

Death in Adam, Life in Christ

Romans 5:12-15

Yesterday I spent several hours on the ground repairing my lawnmower. It had a broken axle. To replace the axle, I only had to remove one bolt. Simple enough, right? Wrong. That one bolt was one I could see easily with my eyes, and could even loosen fairly easily. But it would not come out and relinquish its hold on the axle unless everything around it was removed first. The entire frame assembly had to be removed. The hood. The front plate. The wheels. The muffler. All had to be taken off, so that this one unifying bolt could have the clear path to come out.

This text is not simple. It is much more complicated than I will be able to explain in this sermon today. But I do know that it hinges on one bolt, if you will. The one bolt holds all of it together, and the entire theology of the doctrine of justification by faith apart from works depends on this one bolt....this unifying concept that lies behind this most unusual argument by the apostle Paul is the greatness of Christ over Adam. But to see it properly, Paul works to shed away layer upon layer of other ideas, until this one truth shines forth in all its splendor....the greatness of Christ in triumph over the sin of Adam.

Begins with *therefore*. So this discourse is related to the one that was before....and that topic was clearly the doctrine of Assurance. Now let us be reminded how Paul led us to the doctrine of assurance in Chapter 5. He begins by bringing the whole human race under condemnation and judgment, then shows clearly and without a doubt that justification....being made righteous in the sight of God is done by faith only, apart from any form of works, through Christ only. Paul reminds us in chapter 5 that peace with God comes from this glorious doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone, because God did the justifying while we were still sinners, even while we were helpless to do anything in the way of righteousness ourselves. He left us last time looking at the fact that if God reconciled us while we were helpless sinners, then how much more will He save us in the Day of Judgment now that we are reconciled. He reminds us that if His Son's death was the means of our reconciliation, how much more shall we be saved now that we are reconciled and He lives!

This section continues to hammer in the truth of justification by faith, and Christian Assurance, and it does so by a number of means:

It grants assurance because it teaches the superiority of the atonement of Christ, that atonement rising out of the total depravity of all mankind through Adam. It grants assurance because there is certain death (spiritual and physical) to all through Adam. It grants assurance through the freedom of the gift. It grants assurance through the overcoming greatness of life over death. It grants assurance through the overcoming greatness of righteousness over sin. (one act of righteousness on God's side covers many sins on ours....one sin on our side erased many acts of righteousness). It grants assurance through the overcoming greatness of grace over the Law.

And it does so, by using a comparison and contrast of all who are "in Adam", with all who are "in Christ".

✠ Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned— (*Romans 5:12, NKJV*)

Through one man (Adam) sin entered the world:

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2:16-17, NKJV)

The question here is why through Adam? The command here was given *to the man*. But was it not Eve who sinned first? Was it not Eve's initiative? It was Adam's command....It was never spoken to Eve by God. We can see from the text that it must have been Adam that told Eve....it was his responsibility. There was no one else charged with obeying the Commandment but Adam. The Commandment was given to Adam, as he was the High Priest, the one whom God had chosen to communicate His commandment. It was through Adam that Eve was created....and the punishment of death was on Adam, and therefore on all who are in him:

Then **to Adam** He said.....In the sweat of **your** face you shall eat bread Till **you** return to the ground, For out of it **you** were taken; For dust **you are**, And to dust **you** shall return." Then the Lord God said, "Behold, **the man** has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest **he** put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" — therefore the Lord God sent **him** out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life. (*Genesis 3:19-24, NKJV*)

The sentence of death was upon Adam. Because of Adam's sin, God took away eternal life, and pronounced the sentence of death. Therefore all who are ***in Adam*** carry forth the same sentence. No other man since Adam was born with eternal life. In Adam, sin entered the world....in this case, sin entered all people, as is clear here in this verse, and in Romans 3 and innumerable other passages in Scripture. All have sinned. We must remember that here in this section, we are comparing those who are in Adam, with those who are in Christ. So sin entered the world....all people....in particular all who are in Adam. So who are in Adam? Every person ever conceived. Eve was "in Adam" for she was literally created from him. Every child conceived, therefore, is in the same way, created from their parents....who were ultimately created from Adam. In Adam, sin entered, and death through sin.

