

UNIVERSAL SIN AND SALVATION IN ROMANS 5:12–21

MARK RAPINCHUK*

One of the more prominent doctrines in systematic theology is the doctrine of “inherited sin.”¹ A great deal of speculation has taken place regarding the cause, transmission/imputation and consequences of inherited sin. It is commonplace to cite Rom 5:12–21 as the foundational text for this doctrine.² The present essay intends to question this standard practice. It is granted that several related issues of systematic theology will surface, which cannot be adequately addressed within the confines of this article. The focus will rather be one important exegetical issue involved in the common reading of Romans 5, namely, what does Paul mean by εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους?

In reading the provocative words of Paul found in Rom 5:12–21 (especially vv. 12, 18–19), one cannot help but wonder if the standard reading of this section reads too much into the passage. Have interpreters gone off the path by reading this as an exposition on the concept of original or inherited sin? Not only might one question whether this is Paul’s intention and main point, it might be asked if this concept is in view at all. The following essay suggest that such an understanding leads to unacceptable conclusions. If the present passage is read as an explicit statement about inherited sin (on the basis of 5:12, 18), then consistency would seem to require that it also be read as an explicit statement of Universalism.³ If Paul says in v. 18 that all *without exception* are sinners (as a *direct* consequence of Adam’s sin), then he is also maintaining that all *without exception* are saved from their sin.

But this, we maintain, is mistaken on two counts. First, it is not Paul’s intention to speculate on the transmission or imputation of human sinfulness.⁴

* Mark Rapinchuk is assistant professor of philosophy and religion at the College of the Ozarks in Point Lookout, MO 65726.

¹ Following Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1994) 494.

² Examples of this reading are legion. See e.g. Neal Punt, *Unconditional Good News: Toward an Understanding of Biblical Universalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 9–16; Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 631–632; Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 494; Douglas Moo, *Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 321–329; John Stott, *Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994) 148–162.

³ See the detailed argument advanced by Punt, *Universal Good News* 9–20. Punt argues that whatever group is in view in 18a is also meant in 18b. Although we disagree with the conclusion he reaches concerning the scope of Paul’s universalism, we agree that εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους refers to the same group in each case. See also M. E. Boring, “The Language of Universal Salvation in Paul,” *JBL* 105 (1986) 283–292.

⁴ Although it is easily demonstrated that some such speculation is present in Jewish literature contemporary to Paul, this does little to prove that Paul was so engaged. For discussion of the relevant

His point is related, but significantly different. Second, a misplaced emphasis on this alleged speculation obscures the primary intention of Paul. Paul does indeed wish to treat the issue of the universality of sin and salvation, but in a different sense. Paul is speaking of universality in the sense of "without ethnic distinction,"⁵ not in the sense of "without exception."

I. INHERITED SIN?

As already noted, systematic theology has taught us that humankind has been tainted by "inherited sin." Adam's sin is seen as somehow transmitted or imputed to all humankind. The central passage used in support of this doctrine is Rom 5:12–21.⁶ For example, Erickson writes,

All of us, apparently without exception, are sinners. By this we mean not merely that all of us sin, but that all of us have a depraved or corrupted nature which so inclines us toward sin that it is virtually inevitable. How can this be? What is the basis of this amazing fact? Must there not be some common factor at work in all of us? It is as if some antecedent or *a priori* factor in life leads to universal sinning and universal depravity. But what is this common factor, which is often referred to as original sin? Whence is it derived, and how is it transmitted or communicated? We find the answer in Romans 5.⁷

Despite great respect for the work of systematic theologians, it is doubtful whether Rom 5:12–21 can be made to sustain the weight of this argument. Romans 5:12 reads, "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned."⁸ The Augustinian reading of ἐφ' ᾧ "in whom" (cf. "because"; RSV) made it quite clear that he took Adam's sin to be that which contaminated all men.⁹ But most modern exegetes reject this rendering of ἐφ' ᾧ and accept

Jewish literature see e.g. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (WBC 38A; Dallas: Word, 1988) 272; J. Cambier, "Péchés des Hommes et Péché d'Adam en Rom. v. 12," *NTS* 11 (1965) 219–222. See also Stanley Porter, "The Pauline Concept of Original Sin in Light of Rabbinic Background," *Tyn Bul* 41 (1990) 3–13, 30. Cf. Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 147–148.

⁵ We are using "without ethnic distinction" in the sense of "without partiality." In other words, Paul means Jews and Gentiles alike when he says "all men." A key text for this reading is Rom 3:21–26 where Paul argues that the righteousness of God is available through faith for "all who believe," because there is no distinction, because all sin and are thereby justified by his grace. For a similar conclusion regarding "all men" in Romans, see N. T. Wright, "Towards a Biblical View of Universalism," *Themelios* 4 (1979) 55–57.

⁶ So e.g. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 494–496; Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* 631–632. Cf. comments of L. Sabourin, "Original Sin Reappraised," *BTB* 3 (1973) 67–70, 74–77.

⁷ Erickson, *Christian Theology* 631 (although he also speaks of the "conditional imputation of guilt" [p. 639]); Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 494–496; Porter, "Pauline Concept of Original Sin" 18–30. Although Porter acknowledges that Paul did not conceive of his understanding of original sin in "traditional categories of Systematic Theology" (p. 30), he elsewhere describes 5:12 ff. as an "explicit theory" of the concept (p. 20) and concludes that Paul's understanding seems to be most like the "federalist view" (p. 30). Cf. Moo, *Romans* 321–328.

⁸ Unless otherwise noted, all translations will follow the RSV.

