

CHRIST AS LAST ADAM

By Blake White

In our postmodern context, theological confusion abounds. Christian doctrines are all inter-related, and a misunderstanding on one issue will undoubtedly affect other areas of theology. Theology is a web, rather than a “bag of marbles” disconnected from one another.¹ While there is confusion today concerning many doctrines, two in particular will be in focus: eschatology and atonement. The former is commonly either misunderstood or neglected, while the latter is hotly debated, even within evangelical circles.² Penal substitutionary atonement is even under attack by many self-professing evangelicals.³ While there have been many able refutations of these attacks, the ever-present danger in theology is that of reductionism. Reformed evangelicals have spent lots of time and energy articulating and defending penal substitution. This is good and proper since penal substitution is at the heart of the atonement,⁴ but the downside is that not enough attention has been focused on the other aspects of the atonement that are under girded by penal substitution. With this in mind, the aim of this paper is to examine a slice of the eschatological aspects of the work of Christ as last Adam. First, a brief word will be made about the canon as eschatological to frame the discussion. Next, Adam will be looked at as image of God, head of the old creation and the head of God’s covenant with creation. Then, Christ will be investigated as the true image and Son of God who inaugurates the new covenant, and ushers in the new creation.

Eschatology

Eschatology is often defined as the study of last things, but as will be shown, this definition is too narrow.⁵ A better, more comprehensive definition is “the direction and goal of God’s active covenant faithfulness in and for His created order.”⁶ Greg Beale writes, “Many

¹ See Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), and D.A. Carson, “The Role of Exegesis in Systematic Theology,” in *Doing Theology in Today’s World: Essays in Honor of Kenneth S. Kantzer* ed. John D. Woodbridge and Thomas Edward McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 39-76.

² The former is in large part due to the popularity of the Left Behind series and the Trinity Broadcasting Network.

³ See for example the supposedly eclectic work by Joel Green and Mark Baker, which attacks penal substitutionary atonement throughout: Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

⁴ See the chapter by Thomas R. Schreiner in James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, *The Nature of the Atonement* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 67-98.

⁵ K. E. Brower, “Eschatology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 459.

⁶ Kent E. Brower, “Let the Reader Understand: Temple and Eschatology in Mark,” in *Eschatology in Bible and Theology: Evangelical Essays at the Dawn of a New Millennium* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 119.

Christians assume that the end-times pertain only to the future end of history, so that Christ's death and resurrection are events which happened at His first coming and are not closely connected with those events leading up to His second coming."⁷ To reduce eschatology to those events surrounding the end of history is to miss the eschatological conception of the entire Bible. The whole canon has an eschatological outlook. David Wells writes, "One of the great gains in biblical study in the last century was the realization that eschatology is not some final adjunct to the body of theological knowledge but more like a thread which is woven throughout its many themes."⁸

It is not an exaggeration to say that eschatology is at the heart of the New Testament. It is the lens through which all other theological constructs must be understood.⁹ Consider the following language: But when the fullness of time had come (Gal 4:4), on whom the end of the ages has come (1 Cor 10:11), as a plan for the fullness of time (Eph 1:10), now is the day of salvation (2 Cor 6:2), in the last days (2 Tim 3:1), but in these last days (Heb 1:2), at the end of the ages (Heb 9:26).¹⁰ Often eschatology is treated as an appendix in Systematic Theology textbooks. This is unfortunate, and a more accurate way would be to include eschatology in the title of the book since every doctrine in the Bible has an end-time outlook.¹¹ It is with this in mind that we proceed to examine Adam in the first chapters of the Bible.

Adam

The Old Creation

A superficial reading of the first chapters of Genesis reveals Adam as a significant figure. He is the head, or crown of creation as the federal head of all humanity. Every single unregenerate human can be subsumed under the category "in Adam." He is created uniquely as the head of creation in loving and intimate relationship with his creator. Adam is the first man made in the image of God, given the divine commission to have dominion over the created order (Gen 1:26). Genesis 1:28 says, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have

⁷ Greg K. Beale, "The Eschatological Conception of New Testament Theology," in *Eschatology in Bible and Theology*, 12.

⁸ David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 207-08. Similarly, Beale writes, "New Testament scholarship over the past few decades has made great strides in increasing our understanding that the beginning of Christian history was perceived by the first Christians as the beginning of the end-times," in "The Eschatological Conception," 12.

⁹ J. V. Fesko, *Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1-3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Scotland: Mentor, 2007), 200. Geerhardus Vos agrees, "the eschatological principle is so deeply embedded in the structure of the biblical religion as to precede and underlie everything else," in *The Pauline Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1994), 66.

