

"A TALE OF TWO MEN, AND THE SAD STORY OF SIN'S ORIGIN" PT. 1
ROMANS 5:12-14

If you read the news most days, you will find many stories that are filled with tragedy and senselessness that inevitably leads us to ask, "why?"

- ✓ Why does a man drink alcohol and then get behind the wheel of his car — resulting in an accident that kills a 30-year-old mother of two young children, as happened in Granbury this week?
- ✓ Why are people so filled with hate that they kill people of other races simply because their skin color is different, as in Charlottesville, VA last month?
- ✓ Why do husbands and wives who pledge their undying love for each other end up killing the relationship with angry and hostile words that lead to divorce?
- ✓ Why do teenagers embrace illegal drugs as a means of hope?
- ✓ Why are newborn infants murderous in their cries when a feeding is slightly delayed? (Grown husbands are sometimes not much better!)
- ✓ Why does a well-compensated CFO embezzle millions of dollars, destroying a company, his family, and leaving dozens of employees without jobs?

All those questions are essentially asking the same thing. Where does sin come from and how can it be so very evil? One little girl gave a hint to the answer. She'd been in a fight with her younger brother and after her mother separated them and pulled her off of him the mother asked, "Why did you let the Devil put it into your heart to pull your brother's hair and kick him in the shins?" She thought for a moment and said, "Maybe the Devil put it into my heart to pull my brother's hair, but kicking his shins was my own idea." And with that answer she demonstrated a knowledge of the pervasiveness of indwelling, original sin.

And it is the topic of original sin that Paul addresses in Romans 5:12-14. But he is talking about more than just original sin. Remember in chapters 1-3 he has identified the universality of sin and in chapters 3-4 he has explained the gift of justification — the imputation of Christ's righteousness to those who believe. And in chapters 5-8 he will explain the process of sanctification, the living out of the justification that has been given to us. And he begins that discussion in 5:1-11 by talking about the blessings of justification — many of the privileges that come to the believer who has been justified.

And in 5:12-21 Paul builds on that idea of the justification that is given to the believer and the resulting reconciliation, and demonstrates how justification must be an act of God's grace. And Paul does that by comparing and contrasting two men — Adam and Jesus. And the discussion of Adam necessarily includes a discussion of Adam's sin and his impact on the rest of humanity. And that's what Paul introduces in verse 12.

In these verses, Paul says that,

ADAM'S SIN RESULTED IN ALL MEN BEING UNDER SIN.

Where does evil come from? How did all mankind come to be infected with and under sin? Here is Paul's four-fold answer in verse 12 —

1. Sin Entered the WORLD Through Adam's Sin (v. 12a)
2. DEATH Entered the World Because of Adam's Sin (v. 12b)
3. Death Came to ALL Men Through Adam's Sin (v. 12c)
4. All Men SIN Because of Adam's Sin (v. 12d)

Read vv. 12-21.

