

## Two Men Deciding Our Lives for Us

### The Role of Adam and Christ

Revised July, 2009 – Notes designed to accompany a sermon on **Romans 5:12-21** by David H. Linden

[http://www.grebeweb.com/linden/two\\_men.html](http://www.grebeweb.com/linden/two_men.html)

Adam: To understand salvation, we must understand the structure of all human life. God created man in a family structure. The first man was united to his partner and others of his kind came from them. This kind of family structure is unknown to angels who live and act as individuals. In this sense man is more like God than angels are! God is a family of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Furthermore, God made mankind to have a head, namely Father Adam. To this head God committed the duty to decide for us all that we would be righteous. But Adam decided we would be sinners. By this I mean not that Adam decided our sins, but just that we would be sinners. It was a decision that has shaped all human history since, except for the other Man Who came to earth and stepped into Adam's shoes. When Adam became a sinner by choice; we too became sinners by that choice he made for us. This Biblical doctrine is not widely thought about these days; it is not popular; it is not mainstream; it is often not even believed among Christians. In the world around us, it is the silliest doctrine one can imagine. "Someone long ago decided our life today – how preposterous!!" It is, however, Biblical and taught in this text in very clear language.

Christ: Adam was a pattern for "the One to come," v.14. After Adam's sin, God did not change the structure of the human family. He provided a new leader for us, inserting His Son into this world as a fully human person. God sent Him to take Adam's place, to fill that vacancy, and to give what some might call a "second chance". We are all sinners, so we do not get a chance to obey God again so that we can be justified. The gospel is that a new man from outside came in to do that for us, Jesus Christ. As the new man, Christ did the opposite of Adam – He obeyed. Like Adam, He represented His children and made a decision for us outside our lifetime, beyond our ability and without our consent, support, or participation. It was absolutely undemocratic; we elected neither leader and they did not act according to our wishes. It was far more monarchical and familial, a father deciding for his children. Representation, the opposite of autonomy, cuts across the grain of our age. The way Christ represented His people was to obey for us, deciding our status as righteous, and to die for us, moving to Himself the penalty God's law once held against us. Our salvation sits on this structure, a "one for others" representation, where Jesus Christ decided our right standing with God and thereby secured eternal life for us.

ADAM: The result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, v.18. The judgment followed one sin, v.16. Many died by the trespass of the one man, v.15. Sin entered the world through one man, v.12. Through the disobedience of the one man, the many were made sinners, v.19.

CHRIST: The result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men, v.18. Through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous, v.19.

### The Flow of Romans 5:12-21

Two streams course through this section. While they are as different as heaven and hell, they have this in common: **The doctrine moves from an act to a judgment to a consequence.** In the case of Adam, the act is sin, and therefore God's judgment (condemnation), and the resulting penalty (death). In the case of Christ the flows is: obedience, which merits justification (i.e. God's approving declaration of righteousness), and the reward of eternal life.

Frequently the idea of a *judgment* is limited to a penalty. That is only half the picture. Whatever a judge decides is his judgment. A judgment may go either way. He may acquit or find someone guilty. So it is with God; condemnation means the person is judged to be guilty. Justification means he is found to be not guilty, so he is acquitted or pronounced innocent, and declared to be righteous. Both condemnation and justification state a judicial ruling.

The action by a person	The judicial ruling of God	The resulting experience
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That way of saying it applies equally to Adam and Christ, but in both cases the action, ruling, and result are opposites. We need a larger chart.

	Action by Either Representative	God's Judicial Ruling	God's Decision Executed
<b>Adam</b>	Sin	Condemnation	Death
<b>Christ</b>	Obedience	Justification	Resurrection and Life

### The Action of Adam

Paul is not describing the detail of Adam's eating the forbidden fruit. He speaks rather of the character of the act. A journalist might describe a murder with a weapon adding detail of where a victim was struck, how many times, what pain it caused, and the precise cause of death. The same crime could be evaluated as cruelty, a shameful act, a betrayal of trust, a violation of law, etc. Romans 5 is not narrative. This text's focus is on the significance of Adam's act, described as "sin" (vv.12,16), "disobedience" (v.19), "trespass" (v.15), and "the breaking of a command" (v.14). Picking fruit and eating it are not mentioned.

