

WILLIAM HORST**Death through Adam: Two Different Senses in Two Different Pauline Letters**

Paul attributes death to Adam in Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:21-22. Classically, these passages have been understood to indicate that humans became mortal because of the transgression of Adam and Eve, but evolutionary science problematises the notion that mortality 'entered the world' through Adam (Rom. 5:12). However, this difficulty is deprecated if one is attentive to differences in how the Adamic material functions within each of these letters. In 1 Corinthians, it is clear that death through Adam involves human mortality, but it is not clear that mortality is an intruder into creation. Rather, Paul appears to portray human mortality as natural. In Romans, it is clear that death is an intruder that entered creation through Adam, but it is not clear that 'death' refers to human mortality, and the text furnishes good reason to think that 'death' is instead a moral metaphor that describes slavery to sin (cf. esp. Rom. 6:6, 12-22; 8:2). In each of these letters, the proposed interpretation of death through Adam coheres with broader themes in how Paul addresses the circumstances of his audience

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If we claim that humanity came about through evolution, this implies that humans emerged on earth through a process to which death is intrinsic. According to evolutionary science, death and decomposition existed on the face of the earth long before humans did, as countless generations of pre-human organisms lived and died over several billion years. If Christians claim, not only that humanity came about through such an evolutionary process, but also that the New Testament texts are authoritative, a difficulty appears. In Romans, Paul claims that death 'entered the world', along with sin, as a result of Adam's transgression in Eden (Rom. 5:12). In 1 Corinthians, Paul likewise states that death is 'through Adam' (1 Cor. 15:21) and all humans die 'in Adam' (1 Cor. 15:22). If death was in the world long before humans emerged, how can death have entered the world through Adam?

Some have approached this difficulty by arguing that it was typical for Jews in Paul's day to attribute the inception of human death to Adam and Eve, and Paul was merely following the standard world-view of his contemporaries. Since he didn't have the benefit of modern evolutionary science, where else could he have imagined that death came from, but through humanity's first parents? Paul's main point is about eternal life in Christ, not the origin of mortality, so we can accept that Christ offers the solution to the frustration of human mor-

tality, even if we do not hold Paul's view of the aetiology of mortality.¹ However, this argument is problematic because pre-Pauline Jewish writings typically treat human mortality as a natural aspect of the created order, rather than an invader that entered as the result of an Edenic transgression.² So, the available evidence does not support the claim that Paul was drawing from widely-held cultural assumptions in attributing the inception of human mortality to Adam.

Others who have taken up our conundrum suggest that we can understand 'death' as a metaphor for something other than physical death. Most often, proponents of this view use the term 'spiritual death', which involves something like separation from God, moral failure, and/or a forfeiture of eternal life. In Genesis, God says that Adam and Eve will 'surely die' on the day they eat of the forbidden fruit (Gen. 2:17; 3:3), yet they go on to live for many more years (Gen. 3-5), so 'death' must here mean something other than physical death, and perhaps Paul is using 'death' in a similar, metaphorical sense.³ Under this sort of interpretation, Paul does not comment on the aetiology of human mortality, and thus an evolutionary understanding of human origins would not contradict Paul's writings with respect to the reason humans are susceptible to bodily death.

One consideration in favour of this latter approach is that in his letter to the Romans, Paul employs the language of death metaphorically, at least some of the time. For instance, he says,

I did not know sin except through the law, for I would not have come to know desire if the law had not said, 'You shall not desire', but sin, seizing the opportunity through the commandment, produced every desire in me, for without a law, sin is dead. I was once living without a law, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died, and I found that in me, the commandment that was for life instead led to death. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. (Gen. 7:7-11)⁴

In this passage, 'death' is not a matter of the end of bodily life, but rather a state of excessive, immoral desire that arises in response to the commandment

1 See Lamoureux, D.O. *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock (2008), pp. 306-331; cf. Enns, P. *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins*, Grand Rapids: Brazos (2012), pp. 120-124.

2 Henry Ansgar Kelly rightly argues that we do not have any clear evidence of a Jewish belief that Adam caused human mortality until after the time of Paul ('Adam citings before the intrusion of Satan: recontextualizing Paul's theology of sin and death', *Biblical Theological Bulletin* (2014) 44, 13-28). I list some relevant examples below.

3 esp. Alexander, D.R. *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?*, Oxford: Monarch (2008), pp. 260-267; Harrell, D.M. *Nature's Witness: How Evolution Can Inspire Faith*, Nashville: Abingdon (2008), pp. 111-126.

4 All English translations of biblical texts are my own, unless otherwise specified.

against such desire (cf. Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21). This 'death' at the hands of sin results in a state of moral bondage in which sinful desires win out over godly moral intentions (Rom. 7:13-25). Further, although Paul's description of death through Adam (Rom. 5:12-21) is almost universally understood to involve the inception of human mortality, nothing about the passage requires that 'death' be understood as physical death, rather than this sort of moral bondage, and the close association of death with sin in the passage gives us good reason to consider such an interpretive possibility.⁵

Although we could potentially understand 'death' metaphorically in Romans, this interpretation is complicated by the fact that when Paul associates death with Adam in 1 Corinthians, he clearly has physical death and human mortality in mind. Paul contrasts death through Adam with resurrection through Christ (1 Cor. 15:21-22) just after arguing that if Christ has not been raised, then those Christians who have died have perished, once and for all (1 Cor. 15:18; cf. 15:29). Further on in his discussion, Paul contrasts the first Adam's perishable, mortal body with the imperishable, immortal body of Christ, the last Adam. Those who are in Christ can look forward to a resurrected, imperishable body like his (see 1 Cor. 15:42-56). So, when Paul mentions death through Adam in 1 Corinthians, it is apparent that physical death is the phenomenon under discussion, which might suggest that death through Adam ought to be understood in reference to physical death in Romans, as well. Along these lines, Denis Lamoureux acknowledges that several passages of Romans do deal with metaphorical death (Rom. 6:13; 7:9-13; 8:6), but posits that, since Paul is clearly concerned with human mortality and physical death when he refers to Adam in 1 Corinthians, the parallel passage in Romans should also be understood to attribute physical death to Adam.⁶

