

## THE SPREAD OF SIN AND DEATH – AND THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL

### Introduction

1. Today we consider a contrast. It is a contrast between Adam and sin and death on the one hand, and the Lord Jesus and righteousness and life on the other. Here is the problem. We are in a mess. Somehow, in Adam we have inherited sin and the condemnation that goes along with it. But in Christ, there is hope and help. That is where we are headed.
2. To help us get started, here is a quote from John Piper. ***When a teacher becomes complex in his teaching, then probably one of two things is happening. Either he is confused and has lost his bearings and doesn't really know what he thinks, or he is dealing with reality at a level that defies ordinary human language and thought. Not all complexity means that a teacher is deep and wise; it may mean he is confused and befuddled... It may mean that the subject itself is very complex and difficult. In Romans 5:12-21, Paul's thought is complex and difficult to follow. But I don't think Paul has lost his bearings... He is not confused or befuddled. Instead, he is dealing with the saving work of Jesus Christ at a level that pushes the limits of the human mind. So don't panic and don't be too discouraged if you find the flow of thought in these verses difficult to follow. They are difficult. But it's because he is taking us very deep into the very structure of salvation and history and humanity and deity. This should encourage us to linger over these verses and meditate long on them and work hard to mine the gold and silver in this...***
3. This has a profound bearing on our understanding of salvation. Have you ever wondered why we cannot save ourselves? Why can't we do it? Why can't we do something to make up for our sin? Many people think that is how one is saved. You do a few things wrong, so you do a few things to make up for it and basically you even out the account and then you are accepted by God. Why doesn't it work that way? Why is it that we cannot contribute anything to our own salvation? Why is it that we can't be justified any other way than by faith in Christ alone?
4. Paul answers that question with a consideration of the contrast between Adam and Christ.

## **I. ADAM AND THE REIGN OF SIN AND DEATH (vv. 12-14)**

### **A. Sin entered the world through one man**

1. To be accurate, sin did not originate with Adam. It happened before in the heavenly realm with some angels in rebellion against God. But through Adam, sin entered the world - the realm of humanity. You know the story of how that happened as recorded in Genesis 3.
2. When Adam sinned, he was changed forever. And just as Adam passed down his physical characteristics to his posterity, it could be said that he passed on his spiritual nature as well, which was characterized and dominated by sin. Adam not only apparently passed on to all of his posterity this sinful nature, but he was also seen as a sort of corporate representative (in Adam, all sinned). (In other words, how his sin was passed on to the whole human race is still a mystery – and some would flat out argue that it was unfair). But somehow, because of Adam's sin we all are sinners.
3. We must admit that there are various characteristics and tendencies and genetic issues that pass from one generation to another..."You act just like your Dad!" You may think that unfair, but that is the way it is (Consider various genetic diseases – maybe not fair, but that is the way it is)! So also we all have inherited sin. Sin entered the world through one man and it is here in us all! How that happened is less of an issue than that it did happen.

### **B. Death entered the world through one sin**

1. The stated penalty for sin was death - "you must not eat from the tree...for when you eat of it, you will die..." And that happened. Spiritual separation (being separated from God) was first and basically immediate, followed by physical separation of the body and spirit/soul (physical death a number of years later). And if nothing changed, would have been followed by eternal separation from God (the Bible calls this the "second death.")
2. Unregenerate man has reason to fear all of those aspects of death. For the unbeliever, spiritual death prevents true joy as God intended. Physical death brings an end to the opportunity for salvation. Eternal death will bring with it ceaseless pain and punishment. The believer, on the other hand, need not fear death in any of these forms. For we are no longer separated from God, but joined together in His

family. Physical death, though remaining an enemy, is also the passage through which we are able to shed this old body and be joined together face to face with the Lord Jesus. The truth is so certain that Jesus says of those who believe in Him that "they will never die." And rather than the second death, we are granted "eternal life" and death is completely done away with).

