

## Romans: The Hope of Glory, Part 5a

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<http://lifemessenger.org/romans-the-hope-of-glory-part-5a/>

EXPOSITION: Chapter 5:1-21

5:1-11—From Justification to Salvation

**1** Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. **2** Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice [**boast**] in hope of the glory of God. **3** Not only that, but we rejoice [**boast**] in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, **4** and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, **5** and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. **6** For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. **7** For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— **8** but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. **9** Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. **10** For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by [dia] the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by [en] his life. **11** More than that, we also rejoice [**boast**] in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.—Arguing from the judicial certainty of having been pronounced just (aorist tense), through faith, established in chs. 3 and 4, the apostle now shows how this results in "peace with God" (v. 1, 2), that is to say, reconciliation of God and man, and thus the cessation of hostilities; man is no longer under divine wrath nor at war with God (v. 9, 10). This gracious decree of God – of man's covenant reinstatement – is the legal certainty of God's restored glory from which man had not only fallen but had also been expelled, having been "driven" from the Garden (v. 2; 3:23; Gen 3:23-24). This "hope of the glory of God" (v. 2) now guarantees man's destiny, not only eternally but also temporally; his banishment from the manifest glory – from the Garden temple – was God's penal judgement upon sin. No longer having access to the tree of life, he is not only consigned to death – mortality – in this life but also, through the final resurrection and assize, to the "second death"—the lake of fire and perdition (Rev 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8). But now, having been justified by grace through faith, he can "boast in the hope of the glory of God" (v. 2), of paradise restored on earth—indeed, of a "new heavens and a new earth" (Isa 66:22; 65:17; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1). This is so redemptively epochal – "at the right time [*kairos*]" (v. 6) – and spiritually potent that the believer can boast in tribulations; even in their midst the love of God is poured into his heart by the Holy Spirit, supplying assurance of his renewed covenant status (v. 3-5) and the sure hope, not only, of one's status in eternity but also in history. Now, as a reinstated covenant-keeper, man is granted access to the garden-temple and, hence, to his creation-mandate of subduing and renovating the world. History now becomes a foretaste of "the new heavens and the new earth", of the Edenic paradise to be fully restored at the final consummation. Arguing from the utterly unmerited nature of God's grace and love, from the lesser to the greater ("much more" in v. 9, 10), the apostle shows that "justification" (transacted "through" [dia] Christ's death, v. 10) guarantees "salvation" (transacted "in" [en] Christ's life, v. 10) and hence "reconciliation", enabling man to boast only in God through Christ (v. 6-11). Later, in v. 15-17, Paul uses this to argue *a fortiori* (a conclusion that's even more obvious or convincing than the one just drawn) for the super-abounding grace of God in the surety of salvation by virtue of our solidaric relationship to Christ, as a new society, over that of Adam. Significantly, "salvation" (*soteria*) to Paul was not only, importantly, salvation from sin and the wrath of God (i.e. from perdition) – both in the present and the future – but also a comprehensive term embracing the endowment of God's glory and conformity to his image, including the redemption of the body, if you like, the restoration of Eden—of the temporal creation set free from its "bondage to corruption" (ch. 8). While all this is determined from eternity, Paul posits salvation as received in the "now" (v.11)—in real-time history. It is, in fact, eternity invading this space-time realm, as we "taste the powers of the age to come" (Heb 6:5). The apostle argues throughout this epistle, that, in Christ, the eternal both invades *and* renovates the temporal.

As we have already noted, justification not only has individual salvific significance for the believer, no longer at enmity with God and saved from God's wrath, but also corporate salvific significance; that is, for human society in history, which the next passage – 5:12-21 – will clarify. This renewed covenant status of man, "in Christ" (ch. 3-4), means that, in obedience to the cultural mandate (Gen 1-2), God's purpose for history can now be realised in the development of a new social order (5:12-21). And, accordingly, the positive covenant sanctions – blessings – can then be rolled out from heaven, without let-or-hindrance, on a redeemed humanity in the transformation of the world. Through justification – man's renewed covenant status – we now have an assured hope of the promise that the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of glory of the Lord (Hab 2:14).

Redeemed man, boasting only in the Lord, receives assurance, by the Spirit, of his glorious hope and destiny in God's cosmos, even through tribulation (5:1-11), echoing Paul's exhortation of the disciples in Asia Minor, "that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

Furthermore, the apostle continues to underscore the antithesis between two gospels: the "Gospel of God" and the "Gospel of Man" (see our comments [1:1-2](#)), manifested in two kinds of "boasting" (v. 2, 3, 11). He has already spoken of this in [2:17, 23; 3:27](#) (see our comments); and [4:2](#) (see our comments on 4:2 and ch. 4 under *Gospel Clarity & Gospel Scope*; the word, *kauchaomai*, is used across all the above references [v. 1-11], meaning "to boast, to glory"). This antithesis, between the "Gospel of God" and the "Gospel of Man", is between "faith" and "works", between boasting in the Lord or, instead, in man. As a covenant creature, man by nature boasts in his god as the ground of his covenant status, of his significance in the cosmos. Thus, man as a would-be god – as his own ultimate reference point – boasts in himself. This boasting of man one over another inevitably produces human hierarchies and tyrannies: elitist societies – aristocracies, meritocracies, bureaucracies, and autocracies – ruled by intellectual and political cabals – social engineers – walking in the footsteps of Plato's philosopher-kings. Despite secularism's pretensions as non-religious, it is a recrudescence of the ancient Near Eastern god-king, the elite facilitating a chain of being – a cosmic continuity – from the divine above to nature below, mediated by the state with its legislature and courts—in effect, as a false messiah. The media – and sadly also apostate religion – then serve as its prophet and press-agent, promoting and reinforcing the prevailing *zeitgeist*. Autonomous man, still bearing the defaced image of the true creator-God, by default, seeks to recreate the Edenic paradise apart from God. Even in his politics his ground motive is therefore religious and covenantal, albeit fallen and perverted. The twentieth century's statist experiments – Marxist and Fascist – are the result. Moreover, the messianic claims of the contemporary secular-humanist elite, in the name of "freedom and love", "diversity and inclusivity", and even "social justice", is more of the same – the urge to paradise apart from God – dictating to the masses the elite's *fiat* reality. Hence, the Western world is now plunged into an Orwellian dystopia where: against all scientific rationality, non-biological gender preference is enforced by law, even to the point of "gender free" birth certificates; primary age school children are subjected to queer theory, damaging them in the name of "safe-schools"; in defiance of birth-assigned biological sex and of binary male-female categories, pansexuality is the new norm where the individual is no longer hampered by biological facts nor even new gender-fluid categories, humankind having now evolved to a category-free level where romantic love is all-inclusive; marriage as a creation ordinance between a man and a woman is struck down by the courts and legislature; and the death policies of euthanasia and abortion are perversely enshrined in law as acts of mercy and social justice. The "Gospel of Man", prevailing in the body politic, deconstructs creation categories and, hence, reality as a life-sustaining structure, proving to be a gospel of self-destruction, of de-creation and death—indeed, of self-murder.

#### 5:12-21—From De-Creation to Re-Creation

In this next paragraph – 5:12-21 – the apostle arrives at the epicentre of the epistle, in fact, its logical centre where all his lines of argument converge, both foregoing and outgoing (see Nygren, p. 207 ff.). This fact provides the needed corrective to the "Gospel according to St Evangelical", which this commentary seeks to advance. This telling of the gospel has traditionally viewed 3:21-26 as the epicentre, thus centre-staging Justification as the "whole counsel of God", God's end-game in history, unwittingly truncating the Gospel's scope to the *personal* and the *eternal*—to personal salvation. By default, this results in a dualistic gospel that promotes spirit over matter, denying God's sovereignty in history over the real world and his plan for the totality of human existence—for all spheres of life: politics, law, education, economics and so on. It has produced a pietistic Christianity that has retreated from this world.

