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## Romans 5:12-19      “The Impact of Adam & Jesus”

Intro. This Scripture is one of the more difficult and controversial passages in Romans. It contains some heavy theology. This is not Theology 101. It is more like spiritual calculus or spiritual physics. Are you ready for a challenge this morning? In spite of the difficulty, I believe that I can help you understand this text if you will listen and put your mind in gear. This text is controversial because Paul says things here that many people do not readily agree with. So some people reinterpret this text to mean something else. Or some just skip over this text of Scripture and consider it extraneous to the thought of the epistle. In spite of all of this we will consider this text, for it is one of the most important passages in the book of Romans.

Notice that our text begins with the word, “Therefore” or literally, “Because of this.” That indicates that we should find some connection between this text and what Paul has already discussed. Paul has been discussing justification, how we are made right with God even though we are sinners. Paul has also more recently used the concept of reconciliation. Sin has separated us from God, but now we can be reconciled to God by the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. You see, Jesus suffered the penalty of sin when He died on the Cross, so now our sins can be forgiven.

Now, in this text, Paul deals with the question of how *one* man, Jesus Christ, can bring righteousness and salvation to *all* people who believe in Him. How can the death of one person save many millions of people? We understand that somehow Christ took our place on the Cross, but how was such a substitution possible? First, note the repetition of the little word “one.” It is used 11 times. The key that unlocks our understanding of this text is our identification with Adam and with Christ. One man, Adam, brought sin and death to all people. Even so, one man, Jesus Christ, can bring righteousness and life to all people. If sin and death came to humanity through one act of the head of the human race, even so the antidote could come through one act of the Head of a recreated race, the Church.

So let’s consider what Paul says here about this important subject. First of all he makes:

### I. THE COMPARISON BETWEEN ADAM & CHRIST

In the last of v.14 Paul mentions Adam, “who is a type of Him who was to come.” In some sense Adam is a type of Christ. That indicates that there are some similarities between Adam & Christ. The similarity is mainly in terms of the great impact of each one upon many people. Both Adam and Jesus Christ impact many others by virtue of what they did, & by virtue of a person’s vital connection to each one. Paul begins to make a comparison in v.12, but he digresses in vv.13-17. Then in vv.18-19 he draws a couple of comparisons, showing the great impact that Adam & Jesus have upon all who are connected to them.

Now at this point I want to focus just on Adam’s impact upon us. We know from the creation story that Adam was the first man. We are all descendants of Adam, not Cheetah! Like it or not, what Adam did affects all of his descendants. We see a number of ways in which Adam affected all of his descendants:

A. In Adam We Have All Sinned – Sin started in the human race with Adam. In v.12 Paul says, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world...” I should not need to spend any time convincing you that sin has entered our world! Adam and Eve sure did mess things up! There is violence, stealing, lying, immorality, filthy language, and a host of other sins that plague our world.

By the way, in this text of Scripture Paul uses 3 words to describe Adam’s sin. In v.14 it is called a transgression (*parabasis*), an overstepping of a boundary. God established a boundary between Adam and the forbidden fruit. But Adam crossed that boundary, took the fruit, ate it, and thus sinned. Then, in vv.15, 17, & 18 it is called an offense (*paraptoma*), a false step, transgression, sin. Finally in v.19 it is called an act of disobedience (*parakoe*), an unwillingness to hear, give heed to. Adam did not obey the direct command of God.

I think all Bible-believing Christians accept the fact that Adam sinned, and that sin entered the world through Adam. Now let’s look at one of the most difficult statements we have to interpret. Paul says in the last of v.12 that death has passed unto all people “because all sinned” (aorist tense; literally “death passed upon whom<sup>1</sup> all sinned.”). There can be no question but the fact that “all sinned” is stated in the most explicit fashion to be the ground upon which death penetrated to all men. There are 3 main interpretations of that statement.

1. Some interpret this only in terms of our personal sin. Adam sinned, but so have we. “All sinned” is in the same grammatical form as 3:23. Robertson sees this as a constative (summary) aorist active, gathering up in this one tense the history of the race committing sin. [This is the Pelagian interpretation]. But the big problem with that interpretation is that it doesn’t fit in with the point Paul is making here, especially vv.13-14. It is true that all have sinned, but that is not Paul’s point here.

2. Secondly, in the Augustinian tradition it has often been maintained that because of Adam’s sin, we have inherited his sin nature, and therefore “all sinned”. That interpretation is at least better because it does provide a link between Adam and us. Barclay thinks this interpretation is undoubtedly the most acceptable to the modern mind, “but equally undoubtedly,” he adds, “it is not what Paul meant.” Why would Paul put the verb in the past (aorist) tense? If Paul had in mind nothing more than personal sin, it seems he would say, “Because all sin” (present tense). Also, the sustained emphasis in the context upon the one trespass of the one man does not correspond with the notion of hereditary depravity.

3. All have sinned in Adam’s sin. There must be some kind of solidarity existing between the “one” and “the all” with the result that the sin of the one may be regarded as the sin of all. Thus, all sinned in Adam. It is not simply because Adam is the ancestor of mankind that all are said to have sinned in his sin. It is because Adam *is* mankind. All of Adam’s descendents bear the consequence of his sin. It is just as if we all sinned with him.