Romans 5 says nothing of Eve who also sinned, because she was not the head of the human race, so her eating of the forbidden tree did not represent anyone other than Eve. We should note that the moment of disobedience was one sin. That was enough to cause death to reign over all of us thereafter. It was not an offense that would bring a major penalty today; in fact it would be viewed as petty crime. We lose the significance of Adam's sin any time we overlook that it was a conscious defiance of the command of God.

### **The Action of Christ**

Our Lord's obedience was just as deliberate as Adam's sin. His conduct is called **"righteousness"** and **"obedience."** He came born of a woman under the law and was obedient to it all His life (Galatians 4:4). It was an obedience of purity unknown in anyone else in history, produced in the frailty of human flesh, against the temptations of Satan, and unassisted by the fellowship of His friends. It was produced in the fullness of the Spirit Whom God gave to Him without measure (Romans 8:3; John 3:34). The climax of that obedience was His offering on the cross (Philippians 2:8). So a key contrast in Romans 5 is the disobedience of Adam and the obedience of Christ. One Man acted in righteousness; the other committed a trespass. Both Adam's sin and Christ's righteousness are historical realities that occurred under the eye of God. Both brought a divine judicial declaration upon their actions, upon themselves, and upon their constituencies.

### **The Condemnation Brought on by Adam's Sin**

Paul begins by speaking of a certain kind of consequence. *"By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin!"*, v.12. Death has some cause. So Paul begins with the transgression, a transgression that has affected everyone, even people between Adam and Moses who lived before the law was given to Moses. He connects cause and its eventual result. But there is another crucial element that logically comes between sin and the experience of death, namely the legal side, where Adam is judged to be guilty which is what it means to stand before God condemned.

In criminal proceedings:

- there is first a transgression of a law,
- then a charge with a chance to plead guilt or innocence;
- if the charge is contested, evidence must be presented;
- when that is finished, there is a decision, either by a judge or jury, the climax of which is the declaration of guilt or innocence. (This obligation is the chief role of a court, separate from police work and the execution of penalties.)
- Only then is the person released if cleared, or punished (outside the court) if guilty.

Paul simplifies this order without rearranging it. That order is: the act, the legal decision of condemnation, and finally death. It is not wrong to say a man was hanged for murder. We all speak in such sweeping phrases as Paul did in v.12. Saying a man was hanged for murder is a simplification. If it was a legal hanging and not a lynching, it had to be that the man who murdered was first found guilty of it (i.e. condemned) and then hanged. Guilt means that a sin is judicially established as sin. That is why our newspapers are careful to say that a man has been charged, or that a crime is alleged. They do not speak judicially and say, "Last night a man was murdered downtown and the murderer was picked up shortly after near the scene of the crime." The crime is reported but the guilt of the charged man has yet to be properly established in a court. Newspapers are careful to use words like "suspects".

In God's court, sinners and the ones cleared both have a legal standing. To sinners, God is the offended party, witness, prosecutor, judge, and executioner. To those who are saved, He is the redeemer, forgiver, the judge declaring us righteous, the one who remembers offenses against us no more, and our defender.

When man dies, he simply experiences the penalty for sin. If God is God Who rules justly over all, then we must be guilty, or the Judge of all the earth has done wrong in executing a sinner without establishing guilt. Romans 5 does not deny our guilt for our sins. But our independent guilt for *our* sins is not what this passage is speaking about. Romans 5:12-21 is focused on guilt brought on us through another person's sin, Adam's. He sinned for us. In Adam all mankind begins in a state of condemnation. We begin with guilt acquired in Adam and then continue in our own.