To embrace this correction, we will need to fully appreciate the progressive nature of the apostle's argument. Beginning in [1:1-2](#) (see my comments), appropriating the word *euangélion* from the emperor cult, he sets forth the 'Gospel of God' in antithesis to the 'Gospel of man', to autonomous man's claim to sovereignty. This, for the Romans, was personified in the messianic claims of the emperor cult. Rooted in the pagan power-state of the ancient Near East (Mesopotamia, embracing the Babylonian, Persian and Egyptian empires), the Roman Caesars personified sovereign deity, functioning as both divine-king and priest-king, as reflected in the title *pontifus maximus*, mediating a continuity of being, a kind of *Oneism* or pantheism, throughout the world, establishing a divine-human social order—a pseudo-Edenic paradise. The sacral king of the ancient world was the source of cosmic power, order, and control. Rejecting the absolute God and defying the Creator-creature distinction, autonomous man, as a would-be god, becomes one with the universe through the mediatorial role of the pagan power-state. Hence, the militant secular-humanist state of the West is merely Roman tyranny redivivus—reborn. Despite its "secular" claims, it is nonetheless, like Rome, a sacral power-state, and thus, anti-Christian

Paul, therefore, first establishes that autonomous man is at enmity with God and actively suppressing his clear revelation so that he is without excuse (1:18 ff), placing him under God's wrath and judgement (1:18; 2:5, 8). And so, in the climax of history (Gal 4:4), Paul's epistle to the Romans fulfils Daniel 2 by proclaiming the victory of the fifth and final empire of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The stone carved out by no human hand – "a kingdom that shall never be destroyed" (v. 44) – is cast upon the feet of the human colossus, symbolising Rome and the whole humanist project, reducing it to rubble. The pretension of autonomous man to ultimacy – and, hence, godhood – as manifested in humanism, collapses and is utterly destroyed. The stone then supernaturally grows to become a great mountain that, echoing the creation-mandate of Genesis 1, gradually fills the entire earth. In the time of the Roman Empire, Christ, the "Son of Man", ascends to the Ancient of Days and is given dominion and a kingdom that will never be destroyed (Dan 7:13-14). So, Christ presently rules over all the kings of the earth (Ps 2; 110; Mt 18:18; Eph 1:20-23; 1 Tim 6:15; Rev 1:5; 17:14; 19:16), sending the Holy Spirit to supernaturally equip the redeemed community to fill the earth and subdue the nations under him (Mt 28:18-20). Accordingly, Paul's Gospel proclaims Christ as sovereign over the state, providing a Christian theology of the state which he later explicates in chapter 13.

Returning to the progressive nature of Paul's argument, covenant status, as an inescapable divine category, does not vanish with the pagan power-state; rather, man, as a would-be god, transfers the bestowal of covenant status to his corporate manifestation in the state. The state, therefore, replaces Christ as the mediator and, hence, becomes an antichrist, literally "instead of" Christ. Status in this false messianic social order is affirmed by acknowledging Caesar as lord, as did the Jews in their denial of Christ and allegiance to Rome: "We have no king but Caesar!" (Jn 19:15). By granting the state ultimacy, one's allegiance is transferred from Christ to a pseudo-Christ—to the messianic secular-humanist state. Casting off all restraint the nations and their kings rage against the Lord and his anointed (Ps 2), giving obeisance to their own *fiat* laws and bestowing covenant status to all who do likewise. This is the stuff of the West's apostasy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, albeit, often in the name of freedom and democracy. Rather than relying on the Lord for covenant status, for salvation and significance in history, one now relies on the state for its saving power and providence (welfarism). This is the heart of Marxism, whether economic or cultural, and all statist systems.

The apostle, therefore, must address covenant status so as to provide a defence of the faith (1 Pet. 3:15) and destroy intellectual strongholds raised up against the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:3). The spirit of the age and its intellectual permutations are used to 'justify' statism and those who give it obeisance. Building on his whole thesis of the righteousness of God (covenant justice) from 1:17, climaxing in 3:21-26 in justification (covenant status) by faith alone and reinforced in 4:1-25, and then followed by the assurance of salvation in history based on that justification in 5:1-11, he now turns to the big picture to provide the context and purpose of justification.

But until now his argument has rested on a presupposition; so, now he brings it forth, explaining that all God's dealings with the human race are covenantal and grounded in two covenant heads: Adam and Christ. Rushdoony, despite the statism of the ancient world, points out that, "As against the current religious individualism in Greco-Roman culture *and* in the Judaism of his day, Paul asserts covenantalism" (Rushdoony, p. 79). John Murray puts it, "God governs men and relates himself to men in terms of solidaric relationship" (Murray, p. 180). This not only brings into view the ground for his argument thus far – man's plight in sin and provision in Christ – but also serves as the ground for his larger project: God's overarching plan for history and the human race. And this plan is not only covenantal but creational; it moves from de-creation in Adam to re-creation in Christ, to a new social order that fulfils the original creation-cultural mandate of Genesis 1-2 and, thus, restores and extends the renewed Edenic paradise to the whole earth as a cosmic temple for the Lord. Now explaining the origin and history of the universal human situation (no more mention of Jew and Gentile), the apostle pivots it on the progenitors of two humanities: one in Adam and the other in Christ.

Human society is, hence, in solidarity through one of two covenant heads, as either a fallen and rebellious pseudo-Edenic society "in Adam", or, as the renewed true-Edenic society "in Christ". This notion of solidarity is integral to God's covenantal dealings with man. While it is counterintuitive to our Western idea of individualism, it is, nonetheless, the way God has made his world. And, as we will see momentarily, it is also integral to the notion of 'imputation' which explains why so many struggle with it. Every person stands in relationship to one of these two men, as either a covenant-breaker in Adam or as a covenant-keeper in Christ. From God's perspective there are only two categories of the human race: the Adam race or the Christ race. There is neither Jew nor Greek; in other words, there is no ethnicity that grants covenant status. Nor is there any religion, political ideology, or humanistic institution, including the state, that mediates the same. Faith in Christ and his mediatorial role is the exclusive boundary marker amongst men; neither race nor political ideology can be used as the "justification" for status over men, or its concomitant, tyranny. These two humanities, therefore, explain the broad sweep of redemptive history, underscoring man's reinstated covenant status – the "righteousness of God" (1:17) in Christ by faith alone –

and the supremacy of the Christ-order over the Adam-order. This then launches the reader into ch. 8, with chs. 6-7 merely serving as a parenthesis, dealing with the two hurdles of sin (ch. 6) and the law (ch. 7) that stand in the way of the true-Edenic paradise. Moreover, the passage establishes the corporate nature of the people of God, the church (Gk. *Ecclesia*; the citizenry as the governing council of the Greek city-state), as both covenantal and governmental; whether sin or righteousness, they are manifested in community, through a governing social-order. In this way the Gospel, by its very nature, speaks prophetically to society and politics.

The passage is, thus, the linchpin between chapters 1-4 and 6-8 by expounding the parallel between Adam and Christ (showing similarities and dissimilarities), Adam serving as a type of Christ, and hence, explaining the human situation from de-creation to re-creation—from fall to redemption. Its controlling purpose is to show that God governs the human race through a solidary relationship the one with the other and, therefore, that what is true in Adam is also true in Christ; that is to say, just as sin was covenantally imputed in Adam, likewise, righteousness is imputed in Christ to those who believe, although, compared to Adam, with an unparalleled effect. Christ's one act of obedience completely supersedes Adam's one act of disobedience.

This then provides the soteriological footing for Paul's victorious eschatology; that is, the victory of Christ *in* history, which is fully explicated in chs. 6-8, showing victory over sin and the law (chs. 6-7), resulting in the renewal of creation (ch. 8), the covenant reinstatement of the majority of the human race in the fullness of the Gentiles and the regrafting of the Jews (chs. 9-11), and then applied practically in church and culture (chs. 12-16). The nations are harvested, and the earth is restored as the temple of the Lord. Thus, as a linchpin, 5:12-21 shows that the renewal of creation swings on a small hinge, on the covenant category of 'imputation' (see my comments 4:1-8).

#### **Imputation Contended and Defended**

Romans 5:12-21 is considered the *locus classicus* for the doctrine of 'imputation'; that is, the imputation of Adam's sin, guilt, and penalty to humankind and of Christ's righteousness to the believer. However, the 'New Perspective on Paul' significantly contends against 'imputation'. For example, as one of the most influential proponents, we will consider several aspects of N. T. Wright's approach.

This assessment builds on and completes our previous discussions around the 'New Perspective' at 2:13 and 3:21-31 of our Romans commentary. We will consider five aspects of Wright's denial of this doctrine: 1) His *ad hominem* argumentation; 2) It is categorically disallowed; 3) It is invented by medieval reformers; 4) It is not taught explicitly; 5) It is denied by the non-historical Adam.