We have a clear example of how the actions of an ancestor is counted as the action of the descendant. In Heb. 7:9-10 we read, “Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.”

Now this thesis required some demonstration or evidence to make it apparent. The proof of this is found in the previous phrase, “thus death spread to all men.” Paul makes special note of the universal penetration of death to all in v.12b. Why is it that all people die? Well Paul says in vv.13-14, “For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.” At first glance

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<sup>1</sup> In the old Greek εφ ω usually meant "on condition that," but "because" in N.T. (Robertson, *Grammar*, p. 963).

v.13 does not seem to lend any support to the thesis that death penetrated to all because of the sin of Adam. In fact, it might seem to point in the opposite direction. It is for this reason that we must appreciate the strength of the adversative at the beginning of v.14 and the emphasis which falls upon the consideration that death reigned over those who did not sin after the same manner as Adam. From Adam to Moses people did not have a clearly defined law directly from God. Therefore, they did not commit the same type of overt transgression. Yet, they suffered death just the same. Why? Men die because they are united to Adam. In Adam all sinned, and “in Adam all men die” (1 Cor. 15:22). Before the Law, they did not sin like Adam, but they suffered the same death. How can you explain that truth unless they sinned in Adam.

We can carry Paul’s argument even further. You see, even infants & young children, who have not consciously sinned, are subject to death. Why should *they* die? They have not personally sinned? They sometimes they die, because they are children of Adam, and even infants are tied in with Adam’s original sin. Of course, we believe that infants are covered by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and they all go to heaven.

Now if you have a hard time accepting how you could have sinned in Adam, don’t tune me out. As we are going to see in just a moment, that is the basis of how it is possible for you to be made righteous, even though you did not personally participate in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Notice the comparison between how we are made righteous and how we were made sinners here in v.19, “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made (*kathistemi*<sup>2</sup>) sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.” This gives us the direction in which we are to interpret the expression, “made sinners.” It can only be that of imputation, for righteousness comes only by imputation. The expression used here “made or constituted sinners” is definitely to the effect that the many were made to be sinners; they were placed in the category of sinners. We are not born with a clean slate so to speak.

So by our connection to Adam, we all have sinned. It is also true that we are born with a sin nature, and we all without exception will become sinners in our personal experience. Now, notice what else we suffer because of Adam’s sin:

B. In Adam We All Are Condemned – Four times in the first 4 verses of our text the judgment issuing from Adam’s sin had been spoken in terms of death (vss. 12, 14, 15). Now, in vv.16 & 18, a new concept is introduced, namely, condemnation (*katakrima*). Death is the penal consequence of sin but condemnation is the divine sentence which is pronounced upon sin. In Adam we are all guilty before God, and condemned to death.

One of the first steps in salvation is to acknowledge that you are a sinner, and that you are guilty before God. Why else would anyone seek salvation? Have you come to the point in your life that you have acknowledged that you are a sinner, and that you have been condemned to death? That leads to the fatal impact of Adam upon the human race:

C. In Adam We All Die – Paul says in v.12, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.” In Adam all sinned and therefore death passed through to all. In v.15a there is clearly a connection between Adam’s sin and our death. There Paul said, “by the one man’s offense many died....” Then Paul’s language is more vivid in v.17, “by the one man’s offense death reigned....” Oh, how true it is that death reigns! You can’t escape it. Death takes out loved ones away from us, showing

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<sup>2</sup> Here the word probably means “to constitute, to render, make, cause to be.”

no mercy. With all the advances in medical science, we still have to admit that death reigns. We can't stop it.

The Bible teaches that death is a consequence or result of sin. Scientists have not figured out why the human body begins the process that always leads to death. I can tell them why! It is because mankind has sinned, beginning with Adam. And if your sins are not forgiven, you will not only suffer physical death, but spiritual death as well, which is eternal separation from God.

Boy, Adam sure did mess things up! Because of what He did, we all were made sinners. We all are guilty before God. We stand condemned. And as God says in Ezekiel 18:4, "The soul who sins shall die." So we have seen the bad news. Now let us consider the good news. Beginning in v.15 Paul notes that even though there are similarities between Adam & Christ in terms of their impact upon those who are connected to them, there are a number of contrasts to be made. So let's consider the second main point of my message:

## II. THE CONTRAST BETWEEN ADAM & CHRIST

In v.15 Adam's offense is contrasted with Christ's free gift. Paul says, "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<sup>3</sup>." There is a contrast in quantity. Note that the phrase "much more" is repeated 2 times and the word "abounded" or "abundance" is also found two times. . This means that in Jesus Christ we can gain much more than we ever lost in Adam! Can we expect anything less from a God of love, grace, & mercy? Christ not only will ultimately undo all the damage that Adam's sin affected, but He will accomplish "much more" by His grace. The emphasis is placed on the greater achievements of grace. If the disobedience of one man resulted in death for the entire human race, we should expect that something better would result from Christ's work to many as well.

Here Paul indicates that two particular gifts of grace would abound to many. We will see these gifts of grace in the next two contrasts.