The Great Parallel      I do not say we stand accused of Adam's specific sin, but that he represented us in such a way that we sinned in him and so we are justly condemned as a result of his sin. What we mean and do not mean is worth further consideration. When we are justified, we are not considered the ones who did the acts of Jesus' lifetime. We did not do the preaching, praying, healing, teaching, rebuking, and comforting that He did. We did not live His life of obedience, yet God grants us the righteousness of Christ without ever saying we did His righteousness. Neither are we viewed as those who actually ate the forbidden fruit. God does not make false statements by rewriting the facts of history. The sinner's condemnation is simply that God considers him to be what Adam became, namely "sinner", and then God treats sinners accordingly. The justified soul is justified apart from any obedience of his own, and without God ever claiming that Jesus' compliance with God's law is what we have actually done. In Christ we are declared obedient, righteous, and acceptable, so that we have that new standing before God. The imputation of Adam's sin is that identified with him, we are declared to be sinners. The imputation of Christ's righteousness involves no legal fiction, since in union with Him by faith we are simply declared to have as a gift the official status "righteous". For this reason, God then treats us as righteous.

What about Babies?      What of humans who have not sinned for themselves? Babies may die in the womb; some die the day they are born or shortly after. And this happens before they are able to comprehend a transgression. They had made no decision to break any commandment. Where is their guilt? If they are sentenced to death by God in early infancy, what is their disobedience? What is their trespass?

The Christian answer is that Adam represented them and sinned for them and they in him. His disobedience (not his consumption of the forbidden fruit) became theirs. He had made a decision for them in their place and the "credit" (or demerit) for his act of transgression was considered by God as theirs. (We say it was imputed to them.) They did not do what Adam did, but Adam's sin established them as sinners before they even got a chance to commit a sin, and so they are truly guilty. In this state of acquired guilt, for which they did nothing, they die. They did not do the offense but gained from their father the guilt. Condemnation always means that the condemned one is found guilty. When Adam sinned all sinned (5:12), that is, all of us sinned in him. All of us were condemned, and we all face death.

No one believes this but Christians. It is in Adam that all die (1 Corinthians 15:22). He sinned for us. One single trespass of his resulted in our condemnation! (Romans 5:18). Man is credited with Adam's sin. The guilt of it is as much ours as if we had eaten the forbidden fruit ourselves. In other words, God has condemned us in Adam for the offence our representative made for us. If a lawyer acts in another man's name and makes motions in a court or gives arguments, the represented client cannot go back to the judge after a verdict and say what his lawyer said was not his defense. What the representing lawyer does for the client is recognized as that client's real case. The lawyer's arguments are the client's arguments even if the client never opened his mouth. Adam represented us in the original trial and spoke for us. When he disobeyed, we disobeyed in him for he was acting for us all. In Adam we suffer our lawyer's penalty, but in Christ, Christians have a lawyer who paid for theirs. No man has ever had an advocate like that. It is far more than a lawyer who pays his clients' bills; Christ is the representative who has suffered His clients' consequences.

One cannot be condemned justly where there is no crime. There must be a sin! If dead infants broke no law, yet experienced the penalty of death because they were already condemned, it had to be that someone had sinned for them. The alternative to this would be that babies are born condemned for no sin at all, neither Adam's nor theirs, yet they die anyway. That would be a miscarriage of justice. In God's court that cannot happen. In Romans 5, the sin clearly preceded the condemnation. It was *"through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners,"* v.19. *"The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation,"* v.16. *"The result of one trespass was condemnation for all men,"* v.18, *"...death spread to all men, because all sinned,"* v.12. So the condemnation followed the sin, Adam's sin. For all of us without exception, beginning life condemned had nothing to do with what we have done.

