

Intro: I read about what happened in 1980 when a Boston court acquitted Michael Tindall of flying illegal drugs into the United States. Tindall's attorneys argued that he was a victim of "action addict syndrome," an emotional disorder that makes a person crave dangerous, thrilling situations. Tindall was not a drug dealer, merely a thrill seeker.

An Oregon man who tried to kill his ex-wife was acquitted on the grounds that he suffered from "depression-suicide syndrome," whose victims deliberately commit poorly planned crimes with the unconscious goal of being caught or killed. He didn't really want to kill his wife; he wanted the police to shoot him.

Then there's the famous "Twinkie syndrome." Attorneys for Dan White, who murdered San Francisco mayor George Moscone, blamed the crime on emotional stress linked to White's junk food binges. White was acquitted of murder and convicted on a lesser charge of manslaughter.

Nowadays, nobody's at fault for anything. We are a nation of victims (from Leadership Journal, Fall 1993, p. 57).

We've lost a word in the American vocabulary of the 1990's. It's a three-letter word. The word is "sin." The implications of "losing sin" are enormous. The way we view sin affects the way our legal system operates. It affects the way we do counseling. Our view of sin affects the approach we take as parents.

What does the Bible have to say about "sin"? What is sin? Where did the problem of sin originate? Is there a remedy for dealing with sin? To answer those, and other related questions, let's turn to Romans 5.

Proposition: There are two key issues related to sin which we need to understand, according to Romans 5:12-17.

- I. Issue #1: We must understand the problem of sin (12-14).
 - A. Where did sin originate? (12)
 1. There is original sin.
 2. There is personal sin.
 - B. What is the relationship between sin and the law? (13-14)
 1. Sin preceded the law.
 2. Sin produced death.
- II. Issue #2: We must understand the provision for sin (15-17).
 - A. Contrast: Because of Adam's sin...
 1. Many died (15).
 2. Judgment followed (16).
 3. Death reigned (17).
 - B. Contrast: Because of Christ's gift...

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

1. Grace abounded to many (15).
2. Justification followed (16).
3. God's people reign in life (17).

I need to warn you ahead of time that the passage before us is complex. Paul's reasoning is very meticulous. We must put on our "thinking caps" and pay careful attention to this instruction. Perhaps you're wondering, "Why should I? I know I'm saved and going to heaven, so why do I need to make the effort to learn this stuff?" For one simple reason. Sloppy thinking leads to sloppy living. A shallow study of the Scriptures leads to a shallow theology which results in shallow Christian experience. If there is one area in which I am constantly challenged by Paul's example, it's this. I need to be aggressive with my mind. I need to pursue God's truth aggressively. I need to think God's truth aggressively. I need to resolve to live in light of God's truth aggressively.

Last week we pondered the love of God (6-11). God's love is the key to our salvation (6-8), and to our security (9-11). We learned what was true of us. We were without strength. We were ungodly. And we were sinners. Yet what did God do? God saw our need. And God took action to meet our need.

We'll never fully appreciate the love of God until we grasp the following issue.

I. Issue #1: We must understand the problem of sin (12-14).

READ vv 12-14. Even a casual reading points out that we have a problem, and the problem is sin. There are two questions that surface when we consider the problem of sin.

A. Where did sin originate? (12)

That's a vital question. In our society where rugged individualism reigns, this is a hard pill for many to swallow. There are two common approaches. One is to ignore sin. The other is to shift the blame for sin, that is to say, I am not responsible for what I do. My problems are the result of someone else's failure (my parents, my environment).

Where did the problem of sin originate? To answer that, we need to realize two perspectives on sin highlighted in v 12.

1. There is original sin.

V 12 "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." By one man. Who was that? Adam, the first man. What were the effects of his original sin? According to v 12, there were three effects. One, when Adam sinned, sin entered the world. What he did both scarred and marred us. Two, because Adam sinned, death entered the world. And three, death "passed upon" all men.

Sin is like a poisonous vapor. When Adam sinned in the garden, it was like he opened the front door and sin "entered in." Then the fumes of death "passed upon" and permeated every resident in the house (see B.K.C.). All because of original sin.

What do we mean by the phrase "original sin"? It means more than that Adam gave us a bad example, and that we have imitated his example. It means that we were vitally connected with Adam when he was in the garden.

