Adamic Christology and its Implications for Christian Soteriology

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Abstract

The subject of Christology is indispensable in Christianity because the entire Christian gospel centers on the person and works of Jesus Christ. One of the Christological models espoused in the New Testament is Adamic Christology with its focus on the striking analogy between Adam’s sin and Christ’s atoning sacrifice. While allusions of the Adam-Christ comparison appear elsewhere in the New Testament (Luke 3–4; Heb. 2:5–18), the most explicit articulation is found in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. Most of the existing literature on the subject focus more on exegetical issues and fail to provide adequate theological analysis on the Adam-Christ comparison. Current interest in theological implications of the Adam-Christ comparison has prompted this paper which explores Adamic Christology based on a theological reading of Romans 5:12–21 and other relevant texts on subject. The researcher used a literary research design comprising textual, theological and historical analyses of data collected from commentaries, articles, books, and dissertations/theses. The main thesis of the paper is that despite remarkable continuities between Adam and Christ on the basis of an ontological inclusivity of all humankind in their vicarious humanity, Christ exceeds Adam in all soteriological respects as the one who reverses the effect of Adam’s sin and its effect on humanity by bestowing salvific benefits on all who express belief in his saving person and works. The paper is an interdisciplinary study that contributes to the fields of Systematic theology (particularly on the issues of hamartiology and soteriology) and New Testament studies (especially Pauline studies).

Keywords: Adam; Christ; Adamic Christology; Soteriology; Typology

Introduction

Christians traditionally hold that Adam was the first person in human history, and that his sin of disobeying God (Gen. 3) affected all his progeny. Consequent to Adam’s sin, God promised a Savior who was to come as a warrior to crush the head of the seed of the serpent who made Adam to sin (Gen. 3:15). New Testament writers identify Jesus Christ as the Savior sent on the head-crushing mission (1 John 3:8).
Thus, the New Testament both explicit (cf. Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:21–22, 45–49) and implicit (cf. Luke 3–4; Heb. 2:5–18) comparisons between these Adam and Christ. This leads to the typological relationship between the two figures in which Adam serves as a type of Christ (cf. Rom. 5:14).

The significance of Adam-Christ typology in Pauline Christology cannot be overstated. As an important topic, many scholars have published on the Adam-Christ comparison. The problem, however, is that most of the publications on texts related to Adam-Christ comparison are dominated by exegetical and background issues that tend to overshadow the theological perspective. This study addresses this literature gap by exploring Adamic Christology based on a theological reading of Romans 5:12-21. The choice of this text was informed by its details and unique presentation of the Adam-Christ analogy. As Fee (1987) rightly observes the Adam-Christ typology in Romans 5:12-21 is unique in terms of the degree of emphasis placed on the disjunction between the type and antitype. Nonetheless, relevant portions of 1 Corinthians 15 and other texts are considered at various points in the study to give a broader perspective on the subject matter.

The study is a literary research that collected data from commentaries, articles, books, and dissertations/theses. Exegetical details and background information were avoided in order to give room for theological analysis. After a critical analysis of the subject matter from a theological point of view, the paper found striking continuities between Adam and Christ on the basis of an ontological inclusivity of all humankind in their vicarious humanity. At the same time, it found that Christ reverses the effect of Adam’s sin on humanity by bestowing salvific benefits on all who express belief in his (Christ’s) saving person and works. The paper ended with implications for Christian soteriology.

**Brief Background**

Traditionally, the Apostle Paul is considered the author of the Book of Romans. Apart from the identification Paul as the author in the first verse of the letter (Rom. 1:1), the literary, historical, and theological style found in Romans are also found in Paul’s other writings. In addition, major Pauline themes, such as justification by faith, the role of the law, and the universal scope of the Gospel feature prominently in the Epistle to the Romans. Furthermore, the early Church Fathers and the broader early Christian tradition align with the attribution of the Epistle to the Romans to Paul (Uzodimma, 2018). Their writings consistently affirm Paul as the acknowledged author of this epistle.

Paul’s words were transcribed by Tertius (Rom. 16:22). The use of secretaries in letter writing was common first-century practices (Fitzmyer, 2011). The letter, likely dated around 57-58 AD, possibly preceding Paul’s visit to Jerusalem, is among the New Testament's earliest epistles, explaining significant allusions in later writings (Powell, 2009; Fitzmyer, 2011; Gundry, 2012). Paul might have composed the letter from Corinth at the end of his third missionary journey (see Acts 18:23-21:15, especially 20:2-3; Gruenler, 2008). The fact that Gaius, a Corinthian, was hosting Paul at the time of writing this letter (16:3; cf. 1 Cor. 1:14) and his mention of Erastus, a city treasurer (16:23); and Paul's praise of Phoebe of Cenchrea (the port city of Corinth; 16:1) support a Corinthian origin of this letter. Paul’s skillful negotiation between Jewish and Gentile factions suggests a diversity in the background of the audience (Gundry, 2012).