3. But the point here is that through one man's sin, death became a reality for all.

#### C. Death spread to all men because all have sinned

1. Probably no truth is more apparent than the inevitability of death, and no human being has ever escaped death. (Even those who were taken up into heaven such as Enoch and Elijah (and those future rapturees!), were born separated from God, being dead spiritually prior to being made alive in God through regeneration).
2. We may have misunderstood something here. A person does not become a sinner by committing a sin. He commits a sin (and continues to commit sins) because he is a sinner. He is that by nature. (Jesus said, "For out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders..." Matthew 15:19) The problem of sin is much deeper than us doing something wrong from time to time. Our wrongdoing flows from a heart that has been corrupted by sin which itself flows from the original sin of Adam, which itself is a manifestation of the fact that we are in Adam; we are under bondage to his judgment. As he rebelled, we are implicated.
3. To answer any possible objection, Paul makes the point about sin and the breaking of the law. The law came with Moses. So what about people between Adam and Moses – before the law was given? They also died. Consider Genesis 5 - the death chapter in the Bible. The ultimate proof that all are sinners is that all die. Before the law, after the law, it doesn't matter. The wages of sin is death. All have sinned because of the sin of Adam and all get paid their due, on time because in Adam all die! It is important to note that Paul doesn't stop by just saying, "Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses." He adds, "[Death reigned] even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam." In other words, Paul concedes that there were other kinds of laws before the Mosaic Law, and for sure people broke those laws. But that is not Paul's point here. Paul would affirm that there are those who died without seeing a law and choosing to sin against it. (Who might that be?

Think infants or those with no ability to discern, much less choose to break a law). The sin of Adam and the imputation of that sin to the human race is the reason why death passed upon all. Death reigned over all humans, even over those who did not sin against a known or understood law.

5. Unfair? (**MacArthur, p. 297**).

6. Now, if we stopped there, it might be as depressing as it is confusing, but Adam is only half of the contrast. Through the one, Adam, came sin and death, but through the one, Christ, came grace and life. Let's check it out.

## **II. JESUS AND THE REIGN OF GRACE AND LIFE (vv. 15-21)**

### **A. Grace entered the world through one man**

1. In keeping with the strong contrast, by one act of disobedience, Adam brought condemnation on the whole world. But by one act of grace - a gift from God - the curse on mankind was reversed, providing a way not only for forgiveness and cleansing from sin, but also a way for redeemed man to share in the full righteousness and glory of God! (Ligon Duncan – ***(Jesus has) liquidated our debt. He's absorbed our penalty. He's acquitted us in court, and He's transformed our hearts by grace. He has put a stop to the incessant seemingly immutable pattern of sin and judgment and condemnation. And Paul says that's surprising. You want to find something to be surprised about, don't be surprised about sin in a fallen world. There's nothing surprising about that. What's surprising is about the transforming grace of God*** – see verse 17!).
2. As suggested by John Calvin, "Since the fall of Adam had such an effect as to produce ruin of many, much more efficacious is the grace of God to the benefit of many; inasmuch as it is admitted, that Christ is much more powerful to save than Adam was to destroy."
3. It was through the entrance into the world by the Lord Jesus, that we could be the recipients of His grace. Remember John's commentary on this in John 1:14 – *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*
4. Many of the Puritans and the Reformers ended their comments and sermons with a statement of the practical value of this text. It was, "the power of sin, which is death, can be broken; but the power of Christ, which is salvation, cannot be

broken." Paul spoke of our Lord Jesus Christ, when he said, that He had "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10). It is through the Lord Jesus and only through Him that grace has come to the world! It is infinitely more powerful than that which came through Adam.

