

ROMANS – LIVING BY FAITH
MAN’S RUIN & CHRIST’S REDEMPTION – Chapters 4-7

LESSON 17 – ADAM AND CHRIST – Romans 5:12-21

This lesson explains the foundations of salvation itself based on our identification with Adam in his death, and with Christ in His life.

Until this section of Romans, Paul has been dealing with sins as they are expressed in human life. But now he goes on to deal with sin as the root of mankind’s problem.

The Ruin of Mankind in Adam

Romans 5:12 describes the ruin of mankind in just a few words. As John Stot says, “Paul describes the downward steps in human history, from one man sinning to all men dying.”

Adam and the Presence of Sin in the World

Romans 5:12, “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man...”

Paul says that sin entered into the world through one man, and he tells us that one man was Adam.

“The story of Adam and Eve is no mere myth, folklore, or legend but an actual event in human history. Scripture puts the full blame for human sin on the shoulders of Adam, the father of the human race. All the unborn generations of men were ‘in Adam,’ so to speak, when Adam fell.”

- John Phillips

Paul does not say that sin originated with Adam, but rather sin entered the world through Adam. So we need to understand as we read Romans 5:12 that through this one man sin came into the world. Satan was the original violator of the righteousness of God and that is where sin originated, but it was through Adam that sin was introduced to the world.

Adam and the Penalty for Sin in the World

Romans 5:12, “...and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned –”

Just as it was Adam that introduced sin into the world, it was Adam that brought death into the world. There was no death prior to the sin of Adam. When Adam sinned, death became a part of the fallen human nature. The odds on death today are 100 percent.

But how did death spread to all of mankind because of sin? Why is the earth marked with graves?

The answer is in the fact that everyone has the human nature they inherited from Adam. We all sinned in Adam, and when sin happens, death happens. Since sin has spread to the entire human race, so has death.

Psalm 51:5, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”

Psalm 58:3, “Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward, spreading lies.”

In other words, a person does not become a sinner because they commit sins. People commit sins because they are sinners.

Adam and the Power of Sin in the World

Romans 5:13-14, "To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come."

Sin didn't start with Moses. Sin started with Adam, and so from Adam forward, everyone who was born ultimately died. Death was universal even though there was no law because mankind was still sinful. It was not because of their sinful acts that they died...it was because they inherited the nature of death from Adam.

The Redemption of Mankind in Christ

The wrong that Adam did in his disobedience was made right by the obedience of Jesus. The good that Adam could not do because of his sin, was the good that Christ did in His righteousness. Jesus is not Adam's successor, but his Savior.

"As Adam caused death to his descendants, though they did not eat the forbidden fruit, so Christ has become the Dispenser of righteousness to those who are in Him, though they have not earned any righteousness."

- Martin Luther

Christ's Gift Is Greater Than Adam's Offense

Romans 5:15, "But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!"

The contrast is between the free gift of Christ and the sin of Adam. The purpose of Paul's statement here is to prove that Christ's one act of salvation had a much greater impact than Adam's one act of rebellion.

The sin of Adam brought death to everyone, but the gift by the grace of Jesus reversed the curse of death and provided a way for mankind to share in the life of God. The power of death, which is sin, can be broken but the power of Christ, which is salvation, can never be broken.

2 Timothy 1:10, "...Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

God's grace is greater than anyone's sin. Not only greater than the sin of Adam but greater than all of the accumulated sins that mankind has ever or will ever commit.

Christ's Justification Is Greater Than Adam's Condemnation

Romans 5:16, "Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification."

Once again, what Jesus did is far greater than what Adam did. It was by the one sin by the one man at the one time that God's judgment and condemnation resulted.

The free gift arose not because of that single sin but because of many sins. The result of the free gift is not only restoration, but justification as well.

Christ's Reign of Life Is Greater Than Adam's Reign of Death

Romans 5:17, "For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!"

The one sin of the one man Adam brought the reign of death to mankind. Everyone is subject to it. Nobody gets out from under it.

This is not what Adam and Eve wanted or even expected. What Adam expected was to be like God, knowing good and evil. What happened was the exact opposite. This one act of the man in the Garden separated him from God.

But the one act of Jesus produced the desired result. Jesus accomplished on the cross exactly what He set out to do. He provided for us freedom from death...He gave us life.

So the contrast, again, is between what Adam did and what Christ did. Adam didn't get what he wanted, but Jesus got everything He set out to do and He keeps making that available to us as we walk with Him.

2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"

Even though we still sin as believers...and we all do...we are no longer slaves to our sin like we once were. We are now victorious because we are in Christ.

What Paul is trying to help us understand is that what we have in Christ is wonderful, and we have what we have because of what He did. We can identify with Him because we not only have just the old human nature inherited from Adam, but we also have the new nature we received because of our salvation. And this new nature can reign over the old nature.

Christ's Obedience Is Greater Than Adam's Disobedience

Romans 5:18-19, "Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."

The principle of Adam's one transgression was disobedience. The principle of Christ's one act of righteousness was obedience. When Adam was told to not eat of the forbidden fruit, he disobeyed and brought death. When God sent Jesus, the Son obeyed and brought life.

Christ's Abundance of Grace Is Greater Than Adam's Abundance of Sin

Romans 5:20, "The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more..."

In verse 20, Paul returns for a moment to the law that he had mentioned earlier in verse 13. This doesn't mean that the Law makes someone a sinner or that God delights in sin. It means that since the Law

clearly reveals sin, everyone is responsible for their actions. The purpose of the Law is to clearly reveal the extent to which we are already sinners.

“But where sin increased, grace increased all the more...”

R. Kent Hughes sums it up this way, “The word translated ‘increased all the more’ is scarcely translatable in few words. ‘Super-increased’ is a possibility, or ‘super-abounded.’ It pictures unending, overflowing grace – a grace that knows no bounds. Grace is always more abundant than sin.”

The Responsibility of Mankind to Decide

Romans 5:21, “so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Paul finishes Romans 5 with a testimony to the reign of Christ for righteousness and life over the reign of Adam for sin and death. Ultimately, life is an either / or proposition. Either we accept Christ and His righteousness, or we reject Christ and accept the penalty of death for our sin.

Once we become Christians, the truth of Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 15:54 takes on a whole new meaning for us. “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”