

The reign of sin and death theology religion essay



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Student's name: Carlington Hamilton Course: Bachelor in Divinity (BD) Please tick relevant University: University of Manchester University of Wales / University of Chester Date submitted: 28/01/2013 Unit/ Module number and name: 223 Pauline Letter in English Essay title: What are the nature and implications of the parallels Paul draws between Adam and Christ in Romans 5? Actual word count: 3172 Tutor's name: Revd Simon Jones Tick if true: I was granted an extension for this essay. I have requested an extension for this essay. Essay is late. Essay is a resubmission. Declaration: m In submitting this essay I declare that I have read the chapter on plagiarism in the student handbook, and that this essay is in no way the result of plagiarism. (Copies of this chapter are located in the library, in the student lounge and at reception.) I have not submitted any of this material for prior assessments. I have also ticked the relevant boxes above. Signed: hamilton NOTE: All relevant course work must be resubmitted together with this Essay Cover Sheet and the Coursework Report Sheet for assessment by the external examiners at the end of your course. Students at level 6 should also submit an electronic copy to essays@spurgeons.ac.uk Students on courses validated by the University of Manchester and all students at Masters' level should submit two hard copies via the essay tray.

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What are the nature and implications of the parallels Paul draws between Adam and Christ in Romans 5?

A paper submitted for Bachelor in Divinity (BD)

By

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Date: 28th January 2013

Word Count 3172

All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Versions of the Bible unless otherwise stated

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1. 0 Introduction

The fact that, the Genesis account of Adam's universal sin and death over humanity becomes a plight in Paul's argument in Romans 5; he however,

argued in Romans 5 that sin and death that was cause by Adam was justified or reconciled by Jesus Christ to demonstrate God's righteousness and how it works through faith to make human righteous through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, this argument led to the parallel Paul draw between Adam and Jesus Christ in Romans 5: 12-21. However, because of the intricacy of Paul's arguments and parallel between Adam and Christ there are many questions and different interpretation such as; how does one man sin be a punishment to death to the whole of humanity? Does the Mosaic Law change sin and death or what is the role of the law? Who is the type of Adam to come? And how is Adam a type of Jesus Christ? Martin Luther argued, ' as Adam became a cause of death to his descendants, so is Christ has become a dispenser of righteousness to those who are of him'.¹ However, although Paul's argument in Romans 5 would therefore seems to ' falls naturally into two section which are intimately related, Romans 5: 1-11 emphasizes the reality of the gift of God given to us in Christ while in 5: 12-21, he stresses the greatness and character of that gift however, the question is; how one person's sacrifice could have brought such blessings to so many'.²

Therefore, in Paul's argument in Romans 5 he will demonstrate the gift of God's grace and mercy and not only that he will demonstrate these gifts, but also stressed the impact sin and death and the undoing through grace and life has on humanity. Therefore, this essay will examine Paul's argument in Romans 5 using scholarly material and authoritative internet sources to probe what are the nature and implication of the parallels Paul draw between Adam and Christ, first I will examine Paul's argument on the reign of sin and death, the argument of original sin, the law and its purpose, condemnation

and judgement in Adam, the contrast between Adam and Christ, to arrive at a meaningful conclusion.

2.0 The Reign of Sin and Death (Rom: 5: 12)

Paul relates his argument in Romans 5: 12 on the fact that because of 'one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin and death spread to all men'. This verse would therefore seem to be that Paul goes back to the origin of sin and the reign of death in a different perspective from his other arguments on idolatry. ³ He argues that through this one man act or disobedience all men sinned and all men will suffer death as a penalty for this act of disobedience. However, in describing this act Paul draws on a historical event that establishes an account to Adam the first man that he was responsible for the entry of sin and death into the world. ⁴ This account that Paul draws from is related to Genesis 1-3 whereas Adam was known to be the first man created and the first man who sinned after he disobeyed an instruction by God. Moreover, the effect by which Paul's use of Adam in his argument in Romans 5: 12-21 would seem to emphasize that Adam was the one who is responsible for the entry of sin and the reign of death in the world that brings to the condition of mankind because of that transgression. ⁵ Although Paul didn't comment on the link of Adam's sin from one generation to another, he left the process by which means this sinful nature is transmitted unexplained to how all mankind sinned. Barrett affirms, that though Paul argues that, "all men sin, and that all men die because they sinned" that Paul did not add to his argument that it was because they are physically descended from Adam. Therefore, the fact that Adam is perhaps responsible

for the origin of sin and the reign of death in the world, it could be argued that Paul made no conclusion that Adam is responsible for individual sin. 6

1 Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1977), p96-97. 2 Luke Timothy Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological commentary* (New York: The Crossroads, 1997), p78. 3 N. T. Wright, 'Romans and the Theology of Paul', in *Pauline Theology Vol111*, ed. by David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p30-67. 4 A. Katherine Grieb, *The Story of Romans: A Narrative Defense of God's Righteousness* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p64. 5 L. J. Kreitzer, 'Adam and Christ', in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, ed. by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid (Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1993), p12-13. 6 C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: A. and C. Black Limited, 1975), p110-111 However, Paul's argument led to the concept of the doctrine of the "Original Sin" in Christian Theology that was centred on the rationality of the imputation of Adam's sin to us. Therefore, in Paul's argument he perhaps sees a universal death due to a universal sin that has passed upon all mankind or humanity, because of the fact that we were in Adam.