⁹ For discussion of this point see Kaylor, *Paul's Covenant Community* 109–110; Cambier, "Péchés des Hommes" 242–251; Porter, "Pauline Concept of Original Sin" 22–24; Moo, *Romans* 321–329; Karl Kertelge, "The Sin of Adam in Light of Christ's Redemptive Act According to Rom

in its place something like "because."¹⁰ This understanding of ἐφ' ᾧ suggests Paul's emphasis is not so much on inherited sin, but on "original death."¹¹ In other words, Paul does not speculate on how Adam's sin is transmitted/imputed to every person. Rather, he wishes to demonstrate that sin always results in death.¹² So far, so good. But Paul also says "all sinned" (πάντες ἥμαρτον). This statement in conjunction with Paul's further discussion of Adam (vv. 18-19) has led many to conclude Paul intends some relationship between Adam's sin and "universal condemnation."¹³

Those who see inherited sin in view appeal to v. 18, "Then as one man's trespass leads to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men."¹⁴ Here it seems even more clearly stated that Adam's sin is the cause of condemnation for all men, therefore, it would seem, some idea of inherited sin must be in mind for Paul to make this statement. For instance, Douglas Moo suggests v. 12 read in an "individualistic sense" creates a conflict with v. 18, understood in a "corporate sense." This alleged conflict surfaces when one tries to reconcile the assertions "each person dies because *each person* sins [in the course of history]" and "*one man's* trespass led to condemnation for all people" (v. 18a).¹⁵ His resolution is to reject the "individualistic" reading of v. 12 in favor of the "corporate" reading of v. 18.¹⁶ If we are correct in suggesting "all people" (πάντας ἀνθρώπους) should be read

5:12-21," *Communio* 18 (1991) 503-505. See also Sabourin ("Original Sin Reappraised" 72-81) for discussion of the development of the doctrine within the Roman Catholic Church and a summary of the position of many of the Greek fathers. Cf. J. A. Fitzmyer, "The Consecutive Use of Ἐφ' ᾧ in Romans 5:12," *NTS* 39 (1993) 321-339.

¹⁰ So for example, Käsemann, *Romans* 147-148; Moo, *Romans* 321-322; Dunn, *Romans* 1: 273-274; Kaylor, *Paul's Covenant Community* 109-110. Cf. Fitzmyer, "Consecutive Use" 322-329; Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 273-277.

¹¹ So Moo, *Romans* 322-323; Dunn, *Romans* 1:273.

¹² Moo, *Romans* 323. It must be noted that to argue here that Paul is not teaching "inherited sin" as commonly understood does not require a Pelagian perspective. Paul may be saying that once the power of sin was unleashed into the world, it is inevitable and inescapable that "all sin" and therefore, "all die." See e.g. Käsemann, *Romans* 150. Schreiner's translation "... and so [death] spread to all people, and on the basis of this death all sinned" (*Romans* 270) admits the reality of universal sin without the need to posit the transmission of a corrupted nature (275).

¹³ So e.g. Moo (*Romans* 323) who notes that although v. 12 can be understood to mean everyone is subject to death because of his or her own sin, this "individualistic" understanding may conflict with the "corporate" explanation present in vv. 15-19. Furthermore, some (e.g. Stott, *Romans* 150-153) argue Paul must have "inherited sin" in mind because he says in vv. 13-14 that although sin was in the world before the law was given, sin was not counted where there was no law. Even still, death reigned from Adam to Moses. This reign of death, says Stott, must be due to the sin of Adam, since sin was not reckoned apart from the law. Put differently, if people died before the coming of the law, it must be because they were guilty due to Adam's sin. This position, however, overlooks at least two crippling objections. First, Paul himself has already argued that no one has an excuse because God has sufficiently revealed himself through creation. Failure to acknowledge God in response to this revelation, which is apart from and prior to the law (ever since the creation of the world, 1:20), is sufficient to establish the guilt of all. Second, Stott's reading overlooks texts such as Genesis 6 where the wickedness of mankind is judged by death (so also Genesis 19). In other words, these OT texts speak of judgment against sin which leads to the death of those who are wicked, not those who are guilty due to Adam.

¹⁴ E.g. Erickson, *Christian Theology* 632.

¹⁵ Moo, *Romans* 323.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 326.

in a sense other than "each individual person without exception" this apparent conflict between "individual" and "corporate" readings disappears.

There is, we suggest, significant difficulty with the conclusion that Paul intends some statement regarding inherited sin (due to his use of πάντας ἀνθρώπους). If Paul's statement is to be taken at face value and interpreted to mean that Adam's sin and consequent guilt are applied to *all men* (without exception as would seem to be required for the idea of inherited sin to survive), then it seems necessary that Christ's act of righteousness must also be applied to this same group. In other words, since Paul is at pains to argue that the effect of Christ's act surpasses the effect of Adam's trespass (εἰ . . . πολλῷ μᾶλλον; vv. 15, 17), and in light of the exact parallel in language between 18a and 18b¹⁷ (esp. εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους), it seems that an insistence on inherited sin requires a conclusion of absolute Universalism. If sin is universally applied (every human being without exception), then so must salvation be universally applied.¹⁸

Our argument and suggested reading of this passage hinges on the wording of vv. 18–19. If εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους in 5:18a means "all men without exception," then how can we make εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους denote something different in the very next clause? If there were solid contextual clues for this change in designation, it would not be problematic. But such contextual clues are lacking. It seems rather that Paul intends the force of εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους to be the same in each clause (as well as in 5:12).¹⁹ The plain reading of this text seems inescapable, whomever Paul sees as affected by Adam's sin is also affected by Christ's act of righteousness. The group affected by Adam's sin is brought under judgment and death. The group affected by Christ's righteousness is pardoned and receives life. Thus if Paul's point is that every single human being is condemned by Adam's sin, then it follows that every single human being is pardoned and receives life. Such is the plain reading of the text, if we see inherited sin in this picture.

