

## Romans Session 66

### Adam and the Reign of Death 1

*Romans 5:12-14 (NASB)*

<sup>22</sup> *Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—*

<sup>23</sup> *for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.*

<sup>24</sup> *Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.*

Many people consider Romans 5:12-21, to be the most difficult passage in the epistle.

At first reading it seems to be complex and enigmatic, and in one sense it is.

And that is true as we later learn what this all means in relation to human comprehension. We will find these truths to be beyond human reach.

On the other hand, these truths in themselves are wonderfully simple and clear when accepted in humble faith as God's Word.

Just as it is possible to accept and live in accordance with the law of gravity without fully understanding it, so it is possible for believers to accept and live according to God's truth without fully understanding it.

Verses 12-14 lay the foundation for the remainder of the chapter by pointing out the obvious truth that death is universal to the human race.

Paul in these verses, focuses on Adam and the reign of death that his sin engendered.

In the remainder of the chapter (15-21), he focuses on Christ and the reign of life.

Paul makes it clear later in the letter, that the destruction caused by sin affects all creation;

*Romans 8:19-22 (NASB)*

<sup>19</sup> *For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.*

<sup>20</sup> *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope*

<sup>21</sup> *that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*

<sup>22</sup> *For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.*

However, for now, Paul focuses on the universal destruction of human life that sin brought upon the world, the death of those whom God created in His own image.

No truth is more self-evident than the inevitability of death.

The earth is pock-marked with graves, and the most incontestable testimony of history is that all men, whatever their wealth, status, of accomplishments, are subject to death.

Since Creation, every person but two, Enoch and Elijah, have died.

And were it not for Christ's accomplishments, for the Church, all men would continue to die.

The painful reality of death touches mankind without interruption and without exception.

According to the Oriental proverb, "***The black camel death kneeleth once at each door and each mortal must mount to return nevermore***"

The very term, "*mortal*" means subject to death.

The eighteenth-century poet Thomas Gray wrote these haunting lines in his, "*Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*"

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow'r,  
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,  
Awaits alike th' inevitable hour,  
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

In Shakespeare's *King Richard 11*, the king wisely observes (111.11.195):

Within the hollow crown  
That rounds the mortal temples of a king  
Keeps death his court, and there the antick sits,  
Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,  
Allowing him a breath, a little scene,  
To monarchize, be fear'd, and kill with looks,  
Infusing him with self and vain conceit  
As if this flesh, which walls about our life  
Were brass impregnable; and humour'd thus  
Comes at the last, and with a little pin  
Bores through his castle wall, and farewell king!

The seventeenth-century poet James Shirley wrote in "*The Contention of Ajax and Ulysses.*"

The glories of our birth and state  
Are shadows, not substantial things;  
There is no armour against fate;  
Death lays his icy hands on kings:  
Sceptre and crown  
Must tumble down,  
And in the dust be equal made  
With the poor crooked scythe and spade.

In view of the universality of mortality the questions come to mind, why does death reign in the world? Why must everyone die?" whether at the end of its long life or at its beginning? How did death become the undisputed victor over mankind?

Paul gives the answer to those questions in the present text.

And although the basic truths he presents are in themselves rather simple, his argument in defense of them is not.

His divinely inspired reasoning plunges the reader deep into mysteries that we will never fully understand until we one day see our Lord face to face.

The primary purpose of this passage, however, is not to explain why all people die.

Paul brings in this subject of death merely to establish the principle that one person's deeds can inexorably affect many other people.

Paul's primary objective in this chapter is to show how one man's death provided salvation for many, and to do so the apostle first shows the reasonableness of that truth since one man's sin produced the condemnation for many.

Paul's analogy of Adam and Christ clarifies several truths about God's plan of redemption, but it by no means clarifies every aspect of that marvelous provision.

It is not that any of God's truths are unexplainable but that the explanations of many of them are beyond human comprehension.

Our responsibility is to accept in faith both what is clear and what is not, what is comprehensible and what remains a mystery.