#### *Imputation contended 'ad hominem'*

First, he responds with *ad hominem* rhetoric to those who hold the historic view of imputation when he exclaims somewhat petulantly, "When will it become clear to the geocentrists?", and thus ironically 'imputes' flat-earth obscurantism to them (Wright, *Justification*, p. 95). To engage in fallacious *ad hominem* argumentation – personal affront and mockery – is not worthy of a scholar of Wright's status and does not add to his cause. His body of work is, unfortunately, peppered with it.

#### *Imputation categorically disallowed*

Second, and more to the point, he states, that although believers are 'in Christ', "...it is quite illegitimate to seize on that and say that therefore they have something called 'the righteousness of Christ' imputed to them, in the full sixteenth-and-seventeenth century sense..." (*ibid*, p. 133-4). He thus categorically disallows 'imputation' and goes on to claim that Paul is not teaching that Jesus perfectly obeyed the moral law so as to possess "moral righteousness" which can then be "credited" to those who are "in Christ" (*ibid*, p. 134). Rather, he claims, through union with Christ, he has become our righteousness only in the sense that God has vindicated him in the resurrection; hence, a *christus victor* view of atonement, of vindication over against his enemies; this supplants any notion of propitiatory atonement based on forensic righteousness and the judicial wrath of God (1:17-18;). The "faithfulness of God" to his covenant is set off against the moral and ethical "righteousness of God", evacuating the Gospel of the need for propitiation and hence the imputation of Christ's moral righteousness to our account (see our comments on the 'pagan' notion of 'propitiation' promoted by N. T. Wright at [3:21-26](#)). Sin and the wrath of God are recast and hence our need for propitiation. Consequently the Gospel as "the power of God to salvation" (1:16-17) is disempowered by the 'New Perspective's' reinterpretation of "righteousness".

Contra to Wright, our exegesis below of 5:12-21 will show imputation, while not using the actual word, as unarguably the

Pauline thought. Likewise, our exegesis of the previous four chapters has already conclusively demonstrated man's plight under the judicial wrath of God and thus in need of a righteousness not his own, a forensic transfer of, in Luther's words, "alien" righteousness to one's own account. See [4:1-8](#) and [3:21-31](#), *Righteousness Reinterpreted* and *Justification Reinterpreted*, for 'imputation' and the 'New Perspective's' reinterpretation of righteousness as the "faithfulness of God" and justification as "membership of the covenant community". These revisionist pre-commitments require a categorical rejection of "imputation", of Adam's sin to us, our sins to Christ, and his righteousness to us. For Wright's overall project to offer some semblance of coherence his version of "righteousness" and "imputation" cannot co-exist.

Hence, Wright's exegesis of 5:12-21 conveniently ignores the large theological questions provoked by the passage, glossing over questions such as "imputation"—"the mode by which...sin is transmitted" from Adam to all human beings. The "primal sin" of Adam, he acknowledges, "somehow" involves "all subsequent humanity"; but *how*, according to him, is not in the scope of the passage. As Venema points out, "In one of the few places where Wright offers a definition of 'imputation,' he clearly seems to confuse it with what theologians historically termed 'infused' righteousness: 'If we use the language of the law court, it makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. Righteousness is not an object, a substance or a gas which can be passed across the courtroom.' [*What Saint Paul Really Said*, p. 98]. This statement not only misrepresents the idea of imputation, but it also leaves unanswered the corollary question, by what means do human beings become guilty of the transgression Adam committed?" (Cornelis P. Venema, *N. T. Wright On Romans 5:12-21 And Justification: A Case Study In Exegesis, Theological Method, And The "New Perspective On Paul"*, MJT 16 [2005], p. 69 n. 46).

#### *Imputation invented by medieval reformers*

*Third*, as to Wright's suggestion that the forensic righteousness of Christ was a "sixteenth-and-seventeenth century" invention is far from the fact (see also comments on the 'New Perspective' under [3:21-31](#)). While the church Fathers were not fully developed in their articulation of the faith nor always consistent in their statements and, equally with Luther and Calvin, not the arbiters of orthodoxy apart from their agreement with God's word, it is imperative that we correct Wright's claim. A mass of testimony to justification by grace through faith and the forensic righteousness of Christ can be adduced from the writings of Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, the Epistle of Diognetus, Irenaeus, Cyprian, Athanasius, Basil, Ambrose, Origen, Jerome, Chrysostom, and Augustine; I refer the reader to James Buchanan's, *The Doctrine of Justification: An Outline of its History in the Church And of Its Exposition from Scripture*, for a full treatment. Contra to Wright these forensic truths of justification by faith were gradually obscured in the life of the church through the predicted apostasy that materialized in the post-apostolic period, progressively degenerating into the full-blown Romanist doctrines of the medieval period that eventually precipitated reformation.

#### *Imputation not taught explicitly*

*Fourth*, Wright claims that "...if 'imputed righteousness' is so utterly central, so nerve-janglingly vital, so standing-and-falling-church important...isn't it strange that Paul never actually came straight out and said it?" (Wright, *op cit*, p. 30). In other words, Paul would have been far more explicit in teaching it and, also, used the actual word. Nevertheless, if this canon were applied to the biblical teaching of the Trinity, for example, Wright should also disallow it; it is not taught explicitly in the NT nor does it use the word "trinity". But he does not; his hermeneutic is not consistent. Likewise, the Bible's teaching on the 'hypostatic union' of the two natures of Christ in the one person is not taught explicitly in the NT nor is the technical term used.

In this regard, D. A. Carson astutely poses:

Even if we agree that there is no Pauline passage that explicitly says, in so many words, that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to his people, is there biblical evidence to substantiate the view that the substance of this thought is conveyed? And if such a case can be made, should the exegete be encouraged to look at the matter through a wider aperture than that provided by philology [text and language] and formulae?" (D. A. Carson, *The Vindication Of Imputation: On Fields Of Discourse And Semantic Fields*, from "Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates", Edited by Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier, Downers Grove: IVP, 2004, p. 50).

Here, Carson brings into focus two domains: the exegetical and the theological. Wright, along with many contemporary scholars, bifurcates two valid domains of the hermeneutical process. He asserts that traditional theology is "abstract" and engages in the "de-historicizing" of the text (Venema, *op cit*, p. 4, 5, 9, 16, 18, 28 45, 50), claiming, "We [the New

Perspective] have abandoned biblicistic proof-texting, as inconsistent with the nature of the texts that we have..." (Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, pp. 139-40). In other words, "traditional theology" has divorced itself from the biblical narrative producing a "Procrustean bed", and so he promotes the authority of the text's historical context over that of the larger biblical context and, more particularly, its complete data on that particular narrative's subject (theology); what he calls, "biblicistic proof-texting" that diminishes the story-form of Scripture. For example, Paul, as a product of "Second Temple Judaism", interprets the Gospel through a rabbinical Jewish lens and, hence, is *the* key to understanding Paul. This is not to say that Wright dismisses the notion of systematic theology (because he does not), but it is to say that until now, in his opinion, theology has got it wrong (see N.T. Wright, '*Historical Paul and "Systematic Theology": To Start a Discussion*', in 'Biblical Theology', ed. M. W. Elliott. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016; p. 147-164). In other words, it has not been developed from *his* particular exegetical methodology, that is to say, through the lens of "Second Temple Judaism" allied with *his* particular version of covenant theology (see our comments on 'The New Perspective on Paul' at 3:21-31 for Wright's version of 'covenant').

In response, not only does Wright's approach evidence a low view of God and the divine inspiration of Scripture – that revelation is culturally bound – but his particular exegetical method, severed from systematic theology, is inevitably atomistic, isolating the text from the rest of Scripture and absolutizing the part over the whole. Rather than the *whole-of-Scripture* context informing the text, it is made captive to the *historical* context (e.g. in Paul's case, rabbinical Judaism) and must then be interpreted exclusively through the lens of that culture. This is not to deny the significance of historical background – understanding NT cultural context is a given, principally, but not exclusively, to elucidate authorial intent – but it must come under the authority of the rest of Scripture in the interpretive process. Otherwise, both first or twenty-first century worldviews and sensibilities are projected onto the text, controlling its interpretation. All human culture, whether ancient or contemporary, stands equally under the judgement of the Word of God. As the sovereign creator-God, his Word is not trapped within space-time, held captive by the created order, by human culture; rather, he rules over all and through all, speaking without let-or-hindrance through men as men. The doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture, thus, underlines its inherent clarity for the reader aided by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, whether learned or unlearned. In this way, the plain reading of the text must stand. Otherwise, a new cabal, a caste of priest-scholars, will control biblical interpretation, and if Wright had his way, only those who adopt his "new perspective" on Paul.