...and thus death spread to all men because all sinned.....

Now notice that the apostle breaks off his thought here to explain something that could possibly take the interpretation of this verse WAY off track. Paul says, "death spread to all men because all sinned." We can break this little sentence down neatly in half and look at what the implications are. First, "Death spread to all men". Agreed. Death is a fact of life for all men. Every person who has ever been conceived has died, with the possible exceptions of Elijah and Enoch. Therefore, again, the proof of that sin has spread is found in the effect of sin....death.

It's like the diagnosis of a disease. You go into a doctor's office with certain symptoms. You sit there and tell the doctor what the symptoms are. He listens and begins to narrow the diagnosis down. He announces the diagnosis, and proceeds to give you the cure for the particular disease you have. Now if one of the symptoms is a headache, he may give you Tylenol. But that will not cure the malady. It will cover a symptom, but not do anything to strike at the root of the problem. That's what Paul is doing here. He is like a soul doctor. He sees certain symptoms in people. In fact, all people ever conceived have these same symptoms. The spread of this disease is epidemic. The infection rate is 100 percent.

Many religions deliver potions that simply mask the symptoms of the disease, but do not strike at the heart of what causes it. To deliver a cure of good works may relieve the patient's conscience for a time, but when Judgment Day comes around, there will be no announcement that the patient has been cured. Many other religions, even those who profess to be Christian, seek to make people feel better by teaching positive thinking, meditation, or works righteousness. Others teach that the death of Christ is applied to all people, so everyone is saved. This masks the conscience, but does nothing to provide a cure. These physicians are those who cry "peace, peace" when there is no peace. They "heal the wound of My people slightly," superficially, without touching the true disease...the biggest problem. Paul is not seeking to deliver a medicine to mask the symptoms, but has, like a good doctor, examined the human race thoroughly, and made his diagnosis on what the greatest problem is. And it is this:

That death spread to all men, because all sinned. But what sin is it that is being spoken of here? Paul's thrust here, his diagnosis of man's greatest problem and the root cause of the disease that is literally killing us, is NOT personal, willful sinning. The problem that we see here is deeper even than that. It is the union with Adam, and the fact that Adam's sin spread to us. That is why people die. All people die because of that reason....the imputed sin of Adam. Let us look at the apostle's argument, and there we will find this truth, and we will find the glorious truth of the cure:

(For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. (Romans 5:13, NKJV)

Now the argument for what sin is spoken of here is a parenthesis for 5 verses! Paul is desperate to define his terms, so that we get it right. No misunderstandings.....because if we get this wrong, then there are all sorts of directions we will go in, many which lead to heresy in one form or another....so we MUST get this right.

He begins saying the obvious....before the law (the Law of Moses), sin existed. We know that. God gave instructions to people, and condemned....even destroyed in terrible judgment those who sinned against Him. Like the Flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah. So sin existed, even when there was no Law. And people died, and even were judged, because of personal sinning, even before the Law of Moses. So there was sin, and there was death. Paul's argument is critical here...so keep focus!

Sin existed and death existed....but Paul says that sin was not imputed before the Law. It was not counted. That must mean that death was due to sin that was apart from the spoken revelation of God. Now we are not talking about judgment here....we are talking about physical death. Heart stops beating, lungs stop filling with air. Body decays. Death, and the grave. What we need to answer, and what is most important because it is the root cause of our greatest problem, is, **was death before the Law due to personal sinning, or not?** IT MATTERS, because it makes or breaks Paul's argument here, and if we get it wrong, then we will get the Gospel wrong. Keep reading.....

Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, (Romans 5:14, NKJV)

Death reigned....people died...between the time of Adam and Moses. The question, again, is, why did they die? Personal sinning, or something else? Paul's argument, and the argument for the Gospel, is.....they died because of something else. Their death is a symptom of a disease, and Paul sees past the superficial diagnosis, that wrong diagnosis being that death is due to personal sinning, by **looking at when exactly the symptom began to manifest itself**. That's the mark of a good doctor. Instead of giving a patient Tylenol for a headache, a good doctor will ask the patient to recall when he first started getting the headaches. Allergies. Food. Diabetes. Many other causes. So when the doctor and patient can come together and pinpoint when the symptoms started, they can together see what causes it, and avoid that cause, or in this case, give a cure that specifically removes the cause.

