

Sermon 34: Romans 5:12-14: Dying in Adam

OUTLINE

Adam

Sin

Death

INTRODUCTION

When I say the words, 'legal fiction' what comes to mind? Perhaps you would think about some of John Gresham's books which have been made into movies like *The Firm*, starring Tom Cruise, or *The Pelican Brief*, starring Julia Roberts and Denzel Washington. These books are written in the world of lawyers, and are fiction. However, the words legal fiction have a much more important understanding in the church's understanding of the Gospel. You see when Martin Luther and the other Reformers began to teach that justification is by faith, the Roman Catholic Church accused the Reformers of creating 'legal fiction.' The logic goes something like this: if justification is 'to declare someone righteous' yet the Reformers claimed that we are justified by faith and not by works, we are making God call someone who is not really righteous, righteous, and this is to create a 'legal fiction.' The Roman Catholic Church claimed that the only way to make the declaration of righteous true was if it was based on the Christian's own righteousness. They believe that original sin is cleansed in baptism, but there is also a deposit of grace. If we co-operate with that deposit of grace and produce works of love, those good deeds then become the grounds for declaring us righteous so that God does not call nothing righteous, but the righteousness of the believer. The charge of legal fiction is charging us with making God a liar for calling sinners who are not righteous, righteous. How can God declare sinners who are not righteous, righteous?

The portion that we have before us is a new section in Paul's thought. Romans 5:12-21 gives us the 'how' to this question, as well as explaining a number of other questions as well. Questions such as: why do we die? Why do is sin? Why is the world a place of suffering and sin? Where does sin come from? You will remember that Paul has been drawing out the implications of what it means now that we are justified by faith. He has been listing for us some of the most wonderful benefits and thoughts that the heart can handle. He is still on his quest to reinforce our faith and build up our assurance in this section as well. Paul is wanting us to grasp some fundamental truths that result in this assurance, 'where sinned increased, grace abounded all the more.' That however dead we were in sin, we are much more alive in Christ than we were ever dead.

We must note Paul's method as he seeks to pastor us, he uses deep doctrine and theology to build up our faith. This next section has been called the most difficult section in the book of Romans. It is full of very tight sequences of logic forcing us to put our thinking caps on. And it is full of strange and alien truths that are unfamiliar to the modern mind, things that we accept not because we fully understand them but because they are revealed in God's word. Our pride is naturally resistant to anything that cannot be verified by our own

scrutiny. We are rationalists who are not willing to believe anything until it has first been verified by our finite minds. But here in this section we are out of our depths and have to accept truths and principles that we cannot verify and have to accept on the grounds that they are God revealed. So then, as we enter this section please note it is not only your mind that is going to be stretched to comprehend these marvellous and deep truths, your willingness to accept these truths is another difficulty that we have to be aware of as we look at these verses.

I cannot stress enough the importance of the section we are getting into. Paul is revealing to us one of the fundamental pillars of his theology upon which many other truths depend. It really is one of the truths in the Bible which makes many other parts of Scripture plain. Paul reveals to us here that he sees covenantal relations being the bedrock of how God relates to His people. He helps us see how death and life, sin and righteousness, condemnation and reward are bound with up our covenant relationship to Adam or Christ. The section before us is a contrast drawn between Adam and Christ. Why Adam and Christ and not Abraham and Christ, or Moses and Christ? Well the Bible clearly reveals that Adam and Christ are unique in their covenant relationship to humanity. They are the only two men who have been placed as a legal head, as a federal head, as a covenant head whose actions can save or damn those who they represent. The whole world belongs to either Adam or Christ, we are born into Adam's family by physical birth but have to be born again into Christ's family. Paul wants to show us that since we are justified by faith, we have been made citizens of Christ's kingdom and that the benefits of Christ's actions on our behalf superabound far beyond the condemnation and death that Adam brought upon us.

Fundamental to this contrast is the doctrine of our union with Christ. This too is one of those truths that enriches every other truth. It is one of those truths that has a far reach and colours how we understand many other teachings. For example, the doctrine of election, we were elected 'in Christ;' regeneration is described as our being raised with Christ; when we are justified we are imputed with His righteousness because we are united to Him by the Spirit; sanctification is the process of the Spirit of Christ making us more and more like the head to which the Spirit unites us taking of what is His and making it ours, etc. In Romans 5:1-11 Christ is mentioned 9 times in 11 verses. Many of these references have to do with how it is only 'by' or 'through' Christ that we receive the benefits of justification. Well think of 5:12-21 as a deeper exploration of this theme of how it is by our union with Christ that the many benefits of salvation and salvation itself are ours. And as you stretch your brain trying to get a handle on intricate notions realise that Paul has one great purpose in forcing you to think so hard, so that you can be assured of your salvation in Christ.