¹⁰ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

¹¹ Beale, "The Eschatological Conception," 18. So also, Richard Gaffin writes, "eschatology is to be defined not only with reference to the intermediate state of individuals following death and to the second coming of Christ but inclusive of his first coming and the present existence of the church in the world. This is an insight of a magnitude that requires recasting not only eschatology but also the other loci as traditionally conceived, especially Christology, soteriology, both accomplished and applied, and ecclesiology," in "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 38, (Spring 1976): 299.

dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Adam was told to work and keep the garden (2:15). Rather than approaching the human head of creation, the serpent approaches his helper (3:1-2), attempting to reverse the created order. Our first parents disobeyed God, and the entire cosmos is cursed as a result. Sin not only affected human beings. The entire creation is fallen. Although Eve took the fruit, God approaches Adam (3:9), the covenantal head. As will be shown, Paul also conceived Adam as head of the old creation (cf. Rom 5:12-19). Creation is the beginning of the story line, and as such is absolutely foundational. William Dumbrell writes, “Creation is the assumption in the OT from which all theological movement proceeds.”¹²

Adam as Image/Son

The notion of humanity made in the image of God has been debated throughout the history of the church.¹³ Some theologians emphasize the structural aspects of the image of God, while others emphasize the functional aspects. Old Testament scholar John Walton has shown that across the ancient world, and the Hebrew Bible, humans are made in the image of God in that they “embody his qualities and do his work. They are symbols of his presence and act on his behalf as his representatives.”¹⁴ Likewise, Anthony Hoekema concludes that the divine image consists of both structural and functional aspects.¹⁵ William Dumbrell sees both aspects but gives priority to the representative function in the world. Adam, and thus all humanity, is made in the image of God *in order that* they may have dominion.¹⁶ Since Yahweh cannot be seen, humanity is to be the visible representatives of His rule and reign.¹⁷ Humans were to reflect God’s kingship by being his vice-regents on the earth.¹⁸ Having dominion is a kingly function.¹⁹ Psalm 8 is an inspired commentary on Genesis 1:26-28, that is filled with kingly language showing that kingship and image are intimately related. Adam was to be king, but of course it was a derived kingship.²⁰ He was to mediate God’s rule and respond obediently to the rule of God on behalf of creation.

The notion of image would have been familiar in the Ancient Near East. The first

¹² William J. Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning: Revelation 21-22 and the Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1985), 189.

¹³ For a helpful discussion of this issue, see Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 11-101.

¹⁴ John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 212.

¹⁵ *Created in God's Image*, 66-101.

¹⁶ William J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 18-19. Similarly, J.V. Fesko writes, “One finds the image of God primarily in man’s role as God’s vice-regent over the creation, and secondarily in his mental and spiritual faculties, his ability to relate to God, and ability to create like God,” in *Last Things First*, 47.

¹⁷ William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1984), 34.

¹⁸ G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 81. Also see his treatment of Adam as the first priest in the garden-temple, both of which are vital themes that are beyond the scope of this paper.

¹⁹ Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 18-19.

²⁰ Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning*, 175-76. Also see Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 33-34, and Fesko, *Last Things First*, 147-48, who argues that Adam was the first prophet, priest, and king.

hearers would have heard Yahweh making a grand statement. Greg Beale writes, “Ancient kings would set up images of themselves in distant lands over which they ruled in order to represent their sovereign presence. . . . Likewise, Adam was created as the image of the divine king to indicate that earth was ruled over by Yahweh.”²¹ All humanity was created in *His* image. Every time a person sees a person who is God’s image, we should think, “God owns the world.” This would have conveyed that God alone is Ruler and Lord of the universe!

The link between image and sonship must also be noted. Genesis 5:1-3 is telling in this regard. Picking up the language of 1:26, the text says that Adam “fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image.” Furthermore, Luke 3:38 reads, “the son of Adam, the son of God,” and Paul says, “For we are indeed his offspring” (Acts 17:28).²² The absence of sonship language in Genesis is probably due to sensitivity to the ancient near eastern context, and to avoid pagan concepts. Also, it may have been avoided to reserve the title for the true Son who has been so from eternity (John 1, Col 1:15-20). So Adam is the first human, the first divine image, and first created son.²³

Edenic Covenant

Acknowledging the difficulty of providing a single definition for all the different types of covenants in the ancient world and in Scripture, Michael Williams broadly describes covenant as, “a relationship between persons, begun by the sovereign determination of the greater party, in which the greater commits himself to the lesser in the context of mutual loyalty, and in which mutual obligations serve as illustrations of that loyalty.”²⁴ The issue of whether or not a covenant with creation exists is hotly debated in biblical studies.²⁵ An examination of the evidence however demonstrates the need for affirming that there is indeed a covenant with creation in the opening chapters in Genesis.

