

Death in Adam, Life in Christ

Romans 5:12-21

ESV

12 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— 13 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.

15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. 16 And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. 17 For if, because of one 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.

18 Therefore, as one trespass ^[1] led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness ^[2] leads to justification and life for all men. 19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. 20 Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.ⁱ

[1] 5:18 Or the trespass of one

[2] 5:18 Or the act of righteousness of one

NLT

12 When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. 13 Yes, people sinned even before the law was given. But it was not counted as sin because there was not yet any law to break. 14 Still, everyone died—from the time of Adam to the time of Moses—even those who did not disobey an explicit commandment of God, as Adam did. Now Adam is a symbol, a representation of Christ, who was yet to come. 15 But there is a great difference between Adam's sin and God's gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ. 16 And the result of God's gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man's sin. For Adam's sin led to condemnation, but God's free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins. 17 For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ.

18 Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. 19 Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous.

20 God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God's wonderful grace became more abundant. 21 So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.ⁱⁱ

Context:

In the previous 4 ½ chapters, Paul has established the following:

1. (1:18-3:20) All people, both Jew and Gentile, and under sin and justly deserving the wrath of God
2. (3:21-26) God has put forth his Son Jesus to reveal his righteousness:
 - a. His saving righteousness – in that he has made salvation available to all as a free gift through faith in Christ.
 - b. His judging righteousness – in that he put forth Jesus as a sacrifice to satisfy his wrath and wipe away sin through his blood.
 - c. He did this so that it would be clear that he is just (i.e. he punishes sin), and the one who justifies (i.e. grants his saving righteousness) those who have faith in Jesus.
3. (3:27-4:25) This right standing before God is and has always been by faith, as seen in the case of Abraham, who is the father of all who believe, both Jew and Gentile.
4. (5:1-11) Since we have been justified (counted as righteous) by faith, we now have peace with God and the assurance of hope for future glory and eternal life.

What follows in verses 12-21 is an explanation of the basis of our assurance of hope in verses 1-11. The term “therefore” should be understood in the sense of “for this reason” or “in order to accomplish this.”

Summary of 5:12-21:

In order to accomplish the salvation mentioned in 5:1-11, there is a life-giving union between Christ and his own that is similar to, but more powerful than, the death-producing union between Adam and all his own.ⁱⁱⁱ

Sin entered the world through Adam, and death is the consequence of Adam’s sin, and death has spread to the whole human race. Because they entered the world alienated from God, human beings commit sin. Adam is a pattern of Christ (in this case, by way of contrast) - just as Adam brought sin, death, and judgment into the world to those born in him, Christ brings righteousness, life, and salvation into the world to those born in him. As sure as death came through Adam we can be assured of life in Christ.^{iv}

The law was given to make the situation worse, since now people were made aware of their sin, and not only that, but by continuing to sin they were breaking a revealed command of God. This serves to amplify grace, because where awareness of sin is great, grace appears all the more precious, and where sins are many, the mercy of God is all the more abundant.

Contrasts:

- Christ as the true Adam
 - o He is perfected in him – the model of man
 - o He is the true image of God
 - o He is given dominion over all things
- Trespass of one man vs. Free gift by the grace of one man
- Condemnation for all (in Adam) vs. Justification for all (in Christ)
- Death vs. Life
- Disobedience of one = many made sinners vs. Obedience of one = many made righteous

Related Scripture:

1. 1 Corinthians 15 (Adam and Christ):

- a. v.21-23: *For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.*
- b. v.49: *Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.*

2. Ephesians 2 (Death vs. Life)

- a. v.4-5: *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved*

Theological Concepts

This passage is the main point of discussion with regards to the doctrines of:

1. **Original Sin** - As a result of Adam's sin we all enter the world with a fallen nature (i.e. the sinful tendencies, desires, and dispositions in our hearts with which we are all born).
2. **Imputed Sin** - The guilt of Adam's sin is credited not just to Adam himself, but to us all. We are regarded as having sinned *in Adam*, and hence as deserving of the same punishment.

(A number of other theological issues also arise here, such as Universalism, Salvation of infants, etc)

Those are the two sin problems that plague the human race and Christ provides two solutions:

1. **Justification** – This is the gospel solution to imputed sin. For those who have faith in Jesus, God imputes the righteousness of Christ to them, removing the guilt of Adam's sin (and ours). This is a declarative act of God, whereby a guilty sinner is declared not guilty on account of Christ.
2. **Sanctification** – This is the gospel solution to original sin. Through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, the righteousness of Christ is imparted to the believer, progressively overcoming their sinful dispositions and transforming them into the image of Christ.^v

To provide some theological perspective (by no means exhaustive), below are some short summaries of the main theories regarding the nature of imputed sin:

1. Pelagian Theory

The Pelagian Theory was the postulation of a British Monk by the name of Pelagius who was born in A.D. 370. He presented his theory in Rome in A.D. 409, but it was later condemned by the Council of Carthage in A.D. 418.