B. Life was extended to the world through one death

1. The "one act of righteousness" of which Paul speaks is the death of the Lord Jesus. It was through the disobedience of one that brought death to all. It is through the obedience of one that brought life to many.
2. Consider this: God hates sin so much that it took only one sin to condemn the entire human race and separate them from Him. But even greater than the hatred God has for sin is the love God has for the sinner. His loving grace toward man is so great that He provides not only redemption for the one who began this whole thing, but also redemption for all men for all sins – that is for those who believe! Listen again to verse 17. *For if, because of one's man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, 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.*
3. Neither Adam nor Eve sinned because they wanted to die. They sinned because they expected to become like God. But their sin produced the exact opposite result. And so, death reigned. But as a result of the gift of grace by the Lord Jesus, we are no longer dead in our sins, but alive unto righteousness (See 6:17-18).
4. Now this is a bit complicated, but it is important for us to understand what happened with Adam and what happens in Christ. The consequences of Adam's sin are experienced by all people not on the basis of their individual sins, but on the basis of their being in Adam and his sin being imputed to them. Having hammered that home, Paul introduces Christ as the parallel to Adam: The consequences of Christ's righteousness are experienced by all people not on the basis of their doing righteous deeds like He did, but on the basis of their being in Him and His righteousness being imputed to them.

C. Life spread to many because many were made righteous

1. When we trust Christ, we are declared righteous. And having been so declared, we can live lives of righteousness. The awesome power of God is able to take a

condemned, hopeless sinner and make that one into a celebrated hope-filled saint.

2. What Adam's sin did to us in bringing condemnation, much more, Christ's righteousness has secured for us no more death, but life eternal. Does that make sense? In Adam, we were imputed his sin, but in Christ we are imputed His righteousness! That is the Gospel that Paul is proclaiming!
3. I leave with you a John Piper summation of this paragraph to hopefully clarify what I have been trying to say. ***O how much light this sheds on why Paul embarked on this paragraph at all! He did it for the sake of our faith and our assurance and our joy. He did it to underline the fact that our right standing with God and our freedom from condemnation is not based on our righteous acts but on Christ's righteous acts. This is the foundation of the great Biblical truth of justification by grace alone through faith alone. It has rescued thousands of saints from the despair of legalism and the paralyzing fear of imperfection. Christ became obedient even unto death so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). Here is rest for your soul. Here is a message that everyone you will ever meet needs to hear. Christ is our righteousness. Trust him. Trust him. Trust him.***

## Conclusion

1. I love the contrast made by Warren Wiersbe in his commentary on Romans (p. 530). *Adam came from the earth, but Jesus is the Lord from heaven (1 Cor. 15:47). Adam was tested in a Garden, surrounded by beauty and love; Jesus was tempted in a wilderness, and He died on a cruel cross, surrounded by hatred and ugliness. Adam was a thief and was cast out of Paradise; but Jesus Christ turned to a thief and said, "Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). The Old Testament is the "book of the generations of Adam" (Gen. 5:1) and it ends with "a curse" (Mal. 4:6). The New Testament is "the book of the generation of Jesus Christ" (Matt. 1:1) and it ends with "no more curse" (Rev. 22:34). So, are you "in Adam" or are you "in Christ"?*
2. If you are "in Adam", you are in serious trouble. You are a sinner and you are going to die (guaranteed) and your death will culminate in eternal separation from God. That is certain. But if you are "in Christ", you have received God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness and you have the promise of eternal life! You are

out of the mess of condemnation and death and you are into the bliss of eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ. If that is your situation, for certain, it is well with your soul.

3. Speaking of which, more than 100 years ago Horatio G. Spafford wrote this incredible hymn, capturing a good understanding of what the Apostle Paul has penned here in Romans, chapter 5, and Philip P Bliss put it to music.

4. Listen to the final three stanzas:

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blest assurance control, That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate (remember - death and condemnation) and hath shed his own blood for my soul (the obedience of the one!).*

*My sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin, not in part, but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross (His cross) and I bear it no more! Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! (How could we do anything else?)*

*And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight; the clouds be rolled back as a scroll. The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend! (But) Even so - it is well with my soul!*