

## Adam, Sin, and Death's Universal Grip

### Romans 5:12-14

*Therefore, just as **sin** came into the world through one man, and **death** through **sin**, and so **death** spread to all men because all **sinned***

**Introduction:** It's nearly impossible to get everyone to agree on anything. We all have different opinions, viewpoints, experiences, upbringings, education, and biases, meaning that to come to universal agreement, even on something factual, is a fool's errand. Do you and your wife agree on everything, especially where to go to eat or how many pillows are enough for the top of the bed? Does your family agree on everything, or are there differing opinions on what music to listen to in the car or what team to root for in the Super Bowl? Do we all agree in this church on everything, or do we differ on areas of schooling and diets? In politics we hear that something that is an 80/20 issue is a dominant position, even though 1 in 5 disagree with the rest. The point is, there are not too many issues that everyone in the world would agree on. However, there is one universal truth that cannot be argued or denied, though it is NOT celebrated or welcomed: the reality that **death is inevitable, even though we may shove that truth into the back of our minds.**

The poet John Donne wrote, *"Death comes equally to us all, and makes us all equal when it comes."*

Author Robert Bolt in the play *"A Man for All Seasons"* wrote, *"Death comes for us all; even at our birth, death does but stand aside a little. And every day he looks towards us and muses somewhat to himself whether that day or the next he will draw nigh. It is the law of nature, and the will of God."*

J.R.R Tolkien said it this way through the character Gandalf, *"Death comes to us all. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us."*

And of course the dual influential theologians *Maximus* and *William Wallace* (fictionalized in the movies *Gladiator* and *Braveheart*):

*"Death comes to us all. All a man can do is smile back" ...." Every man dies, not every man really lives."*

Mankind has tried to avoid it, run from it, or prolong life in every fathomable way possible, but no matter what he attempts, he is always on the losing end. This not only creates a problem for all in this life, but also in the life to come. For the next two weeks we will look at how all people for all time are effected by two men, **Adam**, the first man, and **Christ**, the better man.

Now, it's important that we see this new passage and expanded theme within the overall context of where we've been in Romans and how Paul is building a broadened explanation of the gospel. **Romans 1-3** we saw that all people are guilty sinners before the Lord, meaning that we are *not only* under God's wrath, but we **deserve to be so**. Everyone in the world will acknowledge that there are bad things and bad people in the world, but few ever take responsibility for their own individual condition that is part of it. Paul made sure that everyone was left without an excuse (*'it's because of my parents', or where I was born, or not enough opportunity, or not enough money, or \_\_\_\_\_*). **But the fresh air** of Romans 4 showed that **ungodly** sinners are freely justified **apart from works of the Law or their own effort**, and are justified by faith alone by the work of Christ alone. God declares sinners righteous by imputing the

work of Christ on their behalf, with Him substituting Himself on the cross for us, God treating Him the way we deserved.

We then spent a couple of weeks on some personal, joyful, and hopeful implications of justification by faith alone in Romans 5:1-11. Where there was enmity, there is now peace. Where we had been shut out from God, we now have access through His grace. Where we had no hope in the midst of hard and harsh circumstances, we now know **why** they are happening and can rejoice. Where we had been enemies, we are now reconciled in personal relationship with God in Christ. But in **5:12-21**, Paul shifts the argument from God's personal love for believers using the **1<sup>st</sup> person plural** (5:1-11), to now **universal realities effecting all mankind** by using the **3<sup>rd</sup> person**.

At first glance, 5:12-21 is complicated and tough to understand, and there is no way around that! But, we also see that Paul is making a relatively simple case: **everyone is a descendent of Adam**, and in him, we have inherited twin realities of sin and death, and in **Christ**, all who are found in Him will find grace and eternal life. What Paul does here is NOT primarily by comparison but **contrast**, how the work of Christ is far better than the work of Adam, and how Christ's work overcomes that of Adam. **Why does Paul use this complicated device?** One powerful reason is that contrast helps us understand a reality more clearly and fully. If you wanted to show someone the greatness of a new Tesla, it would be helpful to start by showing someone a 1995 Toyota Corolla with fading interior and chipped paint. Both would have doors, get you to where you wanted to go, and an engine, but that is where the comparison ends and the contrast begins. A Tesla would be seen as far superior, and it would not be close. This is the essence of Paul's argument here, and this morning we will start by looking at the Corolla.

### **Through One Man, Death Enters the World Through Sin (12a)**

*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin,*

Leadership can stink. One may think leadership is great, since it does come with authority and influence, but it also comes with an equal or greater amount of **responsibility**. Paul narrows his explanation of universal death and sin to **one man or source, in Adam** (the Hebrew word literally means "man or mankind"). Paul harkens back to the **Garden of Eden** and the story of Paradise Lost, where mankind went from perfect union in marriage and perfect communion with God to being the first to experience judgment, and with it, the promise of death.