Scholars consider Romans as serving multiple purposes (Powell, 2009; Fitzmyer, 2011; Gundry, 2012). Firstly, it addresses Jewish-Gentile tensions within the Roman church (cf. Rom. 3:20-31; 11:17-32). This tension prompted Paul to seek financial aid from Gentile churches for the distressed Jerusalem church (1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9). The letter's emphasis on fundamental Christian gospel tenets reflects a missionary objective (1:16; 3:8; 9:1-2). Additionally, Paul wrote Romans to garner financial support from his audience for his upcoming mission to Spain following his visit to Rome (15:24, 28).
Romans 5 is situated in the broader context of Paul’s theological explanation of salvation and righteousness. Before this chapter Paul had discussed the concept of justification by faith and the reconciliation of humanity with God through Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21-26). At the beginning of the chapter, he focuses on the benefits of Justification, namely forgiveness, reconciliations with God and access to divine presence (5:1-11). Then he proceeds to 5:12-21 where he focuses on the contrast between the consequences of Adam’s sin and the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. He explores the idea that through Adam, sin entered the world, bringing death, but through Jesus Christ, grace and righteousness abound, leading to eternal life. His comparison between Adam and Christ is crucial in shaping Christian theology regarding the doctrine of original sin and the concept of imputed righteousness. It lays the foundation for understanding the universality of sin inherited from Adam and the universal offer of salvation through faith in Christ.

With the above introductory notes the study now proceeds to explore key theological themes embedded in Romans 5:12-21. This passage presents the entirety of human history in under two archetypal figures.

Theological Reading of Romans 5:12-21

Adam, Sin and Death (vv. 12-14)

12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—
13 for sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. 14 Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam, who is a pattern of the one who was to come.

Adam and the Doctrine of Original Sin

With allusions from Genesis 3, these verses (vv. 12-14) draw a comparison between the effects of Adam’s transgression and Christ’s obedience. The first word “therefore” (also, “because of this” or “for this reason”) indicates that Paul is about drawing a conclusion from the preceding text (5:1-11). The first major issue Paul talks about is the effect of Adam’s sin on the human race. Verse 12 is particularly determinative: “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned” (NIV). The interpretation of this text has contributed immensely to the development of what theologians refer to as the doctrine of original sin, which states that Adam’s sin made the entire human race sinful. The first theological task is to explore this doctrine from a biblical perspective, with particular reference to Romans 5. Before that it is important to discuss various views about the doctrine of original sin.

Theological investigations into the question of the relationship between Adam’s sin and that of his posterity has yielded two main groups of theories—imputation theories and non-imputation theories. Imputation theories hold that the whole human race is guilty of original sin because Adam’s guilt has been imputed on all his posterity (this will be examined further later). Non-imputation theories reject the idea of the imputation of Adam’s sin on his descendants. Two such theories are Pelagianism and Arminianism (Norman, 2007).

Pelagianism

Pelagianism is a theological heresy that emerged in the 5th century AD, primarily associated with the teachings of a British monk named Pelagius (c. 354-420) and his followers. Pelagianism centers on the nature of human free will, original sin, and the role of grace in salvation. These aspects need to be considered in this work because they are interrelated. For example, one’s view on original sin informs their position on the freedom of human will. Pelagius emphasized the inherent goodness of human nature,
arguing that humans possess free will and can achieve moral perfection through their own efforts (Erickson, 2013; Norman, 2007). Pelagianism rejects the idea of original sin and teaches that each person is born morally neutral and has the capacity to live a sinless life if they choose to do so. In other words, human beings are born morally neutral with freedom to will, decide and choose what they want to do. According to this doctrine, Adam’s sin injured only himself and serves as a bad example for any of his posterity to follow (Asante, 2014; Norman, 2007). It also holds that God creates the human soul for each person without any intrinsic bias toward sin (Norman, 2007). Therefore, every newborn is free from sin and has the capacity to obey God. In his view, infant baptism is a symbol of the strengthening of human nature that was already good (Slaton, 1973). Whether a new born is baptized or not has nothing to do with original sin. According to Pelagianism God’s grace merely provides guidance and moral teachings but does not play any role in changing human nature. It argues that individuals can merit salvation through their own efforts and good deeds.

St. Augustine of Hippo vehemently opposed Pelagianism and argued for the doctrine of original sin and the absolute necessity of God’s grace in the process of salvation (Slaton, 1973). First, on the issue of the state in which humans are born, Augustine held that humans are inherently born with a corrupt and evil nature. According to Augustine, the transformative power from bad to good lies solely in the grace of God (Slaton, 1973). The controversy extensively addressed the issue of human free will, exploring the profound implications of whether individuals possess the freedom to choose their actions in the context of this theological debate. Contrary to Pelagius assertion that humans were endowed with the equal ability to choose between good and evil, Augustine, while acknowledging human freedom of choice, contended that the capacity to choose the good was only possible when the will received assistance from divine grace (Slaton, 1973). While Pelagius posited that Adam's disobedience was an individual act with no impact on the entire human race, Augustine maintained that Adam served as the representative head of humanity, and his disobedience carried universal consequences (Slaton, 1973).