This same conclusion is supported by Paul's use of ὡς . . . οὕτως in 5:18. The use of ὡς . . . οὕτως in Paul frequently denotes similarity of means or manner.²⁰ Thus in Rom 5:18 Paul's comparison of the results of ἑνὸς παραπτώματος and ἑνὸς δικαιώματος would require that they be applied through similar means or manner. If the result of ἑνὸς παραπτώματος is applied to εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους without any conscious participation, then so must the results of ἑνὸς δικαιώματος (that is, without conscious participation). If, on the other hand, the application of the results of ἑνὸς δικαιώματος is based on some form of active participation (the exercise of faith), then it would seem the application of guilt must also be based on active participation.

¹⁷ Ἄρα οὖν ὡς δι' ἑνὸς παραπτώματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς κατάκριμα
οὕτως καὶ δι' ἑνὸς δικαιώματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς δικαίωσιν ζωῆς.

¹⁸ E.g. Punt, *Universal Good News* 9–16; Boring, "Language of Universal Salvation" 284–286.

¹⁹ See also Punt, *Universal Good News* 17–20. It is interesting to note that Stott, who wishes to modify v. 18b on the basis of v. 17, elsewhere affirms, "it is a right principle of interpretation that the same phrase in the same context bears the same meaning . . . (Romans 170; emphasis added).

²⁰ See e.g. Rom 5:15; 1 Cor 5:3; 7:17; 2 Cor 1:7; 7:14; Eph 5:24; 1 Thess 5:2.

II. UNIVERSALISM?

The doctrine of absolute Universalism (the salvation of all without exception), however, runs aground almost immediately.²¹ Unless we assume Paul was incoherent and quite inconsistent in his theological thought (an unfair assumption about any author, much less one who has proven himself to be quite sophisticated in his theological reflection), we must reject Universalism. Throughout Romans the death knell of Universalism is sounded. For example, Paul clearly teaches that salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ (e.g. 1:16; 3:22; 5:1; 9:32; 10:9). It is those who call upon the name of the Lord who will be saved (10:13).²² Furthermore, Paul makes it clear that he understands only a remnant will be saved (9:27; 11:5). He likewise speaks of a hardening which has come upon part of Israel (11:7, 25), which in turn means some of Israel does not come to faith. It seems inescapable that Paul envisages two distinct groups of people: those who exercise faith in Jesus and those who do not.²³ These groups do not enjoy the same eschatological fate. Those who have faith will live, those who do not, will not. Simply stated, Universalism cannot be sustained.²⁴

If Universalism is to be dismissed, and we maintain in light of Paul's argument throughout the text of Romans it is, then how are we to account for the language of vv. 18-19? An interesting and insightful attempt is found in Nygren. He attempts to show that Paul's real intention is to contrast the ages or epochs of Adam and Christ. As Adam was the initiator of the age of sin and death, so Christ is the initiator of the age of righteousness and life.²⁵ While there is a great deal of insight in this suggestion and undoubtedly an equal measure of truth, it still does not entirely satisfy the language of vv. 18-19. Where, we might ask, does Paul use this language (*πάντες ἄνθρωποι*) to denote

²¹ It is not our purpose to present a detailed refutation of Universalism in Romans. Rather, we will merely state our conclusion and present cursory evidence that Paul does not teach a universal salvation in the absolute sense.

²² This "requirement" itself may not be sufficient ground for rejecting Universalism. It could, of course, be argued that all will eventually "call upon the name of the Lord." It is beyond our intention to engage in the debate on the concept of *ἀποκατάστασις*. For a critical discussion of this concept see e.g. Richard J. Bauckham, "Universalism: A Historical Survey," *Themelios* 4 (1979) 48-54. For a positive assessment see Esteban Deák, *APOKATASTASIS: The Problem of Universal Salvation in Twentieth-Century Theology* (Ph.D. diss., Institute of Christian Thought, University of St. Michael's College, 1979) 1-19, 209-362. See also Käsemann, *Romans* 157.

²³ His comments in 9:1-3 would seem to be meaningless if Paul thought in terms of universal salvation (without exception).

²⁴ Even the mild or suggestive form such as that found in e.g. Cranfield (*Romans* 121), who quite possibly presents this possibility because he recognizes the force of Paul's language in vv. 18-19 yet is unwilling to abandon inherited sin. See also Kaylor, *Covenant Community* 114; Dunn, *Romans* 297. See also, Sabourin, "Original Sin Reappraised" 70. Likewise, the nuanced version espoused by Punt (*Universal Good News*) fails to persuade, although he attempts to qualify universalism by acknowledging the "restricting" texts. Punt's universalism, although not absolute (all without exception), is based on a reading of "all men," which he attempts to qualify from the context of scripture as a whole, rather than from the immediate literary context. Boring ("Language of Universal Salvation" 292) admits the presence of "limited-salvation" texts, but asserts that Paul affirms both "universal salvation" and "limited-salvation" without any attempt to reconcile the apparent conflict.

²⁵ Nygren, *Romans* 210-224. See also Dunn, *Romans* 1:272-277; Moo, *Romans* 343-344.

the citizens of an epoch, either Adam's or Christ's? Conceptually this may be argued, but where does Paul explicitly use this description? Furthermore, while it is a small step to see "all men" denoting all those who are under the sway of Adam and death, it is much more of a leap to see "all men" in v. 18b as denoting *only* those who are in Christ. Once again, it would seem that without explicit modification or stronger contextual clues "all men" in vv. 18a and 18b denote the same group.²⁶

Some appeal to v. 17 which reads, "much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ" as a way out. Here, it is argued, Paul makes it clear that it is those who "receive the free gift" who also "live." Therefore, it is maintained, v. 18b must be read in light of v. 17. As a result, "all men" must mean "all those who receive the free gift."²⁷ For example, Cranfield maintains Paul's point was that "what Christ has done he really has done for all men, that a status of righteousness the issue of which is life is *truly offered to all* . . ." (emphasis added).²⁸

Others would justifiably cry foul. This appears to be a theologically determined reading.²⁹ Since it is *assumed* that Paul cannot mean Universalism, we are allegedly justified in importing a qualification into the text which is not actually present (namely, the "truly offered to all"). We might well ask if this were Paul's intention, why did he write v. 18 the way he did?³⁰ If his point were to say "Just as Adam's sin led to condemnation and death for all men (without exception), so also Christ's righteousness leads to pardon and

²⁶ Of course, there are some who conclude Paul is simply confused or self-contradictory. For instance, Sanders writes, "Thus he means really neither 'all . . . all' nor 'many . . . many,' but 'all . . . many.' The Adam/Christ analogy does not permit this last formulation, however, and Paul has allowed the form and force of his argument to lead him into a confusing statement" (E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977] 473).

