

Romans: The Broken Covenant of Works Brought Death into the World

Romans 5:12-14

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans, chapter 5. It's been a month since we've been in Romans together, so let me refresh your memories. In Romans 1 and 2 the apostle tells us what the problem is. Our problem. The problem of sin and estrangement from God. Rebellion against Him. In Romans, chapter 3 he sets forth God's solution, the only solution to our predicament, and that is justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. He set forth the atoning work of Jesus Christ, he set forth the importance of our trust in Him and in Him alone as God's way of salvation, as His resolution to our predicament. In Romans, chapter 4 he defends that particular view from scripture. Particularly, he shows that it is an Old Testament idea that we are justified by grace through faith in Christ alone. Paul does not want to be accused of being an innovator in that regard. He wants to make it clear that he did not come up with the idea of God saving His people by grace alone. So he demonstrates justification by faith from the Old Testament, especially from the story of Abraham and David.

Having done that in Romans, in chapter 5, in the portion that we've already studied in verses 1 through 11, he begins to draw some implications from this glorious doctrine of justification. He tells us, for instance, at the beginning of Romans 5, that because we are justified by faith, we have peace with God. We are literally at peace with God. We've been reconciled. He has been reconciled to us. So now for the first time in our experience we have peace with God.

He furthermore tells us that because we are justified by faith we have reason to rejoice in sufferings. He tells us that because we are justified by faith, we have an experience of being awash in the love of God, and He tells us that because we are justified by faith, we have no need to fear the final judgment. We have no need to fear the great tribulation. We shall be brought through it, and in it we shall glory in Him because we are secure in the one who has died for us.

Now having reminded ourselves again of those things which Paul has been speaking about, Paul is now about to launch into a new section of the book. From

Romans, chapter 5, verse 12 all the way to Romans, chapter 8, verse 39, Paul is going to do a little bit of a recapitulation. He's not going to say the same thing over again, but what he is going to do is he's going to say, "Now, having heard what I've said so far, I want you to understand what is behind what I have said. What are the presuppositions? What are the theological points and premises on which what I've told you about the gospel so far is based? And that's where we are in Romans, chapter 5 and we'll begin in verse 12. This is God's holy word. Hear it tentatively and relevantly:

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin. And so death spread to all men because all sinned; for until the law, sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of him who was to come.

Amen, and thus ends this reading to God's holy and inspired word. May He add His blessings to it. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, this is Your word. We ask this day as we come to it that as we understand it You would enhance our gratitude for the grace that You have shown to us; or if we have not yet tasted of that grace in Jesus Christ, that in the very hearing of this word, we would be driven to Him. This we ask earnestly in Jesus' name, Amen.

Why can't we save ourselves by our own works? Why can't we do it? Why can't we do something to make up for our sin? There are a lot of people who think that's how you're saved. You do a few things wrong, you do a few things to make up for it and even out the account and you're accepted by God. Why doesn't it work that way? There's a sense in which Paul, having gotten to Romans, chapter 5, verse 11, wants to pause right there and pull back and look at the presuppositions to which he has said, and he wants to explain to you again that salvation doesn't work that way. Why is that we can't contribute anything to our salvation. Why is it that we can't be justified any other way than by faith in Christ alone?

Well, beginning in Romans 5, verse 12, Paul supplies you a very ample answer to that particular question, and I'd like you to follow his argument with me for a few moments. Paul is saying that everything that he has told you previously about the human predicament, about your sinfulness. And remember Romans 1 and Romans 2 where he talked about our sinfulness in heart. We didn't worship God as we knew that we ought to worship him. He's talked to us about our sinfulness and perversion where we've actually inverted what God said. We glorified those things which He condemned, we have condemned those things which He glorified. We've worshipped the creature rather than the creator. We've perverted justice, we've perverted morality. So, he speaks to us of our sinfulness

in heart. He speaks to us of our sinfulness in behavior, he speaks to us about sinfulness in worship, in all those ways. But in all those ways as he demonstrated our need for redemption, what had he done? He had focused on our sins.

