

Sin, Death, and Redemption as it relates to the Age of the Earth

[Romans 5:12 and 1Corinthians 15:21]

© Rodney Whitefield 2006 This document may be freely distributed provided it is complete and unchanged.

Recently, I was asked to comment on Romans 5:12-21 and 1Corinthians 15:21-22 as they relate to claims of relevance to the Bible's view of the age of the Earth. This request is one of several often asked by readers of my book *Genesis One and the Age of the Earth*.¹ **Why was I asked?** Those advocating that planet Earth is young (i.e., about 10,000 years old) often use an argument which starts by quoting Romans 5:12 shown below:

^{KJV}Romans 5:12 “Wherefore, as by one **man** sin entered into the world, and **death by sin;** and so **death** passed upon all **men**, for that all have sinned:

The young Earth advocate then expands the scope of Romans 5:12 to include the death of animals in addition to the death of men. They then assert that there was no animal death prior to the fall of man. Based on “no animal death prior to the Fall,” they assert that the fossilized bones of animals cannot be older than Adam (mankind) and therefore the six creative times of Genesis could not be long periods of time. This interpretive result is used to oppose the day-age interpretation of the six creative times and to support a favored 24-hour interpretation of the Genesis creation account.

Is the animal death claim true? If true, would it apply to determining the biblical age of the Earth?

Does the death in Romans 5:12-21 and 1Corinthians 15:21-22 apply to life forms other than mankind?

In Romans 5:12-21 and 1Corinthians 15:21-22, Paul refers to man and does so using a form of the Greek word *anthropos*. *Anthropos* always refers to a human being. Paul again uses *anthropos* in 1Corinthians 15:35-39, verses in the same passage as 1Corinthians 15:21-22. Paul's use of *anthropos* in 1Corinthians 15:35-39 shows that Paul himself did not consider *anthropos* to include other life forms. As we shall make clear, much of the confusion and confused interpretations result from:

- 1) Quoting only the first 10 (of 26) English words of Romans 5:12, and
- 2) Not considering the entire context and subsidiary statements of Romans 5:12-21.

We shall begin our analysis by studying the KJV of Romans 5:8-21. The analysis will proceed by first presenting and commenting on three sequential sections, namely, Romans 5:8-11, Romans 5:12-14, and Romans 5:15-19. In the following verses, words of significant interest have been printed in bold. Comments follow each section.

^{KJV}**Romans 5:8-11** ⁸ But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. ¹⁰ For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. ¹¹ And not only *so*, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

Comment: Romans 5:8-11 refers to believers, that is, those persons who have been reconciled because of their faith. As such, the passage is addressing men (people). The “us” and “we” in this passage are those people who have believed. The context is EXCLUSIVELY the salvation of **men** (people).

^{KJV}**Romans 5:12-14** ¹² Wherefore, as by one **man** sin entered into the world, and **death by sin;** and so **death** passed upon all **men**, for that all have sinned: ¹³ (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. ¹⁴ Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.

Comment: Those to whom Romans 5:12 refers are also men (people). The Greek word translated **man** is ἀνθρώπος (*anthropos*), the word from which we get the English word anthropology. Thayer's Greek lexicon says of *anthropos*: “It is used **1.** universally, with reference to the genus or nature, without distinction of sex, *a human being, whether male or female.*” Restated more clearly, *anthropos* always refers to **human beings**.

1. *Genesis One and the Age of the Earth* is available from www.creationingenesis.com

In Romans 5:12, the death is not just any death, but is the death of **men** as the consequence of sin. It is men (not animals) who are said to sin with the result that “**death** passed upon **all men**.” The use of *anthropos* continues in Romans 5:15-19. The italicized words in Romans 5:15-19 are words added by the translators and do not appear in the Greek text. A better sense of the Greek can be attained by reading the verses without the italicized words.

Romans 5:15-19 ¹⁵ But not as the offence, so also *is* the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, *which is* by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. ¹⁶ And not as *it was* by one that sinned, *so is* the gift: for the judgment *was* by one to condemnation, but the free gift *is* of many offences unto justification. ¹⁷ For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) ¹⁸ Therefore as by the offence of one *judgment came upon all men* to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift came upon all men* unto justification of life. ¹⁹ For as by **one man’s** disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall **many** be made righteous.

Comment: The entire passage deals with the redemption of **men** (*anthropos*) who have been reconciled by the death of Jesus because of their faith. What was the offence? The offence was disobedience. The result brought a consequence “upon **all men**” (*anthropos*).

To whom does death refer?