I propose a different solution to the above dilemma: that Paul has two different senses of death in mind when he speaks of death through Adam in Romans and 1 Corinthians. Specifically, in 1 Corinthians, 'death' clearly refers to physical death, and thus human mortality, but it is not clear that this 'death' is alien to God's creation, and good exegetical reason exists to think that Paul understands human mortality to be natural. In Romans, 'death' is clearly alien to God's creation, but it is not clear that this 'death' refers to physical death,

5 For detailed argument that the inception of death through Adam in Romans should be understood as moral rather than mortal death, see Horst, W. 'Morality, not mortality: the inception of death in the book of Romans', *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* (2019) 71, 24-36. So also de Boer, M.C. 'Paul's mythologizing program in Romans 5-8', in Gaventa, B.R. (ed.) *Apocalyptic Paul: Cosmos and Anthropos in Romans 5-8*, Waco, TX: Baylor University Press (2013), p. 11.

6 Lamoureux *op.cit.*, (1), pp. 315-317. Lamoureux also appeals to Rom. 8:19-23, which he claims clearly involves a primordial, cosmic fall in which human bodies suffer the decay of physical death until they are redeemed in Christ. Against this sort of interpretation of Rom. 8:19-23, see Horst *op.cit.*, (5), pp. 30-31.

and good exegetical reason exists to think that Paul has in mind moral bondage, rather than mortality, when he associates death with Adam. This argument for two different senses of death through Adam is not an artificial, interpretive contortion undergone in order to address an inconvenient scientific consensus. Rather, my distinct readings of these two Adamic passages cohere with important differences in the occasions and emphases of Romans and 1 Corinthians.

Diversity in Paul's letters

Paul never wrote a theological treatise. Instead, he wrote letters to particular communities, on particular occasions, in order to address particular issues. It should not surprise us if we find that Paul's content varies significantly between his letters, since he wrote them with different aims. To the question of how Paul understands the inception of 'death' in Romans and 1 Corinthians, Edward Adams's analysis of diversity among Paul's letters is especially relevant. Adams argues convincingly that the differing occasions of Romans and 1 Corinthians prompt Paul to construct creation differently in order to encourage different social behaviour by the members of the churches in Rome and Corinth.⁷ The Corinthian church has a problem with cohesion, as Paul makes clear at the opening of the letter. He has heard that there are quarrels among the Corinthians, and so he urges them to pursue unity and resist division among themselves (1 Cor. 1:10-17; cf. 3:1-10; 11:17-22). Further on in the letter, Paul uses the image of the body of Christ, which is composed of many diverse members, to promote unity among the Corinthian believers (1 Cor. 12:4-30). Although different members of the 'body' have different spiritual gifts, and as a result, some members are more prominent than others, the various parts of the body need one another to function, and the same Spirit bestows the various gifts on particular people. Paul's description of this 'body' clearly betrays again the factions who are quarrelling with one another at Corinth: "The eye is not able to say to the hand, "I have no need for you", nor again can the head say to the feet, "I have no need for you" (1 Cor. 12:21; cf. 12:22-25). Presumably, different groups among the Corinthian community would have recognised their own sentiments toward one another in Paul's portrayal of such ludicrous quarrelling within a human body, and the hope is that the image of the body of Christ will prompt the different factions of believers to pursue harmony and peace with one another.

Paul does not simply encourage unity among the Corinthians. He also differentiates the Corinthian believers from the rest of the outside world. Just after his initial exhortation to unity at the beginning of the letter (1 Cor. 1:10-17), he begins to criticise worldly wisdom in favour of divine revelation through

⁷ Adams, E. *Constructing the World: A Study in Paul's Cosmological Language*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark (2000), chaps. 4-7.

Christ: 'The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God' (1 Cor 1:18; cf. 1:19-2:16; 3:18-20). Paul also criticises those Corinthian believers who engage in practices that reflect too high a degree of conformity to the surrounding culture, such as settling disputes with one another in front of unbelieving outsiders (1 Cor. 6:1-6). 'Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? ... Do you not know that we will judge angels? ... If you have mundane legal issues, then, do you appoint people (as judges) who are considered of no account among the church?' (1 Cor. 6:2-4). In these and other ways, Paul portrays those outside of the church in a negative light, apparently to reinforce boundaries between the community of Corinthian believers and those outside of it, while encouraging cohesion and harmony among those inside the community of believers.⁸

Adams further argues that Paul's theological and cosmological emphasis in 1 Corinthians coheres with his social aims. He emphasises that the world in the present age is corrupt and intrinsically problematic and in Christ it is coming to an end. Believers at Corinth should not become overly entangled in the affairs of the present world, but instead focus on their living as a community in anticipation of the age to come. True wisdom is God's wisdom, but conventional wisdom is 'the wisdom of the world', and one who engages in discussion based on worldly wisdom is 'the debater of this age'. God's wisdom renders both the wisdom of the world and the debater of this age foolish (1 Cor. 1:20). The Corinthians should embrace the Lord's discipline in the present 'so that we may not be condemned together with the world' (1 Cor. 11:32). In these and other ways, Paul paints a cosmological picture for the Corinthians of two ages, one that is perishing, together with those who live in accordance with the ways of the present age, and another that is glorious and wonderful, which is for those who are 'in Christ' and not for those who are outsiders to devotion to Christ. The Corinthians should live as one body in anticipation of this glorious age to come, and extricate themselves from excessive involvement in the ways of the present world.⁹

In Corinth, Paul appears to think that the believers are conformed to the ways of the surrounding world to too great an extent, but in his letter to the Romans, Paul makes a number of comments that suggest the believers are suffering in certain ways at the hands of outsiders. Paul encourages the Romans that such suffering is something in which to boast, for 'suffering produces endurance' (Rom. 5:3). He says further, 'I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing to the glory that is about to be revealed to us' (Rom. 8:18). Persecution of some kind probably also lies behind Paul's insistence that nothing 'will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8:39; cf. 8:31-38). We do not know for sure what the Romans

8 *ibid.*, pp. 97-103.