Moreover, to claim the imprimatur of *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), as Wright does, in the name of philology or narrative pre-eminence is, in fact, to obfuscate the principle of *sola Scriptura*. In recovering *sola Scriptura*, the authority of Scripture over that of church tradition, the Reformers advanced the hermeneutic of "Scripture interprets Scripture" (i.e. the analogy of faith), the whole-of-scripture context, and the lighter text shining on the darker and, thus, moving the interpreter from the known to the unknown. Hence, Scripture interprets itself. While underscoring the importance of the grammatico-historical context of the text, *sola Scriptura* was never pitched, by the Reformers, against *regula fidei* (the rule of faith), Scripture as a coherent whole (i.e. theology). In his strict adherence to the pre-eminence of narrative and his allergic reaction to traditional theology, Wright exposes a pre-commitment to the tenets of Postliberal theology. His scheme is not free of its own theological formulae (N. T. Wright, *Reading Paul, Thinking Scripture*; Originally published in 'Scripture's Doctrine and Theology's Bible', 2008. Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI, pages 59-71).

Additionally, Wright also subtly sets the authority of the Word of God *incarnate* (Jesus) over against that of the Word of God *inscripturate* (the Bible) as incompatible in some way:

But I've been trying to stress that the risen Jesus does not say to the disciples, "All authority on heaven and earth is given to the books you chaps are going to go off and write." He says, "All authority on heaven and earth is given to Me." So that if we say that Scripture is authoritative, what we must actually mean is that the authority which is vested in Christ alone is mediated through Scripture.

That's a more complicated thing than simply having a book on the shelf, full of right answers that you can go and look up. It's more a way of saying that when we read Scripture and determine to live under it, we are actually saying we want to live under the sovereign lordship of Jesus mediated through this book. (*Wright On Sola Scriptura*; The Gospel Coalition, November 19, 2007; <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/wright-on-sola-scriptura/>; accessed 16/10/2018).

How can this not diminish the propositional objectivity of Scripture, resulting in gnostic subjectivism? Or, on the other hand, if

the Bible is abstracted from Jesus, how can it not lead to "bibliolatry" and pharisaism, a sterile scholasticism. It is not an either/or choice, as Wright seems to suggest. Moreover, the Bible does not merely "mediate" God's Word or Christ's authority, as he claims; it *is* God's Word and, hence, God's authority.

And so, Wright avers the text's historical context over all else. Consequently, in applying his historical-critical method, he adopts the modernist presupposition of Higher-Criticism, that everything that is raised above historical conditions must be removed (truth as absolute and eternal), thus, precluding the hermeneutic of the whole-of-Scripture and excluding any movement from exegesis to theology, including any on-going symbiotic interaction between the two. In this way, both the unity of God and the unity of Scripture – the revelation of God's one mind and purpose – are diminished, if not denied, despite Wright's attempt to promote it through the meta-narrative of Abraham (his version of covenant theology). In the end, his historical-critical project over-plays the situatedness of Scripture, interpreting them through the lens of an apostate religion – "Second Temple Judaism" – and thus extra-biblical texts (again this is not to deny the helpful, but subservient, role of historical background); hence, the full inspiration, perspicuity, and authority of Scripture are precluded. In the end God is trapped in history. Wright's claims to orthodoxy are proven facile and only serve to obfuscate his actual theological agenda.

As mentioned above, our exegesis, despite Wright's protestations to the contrary, will demonstrate that "imputation" is unarguably the apostle's thought in 5:12-21.

*Imputation denied by a non-historical Adam*

*Fifth*, by denying the historical Adam, Wright must also logically deny imputation. For Wright there is two "theological drivers" behind belief in the historical Adam: 1) The authority of Scripture, and 2) The doctrine of salvation (soteriology).

In chapter 2 – 'Do We Need a Historical Adam?' – of his book, *Surprised by Scripture: Engaging Contemporary Issues* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014), Wright dismisses the traditional view on the authority of Scripture as primarily a "sociocultural" phenomenon and then proceeds to caricature it as treating them like a collection of "true but miscellaneous information" or "an early version of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*." He asserts that this is not the Scripture's kind of authority. Wright continues, "The risen Jesus doesn't say, 'All authority in heaven and earth is given to... the books you chaps are going to go and write.' He says, 'All authority has been given to *me*.'" It would cause some logical consternation to say that the Bible authoritatively claims that all authority lies somewhere else! So, he claims, "The phrase authority of scripture can only, at its best, be a shorthand for *the authority of God in Jesus, mediated through scripture*" (*ibid*, p. 28 [his italics and ellipsis]). Moreover, the authority of God is about reclaiming his proper lordship over all of creation. The Bible's role in this is to point us to Christ and to equip us as the royal priesthood charged with "bringing the saving rule of God in Christ to the world" (*ibid*, p. 29). That is what the Bible does authoritatively. In Wright's estimation it is not a collection of timeless truths to which all people everywhere and every time must intellectually assent in order to be saved. In fact, he claims, "it simply won't do to check the boxes of the traditional dogmas", caricaturing the handling of the Scriptures, by the Reformed tradition, as abstracted from reality and divorced from the renewal of creation. He sees all this as Gnosticism.

In prosecuting his agenda, Wright has set up here a series of false dichotomies: of the Bible's factuality versus the Bible's spirituality; of the Bible's authority versus Jesus' authority; of the Bible versus Christ's lordship over creation; and, of the Reformed tradition versus the renewal of creation. However, none of these are either/or options as perversely postured by Wright. They are all to be held in balanced tension, with each contingent upon the other; one unable to function without the other, they go hand-in-glove. In a full-blooded, orthodox, Reformed theology they are not mutually exclusive. This then is a rhetorical strategy, setting up a straw man so as to set a torch to it with his own theological brilliance. A trap for the untaught or unwary.

Paradoxically, despite his voluminous published prosecution of his own interpretation, Wright's goal doesn't seem to be to uncover the one correct interpretation of the text that must be imposed on everyone. He says, "No, the Bible seems designed to challenge and provoke each generation to do its own fresh business, to struggle and wrestle with the text" (*ibid*) and "Each generation must do its own fresh historically grounded reading, because each generation needs to grow up, not simply to look up the right answers and remain in an infantile condition" (*ibid*, p. 30). In this vein, so it goes, Paul routinely reinterpreted Old Testament texts, infusing them with new meaning which the original audience would not have understood. His rereading of the Adam story into his own context of first century Judaism is a prime example. In so doing, did Paul establish that as the normative context for all future Christians? Or did he model for us what we should do too—reread the Adam story in our context, which means we do so in light of discoveries that God has allowed about genetics, prehistoric human beings, and our

relatedness to (and distinction from) the rest of created life? Those are hard questions. They could have implications, so the argument goes, for how we interpret other parts of Scripture too. We should have confidence, though, that the "authority of Scripture" to do what God intended it to do is not in question.

So, in summary, the "authority of Scripture" is recast by Wright to mean its power to inspire Christians "to bring the rule of God to the world". Suggesting implicit elements of the Higher-Critical school (or more specifically, Neo-orthodoxy), the Bible's factuality in relation to history and the cosmos, to the space-time world, is divorced from its spirituality. This is not to deny the necessary role that text and historical criticism play in the interpretative process. Unlike Higher-Criticism, they, however do not necessarily come with an inbuilt presupposition that Scripture is merely a human text. While on one hand affirming a kind of "inspiration" and "authority", on the other, Wright overplays the historical and the human element of Scripture (e.g. recasting Paul as a product of first-century Judaism, explaining his misplaced belief in the historical Adam), thus diminishing the Bible's inspiration and, hence, authority. Ironically, he has used the study of historical context, infused with Higher-Critical assumptions (i.e. the historical-critical method), to deny the historicity of Adam. Consequently, how then is Wright not falling into the Enlightenment fact-value abyss; and, hence, into the Kantian fact-faith dichotomy and, inescapably, Kierkegaard's resultant religious existentialism? Ironically, Wright falls into the very ditch he seeks to escape, Gnosticism.