Romans 5:12-21 refers to **men** (*male or female*) and **not to any other life form**. The Bible is very clear that man differs for all other life forms by being “made in the image and likeness of God.” The claim is made (by some) that death did not exist before Adam’s sin. When restricted to the death of **men** (*anthropos*) that is correct, because until **men** (*anthropos*) were available to die, no death of **men** (*anthropos*) could have occurred. **Romans 5:12-21** does **not** refer to animal death.

What sort of “death” is being referenced in this passage?

It is generally held that it is spiritual death that is being spoken about.² The words sin, justification, grace, and law apply to mankind’s spiritual nature, and not to animals. Many commentators note that Adam did not physically die when he ate the forbidden fruit, but that he became spiritually separated from God and his eventual physical death was certain. It is commonly observed that sin is possible only for **men** (*anthropos*).

We will now consider **1Corinthians 15:12-23**, verses which parallel the death of **men by sin** of **Romans 5:12-21**. Subsequently, we will also consider **1Corinthians 15:39** where Paul explicitly indicates that **man** (*anthropos*) and other life forms are different, i.e., *anthropos* does **not** include animals.

The New American Standard (NAS) version has been used below because it closely follows the Greek in the verses which we will consider in detail. The word **men**, which translates the Greek *anthropos*, has been printed in bold. The italicized words in the translation are words added by the translators and do not appear in the Greek.

^{NAS} **1Corinthians 15:16-20** ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁷ and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all **men** most to be pitied. ²⁰ But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

Comment: 1Corinthians 15:16-20 speaks of believers (**men**) and explicitly uses the word *anthropos* for **men** in verse 19. Those who have fallen sleep are **men** (*anthropos*).

2. A good discussion of the spiritual death of Adam, physical death, and eternal death can be found in: Gleason L. Archer, Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties, pages 72-74, Regency Reference Library, Zondervan, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1982, ISBN 0310435706.

^{NAS} **1Corinthians 15:21-24** ²¹ For since by a **man** *came* death, by a **man** also *came* the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, ²⁴ then *comes* the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. . . .

Comment: 1Corinthians 15:20-24 speaks of believers (men) and explicitly uses the word *anthropos* two times for **man** and **men** in verse 21. It is **men** (believers) who shall be "made alive." Again, as in Romans 5, the death is the death of **man** and the resurrection is the resurrection of **man**. The **all** who die and the **all** who are made alive are **men**, those who have fallen asleep in Romans 5:6, 18 and 20. In 1Corinthians 15:39 (immediately below), Paul clearly indicates that **men** (*anthropos*) are distinct from other life forms.

. . . ^{NAS} **1Corinthians 15:35-39** ³⁵ But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?" ³⁶ You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; ³⁷ and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. ³⁸ But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. ³⁹ All **flesh** is not the same **flesh**, but there is one *flesh* of **men**, and another **flesh** of beasts, and another **flesh** of birds, and another of fish.

Comment: In 1Corinthians 15:39 Paul shows that he does not consider *anthropos* to include other life forms. Paul does not include animals and birds when he refers to **men** (*anthropos*). 1Corinthians 15:21 conveys the same information as Romans 5:12. Both verses are printed below for comparison with the Greek word translated death shown in parenthesis. In both verses the Greek word translated **man** is *anthropos* and in both verses it is by **man** that death entered. Romans 5:12 provides greater detail about the process.

1Cor. 15:21 "For since by **man death** (*thanatos*), by **man** also the resurrection of the **dead** (*nekros*)."

Rom. 5:12 "Wherefore, as by **one man sin** entered into the world, and death (*thanatos*) **by sin**; and so **death** (*thanatos*) passed upon all **men, for that all have sinned**:"

In conclusion: Romans 5:12-21 and 1Corinthians 15:21-22 apply EXCLUSIVELY to men (*anthropos*), male and female. There is no basis for applying these verses to any other life form.

The assertion "no death before the Fall" has no applicability to determining the age of the Earth. The Fall occurs near the end of the sixth creative time. The creation of "heavens and the Earth" are stated in Genesis 1:1. Planet Earth is described as being water covered and in darkness in Genesis 1:2. Both of these verses describe conditions before the first creative command and before any animal life appears. The dry land, sea, and plants appear in the third creative time (Genesis 1:9-13), again before animal life appears.

My books, *Genesis One and the Age of the Earth* and *READING GENESIS ONE: Comparing Biblical Hebrew with English Translation* can be consulted for a more complete explanation about what Genesis says about the age of the Earth and the age of the universe. Both books are available from www.creationingenesis.com

I hope this provides some useful information and clarification.

Rodney Whitefield 11/16/2006