9 *ibid.*, pp. 105-149.

were experiencing, but any social friction may well be part of the after-effects of the edict of Emperor Claudius several years earlier (ca. AD 49), which required that a number of Jews, including at least some Jewish Christians, be expelled from Rome.¹⁰ In chapters twelve and thirteen of Romans, Paul exhorts the Romans to a variety of behaviours that are conducive to the believers living at peace with the outside world, rather than strengthening boundaries around the community of faith. Paul calls on the Romans to be subject to governing authorities, to pay their taxes (Rom. 13:1), and to love their neighbours (Rom. 13:9-10). He instructs them to live decently, in a manner that would be respectable in the eyes of the broader culture (Rom. 13:13)¹¹ and to extend mercy and generosity, rather than retaliation, to those who persecute them (Rom. 12:14-21). Although Paul clearly sees the Roman believers as a distinct group with a particular, elect status before God (see esp. Rom. 8:33), his instructions to the Romans about how to conduct themselves involves more of a sense of harmony with the outside world, compared with the overall character of Paul's portrayal of the outside world in 1 Corinthians.¹²

Adams argues that just as the cosmology that Paul articulates in 1 Corinthians coheres with his social aims for that letter, the cosmology of Romans coheres with Paul's desire to encourage the Romans to live in a way that mollifies friction with the broader society in Rome. In Romans, Paul emphasises the intrinsic goodness of the created world, while still acknowledging the corrupt state of the world at present. Near the beginning of the letter, Paul states that the creation reveals the invisible things of God to humans (Rom. 1:19-20). In spite of this available knowledge, humans turned aside to idols and refused to worship the creator properly (Rom. 1:21-23). Since they refused to acknowledge God, God handed idolatrous humans over to their sinful desires, with the result that moral depravity became widespread (Rom. 1:24-32), and ultimately, every human is under the influence of sin (see esp. Rom. 2:1-3:20; 3:23) and needs to be saved by God's grace through Christ (Rom. 3:21-26; cf. 5:1-21). Instead of disassociating the Roman believers from the created world, Paul describes the creation suffering alongside the children of God and eagerly anticipating their redemption, since it will also mean the redemption of creation from slavery to futility and corruption (Rom. 8:19-22). In fact, this slavery to futility and corruption is not intrinsic to creation. Rather, God subjected the creation to these corrupting influences in the hope that creation and the children of God

10 *ibid.*, pp. 196-198, 210-213; cf. pp. 213-216. On the Edict of Claudius, see Suetonius *Divus Claudius* 25, Acts 18:2; cf. Rom. 16:3-5. Romans is usually dated in the mid-to-late-50s AD; see, e.g., Fitzmyer, J. A. *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New York: Doubleday (1992), pp. 85-87.

11 James D.G. Dunn describes the Greek word *euschēmonōs* (Rom. 13:13) as 'conventional respectability' (*Romans 9-16*, Dallas, TX: Word (1988), pp. 788-789). Similarly, see Adams *op.cit.*, (7), pp. 202-204; Jewett, R. *Romans: A Commentary*, Minneapolis: Fortress (2007), pp. 824-827.

12 Adams *op.cit.*, (7), pp. 195-220.

will both participate in the same glorious liberation when God's children are revealed (Rom. 8:20-21).¹³ Paul does not explain all this as thoroughly as we might have liked, but he makes clear that the Roman believers are to understand creation as more of an ally than a foe. In short, Paul frames the end of the age, less as the discarding of a corrupt, undesirable world in favour of a new, desirable one and more as the restoration of an inherently good world that God has subjected to corruption in order to accomplish certain purposes. Thus, Paul's cosmological emphases differ in Romans and 1 Corinthians, in a manner that coheres with the different social postures he wants to encourage in each community, based on their particular circumstances.¹⁴

Like Adams, J. Christiaan Beker also identifies relevant differences in the pattern of Paul's rhetoric between Romans and 1 Corinthians. He notes that Paul relates sin to death differently in 1 Corinthians and Romans. In 1 Corinthians, Paul discusses death with scarcely any mention of sin (1 Cor. 15, but cf. 15:17, 34, 56). Paul portrays death more as a natural part of life in the present age, not as the result of problematic human activity per se. By contrast, in Romans Paul depicts sin and death as intruders into creation and thus death is never morally neutral.¹⁵ So, both Adams and Beker recognise important differences in Paul's rhetoric in Romans and 1 Corinthians, which are potentially relevant to how we understand the significance of the language of death and corruption in either letter.

Is death alien to creation in 1 Corinthians?

As I explained earlier, the 'death' that Paul associates with Adam in 1 Corinthians is clearly physical death, and thus Paul implicates Adam in human mortality. However, a number of exegetical considerations suggest that Paul may not understand human mortality to be an intruder into God's creation. In fact, Paul appears to indicate that mortality is part of how humans were created in

13 Scholars have occasionally proposed that the phrase, 'because of the one who subjected it' (Rom. 8:20) refers to Adam, whose trespass brought ruin to humanity (Rom. 5:12-19), and, according to Genesis, a curse on the ground (Gen. 3:17). e.g., Robinson, J.A.T. *Wrestling with Romans*, Philadelphia: Westminster (1979), p. 102. However, most exegetes rightly identify the referent as God rather than Adam, since it would be rather odd to suggest that Adam intentionally ate the forbidden fruit and thereby put creation into subjection to corruption in order that creation would share in the glory of the children of God, whereas it would make perfectly good sense for God to subject creation to corruption in order to bring about such glory. See e.g., Fitzmyer *op.cit.*, (10), p. 508; Jewett *op.cit.*, (11), p. 514.