### **Problems Encountered When This Doctrine Is Rejected**

Many people do not like this doctrine of representation. Apart from the evil of disagreeing with the Word of God in Romans 5:12-21, this dislike encounters two major problems:

1. One is the loss of the uniqueness of human life. We are designed and created to be communal not just in living arrangements, but in our standing before God. God in His wisdom chose to have a humanity that was so tight-knit that its head could decide our lives for us. We still get little dribbles of this when parents decide what country they will live in, what schools children will attend, what language they will speak and whether or not their child will have surgery. Humans do not stand alone, nor do we merely stand together, we stand before God in our head, and our head was Adam. Fallen angels sinned one by one. We fell all at once in the official corporate decision of one man. Denying the unity man used to enjoy does not solve man's problems. Neither governments nor courts can avoid representation. It is part of the human essence.

2. The second major problem with not liking this structure is even worse, because it is within this representative structure that all salvation comes. When we were sinners without righteousness to merit God's justification, God sent a Savior to assume the headship of a new humanity to act in our behalf. This kind of human relationship is an irritation to those who make a cult of autonomy, but it is only by a leader deciding, dying, and obeying for us that we are saved. To reject the created framework in which

Adam represented us, is to reject the only way we can be saved – that is through the legal advocacy of Christ our Representative mediator Who obeyed and died in our place.

What about Deuteronomy 24?

Scripture prohibits children being put to death for their fathers; and requires that when any person is punished that it should be only for one's own sin (Deuteronomy 24:16). Since this is a principle of justice which applies to all ages, how can anyone be punished for Adam's sin since Adam's children did not participate in it? The answer lies in the surprising truth that in Adam all sinned (5:12); otherwise God would not have condemned nor applied the death sentence upon them for it. Death was upon all and condemnation was upon all, because all of us were united to Adam. God viewed the human race as such a unity, so much so that Adam's sin was ours. The Christian is so united to Christ that we died in Him before we were born, we were buried with Him when we were not present; and we have been raised with him already (Romans 6:1-11). Furthermore, His righteousness or obedience is ours though we did not participate in it (1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:20,21; Philippians 3:8,9). If God can view His people in Christ (and He does), He can view Adam's children in Adam, and He does. Romans 5 teaches that God He gives sinners who have been joined to Christ the gifts of righteousness and life. In the same way those joined to Adam in creation are implicated in a sin they did not commit and are justly condemned to death. The alternative to this is a human race contrary to God's creation which was made in the beginning as one totally fragmented into billions of units. That was not the way it was, and so when our first father sinned all humanity sinned in him and with him, apart from our will in Adam's wicked decision. The children Deuteronomy 24 mentions are not in their fathers, and thus not in his sinful act at all and therefore ought not to be punished as if they were.

Perhaps these illustrations will help:

1) When the United States declared war on Japan in December, 1941, one person in the US Congress voted against the declaration. She (Jeannette Rankin) stood alone in her decision, opposing the will of the majority, yet when the decision was final and official, she too as a US citizen was at war with Japan along with all other Americans whether or not they knew of Pearl Harbor or the act of Congress. The nation could act as a unit with binding implications for all. So it was with Adam's disobedience.

2) In Numbers 19:11-13, when a man touched a dead body, he was ceremonially unclean. He was unclean as a whole person, not just his hand. If the touch was with his right hand, his left hand, knees, and ears were unclean also even if they had had no contact. For the required ceremonial cleansing, the man could not just wash the contaminated hand, because his entire physical unity was defiled by the contact of one part with the dead. Likewise all Adam's descendants **in union with him** were guilty, condemned, and liable to death because of that divinely created union.

So, to summarize: In a nation, all were officially made to be enemies by the declaration of a few representatives. The declaration of the few became the official position of all, including the uninformed. The hand that touched a dead body brought instant defilement to the entire body. The man Adam decided that the entire race would instantly become sinners apart from anything they would later do.

The gospel is that the second Man, the Lord from heaven, has brought righteousness to all who are His, prior to and apart from any eventual righteousness in us.