A. In Adam We Are Condemned; In Christ We Are Justified – Paul said in v.16, "And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from (*ek*) many offenses resulted in justification." In the case of Adam there is expansion outwards, from one to many; in the case of Christ, there is contraction inwards; many sins are all embraced in a single sentence of pardon. So we see here that the first gift of grace that abounded to many was justification. Even though Adam's sin caused many to stand condemned, Jesus made it possible for many transgressors to be made right with God. Indeed, "the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned." Adam passed on to us condemnation. When we believe in Jesus, we receive the gift of justification!

Then in v.19 Paul arrives at the same truth by making a comparison, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous." Being "made (*kathistemi*) righteous" has the same legal character as justification and must be just another mode of expression. And just as our relation to Adam means the imputation to us of his disobedience & condemnation, even so our involvement in the obedience of Christ is not that of our personal obedience, but His obedience and righteousness is imputed to us.

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<sup>3</sup> "Many" is literally "the many" in both clauses, referring to the great mass of mankind. The scope of "the many" must be the same as the "all men" of vv. 12 and 18.

I want to make an important point here. In Adam sin is not only imputed to us, but we actually become sinners in our personal experience. Even so, the true Christian not only is declared to have the righteousness of Christ, but he actually begins to live out the righteousness of Christ in his daily life. Justification is a constitutive act, not merely declarative. And this constitutive act consists in our being placed in the category of righteous persons by reason of our relation to Christ by faith. If you have truly believed in Jesus, His righteousness will be seen in your life. If you say that you are a Christian, have you become righteous in your daily living?

B. In Adam We Die; In Christ We Are Made Alive – Paul says in v.17, “For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.” We have already talked about the fact that Adam brought death to the whole human race. It is inescapable. But in the last of v.17 we see that if through one man death reigned, “much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.” Here we see the second free gift of grace that flows from the gift of righteousness: We will “reign in life.” The day is coming when death will no longer reign. Instead, we will reign with Christ throughout eternity as we enjoy the gift of eternal life (note the future tense used here).

Then in the last of v.18 Paul says, “through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.” Here Paul draws a direct connection between justification and life.<sup>4</sup> You can’t have eternal life unless you become right with God through Jesus Christ. And this verse mentions what Christ did to make it possible for us to receive these gifts of grace. It was “through one Man’s righteous act.” What is the righteous act (*dikaioma*) spoken of here? The righteousness of Christ is regarded in its compact unity in parallelism with the one trespass of Adam. Notice in v.19 that the righteous act of Christ is restated as “one Man’s obedience.” Undoubtedly the climactic expression of obedience was Christ’s willingness to obey God the Father & shed His blood at the cross (cf. Phil. 2:8). But obedience comprehends the totality of the Father’s will as fulfilled by Christ. There would be no effectiveness in His death if Christ did not have a life of perfect obedience.

This verse clarifies the misconception some people get from the last of v.18, which says, “even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.” Based on that verse some may conclude that Paul is teaching universal salvation. But that is not the case. V.18 teaches that justification & eternal life are available to all, but here in v.17 we see that only those who “receive” the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will have eternal life.<sup>5</sup>

So if you want to be right with God, if you want to have eternal life, you must trust in Jesus Christ, and what He did for you on the cross. Righteousness and eternal life are gifts of grace. All you have to do is receive them by faith.

Conclusion: Now I want to sum up the importance of this comparison & contrast between Adam & Jesus. Though we don’t like the idea that the whole human race was condemned to death through one man (Adam), the good news is that God was then able to save many through just One Man,

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<sup>4</sup> The phrase “of life” may mean the justification which consists in eternal life (genitive of identity). Another possibility is to see “of life” as descriptive, justification which leads to eternal life (attributive genitive).

<sup>5</sup> This is similar to what Paul said in 1 Cor. 15:22, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.” The “all” of the second clause is therefore restrictive in a way that the “all” in the first clause is not. All “in Christ” will indeed be made alive.

Jesus Christ! You are connected to Adam by physical birth. If you repent of sin and trust in Jesus Christ, you establish a new link to the Head of a new race. In Christ you become righteous, and gain eternal life!

In v.14, Adam is called “the figure of Him that was to come.” Adam was a type, or picture, of Jesus Christ. But we can also draw a number of other contrasts as well. Adam came from the earth, but Jesus is the Lord from heaven (1 Cor. 15:47). Adam was tested in a Garden, surrounded by beauty and love; Jesus was tempted in a wilderness, and then later died on a cruel cross surrounded by hatred and ugliness. Adam was cast out of Paradise; but Jesus Christ turned to a thief and said, “Today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). The Old Testament is “the book of the generations of Adam” (Gen. 5:1) and it ends with “a curse” (Mal. 4:6). The New Testament is “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ” (Matt. 1:1) and it ends with “no more curse” (Rev. 22:3).

You cannot help being “in Adam,” for this came by your first birth over which you had no control. But you can be born again (John 3:7), and establish a relationship with Jesus Christ. By faith in Him you can experience a change from condemnation to justification. You can move from death to life in a moment of time. If you have not done so, why not put your trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord & Savior?

Sources: F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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