²⁷ It must be acknowledged, however, that such a reading does not necessarily follow from 5:17. Paul says those who receive the gift (p) receive life (q). This does *not* require that those who have life (q) receive the gift (p) [if p, then q; but q does not imply p].

²⁸ Cranfield, *Romans* 121. So also Moo, *Romans* 343–344 (although carefully nuanced). Moo argues that Paul's point is not so much the identity of the groups as it is the affirmation that Christ affects those who are his just as certainly as Adam affects those who are his. As a result, Moo concludes that since all without exception are in Adam, the universalism of v. 18a is indeed without exception, but the universalism of 18b is tempered by the reality that not all are in Christ and therefore only those who believe fully benefit. See also Porter, "Pauline Concept of Original Sin" 29, where the "all men" of v. 18 is seen as qualified by v. 17. This conclusion implies the presence of the qualifying language of ἐν τῷ Ἀδὰμ and ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, which is not here. This language is found in 1 Cor 15:22, but rather than importing this qualification from 1 Corinthians (which is not entirely free from difficulty with respect to apparent universalism—it says "in Adam all die, in Christ all will be made alive," not all "who are in Adam" die, all "who are in Christ" will be made alive) we wish to allow the context of Romans to be determinative. Schreiner also concludes that "the πολλοί and πάντες who have been affected by Christ are not coterminous with the πολλοί and πάντες affected by Adam's sin" (*Romans* 292). Cf. Boring ("Language of Universal Salvation" 285) who argues against "all" = "those in Christ."

²⁹ This critique is found e.g. in Punt, *Universal Good News* 10–20. See also Brendan Byrne, "Universal Need of Salvation and Universal Salvation by Faith in the Letter to the Romans," *Pacifica* 8 (1995) 129.

³⁰ We recognize the tenuous nature of such questions and arguments, but the language of v. 18 is so clearly and intentionally parallel that it cannot be so easily dismissed.

life for all who believe," why did he not say so? In fact, Paul does not say the effect of Christ's righteousness is *offered* to "all men"; he indicates it is *effective* for "all men."

Furthermore, if v. 17 is so easily permitted to modify v. 18b, why can this not apply in reverse? Paul says those who have received the gift receive life (v. 17). He then says "all men receive life" (v. 18b). Therefore, Paul could as easily be saying that all men will eventually receive the gift. This argument appears to be more logically valid than the one which rejects Universalism on the basis of v. 17.³¹ The explicit universalism of 18b must be addressed. If 18a means all men without exception, then it seems 18b must as well.

III. SUGGESTED SOLUTION

The presumption that Paul expresses the view of inherited sin in Rom 5:12-21 seems to lead to a significant problem; namely, absolute Universalism. How then do we avoid this difficulty in light of the fact that Paul clearly says Adam's sin affects "all men" and likewise Christ's righteousness affects "all men"? We suggest that in keeping with one of Paul's primary points of emphasis throughout Romans, and one explicitly expressed in 3:21-24 (cf. 10:11-13), we should read "all men" in the sense of all men *without ethnic distinction*, that is, Jews and Gentiles alike. Thus when Paul says the sin of Adam brings condemnation and death to "all men," he means Jews and Gentiles alike are affected by sin and death. Likewise, when he states that the righteousness of Christ leads to pardon and life for "all men" he means to say that salvation in Christ is available to all men without distinction. Jews and Gentiles alike may accept the free gift; it is not limited to any one group. This reading thus accounts for the language of vv. 18-19 and also maintains continuity with Paul's teaching on salvation by faith in Jesus. In this sense, those who point to v. 17 as the qualifier are not entirely wrong. It is indeed those who accept the free gift of grace who also receive pardon and life. But Paul's point is that "all men," whether Jew or Gentile, may receive this gift of life.

Thus the notion of inherited sin is not really in view here. Paul is talking about the universal nature of sin in that it affects all peoples.³² It is not his concern to speculate about the transmission or imputation of Adam's sin to all men *without exception*.³³ Neither is it his intention to suggest that all men *without exception* will receive the benefits of Christ's righteousness. Rather, Paul is talking about people groups, with "all men" being inclusive of all such

³¹ Those who use v. 17 to modify 18b argue something like this: Paul says those who receive the gift receive life (v. 17). He then states all men receive life (v. 18b). Therefore, he must intend to qualify "all men" to mean "all men who receive the gift." However, the use of v. 17 does not require this conclusion (see note 27 above). Those who argue for Universalism construct the argument as follows: If all who receive life receive the gift (v. 17); and "all men" receive life (v. 18b), then "all men" receive the gift.

³² In fact, this has been a major point of Paul's argument in 1:18-3:26.