### **The Justification Brought by Christ's Obedience**

Adam's sin and death created a vacancy in the human family. God chose to have a new creation, to establish a new humanity out of the old. It would be composed of those no longer condemned, who will have eternal life on the merits of Christ. It is too late for Adam and all his posterity to have life on their own. Our corporate decision as sinners has been made and we cannot reverse it. But God could and did send another Person into the human family, a Person from outside Adam's circle. God sent His Son from heaven, One Who is the Lord Himself to step into Adam's position, and fill the vacuum. Adam sinned. The Gospel is of the Man who obeyed.

The Lord Jesus would have an awful mess on His hands, and His representation would need to fulfill a double need.

1. He would have to take on the condemnation of those He would save, which means that He would have to assume the penalty that goes with it – and this He did on the cross when Jesus died for His peoples' sin. (See 2 Corinthians 5:20, 21.)
2. He would have to provide the required righteousness. (See Philippians 3:7-10.)

If anyone thinks it is evil for people to be condemned for sin they did not commit, the Bible never speaks of the Judgment Day as being for more transgressions than people committed on their own. From Adam, they got their condemnation plus their sinful nature. If they have no Mediator, they go on to stand before God alone to face Him without a redeeming advocate simply for what they have done.

So just as the transgression/condemnation/death complex forms the judicial pattern for Adam and all his, so Christ's later righteousness/obedience will bring justification and life to those united to Him. Romans 5 does not spell out the circumstances of Christ's obedience. It does not mention His temptation in the wilderness. It simply asserts His obedience. Paul's motive is to wrap up his doctrine of justification, which he earlier built on the atoning blood of Christ in Romans 3:24. Elsewhere in Romans he argued that righteousness comes from God (3:21,22) and is imputed to ungodly people (4:5) who believe and do not do any righteousness to obtain the verdict of being righteous! He had argued the principle of grace from God versus merit by man (4:4). Paul's doctrine is strong gospel medicine, contrary to every instinct in natural man.

How else can Paul show that our justification is in no way attached to our actions? How can we learn that something WE do not do can result in God's judicial acceptance of us? Paul had at hand the parallel of condemnation and used it, because in Adam, it is already the case that someone else acted for us, merited God's judicial decision concerning us, and secured the result. The parallel is powerful. Since this is the way God constituted human life from the outset, justification simply falls into a framework that already exists.

Paul labors to show that just as it was with Adam's sin, so it is with Christ's obedience. Both are representative acts. Their actions result in two consequences, a judicial (guilt or acquittal) and an experiential (death or life). So if we understand Adam's sin and its legal result, we can grasp justification and see that it rests on obedience outside us. We were as much involved in Christ's obedience as we were in Adam's transgression, which is, not at all, and that is the point! In both cases we did nothing, yet were tremendously affected by one or both of those events outside our lives. For all of us now, these two events of disobedience and obedience happened long before we had any awareness of them. Paul is clinching the Christian doctrine of justification: in the received condemnation, we did nothing, and likewise for the gift of justification we do nothing. Our justification rests only on Christ's obedience, not ours even one little bit.

So it is true that by one man sin entered into the world, and just as that happened righteousness entered the world by one Man. The former brought condemnation to all and the later Man, our Lord and Savior, brought justification to all of His. The first man brought death, and the last brought life. So when Paul taught about a justification that excludes our righteousness, it was a doctrine fully consistent with the universal condemnation that was not based on us sinning for ourselves.

We were not there in the wilderness of Judea to assist our Lord to resist sin. We were not there in the Garden of Eden or at the cross. We were only represented, but that is enough if the right man stands for us. The obedience that saves us is not native to us but does not need to be. It only needs to become ours. It is all a gift of God based on events we did not participate in. Ours is not the joy being "players". Instead, we are morally crippled spectators benefiting from the "play" of the One Who took our number and went in in our place. Since His obedience is historical fact, God has the necessary righteousness available for every sinner who comes to Him without any.

### **The Contrasting Experiences: Life or Death**

One of the difficulties in reading Romans 5 is that while the parallels are so clear, they are also lopsided. Death is not neatly balanced with life. The dullness of death is contrasted with "God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflowing to the many" vs. 15. This is the way this evangelist apostle chose to contrast life and death.