Paul is asking, when did death begin, and under what circumstances? Notice the flow of the argument. Death reigned from Adam to the Lawgiver..... *even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam*. Paul's nailing the point here...and I want you to see it! I have read over these verses hundreds of times and did not see this HUGE point....I want you to see it. Death reigned.....**even in those who did not sin personally**. Who are these people who did not sin personally, but died anyway? And why does it matter?

One thought was that these are the "sinless perfectionists", who deny the doctrine of Original Sin, and therefore believe that a person can live sinless. Impossible. They die. End of argument. Another is those who do not know the Law of Moses. They die too. Scripture teaches that the Law is written on their hearts. People die. All people die. Paul is getting us to see why. So what Paul is speaking of here....whom he is speaking of here...that there are those who did not have knowledge of God's commands, and died in complete innocence. They never sinned personally. Who are these people?

Scripture is clear....there are none of these people alive. No one does good...all have turned aside. So who can these people be, that paid the penalty for sin that they did not personally commit? Those in whom death reigned, but did not sin like Adam (with personal knowledge of the command)....**must be babies. Infants.** I agree with the Puritan commentator Matthew Henry here....the only people these can be and move Paul's argument forward and focus it like a laser...are infants who died.

Embryos do not peruse a buffet of attributes, and decide which ones they will take on and which ones they will refuse. No child has ever looked at the vast array of eye colors and said....I think I'll have hazel eyes. Take these blue ones and give me hazel. "I want to be tall, so take this short stature and let me trade it for tall." How ridiculous is that! In the same way, no embryo has the ability to choose a sinless nature. They are created like their father, Adam, conceived with the penalty of death being standard equipment. It is not an option.....

They did not commit sin, because they did not have the capacity to know a Law to sin against....but they died. They did not die because of personal sinning, but of something much deeper than that....sin was imputed to them....by their union with Adam. They died because sin was imputed to them by the one man....Adam. *who is a type of Him who was to come. (Romans 5:14, NKJV)*

Then Paul gives us some strange words here....Adam was a *type*, or a *pattern*, or *figure*. He was like Christ in some way that Paul is teaching us here. How so? In Adam, through this one man, sin and death through sin, was IMPUTED to us. This was given to all people without exception, by virtue of our being *in Adam*. It was given to all who are IN ADAM. Given without our assent, but sovereignly, by God. All who are in Adam....die. And Adam is said to be a pattern...a type....of Christ. Read on.... *But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. (Romans 5:15, NKJV)*

There is more in this verse that we will be able to tackle today, but I will use it to conclude the argument Paul is making in our time together this morning. Adam is a type Christ, in that through this one man, what was Adam's (sin) was imputed to all people who are **in him**....which is all people. He is like Christ in that way...that all who are in Him receive something freely, and without choice. Even infants, the most helpless of all, who have no choice to make good or bad, receive what Adam has given them. And Christ gives freely in the same way. In that all who are **in Him** receive freely what is Christ's alone.....to the most helpless of all creatures, unable to do anything for righteousness sake.....all who are in Him receive the free gift of His righteousness, not by our own will or decision, but by the free mercy and predetermined will of our God. God used one man, Adam, that sin and death would enter all that are in him, not by anything that we have done, but by virtue of our being in Adam.....so that He could use One Man, that sin and death would be defeated, in all that are in Him....not by anything that we have done, but by virtue of our being in Him....Jesus Christ, the Righteous.

This is an amazing truth that could never be conceived by mortal man. It is far too glorious to be man's invention. Well does the Scripture say, *"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."* (Isaiah 55:9, NKJV). And this is spoken in the direct context of the amazing doctrine of justification by faith only, by the prophet Isaiah, on which I close:

"Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you— The sure mercies of David. Indeed I have given him as a witness to the people, A leader and commander for the people. Surely you shall call a nation you do not know, And nations who do not know you shall run to you, Because of the Lord your God, And the Holy One of Israel; For He has glorified you." Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:1-9, NKJV)