

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine God's communicable attribute of goodness.

We examined the fall of Satan last time, and we know that after his fall Satan tempted Adam and Eve to sin. But we didn't have time to answer the question of how Adam's sin affects the rest of us. I know that this is a question that has been controversial throughout the ages but, Dr. Spencer, what does the Bible say about it?

Dr. Spencer: The Bible is clear that Adam was acting as our representative, what theologians call our federal head. We briefly mentioned this in Session 45 when we were discussing hermeneutics, the science of how to interpret the Bible. And we noted at that time that God uses a kind of representative government for his creatures. While he treats every individual with absolute justice or rich mercy, it is still true that he sees all human beings as being in one of two camps. We are all either in Adam, or in Christ. They are the two federal heads and we are all represented by one or the other.

Marc Roby: As I remember, you quoted Romans 5 in support of this view.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, I did. But we only took a brief look at a couple of verses. In answering this important question today, I'd like to take a longer look at Romans 5:12-21. In examining this passage I'm going to draw heavily on P.G. Mathew's book on Romans. He points out that Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said that Roman 5:12-21 is the key to understanding the whole book of Romans, but then Rev. Mathew states that "I would say this section is the key to interpreting all Scripture and all human history. If we want to know why people are bad and do bad things, or why a sinner cannot save himself, we should read this passage. If we want to understand why human salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, we should read this passage. If we want to comprehend the doctrine of union with Christ and be fully assured of our ultimate salvation, we must read this passage."¹

Marc Roby: Those are bold claims about the importance of this passage. I'm looking forward to getting into it.

Dr. Spencer: They are bold claims, but they are also true. The core of the gospel message is presented in this passage and it is often rejected by people because, as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1:18, "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."² And, in 1 Corinthians 2:14 we are told that "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."

¹ P.G. Mathew, *Romans: The Gospel Freedom* (Volume 1), Grace and Glory Ministries, pg. 302

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Marc Roby: And therefore, this passage in Romans is particularly important for anyone who considers himself a Christian. If we cannot accept this teaching about God's way of salvation, we need to cry out to God for his Holy Spirit to grant us understanding and salvation.

Dr. Spencer: You're right. This passage is that important. And it fits in with a discussion of God's attribute of goodness because I can't think of anything that illustrates God's goodness more than the gospel of salvation by grace.

Marc Roby: Nor can I.

Dr. Spencer: The passage begins, in Verse 12, by saying, "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—". The first thing we need to look at is the word "Therefore".

Marc Roby: Which, of course, refers to what Paul had said prior to this verse.

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. And, certainly, in part it refers back to Verse 10, where we read, "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" This verse clearly states man's problem, "we were God's enemies".

Marc Roby: And it is never a good thing to have the eternal, omnipotent Creator of all things as your enemy.

Dr. Spencer: No, it isn't. You're bound to lose. And Paul goes on to argue that we were God's enemies precisely because we were still in Adam; in other words, he was still our representative. But, in Verse 10 he tells us that we were reconciled to God through the death of Jesus Christ and that, having been reconciled, we will be saved. So, the word "therefore" at the beginning of Verse 12 is pointing back to this reconciliation and salvation that we have in Jesus Christ.

Marc Roby: Alright, let me read the verse again with that thought in mind. It says, "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—".

Dr. Spencer: And notice that this verse does not express a complete thought, it leaves you expecting something, expecting it to go on. And yet the next verse, Verse 13, starts a new sentence. In other words, Paul leaves his thought half finished. And this is indicated in some Bibles by ending Verse 12 with a dash or a colon. Also, in some Bibles Verse 13 begins with a parenthesis, indicating that it is the start of a parenthetical section that continues through Verse 17. Paul is doing what we all do often, he starts a thought and then realizes that he needs to explain it more fully before continuing. So, let's look at the thought. He said, "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".

Marc Roby: That is a statement loaded with meaning.

Dr. Spencer: Which is why Paul realized it needed to be fleshed out. The statement makes three points. First, sin entered the world through one man. Second, death is the result of sin. And, third, all die because all sinned in Adam. Let's deal with the second point first.

Marc Roby: And that second point is that death is the result of sin.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, but it is specifically the sin of Adam as we'll get to in a minute. The apostle says that death came "through" sin. He says the same thing somewhat differently in Romans 6:23, where we read that "the wages of sin is death". In other words, death is not natural. It is the punishment God promised Adam and Eve for sinning as we read in Genesis 2:17. And so, in Verses 13 and 14, Paul explains this further.

Marc Roby: Let me read those verses before you go on. Romans 5:13-14 say, "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."

Dr. Spencer: And notice Paul's logic here. He points out that sin is not taken into account when there is no law. He doesn't say that people didn't sin during this period of time, because they most certainly did; in fact, he says "sin was in the world." But he says that sin isn't taken into account. Nevertheless, he points out that the people who lived between the time of Adam and Moses and "did not sin by breaking a command", still died. This proves that these people died for Adam's sin. He makes that explicit in Verse 15 where he says that "many died by the trespass of the one man". In fact, he repeats this point several times so that we can't get it wrong. He also says in Verse 16 that "judgment followed one sin" and in Verse 17 he says that "by the trespass of the one man" death reigned.

Marc Roby: I can hear many of our listeners just bristling at the thought that people would die because of someone else's sin.

Dr. Spencer: I understand the objection. But let me put off dealing with it for a few minutes, there is a very good answer to it. We can summarize Paul's argument as follows: sin entered the world through Adam and all people since the time of Adam are subject to death as a result of his sin. So far this doesn't sound good for us, but then Paul ends Verse 14 by saying that Adam "was a pattern of the one to come." And he goes on to explain that in Verse 15.