On the concept of original sin, Pelagius' contention that individuals were born without sin, was opposed by Augustine’s argument original sin was transmitted from parents to children at birth (Slaton, 1973). Augustine also regarded sin as a disease that spread to all through Adam. According to Augustine (cited in Schaff, 2022, No, 154) original sin “is the native bent of the soul towards evil, with which all the posterity of Adam . . . come into the world, and out of which all actual sins of necessity proceed. . . . Sin is not merely an individual act, but also a condition, a status and habitus, which continues, by procreation, from generation to generation.” A critical element in the passing on of original sin was identified as concupiscence or lust (Slaton, 1973). Augustine did not view concupiscence itself as original sin, but rather as a weakness inherent in human nature, a result of the fall (Slaton, 1973). It is through concupiscence that the transmission of original sin occurs in infants. Bonner (cited in Hall, 2002, p.152) states: “Concupiscence itself is not Original Sin; it is a wound and a vice of human nature, making it a slave to the devil; can be the occasion of sin, even in the baptized; and is the means whereby Original Sin is transmitted.” Augustine substantiated his doctrine of original sin through three key sources: the scriptures, infant baptism, and personal experience. The scripture passage he frequently made reference to Romans 5:12 (which will be considered later in this paper) Genesis 8:21; John 3:6 and Ephesians 2:3 which he argued pointed to the fact that Adam’s posterity inherit his sinful nature and need a new birth. Augustine considers infant baptism as necessary to deal with original sin. Augustine further contends that original sin is demonstrated through the evidence of personal experience. He illustrates this point by using a newborn as an example to showcase how the flaws of human nature become apparent. Even in the youngest infant, one can observe traits such as self-will, anger, and disobedience. This observation leads adults to the undeniable realization that human nature falls short of its intended state. Augustine considers the original sin as punishable, even in the case of infant but was uncertain about the nature and severity of the punishment (Slaton, 1973). Augustine’s demonstration of the weakness of Pelagianism contributed immensely to its eventual condemnation at the Council of Carthage in 418 and the Council of Ephesus in 431.
Arminianism

The Arminian view (Arminianism) is a theological perspective within Protestant Christianity that is named after a Dutch theologian, Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). The Arminian view, unlike the Pelagius view, holds that Adam’s sin was imputed on his posterity, making them totally depraved and unable to fulfill God’s spiritual commands without divine grace (Norman, 2007). This inability to obey God is physical and intellectual rather than volitional. John Wesley, expressing Arminian thoughts, argued that the inherited corrupted nature makes each one sinful and guilty before God (Burtner and Childs, 1954). Yet, he argued that people are responsible only for the actual sins they commit. Wesley reasons this way because according to him God provides humans with “preventing grace” which neutralizes the inherited sinful nature and penalty and frees everyone from the judicial consequences of Adam’s sin (Norman, 2007). The prevenient grace enables everyone to voluntarily repent and express faith in Christ. Finally, the Arminian view holds that even though infants theoretically inherit depravity, guilt and punishment, they are not condemned eternally because these things are removed by prevenient grace.

Having considered the major positions on the subject of original sin, the paper now proceeds to analyze the text theologically to determine what Paul has to offer.

Does Romans 5:12 teach original sin?

In the verses under consideration (Rom. 12-21) Paul makes two key theological assertions. He traces the origin of death to Adam’s sin and attributes the universality of death to the universal sin of humankind (v. 12 cf. v.15, v. 17). The theological challenge in this text is how to relate the assertion that the universality of death resulted from Adam’s sin to the assertion that it is the result of universal sin of humanity. Augustine’s understanding of the word “because” in the last part of verse 12 as “in whom” (based on the Latin version) made him conclude that all human beings were in Adam when he sinned (Norman, 2007; Erickson, 2013). He misinterpreted the text to mean “In this way death spread to all men, in whom all sinned” (Norman, 2007, p.460; emphasis original). Even though it is clear to contemporary readers that the Latin version was inaccurate in this instance, further theological analysis needs to be conducted.

One way to look at it is that, this final clause refers to individual’s sin(s) which makes everyone incur the same personal guilt as Adam incurred through his sin (Erickson, 2013). Relating this view to the principle of individual responsibility for one’s own action and for them alone, the clause would mean death is universal because all are guilty and all are guilty because all have committed their own sins (Erickson, 2013). This position lacks support from the tense Paul used. If that is what Paul intended, he would have used the present tense (hamartanoun) which indicates that an action is continually going on. Another problem with this interpretation is that it makes the sin referred to in the expression “all sinned” different from that referred to in verse 15 (“many died by the trespass of the one man” and in verse 17 (“by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man”) (Erickson, 2013, p.653).