After describing the appalling sin and lost-ness of all mankind in chapter 1 verse 18, through chapter 3 verse 20, Paul has revealed how Christ, by His justifying death on the cross, provided the way of salvation for everyone who comes to God in faith. (3:21-5:11).

So, the question is how could what one man did at one time in history have such an absolute effect on mankind?

The analogy of Adam and Christ is antithetical, an analogy of opposites.

Because of Adam's sin, all men are condemned; because of Christ's obedience, many are pardoned.

Adam is therefore analogous to Christ only in regard to the common principle that what one man did affected countless others.

Paul's argument in verses 12-14 is comprised of four logical elements or phases:

1. Sin entered the world through one man (v12a)
2. Death entered the world through sin (v12b)
3. Death spread to all men because all sinned (v12c)
4. History proves that death reign over all men (vv13-14)

### SIN ENTERED THE WORLD THROUGH ONE MAN

<sup>12</sup> *Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world,*

The word, "therefore," connects what follows with what has just been declared, namely, that as believers we have been reconciled to God by the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ;

**Romans 8:8-11 (NASB)**

<sup>8</sup> *and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

<sup>9</sup> *However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.*

<sup>10</sup> *If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.*

<sup>11</sup> *But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.*

So, Paul begins the analogy of Christ with Adam, the common principle being that, in each case, a far-reaching effect on countless others was generated **through the one man**.

In the case of Adam, it was **through one man** that **sin entered into the world**.

**Now it is important to notice that Paul does not say that sin originated with Adam, but only that sin in the world, in the human realm, began with Adam.**

Sin originated with Satan, who has sinned from the beginning;

**1 John 3:8 (NASB)**

<sup>8</sup> *the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.*

Now John does not say way that beginning was, but it obviously was before the creation of Adam and Eve, because they were tempted by Satan.

After He placed Adam in the Garden of Eden,

**Genesis 2:15-17 (NASB)**

<sup>15</sup> *Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.*

<sup>16</sup> *The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely;*

<sup>17</sup> *but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."*

Adam was given one prohibition by God, yet the consequence for disobedience of that prohibition was severe.

After Eve was created from Adam and joined him in the garden as his wife and helper, Satan tempted her to doubt and to disobey the command of God.

She in turn, induced her husband to disobey, and they sinned together.

Now listen, even though Eve disobeyed first, the primary responsibility for the sin was Adam's first of all because it was to him that God had directly given the command, and second because he had headship over Eve and should have insisted on their mutual obedience to God rather than allow her to lead him into disobedience.

This one command was the only point of submission to God required of Adam.

Except for that single restriction, Adam had been given authority to subjugate and rule the entire earth **"(Gen. 1:26-30)**

But when Adam disobeyed God, sin entered into his life and generated a constitutional change in his nature, from innocence to sinfulness, an innate sinfulness that would be transmitted to every one of his descendants.

Paul's argument begins with the assertion that, through Adam **sin entered into the world**.

He does not speak of sins plural, but of sin, singular.

In this sense, **sin**, does not represent a particular unrighteous act but rather the inherent propensity to unrighteousness.

It was not the many other sinful acts that Adam eventually committed, but the indwelling **sin nature** that he came to possess because of his first disobedience, that he passed on to his posterity.

Just as Adam bequeathed his physical nature to his posterity, he also bequeathed to them his spiritual nature, which henceforth was characterized and dominated by **sin**.

God made men a procreative race, and when they procreate they pass on to their children, and to their children's children their own nature, physical, psychological and spiritual.

John Donne wrote these, well known, lines in his *Meditation XVII*

*No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; and therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.*

Mankind is a single entity, constituting a divinely ordered solidarity.

Adam represents the entire human race that is descended from him, no matter how many subgroups there may be. Therefore, when Adam sinned, all mankind sinned, and because his first sin transformed his inner nature, that now depraved nature was also transmitted to his posterity.

Because he became spiritually polluted, all his descendants would be polluted in the same way.

That pollution has, in fact accumulated and intensified throughout the ages of human history.

Instead of evolving, as humanists insist, man has devolved, degenerating into greater and greater sinfulness.

We will continue these four elements or phases next time.