In pointing us to the hope that we have in Christ Paul tells us about several of his other beliefs that are necessary to believing that our salvation is secure. Today as we look at 12-14 we are going to look at three of them and how they connect. What Paul believes about Adam, sin and death.

Adam

Lets begin with 5:12, '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—.' Firstly, we need to pay attention to a few mechanical points as they relate to the shape of Paul's argument as we begin. Note that Paul begins with the word 'therefore' indicating to us that the next section is not unrelated but connected to the verses we have just looked. There are some that think Paul lost his train of thought and got caught up in an unimportant oddity in these verses, but rather we have outlined and will prove that this section is tightly bound to Paul's overall purpose in establishing our assurance. Secondly, Paul begins to point out a contrast, but in order to clarify his point, he breaks off from the contrast and it is only made clear later on in the section. You will notice that he begins with the words, 'just as...' now you would expect that shortly after his first statement you would have the appropriate follow up, 'likewise/even so/also.' But having made an important point that 'sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.' He feels that statement is open to misunderstanding so he adds v13-14 for clarification so that it is not misunderstood. Paul might have failed an exam for bad style, but we need to see that he is making his argument serve his purpose, that we might understand. It have read something like this, 'just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned; so righteousness came into the world through one man, and life through righteousness, for life will spread to all in Him for they are all righteous in Him.' In this way Paul would have been drawing out a comparison between Adam and Christ showing us how each one was alternately responsible for death and life, sin and righteousness. However, Paul first statement is so controversial and unexpected, so different to what we would normally expect that he has to clarify it for his readers, and we are glad he did. So if you find yourself reading this and getting a little lost in the logical sequences, now you can see why.

Before we are able to benefit from the contrast between Adam and Christ there are a few truths we have to first assume with Paul. Firstly, notice that Paul bases his argument on the premise of a real and historical Adam. There are those who believe that it does not matter if you believe Genesis 1-3 or not, or whether there was an historical Adam or not. What we need to stress here is that Paul took the historical person of Adam seriously. Paul was not an evolutionist who believed that the person of Adam was merely a myth or a fable where animals can talk to teach us some basic truths. No Paul believed in the historical reality of Adam. This is not a luxury but a necessity for the Christian. Over and over again in the Scriptures you will see that the historical reality of Adam and Eve is presumed in the proving of various biblical truths. For example, in 1 Corinthians 11 Paul appeals to the historical reality of Adam and Eve to prove that wives are to be in submission to their husbands; in 1 Timothy 2 Paul uses the historical fact of Adam and Eve and the temptation and fall to establish that women should not preach to or have authority over a man; in James 3 James appeals to the Creation narrative of man being made in God's image as being the grounds for how we treat people; and Jesus appeals to the historical reality of Genesis 1-3 to show that divorce is not merely a reality of life but a sin and a reversal of God's original purpose for marriage before the fall. Likewise now Paul appeals to the account of the fall in Genesis

3 to prove the doctrines of sin and death. If you had to ask Paul why do we die, why do we sin? He would point you to the source of how it all began in the historical account in Genesis 3. If we deny the historical existence of Adam and the account of the fall in Genesis 3 then the whole contrast that Paul is seeking to establish collapses and we lose not only a basis for our doctrines of male headship, male eldership, our being made in the image of God, the origins of sins and death, but also the truths on which the contrast in this section rests. We lose the notion of Adam and Christ as a legal representative acting on our behalf and the benefits of their activity falling to us; we lose the covenantal basis of our original relationship to God through Adam, and will be ignorant of the covenant of works into which we are all born into; and most importantly if we undermine our relationship to a real Adam we are destroying the grounds on which Paul is positing our relationship to Christ. If we did not die in Adam we do not live in Christ, it is both or none.

So in proceeding into this portion let me ask you will you have the same view of Adam as Paul and Jesus had or are you cleverer than they are? Jesus who was the Son of God and Paul who had the Gospel revealed to him from heaven, do you by accepting the statements of present science know better than they? I pause here in order to push this point upon you because we so often allow the culture to shape our view of God's truth, here is place you cannot afford to buckle under the finite claims of science.

