

Romans Five

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Last week we looked at Romans 5:12 and 5:20 and the implications of those verses. Firstly, we looked at Romans 5:12 which says that sin entered into the world by one man. Nothing about this sounds irregular at first, for the story of Adam's fall in Genesis Three comes to mind. But wait a minute, didn't the fall come first through Eve? By "one man" does Paul mean Eve, for the Bible often uses the word "man" to indicate mankind, and there men and women? Here in Romans 5:12, however, Paul means Adam, for in verse 14, he traces death to Adam, so the question arises, "Why does Paul trace sin and death to Adam instead of Eve?"

The answer to this question centers in the Bible's understanding of "nature" and how "nature" gets transmitted from generation to generation, for every person born has an indwelling nature, either of sin or righteousness, and that nature derives from the father. That may sound minimizing to the mother, but the Bible does not deal here with an issue of equality of the sexes, but simply a spiritual fact that spiritual nature is transmitted from father to child; it simply concerns a matter of role and not gender inequity. So feminists do not need to get agitated here at this issue of the patriarchal generation of nature, for God in the Bible is called our Father, and so he created human fathers as well.

Romans 5:12, therefore, tells us that Adam became the father of sin in the world, not only by example, but also by the infecting of the pool out of which all humanity comes. Hereditary disease provides an example of this principle; in the same way that a father passes on the genes leading to coronary disease, Adam passed on the sin nature to all who would ever be born of his lineage. Now the major consequence of sin is death; Romans 5:12 explains that death is a result of sin; apart from sin, nobody would ever die from old age, and the fact of death proves the antecedent of sin as cause. Each generation inherits death going back to Adam, and

actually all men sinned and died in the very moment that Adam sinned and died.

This concept may not soak in immediately, for we distrust initially the idea that we assume responsibility for the actions of someone else. What justice presides in making all men sinners because one man sinned? (And here, when he says "death passed upon all men, for that all sinned," he does mean by "men" all people, male and female.) The justice of lumping all together arises from the assertion that all future generations were in Adam when he sinned, and therefore, Adam acted as all men; Adam contained within him all men, and no one born of Adam would have done any differently. Paul, here, requires the conclusion of the reader that the reader sinned when Adam sinned, and the reader died when Adam died, therefore eliminating the excuse, "I wouldn't have given in like Adam did."

Anticipating the objection that people should die for their own particular sins, Paul explains in Romans 5:13, "sin is not imputed where there is not law." In other words, if God does not give a law, sin cannot exist, for sin by definition includes the transgression of a law. Now the law given to Adam and Eve only addressed one issue, the forbidden tree. God's whole legal system with them contained only one law, and therefore, there could be only one sin, because nothing except that one tree was forbidden to enjoy. Paul then proves that everyone dies because of Adam's sin, for he says that everyone between Adam and Moses died. Not until Moses did God give a legal system that included more than the one prohibition to Adam and Eve, so death during that interval proved that death resulted from Adam's sin, for everyone died, even those who did not sin the sin of Adam.

Another biblical story helps verify this truth, for God ensured that Jesus, His son, was born of a virgin, and Romans 8:3 says that Jesus was born in the "likeness" of sinful flesh. Had Jesus been born of a human father, he would have been in the lineage of Adam, and therefore a sinner and one dying from birth. Therefore, God assumed supernatural fatherhood and planted His own holy nature in Mary's womb, in order to start a new race, for Jesus is called "the Last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45)." Everyone born of the last Adam does everything that he did. The plan of salvation, then,

means taking those born of the first Adam, putting them to death for sin on a cross, and then birthing them into the new Adam who is righteous.

Paul does not develop how this happens until Romans Six, but he gives a glimpse in Romans 5:18,19 in which he tells us that "by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men (...) by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. In Romans Six, Paul will reveal that we were in Christ when he died to sin as us (2 Cor. 5:21), for not only did he die for our sins, but he actually became the first Adam, dying as the first Adam, and as all who are in the first Adam. Then he was raised as the last Adam, and as such, contained within Him all who would ever choose to be born out of the old Adam and into the new Adam.

All accusation of unfairness about original sin deflates at this point, for sin no longer stands to damn anyone, but only the rejection of Jesus who saves from sin. If I inherit a fatal disease from my earthly father, I do not curse him if I have the antidote. Sin will never send anyone to hell, but refusing Christ will, for that is the one unforgivable sin, because to refuse Christ means to refuse the only rescue from sin.

Lastly, in Romans 5:20, our other key verse, Paul tells us "the law entered that the offense might abound." Originally when we hear law, we think, "Okay, I'll do that." This optimism springs from the sin nature, though initially we think it shows devotion to God. But resolutions to reform actually indicate that we still think the human self can obey God's law, whereas God knows we cannot keep the law. So though it seems unfair that we get tagged with original sin, God gives plenty of other laws to test us so that we can see with finality that we don't do any better than Adam did and were never meant to. God's real purpose is to prove to us that we can only live successfully as vessels to contain His righteousness, which is to say contain His life as the gift of grace. Only Christ can live the Christian life, so he must live it through us!

Next time, we will look in detail at the sin nature and God's nature and how through the Cross we exchange one for the other.