William Dumbrell in particular has convincingly shown the presence of a covenant with creation.²⁶ A key text is Genesis 6:18a, which reads, “But I will establish my covenant with you.” This is the first time the word “covenant” is used in Genesis, but does this mean that the Noahic Covenant is the first in the storyline? Dumbrell has shown that covenant initiation is usually described by the words “cut a covenant.” The absence of the standard terminology is due to the fact that Genesis 6:18 is not referring to the initiation of a new covenant, but rather a “confirmation of what was in fact an existing covenant.”²⁷ There already existed a divine

²¹ Beale, *The Temple*, 82. Also see Fesko, *Last Things First*, 48-50.

²² It should be noted that in Acts 17:28 Paul is quoting a poem from Aratus. This does not negate its veracity. In fact, Paul is picking up this poem for the truth it contains. Aratus too was made in the image of God and lived in God’s world so even pagans are bound to get some things right. Paul himself was carried along by the Holy Spirit so that the text that was produced was God-breathed (cf. 2 Pet 1:21, 2 Tim 3:16).

²³ Stephen J. Wellum, “Systematic Theology II Handouts” (classroom lecture notes, 27070—*Systematic Theology II*, Spring 2007, photocopy), 44-45.

²⁴ Michael D. Williams, *Far As the Curse is Found* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2005), 45-46.

²⁵ For example, see Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed With an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007).

²⁶ See his *Covenant and Creation*, especially 25-43, and *Search for Order*, 30-32. Also see Fesko, *Last Things First*, 82-95.

²⁷ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 43. In *The Search for Order*, Dumbrell writes, “In every case where ‘establish a covenant’ occurs, the phrase refers, not to the initiation of the covenant, but to the perpetuation of

relationship that was established by creation itself, which is confirmed with Noah.²⁸ Noah should be seen as a new Adam with a new start, who is given the same commission to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (Gen 1:28, 9:1, 7).

Hosea 6:7a is also an important but debated text that says, “But like Adam they transgressed the covenant.” This seems to point toward an Adamic or creational covenant. Additionally, in Jeremiah, the Lord speaks of the covenant with the day and with night, echoing the word of Genesis (Jer 33:19-26). Williams writes, “In the midst of exile, the prophet reassures Israel that God’s faithfulness to his people is as sure as his faithfulness to his creation. As God has covenantally bound himself to creation, he has no less bound himself to Israel.”²⁹ All this points to the fact that “God’s creative activity is covenantal.”³⁰ This truth leads Reformed theologian John Frame to write:

During the creation week, all things, plants, animals, and persons are appointed to be covenant servants, to obey God’s law, and to be instruments (positively or negatively) of His gracious purpose. Thus everything and everybody is in covenant with God.³¹

As mentioned above, Adam is the covenant head of all humanity. We will see this by looking at the way the Apostle Paul makes the Adam/Christ link (Rom 5:12-19, 1 Cor 15). It is significant that Paul never mentions a typological relationship between Christ and Noah. All later covenants have their foundation with creation. This should be clear from a careful reading of the storyline. Adam is commissioned, but fails. The consequences of this tragedy are immediately discernable with the murder of Abel. Noah is called out by grace as a new Adam, but then we find Genesis 3 all over again with Noah’s drunkenness. Although humanity was wicked before and after the flood, God remains committed to his creation and faithful to his covenant. Israel is called out, but falls with the golden calf incident. Adam’s failure as covenant head has consequences for the entire human race. Now everyone born is born “in Adam.” His disobedience brings death on all humankind.³²

Christ

Christ as Eschatological Adam

The clearest connection between Adam and Christ comes in Romans 5:12-19.³³ In this passage, Paul writes that Adam “was a type of the one who was to come” (5:14). He makes

a covenant previously concluded (cf. Gen. 17:7, 19, 21; Exod. 6:4; Lev. 26:9; Deut. 8:18; 2 Kings 23:3; Jer. 34:18). We may surmise then that the phrase ‘establish my covenant’ in Genesis 6:18 (and in Gen. 9:9, 11, 17) refers to the maintenance of a preexisting *covenant* relationship” 31.

²⁸ Ibid., 32.

²⁹ Williams, *Far As the Curse*, 47. Also see 45ff for more examples of the presence of covenantal features in Genesis 1-3.

³⁰ Fesko, *Last Things First*, 84. Similarly, Dumbrell writes, “any theology of covenant must begin with Genesis 1:1,” *Covenant and Creation*, 42.

³¹ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1987), 13.

³² See Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 133ff.