Now, he says, think about that predicament that I've already talked about. You are sinful, you're in need of reclamation. But I want you to think about it a little bit differently now. I have talked to you in the past about your sinfulness, in view of your own personal sin, and perhaps the sin of your particular group, whether you be Jew or Gentile. Now, however, I want you to think in terms of your sinfulness because of the fact that you are related to Adam. I want you to think of your sinfulness in light of the fact that you are under Adam, your head and representative, and he sinned and rebelled against God, and because he sinned and rebelled against God, you are justly condemned. Let me just pause right there. Don't argue with me, yet. I know there are already some people saying, "That's not fair, Paul." We'll get to a chance to let you argue in a few moments. But right now hear Paul's argument out. You can start probing him with questions in a moment. But unless you understand what he is asserting, you won't understand the answers to your questions about what he is asserting.

Paul is saying, because we are in Adam, we bear responsibility and we are accountable to God because of his sin rebellion and defection. However unfair that may seem to you, understand what Paul is saying about it. This doctrine is called original sin. It has been one of those doctrines which people have loved to hate for years. But it's right here in Romans, chapter 5. And Paul clearly thinks it is important for us to understand it in order to understand and appreciate the gospel. And he says, I want you to think of yourselves as in Adam. You're part of his race. You're descended from him. You're descended from him ethically and morally. You act like he acted.

But more significantly than that, Paul is saying, Adam was your covenant head and representative. What Adam did, he did as a public person, he did as your federal representative. He acted as if you were acting when he acted in the garden in taking that forbidden fruit. And because of that, I want you to understand yourself in that light, I want you to understand that if you are in Adam, you are under an old order of existence, and in that old order of existence, there is only sin, death and judgment.

Now the reason Paul is raising this point is so that we will be able to contrast Adam and being in Adam with Christ and being in Christ. Adam the negative example. Christ the positive example.

But you will notice in verse 12 that Paul didn't even get to that part of his argument. You need to understand that Paul begins a statement in verse 12 that he does not complete until he gets to verse 18. Now already you're thinking to yourself, "Boy, I understand what Peter meant when he said that there were things in Paul's writings that were hard to understand." Okay, I hear you, but it's

not that hard. What Paul is going to say is going to be hard to swallow, but it's not going to be that hard to understand. In fact, in verse 12, Paul makes an assertion; In verse 13 and 14 all he does is prove those assertions. I'd like to look at three things with you today.

Before you do that though, notice, looking at verse 12, that Paul begins a sentence that he does not finish. And he does not finish that sentence until verse 18. You can see it. Look at the *just as* and the *even so*. *Just as* always begins as a clause that's going to be followed up by another clause that begins with *even so* or *so also*. Okay. Look at verse 12. You get the *just as*, but you don't get the *so also*. Where is the *so also*? Look at verse 18, "So then just as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men," he's basically repeating just what he said in verse 12. "So also, even so, through one act of righteousness, there resulted justification for all like men. So understand the structure of Paul's argument. He starts off in verse 12. In the middle of his statement, he's thinking, you know they're not going to have a clue what I'm saying unless I tell them something else in five more verses. So he stops right there in the middle of a sentence; plunk right in the middle of a sentence, and he plugs in a very long explanatory paragraph. And then he comes back to his sentence again; he repeats the first half, and he gives you the sentence again. So the whole point of this section is to parallel Adam to Christ. To compare them and to contrast them to show what it means to be in Adam and to show what it means to be in Christ.

But the reason he's showing you this is so you will appreciate how grave your predicament is. Your problem is not nearly that you do a few sins here and there. Your problem is not nearly that you make a mistake every once and a while, and you need to be tidied up. The problem is more pervasive, it's more comprehensive, it's deeper, it's more intractable than that. And Paul knows that unless you know what he is about to tell you in these verses you won't be able to appreciate that. So here are three things that we learn in the passage. For clarity, verse 12, point 1, our problem. Verse 13, proof of his point in verse 12, part 1. Verse 14. Proof of his point of his point in verse 12, part 2. There's your outline. Three points.

I. Our problem - we sin because we are sinners.

Let's take the first verse and begin. Verse 12. "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin. And so death spread to all men because all sinned. What is Paul talking about here? Paul is telling you what our problem is. And the problem is this. We sin because we are sinners. Now it's very important for you to hear what Paul is saying. We sin because we are sinners. In other words, it is not that we are sinners because we sin, but rather that we sin because we are sinners. The problem of our sin is that we are constitutionally sinners. We are sinners by nature because we are united with

Adam. If we are not trusting in Jesus Christ; and we are human beings, we are united to Christ and we are constitutionally sinners. And that is the point that Paul is making in verse 12. We sin because we are sinners. It's not just because we do certain sins, we perform certain sins that we are called sinners. It is that those sins flow from a nature which is itself corrupted by sin at its core. And you see this in what Paul says in verse 12. Just as through one man's sin entered into the world, and death through sin, so death spread to all men because all sinned.

