

"A TALE OF TWO MEN AND THE LONG HISTORY OF SIN" PT. 2
ROMANS 5:12-14

How long? Don't you wonder sometimes how long it will take to get something completed?

- ✓ How long will it take to finish the roadwork on 377 through Benbrook?
- ✓ How many more years can a nine-month pregnancy take?
- ✓ How long will it take to pay off that credit card? Or student loan? Or car loan? Or mortgage?

And more seriously, how long will you continue to battle with sin? I feel that in my own heart — how long will I have to battle against the sins that often entangle me? I often have people ask me, "Will I ever be free from this battle against this sin? Is there any hope that it will one day be gone?" I saw a similar sentiment in an email blog I received on Friday morning: "Are you discouraged by how slow you grow?" YES!

In a similar manner, Paul didn't ask, "how long will we battle with sin?" but he did ask the related question, "how long sin has been in existence?" In Romans 5:12 he stated that sin had entered the human race when Adam sinned and that all men demonstrated that reality through their own personal sins. And in verses 13-14 Paul anticipates an objection to that statement — did all men really sin? What about those who didn't have the Law — since one can't know what sin is without the Law, could those who lived before Moses have been free from the guilt of sin? Has sin really been with us this long? Has there really been no reprieve from sin? And in these questions there is a sense of hopelessness — is there nothing that can be done in the long battle against sin?

In these verses, Paul says that,

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

These verses speak to the pervasiveness and universality of sin. Are *all* men really under sin and sinners? Yes, we really are.

CONTEXT: All men are sinners because Adam was their representative when he sinned (v. 12a), and further all men themselves sin (v. 12d). *Here are five chapters in the sorry story of sin's long history.*

1. **SIN** Was in the World After Adam (v. 13a)
2. The Full Extent of Sin's Sinfulness Was Not RECOGNIZED without the Law (v. 13b)
3. **DEATH** Was in the World After Adam (v. 14a)
4. **ADAM'S** Representation of Man Was Complete (v. 14b)
5. **CHRIST'S** Representation of Man Is Hopeful (v. 14b)

CONTEXT: All men are sinners because Adam was their representative when he sinned (v. 12a), and further all men personally sin (v. 12d). We are dead because we are in Adam, and we are dead because we are sinners. There is nothing good about us without Christ.

- ✓ When Paul says sin **entered into the world**, he means not into the land mass called the earth, but he means the people who live in the world — and he means *all* people became stained with inherited sin, what is called “original sin.”
- ✓ He is emphasizing the 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.
- ✓ And the pervasiveness is not just that sin is part of every man, but that it has touched *every* aspect of every man’s life. We call this “depravity.”
 - 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**).

Having said all those things, Paul anticipates that some might object, suggesting that prior to the Law, there was no sin because there was no known standard to violate. Paul addresses that in vv. 13-14.

1. **SIN Was in the World After Adam (v. 13a)**

- While there are parts of v. 13 that are hard to understand, Paul’s primary premise is given in the first part of the verse and he is exceedingly clear: **until the Law, sin was in the world.**
 - ✓ Notice that Paul says “sin was in the world.” That is, it really existed. It was their sin and their sin was as true of them as it was of Adam.
 - ✓ And remember that when Paul uses the term **world**, he does not mean just that it existed in some places spread around in various locations on the earth. He means that it was in every individual who resides in the world. He’s talking about original sin resident in the hearts of men. And that sin really did exist in all men.
 - ✓ And he says that it existed **until the Law**. That is, sin existed in the hearts of men before the Law was given through Moses that condemned them. As Paul will say in the next verse, from Adam until Moses, there was sin in the hearts of every individual person in the world.
 - ✓ Is Paul right? How about the story of Cain and Abel? And the tower of Babel? And Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah? And Lot’s daughters? And those happening at the Flood (**6:5-7ff**)?