³³ Thus observations about the presence of such speculation in Jewish thought are interesting but beside the point. See also, Porter, "Pauline Concept of Original Sin" 30.

people groups.³⁴ Dunn has observed in his comments on 5:19, "the universalism therefore is in part at least a way of denying the limited nationalism of normal Jewish hope—'all' = Gentiles as well as Jews." This statement is, we maintain, substantially correct.³⁵

1. *All Men*. In support of this we offer a brief look at Paul's use of $\pi\alpha\upsilon$ and his argument throughout the book of Romans. The 70 occurrences of $\pi\alpha\upsilon$ in Romans seem to fall into three basic categories:

a. *all—denoting every single component of the group (without exception)*. For instance, 3:19 says, "Now we know that whatever the law says it says to those who are under the law, so that *every* ($\pi\alpha\nu$) mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God." In 14:11–12 we find, "for it is written, 'As I live says the Lord, *every* ($\pi\alpha\nu$) knee shall bow to me and *every* ($\pi\alpha\sigma\alpha$) tongue shall give praise to God.' So each ($\xi\kappa\alpha\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$) of us will give an account of himself to God." And 14:23 states, "But he who has doubts is condemned, if he eats, because he does not act from faith; for whatever ($\pi\alpha\nu$) does not proceed from faith is sin."³⁶

b. *all—denoting every manner or kind*. For example, in 1:18 Paul writes, "For the wrath of God is revealed against all ($\pi\alpha\sigma\alpha\nu$) ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth." In 1:29 we find, "They [those whom God has given up to improper conduct] were filled with all manner ($\pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\eta$) of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice." Likewise 8:28 says, "We know that in everything ($\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha$) God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose."³⁷

c. *all—denoting all men without distinction* (this may be considered a subset of #2). For instance, 1:16 reads, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone ($\pi\alpha\nu\tau\iota$) who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (see also, 4:11–12). In 2:9 we find, "there will

³⁴ Kaylor (*Covenant Community* 104, 114–115), Dunn (*Romans* 285) and Cambier ("Péchés des Hommes" 222–223, 229, 254) come close to this view but do not carry it through to this conclusion in their discussion. N. T. Wright ("Biblical View of Universalism" 54–56) reaches a similar conclusion with respect to Paul's use of "all men" throughout Romans. Interestingly, Schreiner observes that Paul uses universal language with respect to Christ's work "to signify that all people without distinction (both Jews and Gentiles) are recipients of God's work" (*Romans* 292), but he does not appear to accept the implications of this observation for v. 18a.

³⁵ Dunn (*Romans* 285) fails to apply this observation throughout the passage. As a result, he is compelled to leave the door open for possible universalistic readings and suggests Paul could hardly have complained if his readers read vv. 18–19 in this sense (p. 297).

³⁶ For other texts which display this sense we suggest 8:22 (the whole creation has been groaning in travail); 9:17 (my name might be proclaimed in all the earth); 10:18 (their voice has gone out to all the earth); 11:10 (and bend their backs forever [through everything!]); 11:36 (to him are all things); 12:4 (all members do not have the same function); 15:11 (Praise the Lord all Gentiles, let all the people praise him); 15:13 (all joy and peace in believing); 15:14 (filled with all knowledge); 16:4, 16 (all the churches); 16:15 (all the saints); and possibly 8:37 (in all things we are more than conquerors).

³⁷ For other texts with this sense we suggest 3:2 (much in every way); 7:8 (all kinds of covetousness); 8:32 (give us all things); 14:2 (one who believes may eat everything); 14:5 (another man esteems all days); and possibly 8:37 (in all things we are more than conquerors); 14:20 (everything is clean); 15:14 (filled with all knowledge).

be tribulation and distress for every (πᾶσαν) human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek" (see also 2:10). In 3:9 Paul asserts, "What then? Are Jews any better off? No, not at all; for I have already charged that all (πάντας) men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin" (see also 3:12, 22-23). And in 4:16 we read, "That is why it depends upon faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all (παντί) his descendants—not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham, for he is the father of us all (πάντων)."³⁸

It seems clear that Paul uses πᾶς in a variety of ways. It does not always mean "everyone/everything without exception." In fact, he has explicitly modified it many times with the mention of Jew and Gentile in order to clarify his intention (e.g. 1:16; 2:9; 3:9, 29; cf. 4:11-12).

Additional support for our suggestion of "all men without distinction" as opposed to "all men without exception" may be found in a look at the use of πᾶς plus ἄνθρωπος throughout Biblical Greek. The combination of πᾶς with ἄνθρωπος occurs 75+ times in the LXX and an additional 26 times in the NT. Although there is no precisely or rigidly defined usage pattern, and it may go too far to suggest that some grammatical or lexical "rule" is at work, the general tendency seems to be to denote "all men without exception" with the singular forms of πᾶς + ἄνθρωπος.³⁹ For example, in Gen 6:13 God declares that he has determined to make an end of all flesh (παντός ἀνθρώπου) through the flood, and Gen 7:21 (πᾶς ἄνθρωπος) speaks of everyone who was not on the ark being destroyed (without exception). In Gal 5:3 Paul declares that everyone (παντί ἀνθρώπῳ) who receives circumcision is obligated to keep the whole law. And 1 Macc 5:42 reads, "permit no man (πάντα ἄνθρωπον) to encamp, but make them all enter the battle." In each of these cases the sense seems to be all *without exception*.⁴⁰

³⁸ Among the texts which we suggest also display this sense are 1:7 (to all God's beloved in Rome); 1:8 (for all of you); 3:4 (though every man be false); 8:32 (he gave him up for us all); 9:5 (God over all); 10:4 (Christ is the end of the law that all who have faith may be justified); 10:11 (all who believe in him are not put to shame); 10:12 (no distinction between Jew and Greek, . . . he bestows his riches on all who call on him); 10:13 (all who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved); 11:32 (have mercy upon all men); and possibly 12:3 (I bid everyone among you); 12:17 (noble in the sight of all); 12:18 (live peaceably with all); 13:1 (let everyone be subject to governing authorities); 13:7 (pay all of them their due); 14:10 (we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God); 15:33 (God of peace be with you all); 16:19 (obedience known to all); 16:26 (made known to all nations).