14 Adams *op.cit.*, (7), pp. 151-193.

15 Beker, J.C. 'The relationship between sin and death in Romans', in Fortna, R.T. & Gaventa, B.R. (eds.) *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John in Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, Nashville: Abingdon (1990), pp. 55-61. Beker notes that 1 Cor. 15:21-22 seems to allude to Adam causing death (which Beker understands as mortality), but he does not consider this a significant emphasis.

the first place.

Near the end of 1 Corinthians Paul contrasts Adam's body, which is weak, dusty and perishable, with the resurrected body of Christ, which is strong, heavenly and imperishable (1 Cor. 15:42-50). Based on the common understanding that Paul thought human mortality resulted from Adam's Edenic transgression, one might assume that Paul is here contrasting the fallen body of Adam with the risen body of Christ. However, Paul justifies his description of Adam's body with a quotation from Scripture: 'The first human, Adam, became a living soul' (1 Cor. 15:45). Paul's words reflect an exact quotation of the Septuagint – the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures, which was popular among Greek-speaking Jews in Paul's day, and from which Paul commonly quotes – with the addition of the words 'first' and 'Adam,' to help Paul articulate his contrast between Adam and Christ clearly. This verse does not describe Adam in his *fallen* state, but rather his initial coming to life after God formed him from the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils (Gen. 2:7).¹⁶ Throughout his series of contrasts between the perishable body of Adam and the imperishable body of Christ, Paul uses a word that sounds somewhat odd in the original Greek, but this weirdness is obscured in most English translations for the sake of clarity and eloquence. Specifically, Paul repeatedly contrasts Adam's 'soulish' body (*psychikos*) with Christ's 'spiritual' body (*pneumatikos*) (1 Cor. 15: 44, 46). In some Hellenistic philosophical circles (for instance, in the Platonic school), a person is understood to be composed of a mortal body and an immortal soul (*psyche*), so to refer to a 'soulish' body, especially a perishable, 'soulish' body, is rather odd from a Hellenistic perspective. This language appears to derive from Paul's quotation from Genesis about the creation of Adam, which says that Adam 'became a living soul (*psyche*)', that is, a living *creature*.¹⁷ So then, Paul appears to be contrasting Adam's *creaturely* body, which is perishable and dusty, with Christ's *spiritual* body, which is imperishable and heavenly. This gives the impression that, at least in this passage, Paul is attributing Adam's mortality (cf. 1 Cor.15:53-54), and by extension, the mortality of all humans, to the fact that we have a *creaturely* body like the one with which Adam was *created*. This would imply that mortality is a feature of how humans are built, at least until we come to share in Christ's resurrection at the last trumpet (see 1 Cor. 15:52).

In a pair of contrasts between death, which he associates with Adam, and life, which he associates with Christ, Paul states that death is 'through Adam' and that everyone dies 'in Adam' (1 Cor. 15:21-22). In an effort to make clear what is ambiguous in the Greek text, English translations often render the first contrast along the following lines: '(S)ince death *came* through a human be-

¹⁶ Adams makes this point briefly (*op.cit.*, (7), pp. 145-146).

¹⁷ The same phrase, 'living soul' (*psyche zōsa*), occurs in the Septuagint version of Gen. 1:20, 24; 2:7, 19; 9:10-16, usually in reference to animals.

ing, the resurrection of the dead *has also come* through a human being' (1 Cor. 15:21 NRSV).¹⁸ The word 'came' here gives the impression that death was absent, and then became present through Adam. However, the verbs are implicit in the Greek text (which is not unusual in ancient Greek), and while 'death *came* through a human being' is certainly not an unreasonable rendering of these words, the language could also be understood to say that 'death is through a human being' and likewise, the resurrection of the dead 'is through a human being', indicating that death is *due to* or *because* of Adam, and resurrection is *due to* or *because* of Christ.¹⁹ It is worth noting that in the second of the pair of contrasts Paul makes between death 'in Adam' and life 'in Christ', the verbs are explicit, and occur in the present and future tenses, respectively: 'Just as everyone *dies* in Adam, so also everyone *will be made alive* in Christ' (1 Cor. 15:22). The present-tense language that 'everyone *dies* in Adam' is ambiguous, and could accommodate a diversity of possible interpretations. The point is, Paul's words *could* be understood to indicate that Adam *brought about* human death, presumably through the transgression of Eden. However, his words are also sufficiently flexible that they could be understood to mean that humans die *because they share* the creaturely body of Adam.²⁰ Given that, in the same chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul appears to indicate that human mortality is an aspect of how Adam was created (1 Cor. 15:42-50, see above), we have good reason to favour an interpretation of Paul's contrasts between Adam and Christ (1 Cor. 15:21-22) in which all humans die *because we have a corruptible body like Adam's*, rather than because Adam introduced mortality by eating the forbidden fruit.

The notion that human mortality is due to sharing in the corruptible body with which Adam was created – rather than being the result of a 'fall' that introduced mortal corruption to the world – is present in a number of Jewish writings from roughly the time of Paul. For instance, in *Wisdom of Solomon*, the author, speaking as King Solomon, states, 'I myself am also a mortal human, just like everyone else, and (I am) descended from the first-formed human made of earth' (*Wis.* 7, 1). The key idea here is that despite being king of Israel, Solomon shares in the same humanity as everyone else. His mortality stems from his

18 Young's Literal Translation is the only published English translation I have found that does not say that death 'came' through a human: '(S)ince through man *is* the death, also through man *is* a rising again of the dead' (1 Cor. 15:21).

19 The Greek conjunction 'through' (*dia*) can indicate cause, even when used with a noun in the genitive case (as in 1 Cor. 15:21), though this is not the most common usage of this construction. Rom. 8:3 and 2 Cor. 9:13 are possible examples. See Danker, F.W., Bauer, W., Arndt, W.F. & Gingrich, F.W. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd edn., Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2000), p. 225.

