

Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia,  
on Sunday, March 24, 1996, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

**ROMANS 5:12-21**

**HOW JESUS REPLACED WHAT ADAM ERASED**

In these few momentous verses Paul summarizes the history of mankind and why we have the problems we do. Let me give you a few questions:

- Why is there evil in the world?
- Why do people die?
- Why does human nature never change?
- What happens to babies when they die?
- What happens to people who never hear the Gospel?

Are you interested in any of these questions? If you are, you're going to like this passage because it deals with these issues.

The verses divide themselves naturally into 3 short paragraphs, in each of which ADAM and CHRIST are related to each other, although with significant differences.

- a. In verses 12-14 Adam and Christ are introduced.
- b. In verses 15-17 Adam and Christ are contrasted and
- c. In verses 18-21 Adam and Christ are compared.

**I. Adam and Christ are introduced.** Look at verses 12-14. "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned — for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the One to come."

Why is there evil in the world? Because of the disobedience of one man, Adam. What was the disobedience? He ate the forbidden fruit. Eve was disillusioned, but Adam willfully took the fruit and ate it. God had said, "You may eat the fruit from every tree in the garden except this one." And guess which one they went after — the one thing that was off limits! Is that typical of folk today? Anytime there is a prohibition, we want to go after it! Mom says, "Don't do that," so we want to do it!

Now, of course, once sin entered the world, Paradise was lost. Adam blew it. He spoiled the world for us: And I'm going to confront him in heaven some day and say, "Adam, you little

creep; you messed us all up, didn't you?" And I hope Eve is eavesdropping when I'm talking to her husband!

Paul doesn't discuss the origin of sin, which is Satan: He simply shows how it entered the world through our first parents, Adam and Eve.

Now why do people die? Paul says that death came through what? — Through sin. You see, there are two diabolical twins, SIN and DEATH. In Scripture, every time you see one, you're going to find the other. Death is the direct result of sin. "The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23) What is death? Death means separation from God and from your loved ones. There are actually 3 different kinds of death:

- There is physical death. The Bible says, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27 KJV); and that is one appointment we will not be late for. God knows exactly when it is going to happen.

- The second kind of death is spiritual death. God had said, "Once you eat the fruit of this tree you will die." But Adam didn't die physically at the moment he ate the forbidden fruit. He lived on for a long time after that. But at that moment he experienced this second kind of death. When Adam sinned, immediately something died within him, and this condition was passed on to everybody in the human race except the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, all of us were born spiritually dead. In Ephesians 2:1 Paul, in speaking to Christians says, "As for you, you were (past tense) dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live." How can you be alive and dead at the same time? Because he is talking about spiritual death. Look at verse 4, "But because of His great love for us, God Who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions." In other words, to be saved we need to be "born again" and made spiritually alive through our Lord Jesus Christ.

But there is a third kind of death. If someone who is spiritually dead dies physically, then that person experiences eternal death. You see, when you leave this world, you go either to eternal life or eternal death — heaven or hell. Listen to this solemn equation — physical death + spiritual death = eternal death.

Now in Romans 5:12 Paul says, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men..." Do you know anybody who doesn't die? Death is the great equalizer. Rom. 5:12 states 2 things:

- a. There is universal sin. Why? Because Adam is the father of all of us;
- b. There is universal death.

Now notice the words, "And in this way death came to all men because all sinned." Notice it is the past tense. Let me ask you a question — How can you sin if you haven't been born yet? Note that Paul doesn't say "sins"; he says "sin" — "just as sin entered the world..." He's talking about our sin nature. Is it possible for a mother to pass on an infection to the baby that she is carrying? Alas, it is. Think of the poor little souls born with the HIV infection and doomed to an early death. Is it possible for a defect to be passed down from generation to

generation? Yes. And sin is an emotional and spiritual defect. The Bible says that Adam is the father of us all, and when Adam blew it, he was carrying in himself the genes of everybody who was ever to be born, and he passed on the infection called “sin.” So, you and I were born with a “sin nature” which makes it natural for us to want to go the wrong way.

