

Sermon 35: Romans 5:12-14: Dying in Adam: Part Two

OUTLINE

The consequences of sin

The transmission of sin

INTRODUCTION

Why do we die, why do we sin, why do we have a sinful nature, why is the world falling apart and full of suffering? These are the questions that we have begun to investigate as we look at Romans 5:12-14. You will remember that Paul is trying to assure us that we have gained more in Christ than we have lost in Adam, that where sin abounded grace has abounded all the more. We are entering a portion of Scripture that has been called one of the most difficult which consists primarily of a contrast between Adam and Christ. Now before we are able to track with Paul as he lays out the comparison before us, we first have to assume the same foundational beliefs that he does. In order for Paul to draw this comparison he first has to assume many other truths first. We have already begun to touch on those. We have looked at the fact that Paul believed in the historical Adam, and did not believe Adam was a myth. Secondly, we looked at the historical event of the fall where a real devil tempted a real Adam and Eve, and there was real sin and consequences. We broke off our discussion mid-flight last week and we are now going to pick up where we left off.

As we look with Paul at 5:12-14 we are going to look at his background beliefs in two areas all relating to sin. Firstly, the consequences of sin, secondly, the transmission of sin to all of the human race.

The consequences of sin

Cast your minds back with me then to Genesis 3, the darkest and saddest chapter in the Bible. And let us look at the very understated way in which the Scripture shows us the consequences of sin. You'll remember that Adam and Eve were tempted and have eaten the fruit. They were promised that they would be like God. Let me begin by asking, after Adam and Eve ate, did they feel like God? No, they tasted the first empty promise of sin, but far being empty it was full of poison. They felt shame, guilt and exposure so they hid away from God and threw themselves on their own works to cover them. They felt fear and trembling at the thought of God's holiness and hid away from Him, rejecting His love call to them. They felt the death hold of sin on their minds and hearts as they lied and blamed each other when confronted about their sins. Let's turn to the judgements pronounced by God in sentence upon these actions in Genesis 3:14 and following.

Firstly, God addresses the devil, and tells him that he is going to eat dust. Some have thought that the serpent had the ability to walk before the fall, this is of no consequence to the main thought of what is being said, eating dust is figure of speech relating to defeat, the

devil would perpetually have to eat dust as he waged a war against God's people. He ate dust when God did not kill Adam and Eve, but made a covenant of grace with them promising them a redeemer from their fallen race (Gen. 3:15). He ate dust when he could not turn the whole human race to sin, but Noah was righteous and once again God saved the earth from His wrath. He ate dust when Joseph became 2nd to Pharaoh; when Moses was adopted by the Pharaoh's daughter and not slain; when God rescued Israel from Egypt; when God drove the Canaanites out of the promised land. And one victory which I think is relevant to us in our suffering, the devil ate dust when Job valued God's glory above his own life and comfort. The greatest blow he has suffered was when Jesus died by his hand on the cross in fulfillment of Genesis 3:15, 'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.' The church in all generation in the OT and the NT have been a part of this conflict, and the victory blow that has won the war was struck by Christ when He offered Himself for our sins, our sins being the grounds upon which the devil had any hold over us being the accuser of the Brethren. And by dying on the cross His heel was bruised, but Christ dealt out the more deadly blow by crushing the serpent's head. Christ has bound the strong man and now we are able to rob his kingdom of souls when we go out into all nations preaching the Gospel. We take the light of truth into the darkness of their ignorance and God speaks as we speak the Gospel and the dead come to life. Every time this happens he eats dust again, and every time a church is planted he eats dust again, and every time he kills a Christian he eat dust again because death cannot kill us, we are more than conquerors in Christ.

Gen. 3:15 is probably the most important verse in Genesis 3 as it cuts across the grain of what was expected. Instead of God wiping out the human race, in wrath God remembered mercy. In punishing sin He restrained His hand from pouring out the undiluted justice that sin deserved, instead He staggered the effects of the death that came as a result of eating the fruit.

Next we see God's judgement upon the woman in 3:16, 'To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." The woman was judged in the area of her responsibilities, the areas that God had given to her, namely motherhood and being a helper to her husband. We see that childbearing would be fraught with pain, this resulted in infant death, the death of mother and child, the actual pains of childbirth, birth defects, barrenness, etc. It was because of this verse that some Christians thought that mothers should not be given epidurals or pain medication when they are giving birth, thankfully this was seen as folly. However, we also see that the woman would experience a break down in the area of her other major responsibility, being a helper. Now this verse has been very misunderstood which has led to the abandoning of the role of male headship in the church and home in our modern age. Some have looked at these words in 3:16 and thought that male headship was instituted as a part of the curse, that leadership being male is the result of sin. And so the logic would follow that if we are freed from the curse by Christ (Galatians 3:13) then we should no longer continue this sin installed institution. Although there are many good men and commentators who took this line of interpretation, this is not what the

Bible is teaching at this point. Firstly, in the NT when Paul is making his theological arguments for male headship he nowhere quotes this verse in support. Instead he talks about, Adam being formed first, and the woman being made from the man and for the man, placing his basis for his teaching before the fall in creation itself not in the curse. Secondly, we should read this verse not as the instituting of male headship but rather as a prophetic revelation of the battle of the sexes. That because of sin, there will now be chauvinism and feminism. The second part of 3:16 should be seen as descriptive of the negative effects of sin on womanhood, just as the first part is. And, when we read that 'your desire shall be for your husband.' You should read that as 'your desire will be to dominate your husband.' This reading comes from a comparison of the word desire as it is found in the very next chapter, 'If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.' (Gen 4:7). So then, male headship is not part of the curse but part of creation, the curse predicts the battle of the sexes, and now in Christ we need to aim to restore the original design of loving male leadership and submissive female helping.

