

Does the “all” in Romans 5 18 mean that all will eventually be saved (Universalism)?

The two uses of “all” of verse 18 must be explained. Does “all” mean every person without exception? Everything Paul has said thus far in Romans and emphasized here in Romans 5 demands that “all men” of 18a must be every person without exception. Does that then mean that the “all men” of 18b must likewise include every person without exception? Do these verses teach a universalism, that every person will eventually be saved? The Bible is very clear that some will spend eternity separated from God. 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 “He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.” Matthew 25:46 “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” It is also true that the word “all” must be interpreted in its context. In Acts 2:17 “I will pour out my Spirit on all people” does not mean every person without exception. In Acts 19:10 “all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord” clearly does not mean every person without exception. So here the “all” of “life for all men,” must be interpreted in its context. Our relationship to Adam is by birth; the “all” includes all who are physical descendants of Adam. Since we are all born, the “all” means every person without exception. But our relationship to Christ is by faith (5:17 “receive”); the “all” includes those who belong to Christ.

To avoid a complete contradiction with the rest of the Bible, it must be that we interpret “all” in light of the context. Specifically we must define “all” in each case with the person who is the head – Adam or Christ. **See 1 Corinthians 15 – each “Adam” delimits the “all.”**

1 Corinthians 15:45-49 “So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being” ; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.

⁴⁶ The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual.

⁴⁷ The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven.

⁴⁸ As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

First Adam, last Adam; first man, second man, etc. Christ was not the second person who ever lived (that was Eve). Each clearly implies a unique relationship to other humanity - each as the head of those who follow.

Adam is the first, the head, the source, of all who follow him, to those who are **physically** born (hence, every human being). Christ is the head, the source, to all who follow him, to all who are **spiritually** born (hence, all those who are born again).

In verse Romans 5:19 Paul changes words using “many” instead of “all.” It seems reasonable to assume that the two words are used by Paul as synonyms and the same rules apply to their interpretation – “context is king.”