

Reading: Genesis 3:1-24 Looking at Romans 5:12-14

Theme: Being in Adam or in Christ.

In my reading and preparation this week, I've been tempted to preach on anything else other than Romans 5:12ff! We will be looking at Romans 5:12-14 - in Adam we all fell, which is a clear summary of Genesis 3, which is history, but Romans 5 is theology and deals with the same incident. The commentators, the structure of the text and the words written have left me with swirling thoughts, ideas, arguments and counter arguments! In my initial reading I thought I understood the passage, then I was convinced I didn't and now I have to present to you an attempted understanding!

Romans 5:12 is a most important verse, one writer calls it "*one of the most important verses in the whole Bible from the standpoint of theology*" (ML J). Do not let the word "theology" put you off - it means biblical truth and understanding. This verse is a key, a crucial verse. Failure to grasp and understand what Paul says here means we will not only fail to understand the truths of v12-21, but many of the truths the Bible teaches on the basis of those truths. It's a most practical verse to understand, to see its truth, as we begin to make sense of 2 universal matters - sin and death (*including suffering*).

Many dismiss and lay aside Genesis 1-3 as history and by doing so this verse, the following verses make no sense. These verses are based on and underline the historical truth of Genesis 1-3 - Creation and the Fall of mankind. If we call Genesis 1-3 myths and fables, then the comparison Paul make here breaks down between Adam and Christ - either both are true, or both are myths and fables! The whole section is comparison and contrast of real persons. The superabundance of God's grace in Jesus is shown most clearly and we have presented to us the love and grace of

God to ones such as us who deserve nothing from Him. I will focus on v12 especially, but also include v13-14. I have 3 headings to try and get to grips with this little section:

1. Principal Parts.

In v12 both sin and death are personified, are given powers and abilities. They are not just some processes or influences, but are real and threatening. Paul is going to contrast and compare these with righteousness and life in Christ. He hints at this as he says “*just as*” and it is left an uncompleted comparison until v18. Paul emphasises and explains 5 things in v12:

A. “sin”: the Westminster shorter catechism asks in Q.14 “*What is sin*” and answers “*Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.*” It is not doing what God wants and doing what God forbids. It is anti-God and His holy nature; it is essentially cosmic rebellion and treason.

B. “sin entered the world”: this cosmic rebellion and treason came into this world, the realm of this world and mankind in particular, through one man. We are back to Adam and will see more on him later. Yet we need to recognise that there was a period in this world’s history when no animal died or suffered, no human being (of the 2) would die or suffer; there were no catastrophes, no poisonous bugs, no pain, no disease and no sin existed on the earth - it truly was paradise! God considered all His creation on the sixth day and called it very good. Sadly, sin entered, invaded, broke in, vandalised and spoiled paradise. Man fell into sin, rebelled against God and now all people sin. The universality of sin flows from Adam’s Fall. Paul moves on:

C. “and death through sin”: here is the Bible’s explanation of the universality of death - physical death. There are 3 types of

death referred to in the Bible, for death is thought of in terms of separation - physical separation of body and soul; spiritual death which is separation of mankind from God in their lives, and eternal death which is separation of soul and body away from God eternally in hell. Here in Romans 5 the emphasis is primarily on physical death, which can also include the other 2.

Sin brought in death. Sin is the ground, the reason for death's infliction. It was not part of God's original creation order. Biblically speaking there is no such thing as "*natural death*"! Death is an invader. Death came in as a penal consequence of sin. The wages of sin is death - physical, spiritual and eternal. Adam was warned of this if he sinned in Genesis 2:17 and in 3:19 it is pronounced as judgement on Adam and Eve. Was Adam immortal prior to sinning? There was no death. Adam before the fall was not doomed to die. Yet, Adam before the fall also did not have the consummated, glorified body, the fullness of the living forever tied to the tree of life. Adam before the fall was still awaiting confirmation in eternal life. Adam was perfect and obedience would have led to being established in that and to glorification and have eternal life on earth. Sin brought that punishment in, not only on him and Eve, but as we see now:

D. "death came to all men": death has "spread" (*says other versions*); "*passed upon*" (AV); "*came to all men*" (NIV). As a result of the one man's sin death came to all mankind - because all sinned. We will come back to the little phrase in NIV "*because all sinned*", but note the final principle which I've kept until now:

E. "through one man": we have already mentioned Adam, but by him universal sin and death came in all mankind. Paul wrote of a historic Adam, as he did of a historic Moses (v14) and a historic Christ (v15). Paul doesn't use Adam as a type of the human race

or the consciousness or moral status of a developing ape creature, else the whole point of this passage would be made ludicrous! In v12-19 he uses the term “*one*” 12 times in various connections to both Adam and Christ - they are viewed as individuals as are their actions.

Make no mistake about it, Adam’s one sin caused all the problems of sin, death and suffering the world has ever known. If it is not true, then we have no need of a Saviour, so here all written of Jesus falls apart and is meaningless, is a sick joke by a fanatical Jew following just a Jewish teacher. Yet if it is true, then we can thank God that where one man caused sin and death, there is a Greater One through whom all can be put right! Let’s move on quickly and pick up on the little phrase at the end of verse 12 and see:

2. Imputed Sin.

As Christians we often speak of the imputed or the credited righteousness of Jesus, but we fail so often to recognise the imputed, credited sin of Adam. It is one of Paul’s comparisons and contrasts here - in Adam his sin is on and credited to us, but in Christ His righteousness is on and credited to us. We cannot have the one without the other!

Paul says here “*because all sinned.*” This is the best translation of the original, better than “*all have sinned*” in some versions, for the tense means “all sinned” - not that all have done sin, or all are sinning, nor all are sinful (*as true as those things are*); but irrespective of age, social standing, morals, even religious background: all men and women, boys and girls sinned. This is a crucial point. We are not to regard mankind as helpless victims who are unfairly caught up in the crime, the sin of Adam. **The Greek indicates a single decisive point at which all sinned.** Paul here involves every person in the first sin of Adam and in the

rebellion that brought the downfall of all mankind, so we are justly condemned for his crime, sin against God and justly involved in its consequences. We will look at this again shortly in point 3.

Paul shows this by the fact that all die - death came and comes to all. In v13-14 he explains a bit more. The Jews always thought of sin in connection with the Law. So, Paul raises the question “*How could sin be in place before the Law, how was death explained then?*” Sin must have been present, working and resulting in death before the Law was given. Paul could have quoted the Flood and the wiping out of all life outside the Ark; or the death of Able, or death of all since Adam fell (*with the exception of Enoch!*) Above all, the Flood showed God took note of sin and punished sin before the Law was given at Sinai.

Yet v13 causes a problem, a difficulty - “*sin is not imputed where there is no law*” (AV, NASB, NKJV). The translation “*imputed*” in these versions is not a good one, for it is a totally different word that is used in 4:3 or 6. The word used in v13 means “*put on one’s account*” or “*charged to one’s account*” i.e. credited. Paul has already dealt with this difficult area in 2:14-15 and touched on it on 4:15. There is the Law of God written in people’s hearts, and consciences. People ignore, suppress these laws, but they are in place. This was in place before the Law at Sinai (*i.e. the 10 Commandments*) was given and the fact that people did not sin as Adam did (5:14) **by disobeying a known verbal command** from God, did not mean that they did not sin. They sinned against His Law written upon their hearts i.e. His moral Law.

The phrase “*because all sinned*” is not just referring to the action of sinful deeds, words or thoughts - as sadly, babies died before the Law and regrettably they still do before any sin is committed by them. The phrase “*all sinned*” refers to the condition that

everyone is in from the moment of their conception - as David says in Psalm 51:5 *“I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”* We inherit, in connection with, by descent from Adam a sinful nature. If you read theologians you will find they write of the depraved nature, a polluted nature. While such is true, I feel it is not what Paul writes of here; he writes of something more basic and profound.