1. Sin Entered the WORLD Through Adam's Sin (v. 12a)

- Paul begins v. 12 with a transitional word — **therefore**. He is making a connection to what preceded. At least one translation says it this way, “For this reason...” and that’s a perfectly good translation. It captures the sense of what Paul is saying. God has justified us and given us blessings through that declaration of our righteousness. And we *must* be justified by God (and not by ourselves) because of what happened to Adam and because of what happened to us in Adam and through Adam.
- And notice that he begins by using a comparison — **just as** through one man sin entered...
 - ✓ The one man that Paul is speaking about is Adam, which Paul clarifies in **v. 14** (2x).
 - ✓ So Paul is making a comparison between Adam and someone else; generally when he uses “just as” he follows that with “so also.” But if you look at v. 12, he never says, “so also.” He gets diverted from his original thought and never makes the comparison.
 - It seems that as soon as he said, “sin entered the world,” that he began thinking about all the implications of that statement and then proceeds to fill out that statement theologically. And that leads to a theologically dense discussion and one of the most important sections in all of Scripture about the nature of sin.
 - But if you look at v. 18, Paul resumes his thought and finishes the comparison — original sin comes to all men through Adam, but justification that redeems men and gives life is made available to all men through Christ.
 - The comparison that Paul is making is that there is a pervasive influence to all men through both Adam and Christ. But Christ is far greater than Adam (the contrast is denoted by **the free gift is not like the transgression**, **v. 15a**), which is Paul’s particular emphasis in vv. 15-17 and then in 18-21.
 - ... Universal sin is superseded by Christ’s righteousness (v. 17).
 - ... Condemnation is overwhelmed by justification (v. 18).
 - ... Death is defeated by Christ’s life (v. 21).
 - ... Sin increased, but grace abounded and flourished even more (v. 21).
 - So, while this passage seems to be about Adam and sin and to a lesser degree Christ and justification, this section (vv. 12-21) is really about two men (Adam and Christ), and ultimately the one man, Christ. Paul wants us to see the supremacy and greatness of Christ above all things and people. And we will only embrace Christ when we see the greatness of the problem of sin.
 - And the problem of sin is contained in the statement, **through one man sin entered the world**.
 - ✓ Paul is not saying that sin originated with Adam. We know that it didn’t (**Ezk. 28:11-17**, esp. 15-16).
 - This section is about the King of Tyre, *and* the power behind the King, Satan.

- Satan is a created being who was particularly beautiful (v. 13) and had special privilege to be around the throne of God (v. 14).
- Satan was created as a perfect being (v. 15a-b) who at some point became unrighteous (15c). There is nothing in this text or any other that explains *where* the unrighteousness came from; we simply acknowledge that it “spontaneously generated.” In an instant, at some point after his creation (we don’t know when), Satan moved from “blameless” to “unrighteous” (v. 15), being “internally filled with violence...you sinned” (v. 16). And he immediately experienced the judgment of God (vv. 16b-17) because he was profane. That’s the origin of sin.
- ✓ But Paul does mean that **through the** action of **the one man’s sin** (Adam) that sin was transmitted to every person in the world.
 - The theological term for this is that Adam was our *federal head* or representative. He was in our place, acting on our behalf. And we have examples of that in our world — elected politicians who represent us and make decisions for us; while we don’t make the decisions, we reap the benefits or consequences of their actions. And if you have mutual funds, you likewise reap the benefits or consequences of the actions of your fund manager who represents you.
 - So Adam represented the entire human race and when he sinned it plunged the entire race into sin and made them all sinners by nature and rightly under the condemnation of God (**1 Cor. 15:22**).
 - Interestingly, if you look at Genesis 3, Adam is not the first one that sinned; Eve sinned first. And yet Adam is held accountable for two reasons: he is the head of the wife (**1 Tim. 2:13**) and Adam had received direct instruction from the Lord and his action was not because he was deceived but because he was rebellious (**1 Tim. 2:14**).
- ✓ Now prior to Adam’s rebellion in the garden, sin was not in the world or in man. Notice that Paul says sin entered **the world**. Often that word refers to creation and the physical realm around us; but it can also refer to the individuals in the world, and that’s how Paul is using it here. So he’s talking about the imputation of sin into all men’s hearts when Adam sinned. He’s talking about the theological term “original sin.”
 - By this we don’t mean “the origin of sin.” But we do mean the nature of sin is in all men.
 - A simple definition: “[Original sin is] the sinful state and condition in which men are born.” [Berkhof] It is “the corruption of our whole nature.” [Hodge]
 - The tragedy of Adam’s sin is not just that *he* sinned but that when he sinned, all those who came from him were born as sinners and under the condemnation of God (**Eph. 2:1-3**; **Col. 2:13**).

“Being born in Adam means that we cannot escape *Original Sin*: we are born with a primary desire to do evil, and a primal propensity to enjoy in the flesh what God calls sin. Original Sin makes us not just bad, but blind. This fact – that Original Sin distorts us at the deepest level – can be an overwhelming idea. But that is not its intent. Original Sin is the most democratizing idea in all of human history. It means that we are all in the same boat. And if we are in Christ, no pattern or sin or brokenness defines us.” [Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 9.]

