

# THE FATAL DISOBEDIENCE OF ADAM AND THE TRIUMPHANT OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST

## How Adam's Sin Serves the Supremacy of Christ

*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.*

ROMANS 5:14

*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.*

ROMANS 5:17



One of the aims of this book is to impress on our minds the fact that Jesus Christ is the most important person in the universe. Not more (or less) important than God the Father or God the Spirit, of course. With them, he is equal in worth and beauty and wisdom and justice and love and power. But he is more

important than all created persons—whether angels or demons or kings or commanders or scientists or artists or philosophers or athletes or musicians or actors—the ones who live now, or have ever lived, or ever will live. Jesus Christ is supreme.

### ALL THINGS FOR JESUS—EVEN EVIL

This book is also meant to show that everything that exists—including evil—is ordained by an infinitely holy and all-wise God to make the glory of Christ shine more brightly. The word *ordained* is peculiar, I know. But I want to be clear what I mean by it. There is no attempt to obscure what I am saying about God’s relation to evil. But there *is* an attempt to say carefully what the Bible says. By *ordain* I mean that God either *caused* something directly or *permitted* it for wise purposes. This permitting is a kind of *indirect* causing, since God knows all the factors involved and what effects they will have and he could prevent any outcome. So his *permission* is a kind of secondary causing, but not a direct causing.<sup>1</sup> This distinction is an effort to be faithful to the different ways the Bible speaks about God’s relation to events.

<sup>1</sup>I find the effort of Stephen Charnock (1628–1680), a chaplain to Henry Cromwell and a non-conformist pastor in London, to be balanced and helpful in holding the diverse Scriptures on God’s will together. He writes:

God doth not will [sin] directly, and by an efficacious will. He doth not directly will it, because he hath prohibited it by his law, which is a discovery of his will; so that if he should directly will sin, and directly prohibit it, he would will good and evil in the same manner, and there would be contradictions in God’s will: to will sin absolutely, is to work it (Psalm 115:3): “God hath done whatsoever he pleased.” God cannot absolutely will it, because he cannot work it. God wills good by a positive decree, because he hath decreed to effect it. He wills evil by a private decree, because he hath decreed not to give that grace which would certainly prevent it. God doth not will sin simply, for that were to approve it, but he wills it, in order to that good his wisdom will bring forth from it. He wills not sin for itself, but for the event. (Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979], 148.)

Some people disparage an appeal to “secondary causes” between God’s sovereign will and the immediate effecting of a sinful act (cf. Jack Cottrell, “The Nature of the Divine Sovereignty,” *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* [Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1995], 100–102). But this idea of intermediate causes, which is different from God’s ultimate causing, is not introduced because of the demands of a theological system, but because so many Scriptures demand it. For example, 1) God commissions an “evil spirit” between Abimelech and the men of Shechem to bring about his will (Judg. 9:22–24); 2) in Luke 22:3 Satan leads Judas to do what Acts 2:23 says God brought about; 3) Paul says that Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers (2 Cor. 4:4), but also says that God sends a blinding spirit of stupor (Rom. 11:8–10); 4) Satan stirs up David to take a census (1 Chron. 21:1), which proved

The Bible expresses both ideas—causing and permitting—in the way God brings things about. For example, in Mark 5:12–13, the demons beg to be sent into the pigs, and Jesus “gave them *permission*.” In 1 Corinthians 16:7 Paul says, “I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord *permits*.” Hebrews 6:1–3 exhorts the people to “leave elementary doctrine . . . and go on to maturity,” then concludes, “And this we will do if God *permits*.”

And the Bible speaks of God’s more direct action even in events that involve evil. For example, Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery. By this sinful act Joseph goes to Egypt and later is in a position to save the very brothers who hated him. Joseph says, “God *sent* me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth” (Gen. 45:7).

At the exodus from Egypt, we read about God’s hardening the heart of Pharaoh and his turning the Egyptians to hate the Israelites. “I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go” (Ex. 4:21). “He turned their hearts to hate his people, to deal craftily with his servants” (Ps. 105:25).

And when it comes to calamities—physical and spiritual—they are repeatedly described as sent by God. “I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will rob you of your children” (Ezek. 5:17). “I will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD” (Amos 8:11).