³³ For thorough exegesis of this passage (which is beyond the scope of this paper), see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 270-97; Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 314-50.

a typological connection between the two.³⁴ “Sin came into the world through one man. . . . as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 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 (5:12a, 18-19). This passage teaches what theologians have called federal headship. Adam, as the federal head of the human race, acts on behalf of his people. Christ, as the new federal head, acts on behalf of the new humanity, God’s elect people.³⁵ What Adam does is determinative for those in him. What the eschatological Adam does is also determinative for those in Him. Douglas Moo writes, “This ‘structural’ similarity between Adam’s relationship to his ‘descendents’ and Christ’s to his underlies all of vv. 15-21.”³⁶

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul also makes an explicit Adam/Christ connection. It is here, in verse 45, that Christ is called “the last Adam.” Christ is also called the second man (v. 47).³⁷ Paul’s language here is insightful. Paul could have avoided using the label “second Adam” due to the fact that in many ways Noah was the second Adam. Christ is the *second* man over the second creation, and the *last* Adam. Adam brought death, but Christ brings resurrection from the dead (v. 21). Verse 22 says, “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” These texts confirm the conclusion that Adam was in a covenantal context, the legal head of the old creation.³⁸ These are legal structures. Adam represents *all* humanity, while Christ represents the *new* humanity.

Luke’s gospel is also informative in this regard. It is not by accident that the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness follows the genealogy of Jesus Christ that ends with “Adam, the son of God” (Luke 3:38). Just as Adam was tempted, so was Christ. Sinclair Ferguson writes, “Here the *inclusion* of the whole of human history between Adam and Jesus suggests that the temptation and victory of the latter are to be interpreted in the light of the testing and defeat of the former with all its baneful entail.”³⁹ Other passages will be examined below, but these three chapters set the stage for looking at the work of Christ as the last Adam.⁴⁰

³⁴ See Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981), 297-316 for an examination of this passage as a legitimate typological structure.

³⁵ Herman Ridderbos writes, “Christ and Adam stand over against one another as the great representatives of the two aeons, that of life and that of death. In that sense, as representing a whole dispensation, a whole humanity, Adam can be called the type of ‘him who was to come’ (v. 14), i.e., of the second man and of the coming aeon represented by him. For as the proto-father brought sin and death into the world, so Christ by his obedience (that is, by his death) and his resurrection has made life to dawn for the new humanity” in *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 57.

³⁶ Moo, *Romans*, 334.

³⁷ See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 748-95

³⁸ So, Meredith Kline writes, “If the role of Christ as the second Adam is recognized as covenantal, this scheme provides further clear warrant for classifying the arrangement made with the first Adam as covenantal,” *Kingdom Prologue* (Overland Park, KS: Two Age Press, 2000), 20.

³⁹ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 49.

⁴⁰ J.V. Fesko also notes that Christ was crucified on Friday, the sixth day of the week which is the same day that Adam was created. He also notes that Pilate’s language in John 19:5 (Behold the man) echoes the creation of Adam. Lastly, he points out that Jesus cry, “It is finished” (John 19:30) also echoes the completion of creation on the sixth day (*Last Things First*, 162).

The True and Obedient Image/Son

Often, the work of Christ is limited to His cross work, which *is* central in the New Testament, but the danger is missing the comprehensive nature of his work. It is important to keep in mind that his work and person go together and can never be separated. Also, we must not separate his life, death, resurrection and ascension.⁴¹ All are vital aspects of Christ's work. With this in mind, Robert Letham's definition of the work of Christ is suitable: "All that Christ did when he came to this earth 'for us and our salvation', all that he continues to do now that he is risen from the dead and at God's right hand, and all that he will do when he returns in glory at the end of the age."⁴²

First, Christ as true image will be investigated. The New Testament presents Jesus Christ as the image of God (2 Cor 4:4). Colossians 1:15 says, "He is the image of the invisible God." This is clearly alluding to Genesis 1 and the first Adam who was the image of God.⁴³ In this passage, Christ is called the "firstborn from the dead" which also alludes to the first Adam.⁴⁴ Another passage showing the Christ/Adam parallel is Philippians 2:6-11. Ridderbos convincingly shows that the phrase "in the form of God" (2:6a) echoes "in the image of God" in Genesis 1.⁴⁵ The phrase "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (2:6b) hearkens back to Genesis 3:5 (you will be like God) and the temptation of the first image-bearers. While the first Adam attempted to grasp equality with God, but the last Adam did not use his equality with God for his own advantage but made himself nothing.⁴⁶

It is quite obvious that Christ is God's true Son (Luke 1:31-32, John 1:34, 1 John 5:20, Rom 8:3, 8:32, John 3:16, Heb 1:2, Matt 16:16), but it is important to show that unlike Adam (Luke 3:38), Israel (Ex 4:22, Hos 11:1), and the Davidic son (2 Sam 7:14, Ps 2), Christ is the obedient Son who alone is fully faithful to his Father. Adam's disobedience brought death, but Christ's obedience brings life (Rom 5:18). Just as we bear the consequences of the act of the first federal head, those who trust Christ bear the consequences of the act of the second federal head. By faith union with Christ, we are transferred from being in Adam to in Christ. Christ becomes our legal representative, and we share in all he has done. We benefit from all he did. All of his work is ours by faith union with him. Adam's disobedience is overthrown by Christ's obedience. Herman Ridderbos writes, "What was lost in the first Adam is regained in the second

⁴¹ At least as early as Calvin, the observation has been made that when Scripture refers to the death alone, or the resurrection alone, the terms are synecdochic, always having the other in mind even if not mentioned. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.16.13, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960; Reissued, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 521.