Of greatest import to us though is the curse pronounced upon Adam. In 3:17, we see his sins are listed. Firstly, he failed to lead his wife and listened to her instead of to God. Secondly, he disobeyed the clear command of eating from the tree. This resulted in firstly, the ground being cursed. This is indicating the fall that occurred in Adam's dominion of creation. Adam who was the head of creation not only affected the human race but the whole creation with his sin. Paul talks about this effect further in Romans 8:19-22, 'For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.' Paul is telling us that the world we are presently living is not the good creation that God originally made, and its fall can be traced back to God's judgement on Adam. This probably accounts for earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, etc. Secondly, not only was Adam's domain but his labour was also judged, he would now have to toil in pain for food, and thistles and thorns would be a problem as well. Here we see the entrance of destructive alien life forms, and if microbiology was known back then, we might also have had a reference to germs, bacteria, diseases, and decay. Thirdly, we see that Adam will die. He was formed from the ground, and now to the ground his body will return. Here then is the death that Paul is talking about in Romans 5:12. Please note that the plunging of all of creation into the effects of sin, as well as the inevitable judgement of death is not linked with Eve's sin but with Adam's. This we will see not only reinforces the male headship established in creation, but Adam's headship, not only over Eve and creation, but all of the human race. This is a vital truth which Paul picks up on and develops at length.

Theologians speak about death in 3 ways. There is physical death which includes the effects of death in our natures tending us to corruption and our bodies to dying. Secondly, there is spiritual death which means that we are dead in spirit though alive in body, much like a zombie, this describes our separation from God. And then there is eternal death, in

other words hell! God's grace ensured that Adam did die spiritually and physically the day he ate, in fulfilment of the promise of death, but eternal death was delayed and this gave Adam the opportunity to be saved by grace, and to be finally restored in a new heavens and earth.

The transmission of sin

We are now in a position to look more closely at Romans 5:12-14. '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—.' We are now ready to talk about the doctrine of original sin. You have probably heard to that before, now we get to see what the Bible teaches about it. The doctrine of original sin is about the sin into which every human being after Adam is born in. The name 'original sin' is deliberately forcing us to think about how the original sin of Adam affects us today. And in discussing this we will see that the original sin is the source of our own sin and death.

Paul makes the connection between sin and death. We die because of sin, more specifically Paul says, 'death spread to all men because all sinned.' Now here is where the controversy begins to come into it. There have been different views with regard to how sin and death are related. We are not going to engage with those views that think that death was a part of the universe and evolution is the only reality we need to grasp. No this is not what the Bible teaches us, God made all things good and death came into the world through sin. There have been various ways in which Christians have attempted to relate sin to death, and in particular how we understand the statement, 'death spread to all men because all sinned.

The three main views are: Firstly, Pelagianism which believes that we die because we sinned ourselves. Secondly, there is the view that says we die because of God's judgement upon the corruption in our natures. Thirdly, the view I hope to defend and show you is Paul's view, we die because we have been imputed with the guilt of Adam's sin who was our legal representative. Simply put those three are, what we do, what we are, and because of Adam's imputed guilt. We are wanting to answer this question, what is the relationship between Adam and our sin and death? The answer we believe the Bible gives is this one: the effects of Adam's sin are twofold, we receive not only a polluted nature but an imputed guilt.

Firstly, Pelagius a 4th Century British Monk denied that there was any relationship between Adam and our sin and death. He taught that Adam was created neither good nor bad, but neutral, this was to preserve a particular notion of free will. He taught that there was no such thing as original sin, that there was no pollution to our natures, and that we do not inherit Adam's criminal record. To Pelagius sin is not a condition but actions. And whenever a person sinned, his/her nature was left unaffected, they resorted to their neutral position unchanged by their actions once they had been committed. Pelagius claimed that a person can perfectly keep God's law. And when he needed to explain why everybody sinned he claimed that we have all followed a bad example, and this for him is the only way sin is

passed from one generation to another. If we were to put it in terms of the nature versus nurture debate today, he would say that our sins are all because of nurture. This of course implies that we do not need to be born again, or receive the inward work of the Holy Spirit to live holy lives. Pelagius's teachings were condemned by the church in the Council of Carthage in 418, and the Council of Ephesus in 431. And if Pelagius were to interpret 5:12 he would have to say that we die for our own sins not for Adam's. This view is held today by those who do not accept the bible's teaching on a historical Adam and fall and man as having a sinful nature. This is the view held by theological Liberals who have a form of religion which has nothing to do with needing a saviour from sin, but is rather all about doing good, their view of man's ability encouraging them in these false views. This is also the theology that you find in most Hollywood heart-warming films or sitcoms, that we are basically good, but are just victims or misguided and we just need people to believe in us and we can out of our own potential do great things. We can save ourselves given the right conditions.