³⁹ See the related comments of M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek: Illustrated by Examples* (Rome: Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1963) 61; A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1914) 771.

⁴⁰ E.g. πᾶς ἄνθρωπος Gen 7:21; Lev 16:17; 21:18; 22:3; Deut 4:3; 27:26; Ezra 6:11; Esth 4:11; Ps 39:5 [38:6 LXX]; 39:11 [38:12]; 64:9 [63:10]; 116:1 [115:2]; Job 21:33; 36:25; 37:7; Isa 2:17; Jer 10:19 [28:17]; 51:17 [28:17]; Sir 13:15; 1 Macc 2:41; John 2:10; Jas 1:19; παντός ἀνθρώπου Gen 6:13; Job 12:10; 37:7; Tob 4:14; παντί ἀνθρώπῳ 1 Kgs 8:38 [par. 2 Chr 6:29]; Sir 8:19; cf. Esth 6:9, 11; Gal 5:3; πάντα ἄνθρωπον Job 28:21; Jer 30:6 [37:6]; Tob 6:13; 1 Macc 5:42; John 1:9; Col 1:28. In the OT the "exceptions" all appear in Wisdom and poetic literature. The NT use does not seem quite as consistent as the OT. In other words, there are instances where the singular forms appear to be used representatively (non-distributively).

The use of the plural form, however, frequently denotes a more generalized or representative sense.⁴¹ For example, in Acts 22:14–15 Paul says, “And he said, “The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to all men (πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους) of what you have seen and heard.” In 1 Cor 7:7 (with respect to being unmarried) Paul writes, “I wish that all (πάντας ἀνθρώπους) were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.” In 2 Cor 3:2 Paul says he has no need of “letters of reference” because, “You yourselves [the Corinthian assembly] are our letter of recommendation, written on your hearts, to be known and read by all men” (πάντων ἀνθρώπων).⁴² In each of these texts it seems likely that Paul does not intend “all men” to denote “all men without exception.”⁴³ There seems to be solid support for reading πάντας ἀνθρώπους in a sense other than “all men without exception.”

One additional observation may be in order. There appears to be a consistent pattern when one wishes to express “all men without exception” which applies to both singular⁴⁴ and plural⁴⁵ constructions, namely, πᾶς + article + ἄνθρωπος. In each of the occurrences of this construction in biblical Greek, the sense seems to be “all men without exception.”⁴⁶

If what we have outlined above is accurate, there are good reasons for reading πάντας ἀνθρώπους in Rom 5:12, 18 in a sense other than “all men without exception.” In light of this, we suggest the following summary of 5:12–21,

Sin became active after the disobedience of Adam. As a result of the introduction of sin into the world, death also entered the world and spread to all men because sin affected everyone (both in commission and consequence). Sin was not a result of the law. The law neither caused nor can it cure sin. Sin was in the world before the law and as a result of its presence in the world death reigned. Death reigned over all men, whether their sin was like Adam’s (direct disobedience to God’s command; e.g. Jews) or different in kind (e.g. Gentiles). There is good news. The free gift is not like the trespass. The trespass does not have power over the free gift. If Jews and Gentiles both died as a result of one man’s sin, which brought sin and death into the world, much more will Jews and Gentiles alike enjoy the benefits of Christ’s gracious gift. Put differently, the gift is unlike the trespass because a single act of disobedience brings death to all (without distinction), yet the obedience of Christ is sufficient to undo the disobedience of many. If such is true, then since death reigned as a result of a single sin, then those who receive the free gift will reign in life through Christ. In the same way

⁴¹ Zerwick, *Biblical Greek* 188; BDF 144.

⁴² Other examples include πάντες ἀνθρώποι Wis 13:1; πάντων ἀνθρώπων Num 16:29; 2 Macc 7:34; 4 Macc 1:11; Sir 44:23; Rom 12:17, 18; 1 Cor 15:19; 2 Cor 3:2; 1 Tim 2:1; 4:10; πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις Phil 4:5; 1 Thess 2:15; Titus 2:11; πάντας ἀνθρώπους Isa 53:3; ἀπάντας ἀνθρώπους 3 Macc 3:18; 7:6; 1 Tim 2:4; Titus 3:2.

⁴³ In fact, it may be questioned whether any of the 16 plural NT usages of πᾶς + ἄνθρωπος can be read as “all men without exception.”

⁴⁴ Eccl 3:13; 5:19; 7:2; 12:13; Luke 6:36; 13:4.

⁴⁵ Gen 20:8; Exod 9:19; Num 12:3; 16:32; Judg 16:17; 1 Kgs 4:31 [5:11]; Jer 42:17 [49:17]; Ezek 38:20; Dan 2:30; 4:24 [21]; 6:26 [27]; Zech 8:10; 1 Esdr 3:18.

⁴⁶ Zerwick, *Biblical Greek* 188; Robertson, *Grammar* 772.

that Adam's sin led to death for both Jews and Gentiles, so also will Christ's obedience lead to pardon and life for Jew and Gentile alike. Now law increased the trespass, it did not undo it. Even still, where sin increased because it spread to all (both Jew and Gentile) and all sinned, grace increases because Christ's act is sufficient to undo the power and penalty of sin. Therefore, as death reigned after the introduction of sin into the world, life will reign as a result of the corrective and overcoming power of righteousness in Christ Jesus.