It's the idea of solidarity (Barclay, 79). The Jew did not think of himself merely as an individual, but always as part of a family, a clan, or a nation. With all our talk about "individual rights," this is hard for us to grasp. Other people groups understand. To this day it is said that if an Australian aboriginal is asked his name he gives the name of his tribe or clan. He does not think of himself as a person, but as a member of society (Barclay, 79).

We see this in the Bible, too. When Achan sinned, the whole nation of Israel suffered the consequences. That is how Paul viewed Adam. When Adam sinned, we sinned. What Adam did, we did. His sin was imputed to us. As J. Vernon McGee put it (97), "We are so vitally connected with the first father of the human race that before we even had a human nature, before we have committed a sin, even before we were born, we were sinners in Adam."

That might rub you the wrong way, yet God says it's true. Theologically, it's called "federal headship." It's illustrated in Heb 7:9-10, "And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, paid tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchizedek met him." Abraham lived hundreds of years before Levi, yet the text says Levi was in his forefather's loins.

Original sin affects every one of us. We don't teach our babies how to sin. They know how. They inherited Adam's sinful nature, and are marked by original sin.

2. *There is personal sin.*

V 12 ends, "For all have sinned." What Adam did, we have all done. We are born in a state of sin, due to original sin. But we also commit personal sin. In fact, God could have put us in the Garden of Eden and given us the same test He gave Adam, and we'd have blown it too.

Here's a good place to point out that Paul uses three different words for sin in this passage. The first is the Greek word "hamartia," translated "sin" in v 12. It means "to miss the mark, to err." The second is "parabaseoes" in v 14, which is translated "transgression" and means "a going aside." The third is "paraptoma" in v 15, translated "offense" in the KJV, which means "a false step, a trespass."

When we sin, we miss God's mark. We choose to go aside, to violate God's command. We trespass on God's earth, and deliberately go on forbidden ground. When we sin, we follow in the steps of our representative, Adam. We are all guilty of personal sin.

Having answered the first question, "Where did sin originate?", the apostle addressed a second question.

B. What is the relationship between sin and the law? (13-14)

At first glance, v 13 doesn't seem to "fit" the flow of Paul's logic. The KJV inserts a parenthesis to show a shift in thought. What's going on? Remember that in Romans, Paul is detailing the gospel he preached. This is what he told people from Jerusalem to Ephesus, from Philippi to Athens. Wherever he went, he encountered

opposition, especially from Jewish critics. In v 13, Paul is dealing with what was a big hangup for his Jewish critics--What is the relationship between the sin and the law?

1. Sin preceded the law.

V 13 "For until the law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law." What did Paul mean by "the law"? Here he has in mind the law God gave to Moses, in roughly 1400 B.C. What was true BEFORE God gave His law to the world? Was there sin? Certainly. Adam sinned. So did Noah, and Abraham, and all the rest. How did people sin before the law was given? Their sin was not so much "transgression" as "rebellion against God" (McGee, 98). They didn't have the 10 Commandments to break. They didn't have the written Word of God.

Were they innocent? Not at all. They were sinners, even though they didn't understand the horrid ugliness of their sin. So it is today with the so called "innocent native" who has never heard the Word of God. All men are sinners whether they have heard the truth or not. Sin preceded the law.

2. Sin produced death.

V 14 "Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adams transgression..." Please notice that Adam was no mythological figure. Paul considered Adam to be a real, historical person. Paul here affirms that the Genesis record is historical. If you don't believe in a literal Adam, then why is there any need for forgiveness? And if there was no need for forgiveness, then Jesus Christ died in vain. The doctrine of man and the doctrine of sin are rooted in the historical account of Genesis. The bumper sticker put it this way, "My ancestors were human--sorry about yours."

Why is there death in the world? V 14 tells us that sin produced death. Adam disobeyed a specific command of God--God said, "Don't eat the fruit!" but Adam ate. Prior to the Law, Adam's descendants didn't sin after the "similitude of Adam's transgression" (i.e. "in the same way Adam did). Until the Law was given, they didn't have specific commandments to violate. Yet death reigned because, like Adam, they lived in willful rebellion against the Creator. The consequence was death.

It's vital that we get a handle on issue #1. We must understand the problem of sin. Until we do, we'll never grasp why we needed a Savior. Until we do, we'll never experience victory in our Christian lives. The problem of sin is not merely behavior. It goes all the way back to Adam. It's inherited.

Is there hope? Yes.