And you're saying to me I don't follow that. It sounds like Paul is saying Adam sinned, death came into the world because of that sin, death spread to all men because all men individually sinned. That's not what Paul is saying. Paul is saying Adam sinned, death invariably accompanies sin and so the presence of death in the world means that there is sin in the world which means there is nothing wrong in the world. And, all men were implicated in that sin and death because of Adam's sin. See, we could really translate that passage 'just as one man's sin entered into the world and so death spread to all men, because all men sinned in Adam.' Paul's point is not to talk here as he did earlier about your particular sins. You see it would be true if you said because of Adam's sin, we sin. That's true. That's a true theological statement. I could give you a zillion Scripture references to back it up. That's not what Paul's talking about here. Paul is saying, you sinned. You, you're sitting there in the pew, you're alive, you're breathing. You sinned in Adam. Paul's argument is that sin entered into the world through sin and death through sin. And death spread because all sinned in Adam. That is, sinners are united to Adam. He is our head and our representative. And what he did had implications for us. It's not simply that we're sinful because we do specific sins, it is because we are by nature sinners. And Paul is arguing here, among other things, that death in the world is the result of sin, and the proof of the violation of God's covenant of works. Paul's argument is that all have sinned in Adam, not that they have individually sinned as a consequence of Adam's sin, though that's true, but that they had actually sinned in Adam.

Now I want you to think about this for a moment. I'm not sure whether I buy that. That looks like he's talking about the individual sins of people. Let me give you six passages in this larger passage that make it clear that Paul is not talking about your individual sins, he's talking about Adam sin. First, look at verse 15. In verse 15, Paul says, "For many died by the trespass of the one man." Notice, he didn't say the many died because of their own sins. That might be true, but that's not what he said. The many died because of the trespass of one man.

Notice again verse 16. He speaks of the result of the one man's sin, not the result of your sins, but the result of the one man's sin. Notice again second half of verse 16. He says the judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation.

In verse 17 he says, "By the trespass of one man, death reigned through that one man." He doesn't say through the trespasses of us all sin reigned. That would be

true, but that's not what he said. Through the trespass of one man.

Verse 18. The result of the one trespass was condemnation for all men.

In verse 19, through the disobedience of one man, the many were made sinners. Clearly throughout this passage what is Paul concerned with? Adam's sin, and it's implications for us.

In other words, Paul is saying the problem of sin is far deeper than you are usually willing to admit. Apart from Christ it is not simply that you from time to time do things which are out of accord with God's word. The problem of sin is that by nature, if you're not in Christ, by nature you are a sinner. You have inherited from Adam a sinful nature; but you have also, because Adam is your representative, been implicated in Adam's sin. In other words, Paul is saying this so we will say, "Oh, well no wonder we can't save ourselves. We're involved in something that is so much bigger than us, so much deeper than our own outward and superficial desires and actions may be, that we need rescue from the outside.

And Paul is sitting there waiting for you exactly. You do need rescue from the outside. Your redemption can't be affected by your turning over a new leaf. Making a few resolutions, tidying up this and that area of your life where you have some problems or mistakes or some shortcomings. It's more radical than that. It goes to the heart of who you are. It goes to the heart of the race. It goes to the very first man who stood in as representation of all men. Adam the representative, Adam, the federal head. You are guilty in Him.

I know there are a lot of you that are saying, "But that's not fair." I understand that. I'll help you as we work through this passage understand a little bit more of why this is a just way of God's working. But consider this for a moment. Even in the Scripture we have examples of people standing in and doing things which have implications for the whole of the people of God. Think of David and Goliath. Now there's a story that you learned as a child. And in the story, you remember that the deal was whoever won the hand-to-hand combat between Goliath and whomever Israel's representative was going to be, won the battle. If Goliath won the battle, the Philistines won the battle. If the representative of Israel won the battle then Israel won the battle. "Well that's fair," you might say, but that was the deal. That's the way it was.