⁴² Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 18-19.

⁴³ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 68-78.

⁴⁴ See Ridderbos, *Paul*, 81; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 175-76.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 72-74. Also see C.K. Barrett, *From First Adam To Last* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1962), 69ff; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 263-68.

⁴⁶ Tom Schreiner writes, "The contrast of Jesus with Adam is striking since Adam in the garden strove to be equal to God and thus rejected God's lordship in eating of the fruit of the tree. Christ, on the contrary, though possessing equality with God (in this respect he differs from Adam), did not use his status as a means of enriching himself. Indeed, precisely because he was in the form of God and was equal with God, he refused to use his position as a means of self-aggrandizement" in *Paul*, 172.

in a much more glorious way.”⁴⁷ Concerning Luke 4 and the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, Sinclair Ferguson writes, “The second man-Son thus undid what was done by the first man-son; he obeyed and overcame as the last Adam, and now no further representative is needed.”⁴⁸ Jesus takes up the failed work of Adam in the Eden “re-run” but is successful. Unlike Adam, Jesus does not use his status as a bridgehead for praise and self-exaltation, but instead as a platform for giving and self-surrender (Phil 2).⁴⁹ Jesus made himself nothing, and humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death (Phil 2:7-8).

New Creation

It was mentioned above that eschatology is at the heart of the New Testament. The writers of the New Testament saw Jesus fulfilling all that the Old Testament hoped for and pointed to. Eschatology begins and ends with the person and work of Jesus Christ because all of God’s purposes are focused in him and all of God’s promises are fulfilled in him. The coming of Christ was an eschatological event, and to miss the eschatological element of his coming is to miss a central part of his work.⁵⁰ He came “when the fullness of time had come” (Gal 4:4) and in “these last days” (Heb 1:2). Herman Ridderbos writes that Paul “saw the advent and work of Christ as revelation of the fulfilling activity of God in history and as the breaking through of the great time of salvation. . . . The time of the world has come to a conclusion with Christ’s advent.”⁵¹

The eschatological significance of Christ’s work is most clearly connected to His resurrection, though his person and work must always be viewed as an inseparable unit. When evangelicals speak of atonement, often the resurrection is neglected. The resurrection is vital to the work of Christ, not simply an apologetic for the Christian faith.⁵² Indeed, the crucifixion would have been a “tragic charade” if the empty tomb had not followed.⁵³ It is the resurrection that is an “innately eschatological event—in fact, the key inaugurating event of eschatology.”⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 85. Robert Letham notes, “The disobedience of Adam enacted on a tree was remedied by Christ’s obedience on the tree,” *The Work of Christ*, 28.

⁴⁸ Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 49.

⁴⁹ Schreiner, *Paul*, 172.

⁵⁰ Greg Beale writes, “Christ’s work reveals that the end of the world and the coming new creation have begun in his death and resurrection,” “The Eschatological Conception,” 19.

⁵¹ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 44-45.

⁵² Commenting on the amount of attention focused on the death of Christ, Richard B. Gaffin Jr. writes, “My point is not to challenge the validity or even the necessity of this development, far less the conclusions reached. But in this dominating preoccupation with the death of Christ, the doctrinal or soteriological significance of his resurrection has been largely overlooked. Not that the Resurrection has been deemed unimportant, but all too frequently it has been considered exclusively as a stimulus and support for Christian faith (which it undoubtedly is) and in terms of its apologetic value, as the crowning evidence for Christ’s deity and the truth of Christianity in general,” in “Redemption and Resurrection: An Exercise in Biblical-Systematic Theology,” *Themelios* 27, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 17-18.

⁵³ Letham, *The Work of Christ*, 178-79. Letham also emphasizes that all of Christ’s life is vicarious, *Ibid.*, 116. All that he does is on our behalf.

⁵⁴ Richard B. Gaffin Jr., “Life-Giving Spirit: Probing the Center of Paul’s Pneumatology,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41, no. 4 (December 1998): 575. Geerhardus Vos comes to the same conclusion, writing, “That the resurrection is something specifically eschatological needs no pointing out. Nor is it necessary to show that Paul regards the resurrection of Jesus as the actual beginning of this general epochal event,” in *Pauline Eschatology*, 44-45.