Some people say, “I don’t believe that. I believe man is basically good.” I can’t ever remember anyone saying that to me who was a parent! You parents know that babies are very selfish little creatures! How many of you had to teach your child to lie? How many of you had to teach your child to be disobedient? Folks, they do “what comes naturally.” It is a natural and inevitable tendency to want to do what’s wrong. The Bible says it’s because we are part of the “fallen” human race. When our father Adam sinned, he passed on that infection, that sin nature, that inevitable tendency to be our own boss and do our own thing.

Now let me ask you a question: Are you a sinner because you commit sins, or do you commit sins because you are a sinner? When does an apple tree become an apple tree? After it bears apples? Or is it already an apple tree? You know the answer. It bears apples because it is by nature an apple tree. You and I commit sins because we are by nature sinners — and it all goes back to Adam’s transgression

Now your mind is going ‘round and round, and you’re saying, “But Pastor, is it fair of God to condemn the whole world just because of one man? Is it fair that I should suffer because of Adam’s sin? I wasn’t there. I didn’t eat the apple.” My answer to you is this — Yes, it’s not only fair, but it is wise and gracious of God to condemn everybody because of one man. You say, “Why is that fair and gracious?” For a couple of reasons:

1. If God had taken each of us on a case-by-case basis and evaluated our lives, He would still come to the same conclusion — We all sin!

2. But by condemning the entire world through one man, God was able to save the whole world through one Man, Jesus Christ. Now that’s what this passage is all about. One man brought total condemnation to the world; but one Man, Jesus Christ, can bring total salvation to the world. Adam represents sin for all of us; and Jesus Christ represents salvation for all who receive Him.

What about people who have never heard the good news? Look what Paul says in verse 13, “For before the Law was given (the Ten Commandments) sin was in the world, but sin is not taken into account when there is no law.” God says that even people who have never heard the Law (the Bible) — they still have a sin nature too whether they know the Law or not, because they’re part of the human race. They have Adam as their father; they too are infected with sin, and the fact that they die proves it. Paul is saying, “If you could ever find one person who has never sinned, that person would never die, but obviously even people who have never heard of the Bible die, don’t they?”

Paul explains this by giving an example from the Old Testament. He says, “Some of you are thinking that it is breaking the Law of God that makes us sinners.” How can God judge you for breaking a law you don’t know about? He can’t. So what about people who have never heard

about the laws of God? Paul goes back and says, “What about the people who lived from the time of Adam all the way up to Moses?” You see, the Law was not given until Moses’ day. But even though there were no Ten Commandments, those people still sinned because they had a sin nature inherited from Adam, and they died to prove it. Notice what Paul says, “Sin is not taken into account where there is no law.” That is to say, sin was present during that period before God gave His Law, but God didn’t hold it against anybody. You say, “I wish I had lived in those days!” God couldn’t condemn anybody for breaking a law that didn’t exist. But nevertheless death (the wages of sin) reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam. You see, Adam broke a command. He ate the forbidden fruit.

What am I saying? I’m saying, “It is your inherited sinful nature that condemns you and me; not our individual sins. Somebody says, “Will smoking send a man to hell?” I say, “No, but it will make him smell like he’s been there!” “Will adultery send a person to hell?” No. “Will getting drunk send you to hell?” No. These are “sins,” and of course you will reap the results of these sins in your life here on earth. But God says, “It’s not what you do, but rather what you are, that condemns you.” The people who lived before Moses had this sin nature which made them do such awful things that God wiped them out with the Flood.

Now when you understand that you have a sin nature, you’re going to understand why people have psychological problems. Have you ever found yourself saying this, “The things I don’t want to do, I end up doing, and the things I want to do, I end up not doing!” All of that makes sense when you realize that you have a basic nature problem inside of you — that infection inherited from Adam.