20 e.g., Maston, J. 'Anthropological crisis and solution in the Hodayot and 1Corinthians 15', *New Testament Studies* (2016) 62, 542-553. cf. Lindemann, A. *Der Erste Korintherbrief*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck (2000), pp. 343-344. Contra, e.g., Yates, J.W. *The Spirit and Creation in Paul*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck (2008), pp. 94-95.

descent from Adam, who was formed from the soil of the earth. Nothing in this passage suggests that Solomon's susceptibility to death is the result of a moral failure on the part of Adam (cf. *Wis.* 10, 1-2).²¹ Similarly, the book of *Sirach* describes God's creation of humanity as follows: 'The Lord created a human from the earth and returned that human to it again. (The Lord) gave to (humans) a certain number of days, and gave them authority over everything on (the earth)' (*Sir.* 17, 1-2; cf. 40, 1; 49, 16). In this account, human death is due to divine mandate, and mortality is associated with human formation from the soil of the ground, without any clear sense that Adam introduced mortality as a foreign invader to God's good creation. Philo of Alexandria is more explicit about mortal death being a natural phenomenon. He demarcates two kinds of death: the separation of the soul from the body, which occurs naturally, and the death of the soul, which is a divine punishment, and which involves 'the corruption of virtue and the ascension of vice' (*Allegorical Interpretation* 1, 105). Philo says that the death imposed on Adam and Eve for eating the forbidden fruit of Eden must be the metaphorical death of the soul, since the death of the body is natural, and thus not a punishment for wrongdoing (*Allegorical Interpretation* 1, 105-8). Again, a number of passages among the *Thanksgiving Hymns* (1QH) of the Dead Sea Scrolls attribute mortality to a sharing in the 'dusty' body of Adam, without any clear reference to a fall that introduced corruption to the human body. Humanity is made of the dust of the earth, and for that reason, humans necessarily return to the dust (see esp. 1QH 18, 5-7; 20, 27-34).²² All of these authors appear to understand susceptibility to death to be an intrinsic part of how God created humans. So, for Paul to associate human mortality with Adam in *his initial, created form* was perfectly typical for a Jewish writing of the second-temple period during which he wrote.

If Paul does indicate that humans die because we share in the created humanity, and thus the dusty body, of Adam, this coheres with the analysis of Beker and Adams that in 1 Corinthians, Paul emphasises the need for creation to be transformed in a fundamental way. 'Death' is an aspect of creation that needs to be brought into subjection to Christ's glorious reign. It is the 'last enemy' to be defeated as Christ brings all things into subjection (1 Cor. 15:26).

Paul's characterisation of death as an 'enemy' of Christ potentially sounds contradictory to the notion that death is a natural part of the created order. However, the focus of the passage in which this comment occurs (1 Cor. 15:23-28) is not on what elements of creation are or are not natural, but rather on the proper 'order' of events in the eschatological triumph of Christ (1 Cor. 15:23). Paul seeks to address concerns at Corinth about whether or not believers in

21 Kelly *op.cit.*, (2), p. 19.

22 Maston *op.cit.*, (20), pp. 534-538. For a similar argument regarding the phrase, 'all the glory of Adam', in the Dead Sea Scrolls, see Meyer, N.A. *Adam's Dust and Adam's Glory in the Hodayot and the Letters of Paul: Rethinking Anthropogony and Theology*, Leiden: Brill (2016), p. 67.

Christ should look forward to an eschatological resurrection from the dead (1 Cor. 15:12-19), and makes the point that the ultimate defeat of death – namely, the resurrection of those who are in Christ – will be the final stage of the salvific process, to be completed only once all of the other forces opposed to Christ have been defeated (1 Cor. 15:24-25). Paul describes the victory of Christ through an allusion to Psalm 110, which begins, “The LORD said to my lord, “Sit on my right until I make your enemies into a footstool for your feet”” (Ps. 110:1; cf. 8:7).²³ Paul likewise states that Christ must reign until he has put his enemies under his feet (1 Cor. 15:25), which seems to draw from the psalm the notion of a reign that involves a process of gaining victory over time. Christ must rule until he has brought every authority into subjection (1 Cor. 15:24). The designation, ‘enemy,’ which Paul applies to death (1 Cor. 15:26), is drawn from the allusion to the psalm, and simply includes death among the things that Christ’s reign will affect. In other words, Paul does not call death an ‘enemy’ of Christ because death is particularly nefarious, but rather because he has just described the transformative reign of Christ as a progressive defeat of enemies, and wishes to make the further point that death will be addressed last in this sequence. So, we might say that Paul’s point is that death is the *last* enemy of Christ, not that death is the last *enemy* of Christ. The language of death as enemy in 1 Corinthians should not be taken to indicate that death comes from some source other than God.

Toward the end of his discussion of resurrection in 1 Corinthians, Paul makes another statement that could potentially be taken to undermine the claim that human mortality is natural to creation. Paul describes the future, bodily resurrection of believers as a fulfilment of the words of the prophets Isaiah and Hosea: ‘Death was swallowed up in victory. Where, oh death, is your victory? Where, oh death, is your sting?’ (1 Cor. 15:54-55; cf. Isa. 25:8, Hos. 13:14). Paul then adds an additional, cryptic statement: ‘The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law’ (1 Cor. 15:56). This brief comment is a digression that does not fit well into the flow of the passage, which makes it difficult to determine exactly what Paul means. Commentators almost universally take this formulation to be a concise encapsulation of the ideas Paul discusses at length in Romans 5–7, which implies that (1) sin is the sting of death in the sense that death is the penalty of sin, and so death can be said to employ sin in order to gain mastery over people (see Rom. 5:12; 6:16, 21-23; 7:5, 9-11, 13), and (2) the law is the power of sin in that the law increases the detrimental effects of sin (see Rom. 5:13, 20; 7:5-6, 7-9).²⁴ If Paul does mean to indicate that the death

23 This translation is based on the Greek text of the Septuagint, which more closely matches Paul’s wording than does the Hebrew Masoretic Text.