- The perversity and corruption of all men is clearly seen immediately after Adam and through the giving of the Law. And there was no one who could say, “I didn’t know. No one told me what sin is.”
 - ✓ How is it that people can know what sin is even when there isn’t a Law to tell them?
 - ✓ Remember **Romans 2:14-15**. The Law of Moses is not needed to convict men of sin because God has instilled a moral compass called the conscience in every individual. All men internally and inherently know what is right and wrong without being told by the Law. And it has been that way since Adam (**Gen. 3:10** — Adam knows shame because he inherently knows he is guilty — he *really does* now have the knowledge of good and evil that Satan promised in 3:5).
 - ✓ What is the conscience? “The conscience is one’s awareness of what he believes is right and wrong, and the evaluator of how one is living to that standard.” What’s helpful about that definition is that it emphasizes three particular truths about the conscience:
 - *Everyone* is internally evaluated by conscience
 - The standard of one’s conscience will vary according to information and training
 - Response to one’s conscience will vary based on willingness to submit to the conscience
 - ✓ And for our sake this morning, while there are several benefits and uses of the conscience, it is significant to note that the existence of the conscience means that after Adam, sin has always existed in the hearts of all people rendering us guilty before God, *and without excuse*. That means that God has been right to judge men for their sin because all men have always known of their sin. It was true five minutes after Adam sinned and it was true with Lot and Abraham and every citizen of Israel prior to Moses and every resident in any jungle without the Scriptures today. Sin has infected *every individual* by relationship with Adam and by deed. No exceptions.

2. The Full Extent of Sin’s Sinfulness Was Not RECOGNIZED without the Law (v. 13b)

- While sin was in the world from Adam forward, Paul does make a qualifying statement in v. 13 — **but sin is not imputed when there is no law.**
 - ✓ The word imputed is the same one that appears several times in ch. 4 to refer to the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to sinners. It is an accounting term that means “to place in an account,” or “to consider” or “to reckon.” So God declares sinners to be righteous because Christ’s righteousness has been counted to be theirs.
 - ✓ So what does it mean when Paul says **sin is not imputed**? It sounds like Paul means that there is no sin if there is no law. But that *cannot* be what it means because of what he has just said in 13a.
 - ✓ Some suggest that it means that there is sin, but there is no guilt (culpability) for sin until there is law. But if that’s true, then why do people die and why was Sodom and Gomorrah punished and why was there a flood, and why did Pharaoh have the problems he did...? There *was* guilt.

- ✓ A better option is to say, “there is a law and there always has been a law.” Paul is not saying, “there was no law after Adam, so there was no imputation of sin.” He is saying, “Sin is always imputed (counted) against sinners because there is always a law of some kind. It is either codified, as it was with Moses, or it is in our consciences (2:14-15), but there is *always* a law and man is always guilty of violating that law.” [Hendriksen] That’s a reasonable explanation. But because he refers specifically to Moses (meaning the Law that came from Moses) in v. 14 and because he uses the word “law” in Romans much more specifically than “conscience,” I don’t think he means that.
- ✓ The best option is to acknowledge that Paul is affirming that sin existed always in all men after Adam — death and judgment makes that clear. And the function of the law is to make people recognize their culpability for their sin — to make them accountable. Until the law came, they did not realize the fullness of their culpability, but after the law, they had a higher accountability. So when he says ***sin isn’t imputed*** it is a way of saying that there is a scale of responsibility for sin and until Moses’ law came that made them fully aware of the nature of their sin, there was less responsibility for their sin. That doesn’t mean they escape God’s wrath; many passages make clear that there is no escaping wrath for *any* sinner (Rom. 1:28; 6:23). But it is to acknowledge that there are degrees of wrath and punishment according to what is known about God and sin:
 - The parable in **Luke 12:42-48** teaches there are two different levels of judgment for those who unknowingly do wrong and those who rebel willfully.
 - **Hebrews 10:29** says there is worse punishment for those who knowingly rejected Christ as the Son of God than those who did not knowingly reject Him. (cf. also Mt. 23:15; Acts 1:25).
 - Paul appears to be making a similar point in Romans 5:13 — sin is sin and death is death and all sinners will receive condemnation, but there is a greater condemnation for willful sin.
- So Paul is affirming that sin reigns in the hearts of all men and always has. And no man is without excuse. All men are guilty and know in their hearts they are guilty (even if they don’t admit it). They may not know the full extent of their sin or the one they sin against, but they know they sin.
- And the ugliness of our original sin (before Christ) is explained by R. C. Sproul —

“Sin is cosmic treason.”