The statements of death are terse and stark: "death [entered] through sin;" "death came to all men;" v.12 "death reigned;" v.14,17, and "many died," v.15. But the life side is exuberant and "overflowing" as one moves from bleak assessment to joyful proclamation. Life is put in v.17 as, "... 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." His expression is not emotionally detached. Sin once reigned, but grace overcame it as v.21 says, "grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

It takes no great skill to start a forest fire. A child with a match can do that. But if one man puts out the fire by himself, restores the forest and revives what the fire destroyed, the contrast is more than mere parallel; it is amazement. To kill is easy; to raise to life is supernatural. Adam's sin required no great effort. As an accomplishment it is a zero, as easy as eating a piece of fruit. But the accomplishment of

Christ is incredible, cleaning up after sin's desolation throughout history to bring about an entire earth of redeemed mankind in a new creation. We have all seen advertisements where something is demolished yet with the film being run backwards, all returns to normal. It is a clever technical device, but it is not reality. For His own, this reversal, so impossible to us, is reality, the wonderful effect of Christ's saving obedience.

The other consequences that flow from justification are in other Scriptures: the gift of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13,14), a new and godly life (Romans 6:4), the resurrection of the body (1 Corinthians 15:51-55), a renewed earth (Romans 8:18-21), and God walking among His children in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:3).

### One man/One Man

Two men decide for us. Our destiny depends upon one or the other. No other person is in the picture until the two judgments of condemnation or justification are already in place. (See John 3:18.) The first head of the human race was Adam alone. (Eve's sin is irrelevant to the condemnation of the rest of mankind. She represented only herself and became a sinner on her own.) The new head is Christ alone, with all of our defective "righteousness" irrelevant to our justification. Is there a clearer way Paul could have shown that we depend on Christ alone? If anyone inserts his righteousness into the picture, he destroys the teaching of the passage that justification for all men rests only on the deeds/actions/obedience/righteousness of one man. Justification does not sit on a WE but on a HE. The purest goodness of the most sanctified saint on earth cannot compare with the purity of the righteousness of Christ. None of us have ever done anything to affect the condemnation with which we began our lives. Nor can any of us do anything to remove it. We are prisoners to Adam's transgression and are without hope apart from Jesus' intervention.

All the Christian duties of our obedience and "cooperation with grace" are sealed out of this doctrine in an airtight compartment. In justification, God looks only at the obedience of Christ. And that is all we want Him to look at, because if God ever looked to ours for a judicial ruling, He would never declare us righteous. The question must never be how can we get our good deeds into the picture, but how can we keep them and Adam's out?

Regeneration is a transforming act within us. Sanctification is a transforming work of God within. Justification makes us look outside to one Man, whose obedience is holy, and Who deserves the declaration of righteous that God gave Him in the resurrection (4:25). God gives this declaration just as really to all who are found in Him (i.e. are represented by Him) not having their own righteousness but that of the God-Man sent to replace Adam as Head of the new race of righteous men. These righteous persons all have an acquired perfect righteousness received as a gift from God who views us in Christ and treats us as righteous.

Our Father Adam is now gone and we do not know the location of his dust. The Other Man has left to go home to His Father's side. Our righteousness is seated at God's right hand (1 Corinthians 1:30). There He intercedes for all who are in Him; He ensures our enjoyment of the life He has earned for us (Romans 8:35).

## The Issue

Paul begins this passage speaking of the entrance of sin through one man acting alone, and finishes his presentation with the gracious reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. You may read my paper and not understand all I write. I do not myself. You do not need to understand this paper to be saved, but you must trust in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation. If you trust in **your** righteousness, you are not trusting in **His** and thus not in Him at all, and you are still in Adam under condemnation and assured of eternal death. Please flee for safety to Christ Whose righteousness and life is presented to us as a gift in Romans 5:12-21. Four times in these verses Paul calls it a gift, so believe the Lord Who cannot lie, and take it as a gift. All you need is Christ as the representative you embrace. He promises you that if you will come to Him, He will receive you. But you must come as a beggar with nothing to offer and everything to receive.