➤ There is a pervasiveness to sin. No one escapes this reality. In **3:9**, Paul says that all men are **under sin**. That is, all men are under the dominion and power of sin. It is the ruling power in their lives. None can escape it. Sin dominates all men who are outside of Christ.

- Because of Adam, all men are under original sin — and because we are under sin we are *depraved*.
 - ✓ This is a theological term to denote the extent of sin in our lives. It doesn't mean that we are as bad as we could be, nor that we engage in every kind of sin.
 - ✓ But it does mean that every aspect of our lives is touched and perverted by sin. Our intellect is affected (2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 4:17-19), as is our conscience (1 Tim. 4:2), and our will (Rom. 1:28), and heart (Jer. 17:9; Mk. 7:21-23). Our entire being is stained by sin (Rom. 1:18 – 3:20).
 - ✓ Because we are depraved, we can do nothing to please the Lord (**Rom. 8:7-8**).
- And this is a clear answer to the question about where such ungodly actions come from in the world. No one should be surprised by any kind of sin or any amount of sin, because we are all born as murderous, rebellious, and idolatrous sinners. There is none who does good and none who wants to do good. And it is beyond every man's ability to do good.
- Years ago, *The Times* of London posed a question in its editorial pages, "What's wrong with the world today?" And G. K. Chesterton responded with a letter that simply said, "Dear Sir, I am. Yours, G.K. Chesterton." He understood the nature of original sin and human depravity.
- When Mike Wallace was reporting for "60 Minutes," he conducted an interview with Yehiel Dinur, a Nazi concentration camp survivor who testified against Adolf Eichmann at the Nuremberg trials in 1961. Wallace showed a clip to viewers of Dinur walking into the courtroom and seeing Eichmann for the first time since he sent Dinur to Auschwitz 18 years earlier. Dinur stopped and began weeping uncontrollably. So Wallace asked Dinur if he was overcome by hatred or fear or memories. No, Dinur said. In that moment he realized that Eichmann was not a godlike man, but an ordinary man. "I was afraid about myself...I saw that I am capable to do this. *I am...exactly like he.*" So Wallace summarized, "Eichmann is in all of us." This is exactly the truth of original sin — it is in all of us to sin and to do any sin. No one is exempt.
- Our tendency is to think that our sin problem is just what we do; but here Paul tells us that our sin problem is something we were born with and that has touched every aspect of our lives, leaving us unable to do anything to please God. We are displeasing to Him because of both our actions and nature. We can do nothing good and there is no limit to the evil that we can do. That's why there is evil in this world. It comes from within the hearts of men. It comes from within us (if we have not been transformed by Christ through conversion).
- There is a second aspect to the sin of Adam ...

2. **DEATH** Entered the World Because of Adam's Sin (v. 12b)