Now, a few observations of the text to note:

- 1) Paul is clear to point out that Adam was NOT the originator of sin, but he was the conduit through whom sin entered the world, or the realm of humanity. Satan was responsible in the heavenly realm, *"for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil"* (1 John 3:8).
- 2) It's important to remember the particulars of the Garden in Genesis 2 and 3. Adam was created first by God out of the earth and Eve was created after, out of Adam (Gen. 2:7; 22). Adam was placed in the Garden as an image bearer of God to glorify Him by mirroring back to Him the value of His worth. He was to multiply and fill the earth, exercising dominion over it. He was perfect but incomplete, and Eve was brought to Him not ONLY for companionship, but Adam could not fulfill God's mission for him without her. With a clear mission and unlimited opportunity, Adam ALONE was given the ONLY negative command (2:17), which was NOT to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Adam alone was given this command and he was

supposed to lead his wife in the truth of God's Word. Some theologians have called this "the Covenant of Works", which is a bit of a confusing title, but it means that as long as Adam fulfilled this point of obedience, he and his family would live forever and fulfill their purpose. But mankind cannot have good things for very long...

When the Serpent confused and went after Eve (Gen. 3:1-6), two important things happened: 1) Eve was deceived (1 Tim. 2:14), sinning first by taking the fruit since she was convinced that it would make her like God (Gen. 3:5). Inexplicably, she turned and gave the fruit to her husband **who was with her yet stayed silent**, and he ate. 2) Because Adam listened to his wife (3:17) rather than lead, mankind was plunged into sin. NOTICE that it was not sins plural but **sin singular** that entered the world. The effect of that sin was immense:

- Sin effected the marriage union, introducing fear, shame, and blame shifting (or the unwillingness to take responsibility)
- Sin effected women and men individually: women would have pain in child bearing and a desire to control, to be set against the leadership of her husband, and men will have pain in trying to fulfill their responsibility, since the world itself AND their wives are set against them. It will be through the sweat of his brow that he will have to fulfill his mission, since thorns and thistles are now prevalent (3:18).
- Adam's sin had the direct result of **DEATH** – "*till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return*" (Gen. 3:19). Death means **separation**, and this was the initial punishment for sin, or a failure to obey and give glory to God. Adam and all of his descendants would now be under the same curse and **physical death** would be the norm.
- But **physical death** was NOT the only form of separation that resulted in Adam's singular sin. Before Adam and Eve sinned, it was clear that God had a personal relationship with them while He would walk in the Garden (3:8). But after sin, they hid themselves from the presence of God, and they would no longer have the same unhindered access to Him like they once did, leading to **spiritual death**. The couple had to leave the Garden and work the ground outside of the Garden.
- Finally, they experienced **eternal death**, which Rev. 21:8 calls the second death, which not only produces a separation of relationship with God but eternal punishment in hell. This is why God cast Adam and Eve out of the Garden, so that they would NOT reach out and eat of the **tree of life and live forever in an unredeemed state** (Gen. 3:22), which would have left them forever separated from God. So it was a measure of God's grace for them to be placed outside of the Garden so they had the opportunity for redemption by faith.

Now, before proceeding to the next implication of Adam's failure, it is important to step back and recognize that Paul is NOT making an argument from legend to reality, but treated Adam and Eve as both true and real **historical figures** but **the literal first humans on the earth**. In other words, in Paul's mind and reasoning, Genesis 1-3 was not a metaphor, myth, or a symbol, but real events ground in time. Many have tried to deconstruct Genesis 1-3, making it less than truth, and if it is less than truth, it does not have authority over our lives. Once Genesis 1-3 is leveled out of Biblical authority, things like roles in marriage, gender identity, and sin itself can be re-defined. The first test of fidelity to the inerrancy and supremacy of Scripture is Genesis 1:1, and if we are unwilling to accept and yield to the fact that God

created the heavens and the earth, one will not be able to yield to the truth of Christ, the cross, and the gospel.

### **Through One Man, Death Spread to All (12b)** *and so death spread to all men because all sinned*

Because of Adam's sin and the implications of it, **death** spread or passed through all people, everywhere, for all time. *"For as in Adam, all die..."* (1 Cor. 15:22). The ESV and many others translate *"because all sinned"*, meaning sin is the cause of death.<sup>1</sup> But the real question is, when was this sin committed? It is NOT that we sin and then are condemned and died, but we are born with Adam's nature and thus are condemned to die and sin. *"When Paul says 'all sinned' he means that **all sinned in Adam**. Death spread to all people without exception because everyone sinned **in Adam**. **Adam's sin was their sin, and Adam is their covenant or federal head.**"*<sup>2</sup> What does that mean? It means that we all sinned in the person of Adam as our representative. This means that we DIE because we are connected to Adam, and we SIN because of the same connection.