Now, to Wright's treatment of the second "theological driver": Adam's role in the story of salvation. In his telling there is a commonly held approach – Catholic and Protestant – to salvation which holds that a perfect creation was marred through Adam's sin, and Jesus came to pay the penalty for sin, thereby allowing us to go to heaven when we die. Adam's role in that story is crucial: "no Adam" means "no reason for Christ to come." But according to Wright, that is not the story that Paul tells, and is a distortion of the Gospel. In fact, at this point he puts forward another false dichotomy: a choice between "traditional soteriology" and the kingdom of God. Paul, instead, connects our salvation to the story of Israel: their being placed in the Promised Land, given a commission to bless all nations, then breaking the Law and being exiled. Paul uses Adam to retell Israel's story: "placed in the garden, given a commission to look after it; the garden being the place where God wanted to be at rest, to exercise his sovereign rule; the people warned about keeping the commandment, warned in particular that breaking it would mean death, breaking it, and being exiled. It all sounds very, very familiar" (*ibid*, p. 37). On this account not much hinges on the literal historicity of Adam. Other Jewish authors around the time of Paul also appropriated Adam for their theological agendas. Moreover, the genre of the Adam story was not historical journalism.

Predictably, Wright posits a form of theistic evolution in this book. He suggests the possibility that God chose one pair from the rest of the early hominids "to be the representatives of the whole human race". God's purpose was to take place through them but they failed and "abdicate[d] their image-bearing vocation and follow[ed] the siren call of the elements of chaos still within creation" (*ibid*, p. 38). Instead of reflecting the glory of God back to creation, through their worshiping created things, they reflected death back to it, failing in their vocation "to make the whole world a place of delight and joy and order". Enter Abraham through whom this vocation was to be fulfilled. Paul merely uses the Adam story to retell God's purpose through Abraham whose descendent, Jesus, "does for Israel what Israel couldn't do for itself, and thereby does for humans what Israel was supposed to do for them, and thereby launches God's project of new creation, the new world over which he already reigns as king" (*ibid*, p. 39).

So, how do we assess Wright's reinterpretation of Adam's soteriological significance? *First*, the story of Adam then, according to Wright, is not about salvation but rather vocation, yet another false binary choice offered by his scheme. Contra to Wright's representation, the Reformed tradition, especially, lays emphasis on Adam's calling to subdue the earth as God's vice-regent, his subsequent failure but final fulfilment through Christ's perfected humanity as the "last Adam" and the "second man" (Rom 5; 1 Cor 15). *Second*, as previously noted in this commentary (see 3:21-31), Wright's overall project is reductionist as it telescopes the Adamic covenant into the Abrahamic, thereby reducing the full import of Adam's sin; and, hence, the nature of that sin from an ethical category to a metaphysical. Instead of ethical and intellectual rebellion against God in man's pursuit of autonomy (per Genesis 2-3), sin becomes a metaphysical force to overcome. This then leads, despite Wright's qualifications, to yet another false binary option: the *christus victor* version of the atonement over penal substitution. In this scenario, imputation of Adam's sin or of Christ's righteousness is defunct. Wright then, instead, represents the cross as "the subversion of all human power systems" and, thus, by default, ultimately externalises and politicises the kingdom of God, returning us to the statist project of salvation through politics. This would explain Wright's political commentary and promotion of the socialist state as a Christian commitment, and this, despite his regular posturing as the *via media* in most debates, the all so reasonable and balanced third way. His promotion of interventionist economics clearly places him somewhere left of centre on the political spectrum. Ideas always have consequences. *Third*, because Adam is put forward as only a "representative" and not as

the "federal [covenant] head" of the race, the Adam story becomes merely paradigmatic of Israel's story, a literary teaching device, an illustration (per H. M. Kuitert, successor to G. C. Berkouwer as professor of systematic theology at the Free University of Amsterdam, in a little book entitled, *Do You Understand What You Read?*). However, contra to Wright, Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, presents both Adam and Christ as the covenant heads of two humanities, as our exegesis will demonstrate. The parallel between the two is contingent upon the literal historical fact of Adam, not as merely a "representative" for man, but as its covenant head and sole progenitor. As Wright champions the historical-critical method, of all people, he should be familiar with the structure of the Ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties and, especially, the covenantal solidarity of ancient societies. This solidarity – forensic and social – via covenant heads and natural descent is evidenced, not only in reference to Adam, but throughout Scripture. This precludes any theistic-evolutionary schemes.

#### *Concluding remarks*

In conclusion, Wright's flawed critique is animated by his extreme caricatures and false dichotomies, thereby intentionally damning whole traditions and, thus, promoting his project as *the* new canon. He ignores the full range of scholarship within those traditions – especially the Reformed – that actually advance his same emphases on the redemptive-historical, the covenant, the kingdom of God, and the renewal of creation, and this was centuries before he was ever a twinkle in his parent's eyes. They can be found in the Reformed and Puritan writers. Furthermore, these emphases have been more recently expanded by the likes of Gresham Machen, Cornelius Van Til, Geerhardus Vos, Herman Ridderbos, Rousas Rushdoony, and others. Following hard on his rhetorical caricatures, consigning whole theological traditions to oblivion, he then presents these same elements in his scheme as if they were his own. One cannot help but wonder if it springs from mere ignorance or something worse. Nonetheless, Wright's caricatures do gain traction because they pick up the more obvious deficits of popular evangelicalism and, especially, of Dispensationalism, although the latter is more a total system failure than a mere deficiency. And so, yes, he is addressing not so much a *distorted* gospel, as he claims, but rather a *truncated* one, a presentation of the gospel that overemphasises personal salvation and, hence, overshadows its cosmic implications. This is not error by creedal belief but error by emphasis. Error is always the razor edge of truth. Seemingly paradoxical truths must be held in balanced tension, not cynically exploited as a binary choice for rhetorical purposes. This principle applies equally to Wright's targets as it does to Wright himself. While his project is subliminally infused with the Higher-Critical presupposition, interpreting history from within, and hence fatally flawed, he does present some emphasises that are valid. Even so, the useful elements only serve to seduce the unwary. The proverbial warning from Virgil's *Aeneid* concerning the Trojan Horse is apt: *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*—"Beware of Greeks bearing gifts".

In view of his overall project of reinterpreting Paul's Gospel, and so turning justification by faith on its head, he has placed himself under the apostolic anathema: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed." (Gal 1:8).

Now, to the exegesis.

#### *Kingdom through Covenant*

The argument of the passage proceeds somewhat unevenly. Paul begins to establish the parallel between Christ and Adam with the phrase "just as" (v. 12a), but immediately breaks off to expand on the sin of Adam (v. 12d-14). At the end of v. 14 he begins to finish the comparison by describing Adam as a "type" of Christ but is again diverted, although this time, by a series of contrasts between them, demonstrating the superiority of Christ over Adam, using the phrase "much more" (v. 15-17). Finally, in two parallel verses, the comparison introduced by "just as" (v. 12) is logically completed by the word "so" (v. 18-19). Verse 20 then returns to the law which was introduced in v. 13-14, but now explains its purpose; no doubt to satisfy those that might observe the omission of the Mosaic economy and its function in the overview of redemptive history. Verse 21 completes the paragraph by picking up the thought of "reigning" from v. 17 as a triumphant declaration of the dominion of Christ through righteousness (covenant status), or to put the same thought differently, of *kingdom through covenant*. Just as any human government functions through a legal constitution, so too, the government of God. God's government of the nations – "his will done on earth as it is in heaven" – is exercised through the new social order's obedience to the covenant that is renewed in Christ. In this way, the redeemed community, as the *ecclesia*, functions governmentally over the earth. Hence, Christ, as the Lord of creation, and man, as his vice-regent, are restored to dominion. Christ is thus the terminal point of the old order in Adam (the "last Adam", 1 Cor 15:45) and the beginning of a new humanity (the "second man", 1 Cor 15:47). This new society in Christ is, indeed, the "new creation" in which "old things have passed away and all things are made new" (2 Cor 5:17). Just as God governed the old creation through a solidaric relationship in Adam, he now governs the new creation

through a solidaric relationship in Christ.