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Another way to look at it is to understand the last clause in verse 12 in a way that avoids the above challenges and goes in line with verse 15 and 17 (Ridderbos, 1975). Paul’s use of the aorist tense (“because all sinned”) means that he is talking about past action (Grudem, 2000; Norman, 2007). Paul’s use of the aorist suggests that in historical past all humanity sinned collectively when Adam sinned. If he wanted to talk of a continued process of sin (and hence refer to sin committed by individuals), he would have used the present or the imperfect tense. At the time of writing, it was not true that all human beings had committed actual sinful acts, because many people had died as infants without committing any actual sin and some were not also born. So Paul was actually talking about the universality of sin in the human race due to Adam’s sin which had taken place in historical past. Taking the sin of all humanity and
Adam’s sin as the same resolves any potential conflict between verse 12 and verses 15 and 17. Such reading also resolves the potential problem presented by verse 14 (“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”) because in that case “it is not imitation or repetition of Adam’s sin, but participation in it, that counts” (Erickson, 2013, p.653).

Given the above analysis, it is obvious that Paul makes the following theological points in verse 12. Firstly, as a consequence of Adam’s sin all humans were engulfed by sin. This means that Adam’s sin made all his progenitors sinful by nature. As Ridderbos (1975, p.96) puts it, Adam’s sin “opened the gate of the world to sin.” “This happened” writes Ridderbos (1975, p.96), “because ‘all sinned,’ namely, on account of their connection with the one man; therefore, Adam’s sin was the sin of all, and in that sense it can hold for them that they all sinned.” Secondly, Paul responds to the theological-philosophical question of the inevitability of death in human life by arguing that the human experience of death is due to sin. He achieves this point by depicting sin as a great force that used Adam as the means of spreading itself and brought disaster and death into the human world of people, the human race (Moo, 1996). Thus, as sin enters the world it comes with its inseparable follower and companion, death. Paul’s point is that death was not part of God’s original intention and purpose for the world. Death is not a natural consequence but a result of the brokenness and fallen state of the world due to sin. Thirdly, Paul displays a double conception of death; namely, the death of humanity as consequence of Adam’s first sin and the death of the individual as a result of their own sin (Dunn, 1998).

Paul’s claim in verse 12 is elaborated in verses 13 and 14. He makes two crucial points in verse 13. Firstly, the world was dominated by the power of sin (brought about by Adam’s transgression) before the Mosaic Law was given. The Mosaic Law, which includes the Ten Commandments and other commandments, was given to the Israelites through Moses. Secondly, in the period from Adam to Moses when the Law had not been given, the sin that was present in the world was not put to account because “sin is not counted where there is no Law.” Here, Paul uses the business language of entering of accounts into a ledger to depict God as recording sin in a book (Witmer, 1983). Paul is not saying sin does not exist in the absence of Law; rather, he is making the point that sin does not have the character of being a transgression or “a sin is not listed as a sin” unless a law is put in place (Witmer, 1983, p.458). This means that without the law, people were still committing sin, but they were not held accountable for it in the same way as those who had received the law. This point reminisces Paul earlier assertion that transgression does not exist where there is no law (Rom. 4:15). The law provided a clear standard of righteousness, making people aware of their sinful actions and their need for forgiveness. Paul is here explaining the role of the Mosaic Law in revealing and highlighting human sinfulness. The law served as a “mirror” that showed people their sin, making them aware of their need for Christ’s redemptive work. Now, since death is the result of sin, and those living from Adam’s time to Moses’s time had no sins charged against them due to the nonexistence of the Law, and yet in spite of that, died (v. 14), it follows logically that their death resulted not from their personal sins but from Adam’s sin (Ridderbos, 1975). People who lived in the pre-law dispensation died because they sinned in Adam, who is their natural head. This point supports the corporate view of the sin in the last part of verse 12. Since the people who lived after Adam did not repeat what Adam did, there is the need to explain how the sins of these people were different from Adam’s own.

Two major views were found in the existing literature. One view holds that a person who lived after Adam but before the Law committed sin but the one who lived after the Law, committed transgression and their act of disobedience after the Law had been given was a violation of a law or commandment (see Hong, 2010). Another position is that the expression “those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam” simply emphasizes the characteristic of people who lived between Adam and Moses (Moo, 1996, p.333). I am of the opinion that those who lived after Adam did not sin in the same way as Adam did by eating the forbidden fruit; their sin was in other ways. They died because of
the sin of one man, Adam. The foregone analysis leads to the conclusion that Romans 5:12-14 supports the idea of the spread of sin from Adam to his posterity. Thus, Paul supports the imputation theory, the idea that Adam’s sin is imputed on his descendants.

