

World History In A Nutshell

Franklin Church of Christ
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PM Worship

Introduction:

Romans 5:12-21 is a hotbed of conflict and controversy between two major religious camps. Those known as Calvinists claim this passage as one of their champion texts supporting the idea of Total Inherited Depravity or Original Sin. On the other hand, non-Calvinists view this passage quite differently, arguing against the Calvinists' interpretation. Because it is involved in this controversy, sometimes it is hard to read this passage without reading in view of this conflict. Paul, however, did not write **Romans 5:12-21** with the present disagreements in mind. He had a point to make. Based on **Romans 5:10-12** we quickly understand his point was about reconciliation in Jesus Christ. In fact, what Paul gives in these verses is world history in a nutshell. He explains the two most crucial events of the world's history. In reality, if you know absolutely no other world history but these two events and you follow and obey what is taught based on these two events, salvation will be yours.

Discussion:

- I. Event #1: Sin entered the world (**Romans 5:12**).
 - A. How long Adam and Eve had been in the garden is unknown to us. But in the earliest days of the history of man Adam disobeyed the law under which God had placed him. Genesis only records two laws for Adam and Eve in the garden. **Genesis 2:15-17** taught they were to cultivate and keep the garden and they were to abstain from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. **Genesis 3:6** shows the transgression of God's law for Adam and Eve. Imagine for a moment a world created in perfection and purity. A world where there were no lies. A world where there was no lust and adultery. A world where there was no theft or murder. Tranquility, peace and contentment were present in their relationship with one another and within themselves. Then, suddenly, with the bite of a piece of fruit a shadow settled on the earth. Sin had come in. For Adam and Eve, their perceptions of one another and their relationship changed in an instant as demonstrated by **Genesis 3:7**. Sin entered the world.
 - B. The significance of sin's entrance is also found in **Romans 5:12**. Sin was not alone when it came into the world. As sin walked into the world, he held the door open wide for death to come along as well. I believe that Genesis demonstrates that physical death came into the world because of sin. After all, how could Eden be paradise when physical sickness and death existed? Secondly, the genealogy of **Genesis 5** goes out of its way to emphasize the death of Adam and his descendents. However, I do not believe Paul is referring to this in **Romans 5**, nor do I believe the presence of physical death was the most significant change in the world resulting from sin. Paul is referring to spiritual death before God, being separated from God by sin. It is evident in the context of **Romans 6:15-23**, which makes a similar parallel between life and death, that Paul is speaking of spiritual life and death, not physical. Thus, the major significance of sin's entrance into the world was the separation of Adam and Eve from God. No longer did they have the intimate relationship they once did, but now their sins separated them (**Isaiah 59:1-2**).
 - C. Paul continues to explain that sin and death did not stop just by entering the world and residing with Adam. No, death spread to all men. This, of course, causes us alarm because we are a part of the group of all men. Death has not stayed with Adam but has come to us. But how? Paul is clear, so clear it is hard to understand how men miss it. Death came to all men, not because Adam sinned but because all men sinned. Thus, being spiritually dead comes upon any man or woman who follows Adam's example in sin. As we examine this point about sin and death we must dispel some false assumptions made about this text by those who would say we are born guilty of Adam's sin.
 1. The illogic of the Calvinistic position says that all sinned in Adam. Their supposed proof is from **Romans 5:13-14**. The progression says, sin was in the world before the Law was in the world. However, there was no law, so sin was not imputed. Yet, death reigned, so they must have been held accountable for the sin of Adam.
 2. However, a closer look at these verses brings us to an exactly opposite conclusion. In the system of Calvinism, the only sin that was committed before the establishment of Moses' law was the sin of Adam in the garden and all men are somehow guilty of it. But Paul says death reigned even over men who "had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam" (**Romans 5:14**). Paul claims some existed who had not sinned in the same way as Adam, but Calvinism claims that was the only sin.
 3. The problem is the assumption that there was no law between the time of Adam and Moses. But, in fact, this passage proves there was. After all, here were some men over whom death reigned because they sinned, but they hadn't sinned like Adam. Therefore, some law must have existed to declare their actions sinful. Take a look at the history between Adam and Moses, law existed. A law was present when God did not accept Cain's sacrifice and when God punished him for killing his brother (**Genesis 4:5**). There was a law present when God held all of mankind accountable for gross sin and immorality and destroyed man by the flood for it in **Genesis 6-8**. There was some law in effect when God punished Sodom and Gomorrah for their sin (**Genesis 11:1-9**). Are we to believe

that all these judgments really came in response to the one sin of Adam? Of course not. Law existed between Adam and Moses and the spiritual death spread to all men because all men violated the law under which God placed them.