The last Adam ushered in the new creation by virtue of his resurrection from the dead. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (cf. Gal 6:15, Rev 1:5, 3:14, Col 1:18). This text should not be merely taken in an individual sense. Those who are in Christ (rather than Adam), participate in and belong to the new world of God.⁵⁵ Herman Ridderbos notes, “The new creation that has broken through with Christ’s resurrection takes the place of the first creation of which Adam was the representative.” The “new creation is that of Christ’s resurrection.”⁵⁶ Kim Riddlebarger agrees, “Christ’s resurrection marked the dawn of the age to come and ushered in a new and final era of redemptive history. . . . Once Jesus burst from the tomb, the age to come dawned, and the new creation commenced. Easter Sunday is the birthday of the new world. The empty tomb is the sign and seal of the new creation.”⁵⁷

Christ’s work is cosmic in its scope. The last Adam has reconciled *all* things to himself (Col 1:20). He “gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age” (Gal 1:4). His substitutionary work brings believers in the new world order that He has ushered in. Jesus Christ has “delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:13-14). Speaking of himself, but surely representative for all believers, Paul writes, “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal 6:14). The work of the last Adam frees those he represents from the world, this present evil age, which is “passing away” (1 John 2:17). Christ reverses the effects of Adam’s fall.⁵⁸ As Richard Gaffin writes, “The believer, in union with Christ, is already participant in God’s new and final order for the creation.”⁵⁹ The believer now lives in the overlap of the ages. The new and last age is here now, but not yet fully consummated. The whole creation groans and waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God (Rom 8:18-25). The victory has been won, and now we await the wrapping up of all things by our victorious king, Christ Jesus.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 45-46.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 85, 66. It must be kept in mind that the new creation, along with virtually all eschatological blessings are *already* inaugurated, but *not yet* fully consummated. See Ridderbos, *Paul*, 52-53; Letham, *Work of Christ*, 59ff; Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003); 43-145, Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979); Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1962); George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 13-52.

⁵⁷ Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 115-17. Greg Beale says, “Christ’s life, and especially death and resurrection through the Spirit, launched the glorious end-time new creation of God,” in “The Eschatological Conception,” 20. For more on the two ages, see Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow’rs*, 203-18; Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 65-97. So Richard Gaffin, “His resurrection is not an isolated event in the past. Rather, in its undeniably full-bodied, past historicity, it belongs, in a manner of speaking, to the future. It can be said to be from the future and to have entered the past and to be controlling the present from that future. In Christ’s resurrection, as it may be variously put, the age-to-come had begun, the new creation had actually dawned, eschatology has been inaugurated,” Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *By Faith, Not By Sight* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2006), 60-61.

⁵⁸ Richard Gaffin writes, “As the era of the first Adam, the psychical order is the preeschatological aeon, the incomplete, transitory, and provisional world-age. As the era of the last Adam, the pneumatic order is the eschatological aeon, the complete, definitive, and final world-age.” Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1987), 83.

⁵⁹ Gaffin, *By Faith, Not By Sight*, 27-28.

⁶⁰ Fesko, *Last Things First*, 199. Also see the helpful chart in Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 38, and note 56 above for more resources. At this juncture, Oscar Cullmann’s analogy is insightful: He has described Christ’s first coming as “D-day,” since the victory was won then. “V-Day” is the second coming when all of Christ’s

In Matthew's gospel, immediately after the death of Jesus, he writes "The temple was torn in two," showing that now Christ is the sole mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5), and "the earth shook, and the rocks were split," (Matt 27:51). Greg Beale states, "These strange phenomena are recorded by Matthew to signal to his readers that Christ's death was the beginning of the end of the old creation and the inauguration of a new creation."⁶¹ In Luke 1, the reader finds that the conception of Jesus is a new creation through the Holy Spirit with echoes of Genesis 1. In the old creation, "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters" (Gen 1:2), and the new creation is inaugurated with Jesus Christ, whose mother is told that "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35).⁶² Jesus Christ inaugurates the new creation.

New Covenant

"Just as creation and covenant are associated at the beginning," writes William Dumbrell, "so will they be at the end."⁶³ It was shown above that God made a covenant with creation. As one moves along the storyline of the Hebrew Bible, discontinuity and continuity must be acknowledged in order to fully understand each covenant in its context, and its place in God's progressively revealed plan for creation.⁶⁴ The New, Davidic, Mosaic, Abrahamic, and Noahic covenants are all rooted in the covenant with creation and the "first gospel" given to Adam and Eve (Gen 3:15). The biblical covenants build on one another, and are all an outworking of the one plan of God. Noah and Abraham are called out as new Adams; Abraham and his family constitute another Adam; Then God calls a new corporate Adam, namely Israel who inherits the role of Adam; Then the Davidic king becomes the new Adam and Israel as son of God (2 Sam 7:14). So Stephen Wellum writes, "The ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant coincides with the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. The Abrahamic blessings, linked back to Noah and creation, will only be ultimately realized through the Davidic son."⁶⁵

None of these covenant mediators were faithful though. None of these covenant heads fulfilled their role but pointed to the faithful covenant mediator to come: Jesus Christ. The New Testament presents Christ as the last Adam (1 Cor 15:45), the true seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16), the true Israel⁶⁶ (John 15:1), and David's greater son (Matt 1:1).⁶⁷ Jesus Christ comes on the

enemies will bow the knee and acknowledge his Lordship in *Christ and Time* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964).