In the gospel, Christ offers His righteousness as your defense before the bar of God. It is a righteousness already accepted by God, and all guilty sinners who receive it are all accepted by Him. The judicial sentence is either condemnation or justification, and we are all out of the loop when it comes to the sin or obedience that establishes one or the other. Adam "earned" one and Christ achieved the other. All the actions of sin or obedience that result in the judicial ruling of God are now over. No sin from us caused our state of condemnation. That was done for us and we were condemned before we ever started to sin. For sure, sinners are well able by sin to increase the consequences it brings, because a just punishment is based on the sinners' behavior.

**Likewise, there is no obedience from us that can justify us.** Justification can come only from obedience outside us. The case against Adam is closed for all in him, unless they flee to Jesus Christ where the righteousness found there has already been produced and no additions to it for justification are permitted or accepted.

Two men and only two, each acting alone, decide our lives for us. (See also 1 Corinthians 15:20-22). Leave the first man; come to the right man. There is no third. In Christ there is forgiveness, righteousness, and reconciliation. Be reconciled to God in the only way God has opened (2 Corinthians 5:20,21). That way is through His divine Son Who became a man to stand in for us, to go to bat for us, to die and obey for us. As a result He brings many sons to glory (Hebrews 2:10).

“...So also grace might reign through righteousness through Jesus Christ our Lord,” v. 21.

There is no alternative to the way God has constructed human life: You may stand before God still condemned in the sin of someone else and punished for your own. OR you may be justified in the righteousness of the Man Who is the Lord from heaven, Who walked on Adam's turf and returned alive to sit at His Father's side. Choose the Adam who saves.

Justification is in its essence an imputed righteousness from outside our experience. Receiving it will always lead us into righteous conduct. The justified person is freed from the domination of sin, while a new fresh grace from Jesus Christ rules our lives. When Paul opened this subject in Romans 5:21, he built a bridge from justification to sanctification and the fresh life that replaces our death.

Up to and including Romans 5, Paul gives us no imperatives, no commandments. The subject of **our** obedience is suppressed till we have been evangelized by the obedient law-keeping of Christ. Paul held off on the duties owed to God, lest in our deeply ingrained sense of merit they might be lumped in with the work of Christ. In the first five chapters of Romans, the Holy Spirit is mentioned but once (5:5), and then only as a result of the justification already in place (5:1). Our justification rests on the obedience of Christ, the only Person of the Trinity to become a man and to live under the law. But our holiness and fulfillment of duty, springs from the Spirit of Christ within, given by God only to the justified. So just as sin used to reign in us but reigns no more in the saved man, grace now reigns instead. This new life is obtained for us through Christ's external ministry, but will be perpetuated in us through the Spirit Who comes only through Jesus Christ our Lord. The pieces have come together. First is the righteousness of our Lord that replaces and undoes the sin of our first father. Only then is it followed by new righteousness springing up Christian conduct, steadily replacing sin.

I hope all who read this will ponder Romans 5:12-21 and find new reason to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.

If there had been no break after v.12, what might the rest of Romans 5:12 look like?

Therefore, **just as** sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned, [my suggestion follows] **So also** righteousness re-entered the world through One Man, and life through His righteousness; because in Him all His obeyed.