- Not only did sin enter this world and the hearts of all men through Adam's sin, but also sin brought with it a partner — **death**. The problem of sin's entry into the world was not only its presence and power, but also its consequence, death. And Paul is very specific — death came **through sin**. So, sin is the means for the entry of death into the world (i.e., into the lives of men); had there been no sin, there would not have been any death. The only reason there is death is because of sin.
 - ✓ The theme of death and life is significant in Romans; Paul uses **death** in Romans more than in any other NT book (Revelation it is used 19x). And interestingly, of the 22x Paul uses the term, 18x it is related to sin and all of the uses of the term are in chs. 5-8, where he is explaining justification.
 - ✓ Paul uses **death** in these chapters to denote that "death is the desert of sin" [Morris], and that sin never has any good consequences: it enslaves (6:16); its consequence is death (6:23); its passions bear the fruit of death (7:5); and the mind set on the law is death (8:6).
 - ✓ And he uses **death** to remind us that Christ has liberated the believer from **death**, giving us hope (6:9); he died to liberate us from sin and death (8:2).
- What is meant by the term **death**? There are three aspects of death —
 - ✓ **Physical death:** Adam didn't die for at least 800 more years (**Gen. 5:3, 5**), but he did die, fulfilling the warning and discipline of God (**2:17; 3:19**). While Adam did not die immediately, his sin immediately set in motion the process of his death. And his sin did result in the first instance of death almost immediately after his sin — the death of the sacrificed animal (**3:21**). And with that death, we also see the provision of grace and redemption and salvation. Death has arrived, but already God is demonstrating His sovereignty and superiority over that death.
 - ✓ **Spiritual death:** This is the alienation and loss of relationship with God that comes from sin; and for Adam, that *was* instantaneous.
 - In **Gen. 3:7** they attempted to hide from God — which is always the nature of sin: it runs from the light and attempts to deceive (God and others) about its reality, though it can never hide completely or deceive fully.
 - And the tragedy for Adam and Eve was that they had known the fullness of fellowship with God and exchanged and lost it in a vain attempt to usurp His authority; and instantaneously they knew the truth (**3:9-10**). And they were banished from His garden (**3:23-24**), which also was a form of grace to keep them from eating from the tree of life, which would have confirmed them in their sin.
 - Spiritual death makes one unable to respond to God (**Rom. 8:7-8; 2 Cor. 4:4**).
 - ✓ **Eternal (second) death:** This is the death that never ends; it is the condemnation and wrath of God being poured out on unrepentant sinners for all of eternity (Rev. 20:6, 11-15). The desire of all sinners is to be autonomous and free of the rule of God, and for all eternity they will always be dying and never dead, experiencing the full and unrelenting wrath of God.

- ✓ This is what sin brought. There is nothing glamorous about sin; it entices and promises joy and beauty and hope and life. And it brings unremitting tears, and horror, and bitterness, and death.

3. Death Came to All Men Through Adam's Sin (v. 12c)

- We are seeing the cost and weight of sin. It is pervasive and indwelling and our very nature. And it brings death. But in the third part of the verse Paul notes that like the sin that is transmitted to every individual, so also death is transmitted to every individual.
- Like Adam, now every individual faces death. It's like the little boy who heard the story of Adam in Genesis 1-3 in Sunday School — Adam was created from dust and because of sin, would die and return to dust. Later that week his mom told him to clean his room and when he reported his progress to her, he said, "I was cleaning under the bed and I'm not sure what it is, but it looks to me like someone is either coming or going." That idea is here in Rom. 5:12 — because of sin everyone is going to die. It's a universal, inescapable principle.
- But it is not merely that people die physically, but that they also all die spiritually and will die the second death if they do not repent. And that death is appropriate to all men. All men die because all men are born under the wrath of God (**Eph. 2:1-3**). Paul anticipates here what he will say in 6:21-23.
- Death is universal because sin is universal. And that takes us to the final point of Paul in this verse...

4. All Men SIN Because of Adam's Sin (v. 12d)

- This part of the verse is the most difficult to translate and interpret. One of my favorite commentators came up with six different ways to translate and interpret the short phrase, **because**. I won't attempt to explain all of them. There are, however, two primary options (both of which are taught elsewhere in the NT):
 - ✓ **Because all sinned** refers to the fact death has come to all men because all sinned (Paul is pointing to causation between death and sin). *When* did all men sin? We sinned *in* Adam and *with* Adam when he sinned as our representative. We sinned *in him*, in the same way that we are resurrected to life *in Christ* (**6:3-6**). This phrase **because all sinned** is simply reaffirming what Paul said in the first part of the verse (**through one man...**). And he will reiterate that point in vv. 18-19, so that's likely what that means here. And again, it certainly *is* true that Adam sinned as our head, but is that what this particular phrase means here?
 - ✓ A second option is that **because all sinned** means that death came to all men as the result of the sin of all men (agreeing that **because** is causal). And that sin is actual sin that all men personally commit.