⁶¹ Beale, "The Eschatological Conception," 19, 33.

⁶² Brower, "Eschatology," *NDBT*, 461.

⁶³ Dumbrell, *Search for Order*, 32.

⁶⁴ See Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*; Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003); Stephen Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship Between the Covenants," in *Believer's Baptism*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2006).

⁶⁵ Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship Between the Covenants," 131.

⁶⁶ On this theme, see Dumbrell, *Search for Order*, 178-79; Beale, "The Eschatological Conception," 26f; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 514ff.

⁶⁷ Again, Wellum summarizes nicely, "That is why the NT presents Christ as nothing less than the Lord as well as the last Adam, the true seed of Abraham, David's greater Son, who ushers in a new covenant—a covenant which all the previous covenants anticipated and typified. In Christ, all the promises of God are yes and amen (2 Cor 1:20)," in "Baptism and the Relationship Between the Covenants," 131.

scene, in God's own timing, to initiate the new covenant that was promised in the Old Testament (Jer 31:19-24, Ezek 36:25-27, Isa 44:3-5). In Luke 22:20, Jesus said, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." Hebrews presents one with the lengthiest treatment of this reality, particularly chapters 8-10. Jesus is "the mediator of a new covenant" (Heb 9:15, 12:24). The last Adam brings perfection, something the old covenant was never intended to do (Heb 7:11-12, 7:19). With Christ's coming, the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law covenant (Rom 3:21).⁶⁸ Paul teaches the superiority of the new covenant wrought by Christ's person and work over the old covenant (see 2 Cor 3, Gal 3:15-4:7).⁶⁹ Jesus comes and brings to pass all that which the Law and the Prophets pointed to (Matt 5:17).⁷⁰

Not only does the last Adam usher in a new creation, and a new covenant, but he is also the inaugurator of a new humanity who are recipients of this covenant. Christ creates "in himself one new man" (Eph 2:15) consisting of Jews and Gentiles. As Adam was covenant head of all fallen humanity, Christ is the covenant head of all God's elect, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. Sinclair Ferguson writes, "Adam is the type of Christ; he is the first man, while Christ is the second man. As Adam is the first of one race (the old humanity), so Christ is the first of a new race (the new humanity)."⁷¹

It is vitally important to realize the discontinuity that the new covenant brings, particularly as it bears on the nature of the new covenant people.⁷² Jeremiah proclaims the coming of a new covenant, "not like the covenant that I made with their fathers" (Jer 31:32). This new covenant will bring major discontinuity.⁷³ No longer will only specially endowed leaders know the Lord (Jer 31:29:30), but all believers will know the Lord and have the Spirit (cf. Joel 2, Acts 2). The new covenant people will be characterized by the law written on their hearts, all will know the Lord, their iniquity will be forgiven, and their sins will not be remembered (Jer 31:33-34).

The New Testament presents this new humanity, the church, as the true Israel (Gal 6:16). It is insufficient to simply assert that "the church is a straight-line continuation of Israel,"

⁶⁸ See D.A. Carson, "Atonement in Romans 3:21-26," in *The Glory of the Atonement*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 122-23.

⁶⁹ On 2 Cor 3, see Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning*, 107-113; Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 81-83, 129-33. On Galatians 3-4 see Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning*, 113-14; Schreiner, *The Law*, 78-81, 124-29.

⁷⁰ On this debated passage, see D.A. Carson, *Matthew: Chapters 1 Through 12* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 140ff; Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2002), 77-138; Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1991), 251-86.

⁷¹ Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 251. Similarly, Letham states, "Moreover, Paul's discussion of Christ as second Adam means setting him over against the first Adam as the head of a new humanity. He repairs the damage caused by the first. As such, he marks a new start every bit as much as the first Adam represented the beginning of the race," in *The Work of Christ*, 115. Also see pages 79 and 154 in this same work.

⁷² See Stephen Wellum's important essay, "Baptism and the Relationship Between the Covenants."