Paul says that even though you don’t commit sins (plural), because you have a sin nature, that causes you to die. Do babies die? Unfortunately, yes. But they’ve never had a chance to sin. True. Why, then, do they die? Because they’re part of the sinful human race. By the way, what happens to babies who die before reaching the age when they can understand the Gospel? We believe that they are safe. Psalm 116:6 says, “The Lord protects the simple hearted.” I think that also includes people who are mentally retarded. The word “protect” in Hebrew means to “preserve.” God saves them. How? By the special operation of the Holy Spirit in their lives, regenerating them, even though they don’t know it.

We’re talking, folks, about the famous doctrine of “original sin.” Original sin means that everyone since Adam, except the Lord Jesus Christ, has had a death-dealing problem: A fatal infection.

The last part of verse 14 says, “Adam was a pattern of the One to come.” What is Paul talking about? He is talking about Jesus Christ. Now how in the world is Adam like Christ? Adam got us into the mess we’re in: Jesus saves us. Well, this brings us to the second section of the passage:

**II. Adam and Christ are contrasted:** Verses 15-17. Before we look at these contrasts and comparisons between Adam and Christ, perhaps some of you may be saying, “Why is this important?” Well, this section we are studying is about salvation. In Romans 4 & 5 Paul is

talking about how we are saved. In Chapter 5 he keeps saying that salvation is the result of a single act — the atoning death of Jesus on the Cross at Calvary. For example, verse 9 says that “we have been justified by His blood.” There is one event that makes you a believer — the death of Jesus. Now Paul was a logical teacher, so he always anticipated people’s questions. As he is teaching here, he’s thinking, “Some of them out there will be wondering how the action of just one person can affect the whole world. How could the death of Jesus Christ almost 2,000 years ago affect you and me and everyone else today? Is it possible that one Man could affect the entire human race?” Paul says, “Yes; let me give you an example. His name was Adam!” He’s simply saying that one person can make a vast difference in the whole human race. His conclusion is in verse 18, “We see, then, that as one act of sin exposed the whole human race to God’s judgment and condemnation, so one act of perfect righteousness (the death of Jesus) brings justification to all men and sets them free and gives them life.” Just as Adam destroyed it for everyone coming after him, so Jesus Christ saves it for everyone who receives Him.

Now, let’s look at the contrasts. The key phrase in verses 15-17 is comprised of 3 words: “Is not like...” Look at verse 15, “The gift is not like the trespass”; and verse 16, “Again, the gift is not like the result.”

First in verse 15 we see the event: “But the gift is not like the trespass.” So under “Adam” write, “Adam’s sin.” The event under “Christ” is Christ’s gift. Paul is contrasting Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden and Christ’s gift of salvation purchased at Calvary.

Now look in verse 16 at the result of their action. The result of Adam’s sin was judgment and condemnation. The result of Christ’s gift is justification. Jesus paid for every sin you and I will ever commit.

Then in verse 17 we contrast the effect. The effect of Adam’s sin is death. The effect of Christ’s gift is life. Death reigns today, folks. That’s a fact of life. Every funeral procession proves that that is true. But we can “reign in life” because Jesus purchased life for us.

Skipping over to verse 19 we find a final contrast in the reason these events happened. Adam’s event was sin. Christ’s event was His gift of life. In verse 19 it says, “For just as through the disobedience of the one man, the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one Man the many will be made righteous.” So, the reason these events happened is because of Adam’s disobedience and Christ’s obedience. In Philippians 2:8 we read that Christ was “obedient even unto the death of the Cross.” Now these are the contrasts between Adam and Christ.

**III. Adam and Christ are compared** verses 18-21. The key phrase in these verses is comprised of 2 words: “So also.” We find these words in verses 18, 19, and 21. For example, in verse 18, “Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.”

Now there are two comparisons in this passage:

- a. We have just noted the first comparison in verse 18. Both Adam and Christ committed

a single act. “The result of one trespass was condemnation for all. . .The result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all.” The key word here is the word “one”: It is used 11 times.