“With those words, I [am] trying to communicate the seriousness of human sin. We rarely take the time to think through the ramifications of our sin. We fail to realize that in even the slightest sins we commit, such as little white lies and other peccadilloes, we are violating the law of the Creator of the universe. In the smallest sin we defy God’s right to rule and to reign over His creation. Instead, we seek to usurp for ourselves the authority and the power that belong properly to God. Even the slightest sin does violence to His holiness, to His glory, and to His righteousness. Every sin, no matter how seemingly insignificant, is truly an act of treason against the cosmic King.” [The Truth of the Cross.]

3. **DEATH** Was in the World After Adam (v. 14a)

- There is another reason we know that Paul doesn't mean that there is *no* accountability or guilt for sin prior to Moses' law — it's because **death reigned** from Adam until Moses.
 - ✓ For death to **reign** means that death is authoritative and death is king and death is ruler and ruling.
 - ✓ There are other consequences for sin: Adam's sin brought estrangement in relationships (particularly with God, Gen. 3), the inability of the mind to function as God intended (Eph. 4:17-19), disharmony between husband and wife, difficulty for women in bearing children, hard work for men (the resistance of the earth against man's dominion), and the introduction of disease and illness. *Sin has never produced anything beneficial for humanity.* Yet of all these calamities, the worst of them was the reigning power of death.

“Death has a voracious, insatiable appetite. Much like a vicious animal, it silently stalks its prey and then strikes with great fury and often little warning. It tears asunder hopes and dreams, and declares that life itself is ‘vanity,’ ‘futility,’ meaninglessness,’ or ‘emptiness.’ Thus death “can make a man hate life, not because he wants to die, but because it renders life so futile.” [Barry Davis, [“Ecclesiastes 12:1-8...”](#)]

- It is significant that Paul does not say, “*sin* reigned,” but that “*death* reigned.” His initial statement (v. 12) was that sin had entered the world with Adam's sin, but now he emphasizes the consequence of Adam's sin, **death**. It is another way to say that sin and death are inseparable partners. Where the one exists, the other will also always be present. Notice the union of the connected “lordship” of sin and death in **6:20ff**.
 - ✓ In what sense does death **reign**? It is sovereign over all men; no one escapes death (apart from divine intervention, as with Enoch and Elijah and the coming rapture). So all men must submit to its power. Its authority also looms constantly over all men; its presence is always felt so that all men are always aware of its potential. All will die.
 - ✓ Death is universal, inescapable, and its sovereignty is absolute and complete. Those who lived before Moses might not have known the full extent of the nature of their sin, but because they experienced death, they knew the full extent of the consequence of their sin.
 - ✓ And death is no friend of any man. It is our enemy (even as believers). As Michael Horton has said, “Death is not a portal to life. Death is not a benign friend, but a dreaded foe. It is not a natural part of life, but the most unnatural part of life you could imagine.” [*O Love That Will Not Let Me Go*, 24.]
 - ✓ But for the believer the joy is that sin and death are no longer reigning over us (**6:8-16**). So Horton: “But in his death and resurrection, Jesus crushed the Serpent's head, vanquishing the ‘last enemy’ of every believer. This last enemy will one day be overcome in the final resurrection of the dead, but that is because it has already objectively been vanquished in the resurrection of our Living Head. Look at him and see what the whole harvest will be like in the end. In Christ, the end has already begun. The Head will not live without his body. The shape of the future is already present.”

- Death reigned and death reigns. Paul's point is not that death ceased to reign after Moses, but that after Adam's sin, death has always reigned, even to this day and until God completes His judgment against all sin and sinners.