⁷³ D.A. Carson writes, "In short, Jeremiah understood that the new covenant would bring some dramatic changes. The tribal nature of the people of God would end, and the new covenant would bring with it a new emphasis on the distribution of the knowledge of God down to the level of each member of the covenant community. Knowledge of God would no longer be mediated through specially endowed leaders, for *all* of God's covenant people would know him, from the least to the greatest," in *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 152. Also see Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 177-78.

but that Christ is the true Israel and believers are the true Israel by faith-union with him.⁷⁴ We are coheirs with Christ, and we inherit what he inherits. “If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:29). Christ’s gathering of twelve disciples is to be seen a reconstitution of the twelve tribes of Israel. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus shows his followers the new and true way of being Israel. In Exodus 19:5-6, Israel is told she will be God’s “treasured possession,” and a “kingdom of priests.” Paul, Peter, and John use this same exact language to refer to the new covenant community, the church (Titus 2:14, 1 Pet 2:9, Rev 1:6, 5:9-10, 20:6).

Christ’s work must be appreciated for its comprehensive scope. Yes, Christ paid the penalty for the sins of individuals. Yes, he absorbed the wrath of God on behalf of his elect. Yes, he defeated Satan. Yes, he gave believers an example to follow. But we must not limit his work to individuals.⁷⁵ The last Adam came to undo the damage done by the first Adam. He came to restore creation.⁷⁶ Al Wolters writes:

It is *all* of creation that is included in the scope of Christ’s redemption: that scope is truly cosmic. . . . The scope of redemption is as great as that of the fall; it embraces creation as a whole. The root cause of all evil on earth—namely, the sin of the human race—is atoned for and overcome in Christ’s death and resurrection, and therefore in principle his redemption also removes all of sin’s effects. Wherever there is disruption of the good creation—and that disruption, as we saw, is unrestricted in its scope—there Christ provides the possibility of restoration. If the whole creation is affected by the fall, then the whole creation is also reclaimed in Christ.⁷⁷

The last Adam inaugurated the new creation with his first coming, but it will not be fully realized until his second coming. It is the job and calling of the new covenant community to represent the reign of King Jesus during this era between the two comings. Greg Beale writes, “The resurrection marked the beginning of Jesus’ messianic reign, and the Spirit at Pentecost signaled the inauguration of His rule *through the church*.”⁷⁸ Believers are to do this by modeling genuine humanness, and truly bearing God’s image as it is being renewed in Christ. The victory of the woman’s seed suggests a return to Eden in part, where humanity is to have dominion. Dan G. McCartney writes, “Mankind lost his vicegerency in Adam, but gains it again in Christ.”⁷⁹ It is

⁷⁴ Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1994), 126.

⁷⁵ Dumbrell states, “The ‘gospel’ is then not to be limited to personal renewal or subjective individual redemption. It must be construed in the widest possible terms as conveying God’s intention to bring about a new world order in Jesus (cf. Col 1:20 and its wider context). This gospel assumes a cosmic dimension, including not only the present redemption of the creature, but also the prospective redemption of creation itself, and thus a return to and reestablishment of creation itself, and thus a return to and a reestablishment of God’s purposes for this world,” in *The End of the Beginning*, 194.

⁷⁶ So Richard Mouw writes, “Jesus shed his blood to rescue the creation from the curse of sin. And the cleansing blood of Christ must reach not only into the hearts and lives of individuals, but into every corner of the creation which the curse has affected,” in *When the Kings Come Marching In* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 110.

⁷⁷ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 72.

⁷⁸ Beale, “The Eschatological Conception,” 14-15 (emphasis mine).

⁷⁹ Dan G. McCartney, “Ecce Homo: The Coming of the Kingdom as the Restoration of Human Vicegerency,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 56 (1994): 19. Wolters writes, “The Adamic human race perverts the cosmos; the Christian human race renews it” *Creation Regained*, 73.

painstakingly clear to all though, that we do not yet see a difference in creation, or in the dominion of humanity. After quoting Psalm 8 concerning God's intention for the role of humanity, the author of Hebrews writes that "At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him [humanity]. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone" (Heb 2:8-9). We only see humanity restored in part now, but we see Jesus who reigns as a pledge and guarantee of the world to come.

Conclusion

The work of Christ is at the heart of the entire Christian faith. With reductionism as a constant theological danger, one must do justice to all the many facets of the work of Christ. His death must never be separated from his life, resurrection, ascension, and even Pentecost. This paper has sought to focus on the work of Christ as last Adam. We have seen that the first Adam was unique in creation. He was created as God's image, and was the head of humanity, and head of the old creation. It was also argued that Adam stood in a covenantal context. In God's timing, Jesus Christ was sent to save a people for himself and restore the whole of creation. Jesus is the true image of God, and obedient Son, the fulfillment of all previous covenants and inaugurator of a new covenant. Jesus Christ, as the eschatological man, also ushers in the new creation that is here already, but not yet fully consummated. Now believers in Christ, the forgiven, Spirit-indwelt, new covenant community, is enabled to model true humanity because of Christ's victory. Just as the world began with Adam and *his* bride in Eden, who were to expand the temple-garden, now the new humanity is to expand Christ's kingdom until he returns when this world will end and the whole earth will be the temple and Christ and *his* bride will rule and reign as God intended.

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