Adam committed “one trespass.” What does “trespass” mean? It means “crossing over the line.” When you see a sign which says, “No Trespassing,” you know that means, “You’re not to go beyond this point.” In Genesis 3 we see that Adam made a calculated decision to cross the line. He flat out rebelled against God. He trespassed. Now why is it our nature to rebel against those same kinds of boundaries? — “Like father like son”! We’re all humans, and the first human did it, and that infection has been passed on to us. So, both Adam and Christ committed a single act: One trespass; one act of righteousness.

b. The second comparison is found in verse 19 where we are told that both Adam and Christ influenced the entire human race. “For just as through the disobedience of the one man many were made sinners (we all became infected), so also through the obedience of the one Man the many will be made righteous.” Now salvation, of course, is not automatic. Some people say, “Because of Adam, we all became sinners, but because of Jesus we all became saved.” That sounds good, doesn’t it? Some people in liberal churches actually believe that. It is called “Universalism.” They say, “Our task is not to go out and get people saved. Just go to them and say, ‘You’re saved already; you just don’t know it!’ And if you tell them this good news, they will begin to act like Christians.” But it’s not that way at all. The key verse is verse 17, “How much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace... reign in life...” It is “those who receive” the salvation purchased by our Lord who are within the Kingdom; not everybody.

Paul gives a beautiful conclusion to this whole passage. Verse 20 says, “The law was added so that the trespass might increase.” The law really lets people see what great sinners they are! “But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.” Every time you see Satan doing more and more bad things in the world, God just increases His grace more and more and more!

In our Lord’s parable of the wheat and the weeds, an enemy came one night and sowed weeds on the soil. Now the weeds represent all that’s bad in the world, and the wheat represents all that is good. The farmer said, “Let both grow together until the harvest (the Judgment Day).” (Matthew 13:30) This means that things are getting worse and worse, but they are also getting better and better. You can’t make a blanket statement and say that everything in the world is bad. There are lots of good things in the world. While the devil is at work, God is even more powerfully at work. It all depends on what you want to look at. Is the water glass half empty or half full?

Think of the tremendous spiritual revival going on today especially in Third World countries — places like Indonesia and Latin America.

- By the year 2,000 Africa will be the most Christianized continent.
- South Korea today, percentage wise, is more a Christian nation than the USA.

Rather than being depressed at all the evil in the world, let us never forget that God is at work as

never before, because where sin increases, grace increases all the more — I want to focus on what God is doing, don't you?

Finally, verse 21, "So that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness, to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Now there are 2 key thoughts here that are really good news:

1. The word "reign" is used 5 times in this passage, and it speaks of the control or rulership exercised by a king. So, what he's saying is that either sin and death are going to control your life, or grace and life are going to be in control; and you have to choose between the kingdom of Adam or the Kingdom of God. And

2. The other phrase in verse 20 is "all the more." Grace increased "all the more." The phrase is used 3 times; in verses 15, 17, and 20. Every time it's used, it refers to God's grace. He's saying that in Jesus Christ we gain much more than we ever lost in Adam, and that's great news! I believe these words justify the conclusion that the work of Christ will in the end be seen to be much more effective than the work of Adam; that Christ will raise to life many more than Adam will drag to death.

We know that God will fulfill His promise to make Abraham's seed as numerous as the stars in the sky (Gen. 15:5) and the sand on the seashore (Gen. 22:17). This refers, of course, to his spiritual family, and that includes all of us who believe. As Revelation 7:9 assures us, when the redeemed are all gathered before God's throne, they will be "a great multitude that no one could count" from all the world's nations, peoples and languages.

But someone says, "Didn't Jesus say, 'Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it'?" Yes, He said that. But notice that when someone asked Him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" (Luke 13:23), you remember our Lord's answer: He simply said, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door..." He was really saying, "Leave a question like that to God; God, and God alone, knows how many are going to be saved. It is not your business or mine to discover how many are going to be saved. Our business is to make every effort to enter; to make certain that we are inside the Kingdom, and that we are trusting Christ alone for our salvation. If we make certain that we are inside, then, one day in glory, and not until then, we shall find out how many companions we have. It may very well be that we shall have a great surprise! But it is not our business now.

Dear friend, make sure, this very moment, that you are inside!

**AMEN.**