Tim. 2:13–14). Here Adam is portrayed in similar terms to that of 1 Corinthians 15, as the representative man through whom sin and death are introduced to humanity.

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—<sup>13</sup>for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.<sup>14</sup>Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

I want to address this passage only very briefly, in order to highlight Paul’s interest in and understanding of death.

Much like in 1 Corinthians 15, the broader context of Rom. 5:12–21 is the contrast between life and death. Of the 113 appearances of ζῶη and cognates in the undisputed Pauline letters, nearly 25% appear in Rom. 5–8 alone. Similarly, the term θάνατος and cognates appear 95 times in the undisputed Pauline letters, with a remarkable 44%, occurring in Rom. 5–8.<sup>26</sup> Although one can only learn so much from the concentration of particular vocabulary, this high concentration points to the fact that the

<sup>24</sup> Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2012), 82.

<sup>25</sup> Enns, *Evolution*, 122.

<sup>26</sup> C. Clifton Black, “Pauline Perspectives on Death in Romans 5–8,” *JBL* 103 (1984): 413–433, at 413, fn.2.

fundamental contrast in Romans 5–8 is that between death and life. It is in this context that the contrast between Adam and Christ once again appears.

Here, as in 1 Corinthians 15, Adam is the death-bringer. As a result of his sin, Adam brings the curse of death on himself and all humanity. One theme developed in Romans 5, which is not clearly mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15, is that of the reign of death. Three times in vv.12–21 Paul describes death as “reigning” over humanity (vv.14, 17, 21). This depiction of death as an alien power, or usurping king, is a potent one. As Tom Schreiner writes,

Death reigns as a power over those who are in Adam, for death is not merely an event that occurs but a state in which human beings live as a result of Adam’s sin...death can’t be limited to spiritual or physical death, for both realities are designated by the word “death.”...physical death stands as the culmination point for the spiritual death that dominated human beings during their earthly lives.<sup>27</sup>

Schreiner’s observations remind us of the depth of Paul’s theological reflections on death and force us to take seriously this persistent focus in his thought.

#### IV. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON WHAT IT MEANS TO BEAR THE IMAGE OF ADAM

When Paul refers to image of the earthly man in 1 Corinthians 15 he means Adam, whose primary identity in the course of Paul’s argument is death-bringer. This understanding of Adam’s image is, I believe, rooted in Paul’s reading of Genesis 1–5, particularly the reference to Seth, whom Adam fathered in his own image and likeness. Paul’s interest in the death of Adam and the subsequent death of all humankind continues in Romans 5. There too, Adam’s primary identity is death-bringer. In this passage, the oppressive rule of death as an alien power over humankind is particularly emphasized in the thrice-repeated refrain that “death reigns.” These observations lead me to several reflections.

The first is to wonder: have we in the evangelical community focused on Adam’s sin at the expense of tending to his death? It is far more common to hear a sermon or teaching on “original sin” than on “original death,” and while the former is crucial to Paul and inextricably tied to the latter, the latter seems to carry greater weight in the argument of Romans 5–8 and 1 Corinthians 15 than is generally noted. Treatments of Romans 5, in particular, tend to focus on Paul’s understanding of sin rather than the reality of death. This imbalance ought to be addressed.

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas Schreiner, “Original Sin and Original Death: Romans 5:12–19,” in Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves, eds., *Adam, The Fall, and Original Sin* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 284.

A second reflection, related to the first, is that too often scholars seem to regard death in Paul's writings as a "theological" issue, not an existential or pastoral one. These were letters, written mostly to friends, with whom Paul had shared the intimacy of death. This seems clear from his references to those who have already died in 1 Cor. 15. As students of Paul we must remember this reality because it encourages us to read his letters as profoundly pastoral theology. We do well to follow Paul's example by reflecting faithfully on the reality of death, the foreignness of death (as an invading tyrant to be defeated by Christ), the pain and tragedy of death, and the astonishing new reality that death for Christians is now considered "sleep," because we share the life of Christ in our mortal bodies—that life which transcends physical death.

The pastoral necessity for this kind of multifaceted reflection came home to me as I sat in the surgical waiting room with the family of Judy S., listening as her neurosurgeon gave us the awful news. Her death was, as I described it at the beginning, almost a mockery of life. To be killed by a tuft of grass after successfully battling cancer points to the awful absurdity of this foreign power in our lives. There is a great existential need for us to think, preach and teach on death. One excellent example of this kind of theologizing is Ephraim Radner's recent book, *A Time to Keep*. More such volumes are needed, and the need is both exegetical and pastoral.

There is a cultural need as well. As many observers have pointed out, we live in culture of death. Abortion, infanticide, assisted suicide and euthanasia abound in western cultures. But alongside these wanton acts of murder the culture we inhabit is one that keeps death at a great distance: behind closed doors, with no shared language for discussing it. The serpent's great lie in Genesis 3 is to convince Eve, "you shall not surely die." We live in a culture where death is sometimes described as a "choice," a cultural paradigm in which the lie is more readily believed than we like to think. This is due principally to abortion, but it is also the indirect result of myriad life-saving and life-sustaining medical innovations that are an enormous gift to humanity, but at the same time give a greater sense of control over the one great power we cannot control. Death reigns, to be sure, but it is often viewed as a distant monarch. We must close that distance in order to see it more clearly. We must resist the current trajectory, followed by many who have become convinced of the truth of evolutionary theory (of some kind), to minimize human death as a part of the natural course of life.

This leads to my third reflection. As someone who believes in an "old-earth" I am convinced that death occurs in creation prior to the curse of Adam. This means that the nature of the curse of death must signify either, that newly created human beings had not yet been subject to death, or that the death that followed Adam's sin is substantially different from the kind of death experienced by pre-Adamic *homo sapiens*. The common distinction between physical and spiritual death seems unhelpful at this point, because it has never been clear to me what "spiritual death" actually means. John Walton's approach, in which death is both a reality of non-ordered creation and a result of dis-ordered creation, may prove helpful, but his approach woefully underappreciates the disordering power of death brought on by

Adam's sin, as depicted by Paul.<sup>28</sup> This is seen most clearly in his proposal that the tree of life was an "antidote" to death, which is demonstrably false in the divine logic that lies behind expulsion from the garden (Gen. 3:22).

Death is an enemy to be defeated, not a reality to be overcome or a disease to be cured—it is disorder, not merely non-order. I believe we need to theologize more carefully and systematically about what might be called "total death," which seems at least marginally better as a description of the death that Adam bestows, than to simply call it "spiritual." This will allow us to speak about death as more than the cessation of breath and the stilling of hearts, inviting us to consider death in all its ramifications as a product of human sin.

I want to end with two conclusions. First, the significance of Adam's death for Paul's theological and pastoral logic requires that he was in fact a living man who endured the curse he brought on us all. This is not limited to physical death, but certainly includes that death. That this is obvious for Paul has been affirmed even by those who themselves question the historicity of Adam. For Paul, Adam had to be a living man *because he died*. The way in which I have phrased that last sentence, however, might give one pause; I believe it reflects Paul's logical priorities. Paul is more interested in the death of Adam and what that signifies, than in the life of Adam. For Paul it is the life of Christ and the *death* of Adam that matter. But because his theology requires the actual death of Adam it seems undeniable to assert that he lived as well!

Second, and building on the first conclusion, if Adam has agency as the bringer of death, must he not be an actual person? Adam is a type of Christ, to be sure, but he is also the agent of death. I do not see how a type can also be an agent without being an actual person. Agency would seem to imply historicity.

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<sup>28</sup> See his discussion in John Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2015), 149-160.