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to be sin (2 Sam. 24:10), and yet it is written that God was in some sense the cause behind Satan (2 Sam. 24:1); 5) Satan gets permission from God to torment Job (Job 1:12; 2:6), but when Satan had taken Job’s family and made him sick, Job said, “The Lord has taken away” (Job 1:21), and, “Shall we receive good from God and shall we not receive evil” (2:10)—to which the writer responds: “In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (1:22; 2:10). Texts like these make the theological reflections of Theodore Beza (in 1582) biblically sound:

Nothing happens anyhow or without God’s most righteous decree, although God is not the author of or sharer in any sin at all. Both His power and His goodness are so great and so incomprehensible, that at a time when He applies the devil or wicked men in achieving some work, whom He afterwards justly punishes, He Himself none the less effects His holy work well and justly. These things do not hinder but rather establish second and intermediate causes, by which all things happen. When from eternity God decreed whatever was to happen at definite moments, He at the same time also decreed the manner and way which He wished it thus to take place; to such extent, that even if some flaw is discovered in a second cause, it yet implies no flaw or fault in God’s eternal counsel. (Quoted in Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978, orig. 1860], 143–144.)

So when I say that everything that exists—including evil—is *ordained* by an infinitely holy and all-wise God to make the glory of Christ shine more brightly, I mean that, one way or the other, God sees to it that all things serve to glorify his Son. Whether he causes or permits, he does so with purpose. For an infinitely wise and all-knowing God, both causing and permitting are purposeful. They are part of the big picture of what God plans to bring to pass.

### EVIL EXISTS FOR ITS APPOINTED PURPOSE

The Bible is explicit that wickedness exists for God's wise purposes. For example, Proverbs 16:4 says, "The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble." God has done this in his own mysterious way that preserves the responsibility of the wicked and the sinlessness of his own heart. We should humble ourselves if we cannot explain how this can be. We are told that it is so. Beware of bringing to the Bible assumptions that are not taught in the Bible. That is how God's word is nullified.

We saw in Chapter Two that all things were made through Christ and *for* Christ (Col. 1:16). We saw that this explicitly includes the "thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities" that were defeated by Christ at the cross. In other words, they were made "for the day of trouble," as Proverbs 16:4 implies. God knew what they would become when he created them, and he folded their evil into his plan of redemption. On Good Friday, when Christ died and the evil powers were defeated, the power and justice and wrath and love of Christ were displayed. Sooner or later every rebellion against him comes to ruin and serves to glorify Christ.

### THE GOD WHO IS THERE

This book also aims to solidify the conviction that Christianity is not merely a set of ideas and practices and feelings designed

for our psychological well-being—whether designed by God or man. That’s not what Christianity is. Christianity begins with the conviction that God is an objective reality outside ourselves. We do not make him what he is by thinking a certain way about him. As Francis Schaeffer said, he is *the God who is there*. We don’t make him. He makes us. We don’t decide what he is going to be like. He decides what we are going to be like. He created the universe, and it has the meaning he gives it, not the meaning *we* give it. If we give it a meaning different from his, we are fools. And our lives will be tragic in the end.

Christianity is not a game; it’s not a therapy. All of its doctrines flow from who God is and what he has done in history. They correspond to hard facts. Christianity is more than facts, but not less. There is faith and hope and love. But these don’t float in the air. They grow like great cedar trees in the rock of God’s truth.

And the reason I make this one of my aims in this book is because I am deeply convinced from the Bible that our eternal joy and strength and holiness depend on the solidity of this worldview putting strong fiber into the spine of our faith. Wimpy worldviews make wimpy Christians. And wimpy Christians won’t survive the days ahead. Rootless emotionalism that treats Christianity like a therapeutic option will be swept away in the last days. Those who will be left standing will be those who have built their houses on the rock of great, objective truth with Jesus Christ as the origin, center, and goal of it all.

## JESUS’ GLORY PLANNED IN ADAM’S SIN

The focus of this chapter is on the spectacular sin of the first man, Adam, and how it set the stage for the more spectacular counter-thrust of Jesus Christ. We turn now to Romans 5:12–21.<sup>2</sup>

The glory of Christ is the main purpose that God had in

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<sup>2</sup>When I preached through Romans at Bethlehem Baptist Church, I devoted five sermons to these verses. Those sermons are at [www.desiringGod.org](http://www.desiringGod.org). In this chapter, the focus is different from anything I looked at in those messages.

mind when he permitted Adam's sin, and with it the Fall of all humanity into sin. Remember what we have seen about God's permission: Whatever God permits, he permits for a reason. And his reasons are always infinitely wise and purposeful. He did not have to let the Fall of Satan or of Adam happen. He could have stopped it.

The fact that he did not stop it means he has a reason, a purpose for it. And he doesn't make up his plans as he goes along. What he knows to be wise, he has always known to be wise—eternally. Therefore, Adam's sin and the Fall of the human race with him into sin and misery did not take God off guard. It is part of God's overarching plan with the aim of it all to display the fullness of the glory of Jesus Christ.