II. Issue #2: We must understand the provision for sin (15-17).

At the end of v 14, Paul hints at this coming provision. There we learn that Adam was "a figure of him that was to come." The Greek word for "figure" is "tupos" (type; the image of a stamp made by a die). In vv 15-17, Paul holds up Adam and Christ, side by side. In fact, in I Cor 15:45-49, Christ is called the second Adam, for he reversed what the first Adam did.

Let's read vv 15-17. Notice the contrast between Adam and Christ, the contrast between Adam's offense and Christ's gift.

A. Contrast: Because of Adam's sin...

What happened because of Adam's sin? Notice three consequences.

1. Many died (15).

V 15 "For if through the offense of one many are dead." Because of Adam's sin, what happened? Many died. Sin has consequences, always. Adam's sin plummeted the entire human race into the pit of spiritual death. Adam's sin cut off the creature from the Creator.

Why do people die? People die, not merely because of their own acts of sin (otherwise babies would not die; see Rom 9:11). People die because they are linked to Adam. I Cor 15:22 says, "In Adam all men die." (see Wiersbe, 529)

Here's the second consequence. Because of Adam's sin, many died, and...

2. Judgment followed (16).

V 16 "And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift; for the judgment was by one to condemnation." The NIV reads, "The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation." Adam's sin resulted in the judgment of God.

3. Death reigned (17).

V 17 "For if by one man's offense death reigned by one." From the moment Adam ate the forbidden fruit, death reigned. Why has war ransacked this planet for century after century? Because of Adam. Why has disease been the constant foe of humanity throughout time? Because of Adam. Why do funeral homes dot the landscape of every community in this land? Because of Adam. Because of Adam's sin, death has reigned.

Objection: Perhaps you're thinking, "I don't think it's fair that we should be penalized for Adam's sin. Why should the work of one affect the many? Was that fair?" I like Warren Wiersbe's answer (528), "The answer, of course, is that it was not only fair; but it was also wise and gracious. To begin with, if God had tested each human being individually, the result would have been the same; disobedience. But even more important, by condemning the human race through the one man (Adam), God was then able to save the human race through one Man (Jesus Christ)!"

The real question is this, "If you don't think it's fair that we be penalized for Adam's sin, do you think it is fair that we can be saved through Christ's gift?"

Let's take another look at vv 15-17, and see the contrast. We've already seen the consequences of Adam's sin. Now let's see what Christ did.

B. Contrast: Because of Christ's gift...

Because of Christ's gift, three wonderful results occurred.

1. Grace abounded to many (15).

V 15 "Much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many." Because of Adam's sin, many died. Because

of Christ's gift, many are made alive! Cherish those words, "Much more." Grace abounds!

2. Justification followed (16).

V 16 "For the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offenses unto justification." Adam's sin brought judgment. Christ's work on the cross brought justification. When Adam sinned, he was declared unrighteous. When a sinner trusts in Christ, he is declared righteous (i.e. "justified").

3. God's people reign in life (17).

Notice the strong contrast on the word "reign" in v 17, "For if by one man's offense death reigned by one, much more they who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." Because of Adam's deed, death reigned. Because of Christ, God's people reign in life. I like the way Calvin put it when he wrote (in Bruce, 132), "Christ is much more powerful to save than Adam was to ruin."

What does Paul mean when he says we "reign in life" by Christ? The apostle elaborates in his letter to the Corinthians. Let's check out I Corinthians 15:45-50. Notice the contrast between the first Adam and the last Adam, Christ (45). The first Adam was natural, the second Adam spiritual (46). The first Adam was of the earth, while the second was from heaven (47).

Don't miss this. There are two groups of people in the world (47). There are those who are "in Adam." And there are those who WERE "in Adam" but now are "in Christ." Which are you?

Because of Christ's gift, then, grace abounded to many, justification followed, and God's people reign in life.

Conclusion:

I read a story this week that illustrates what Christ did for us (Leadership Journal, Winter 94, p. 47). "A boy and his father were driving down a country road on a beautiful spring afternoon, when a bumblebee flew in the car window. The little boy, who was allergic to bee stings, was petrified. The father quickly reached out, grabbed the bee, squeezed it in his hand, and then released it. The boy grew frantic as it buzzed by him. Once again the father reached out his hand, but this time he pointed to his palm. There stuck in his skin was the stinger of the bee. "Do you see this?" he asked. "You don't need to be afraid anymore. I've taken the sting for you."

The problem of sin is great. God's provision for sin is greater. Beloved, Christ took the sting of sin and death for us. We are indebted to Him. Let us thank Him.