24 e.g., Conzelmann, H. *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Philadelphia: Fortress (1975), p. 293; Garland, D.E. *1 Corinthians*, Grand Rapids: Baker (2003), p. 746; Vlachos, C.A. ‘Law, sin, and death: an Edenic triad? an examination with reference to 1 Corinthians 15:56’, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (2004) 47, 277-298.

with which he is concerned in 1 Corinthians 15 is a consequence of sin, it would seem to follow that mortality is not simply an aspect of the created order, but instead results from universal human depravity. However, because Paul's writings do evidence substantial variation, and because the relevant passages of Romans and 1 Corinthians have rather different rhetorical aims, we cannot assume that Paul has the same ideas in mind in the two letters simply because of the collocation of the words, 'law', 'sin' and 'death'.

For instance, as an alternative to the common understanding that 'the sting of death is sin' means that human mortality is the result of sin, Paul could instead mean that sin, which separates people from God apart from Christ, is what makes death truly tragic. In his defence of resurrection (1 Cor. 15), Paul makes the counter-factual argument that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised (1 Cor. 15:16), and if Christ has not been raised, then the Corinthians' faith is futile and they are still in their sins (1 Cor. 15:17), and further, those who have died in Christ have perished (1 Cor. 15:18). The point of Paul's rhetoric is that these conclusions are unacceptable, so the Corinthians ought to accept the reality of the resurrection of the dead. Paul's argumentation rests on the convictions that (1) because Christ has been raised, the Corinthians are not still 'in (their) sins', and (2) those believers who have died have not simply perished. Rather, they will be resurrected at the last trumpet (see 1 Cor. 15:52). In Paul's understanding, then, the resurrection of Christ from the dead rescues believers from a state of being 'in (their) sins' during this present life, and from the prospect of perishing once-and-for-all at the point of bodily death. This coheres with Paul's earlier comments that 'Christ died for our sins' and then rose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Given all of the aforementioned elements of Paul's defence of resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, it would fit well with the rest of the passage if by 'the sting of death is sin', Paul means that a person who dies apart from the salvation of Christ and thus dies 'in (their) sins', perishes once-and-for-all, without any possibility of participating in Christ's glorious resurrection, and thus sin renders death truly and ultimately destructive. This interpretation of 'the sting of death is sin' is not completely clear from the passage, but it fits at least as well as the majority interpretation (see above), and does not imply that death must be alien to God's creation. So, Paul's statement about the sting of death (1 Cor. 15:56) is not necessarily inconsistent with my claim that Paul portrays human mortality as natural in 1 Corinthians.

In sum, the discussion of resurrection in 1 Corinthians leaves little question that Paul associates human mortality with Adam. However, the text does not make clear that mortality was caused by Adam's transgression in Eden. Rather, Paul appears to attribute human mortality to humans' sharing in the earthly, corruptible body with which Adam was created from the soil of the earth. Although Paul does present mortal death as an element of creation that Christ will ultimately transform through eschatological resurrection, this does not imply that death is alien to God's creation.

Moral death in Romans

In Romans, Paul indicates that sin and death are both alien to God's creation, in so far as they both 'entered' the world and 'spread' throughout humanity as a result of 'one human', namely Adam (Rom. 5:12-14). Indeed, death and sin are closely related to one another, which hints that death is not morally neutral, but rather associated in some way with immorality.²⁵ Commentators commonly interpret this close connection between death and sin to indicate that human mortality is a divinely-imposed penalty for sin,²⁶ but good exegetical reason exists to understand 'death' instead as a moral metaphor that is roughly synonymous with the notion of slavery to sin, which is also found in Romans (Rom. 6:6, 12-22; 8:2). In other words, a person is morally dead when she or he is unable to act in accordance with God's will, and instead acts in accordance with sinful desires (cf. Rom. 7:5-25). This is the sort of 'death' that entered the world through Adam.

In some passages of Romans, Paul clearly uses the language of death metaphorically. For instance, in addition to the passage I quoted earlier (Rom. 7:7-11), he says, 'the mindset of the flesh is death' (Rom. 8:6), and tells the Romans to live in obedience to God, 'as if (they) have been brought to life from the dead' instead of living as slaves of sin (Rom. 6:12-14; cf. 6:6-7, 16-22; 7:5-6). In these and other passages, 'death' does not involve physical expiration, but rather a life characterised by sinful behaviour, and indeed, bondage to sin.

Various Jewish and Greco-Roman authors from around the time of Paul employ 'death' as a metaphor to describe people of deficient or absent virtue. For instance, Seneca the Younger, a Roman Stoic author and a contemporary of Paul, states that lazy people who 'listen to their bellies' should be counted as dead while they still live, since they are no more productive than an entombed corpse (*Epistulae morales*, 60, 4; cf. Sallust, *Bellum catalinae*, 2,8). Similarly, Ben Sira, a Jewish author from the second century BC says that 'a fool's life is worse than death' (*Sirach*, 22, 11; cf. 22, 9-15). Numerous other authors from roughly the time of Paul likewise employ the language of death in this sort of moral metaphorical sense.²⁷

25 So Beker *op.cit.*, (15). For a lengthier discussion of the relationship between sin and death in Paul's writings, see idem *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark (1980), pp. 213-234.

26 e.g., Nygren, A. *Commentary on Romans*, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg (1949), p. 327; Murray, J. *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1968), 1, 290; Cranfield, C.E.B. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark (1975), 1, 389; Dunn, J.D.G. *Romans 1-8*, Dallas: Word (1988), pp. 273-274.

27 e.g., Letter of Aristeas, 212, Musonius, *Fragment*, 20, Dio Chrysostom, *To the People of Alexandria*, 16, Plutarch, *Moralia*, 1128D. For additional examples and analysis, see Zeller, D. 'The life and death of the soul in Philo of Alexandria: the use and origin of a metaphor', *Studia Philonica Annual* (1995) 7, 19-55; Keener, C.S. *The Mind of the Spirit: Paul's Approach to Transformed Thinking*, Grand Rapids: Baker (2016), p. 34.