3. 0 Original Sin in Relation to Paul's Argument

Furthermore, in this aspect of Paul's argument he never uses words as "original sin," but the term was first used by Augustine in the 4th century in a partial debate with Pelagius suggesting that 'by his sin Adam fell from his original supernatural status, and that through human propagation, which

involved concupiscence, the lack of grace was passed on to every human being descended from Adam. 7 The fact, that this argument was more of a systematic theology debate between the two, the observation of their discussion perhaps may have serve as a clarification by the use of Paul's thought according to (vs. 12). Therefore, the argument in (vs. 12) may have sparked different views and interpretation of the implication used by Paul in his argument relating to the ' sin of one man and the reign of death into the world'. However, the term " original sin" became a context that most scholars seem to use in relation to Paul's argument in (vs. 12). Therefore, Martin Luther agrees with Barrett, that though Paul mentioned in (vs. 12) the words, " death by sin" clearly demonstrated that he is referring to the " original sin" and not the actual sin that an individual incur. 8 Here Luther seem to make suggestion refer to " original sin" so in like of Augustine many commentator uses this term of " original sin" to support their argument, also Luther seems to relate this argument with Paul's suggestion in 1 Corinth 15: 22 that, ' for as in Adam all die,' not through this one man that all mankind dies but as mankind were in this one man they dies. According to Luke Timothy Johnson, ' Thus, Adam sin would be one that did not only influence all others, but actually ontologically contained all others'. 9 This would therefore seems to suggest that because Adam was the first man that sins, and of this sin all mankind face death as a penalty not because of Adam sin but because we were in Adam. Therefore Paul is perhaps emphasising his argument in relation to the preceding context leading up to Romans 5: 1-11.

4. 0 Solidarity in Sinfulness for all Humanity (Rom 5: 13)

Although, in (vs 12) Paul draw an implication of the entry of sin by the one man and death spread or reign because of this sin, he also made mention of the undoing or the coming of the undoing by one man in (vs. 15 and 18). However, Chae suggest that ' Paul's overall intentions is no doubt to affirms the overwhelming sufficiency of Christ's power to overcome all the consequences of Adam's disobedience (Rom 5: 15, 17)'.¹⁰ Therefore, the fact that Paul draw to the universal shift to his focus that seems to further affirms that all humanity or mankind whether Gentiles or Jews belong to the Adamic route would therefore seem that Adam in Paul's argument represent the solidarity in sinfulness for all humanity or mankind. Moreover, Paul is perhaps implying that if this be the case then Jews are likewise in Adam as the Gentiles as he previously argued in Rom 1: 18-3: 20.

4. 1 The Law and Sin (Rom 5: 13-14a)

However, in (vs. 13) Paul give an implication that though sin was in the world, this sin was perhaps universal until the law, but was not charged to sinners accounts. Furthermore, perhaps because Paul's addressees were mainly Jewish he was perhaps compelled into giving an account of the purpose of the law and the relation between the law and sin so he perhaps interrupts his contrast between Adam and Christ to mention the

⁷ Herman Ridderbos , Paul: An Outline of His Theology (London: SPCK, 1977), p96. ⁸ Luther, Commentary on Romans, p94-95. ⁹ Johnson, Reading Roman, p88. ¹⁰ Daniel J-S Chae, Paul as Apostle to the Gentiles: His Apostolic Self-Awareness and its Influence on the Soteriological Argument in Roman
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(Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 1997), p210. purpose or role of the law and sin. However, he emphasised that sin and death already entered and reigned in the world before the law that was given to Moses according to (vs. 13-14). Therefore, though sin was universal before the law or sin predates the law, the law cannot do anything to change that. For some commentator the term " sin" means going astray and the " law" is that it carries a specific commandment while to " trespass or transgression" is going across the line. So, in (vs. 13) Paul is perhaps suggesting that, ' even before the law sin was already present and that sin is not reckoned where there is no law'. 11 Therefore, Paul is implying that sin did not come or entered into the world by breaking the law, because sin was already exist before the law. However, in reference to this argument some commentator seems to agree. Hay and Johnson suggest that; ' The Israel story first appears in Rom 5: 13-14 where Paul interrupts his comparison of Adam and Christ with the statement that although sin is only " reckoned" in the presence of law, death nevertheless reigned over those who had not sinned against a specific command. The rhetorical usefulness of placing this statement at this position in the argument is not entirely clear. Paul's point, after all is simply that even people who did not violate a specific command of God, as Adam had, nevertheless sinned and so were subject to death'. 12 Although Paul's argument here did not instead lift up Israel above the rest of mankind or humanity in reference to the law, but however, shows a brighter interest on the fact they too was in Adam. 13 Therefore, Paul's argument in (vs. 13-14) is not in fact in favour of Jews. But to gives further support to his argument that sin was long predated the law, as Adam predated Moses and the punishment was death, although there were those who have never