2. *The Argument of Romans.* Given what we have so far seen, it is possible to read Rom 5:12-21 in this way. The key issue, however, is whether this reading is consistent with Paul's argument throughout Romans. Not only is it consistent, we believe Paul's argument virtually demands that 5:12-21 be read in this light.⁴⁷

After his introduction, Paul makes a thematic statement in 1:16: "I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also the Greek." This statement, we suggest, is one of three key statements for proper understanding of the point Paul wishes to make in 5:12-21, namely, salvation is available to all, whether Jew or Gentile.⁴⁸

In 1:16 Paul sets out a basic theme of his message in the letter to the Romans. All who believe, whether they be Jew or Gentile, are saved by the power of the gospel. The universal nature of salvation is explicitly stated. The gospel saves all without distinction, whether Jew or Greek, salvation is through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Immediately after this thematic declaration, Paul undertakes to show the universal nature of sin and guilt. In 1:18-32 Paul shows how the Gentile is guilty before God. Despite evidence of God and his attributes, which is readily available to all, they have failed to honor God as God and have exchanged his glory for idolatrous worship and self-promotion. As a consequence, God has handed them over in judgment (1:18-32). Paul moves to denunciation of those who would judge others while themselves being guilty of the very same offenses (2:1-5) and argues that all will be judged according to their deeds (2:6)—not because of Adam's sin. This judgment applies to all, namely, Jew and Greek (2:9-10). This section serves as somewhat of a transition in Paul's argument. He has highlighted the guilt of the Gentiles (1:18 ff.) and will shortly outline the guilt of the Jew (2:17-24). The universal statement of 2:1-11 sets the stage for Paul's rebuke of Jewish presumption. It is not possession of the Law which delivers, it is faithful obedience. It is better to have no Law and yet to obey the essence of the Law (2:12-16) than to have the Law and not obey (2:17-3:4). Paul then defends the justice of God's judgment (3:5-8) which leads to the conclusion that all (Jew and Gentile) are guilty before God (3:9).

⁴⁷ The summary of Paul's argument that follows has been influenced by what I hope is a cautious acceptance of certain aspects of the so-called "new perspective" on Paul (e.g. Sanders, Dunn). Although important questions and cogent criticisms have been raised regarding the "new perspective" (e.g. Schreiner, Moo), I am persuaded there is much truth and helpful insight in this reading of Paul. Perhaps Paul's argument and language are patient of a mediating position.

⁴⁸ The other passages are 3:21-26 and 10:11-13.

The Law does not protect the Jew, all are under the power and the penalty of sin. If such is the case, what hope is there for anyone? Paul provides the answer to this in 3:21–26.⁴⁹ God has solved the problem of sin through the death of Christ Jesus. God has himself paid the penalty for sin, which is death (Gen 2:17; Rom 6:23). Because of this, God is righteous in forgiving sinners who have faith in Jesus (3:25–26). The necessary consequence of this statement is that all grounds of boasting in the Law and the markers of Judaism have been removed. No longer can the Jew boast of his special status, God is indeed the God of all, Jew and Gentile (3:29).

To support his argument Paul turns to the example of Abraham (4:1–25). Abraham clearly demonstrates that salvation, or being reckoned righteous, is not a product of the Law or distinctives of Judaism. It is, rather, the result of faith. Abraham believed and so was reckoned righteous. If Abraham was considered righteous apart from the Law (outside of the Law), then salvation cannot be restricted to those under the Law. Abraham is in fact the father of all who believe, Jew and Gentile (4:11). Salvation is available to all.

Paul next moves to a description of the benefits of this universally available salvation (5:1–5). By faith we have peace with God (5:1), access to this grace (5:2) and the hope of glory (5:2). Furthermore, we are now able to rejoice in suffering, which leads to endurance, development of character, and hope which does not disappoint (5:3–5). The gracious nature of God's gift is spelled out in 5:6–11. We did nothing to earn this. Because God has acted so graciously while we were enemies, we may have confidence now that we have been reconciled. Paul then moves to his famous comparison between Adam and Christ (5:12–21).

Adam's sin has affected all men and has brought death to all men, Jew and Gentile. In the same way, the righteous act of Christ has brought pardon and life to all men, Jew and Gentile.⁵⁰ This emphasis has been dominant throughout Paul's early discussion. From chapter one through chapter five, the thrust of the argument has been the non-distinction between Jew and Gentile. All are guilty before God, all sin, and all are saved through faith in Jesus. Whether this can rightly be extended to all men without exception is

⁴⁹ In addition to providing the answer to this important question, 3:21–26 also demonstrates that Paul's universalism is not absolute. Rather, Paul is thinking in terms of "all" denoting Jews and Gentiles. Paul's argument is clear. God's righteousness is revealed apart from the law. It is revealed through Jesus Christ and it is for *all* who believe, *because* there is *no distinction*, because *all* sin. Furthermore, 10:11–13 reads, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame, because there is *no distinction* between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord of *all* (πάντων) makes rich *all* (πλουτῶν εἰς πάντας) who call on his name, for *all* (πᾶς) who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved." In other words, Paul establishes that "all" refers to Jews and Gentiles (all without distinction) and not all men without exception. In fact when he wishes to make a "universal" statement ("everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved") he uses the singular form of πᾶς. We should read 5:12–21 in light of 1:16–17, 3:21–26, and 10:11–3 and not under the influence of some external consideration.

⁵⁰ The point here is similar to that made by Jesus in John 12:32, all men without ethnic distinction, but not all men without exception. On this reading see e.g. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 442–444. See also his critique of the use of texts such as 1 Tim 2:3–4, Titus 2:11, and 2 Pet 3:9 to argue God loves all without exception in *The Gaggling of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 287–289.

outside the scope of Paul's discussion. His main purpose is to establish the universal (without ethnic distinction) problem of sin and the universal (without ethnic distinction) solution.