**12** 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— **13** for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. **14** 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.—Verse 12 opens with “therefore” (*dia touto*) which can also be rendered “because of this”. Clearly, he is about to draw a conclusion from what has been said, but the question among commentators is what “this” specifically refers to: the whole argument thus far or something more immediately connected, for example, the previous verse, verses, or paragraph? Without rehearsing the various alternatives, it is our conviction that, as more or less stated above, it is the whole argument thus far, but he is also spinning it off the previous three verses (v. 9-11). Not only that, beyond being retrospective (i.e. drawing a conclusion from the foregoing), the phrase is also prospective (i.e. making application in the outgoing argument) in that “because of” shows a final cause for “this” to happen, “this” being the final and total salvation of v. 9-10. In other words, what is promised – final and total salvation – will come to pass for the reasons about to be explained: *first*, because of the solidarity between Christ and the new humanity, and, *second*, while similar to that in Adam, the new society’s solidarity in Christ is dissimilar in that it is so *intensive* in life-giving power and *extensive* in all-encompassing impact that it far exceeds the old society’s solidarity in Adam. In this way Adam is a “type” of Christ (v. 14), prefiguring the universal solidarity common to both. Hence, the foundation is laid for the remainder of the epistle. The issue of the law introduced in v. 13-14, Paul will return to in v. 20-21. The similarity between Adam and Christ is introduced by the phrase “just as” and then demonstrated by the repetitive “one” and “many” (and additionally, “all”)—as it is with the *one*, so it is with the *many*. As explained previously, the apostle interrupts this comparison in v. 12, only hinting at it in v. 15-17, but completing it in v. 18-19 as the governing thought of the passage. This solidarity of the one and the many is so foreign to modern Western sensibilities that scholars have either attributed to Paul Rabbinism or Hellenism, forgetting that he would have been introduced to it in his youth through the first three chapters of Genesis (see Nygren, p. 207-209). From man’s primeval state, he was not only in covenantal relation to God but also to himself (Gen 1-3). As the progenitor of the race, Adam functioned as its covenant and representative head; every individual’s identity was, and is, in solidarity with Adam and, thus, the Adam community. This sense of tribal identity and commonality that is so integral to ancient societies and tribal cultures (even down to the indigenous cultures of today) is alien to the Western individualistic mind and idea of justice: “What, how can I be accountable for someone else’s sin?” And yet it is the central nervous system of God’s dealings with man: every person is either in covenant solidarity with Adam or with Christ. This same principle of corporate solidarity is demonstrated throughout Scripture; for example: Abraham’s seed is named in Isaac (Gen 21:12; Gal 3:8, 16); Levi paying tithes to Melchizedek in the loins of Abraham (Heb 7:9-10); the sins of the fathers visited on the children to the third and fourth generation (Ex 20:5); the sin of Achan bringing judgement on Israel (Josh 7); Israel’s king standing for the whole nation (1 Sam 9:16, 10:1, 2 Sam 7:14; Ex 4:22-23; Hos 11:1 [both king and nation called Yahweh’s “son”]; 2 Sam 24 [Israel punished for David’s sin]); etc.

The notion of covenant solidarity with Adam, therefore, provides the answer to the conundrum caused by Paul’s statement in v. 12: “so death spread to all men *because all sinned*”; it hence does not refer to *actual* sins committed by each person (as in 3:23) but rather to Adam’s *actual* sin ‘imputed’ to each person. The fact that infants die before they have had opportunity to sin – death being the penalty for sin – indicates that their death is not caused by the *actual* sins they have committed. Sin is then a solidary reality; moreover, it is also ethical and forensic, not metaphysical (abstract or philosophical), demanding a forensic atonement over any *christus victor* perspective. As such, the penalty for Adam’s actual sin is also imputed to every person’s account, requiring payment (see Murray, *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin*, pp. 42-64); this explains the otherwise inexplicable phenomenon of “death” as common to Adam and the whole race (Gen 2:17; 3:19). In v. 12 the adverb “so” (*houtos*), meaning “in this way”, opens the phrase “death spread to all men”, demonstrating this covenant solidarity with Adam; sin and death entered through him and, hence, spread to all because of God’s covenant with man in Adam. Although the Law of Moses had not yet been given, death still spread to all men, indicating that the primeval revelation of God to Adam was in terms of a covenant with its law-sanctions that provided the basis of imputation of sin and its penalty to all mankind (v. 13; also 4:15). This then provides the nub of Paul’s argument in the passage, the similarity between Adam and Christ: just as the sin of Adam (covenant-breaking) is imputed, so also the righteousness of Christ (covenant-keeping). In Adam condemnation to death through one act of sin is imputed to all, so, likewise, in Christ justification to life through one act of righteousness. This then means that justification must be viewed as distinct from regeneration and renovation; the latter refers to Christ’s righteousness *imparted* or *infused* progressively in the Christian experience and behaviour, the former to Christ’s righteousness *imputed* instantaneously at the point of faith. Righteousness infused vitally (in one’s covenant behaviour) can only occur on the basis of righteousness imputed legally (for one’s covenant status), the instantaneous leading to the progressive. Renovation is subjective, while justification is objective. In grammar the subject acts upon the object. For example, in the sentence “David believes in Christ”, David, the subject, acts upon Christ, the object, by believing. In other

words, the subjective is contingent upon the objective—there is thus objective ground for subjective assurance. As I believe in Christ and his objective *imputation* (transfer of credit) of his righteousness to my account as the basis of my covenant status, the subjective *impartation* (infusion of character) of Christ's righteousness occurs by the Spirit, transforming my behaviour to one of covenant fidelity. This is the crux of the difference between the medieval Roman view of justification (per the Council of Trent), as progressive *infusion* of Christ's righteousness, and the classic Protestant view, as instantaneous *imputation* of Christ's righteousness (see Murray, *ibid*, pp. 12-21), the former inescapably leading to Pelagianism. It is also, as previously argued in this commentary, the issue we see with N. T. Wright and the 'New Perspective'.

Verses 15-21 now explicate more fully how Adam typifies Christ, with v. 15-17 showing the dissimilarities, v. 18-19 completing the parallel – the similarities – introduced in v. 12, and v. 20-21 explaining the purpose of the law introduced in v. 13-14.

**15** *But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.* **16** *And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.* **17** *For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.*—While a structural parallel between Christ and Adam, as covenant heads, exists, it “does not extend to the nature of the two acts and their consequences” (Moo, p. 334); hence, Paul's delineation of the dissimilarities between them in v. 15-17, showing forth the superabundance of grace. Verses 15a and 16a present two contrasts to Adam, indicated by the phrase “not like”: the first contrast, of *degree* (“much more” and “many”) and the latter, of *consequence* in v. 16b & c (“justification” over “condemnation”) that culminates in v. 17 (the “reign of life” over the “reign of death”). Verses 15-16 show that the antithetical consequences of “condemnation” (unto death) on the one hand and “justification” (unto life) on the other are grounded in the relationship of the “one” to the “many”, that is to say, in the solidary relation of humanity to either Adam or to Christ. Verse 17 then highlights the dissimilarity – the antithesis – between the “dominion of death” through the one man, Adam, and the “dominion of life” through the one man, Christ; the antithesis demonstrating the superabundance of grace through Christ and the certainty of God's reign in history. Murray's comments are salient at this point:

The contrasted modes of expression are no doubt significant. *Death* reigned; it is not said that the subjects of death reigned in death. Death exercises its sway over them. But on the other side it is not said expressly that life reigns. This would not necessarily be inappropriate. But the form used is that the subjects of life “reign in life”; they are represented as exercising dominion in life.” (Murray, p. 197)

On the one hand, death reigned over them, but on the other, those who “receive the free gift of righteousness” do the reigning. As Rushdoony highlights, “The word reign is *basileuo*, from *king*, *basileus*. It is a word which modern man has cheapened and spiritualized away. It was a dangerous word in the Roman Empire because it meant a rival power, another ruler than the emperor” (Rushdoony, p. 80). The new humanity is restored to the dominion of Genesis 1:26. What was lost in Adam is regained in Christ, and more. And this proved, through an *a fortiori* argument (from the weaker to the stronger)—if the dominion of death over the former, how “much more”, dominion in life for the latter! Through the “free gift of righteousness” in Christ, not only is justification made certain for redeemed humanity, but also dominion in this life. Their victory over death – and, therefore, all the enemies of God – is grounded in the solidary relationship of the new humanity to its covenant head, Christ, implicitly demonstrating the reality of imputation. But not-only-so, this imputation of righteousness – and, hence, renewed covenant status (justification) – also guarantees the victory of God's people in history. Soteriology – imputation and justification – is the ground of Paul's dominion eschatology.