Sin

Secondly, Paul takes seriously the narrative of Genesis 3 where Adam and Eve are tempted by satan and fall into sin. Paul makes the statement 'sin came into the world,' what does he mean by this statement? What is the origin of sin? God did not make sin, He is not the author of sin. God made man, He spoke the world into being, but God did not create sin. Now it is true that sin could not exist if God had not allowed it, so we speak of God's permissive will in allowing sin to come into the world. Why did He allow it? That is a question neither you nor I can answer. And let me stress that any conclusions that a sinful finite mind comes to that makes God bad or guilty or unholy should be rejected off the bat. We must not entertain the prideful notion that our finite and fallen minds can conceive of God's hidden eternal thoughts and purposes, least of all accuse Him of bad government. So in wrestling with this particular truth let me remind you of your place and how far you are able to go. You can only go as far as God's word reveals. If He does not tell you His reasons why, any guessing from a finite fallen perspective that ends up with an answer where God is not perfect is a lie and should be rejected. You don't have the tools to test God's motives. However, God has not left us in the dark. Better than giving us an explanation for every action He has ever done He has revealed His character to us. So that whenever we come across God doing something that we don't understand, like allowing sin, we never need to fear that He is being bad or evil or malicious (as sinful accusing minds are prone to think) for we know that He is good and this He has proven most convincingly by giving His Son to die on the cross.

Sin was not created by God but originated in the angelic realm with satan who decided to tempt Adam and Eve. We do not have all the details but we do have a rough sketch from

various verses where Satan we are told was proud, and he wanted to be like God (Isaiah 14:14), this is the same sin with which he tempted Adam and Eve. We are not sure when Satan's sin was in relation to the temptation, but we do know that sin originated in the heart of the devil not as a creation of God. Its original form was a rejection of God, his will and our proper relationship to Him as God.

The devil then probably possessed a serpent in the garden, as the demons were able to possess the pigs in the Gospels. And by some supernatural power, as with Balaam's donkey, was able to speak through the snake to Adam and Eve. The devil did not take Adam head on but tempted him indirectly through his wife Eve. This was probably because she had only received the law of not eating from the tree and the threat of death indirectly through Adam. Instead of Adam stamping on the snake's head as soon as it opened its mouth as an abomination of God's creation; or cut its head off when it began to question the generosity of God, Adam shamed his role as protector and head by exposing his wife to the lies of the devil and death by watching her eat first.

The devil was subtle and instead of denying the truth of God's word outright he took an indirect approach calling God's word and good motives into question, notice this double pronged attack. He said in 3:1, 'Did God really say, you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?' Eve was alert to the first part but did not see the second attack. She corrected the devil's attack on God's word and we see this in her taking Adam's 'leading and teaching' role and informing the devil when she said, 'but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit that is in the midst of the garden....' (3:3) However, the second attack, where the devil brought her to questioning God's motives of goodness and generosity, this one she did not see and counter. We can see evidence of this in the fact that she added her own legalistic interpretation to God's original law making it look unreasonable, 'neither shall you touch it, lest you die.' God never said you can't touch it, but she has bought into the devil's misrepresentation of God being unreasonable and stingy, she never would have added these words if she was firmly committed to God's generosity.

The devil seeing then that he had made a space for doubt made a more frontal attack in 3:5, 'For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' Now his accusations are no longer cloaked in subtlety but are open. He is accusing God of being insecure and unwilling to give what is best to Adam and Eve. Having doubted God's character she has nothing left to fight with, all God's words can be coloured over if you will not believe He is who He says He is. So we read the sad words of 3:6, 'So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.' No longer having the truth of who God is and the proper perspective on His holy provisions as sufficient, sin now looked good. Some point out that her sin corresponds to John's description: lust of the flesh—good for food, lust of the eyes—a delight to the eyes, and the pride of life—to be desired to make one wise. Berkhof in his systematic theology highlights the various sins of the fall in this way: 'In the intellect it revealed itself as unbelief and pride,

in the will, as desire to be like God, and in the affections, as an unholy satisfaction in eating of the forbidden fruit.¹

The consequences of this action are beyond comprehension. We are told in v7 that their eyes were opened to their nakedness. This is probably indicating two new realities, firstly, they felt exposed because of the guilt of their sins, they were experiencing conviction of sin. Secondly, given the fact that they would have experienced a corruption in nature, new sinful desires and thoughts that would have related to the perversion of the gift of sexuality would have been felt.

We see next that they attempted to cover themselves, trying by their deeds to solve their sin problem covering over the guilt and the temptation to sin with mere fig leaves, not to mention not very durable.

Next we see them running and hiding from God. Terror and fear replaces the peace and friendship that once prevailed.

Next we see a break down in their own relationship with each other as they blame each other. What should not be missed in this blaming of one another is that it was not merely a playground sort of blaming. They knew that death was the punishment, in blaming each other they were trying to escape a death sentence and lay it upon someone else. Adam did not die for his bride that day, but blamed her so that God would kill her and not him. How different is Jesus Christ who takes the guilt of His bride so that He dies but she lives.

We are going to have to end here. We have only set the stage now to get at the truths that Paul is placing before us, we will pick it up next week looking at the issue of death.

¹ P223.