How then does the sin of one person, Adam, result in the sin of all people? Imputation theorists differ on the question of how Adam’s sin spread to others. The two prominent positions on this are the federal headship and natural headship models.

Federal Headship Model

The federal headship model (also known as the covenantal or representative model) teaches that Adam was the federal head or representative of all humanity. According to this view, God entered into a “covenant of works” with Adam and appointed him as the “federal head” (the representative) of all human beings; therefore, God imputed the consequences of his act to all his descendants (Moo 1996; Talbert, 2002). In other words, Adam acted as a representative of the entire human race in the covenant or relationship between God and humanity; therefore, when he sinned, it was as if all of humanity sinned with him in a legal and representative sense. The guilt of Adam’s sin is imputed, or legally credited, to all of his descendants. Thus, all humans inherit not only the consequences of Adam’s sin (such as a sinful nature and physical death) but also the guilt of his sin so that all people are considered sinful and guilty from birth (Ps. 51:5). It further argues that Adam’s posterity were neither physically nor spiritually present in him because their souls are created individually by God and united to their bodies at birth (Norman, 2007). Calvin (2006, p.250) supported this view when he asserted that: “The contagion does not take its origin from the substance of the flesh or soul, but because it had been so ordained by God that the first man should at one and the same time have and lose, both for himself and for his descendants, the gifts that God had bestowed upon him.”

Natural Headship Model

The natural headship model (also called the seminal or biological model) perceives Adam as the natural head who together with all his posterity, present seminally or physically in his body, sinned (Norman 2007; Talbert, 2002). It posits that Adam’s sin affected all of humanity because all human beings inherit a sinful nature from him through biological reproduction. In this view, the transmission of sin is seen as a natural or biological consequence of being descended from Adam. Augustine, who first propounded the doctrine of original sin, advocated for this position. He believed that traducianism (the idea that the human soul is transmitted from parent to child along with the physical part of the body) better explains the concept of original sin (Norman, 2007; Slaton, 1973). Martin Luther also subscribed to this position and argued that guilt, depravity and condemnation were all transmitted through procreation (Norman, 2007). This position claims support from the letter to the Hebrews where the writer says that Levi paid to Melchizedek through Abraham because Levi was in Abraham’s body when he (Abraham) paid a tithe to Melchizedek (Gen. 14 cf. Heb. 7:9-10). Similarly, Adam committed the rest of humanity to a certain kind of action because the entire human race was in his body. Even though advocates of the natural headship model agree that all humans inherit a sinful nature from Adam, they generally do not believe in the imputation of Adam’s guilt. Instead, they argue that each person becomes guilty of sin when they personally commit their own sinful actions.
Adamic Christology (vv. 14b-19)

Adamic Christology derives from the typological relationship between Adam and Christ. Therefore, in order to understand this doctrine, it is necessary to examine the background of Paul’s use of the Adam-Christ typology. To this we now turn.

Background to Adam-Christ Typology in Paul

Biblical typology refers to a foreshadowing in a different stage of redemptive history that suggests the framework or key aspects of a future actuality and loses its unique importance when the actuality comes (Goppelt, 1982). A typological interpretation differs from allegorical reading because the former is historical, that is, a “theological interpretation of history” in the light of further revelation given in the life, ministry and death of Christ (Foulkes, 1994, p.366-367; cf. Osborne, 2001, p.1222). Also, a typological interpretation is always based on essential (that is, theological) correspondence as opposed to accidental correspondence (France, 1971). Biblical typology is also based on divine ordination. Paul highlights this principle when he says that Israel’s experiences in the wilderness are examples to serve as a warning to the Corinthian Christians (1 Cor. 10:11), and by extension to all Christians. Furthermore, in a typological relation, the antitype is characterized by completeness and finality and always transcends the type in some essential ways.

According to Osborne (2001) New Testament typological relationships comprise either comparison between two historical situations or personalities, or between a heavenly object and an earthly copy). Paul explicitly employs the Adam-Christ typology in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 (see discussions below). What are the roots of Paul’s Adam-Christ comparison? Many scholars link this typological connection to Paul’s Jewish root. A Jewish source is possible because Paul was a Diaspora Jew and had great knowledge about Jewish traditions. He was also a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5), and boasted of his Jewish background in several places (Rom. 11:1; 2 Cor. 11:22; Phil. 3:5). In Acts 22:3, Paul identifies himself as a Jew who was thoroughly trained in Jewish laws by Gamaliel. He also reveals his zeal for Jewish traditions. His zeal for Jewish religious traditions is seen in his approval for the stoning of Stephen and his persecution of the adherents of the then new faith, Christianity (Acts 7:57; 9:1ff) (Nsiah, 2022).