Particularly relevant for interpreting Romans is the use of the imagery of death in the Platonic tradition. Plato associates irrational desires with the body, which constrains the soul during embodied life and compels the person to act in a manner that is contrary to reason and virtue (e.g., *Phaedo*, 81E; 83D, *Republic*, 572E, 573D, 575A, *Timaeus*, 43A; 44A–B). In several writings, Plato describes the body as a tomb for the soul, which suggests that while the soul dwells within the body, it is in a state of metaphorical deadness (*Gorgias*, 493A, *Cratylus*, 400C, *Phaedrus*, 250C; cf. *Phaedo*, 62B).²⁸ In the *Republic*, Plato describes irrational desires ruling over the soul as a tyrant. In particular, the *Republic* imagines the soul in three parts – a rational part, a ‘spirited’ part, and a desiring part (*Republic*, 441E–442A; 588C–D). In people of ample moral conditioning, the rational part holds the desiring part in submission, which results in virtuous behaviour (*Republic*, 430E–431A; 442E–443A; cf. 571B), but in people of particularly poor moral conditioning, the desiring part of the soul dominates and enslaves the other parts (*Republic*, 573C), which causes unvirtuous behaviour that is contrary to the will of the rational part of the soul (*Republic*, 577C–E; cf. *Phaedrus*, 245C–257B, esp. 246, 254). In these various ways, Plato uses the language of slavery, tyranny, domination and death to describe the dominion of irrational desires over a person’s reason. Various philosophers who are influenced by Plato continue to engage his material on the rebellion of irrational desires, up through and beyond the time of Paul.²⁹

Emma Wasserman convincingly shows that in Romans, the language of slavery and domination by sin, as well as the metaphorical language of death, reflects the influence of Hellenistic moral discourse, and especially Platonic moral discourse, along the lines I have been describing.³⁰ The particularly close correspondence between Paul’s words about the rule of sin and death and discourse about rebellious irrational desires in the Platonic tradition is evident through a number of parallels. Most strikingly, Paul describes a state of self-contradiction in which sin operates through the members of the body to bring about sinful behaviour, while the mind is helplessly dragged along: ‘I delight in God’s law according to my inner person, but I see another law in my members, waging war against the law of my mind, and taking me captive to the law of sin, which is in my members. Wretched person that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?’ (Rom. 7:22–24). This passage reflects many of the

28 Courcelle, P. ‘Le Corps-Tombeau (Platon, Gorgias, 493a, Cratyle, 400c, Phèdre, 250c)’, *Revue des études anciennes* (1966) 68, 101–122.

29 See, e.g., Aristotle *On the Soul*, 411B5–30; 413B13–34, Plutarch *On Moral Virtue*, 445B–452D; 498D–E, Galen *On Hippocrates’ and Plato’s Doctrines*, 3, 3, 5–16, Albinus *Handbook of Platonism*, 17, 4, Stobaeus *Eclologies*, 2, 88, 8–90, 6, Posidonius *Fragments*, 142–149, 160–163, Aetius *Placita Philosophorum*, 4, 4, 1, Arius Didymus *Epitome of Stoic Ethics*, 10B, Alcinoüs *Handbook of Platonism*, 23–24, Diogenes Laertius *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 3, 67, Pseudo-Aristotle *Virtues and Vices*, 1, 3–4; 2, 4–5.

30 Wasserman, E. *The Death of the Soul in Romans 7: Sin, Death, and the Law in Light of Hellenistic Moral Philosophy*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck (2008).

parallels between the tradition of Platonic moral discourse and elements of Paul's discussion of moral bondage that also occur in other passages of Romans (cf. Rom. 6–7; 8:20–21). The language of the 'inner person', who desires to do what is right, closely corresponds to Plato's description of the rational part of the soul as the 'inner person' in the *Republic*.³¹ Sin operates through a person's body, enslaves and violently dominates the inner person, and thereby compels behaviour that is contrary to one's best moral intentions. The cry for rescue from 'this body of death' (Rom. 7:24) likewise evokes the Platonic notion that the body can be likened to a tomb that constrains and corrupts a person's mind. In short, much of what Paul says in Romans 6–8 has to do with bondage to sin, and Paul often uses the language of 'death' to describe this sort of moral bondage. Paul's notion of moral bondage or moral 'death' bears striking similarities to conceptions of moral failure that are found in the Platonic tradition.³²

Paul discusses the inception of sin and death through Adam in the fifth chapter of Romans (Rom. 5:12–21), just before the portion of the letter in which the moral metaphorical use of the language of 'death' appears so prominently (i.e., Rom. 6–7). Nothing in the passage necessitates that 'death' be understood to reflect the expiration of the body and, given the proximity of this material to other instances where Paul employs the language of 'death' to describe moral corruption, as well as the close association between death and sin in this passage (unlike Paul's description of death through Adam in 1 Corinthians), and the language of domination by sin and death that pervades and ties together all of this material (Rom. 5:12–8:2), we have good reason to interpret 'death' through Adam as a metaphor for moral corruption, as well.³³ Under this interpretation, Adam's transgression afflicted humanity with bondage to the power of sin, but not necessarily mortality.

Philo of Alexandria, a first-century Jewish author, often uses the language of 'death' to describe the sort of moral bondage that is prominent in the Platonic tradition.³⁴ Of especial relevance for my purposes is how Philo interprets

31 *ibid.*, p. 77. See Plato, *Republic* 588C–591B.

32 For additional detail along these lines, see Horst *op.cit.*, (5), pp. 25–27. The similarities I identify between Platonic conceptions of moral failure and Paul's notion of moral bondage do not imply that Paul believes everything that Plato (or any given Platonist) asserts about the human body or soul. For instance, whereas the Platonic notion of the body implies that release from the body is desirable (e.g., Plato, *Phaedo*, 67), Paul looks forward to the redemption of his body (Rom. 8:23), rather than release from it. Further, the moral philosophy of Plato and his tradents involves dualism between body and soul, and often includes interaction between discrete parts of the soul, but Paul never refers explicitly to the 'soul' in Rom. 5–8, and never indicates clearly that he has in mind discrete parts of the soul when he describes moral self-contradiction in this passage.