4. **ADAM'S Representation of Man Was Complete (v. 14b)**

- In the middle of verse 14, Paul refers to Adam's sin as being different from those who came immediately after him (and until Moses). In what way was Adam's sin different?
 - ✓ Adam's sin was informed. Adam didn't have the Bible, but he did have special revelation: God spoke directly to Adam and Adam knew exactly what God intended for and demanded from him.
 - ✓ Remember **Genesis 2:16-17** — eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was strictly forbidden. There was no question and nothing to debate about what God said. And Adam heard what God said. He had information and he had understanding. And he volitionally rebelled.
 - ✓ Now after Adam and until Moses, there is no special revelation like that; some knew a few specific things that God said and demanded because of personal revelation from God (like Jacob and Abraham), but God's special revelation was not given broadly. But when God spoke His commandments to Moses, His special revelation was widely known and disseminated. And no man had any excuse for his sin. And after the inception of the Scriptures, every act of sin is also an *informed* act of sin and thus an act of rebellion, just as Adam's sin was rebellious. As Paul says in 3:20, "through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." We know specific sin when we have the Scriptures and thus when we sin, its no longer "accidental." It's purposeful and hostile.
 - ✓ Paul indicates this different kind of sin when he refers to the ***offense of Adam***. "Sin" is "to miss the mark" of God's standard (with rebellion implied); an ***offense*** is to go beyond a boundary, to "overstep" a standard. It is to intentionally sin. Rebellion is in the nature of the word ***offense***. Because Adam had God's revealed Word, his sin was also rebellious.
 - ✓ Chuck Swindoll explains what this looks like: when he was a youngster he had a paper route that he delivered on his bicycle. And to make it go faster, he would sometimes cut across the yards of people who lived on corner lots. And at one house in particular he created a narrow trail across the lawn. And then one morning he saw a sign in the yard: "KEEP OFF THE GRASS. NO BIKES." And seeing the sign he...rode across the yard anyway — all the way right up to the feet of the author of the sign. And as Swindoll said, "The man shared with me a few things from his heart." Prior to the appearance of the sign there was a vague awareness of his sin; after the appearance of the sign, the sin was redefined as rebellion and judgment was justly imputed to him.
- Friends, all my sin and all your sin is informed sin. We have the revelation of God in His Word and every act of sin we commit is an act of rebellion against God's authority over us.
- J. I. Packer has a helpful summary of our sinful condition:

"To sum up: sin, as a label for our natural state before God, signifies rebellion, defilement, condemnation, and slavery. *Rebellion* means that all of us resent, defy, evade, belittle, ignore, and disobey God, one way or another, every day of our lives. *Defilement* means that all of us are unclean—dirty, to say it straight out—in God's sight; we are offensive and unacceptable to him, and unfit for his fellowship. *Condemnation* means that in the presence of God our Judge we are all guilty rebels who can now only await the moment when God makes us feel his displeasure. Slavery—you could call it bondage, or addiction—means that we are all naturally under sin's power; we do not have it in us to love God and our neighbor whole-heartedly and without qualification, the way we should." [Taking God Seriously; my emphasis.]

- Friend, if you are not a Christian, this is your condition: you are a sinner, you are rebellious, and you are dead, and under the wrath of God. And by "Christian," I don't mean a religious affiliation, as in, "I'm not Eastern Orthodox; I'm Christian." And I don't mean that you prayed a sinner's prayer or walked an aisle when you were 7-years-old. By "Christian" I mean you are broken-hearted over your sin, you realize that you deserve God's wrath, and you not only want freedom from that wrath but you want to change and you want to be like Jesus Christ. You want to stop sinning and start pleasing God. That's repentance — brokenness for your sin and a desire and willingness to change.
- Why should you repent today?
 - ✓ Because you are alive today and death is your enemy and you do not know if you will be alive tomorrow to repent and embrace Christ as your greatest treasure and friend.
 - ✓ Because you don't know if tomorrow you will want to repent. Your rebellion against Him may harden you to an extent that you cross-over a pathway from which you can never return. And the pathway is a solidified heart of hardness against Christ. Don't wait. Give up your sin. Follow Christ. Trust Him and obey Him.
 - ✓ Because every day you don't repent when you know you should is another day of rebellion and another day in which you are piling up more judgment for yourself in the future. Not to repent when you know you should and must is the worst kind of rebellion against God. It's not just sin; it's willful sin and hostile sin and mutinous sin. And it will bring God's worst wrath against you.
 - ✓ You have heard the truth of your sin and your condition today. You must repent today.

The last chapter in the story of sin's history is hinted at in the last phrase of v. 14 —

5. **CHRIST'S Representation of Man Is Hopeful (v. 14b)**

- Last week I noted that this section (vv. 12-21) is not really the story of sin or of justification, but it is really the story of two men, and ultimately, it's about one Man and His supremacy — Jesus Christ. And that is given to us at the end of v. 14 and will be amplified in the following verses.
 - ✓ ***Adam, who is a type of Him....*** When Paul says that Adam is a *type* of Christ he means that there is a parallel relationship between Adam and Christ; there is a unique similarity between them.