John Murray lists four reasons why Pelagius is wrong: Firstly, there are many historical examples of people who have died without sinning, in particular we need to think of the many babies that die in the womb. We need to give an account of this reality from Paul's words in Romans 5:12. Secondly, Paul goes on in v13-14 to argue that there are those who sinned, but NOT like Adam yet died. Thirdly, 5 times in this section Paul emphasizes how it is through 'one man,' 'one man's trespass,' and 'one trespass,' making it impossible that Paul is thinking about every individual who dies dying for their own sins when he explicitly links it to Adam's actions. Fourthly, if we say that we all die individually for our individual sins, then the contrast that Paul is trying to construct falls apart for then we would have to argue that likewise we are all saved by our own individual righteousness. However, Paul is showing us that we are condemned by another's sins, just as we are saved by another's righteousness.

The next view attributes our death to the fact that we inherit a sinful nature in Adam, as opposed to have his guilt imputed to us. This view has two facets to it. There is the view that is called, 'mediate imputation,' and what is meant by these words is simply that God judges us guilty on account of the corruption of our natures, for what we are and not for what we do. Then there is another view which is called 'realism' and it teaches that humanity sinned in Adam, and we were all in his loins, that is we were actually there in the substance of his humanity, so that the sin is ours though indirectly as it comes through the nature that participated in Adam's sin though I was not there personally.

However, this view too needs to be rejected because the emphasis in Paul is on Adam's one sin, not a transmitted nature by which we are held guilty. And secondly, we cannot carry the contrast that Paul is seeking to establish if we try and prove our guilt by what we are. For if we say that we were condemned in Adam because of the corrupt natures we received, then we would have to follow it through and say that we are justified by an inherent righteousness, not a gift of righteousness as Paul states in various places.

We come now then to what Paul is actually trying to tell us. We sinned when Adam sinned, and died when Adam died, because he was representing us and his actions were imputed to

us. Now Paul had made this simple statement in v12, 'so death spread to all men because all sinned--.' However, knowing that there would be those who would not get his full meaning he breaks into his own comparison and clarifies what he means. Paul is not unaware of the difficulty of this teaching and he anticipates how it could be misunderstood, so he adds v13-14, '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.' Paul uses the time between Adam and Moses, a time when there was no clear law from God like what we have in the Garden and the 10 Commandments, that is no clear law with a death penalty attached apart from the death penalty for murder in Genesis 9. Yet he points out, although there is a lack of laws carrying the death penalty, everybody dies. He is telling us that the reason everybody dies is because they had already sinned and died in Adam. He is using this simple argument to show that we should not be thinking as we ordinarily would when it comes to being responsible for sin, that we are all accountable for our own actions, Paul is demonstrating something different. He is talking about guilt that comes through the actions of another.

He points out at the end of v14 that the way in which we sinned and died in Adam is the basis upon which we are to understand our being saved in Christ. He points out that Adam is a type for Christ, that is he demonstrates certain principles about how we are saved in Christ. Now please remember that I told you we are going to be confronted with strange and alien ideas that our natural fallen minds will want to reject, we have already noted the problem of God allowing sin, the reality of a historical Adam, now we are looking at the difficult teaching of the imputation of Adam's guilt. And not only the imputation of Adam's guilt, but also the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

God has chosen to deal with the human race through representatives, 1 Cor. 15:21-22, 'For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.' Also 1 Cor. 15:47-49, 'The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. 48 As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.' This may be an alien concept to you, but it is not without precedent in our experience. For example, if we think about an ambassador, he is one man who represents a nation. Or if we think about a nation signing a treaty of surrender, when Japan surrendered in WWII, the emperor signed the surrender. Likewise, God in His wisdom has set over us legal heads, and only two who can save or damn us in Adam and Christ. Many in our day resent being represented by another, we live in an age where we hate our politicians who represent us and spare them no criticism when it comes to criticising their policies and actions on our behalf. So we find it hard to recognise that God has chosen to save and damn us through these covenantal heads. Perhaps some of you would like to think that if you had been Adam you would not have sinned. Let me suggest to that the method God designed is better and wiser than any other possible scenario than you can think of. You might think that a universe without a devil, or the fall, or each person representing themselves would be better. Forgive me I don't think that you

are cleverer than God and gladly submit to His ways even though I struggle to comprehend them. Let me end with one closing thought. If you do not like the fact that God has caused the fall of the human race in Adam, then by the same token you must not like Him saving us in Adam. For just as He has caused us to be guilty and die through the first Adam, He has caused those who have believed to be made righteous and alive through the Last Adam. Without this principle of representation you would not be righteous by another's righteousness, and salvation would have to be of your own making. I hope you can see and rejoice in the wisdom of God, and wonder at His ways as you behold them.