One of the clearest ways to show this from the Bible—and we won't go into it in detail here<sup>3</sup>—is to look at those places where the sin-defeating sacrifice of Christ is shown to be in God's mind before the creation of the world.

For example, in Revelation 13:8, John writes about “everyone whose name has not been written *before the foundation of the world* in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.” So there was a book before the foundation of the world called “the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.” Before the world was created, God had already planned that his Son would be slain like a lamb to save all those who are written in the book.

Or consider 2 Timothy 1:9: “[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and *grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.*” Saving grace was given to us before the ages began. That is, it was given to us before there was any human sin to save us from. Therefore, grace was planned before human sin was there to need it. This means that God's plan to save us through grace was not a response to human

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<sup>3</sup>For a fuller development of this, see my chapter “Why God Appoints Suffering for His Servants” in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of Christ*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway Books, 2006), 91–109.

decisions to sin. Saving grace was the plan that made sin necessary. God did not find sin in the world and then make a plan to remedy it. He had the plan before the ages, and that plan was for the glory of sin-conquering grace through the death of Jesus Christ.

This is even more plain in Ephesians 1:4–6: “[God] chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.” To what end did God predestine us sinners for adoption? To the praise of the glory of his grace. That is why the plan was made. The ultimate aim of the eternal plan was that praise might be as intense as possible for the glory of God’s grace. And the apex of that glory is in the death of Jesus. So much so that the gospel of the death of Christ for sinners is called “the gospel of *the glory of Christ*, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4).

Therefore, the biblical view is that the sufferings and death of Christ for sin are not planned after the actual sin of Adam but before. Therefore, when the sin of Adam happens, God is not surprised by it, but has already made it part of his plan—namely, a plan to display his amazing patience and grace and justice and wrath in the history of redemption, and then, climactically, to reveal the greatness of his Son as the second Adam superior in every way to the first Adam.

So we look at Romans 5:12–21, keeping in mind that Adam’s spectacular sin did not frustrate God’s Christ-exalting purposes, but instead served them. Here’s the way we will look at these verses. There are five explicit references to Christ. One of them sets up the way Paul is thinking about Christ and Adam. And the other four show how Christ is greater than Adam. Two of those four are so similar we will lump them together. Which means we will look at three aspects of Christ’s superiority.

## JESUS, “THE COMING ONE”

Notice the way Christ is referred to in verse 14. Verses 12–13 supply the context: “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—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. 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.” There’s the reference to Christ in verse 14: “the one who was to come.”

This verse sets up the way Paul is thinking in the rest of the passage. Notice the most obvious thing first: Christ “was to come.” From the beginning, Christ was “the coming one.” Paul shows that Christ is not an afterthought. Paul does not say that Christ was conceived as a copy of Adam. He says that Adam was a type of Christ. God dealt with Adam in a way that would make him a type of the way he planned to glorify his Son. A type is a foreshadowing of something that will come later and will be like the type—only greater. So God dealt with Adam in a way that would make him a type of Christ. God’s plan for Christ preceded his dealing with Adam.

Notice more closely just where, in the flow of his thought, Paul chooses to say that Adam is a type of Christ. Verse 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.*” He chooses to tell us that Adam is a type of Christ just after saying that even people who did not sin in the way Adam did still bore the punishment that Adam bore. Why did Paul, just at this point, say that Adam was a type of Christ?

## JESUS, OUR REPRESENTATIVE HEAD

What he had just said gets at the very essence of how Christ and Adam are *alike* and the way they are *different*. Here’s the paral-



lel: People whose transgression was not like Adam's died like Adam. Why? Because they were connected to Adam. He was the representative head of their humanity, and his sin is counted as their sin because of their connection with him. That's the essence of why Adam is called a type of Christ—because our obedience is not like Christ's obedience and yet we have eternal life with Christ. Why? Because we are connected to Christ by faith. He is the representative head of the new humanity, and his righteousness is counted as our righteousness because of our connection with him (Rom. 6:5).

That's the parallel implied in calling Adam a type of Christ:

Adam	>Adam's sin	>humanity condemned in him	>eternal death
Christ	>Christ's righteousness	>new humanity justified in him	>eternal life

The rest of the passage unpacks how much greater Christ and his saving work are than Adam and his destructive work. Keep in mind what I said at the beginning of this chapter. What we are seeing here is God's revelation of realities that define the world that every person on this planet lives in. Everybody on this planet is included in this text because Adam was the father of everybody. Therefore, every person you meet, of any ethnicity, is facing what this text talks about. Death in Adam or life in Christ.

This is a global text. Don't miss that. This is the defining reality for every single person you will ever meet. Wimpy worldviews produce wimpy Christians. This is not a wimpy worldview. It stretches over all of history and over all the earth. It profoundly affects every person in the world and every headline on the Internet.

