

Romans 5:12-21 The Tale of Two Adams, 8/30/20

Many people growing up had that one friend who just being associated with them eventually got you into trouble. And if you are saying, you didn't have that friend, maybe you were that friend? I don't know. My brother had a friend in high school named Willie. Willie was always the one to take an idea too far. He was the one to turn a prank into a felony. One day, while my brother and his friends were driving passed one of their teacher's houses, Willie thought it would be hilarious to stick a ¼ stick of dynamite into his teacher's mailbox and blow it up. Just a little PSA for all you teenagers, be careful who you associate with, when you are friends with a bomb, when they go off- you will get hit by the shrapnel. That's what happened with my brother because guess what? Someone spotted the car, and ID the teens in the car, and so the police catch up to them and take them all into the police station and put the fear of God into them, eventually he's cited for a misdemeanor. Well two days later my parents are at a church potluck and someone says, "Um, pastor- I saw your son made it in the newspaper." My parents had no idea. Sure enough, they check the paper- there is his name, under the headline, "Teens caught blowing up Teacher's Mailbox." This is the kind of thing that made it into the news in my small town.

There is such thing as guilty by association isn't there? Well, today what we will see in this passage is that the whole human race is cosmically, spiritually guilty by association for the sin of Adam. But we will also see the same principle that makes us guilty by association with Adam makes us righteous and free by association with Jesus Christ. Paul is going to look at history through the the true story of Two Adams, the first Adam, and the 2nd- Jesus. That's the message of these verses in a nutshell. So let's break it down and then put it back together and see what difference it makes in our lives.

Last week in Romans 5:6-11 we explored the astonishing love of God displayed in the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ for us on the Cross. Paul is now answering the question "How can one person's sacrifice, as noble as it was, bring about such unbelievable benefits to so many? **How can that one act really transform my present relationship with God and my eternal future?**"¹ The answer is God's Principle of what theologians call Federal Headship. Let's define that term and then see how it plays out in Our Association with Adam and then compare it with our Association with Jesus.

What is Federal Headship?

A federal head is a person, who through a covenant or legal relationship, represents or stands in for others or a group of people. The actions of that one person, for good or bad, impact and is passed down to those he or she represents. We have examples in many ways of this in everyday life in parents, lawyers in a collective negotiation or settlement, and in some ways, but in not all ways, this is true of our federal head of our government, our President. If our federal head declares war, for example, guess what? We all are at war. You can't say, I'm not at war. If you are a citizen of the USA, you are at war. And if the President declares peace, we are

¹ Tim Keller's observation, Romans for You, p.124

also at peace. Well this principle of Federal Headship is true spiritually in God's governing of humanity. Paul is saying that Adam was the representative for all humanity that would come. Let me show you just a few of the verses that show this.

Romans 5:12

¹² Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.

¹⁵ For if the many died by the trespass of the one man [Adam]...

¹⁸ Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people.

Paul uses the word "One" 11x in these verses. This is the major point he is making: **Adam is humanity's federal head: the one representative for all people.** And because of his one sin, even though we weren't present in the garden, we reap the consequences. And those consequences are far reaching: we've inherited sin nature, corruption and destruction, condemnation and death. And these consequences affect everyone- black or white, nice people as much as cruel people, informed people as ignorant people, rich people as much as poor people; innocent infants as much as adults or any other category you can come up with.²

Now I can hear the gears turning in our heads..."Now wait, that doesn't feel fair! I didn't know Adam. **How can I be held responsible for something I had no part in?"**

Well, let me answer first by saying this principle works in other aspects of humanity. Did you have anything to do with where you were born, what you look like, what traits and natural abilities you have? Nope, it's in your genes. 23andMe will tell you all you need to know. We get physical characteristics from parents and grandparents and so on. That gets passed down. In the same way, sin is a matter of spiritual genetics. We inherit a fallen sin nature and the consequences of that nature.

You say, "But still, I didn't make the choice, so it doesn't seem fair to be held accountable for something I didn't choose." OK, but haven't you ratified that choice to rebel at some point in your life? Hasn't there been many points in your life where you have said or acted as if: I know better than God; I would rather do what I want to do than what God wants me to do? How many times in your life have you known what the right thing to do was and done the opposite? And this is true from birth. Every parent knows this. Kids come out of the womb like the seagulls in that scene from Nemo--going, "Mine. Mine. Mine. Mine."³ Has your toddler ever said, "Mom and Dad- you do so much for me, kick your feet up and let me give you a foot massage." Never happened with the Keeler boys, but maybe that's just us.