- ✓ In the following verses, Paul will identify many ways that Adam and Christ are *dissimilar* (and as he does that he demonstrates the supremacy of Christ) [adapted from Witmer, *BKC*] —

ONE MAN (ADAM)	ONE MAN (CHRIST)
v. 15 <i>One man's trespass => many died</i>	<i>One Man's grace => gift of grace (righteousness) to many</i>
v. 16 <i>One (Adam) => judgment and Condemnation</i>	<i>Many trespasses => gift => justification</i>
v. 17 <i>Through one man's trespass => death reigned</i>	<i>Through one Man Jesus Christ => believers reign in life</i>
v. 18 <i>One trespass => condemnation for all men</i>	<i>One act of righteousness => justification offered to all men</i>
v. 19 <i>Disobedience of one => many constituted sinners</i>	<i>Obedience of One => many constituted righteous</i>
v. 21 <i>Sin reigned in death</i>	<i>Grace reigns to bring eternal life</i>

- ✓ There is only one point of similarity between Adam and Christ with Adam being a type of Christ — the action of Adam affected all people who are in him (all mankind) just as the action of Christ affects all those who are in Him. Adam is the representative of all mankind; and Christ is the representative of all who believe in Him. They both have universal impact over their followers.
- And comparing the two, Christ is (infinitely) greater than Adam —
 - ✓ As Adam disobeyed God, so Christ obeyed God.
 - ✓ As Adam disobeyed God and lost peace with God, so Christ obeyed God and always enjoyed peace with God.
 - ✓ As Adam disobeyed God and lost peace with God for all mankind that was represented by him, so Christ obeyed God and restored peace with God for those who believe in Him.
 - ✓ And because of that, all men's hope is not in some kind of self-improvement program. Because we are in Adam, there is no self-help program that will ever be or do enough. Our hope is to be identified with Christ and have His work imputed to us and His righteousness worked in us.
 - ✓ Listen to Thomas Watson:

Faith unites us to Christ; and having union with his person we partake of his merits, and the glorious salvation which comes by him.

...[This] is comfort in case of failings, Alas! How defective are the godly! They come short in every duty; but though believers should be humbled under their defects, they should not despond. They are not to be justified by their duties or graces, but by the righteousness of Christ. Their duties are mixed with sin, but that righteousness which justifies them is a perfect righteousness. [*Body of Divinity*, 231.]

- When we first came to v. 12, you may have been a little perturbed that Adam was your representative, your federal head. How “unfair” that he should represent you. How un-American. We shall stand on our own merit. No, you might be on your own, but you will never stand on your own merit before God. You will only fall before Him (Ps. 1). And for Adam to be your federal head is good news, because that means that Christ also can be your head and through Christ you can have reconciliation (v. 11) and a gift of grace that is justification and not condemnation and the reign of life instead of the reign of death and the reign of grace instead of the reign of sin. Christ is greater than Adam, God is greater than sin and death, and hope abounds to the sinner. That is the essence of the tale of two men.

CONCLUSION: Marilyn Vos Savant writes a column for *Parade* magazine in which she solves puzzles and riddles. A few years ago someone asked her, “If someone offered you a pill that made you immortal, would you take it? (The pill is free, has no side effects and could also be given to any number of people of your choosing.)” Her answer was,

“The question, as I see it, is whether I would be willing to take the risk (for myself and for others) of eventually becoming trapped forever in a situation of intense suffering. This risk seems high, given the fact that we would be existing throughout every war, disease and natural disaster that comes our way. Ultimately — someday, somewhere — we would be so badly damaged that life would not be worth living, but we still would never die. So, no, I would not take that pill. No matter how long I could live happily, the prospect of eternal misery is too high a price to pay.”

The prospect of eternal misery is too high. It is. And as she notes, there is no ultimate hope in this world. But there is great hope in the second Adam, and in Christ there is no misery and there is great freedom.

BENEDICTION: Romans 11:33-36