## CELEBRATING THE SUPERIORITY OF JESUS

Now let's look at three ways that Paul celebrates how Christ and his work are superior over Adam and his work. They can be summed up under three phrases: (1) the abundance of grace, (2) the perfection of obedience, and (3) the reign of life.

*The Abounding Grace of Christ*

First, verse 15 and the abundance of grace. “But the free gift [of righteousness, v. 17] 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.” The point here is that God’s grace is more powerful than Adam’s trespass. That’s what the words *much more* signify: “much more has the grace of God . . . abounded for many.” If man’s trespass brought death, how much more will God’s grace bring life.

But Paul is more specific than that. God’s grace is specifically “the grace of that one man Jesus Christ.” “Much more have the grace of God and the free gift by *the grace of that one man Jesus Christ* abounded for many.” These are not two different graces. “The grace of that one man Jesus Christ” is the incarnation of the grace of God. That’s the way Paul talks about it, for example, in Titus 2:11: “The grace of God has appeared [namely, in Jesus], bringing salvation. . . .” And in 2 Timothy 1:9: “his own . . . grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus.” So the grace that is in Jesus is the grace of God.

This grace is sovereign grace. It conquers everything in its path. We will see in just a moment that it has the power of the king of the universe. It is reigning grace. That’s the first celebration of Christ’s superiority over Adam. When the trespass of the one man Adam and the grace of the one man Jesus Christ meet, Adam and his trespass lose. Christ and his grace win. That is very good news for those who belong to Christ.

*The Perfect Obedience of Christ*

Second, Paul celebrates the way that the grace of Christ conquers Adam’s trespass and death, namely, the perfection of Christ’s obedience. Verse 19: “For as by the one man’s disobedience [namely, Adam’s] the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience [namely, Christ’s] the many will be made righteous.” So the

grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, keeps him from sinning—keeps him obedient unto death, even death on the cross (Phil. 2:8)—so that he offers flawless and complete obedience to the Father on behalf of those who are connected to him by faith. Adam failed in his obedience. Christ succeeded perfectly. Adam was the source of sin and death. Christ was the source of obedience and life.

Christ is like Adam, who was a type of Christ—both are the representative heads of an old and a new humanity. God imputes the failure of Adam to his humanity, and God imputes the success of Christ to his humanity, because of how these two humanities are united to their respective heads. The great superiority of Christ is that he not only succeeds in obeying perfectly, but does so in such a way that millions of people are counted righteous because of his obedience. Are you only connected to Adam? Are you only a part of the first humanity bound for death? Or are you also connected to Christ and part of the new humanity bound for eternal life?

### *The Reign of Life*

Third, Paul celebrates not only the abounding grace of Christ and the perfect obedience of Christ, but finally, the reign of life through Christ. Grace leads through Christ's obedience to the triumph of eternal life. Verse 21: “. . . so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Grace reigns through righteousness (that is, through the perfect righteousness of Christ) to the great climax of eternal life—and all of that is “through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Or, once more in verse 17, the same point: “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.” The same pattern: Grace through the free gift of righteousness leads to the triumph of life, and all of that through Jesus Christ.

I mentioned above that the grace of God in Christ that Paul

refers to in these verses is sovereign grace. You can see that in the word *reign*. Death has a kind of sovereignty over man and reigns over all. All die. But grace conquers sin and death. It reigns in life even over those who once were dead. That is sovereign grace.

## JESUS' SPECTACULAR OBEDIENCE

This is the great glory of Christ—he vastly outshines the first man Adam. The spectacular sin of Adam is not as great as the spectacular grace and obedience of Christ and the gift of eternal life. Indeed, God's plan from the beginning, in his perfect righteousness, was that Adam, as the representative head of humankind, would be a type of Christ as the representative head of a new humanity. His plan was that by this comparison and contrast, the glory of Christ would shine all the more brightly.

Verse 17 puts the matter to us very personally and very urgently. Where do we stand? “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.” Read these words very carefully and personally: “those who *receive* the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness.”

## PRECIOUS WORDS FOR SINNERS

These are precious words for sinners like you and me: The grace is free, the gift is free, the righteousness of Christ is free. The question is: Will we receive it as the hope and treasure of our lives? If we do, we will “reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.” And in this eternal reign, we will enjoy as our supreme Treasure the beauty and worth of Jesus Christ whose glory shines all the more brightly against the backdrop of Adam's spectacular sin. The point of Romans 5:12–21 is that Christ's saving achievement is understood and cherished as it should be in view of Adam's spectacular sin. This was not a coincidence. It was God's purpose before the foundation of the world.