This part of Paul's discussion moves somewhat into the background for a few chapters, but it remains an important presupposition in what follows. Paul's emphasis on unity in Christ, our status as slaves of righteousness, and our freedom from bondage to the Law presupposes the unity of believers based on the universal nature of salvation. What Paul says about believers applies to all who believe, Jew and Gentile. This also stands behind Paul's contrast of the two eras of Adam and Christ (7:7-25).⁵¹ All men, Jew and Gentile, are part of the age of Adam. As such we are subject to the frailties and shortcomings of this age of sin. But all who believe, both Jew and Gentile, have been redeemed from this age and are participants in the age of Christ. For the time being, we struggle as we are caught between the ages. As members of the kingdom, we know what we ought to do. As members of Adam's age, we fail to do it. But as children of God and joint heirs with Christ, we are compelled to walk in the spirit and not in the flesh. We are to live according to what we truly are and what we will be, sons and daughters of God, rather than what we once were (8:1-39).

This reading of 5:12-21 also has implications for chaps. 9-11. Because Paul has argued that salvation is universal in intention he must deal with the apparent rejection of the gospel by the Jews. It seems on the face of things as if the Jews have rejected the gospel and in turn have been rejected by God. How could this be if the gospel of salvation in Christ is indeed universal? Paul deals with this question, and other important questions as well, in chaps. 9-11.

In summary, Paul argues that it was a mistaken notion to think that salvation was the prerogative of the Jew only. This presumption is wrong for two reasons. First, it leads to the mistaken assumption that *only* Jews are eligible for this vindication (Paul has already dealt with this misunderstanding in chapter four where he demonstrates that Abraham was justified by faith independently of the Law and is therefore the father of all who believe, Jew and Gentile alike). Second, it leads to the equally mistaken conclusion that *all* who are Jews are guaranteed of vindication. Paul demonstrates how this perspective, which would call God's integrity into question since Paul is assuming many Jews will not experience this vindication, is misguided. He does this by demonstrating that it was never the case that *all* physical descendants of Israel (Jacob) were likewise recipients of the promise. In the past (9:6-33) as in the present (11:1-10), only a remnant is preserved and only a remnant will experience vindication. Paul also argues that the unbelief of Israel (the non-remnant) has the purpose of extending the compass of salvation. The unbelief of one group makes the universal scope of the gospel possible. This universalism is itself intended to bring about the vindication of the unbelieving group (11:11-16). As a result of faith, all (Jew and Gentile) can be branches of the olive tree (11:17-24). Since faith is necessary to remain

⁵¹ E.g. Dunn, *Romans* 398.

grafted into the tree, no one can boast of their position. All, Jew and Gentile alike, are dependent upon the mercy and grace of God. As a result of God's mysterious plan, he will bring about the vindication of his people (11:25–27).

Paul finishes this section with an important comment, “for God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all men (τοὺς πάντας)” (11:32). This, we suggest, is exactly his point in 5:18. All men have been “consigned” to disobedience (Jew and Gentile alike have been under the power and penalty of sin and death) so that God could show his mercy to all men (both Jew and Gentile). God's gracious salvation is not restricted, it is universal. All men without ethnic distinction can enjoy the benefits of Christ's obedience and righteousness.

Having argued his case for the universal nature of God's salvation, Paul moves to a practical application of this truth. Because *all* were under the power of sin and death, because *all* were rescued from this death through the blood of Christ, it follows that *all* should live accordingly (12:1–2). Paul therefore moves to discuss how the body should be unified in its diversity of members and gifts (12:3–8). The implications of the Jew-Gentile perspective should be obvious. Since sin condemned *all* and since *all* were delivered from this condemnation on the same basis, *all* should live as one body.

Chapters 14–15 make this point abundantly clear. No one should look down upon another because the other has a different background or antecedent religious sensibilities (14:1–23). Since all were once in the same boat, a boat destined for destruction, no one should presume to be better than another. Rather, all should support one another in imitation of Christ (15:1–13).

Paul can therefore be bold in his proclamation of the gospel (1:16; 15:14–21). Because all were in need of salvation from the consequences of their sin, and all were rescued on the same basis, namely faith in Christ Jesus, Paul can appeal to all to be supportive of his ministry and mission (15:22–33).

IV. CONCLUSION

It seems reasonable to conclude that a major emphasis of Paul's throughout Romans is the universal nature of sin and salvation. But this universal nature is defined as *without ethnic distinction* rather than *without exception*. When Paul speaks of “all men” he speaks in the sense of both Jews and Gentiles, not in the sense of every individual. This understanding of “all men” is not only consistent with the use of *πᾶς* and *ἄνθρωπος* in Biblical Greek, it is entirely consistent with the flow of Paul's argument and emphasis in Romans.

We suggest it is time to move beyond an insistence on reading Romans 5 as an exposition of original/inherited sin,⁵² which leads to unnecessary herme-

⁵² Whether this requires we dismiss the traditional idea of original sin is beyond the scope of this article. I would, for many reasons, hesitate to abandon this concept too quickly. However, in light of what has been suggested above I do think it is proper to reinvestigate and perhaps redefine the concept.

neutical maneuvering to avoid absolute Universalism. It is time we let Paul say what he intended to say, no more and certainly no less.⁵³ Sin is a universal problem, it affects both Jew and Gentile. But God, in Jesus Christ, has provided the solution which is available to *all*.

⁵³ The words of J. I. Packer ("Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics," in *Scripture and Truth*; ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992] 328) are worth noting:

Evangelicalism's theology, with all its local and in-house variants, is (at least in intention and idea, if not in perfect achievement) a body of tenets, attitudes, and approaches drawn from the biblical documents *by allowing them to speak for themselves in terms of their own interests, viewpoints, and emphases*; in other words, by a method that is thoroughly and consistently a posteriori. The method has been called "grammatico-historical," as a pointer to the techniques involved; it could equally well be called the a posteriori method, in virtue of its purpose of reading out of Scripture what is there in each author's expressed meaning and of *avoiding reading into it at any point what is not there in that sense* (emphasis added).



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