Both Dunn (1998) and VanMaaren (2013) trace Paul’s Adamic Christology to Genesis 1–3 and post-biblical Jewish understanding of the Adam figure. Dunn (1998) outlines some key features in Genesis 1–3 which are echoed in Pauline theology. First, he notes that the word adam is used as a generic reference to “humankind” or “human being” (cf. Gen. 1:26-27; 2:7). The Genesis account presents an ambivalence between the use of adam for an individual person and adam for the entire human race. Paul, like the writer of Genesis, also displays this ambivalence, using adam both to represent a single person and humankind in general. He describes “man” as “the image and glory of God” and “woman/wife” as “the glory of the man/husband” (1 Cor. 11:7). Again, Paul’s teaching about the futility of creation in its subjection to corruption (Rom. 8:20-22) echoes Genesis 1–3 where adam who was made from adamah
(ground; 2:7) to till the adamah (2:5-9) disobedys God and as part of the penalty for disobedience, the ground is cursed and adam would toil to find food until he returns to adamah (3:17-19). Based in this Dunn (1980, p.103) concluded that “the allusion to Adam as the one through whom sin and death entered the world is specific, and the treatment of the Adam-Christ parallel and contrast is thoroughly Jewish in character.”

In addition, the Adam-Christ typological tradition can be found in extra-biblical Jewish texts. For example, Davies (1955, p.38-39; see also Kreitzer 1989, p.59-60) links Paul’s identification of Christ as the second/last Adam to “the Jewish idea of the Messianic Age as contrasted with the present evil world.” In 4 Ezra 7:30, this Messianic Age is metaphorized as the first creation: “Then the world shall be turned back to primeval silence for seven days, as it was at the first beginnings…” (NRSV). This means that the Messianic Age will bring “the re-establishment of the original creation” (Kreitzer, 1989, p.60).

Furthermore, 1QS 4:23 and CD 3:20 envisage an Age to Come (the Messianic Age) which will be characterized by defeat of the present and corrupt powers and the restoration of creation to an ultimate pre-fall state (as it was in Genesis 1 and 2), bringing to mind the idea of Messiah as second Adam (Kreitzer 1989). Davies (1955, p.41) argues that the interpretation of the Messianic Age as a new creation leads to the inevitable “thought of Christ as the Second Adam…the counterpart of the Adam whose creation was described in Gen. 1 and 2.” Davies (1955), however, rejects any link between Paul’s identification of Christ as the second Adam with a pre-Pauline Christian heritage. Dunn (1998) notes that by the time of Paul Adam’s sin had become the dominant way of accounting for the human condition. The account of Jubilee 3:17-25, retelling the story of Adam’s disobedience and expulsion is one of such examples. The following passage from 2 Esdras 7:118 also support a Jewish root of Paul’s Adam-Christ typology: “O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants” (NRSV). This text clearly teaches that Adam’s sin affected the entire human race, a position Paul espoused in Romans 5:14b-19. (See discussion below)

**Adam-Christ Typology**

The last part of verse 14 describes Adam as “a type of the one who was to come” (that is, Christ). The term “type” is used in Pauline corpus to stand for “example”, “pattern,” and “model” (6:17; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:7; 2 Thess. 3:9), and carries an idea of similarity between the original form and the model (Hong, 2010, p.52). One wonders why Paul would say Adam is a type of Christ when there are many dissimilarities in themselves and their impacts on human history. A close look at the text shows that the typology consists in the fact that both Adam and Christ pass to the people they represent what belonged to them (Adam and Christ). Before considering the text, let us examine how Paul espouses his Adam-Christ typological relation in 1 Corinthians 15. This will provide a wider perspective on the subject matter.

The Adam-Christ typology occurs twice in 1 Corinthians 5. Firstly, Paul employs the typological relationship to argue for the certainty of the believer’s resurrection based on the reality of Christ’s resurrection (vv. 20-23). He refers to Christ as the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (v.20), meaning Christ’s resurrection is a guarantee for the resurrection of the dead. His reference to Christ as the second Adam is based on Christ’s shared humanity (15:21). In this sense, human nature is considered as a crucial foundation for Christ’s role as the second Adam. The result of Adam’s sin—that is, death for all in Adam—and the result of Christ’s obedience—that is, life for all in Christ—are argued out in verse 22 (Fee, 1987). The main point is that those in Adam will certainly die just as those in Christ will certainly resurrect and live eternally. Paul uses the Adam-Christ typology again in 15:44-49 to argue for the bodily resurrection from the dead. He argues contrasts the two figures by identifying the first Adam as the receiver of life (“a living being”) and the second, as the giver of life (“a life-giving Spirit”) (v. 45). The two figures are again contrasted on the basis that the first Adam was “from the dust of the earth” while the
second Adam is “from heaven” (v.47). With this as background, I now turn to Romans 5:15 to continue discussing Paul’s thought.