We see this, of course, in human history, as well. There's a fascinating story from the Scottish wars of independence, Robert the Bruce had been in rebellion against the King of England was the first, and then his son, Edward II for maybe fifteen years or so. A British army marched north to Sterling in Scotland and laid siege to the castle. Robert's army was there. On the very first day of the battle, Robert was out inspecting his troops. When Sir Henry De Bohun, who was reckoned by some to be the third greatest knight in Christendom, and who was in

Edward II's English army, saw Robert the Bruce out in front of his troops, he said, "This is my change for glory. I am going to engage Robert the Bruce in hand-to-hand combat, and I'm going to kill him." So he went charging across the marshes on this giant horse of his, charging against the King of Scotland. Now it's a very interesting story, and I can't tell you a lot of it. But to make a long story short, if Robert the Bruce had been killed in that hand-to-hand combat that day, it would not have been, 'Oh well, the Scottish army goes home that night and regroups and fights again tomorrow.' That would have been not only it for the battle, that would have been it for the Scottish independence because Robert the Bruce was the only claimant to the throne in Scotland. If he dies, the war of Independence is over. So in that case, that hand-to-hand combat between the Bruce and De Bohun was the whole show. Bruce loses, game over. Now hint, he didn't lose. I'll tell you that story later. It's great. But the point is, what one man did had implications.

Now we live in the day of genetics. It's maybe a little less difficult for us to swallow the fact that somebody can have an impact on you, and you have no say in it. I have a friend whose family has a genetic eye condition that is passed along. His children have no say in whether they receive that eye condition or not. They may or they may not. And they'll have absolutely no say in it. And you say, "Well, that's not fair." Well, I'm not ready to answer that question yet. We'll get there. But it is the way it is. We know this even psychologically. I'm thinking of a friend right now whose father left his father when he was a little boy. His dad in many ways never, ever got over that desertion on the part of his father. And it has impacted my friend profoundly in numerous ways. My friend had nothing to do with that action. But he was impacted by that action.

Suffice it to say that Paul is saying that you are all impacted by Adam's sin. Not only subjectively, so that you follow his objective, but objectively so that he was your representative. He stood in for you, and as he stood in for you, and as he rebelled against God, you are implicated in that rebellion. And you might say, "I don't like that." Paul says, You shouldn't like that. But there's only one way out of that; and that's to get a new representative, and he's the One that I want to tell you about - Jesus Christ. But Paul isn't to that point in his argument yet. What he's wound up doing now is convincing you that what he's already said in verse 12 is true. And that's all I want to spend the rest of our time today doing.

II. Proof of the problem, part 1 - Universal sin demonstrates universal law.

Verse 13 is simply Paul's proof that what he said in verse 12 is true. Is it true that we sin because we are sinners? Is it true that we are constitutionally united with Adam and implicated in his guilt? Paul says, let me give you two lines of proof that what I have just said is true. First of all he says, 'for until the law, sin was in the world but sin is not imputed where there is no law.' In other words, Paul says universal sin demonstrates universal guilt. Universal sin demonstrates universal

law. Paul says here that there was sin in the world before the giving of Moses' law. And so there must have been a law to break. You can't sin, you can't transgress unless there is something to transgress. You can't sin unless there is a law.

And so Paul is saying, Look, I know that Moses' law was not given until Sinai, but guess what? We also know that there was sin in the world before Sinai. You can see it in the lives of the patriarchs. Therefore, there was a law in the world before Sinai, and it was broken. Sin was in the world before the giving of Moses' law, and so there must have been a law to break. And for Paul, that establishes that all men are under the covenant of works. God has given a command, all men are to give obedience to it. All men have been given a command, all men are to give obedience, they haven't, they've broken the law. They are under that covenant of works. That's the first part of his argument. He says you can look out there in the world, and even the people who have not hear the law of Moses, sin." That shows that there is a law over them. That shows that they have an obligation to keep the law. That shows that they have violated that obligation, and they are guilty. All men are under obligation to obedience to God because of the covenant of works.