experience death by transgression or violated a specific law or command of God. However, as Adam sinned and was subjected to death so are those from Adam to Moses and after Moses. 14 The fact that there are those people who openly disobeyed God's moral law that is the law that was placed in mankind hearts Rom 2: 14 face the penalty for that act which is the punishment that comes by sin.

5. 0 Adam a Type of Him to Come (Rom 5: 14b)

However, Paul's argument and explanation in (vs. 13-14a) led to a parallel or an analogy where he describes Adam as a "type of the one to come" in (vs. 14b), for most commentators and scholars they reference to the Messiah Jesus Christ. 15 According to Malina and Pilch, 'a type is a person or thing symbolising or exemplifying the defining characteristics of Jesus, the one who was to come. 16 Therefore, in (vs. 14b) Paul begins his parallels or analogy between Adam and Christ which is also clear from how his argument in Romans 8 develops.

5. 1 Universal Consequences of Adam and Christ (Rom 5: 14b)

However, according to Barrett, 'Paul introduces this remark without warning or explanation; he knew that he was treading familiar ground. In various ways, the first man and the redeemer had been compared, contrasted and even identified'. 17 Although there are no explanations that follow Paul's parallel or analogy of Adam as a type of Jesus Christ, there are questions to what Paul is implying such as how is Adam a type of Christ? According to Achtemeier, 'it was thus the universal consequences of Adam's disobedience which anticipated the universal consequences of Christ's obedience. It is because

of those universal consequences that Paul calls Adam Prototype of Christ'. 18 Therefore, according to Luther's argument to the question is that;

11 Paul Achtemeier, *Romans interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1985), p96. 12 David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson, *Pauline Theology Volume 111: Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), p178. 13 Grieb, *The Story of Romans*, p65. 14 Hay and Johnson, p179. 15 Chae, *Paul as Apostle to the Gentile*, p211. 16 Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary: on the Letters of Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), p249. 17 Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p112. 18 Achtemeier, *Romans interpretation*, p97-98.' As Adam became a cause of death to his descendants, though they did not eat of the forbidden tree, so Christ has become a dispenser of righteousness to those who are of him, though they have not earned any righteousness; for through the cross he has secured (righteousness) for all men. The figure of Adam's transgression is in us, for we die just as though we have sinned as he did. The figure of Christ is in us, for live just as though we had fulfilled all righteousness as he did'. 19 Luther's argument here is supported by Paul's argument in (vs. 19). However, Paul's argument in (vs. 14b), is where he was focus on sin and death through Adam, and the suggestion to the parallel figure of Christ. Stott affirms, ' it is enough to call Adam the typos of Christ, because he prefigured and foreshadows him, like Adam, Christ is the head of a whole humanity'. 20 Therefore, Adam and Christ are perhaps similar because of the fact they each have a universal impact on humanity where

both of them founded families that form their individualities or characteristics, but however are not equal.

6.0 Adam and Christ Contrasted between Trespass and Righteousness (Rom 5: 15-17)

However, after mentioning that Adam is a type of Christ (vs. 14b), Paul didn't mention or explain how, but instead stresses while they are a type, they are not equals. Therefore, Chae affirms ' Adam and Christ are compared in their capacity representing all humanity in their solidarity, but the effects of such representation are sharply contrasted'.²¹ Although, Achtemeier affirms that, ' The parallelism implied in that anticipation by Adam of Christ is not entirely balanced, however, because trespass and grace are not equivalent (vs. 15). Paul explains why the following verses (16-17). The reasons are twofold: one implied and one stated. The implied reason is that it takes much more power to overcome (by obedience) the effects of sin once that power has been let loose than it took originally (by disobedience) to allow sin to enter. The stated reason is that an act which brings life is greater than an act which brings death'.²² Therefore, what Paul is implying according to Achtemeier, although Adam is a type of Jesus Christ (vs. 14b) they are not equal. So, the contrast between Adam and Christ in (vs. 15-17) is that what the righteousness or grace of God has done through Jesus Christ is much greater than the undoing of Adam's sin that brings to the imbalanced of the parallelism in (vs. 15-17).