- D. We are to be grateful that the story of history does not end there. Because we too would come under this umbrella of sin and death. What an awful place to be. But, Paul goes on to describe the second significant even in world history, which is even more significant than the first.

II. Event #2: Grace and justification entered the world (**Romans 5:15-16**).

- A. This refers directly back to **Romans 3:23-26, 5:8-10**. As a free gift, God sent Jesus, His Son, to die for us, taking the punishment for our sins. We did not earn this sacrifice. We do not deserve this sacrifice. That is why it is called grace, unmerited favor. Through this grace comes justification. Justification is a legal term describing one who has been on trial and been declared innocent. That is what God has done for His children. We have been on trial for sin, but we have been declared innocent. Not because of our own purity, but because of God's grace and the blood of Christ.
- B. But that is not all. Until this grace and justification entered, spiritual death hung as a pall over all of mankind. But when grace and justification entered the world, they held the door open for life everlasting to remove the disparaging effects of death (**Romans 5:17**). The separation from God which spiritual death brought to us can be taken away by the blood of Jesus if we will only accept it.
- C. Paul claims there are comparisons and contrasts between this event and the first.
 - 1. Comparisons:
 - a. Both events centered around one individual (**Romans 5:19**).
 - b. Both events occurred through one action (**Romans 5:18**).
 - 2. Contrasts:
 - a. Christ's act is far more powerful than Adam's act (**Romans 5:15**).
 - b. Adam's act was the result of one man's sin, Christ's act was the result of our numerous transgressions (**Romans 5:16**).
 - c. Adam's act was one of sin and disobedience. Jesus' act was one of obedience and righteousness (**Romans 5:18-19**).
 - d. And of course, the basic difference is that through Adam's act, death reigned. Through Jesus, life to overcome death came (**Romans 5:17**).
- D. How glorious it is to see the gift of God. To bask in the grace, justification and life that He has given. Now we understand why Paul thought this action of Jesus was so amazing in **Romans 5:8-10**. But all this leads us to one final question.

III. Who gets the life?

- A. Some are confused by the passage because of its varying uses of "many" (**5:15**) and "all men" (**5:18**). One is left to ask the question, "Which is it? Many or all?" Then a thorough Bible student recalls **Matthew 7:13-14**. And wonders, "How does this fit, because life doesn't come to 'many' or 'all', it comes to 'few'?"
- B. The answer, though subtle, is given in **Romans 5**. Paul is using accommodative terms when he speaks of many and all. He is not giving us a technical description of what has happened. Yet, in the passage it is clear who receives the life. **Romans 5:17** clearly says that life comes to "those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness." Only those who receive the grace and justification will receive the life. Those who reject the grace and justification will reject the life. Thus, we learn that salvation is conditional upon our acceptance of Christ's offered gift. We must do something.
- C. Keep in mind **Romans 5:19** and the parallel. "Through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners." But how? Because the many followed his example of sin. This same principle applies to the other part of the verse. "Through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous." But how? Through following the example of Christ in obedience.
- D. Who gets the life? Those who follow Christ's example of obedience.

Conclusion:

Where are you in this spectrum of world history? Are you still under the shadow of death, which you received because you followed in the footsteps of Adam in sin? Or have you received the grace, justification and life, which Jesus gave through His death and resurrection? Interestingly, in the very next chapter Paul explains how we enter Christ's death: through baptism (**Romans 6:3-4**). Interestingly, the thing we do to be saved is an imitation of Christ's own obedience. We entered death by following Adam's example of sin. We enter life by following Jesus' example of death, burial and resurrection. Submit to baptism into Christ and His death today.