- All men are born alienated from God and spiritually dead (which is what the first part of the verse teaches). And because they are spiritually dead, the only thing they can do is sin. In other words, death rules over the sinner so that he sins (notice that verses 14, 17 both affirm that death is a ruling master over sinners).
- In fact, the NT always uses this verb **sinned** to refer to personal sin (e.g., Matt. 27:4; Luke 15:18, 21; Acts 25:8; Rom 2:12; 3:23).
- And in the next two verses, Paul seems to be defending that in light of an argument some might have — “how can you say that all sinned if there was no Law to rule them between Adam and Moses? If there is no transgression apart from the Law (4:15), then how can those who lived without the Law be held accountable for their sin?” And Paul answers that by saying that death ruled (and manifested its rule through their sin), though they didn’t sin exactly as Adam did.
- ✓ So it seems best to say that at the end of this verse Paul is pointing to the personal sin of sinners who sin because they are born spiritually dead. They sin because they are sinners.
- ✓ This verse holds in tension two great, corresponding truths: we sin because we are sinners (born with original sin) and we are sinners because we sin (we have not been treated unjustly; our own sin condemns us).

- What all this means is that we are in the worst of situations:

“Most people have no problem at all admitting that they’ve committed sins (plural), at least so long as they can think about those sins as isolated little mistakes in an otherwise pretty good life—a parking ticket here or there on an otherwise clean record. Sins don’t shock us much. We know they are there, we see them in ourselves and others every day, and we’ve gotten pretty used to them. What is shocking to us is when God shows us the sin that runs to the very depths of our hearts, the deep-running deposits of filth and corruption that we never knew existed in us and that we ourselves could never expunge. That’s how the Bible talks about the depth and darkness of our sin — it is in us and of us, not just on us.” [Greg Gilbert, *What is the Gospel?*, Kindle Loc. 664-9.]

- As I studied this week, I found myself overwhelmed by the weight and heaviness of this verse. Mid-week I wrote this: The simplicity and straightforwardness of this verse belies the awful weight of it. One man. One sin. Sin enters. Death enters. Death is to all men. All men sinned. And the relationship between the one and the all is overwhelming — one man and one sin and one death compared to all men die and all men sin. You must feel that burden and weight.
- Now don’t forget what I said at the beginning of this message. This passage is not about Adam or sin primarily; it is about Christ and the supremacy of Christ. Paul is speaking about Adam and sin to make a comparison and contrast with Christ and to demonstrate the greatness of Christ.

- ✓ And if you are in Christ, my friend, all of this — as discouraging as it is — is what you *were*. It is *not* what you are. Death died in Christ. Sin was cleansed by Christ's righteousness. Life was granted to dead men. And grace reigned (and reigns) supreme for eternity (v. 21). Sin was powerful and death was the worst of consequences and Christ was and is greater than both. As heavy as this passage is, there is tremendous joy for us when we are in Christ as we look at what God has done on our behalf — what we did not deserve and were dead to be able to do, He did.
- ✓ On the other hand, if you are not a Christian, this passage makes your situation much worse than you have ever imagined.
 - Remember all those things we spoke about at the beginning of the message — things like DWIs and manslaughter, and murder and racism, and conflict and divorce, and illegal drug use, and embezzling — where do they come from? They come from hearts that are just like yours. They come from *you*. *You* are the problem.
 - And you are under God's wrath, and you are dead, and unable to do good and only able to do sin. There is nothing good about you and nothing you can do to be good.
 - Your *only* (and I do mean, your *only* hope), is to admit to God you deserve His wrath because of your sin, and repent of your sin (turn away from it and desire to be changed from it) and beg for His mercy to save you from that wrath, forgive you of your sin, and change you into a person who loves and lives for Jesus.
 - And if you repent in faith, He will, in fact, justify you (3:28; 4:5). If you are not a follower of Christ, I urge you to repent of your sin today and begin following Him.

BENEDICTION: Romans 11:33-36