As Daniel prophesied,

But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever. And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.

Daniel 7:18, 27

“The people of the saints” are given “the kingdom and the dominion” in life, promoting a culture of life. But the old Adam-society, under the dominion of death, promotes a culture of death – public policies from genocide to abortion, euthanasia, and assisted-suicide, in the guise of “compassion”, “social justice”, or “evolutionary progress” – while the new Christ-society exercises godly dominion, adopting policies of life, enshrining the sanctity of human life, as made in God’s image. God’s government – and, hence, law – is “given to the people of the saints of the Most High”. Law is always an expression of sovereignty, reflecting the ultimate authority of a culture. And that authority is found either in Christ the King or in autonomous man, the latter corporately exercised through the messianic state; there is no neutral ground between them. This precludes any Christian use of positivist or natural law. As the apostle will explain later in chapter 13, the state, as a “minister of God”, must uphold God’s righteous requirements, visiting “God’s wrath on the wrongdoer”. Who else but the people of God will teach the state God’s righteous requirements—his law-word? Paul’s Gospel, thus, proclaims the Kingdom of God in antithesis to the kingdom of man. It is inherently countercultural, fulfilling Jesus’ mandate to disciple nations, teaching them to obey all that he has *commanded* (Mt 28:18-20). Christ, the King, commands the nations to obey him (Ps 2). Hence, the Gospel of the Kingdom – of the King and his law – is culture-building in its scope.

**18** Therefore, as *one* trespass led to condemnation for *all* men, so *one* act of righteousness leads to justification and life for *all* men. **19** For as by the *one* man’s disobedience the *many* were made sinners, so by the *one* man’s obedience the *many* will be made righteous.—Having clarified the dissimilarities between Adam and Christ in v. 15-17, the apostle can now return to the original argument. Verse 18 both resumes the thought begun at v. 12, but left off, and recapitulates the argument of v. 15-17. The similarity between Adam and Christ is now continued—as it was for one (Adam), so it is for the other (Christ), Adam serving as a “type” of Christ (v. 14). Verses 18 and 19 reassert the principle of imputation; that is, the solidary relationship between the “one” and the “many”—that which applies for the one also applies for the many. And this is a forensic relationship, imputing in v. 18, on the one hand, “one trespass”, and thus, “condemnation for *all*”, but on the other, “one act of righteousness”, leading to “justification and life for *all*”; and in v. 19 imputing, on the one hand, “one man’s disobedience”, making the “*many*” “sinners”, but on the other, through “one man’s obedience” the “*many* will be made righteous”. Alternative renderings of the word “made” sinners or “made” righteous in v. 19 also confirm the forensic nature of the relationship between the “one” and the “many”. The Greek, *kathistemi*, according to Strong, can also be rendered *constitute*, *appoint*, *ordain*, or *set*. This is reflected in the Berkeley Version of the New Testament, translating it, “the many were placed in the position of sinners”, and, additionally, in the American Bible Union translation, that the many will be “constituted righteous”. One’s membership in Adam or in Christ places one in the position of, or constitutes one, as either a covenant-breaker or covenant-keeper. It is a legal position and status, implying a decision or ruling in law. This testifies to the forensic atonement of penal substitution that Paul has taught in chapter 3, which, in Paul’s teaching, does not preclude *christus victor*, but rather precedes it as the ground of Christ’s victory over the principalities and powers. This he makes clear to the Colossians,

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Colossians 2:12–15

Because Christ, as substitute, has borne our sins and paid our penalty by his own death, Satan can no longer find any ground of legal accusation against us (4:25; 5:6, 8; Isa 53:4-11; 54:17; Rev 12:10). And this, because he could find no ground in Christ himself (Jn 14:30), as “a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet 1:19).

From our solidarity in Christ, the question naturally arises as to whether Paul is implying a universal reconciliation, that everyone is ultimately saved from perdition. To answer this, one must not only take into account the whole of the Pauline corpus (e.g. 2 Thes 1:8-9) but also the purpose of the present argument. The point is not the measure numerically but the mode functionally. For example, the “all”, in reference to Christ, of 1 Corinthians 15:22, “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive”, cannot be numerical as the context refers only to those who are dead in Christ being raised at his coming. So, in Romans 5:15-21 the apostle is showing how the categories of Adam and Christ, as covenant heads, actually work. The only similarity between them is demonstrated in the principle of imputation: the case of the “one” is also the case of the “many”. The point of the argument is the notion of covenant solidarity, of imputation, of the forensic transfer of sin and its

judicial results, or, of righteousness and its judicial results from the “one” to the “many”. As it was with Adam, so it is with Christ.

We will comment more fully on v. 19 as background to “the trespass” under v. 20.

**20** Now the law came in to increase the trespass [*paraptoma*], but where sin increased, grace abounded all the **more**, **21** so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.—In v. 20-21 the apostle returns to the purpose of the law, first introduced in v.13-14 where he explains, that although Moses’ law had not yet been given, “death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression [*parabasis*] of Adam”. To understand the argument, we must appreciate the unique nature of Adam’s “trespass”. If, as Paul claims, “death reigned from Adam”, logically death demands a sentence, a sentence demands a verdict, and a verdict demands a law. Even though Moses’ law had not yet been given, Adam was under a law, entailing a penalty of death (Gen 2:17). Not only that, “death reigned over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam”, showing that Adam’s verdict and penalty was imputed to his progeny. However, in contrast to his progeny, Adam had received a *direct* revelation from God which entailed law – certain commands – establishing the divine-human arrangement, the pattern of which corresponds to our knowledge of the ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties. As explained in the [introduction](#) to this commentary, the acronym, THEOS, outlines this fivefold covenant structure: Transcendence, Hierarchy, Ethics, Oath, and Succession. The conquering king establishes his supremacy over his vassal (Transcendence), delegates his authority (Hierarchy), backs it up with certain commands and consequences (Ethics and Oath), and finally ensures the continuity of his reign (Succession). This pattern is woven throughout Genesis 1-3 and, indeed, the whole of Scripture and redemptive history. To reiterate, with the LORD God as man’s victorious King and we his vassals, the covenant arrangement is clear:

1. He sovereignly and graciously establishes covenant relationship with mankind, in Adam (Transcendence);
2. He speaks his law-word over Adam (mankind), delegating him as vice-regent, progressively advancing the covenant through Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, climaxing in his Son, who delegates authority to the Family, Church and State (Hierarchy);
3. His law-word is the means by which the covenant is obeyed, stipulating his righteous requirements as the standard of justice (Ethics);
4. He sanctions the covenant through curses and blessings (Oath);
5. He guarantees the continuity of his reign by promulgation of the Gospel through godly families, churches, and culture (Succession).