Beginning from Romans 12:15, Paul presents Christ as an antitype of Adam using an ancient rhetorical device called *synkrisis*, that is, the comparative juxtaposition of two figures which end up praising one (in this case Christ) and blaming the other (Adam) (Talbert, 2002). In this antithetical parallelism, Paul presents Christ’s work of redemption as superior in every respect to Adam’s work of trespass. He achieves this using the formula “how much more” which alludes to the Christological implications of Jesus’ own use of this expression (Matt. 6:30; 7:11). Whereas Adam’s sin resulted in death, God’s grace has brought the free gift of life for the many through Christ. Paul’s use of “trespass” is probably meant to create a phonetic parallel with “free gift”, that is, “God’s gift” (Moo, 1996, p.333). One sees a clear imbalance in the “judicial result” of Adam’s disobedience (leading to condemnation) and Christ’s obedience (leading to righteousness and life). Adam’s action brought life to an end whereas Christ’s opened up new possibilities.

Here, Adamic Christology stems from Paul’s deliberate comparison of the disobedience of Adam and the obedience of Christ. The two Adamic figures relate uniquely to God as two different sons of God (Ryken, 2009). The first Adam was not born of human; instead, he was “created in the image of God” (Gen. 1:26-27), signifying that he “bore the likeness of God” as the son of God (Ryken, 2009, p.148). This first son of God fell into sin through the temptation of the serpent (Gen. 3:1-21) and this act corrupted the entire human race.

The word “many” when compared to its use in verse 12 (“the many”) seems to signify “all people” (“death came to all people” and “the many died”). Gundry (2012, p.441) notes that the word “many” is a Semitic expression for “all”. The idea is that what one person did (whether Adam or Christ) affected not only one person but many. Paul declares that Adam is a type of Christ but the resemblance does not hold in all respects because they differ both in their actions and in the effects of the acts (Lard, 2007).

Paul presents a second antithetical parallelism in verse 16, that is, Adam’s act brought condemnation but Christ’s brought righteousness. Here, he argues that Adam’s reign of death is surpassed and overturned by the new reign of those receiving grace and righteousness in Christ (Jewett, 2007). The first contrast in this verse has to do with source. Out of the source of Adam’s sin divine judgment came upon all humans. Amid many transgressions, God displayed his grace and gave his free gift of salvation to humanity. The second contrast sets the one trespass over against many trespasses: “the number of sins taken into account — the judicial verdict associated with Adam was based on one sin” but “the decree of justification that came through Christ came after an untold number of sins” (Moo, 1996, p.338).

Verse 17 takes up the thought of verse 14, the reign of death through one person’s trespass and through that person and at the same time expounds the difference between the “condemnation” and the “justification” that began in verse 16. Paul gives another imbalance between Adam and Christ in terms of the two reigns. Here too, he argues from the lesser to the greater (on the superiority of the “Second Man”; cf. 1 Cor. 15:45–47). Contrary to death reigning through Adam’s transgression, righteousness (that leads to acquittal and life) reigns in those who are in Christ (Rom. 5:17). Life in this context may refer to “life of the age to come” (see 2:7; 4:17; 5:10; 6:10, 22–23; 8:11, 13). Here again, “righteousness” is said to be a “gift”, meaning Paul is referring to the initial experience of salvation in which a person is put into the right relation with God. It is righteousness that is connected with the impartation of spiritual life. This righteousness (in itself) is solely forensic.

In verse 18, Paul returns to complete the comparison between Adam and Christ that he began in verse 12 but digressed—this is indicated by the expression “so therefore” which shows a logical
sequence. He mentions again that Adam’s trespass led everyone to condemnation but Christ’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all persons. The expression “act of righteousness” refers theologically to the righteous act of Christ in satisfying all that the Law requires which humans failed to satisfy. “Justification” is how God declares those in Christ innocent.

Paul uses verse 19 to explain his statement in verse 18. He declares that just as one man’s disobedience made many sinners, so the obedience of one man makes many righteous. The word “trespass” describes the nature of Adam’s first act of sin, the one act that made the entirety of humanity sinful. It was the means through which or reason why they were constituted by another.

The table below summarizes the Adam-Christ comparison based on Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adam was a representative man (Romans 5), and he acted on behalf of the whole human race.</th>
<th>Christ was a representative man (Romans 5), and He acted on behalf of the whole human race.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam performed one act which had tremendous consequences.</td>
<td>Christ performed one act which had even greater consequences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam’s act was a sinful act (Rom. 5:12, 15, 16, 17, 18).</td>
<td>Christ’s act was a righteous act (Rom.5:18--&quot;the righteous act&quot;--see NASB).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam’s act was an act of disobedience, in eating the forbidden fruit (Rom.5:19; and see Genesis 2:17; 3:6).</td>
<td>Christ’s act was an act of obedience, in dying on the cross (Romans 5:19 and see Phil.2:8).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Adamic Christology and grace (vv. 20-21)**