6. 1 The Contrast between Condemnation and Justification (Rom 5: 15-16)

According to Stott, ' the nature of their action was different. But the gift is not like the trespass (vs. 15a)'.²³ Grieb agrees with Stott, by suggesting that, ' Paul wants us to appreciate the nature of the great imbalance between Adam and Christ'.²⁴ Therefore, the action of Adam is sin which embrace its condemnation which is death (vs. 15-16), whereas Jesus Christ's action is God's gift of grace which embrace justification that brings new creation or life out of death. According to (vs. 16b), " through one man transgression comes judgement and the result is condemnation. However, through God's gift of grace, that is through Jesus Christ, that led to justification". According to Barrett, ' from one transgressor is a possible alternative, but the parallel expression in a context of many transgressions suggests that the deeds rather than the doer forms the correct supplement'.²⁵ therefore the contrast or parallel Paul draws demonstrates the Obedience act of Jesus Christ to the fact that the outcome change humanity.

¹⁹ Luther, Commentary on Romans, p96-97. ²⁰ Stott, The Message of Romans, p154. ²¹ Chae, Paul as Apostle to the Gentile, p211. ²² Achtemeier, Interpretation, p98. ²³ Stott, The Message of Romans, p154-155. ²⁴ Grieb, The Story of Romans, p65. ²⁵ Barrett, The Epistle to the Romans, p113-115.

6. 2 The Contrast of the Impact between Death and Life (Rom 5: 17)

In (vs. 17) Paul stresses the superiority of Jesus Christ's grace to Adam's sin which is the cause of death to reign over humanity. The fact that, death

reign from Adam to Moses the contrast or parallel Paul draws in (vs. 17) demonstrate that Christ's grace reigns in the life of humanity. Also the contrast Paul made is between death and life. Johnson affirms, ' Paul here makes explicit that death's rule over humans was effected through sin: " the sting of sin is death," he declares in 1 Cor 15: 56, but thanks be to God who gives us victory through Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15: 57)'. 26 Therefore, those who receive the gift of righteousness will reign in life. However, Paul here is perhaps demonstrating the resurrection life that we may participate in which has been initiated through Jesus Christ.

7.0 The Comparison between Adam and Christ (Rom 5: 18-21)

In (vs. 18-21), instead of contrasting Paul uses comparison. According to Stott, ' having completed his contrast between Adam and Christ, Paul now develops the comparison'. 27 Therefore, in (vs. 18), Paul would therefore seem to have finished his thought from (vs. 12) by noting the contrast of Adam and Christ acts. Paul's point is that as Adam's act led to condemnation so does Christ's act led to justification. In (vs. 19), Paul speaks of Adam's disobedience and Christ's obedience compare in relation to their action. Barrett affirms, ' Adam's disobedience did not mean that all men without their consent committed particular act it means they were born into a race which has separated them from God. Similarly Christ's obedience did not mean men did nothing but righteous acts, but in Christ they were related to God as Christ himself was to the Father'. 28 In (vs. 20), sin and Grace compare where the law still a problem. This is where Paul stresses the surplus of grace in Christ over sin in Adam. Finally, in (vs. 21) Paul contrasted Adam and Christ where

he completes his parallel on the fact that, through Adam sin reigned in death. Therefore, righteousness reigns through Jesus Christ's.

8. 0 Conclusion

In considering what are the nature and implications of the parallels Paul draws between Adam and Christ in Romans 5, would therefore seems that, from Rom 5: 12-21 Paul's argument was the focus of a historical acts of two individual with different characteristic that created an impact on the whole humanity. However the evidence would therefore seems that, the parallel in Paul's argument demonstrates the universal extent of the sin and guilt of humanity. Therefore, because of the true obedience of Christ, humanity have establish in the gift of God's righteousness through Jesus Christ. Therefore, it would seem to be that though Adam's sin reign in the punishment of death which is a universal consequence as Paul demonstrated in his parallel it would therefore seems that Christ in his undoing become as universal as Adam. However, although sin and death reign over all humanity, it could be argued that the affected work of Jesus Christ in terms of the effects to all humanity does not refer to the universality of all humanity or refer to absolute everybody. Therefore, the parallel Paul draws between Adam and Christ would seem to symbolise two humanities, which are related to Adam and Christ but in different ways. However, we as humanity are related to Adam by genetic birth, while those in Christ are related only by spiritual or new birth and by faith. Therefore, to conclude this argument Paul demonstrated a choice either to remain in Adam where sin and death is reign or to remain in Christ where grace and life reign. Although grace and

life is not universal as sin and death are, it give the confidence to humanity that many will be saved through the Jesus Christ redeeming works.

26 Johnson, Reading Romans, p91. 27 Stott, The Message of Romans, p156.

28 Barrett, The Epistle to the Romans, p177