So in Adam, everyone dies **physically**. But in Adam, we also ALL ARE DEAD SPIRITUALLY:

**Psalm 51:5** *"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and **in sin** did my mother conceive me."* (cf. Ps. 58:3)

**Ephesians 2:1-2** *"And you were **dead in the trespasses and sins** 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience"*

Those who are born into Adam (all) are dead spiritually, though they live physically. They are darkened in understanding, excluded from the life of God, ignorant, and have hard hearts (Eph. 4:18). In reality, those who are born into Adam and apart from Christ are **the walking dead**, a modern day zombie, walking around with breath in their lungs but dead in their soul. It's also why those who are in this condition cannot find true happiness in this world, but have to settle for fleeting pleasures and temporal happiness. It is what **Solomon discovered** when he went after pleasure and worldly enjoyment as a test (Ecclesiastes 2:1). He experienced the height of all things that would bring happiness: *great works, houses and vineyards, gardens and parks, trees and pools, great possessions of material wealth and servants, mounds of gold and silver, singers and concubines*. But in the end of all of this, it was **all vanity, and a striving after the wind, and there is nothing to be gained under the sun**. (Eccl. 2:11).

This is the nature of the conversation I had with a young man a couple of weeks ago. He is *"deconstructing"* his faith, moving from belief in the truth and reality of Scripture to a view that says the Bible is a mere collection of stories of local gods, complete with errors, inconsistencies, and stretched truth. The problem is, what is he left with? Naturalism, or the view that this world is all there is, that pleasure is to be sought, good is attempted to be done, and life is unknown when we die. This is definition of walking as a son of Adam without hope to overcome the misery of life.

### **Through One Man, Death Ruled Throughout Time (13-14)**

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Schreiner, one of my favorite theologians and commentators, even switched his view as to whether sin is the cause or result of death in this phrase, moving from the result in early editions and *cause* in the updated version. *"Romans: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT., p. 279-280."*

<sup>2</sup> Schreiner, p. 281.

*“for sin indeed was in the world **before** the law was given, but sin is not **counted** where there is no law. 14 Yet death **reigned** from **Adam to Moses**, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a **type of the one who was to come.**”*

Paul breaks with an aside to answer a question he anticipated from his Jewish audience, which he was relentlessly calling to trust in Christ by faith and NOT trust in the Law. There are two important and prominent pieces of information given here:

- 1) Adam sinned against the express and specific law of God given to him, but there was not an explicit Law given again until Moses and Sinai. Did that mean no one sinned between the two time markers? The answer is clear: people continued to sin because **death continued to reign**, but they did not sin like Adam or the people of Israel because they did not have the Law. But Cain was punished for killing Abel (Gen. 4), the heart of mankind was wicked continually, prompting the Flood (Gen. 6), and even the Tower of Babel was an attempt to thwart the goal God had for mankind, prompting a dispersing and confusion (Gen. 11). But we will see that the Law actually increased sin, since it upped the knowledge of God’s will and commands (Rom. 5:20). But the people between Adam and Moses could not violate something that was not yet given, and thus they were not accountable to it.
- 2) This is important to understand this section and the next. Adam was given as a **type** (‘tupos’), which was a stamp, an exact imprint, copy, or pre-figuring of Christ who was to come. Though Adam is burdened in taking responsibility for sin entering the world, it pales in comparison to the greatness of what Christ did in coming the first time. As John Piper said, *“What Christ has done for all that are in Him is far greater than what Adam did for all who were in him.”* That is why the next phrase in verse 15 is so glorious: **“But the free gift is NOT like the trespass!!!”**

Let us close with two implications of the fact that death reigns through the sin of Adam, and our sin in him:

- Sin and death are universal, and do not care if one claims to be an Atheist, Mormon, or Buddhist. One does not have to claim Adam as their father, but we are ALL related to him and are all destined for death because of it. We are truly one **RACE** made up of many **ethnicities**. That means that as believers, we have the understanding that all nations are facing the realities of **physical, spiritual, and eternal death**. This, matched with the greatness of the grace and work of Jesus Christ, should **motivate** us to tell the nations, to wake the dead, and to proclaim the excellency of Jesus Christ. “Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.” (2 Cor. 5:11). There is none who escape, none who avoid, for all must stand before the Lord. We have the answer to the deepest need for every tribe, tongue and nation.
- Is this a doctrine or teaching that proves that God is unfair? If it is true that we are BORN sinners destined for death, that feels overly harsh and unloving, and God already has enough areas of life that have the same markings (problem of evil, deaths to foreign nations in the OT conquest, pain in the world, etc.). How can God punish us with something we are born with? Let me answer this a few ways. 1) God is sovereign and good, and it is how he designed the world. When we are born, we do not get a choice of our eyes, athletic ability, and gender. God decides these things, and is in control of every aspect of our being knit together. 2) If God WERE completely fair only, He would have squashed Adam and Eve at first sin, would not have given them animal skins as covering, and would have left them to their own devices in the Garden. No,

the extreme of God's justice and wrath is only equaled and outdone by the overflow of His grace, to save sinners who were enemies, sinners, and rebels toward Him. He was willing to send Christ as the Better Adam, who offers a free gift through His work on the cross, His righteousness as the reign of life. That led to 3) One of the best ways I've ever heard of describing what faith looks like in the gospel, it was to ask God to be **unfair** to me a sinner, and save me. If God were fair, we'd be punished and judged. But God is both JUST AND JUSTIFIER in Christ, so He can be **unfair to us in our sin as sons and daughters of Adam, and give us the righteousness of Christ.** *May He do that this morning and with all that He's called among the nations. This is what truly breaks the grip of sin and death on our life.*