Our *Confession of Faith* gives a beautiful outline of Paul's point here in the sixth chapter. If you take your hymnals out and turn to the back, I think it's page 852, look at the top of the page, sections 1 through 4. This is how *The Confession* summarizes it: "Our first parents being seduced by the subty and temptation of Satan sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin God was pleased according to His wise and perfect counsel, having purposed to order it to His own glory. By this sin, they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God. And so became dead in sin. And wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body." Now you might think well, that's it. They sinned. They bear the consequences. Look at section 3. "They, being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed." It was charged to your account. "And the same death in sin and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation." That's you and every other human being except Jesus who did not descend from Adam by ordinary generation. But was the only, begotten Son of God. And so *The Confession* goes on to say, "from this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed and made opposite to all good and holy and inclined to all evil, do proceed to all transgressions." In other words *The Confession*, which is simply paraphrasing Paul, is saying, "The problem of sin is much deeper than you're doing something wrong from time to time. Your wrongdoing flows from a heart which has been corrupted by sin which itself flows from the original sin of Adam, which itself is a manifestation of the fact that you are in Adam, you are under bondage to his judgment. As he rebelled, you are implicated. That's part one of Paul's proof of what he said in verse 12.

II. Proof of the problem part 2 - Universal reign of death from Adam to

Moses proves the effect of his sin on us.

Here's part two, look at verse 14. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam. Here's proof of the problem, part 2. The universal reign of death from Adam to Moses proves the effect of Adam's sin on us. Everyone is under the penalty of the violated covenant of works. In other words, Paul is saying that when you look at the Bible, and you look at the time from Adam to Moses what do you see? Everybody dies. Everybody dies. Now they haven't been given the law of Moses until that point. They haven't been given that special revelation of the law of God from Moses' mouth at Sinai. "But even amongst those who haven't sinned against that special revelation, death reigned," Paul says. And that proves the radical and universal nature of sin. And it proves our solidarity with Adam in sin. Paul is saying that despite the fact that Moses' law had not yet been promulgated, that before the time of Moses, death reigned. And that is an evidence that Adam's sin had an impact on everybody. If we are to be extracted from this predicament, we are not going to be able to do it ourselves, because we are involved in a web, in a complex of sin that is bigger than we are. If we are going to be extracted from this predicament, we require a mediator who is simultaneously like us and not like us. He is fully human, but he is without sin, and he comes from outside our predicament, and not under the bondage of sin which we are in Adam. And Paul is saying that is precisely what Jesus Christ does. Jesus Christ comes into the world to redeem people that are in this position. It's not just that they need to turn over a new leaf, or make changes in their lives, or get their act together. That's not Christianity. Christianity is not doing your best to make yourself a little better. We're in a much worse situation than that.

This is so important to remember in evangelism. I had an evangelism professor in seminary who said, now look, when you're evangelizing, don't tell people this. Don't tell them what Paul said in Romans 5. They'll get all hung up on it. Talk about their sins. Why, I understand that to a certain degree, but you understand that Paul is telling you this precisely; because if you don't know this, and if you don't understand it, you won't be able to evangelize. Because evangelism is not about getting somebody to switch from brand X to brand Y. It's not about you changing your name brand loyalty. It's not some sort of a detached decision that you make. You are involved in the greatest predicament that ever existed, and you have not a clue about how to extract yourself from it nor anyway to effect your extraction from it. In evangelism we are sharing the message that God has done something to draw you out of that predicament, unilaterally, by himself, and you must receive it by faith. That is very, very different than sort of presenting the merits of one case, and the merits of the other, and saying, "Okay, it's up to you now." The consumer approach. I've got the better brand, try it, your life will be better.

Christianity, you see, is not making a new start in life, you see. It's receiving a

new life to start with. And here in Romans, chapter 5, Paul is telling you why that is. Because you were involved in such a web of sin that you that could never extract yourself from it. I'm thinking right now of a young man reared in an abusive home. His wife has born the marks of that abuse in his own rebellion. He is the recipient of things which he himself contributed nothing to. But he now bears the effects of it. If it is difficult for a counselor to come along side of that young man, and to bring restoration to his life, how much greater is the difficulty to redeem a people that are to the very core of their heart involved in a sin which has been existing and growing in our humanity for 6,000 years. Jesus alone can redeem that kind of person. Those kinds of people. And Paul is here to tell you that He can conquer there. But until you appreciate how bad the fix is, you'll never see how glorious the fix is to the fix. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we thank You for Paul's blunt words. None of us likes to hear that we are sinners in Adam. None of likes to hear about the implications of his actions upon us. But at the same time, *none of us can deny those implications. Help us then to flee to the only place for hope, which is Jesus Christ, who was like us and yet not like us. He was human in every square inch of what it means to be human, and yet without sin. And He obeyed the law perfectly, and he bore the penalty of the law that we might be rescued out from this web of sin. Help us to then flee to Him. In Jesus' name we ask it, Amen.*

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