#### Appendix: A Caution and Appraisal

This text is one of the more difficult ones in the entire Bible, a passage not well known, one obviously neglected, and culturally irritating. Some reasons for that are:

- Romans 5:12-21 is so outside us that the modern mind cannot identify with it. That mind is interested in its own experience, not what happened in the lives of others long ago. Our time has little interest in history. Evangelicals often bolster this trend by sermons aimed almost entirely on life now, with only passing reference to what has occurred outside ours. Part of this decline is neglect of the Lord Supper, and a focus on what is thought to be more relevant, viz. how to be happy at work, how to keep my kids off drugs, how to communicate better with my husband, how to lose pounds, and make friends, money and music. In such a climate, Romans 5 soon becomes the thinking of another planet, yet it is the thinking of heaven! It is certainly not the thinking of our age, except for those interested in their Savior's role in saving them.
- It is abstract. If we read the account of the Serpent's conversation with Eve, or our first parents eating the forbidden fruit, then we visualize it. We see the story in our imagination, which makes it easier to follow. That is why children's Bible storybooks are always of things the child can see. Doctrine does not always lend itself to pictures. Diagrams maybe, but doctrines are not as vividly generated in the mind as the Good Samaritan putting the wounded man on his donkey.

- Paul's argument does not state his point immediately. He begins with a "just as" and does not give the "even so" until later. People impatient for him to make his point up front cannot read another 59 words for him to resume his main argument. When Paul does not finish verse 12, they get lost in verses 13 and 14 and do not hang on for the later verses. We should remember the Bible has parts written for adult minds.
- We tend to lose the big picture. Paul has laid out earlier in Romans that righteousness comes to us from God. He stresses that since we are sinners we have none, and he reminds us we cannot attain righteousness through the law. But we can receive it as a gift by faith, just as Abraham did when righteousness was imputed to him. Paul's doctrine of justification is really quite complete before he got to Romans 5:12-21, but he decided to add the final nail to the "works righteousness coffin" by bringing up the fall. Adam and Christ have in common that each decided his people's destiny **with no input from the ones affected!** That ought to raise every eyebrow on earth, but widespread doctrinal dullness allows us to overlook such passages. Many have seen trees of salvation and not had a good look at the forest. Many just do not know what they are missing.
- This doctrine is unacceptable in current world thinking. Paul's doctrine would be virtually immoral to our culture. It would be disgusting (as well as unconstitutional) to teach a child the first letter of the alphabet as the old New England Primer did: "In Adam's fall we sinned all." There would strenuous objection at a school board meeting if that were taught today. Our culture intimidates us, so we are less likely to hang out before it a doctrine repugnant to it. So we think we are more "relevant" to propose to the world a doctrine it has already influenced before we give it to our neighbor as a message from God. People who like to be in control will hardly be warm to a doctrine that asserts they have no control whatever of their standing before God. Yet the Lord in Whose control it is, grants justification to all the helpless guilty sinners who come to Him.
- Romans 5 is considered exotic stuff, and not basic, the kind of irrelevant thinking that theologians are prone to fall into, the sort of time-wasting thing that complicates the simplicity of our lives. Yet, it does just the opposite; it clarifies our lives.
- Salvation cannot be stated in one line very well, and we live in a day when people say they believe the whole Bible, all 1189 chapters of it, and then reduce their doctrinal statements to a piece of paper. There is little room for something like Romans 5, which is the same as having no room for the basics. It is a sin to overrule God in demanding an oversimplification of what God commissioned His apostle to spell out for us. The lazy mind says, "Too hard!" The Christian mind says, "Tell me more."
- Romans 5:12-21 was central to the Reformation and is to today's debate on justification. Some feel that the most Christian thing to do is to flee all controversy. If you want to avoid controversy, stay away from the gospel. It is the stuff that lit Reformation fire in Europe, dividing Christendom into those who trusted for salvation in Christ alone, and those who added to Christ their own contribution. Nothing so defines the issues of works versus faith like imputed righteousness. Related to salvation, nothing is so contrary to all human instincts as what Romans 5 teaches. It is still met with contempt or joy; and those two things do not have much in common. Biblical teaching will grate or gratify.

In Romans 5:12-21 the apostle has given us a closely reasoned abstract argument of the significance of ancient events outside our experience and interests, a passage further burdened by being culturally offensive to the world and boring to the church. To the issues raised in this Scripture, I invite your careful attention.