Having ended the comparison between Adam and Christ, Paul comes back to the question of the position the law which he introduced in verses 14-15. He argues that “Law came in” (cf. Gal. 2:4”) (Moo, 1996, p.346) “to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Rom. 5:20 RSV), an argument which is better understood if read together with the next chapters (particularly ch. 7). Based on Paul’s earlier discussions (cf. 3:20; 4:15; 5:13), one could say that the reason why the law increases trespass is that the law throws light on trespass and at the same time triggers sinful desires into new activity (Knox, 1986). The Law, therefore, does not reverse Adam’s act but reveals the “significance” of Adam’s sin more clearly (Moo, 1996). Said differently, “the appearance of the Law made God’s will known [to all], and for the first time, people violated specific commandments of God’s law, just as Adam did. Thus, sin increased” (Matera, 2010, p.140).

The idea that there were many forbidden activities or many commandments by God right from the Fall which made sin attractive to humans and led to an increase in sin as a consequence, cannot be supported by Scripture (Moo, 1996). Neither is the view that an understanding of the Law makes a sinner realize his/her sin and feel condemned supported by the immediate context where “the increase of the trespass is juxtaposed with an increase in grace (v. 20b)” (Moo, 1996, p.347). Considering Paul’s argument in 5:14 (see also 4:15) I am inclined to conclude that the Law was given to Israel to increase the gravity of sin, be it Adam’s or anybody else’s (cf. Rom. 7:13; Gal. 3:19). Paul again opposes any Jewish tendency to think of obedience to the Law as a means to salvation. Yet, the Law remains (7:12). By showing the seriousness of sin (Rom. 7:13) without transforming the sinner, the Law reveals the doom of humanity apart from grace.

God then comes in and freely gives every repentant sinner (who expresses faith in Christ) the gift of salvation, no more counting his/her sins against him/her. This is grace at work, not works of the law. The verb hyperperisséuo means: “an extraordinary degree, involving a considerable excess over what would be expected – ‘extreme, extremely, in an extreme degree, to a very great degree’” (Louw and Nida in Snyman 2016, p.5) or “to be over and above a certain number or measure” (Vincent 2009).
Paul’s point is that God’s grace always stretches beyond human sin and does not have any elastic limit. Finally, he concludes that grace is supplied in superabundance so that it might rule like a king through righteousness, leading to eternal life which the believing sinner experiences through the atonement of Christ (v. 21).

**Soteriological Implications of Adamic Christology**

The foregone discussions have implications for Christian soteriology, some of which are outlined briefly below.

**Humanity Outside Christ**

The first implication of the Adamic Christology is that every human being is either in Adam or in Christ. In fact, everyone is born in Adam and it takes faith to migrate into Christ. A life outside Christ is life without salvation. There is a strong connection between the righteousness of Christ and the life of his people just as there is between the sin of Adam and the death of his posterity living without Christ (Ridderbos, 1975). This has to do with two different modes of existence, the mode of existence of the old man and of the new man, which are determined by two different periods. As a result of the sin of one man (Adam) in the Garden of Eden, the entire human race sinned and died; similarly as a result of the act of righteousness of one man (Christ) on the cross, all believers are made righteous and offered eternal life (Gundry, 2012).

**Corporate and Individual Dimensions of Sin**

Even though Paul speaks of the universality of sin due Adam’s sin, he also details with the way this universal and corporate character of sin is individualized in the life of all human beings. Therefore, the corporate view of sin in no way reduces the responsibility of Adam’s descendants. Each individual has to give account of his/her life to God (Rom. 14:12; cf. Gal. 6:5)

**Imputation of Sin and the Justice of God**

The idea of the imputation of Adam’s guilt on his descendants seems unfair. However, it must be noted that the primary basis of God’s final judgement will be actual sins committed, not one’s “share” in Adam’s sin (cf. Rom. 2:6; Col. 3:25) (Grudem, 2000). In addition, to consider the imputation of Adam’s guilt on us as unfair also requires one to also consider the imputation of Christ’s righteousness on repentant sinners as unfair. The procedure involved is just the same: “For 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” (Rom. 5:19 NIV).

**Conclusion**

The comparisons between Adam and Christ highlights a corporate solidarity of all humankind in their vicarious humanity whereby Adam stands as the head of fallen humanity and Christ, the head of redeemed humanity. Thus, Adamic Christology focuses, not on individuality but on redemptive-historical and corporate dimension of humanity. From the discussions, it can be deduced that sin is both existential and phenomenological reality. Existentially, sin is an inherent part of the human condition, shaping our very existence from birth. The experience of sin is not confined to abstract notions or theological discourse but is observable and tangible in the behaviors and choices of individuals. The Adamic Christology espoused in this paper implies that Christ is the answer to this existential and phenomenological reality. Through Christ people and communities are renewed ethically, demonstrated by improved divine-human, human-human and human environment relationships.
References


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