² Tim Keller, *Romans for You* observation

³ Thanks to J.D. Greear for this idea

Acclaimed child psychologist, not a Christian, named Burton White has done extensive research on early childhood development. "From 15 months on, as his self-awareness becomes more substantial, something in his nature we don't fully understand will lead him to deliberately try each one of these forbidden activities, specifically to see what will be allowed and what won't.

In other words, he will begin systematically to challenge the authority of the adults he lives with. Resistance to simple requests becomes very common at this time, and if there is more than one child around, this can be a low point in the parenting experience."⁴

"Something in his nature, which we don't fully understand...." Well, we understand it because God has revealed it to us in the Scriptures. That "something inside of him" is from his representative, Adam- his spiritual sin nature.

[Blank Slide] The reality of sin and evil and dysfunction...and the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics which implies that things move from order to disorder... all of this and more is ample proof that Adam messed up and we are all reaping the results.

OK, so this is a lot of bad news, sorry. But this is only half of the story, in fact Paul is only bringing it up to set up the great news. Paul says this whole idea of being represented by someone is actually the best thing that has ever happened to us because it set up the way of our salvation. See, there was a second Adam, the Anti-Adam, Jesus Christ that becomes our new federal head, our new representative.

¹⁵ But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

¹⁶ Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.

¹⁷ For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

¹⁸ Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. ¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

⁴ Burton White, The New First Three Years of Life

And verse 20 is really the pinnacle of the entire passage. ²⁰ *The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more,*

A better translation: "Where sin abounded, grace super-abounded"...To whatever extent Adam's sin brought about destruction, God's grace in Jesus Christ will not only cover but overflow. He then closes chapter 5 ²¹ *so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Because of our new representative, Jesus, Paul is saying we reap all his heavenly benefits. As much as we might not fully understand or even like this principle of federal headship, I thank God that He operates his cosmic economy on this principle. We might say, why should I get punished for what Adam did? Here's my question. Why should Jesus get punished for what you did? And yet he did. Why? He must think we're worth it. He must think we're worth it.

Chances are few of us have heard the name **Dashrath Manjhi**, whose nickname is the Mountain Man. He was a man who lived in the hills of India, living a quiet life, tending his goats, loving his wife. But one day, his wife slid down a slope accidentally and was injured severely, had to be taken to a hospital. The nearest hospital was 45 miles away because the road had to wind down around the mountains. They had no vehicle. Unfortunately she did not survive.

After this tragedy, Dashrath Manjhi sold his goats, bought a hammer and chisel. Get this. For the next 22 years, he dug a road through the mountain that is 30 feet high, 25 feet wide, 360 feet long to connect his village to the nearby town, reducing the drive rate from 45 miles to the hospital to 4 miles. That's what one guy did for 22 years. Now because of his one extreme act of sacrifice- all the others in the village reap the benefits of his arduous labor.⁵

Now as impressive as that is, **Jesus** is far more than our Mountain Man. Jesus chiseled through the mountain of our sin that separates us from a holy God by his labor on the wood of a cross, costing him his life. He cleared the path to God once and for all.

So, as we begin to close, let me summarize the contrast of our **two representatives: Adam and Jesus Christ.**

Two Acts: One Act of Rebellion in the garden vs. One Act of Righteousness on the cross.

Two Results: Condemnation, sin nature, death vs. Justification, righteousness, grace and eternal life.

Two Kingdoms: Sin Reigns through Adam, Grace Reigns through Christ.

And so all of this leads to **Two Choices for us today: Are you In Adam or In Jesus?**

Today, there is such an emphasis on finding our true identity in our differences like race, gender, sexuality, education, economic status... and the list goes on. Now I'm not minimizing

⁵ Thanks to Pastor Skip Heitzig for this illustration.

these differences- they are real and we need to understand them. The Bible tells us that our core identity is not found in any of these categories. The Bible says, spiritually- there are two races, two families, two identities: We are either in Adam or in Jesus. All of us are born into Adam's race. It's helpful for me to think about the fact that every person I meet is, at his or her core, sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. We may come from different backgrounds, ethnicities and identities, but we were all made in God's image and made for Him. I had an Uber ride back from the airport a couple years ago and the driver was a transgender man. This was a son of Adam made in the image of God! Just like me. He is created for God just like me; this man yearns for him even if he doesn't know what he's yearning for; he has resisted the voice of his loving Creator and suppressed the truth just like I had--but God loves him as a wandering son; Jesus was thinking about him when he died on the cross and has been working in his heart to bring him back. Every human is at his or her core is in Adam and someone that Jesus has died to redeem.

Are you in Adam or in Jesus? Well how do I change identities? Paul will go on to say in **Romans 10:9** *If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

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