33 So *ibid.*, p. 27; de Boer *op.cit.*, (5), p. 11.

34 See esp. Philo *Allegorical Interpretation*, 2, 77–78.82; 3, 52, *Agriculture*, 67–77, *Posterity*, 73–74, *Worse*, 70, *Planting*, 37, *Flight*, 55, *Special Laws*, 1, 345, *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, 2, 45. For further examples and detailed analysis, see Zeller *op.cit.*, (27); Wasserman *op.cit.*, (30),

the sentence of death decreed over Adam and Eve for eating the forbidden fruit. Philo notes that Adam and Eve do not physically die when they violate God's command (cf. Gen. 2:17; 3:3-4), and takes this to indicate that God had another sort of death in mind. Philo differentiates between mortality, which is natural, and the death of the soul, which involves a person's subjection to sinful passions, and which is imposed as a form of divine punishment. He determines that the latter sort of death, the death of the soul, is the punishment God visited on Adam and Eve for their disobedience (Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation*, 1, 105-108; cf. 3, 52, *Heir*, 52-53, *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, 1, 16.45.51). This further reinforces the prospect that Paul has in mind moral death rather than mortality when he describes the inception of death through Adam.³⁵

It is here worth noting that interpreting 'death' through Adam in Romans as moral death rather than mortality resolves an apparent contradiction between Romans and 1 Corinthians in the analyses of Beker and Adams. Both scholars understand 'death' in Romans to be a matter of physical expiration, and thus human mortality, as a phenomenon that invaded the world when the primordial couple ate the forbidden fruit in Eden.³⁶ However, both scholars understand mortal death in 1 Corinthians to be an inherent element of creation, which is in need of eschatological transformation.³⁷ This combination of interpretations results in an inconsistent Paul, since human mortality cannot be both alien to creation and intrinsic to it. Beker leaves unresolved the matter of whether the difference between how Paul portrays death in Romans and 1 Corinthians is due to the different situations he seeks to address in each text, or due to a development in Paul's theological thought.³⁸ Adams argues persuasively that the differences in the character of the two letters are due to the social circumstances of the two communities,³⁹ but his analysis nonetheless implies that Paul expresses two different views of the aetiology of human mortality that cannot both be true. However, if the 'death' that Paul describes entering the world through Adam in Romans involves moral corruption rather than mortality, as I propose, then Paul does not contradict himself on this matter, he simply emphasises two different aspects of human life in the present age, both

passim. Josephus, another first-century Jewish author, uses the language of 'death' to describe the soul's dwelling in the body and being subject to the body's influence, in a manner similar to Plato and Philo (*Jewish War*, 7, 344). For additional examples of a Hellenistic Jewish appropriation of Platonic moral discourse, see Josephus, *Jewish War*, 1, 34; 2, 154-155, *Antiquities*, 1, 74; 15, 91; 19, 173.201-202, 4 *Maccabees*, 1, 1-3.8-12.31; 3, 1.

35 It should be kept in mind, however, that Philo does not clearly indicate that Adam and Eve passed their moral death on to subsequent generations.

36 see Adams *op.cit.*, (7), chap. 6, passim; Beker *op.cit.*, (15); Beker *op.cit.*, (25), pp. 224-226.

37 Adams *op.cit.*, (7), pp. 145-146; Beker *op. cit.*, (15).

38 Beker *op.cit.*, (15), pp. 60-61.

39 See esp. Adams *op.cit.*, (7), pp. 242-245.

of which were associated with Adam by some authors in Paul's second-temple Jewish milieu.

Conclusion

In 1 Corinthians, Paul associates Adam with human mortality, but does not clearly indicate that mortality entered the world due to an Edenic transgression. Rather, it appears that Adam was *created* mortal and humans die 'through' and 'in' Adam in that they share in a mortal body like Adam's. By contrast, in Romans, Paul describes death as something more like an intruder that 'entered' the world and 'spread' to all humans as a result of Adam's transgression, but it is not apparent that 'death' here involves human mortality, and the subsequent chapters suggest that 'death' is more likely a metaphor for moral bondage, which Paul elsewhere describes as slavery to sin. In both cases, the reading I proffer is bolstered by overall themes in Paul's apparent rhetorical aims in each of these letters. If we merge the insights of both texts, we get the picture that humans are naturally mortal, but have also become morally corrupt because of the transgression of Adam. In Christ, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, both mortality and moral bondage are ultimately overcome. This model leaves open the question of exactly when and how sin began to exercise an enslaving influence on humanity, and this question certainly deserves further reflection. For now, it should be noted that if we take Paul's words at face value, then moral corruption should be understood as attributable to 'one person' (Rom. 5:12-19), rather than a community of hominids at a population bottleneck.⁴⁰ My interpretation also leaves open the question of whether humanity forfeited an opportunity for immortality at an early stage of development – a notion that some have found in the exclusion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden before they could eat of the tree of life (Gen. 3:17-24).⁴¹

The key import of my argument is that Christians who are committed both to evolutionary science and to the authority of Scripture do not need to dismiss Paul's words about death through Adam as a forgivable element of ancient anthropological naivety. Although it is doubtful that Paul imagined anything like a twenty-first century understanding of human evolution, he may well have understood human mortality to be natural, and this squares well with a theologically-informed understanding of evolution.

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40 cf. Collins, R. 'Evolution and Original Sin', in Miller K.B. (ed.) *Perspectives on an Evolving Creation*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2003), pp. 469-501. See also Wright, N.T. 'Do We Need a Historical Adam?', in *Surprised by Scripture: Engaging Contemporary Issues*, New York: HarperOne (2014), pp. 26-40.

41 See, e.g., Barr, J. *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press (1993).