In view, then, of this covenant structure, “the trespass” of Adam (v. 15, 16 17, 18, 20; *paraptoma* – to fall aside, to deviate wilfully), or “the transgression” (v. 14, 19; *parabasis* – violation, disobedience), is exposed in its full horror as a betrayal of God’s covenantal condescension – of the Creator to the creature – and of man’s appointment to the government of the world (Gen 1:26-28; Ps 8). But not-only-so, it exposes the inner workings of “the trespass”, of Adam as a covenant-breaker. And this is where the principle of God’s law-word, in the divine hierarchy of authority, comes into play, as Paul explains, “the law came in to increase the trespass” (v. 20a). As an aside, it is important to note that the law “came in”, rendered by Strong, and also Meyer, as “came in alongside”; not, therefore, as an alternative but as a complement. God’s righteous law is integral to covenant as its ethical component, as seen in the fivefold covenant structure. The law is a provision of God’s gracious purpose so as to advance that purpose; it is, hence, not antithetical to grace, as many argue (Gal 3:19, 21). And this “increase of the trespass” occurs through the *specification* and *inscripturation* of the law in Moses. The more explicit the revelation, the more heinous the sin. Paul explicates this function of the law more fully in 7:8, 11, 13 (note, there are other purposes: Gal 3:17-25; 2 Cor 3:6-11; 1 Tim 1:8-11). It merely serves to increase what has already been the case under Adam. The principle being: “to whom much is given, much will be required” (Lk 12:48)—the greater the light, the greater the judgement. So, because of a direct command from God, Adam’s “trespass” was greater than his progeny. Although, while his progeny was culpable, it was less so because of Adam’s privileged revelation. Nevertheless, it *is* culpable, not only through Adam’s relayed communication from God but through the law of God inscribed on their *own* hearts (2:14-15). Parenthetically, this should not be confused, as in Thomism, with natural law or natural theology that seeks to arrive at the knowledge of God and ethics through human reason. All revelation from God is supernatural. It is directly apprehended by man and not the product of deduction. To return to man’s culpability, this is only increased by the law through Moses, as Paul indicates in the verse being considered. While we might attempt to suppress the clear knowledge of God, mediated by creation without (1:18-20) and conscience within (2:15), the inscripturated revelation of God to Moses, possessing definitive specificity and declarative authority, leaves Adam’s progeny without “excuse” (1:20; 2:1, 15 – from *apologeomai* – to give an account of oneself, a legal plea). They have been indicted by God through the covenant lawsuit and found guilty. The sovereign and non-negotiable nature of God’s law-

word – whether through Adam or increased through Moses – exposes man’s heart in all its rebellion, as he attempts to be autonomous. To appreciate this, we must back up to the previous verse (v. 19): “For as by the one man’s **disobedience** [from *parakouo* – to mishear; to hear alongside, above, or against] the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s **obedience** [from *hupakouo* – to hear under] the many will be made righteous”.

Here we have not only the external expression of the historic Fall but also the kernel of it. In the Garden our first parents stepped out from “obedience” (*hupakouo* – to hear under) *under* the authority of God’s word, his verbal propositional command. But here now is the nub of “the trespass”: they instead, stood in judgement *over* God’s word, in “disobedience” (*parakouo* – to hear alongside or above), determining for themselves its truthfulness (Gen 3). And this provides the genesis of every controversy with the authority and inerrancy of God’s word ever since. Man pridefully stands in judgement over God’s word rather than standing under *its* judgement! Presuming the neutrality of human reason, they set themselves up, equal to God, able to judge between two equal hypotheses: God’s verbal communication and Satan’s counter-communication. The result: the Creator-creature distinction is broken; these crash into each other and merge into one, resulting in pantheism, an impersonal divine immanence in the universe—the *Oneism* of our current cultural milieu that obliterates all distinctions. In short, the transcendent Creator-God is expelled from the universe. And so, here we have the essence of “the trespass”. Not to mention the presupposition behind the current secularising of our culture and, yet, perversely, the divinising of man and nature. Man, as a would-be god, elevating autonomous reason over revelation, determines his own reality by sovereign fiat. It is true because I say so. And this, in denial of God-created God-interpreted categories, for example, male and female (Gen 1:27), obliterating not only the image of God in man but also the Creator-creature distinction. Explaining why in the current cultural milieu it is not only acceptable but my inalienable right – protected in law – to declare my self-perception that, “I am a six-year-old girl!”, despite my birth-assigned age of forty-six and male gender, not to mention my wife of twenty-three years, seven children, and job as a motor mechanic! But wait, the *pièce de résistance* was this man’s adoption – in the six-year-old girl persona – into another family! (Daily Mail, report of a Canadian transgender man, 12 December 2015). As I write, the Tasmanian state government, the first Australian jurisdiction to do so, has today passed legislation that makes gender optional on birth certificates and allows a sixteen-year-old to change their birth-assigned gender without parental permission (Daily Mail, 10 April 2019). Ironically, while declaring the supremacy of reason – of rationality – our culture is being consigned to irrationality. As we reject God-created categories, pursuing unbridled autonomy, we are losing the capacity to think and sliding rapidly into collective insanity. Talk about “joy-riding on the downgrade [of God’s word] at breakneck speed!” (Phil Johnson, *Reforming or Conforming: Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church*, Ed. Gary Johnson & Ronald Gleason). With the rejection of Christianity as our societal foundation we are swiftly playing out the full logic of mankind’s primeval fall. Vehemently prosecuting our personal autonomy through the myth of neutrality – that is, the myth of bias-free reason and its handmaiden, the secular state – and wilfully suppressing the knowledge of God, we have been given over to our own lusts, and become as gods, capriciously decreeing our own realities. And, hence, consigned to building castles in the sky, while mental health professionals charge the rent.

To return to the apostle’s argument: *the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more* (v. 20). And this grace, as a solution to “the trespass”, came through “the one man’s *obedience* (*hupakouo* – to hear under)” so that “the many will be made righteous”(v. 19). What Adam failed to do, Christ has done. As truly man – in fact, as the “second man” (1 Cor 15:47) – he perfectly obeyed the law-word of God, hearing the voice of the Father and doing his will in the totality of life (Jn 4:34; 5:50; 6:38). And so, as the “second man”, he becomes the covenant head and progenitor of a new humanity, one that now stands in covenant status under God. The “son of man’s” obedience to the death of the cross justifies the sinner, granting that covenant status; but moreover, his obedience to the Father, in the totality of his life, perfects the new humanity. Rather than pride and autonomy, man, in Christ, is now characterised by humility and obedience, hearing the voice of God under his word.

Having shown the function of the law to increase sin – and in turn increase grace – he climaxes the passage eulogising the superabundance of grace over sin. Indeed, sin and the law are mere servants of God’s goal for a government of grace: *so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness*. This characterises the whole passage (v. 12-21) as a panegyric to the new Christ-order: to his reign – indeed, his government – of righteousness leading to life! Here we have the ground for the unshakable “hope of the glory of God” (v. 1), for the world-wide triumph of the Gospel harvesting the nations such that the majority of the earth will serve the King in righteousness. The superabundance of grace in Christ, over and above all the horrors of sin in Adam, will resound to the glory of his name throughout the earth before history is done.

In summary, the apostle has progressively prosecuted his theme of the righteousness of God revealed, from 1:17 to 3:21, 22; and 5:17, 21. The new order is characterised by righteousness, the righteousness of Christ imputed to the believer’s account as

a free gift, securing a right standing before God, the believer being now justified as a covenant-keeper. And, as such, is identified in solidarity with the new Christ-order – the new covenant community – in contradistinction to the old Adam-order in its community of unrighteousness. Moreover, he has shown that the theme of God's righteousness is not only *covenantal* but also *governmental*, positioning the "Gospel of God", from chapter one verse one, addressed to the centre of the Roman Empire, in the form of an imperial epistle. In this way he has established the Gospel in antithesis to the messianic claim of all humanistic governments, showing them as an expression of the corporate Adam. And so, in this passage, he represents the Gospel calling forth a new social order in Christ—indeed, as the outworking of God's government in the earth. As the epicentre of the epistle, this passage not only brings to a climax the thesis begun in chapter 1 but also lays the foundation for the remainder of the epistle.

Now turning to chapters 6 and 7, as a parenthesis, Paul deals with the hindrances to the full manifestation of this government of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (14:17). The sheer spiritual power and glory of God's government is then expounded in chapter 8, but only after hurdling the twin barriers of sin (ch. 6) and the law (ch. 7). These are not only barriers to the individual believer but to the whole corporate order of the new Christ-society—of God's government in the church *and* wider culture. The apostle has, hence, secured the hope of God's manifest glory as the goal of history, moving it from *de-creation* to *re-creation*. Indeed, to 'paradise restored' in tangible measure this side of the Second Advent.

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[Part 5: Introduction—De-Creation & Re-Creation: \*Paradise Restored\*](#)

Part 5a: Chapter 5:1-21—The Hope of Glory

Part 5b: Chapter 6:1-23—The Problem of Sin

Part 5c: Chapter 7:1-25—The Problem of the Law

Part 5d: Chapter 8:1-39—Re-Creation by the Spirit: *Paradise Restored*

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The *Romans* Series:

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Part 4: [Judgement & Justification: \*Justice Promised\*](#)

Part 5: [De-Creation & Re-Creation: \*Paradise Restored\*](#)

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Part 7: Autonomy & Theonomy: *Covenant Obeyed*

Part 8: Personal & Cultural: *Dominion Regained*

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