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Romans 5 (Part 4)

by Dana L. Goodnough

The theologically rich fifth chapter of Romans includes such themes as justification, substitution, redemption, reconciliation, imputation, faith, and grace. Romans 5:1-11 focuses on the fact that justification by faith results in peace with God. Romans 5:12-21 expands on the contrast between spiritual death and spiritual life—eternal life that’s the outcome of justification by faith. Romans 5:12-14, the focus of this article, introduces the relationship between Adam and Jesus Christ. It points out that everyone related to Adam through birth will die. Here Paul paints the picture of humanity’s dire condition outside of Jesus’ saving work. The concept of “original sin” finds support in this passage.

Adam’s sin and our participation in it introduced sin and death to the whole world (5:12).

Paul begins this section with the transitional term “therefore,” pointing back to his immediate description of our peace with God through justification by faith. This section provides the basis for that outcome of justification. In order to grasp the nature of our

justification, we must understand our deep spiritual need. Death best captures the gist of our spiritual condition prior to our faith encounter with Jesus. Paul states that sin entered the world through one man, clearly referring to Adam and the account of the fall in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve (though Paul focuses on Adam’s culpability) disobeyed God’s commandment and thereby introduced sin into the human race. “Scripture clearly intends us to accept their historicity as the original human pair. . . . Paul’s carefully constructed analogy between Adam and Christ depends for its validity on the equal historicity of both.”¹ Sin, as God had warned, resulted in death, both spiritual death and eventually physical death.

This condition of death passed through Adam to all people because “all sinned.” This phrase, identical in form to that in Romans 3:23 where individual sin is implied (although corporate sin is also possible in that setting), here takes on a deeper meaning based on the context. “Either *all sinned* by copying and so repeating Adam’s sin, or *all sinned* when Adam sinned and were included in his sinning. The first would be a case of imitation (all sinned *like* Adam), and the second a case of participation (all sinned *in and with* Adam.”² Because Paul connects Adam’s sin with the sinful condition of the entire human race, this passage points to the idea that everyone shared in Adam’s original sin. “That Paul meant ‘all sinned in and through Adam and therefore all died’, although theologically difficult, is surely exegetically correct.”³

Adam’s first sin becomes the basis for the doctrine of original sin, meaning that everyone is sinful at birth, born with a sin nature. “‘Original sin’ is a term used to describe the idea that every person sinned in and with Adam, so that Adam’s sin and guilt was our sin and guilt.”⁴ In a way, we all participated in Adam’s sin. We were there “in Adam” and are held responsible. While this may not seem fair to the human mind, there is a spiritual principle at work that’s proven by our own individual acts of sin. Therefore, we could understand our participation in Adam’s sin as the certainty that we’d

have done exactly as he did if we had been in that situation. We sinned in Adam, and therefore we are born spiritually dead and inevitably face physical death.

Sin permeated the human condition even prior to the giving of God's explicit law (5:13).

One line of evidence for the concept of original sin rests on the fact of the universality of death prior to the giving of God's explicit law. Before Moses received God's law on Mount Sinai sin still permeated the world. But, Paul indicates, sinful acts aren't counted against an individual when there's no explicit law. However, sin was still present prior to the law. "The law makes sin an *offense* . . . it intensifies sin and its consequences—but *the law does not create sin*. Sin found its origination in Adam, not in the law."⁵ Since Adam's sin we all possess a sinful nature, a propensity to act outside God's holy standard.

Death reigned over those who were unaware of God's explicit law due to inherent sin (5:14).

Even though there was no explicit law prior to Moses, death reigned from the time of Adam's sin until God gave His law. Even those who didn't sin like Adam by violating a known command—an act of "transgression"—died. Sin is, therefore, inherent to our fallen human condition and the consequence, death, touches us all. Therefore, everyone who is related to Adam through birth will die. But there's hope in the "coming one," the one who from Adam's time perspective was to come into the world to rescue us from our sins. That coming one is Jesus Christ. Paul describes Adam as a "type" or "pre-figure" of Jesus Christ. Jesus stands in contrast to Adam, but there are certain ways in which Jesus and Adam were

similar. These contrasts and comparisons become the subject of Romans 5:15-17.

¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 163.

² Stott, 150.

³ Stott, 151.

⁴ Michael G. Vanlaningham, "Romans" in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham, Editors. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014, 1752.

⁵ Vanlaningham, 1752.