Paul is saying we are **all** guilty of **the act** which brought sin into the world – Adam’s sin is credited, imputed, put to the account of every person there has been, is or will be. Death comes on all because in Adam all sinned in his original sin. Adam’s original sin is imputed, credited to us – we all are guilty of his original sin. This is the basis of Paul’s argument here in 5:12-21 and that Jesus’ righteousness is credited, imputed to us when we believe and are in Jesus. Adam’s sin, guilt and condemnation are imputed, credited to us as we are in Adam. Take time later to read through Paul’s reasoning here and see that this is the case. His words in v18-19 makes sense only if this is so (*in v19 word “made” is better translated “constituted” or “caused to be”.*)

If it is through justification that God makes, regards us as righteous through Jesus’ salvation accomplishments on our behalf that we are judicially regarded as righteous in Christ. Before this, we are judicially regarded as having Adam’s sin on us - original sin in Adam. We are told in v14 that Adam is a pattern, a figure, a type of the Lord Jesus and God deals with us in our connection with either Adam or Christ. All sinned in Adam, so let’s see:

3. Blame Adam?

How did we all sin in Adam? It seems unfair, for we were not there; in fact, we blame Adam and say it is his fault for the mess and the way the world is! Therefore, we make out that we would

not have done as he did! I question if the outcome would have been any different if you or I had been there! There are 2 main ideas to explain our guilt in Adam:

A. Realistic or Seminal Identity: which says Adam contained the totality of human nature as he was the father of mankind and so all mankind is a subdivision, a part of Adam. Therefore, when he acted, we all acted. It is as if we were there when he sinned and he did exactly what we would. Hebrews 7:9-10 is pointed to - that Levi gave tithes to Melchizedek in the loins of his grandfather Abraham. It is argued that in the same way, we were in Adam and sinned when he sinned. I'm not too keen on this on its own, as it doesn't tie in too well with Paul's arguments. Yet some commentators force it to fit into Paul's words in these verses! Now see:

B. Representative or Federal Headship Identity: Yes, Adam was head of the whole human race and father of all, but more importantly he was also our legal representative as head of the covenant. God would make a covenant with him and through him with all his descendants. Because of this all the benefits, blessings of the covenant, as well as the punishments for breaking it, would be to him **and to all his descendants**. Adam was constituted the head; the federal head and representative of the human race as the first created human being. That is why Adam is always said to be the one who brought in sin - even though Eve sinned first - for Adam was her head as husband, and was her federal head as first created, so sin is imputed to mankind through him and not her.

We are familiar with the idea of an ambassador - a person who represents a country and has power to speak on behalf of that country's government and people. What they say is taken as what

that country is saying, for they legally represent their country. This is a faint picture of Adam's position on mankind's behalf.

God constituted Adam our federal head and representative. He stood or fell for us all. In the same way Jesus is our federal head and representative in the NT covenant. He stood and we stand; He lives and we live; He is righteous and we are righteous; He is glorified and we shall be glorified. As believers God deals with us **in Christ** and **not Adam**. We should thank God for that!

This is why it is so important to be in Christ; else we remain imputed, credited with Adam's sin and guilt. In Adam, no matter how moral, religious or good we are, we are still under God's judgement and condemnation in Adam. We need to be in Christ and imputed, credited with His righteousness. Where are we this evening? Are we still at the end of the Genesis 3 situation and in Adam; or are we in Christ and accepted by God in Him? Are we part of the old humanity or the new? Are we in the Adamic covenant and therefore condemned; or are we in the new covenant in Jesus Christ and therefore justified?

These are important questions, but they all depend on Genesis 3 being true! Yet we cannot blame Adam - for we would most certainly have sinned as he sinned. That is why my heading had a question mark at its end! Blame Adam? No. We, in God's view, were all there and therefore we are guilty of that original sin. Yet it is not a situation of hopelessness. There is hope - as Paul writes "*how much more...*" For he goes on to write of what we are and have in Christ! My prayer is that we would all be and live as those who have the '*how much mores*' in Christ and Christ alone and this will affect the way we think, react, desire and live.