Pelagius proposed, as does the Creation Theory, that the soul of a person is an individual, immediate creation of God. Therefore he taught that the soul was created as Adam's and Eve's were, in innocence, and able to obey God, being free of sin. Therefore Adam's sin was not imputed to mankind, only personal sin which each person committed. Death then is the result of the law of nature; even Adam would have died a natural death. Eternal death though is the result of man following the example of Adam. The main thing that Adam did to negatively affect the human race was to set a bad example for us. In this view, each individual needs to personally fall into sin since their soul was created in innocence by God.

Held by: Unitarians

2. Arminian Theory

Jacobus Arminius was a theologian from Holland. He was a professor. He lived from 1560 to 1609. Semi-Pelagianism is another name for this view.

Arminius, as Pelagius, did not see mankind as guilty for the sin of Adam. He did see man as not having original righteousness as a result of Adam's sin, though with divine help, he was capable of attaining it. God on the other hand, for the purpose of justice, gives to each man at the beginning of consciousness a special influence of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of counteracting the effects of their inherited depravity which makes obedience to God possible, that is, if they so decided to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. Though man has the tendency to do evil (which may be called sin), Arminius believed such tendencies would not result in guilt or punishment. It is only when man consciously and voluntarily follows these tendencies does God impute to him as sin. Therefore Arminius saw an effect of Adam's sin -- that all suffer for it -- but he did not see its full impact.

Held by: Methodists, Weslyans, Pentecostals, Greek Ch

3. **Federal Theory**

Cocceius (1603-1669) was the originator of this view, and it became central doctrine of Reformed Theology. The word "federal" has the idea of a covenant between God and man. The federal theory teaches that Adam entered a covenant of works with God, where, if Adam obeyed God, he and the entire human race would be blessed by God with eternal life. Therefore, Adam, having made the covenant with God, became our representative, our federal head. Having broken God's covenant, his sin is imputed to us, those he represented.

Held by: Presbyterians, covenant theologians such as Charles Hodge, J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., and Louis Berkhof

4. **Augustinian Theory (or The Realistic Theory)**

This view which originated from Augustine (A.D. 354-430) teaches that all mankind participated with Adam in his sin. This view comes from Hebrews 7:9-10, where we see that Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham, though Levi was not yet born (cf. Gen. 29:31, 34). The writer of Hebrews states: "And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him."

We see that Levi was present in the loins -- semen -- of Abraham, and that it is attributed to him as actually having paid tithes to Melchizedek. Therefore when Adam sinned, and we were in his loins, we too sinned with him. This is why each of us is guilty and why we all die, because in Adam we all sinned and death is the result of Adam's sin.

Held by: Reformers and such as John Calvin, Martin Luther, William Shedd, and Augustus Strong

5. **The Theory of Mediate Imputation**

This theory sees all men as depraved, both physically and morally. Where the physical body is considered depraved from conception due to the propagation of the species, the soul is considered innocent, having been created by God, that is until it is united with the body. It is then seen as corrupt when the two are united. It is believed that as a result of this inherited depravity that God imputes that depravity to man as a consequence and not as a penalty of Adam's sin (mediate or through Adam). Therefore it is viewed that the imputation of sin is the result of inherited depravity, not that depravity is the result of the imputation of sin because we sinned with Adam. Henry Thiessen stated in his book, Lectures in Systematic Theology, "Depravity is our fault, not mere misfortune. Depravity is the penal consequence [imposed punishment] of sin."

6. **The Corporate Personality Theory**

This view understands Romans 5:12 from the perspective that one person can represent a group of people. Therefore, that one individual can act on behalf of the group in which the group can either be blessed or cursed. One example of this was when Achan sinned, and as a result he and his family were put to death (Josh. 7:24-26). Also, as a result of King David's sin of numbering the nation of Israel, the nation suffered (2 Sam. 24:10-14). This theory then sees that as a result of the corporate personality (identity) of mankind, Adam acted, and as a result we reaped the consequences of his sin.^{vi}

Application

1. Everyone acknowledges the suffering, misery and death that exist in the world today, and there are countless theories regarding the causes and solutions. What insight does this text provide with regards to the source of these problems and the solution?
2. Read Genesis 3. Why do you think the NT consistently refers to the guilt and effect of Adam's sin (as opposed to Eve's or Adam and Eve's)? Does this have any implications for men today with regard to their responsibilities as husbands and fathers?
3. What are some ways that our perception of original sin and guilt affect the way we view:
 - a. Ourselves?
 - b. Salvation?
 - c. The world we live in and the history of man?
 - d. Government?
 - e. Other people?
 - f. Evangelism?
4. What do you think about Paul's explanation for the purpose of the law in verses 20-21? Compare with 1 Timothy 1:8-17. Is there anything we can learn from this regarding how to view and speak of our own past sins, particularly with unbelievers?

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ⁱⁱⁱ Moo, "Epistle to the Romans" p 315-317

^{iv} Schreiner, "Romans," p 270-282

^v http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/2006/1609_What_is_the_difference_between_original_sin_and_imputed_sin

^{vi} <http://www.believersweb.org/view.cfm?id=1098&rc=1&list=multi>