Marc Roby: Which says, "But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!"

Dr. Spencer: And here is the gospel message! Adam was a pattern of the one to come, which is speaking of Christ, but there is a drastic difference, because we are condemned if we are in Adam, but eternally saved if we are in Christ. He was a pattern only in the sense that he was our head before and Christ is our head now.

Paul starts off Verse 15 by saying that "the gift is not like the trespass". Salvation is a free gift. Paul also tells us that in Ephesians 2:8-9, where we read, "For it is by grace you have been saved,

through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Marc Roby: And, of course, grace is unmerited favor. Or, we could even say, it is showing favor to those who deserve condemnation.

Dr. Spencer: That’s right. And Paul then explains further. He goes on in Romans 5:15 to say, “For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!” As I noted earlier, this verse makes it even more explicit that many died because of the sin of the one man, which refers to Adam. But the gift, which we are told came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflows to many.

Marc Roby: Praise God for his rich mercy.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, praise God indeed. And Paul goes on, in Verse 16, to say that “Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.” Here he again makes it clear that death, which is the just judgment for sin, followed “one sin”, which was the sin of Adam. But the gift, which followed many trespasses, or sins, brought justification. As he said in Verse 10, we are reconciled to God.

Marc Roby: And in Verse 10 it had said that “we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son”.

Dr. Spencer: Which, of course, refers to Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross. Then, in Verse 17, Paul says, “For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.” We again see the emphasis on the “one man” through whom death reigned, which is Adam, and the “one man” through whom righteousness and life reign, who is Christ. This passage clearly shows that the theological idea of Adam and Christ as the two federal heads is completely biblical.

Marc Roby: And it again speaks of God’s grace and gift. Salvation is clearly not by works.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that point is abundantly clear in this passage. And we have now finished the parenthetical comments that began in Verse 13, so Verse 18 finishes the thought that Paul started in Verse 12. Let me read both verses. Verse 12 says, “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—” and then Verse 18 says, “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.”

Marc Roby: And I must praise God again. And I must point out that we have to be careful with this verse, when it says that this one act of righteousness, which is referring to Christ’s atoning sacrifice, “brings life for all men”, it is not telling us that every single human being will be saved.

Dr. Spencer: No, it isn't. It means that all who are saved by the grace of God are saved as a result of this one act of righteousness. In fact, Paul phrases it differently in the very next verse. Verse 19 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." We have to interpret these verses in a way that is consistent with all of Scripture.

Marc Roby: The first principle of hermeneutics as you taught in Sessions 39 through 48.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it is the most important principle of hermeneutics. And when you apply it here it is obvious the statements about death coming to all men and the many being made sinners both refer to every single human being who has descended from Adam and Eve in the natural way. Whereas, the statements about bringing life to all men and the many being made righteous do not refer to every single human being, but only to those who are born again and justified by faith in Christ.

Marc Roby: Now the last two verses, 20 and 21, then say "The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Dr. Spencer: We don't have time today to deal with what is meant by saying that "where sin increased, grace increased all the more", but notice again that sin reigned in death – in other words, death is the penalty for sin, but specifically for the sin of Adam. And then also note that grace reigns through righteousness and brings eternal life through Jesus Christ. Saying "through Jesus Christ" means that eternal life comes to those people, and only those people, who are united to Christ by true saving faith. We are all conceived with Adam as our federal head and we are, therefore, subject to death. But, praise God, if we place our trust in Jesus Christ, we are united to him by faith and receive eternal life. In Romans 8:1 Paul wrote that "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus".

Marc Roby: What a glorious promise that is. But I'm not going to let you forget the question you put off earlier. You said that you have a good answer for those who think it is unfair for them to be born subject to the penalty of death because of the sin of Adam.

Dr. Spencer: There is a great answer to that question. First, let me point out that God is perfect and all he does is perfect, so he chose the perfect representative for the human race. None of us would have done any better than Adam did. And so, if what you want is fairness, and you interpret that to mean that you should be judged on your own merits, you need to realize that we would *all* have fallen and would go to hell for our own sins if we were put in the same situation as Adam. God's representative government is the only way anyone can be saved! It is only because we can be united to Christ as our federal head that salvation is possible. If you have a problem with being represented by Adam, then logically, you should also have a problem with being represented by Christ.

Marc Roby: Yes, I see your point. We like the one, but not the other.

Dr. Spencer: And, of course, ultimately, it doesn't matter what we like. What matters is what is true. And God's Word makes it clear, as we have just seen, that this is how he has chosen to deal with his creation. And who are we to complain?

Marc Roby: Well, we certainly shouldn't, but unfortunately people often do.

Dr. Spencer: It is unfortunate, but it is also because we are sinners. Not only do we inherit the guilt of Adam's sin, we also inherit his sinful nature. When Adam and Eve sinned, it produced a real change in their natures. We aren't told exactly how that works, but it is clear that it did. They used to have perfect fellowship with God, but right after the fall we see them hiding from God.

Marc Roby: Sin always produces fear and animosity.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it does. And the sinful nature that is displayed by their fear and animosity is handed down to us. We aren't told exactly how that occurs, but however it happens, the results are clear. Every single human being who has descended from Adam and Eve by the ordinary means of procreation is, conceived in sin, born in sin, and practices sin. As David put it in Psalm 51:5, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." And because we are sinners by nature, we sin.

Marc Roby: Which is abundantly obvious in the world all around us. And I think you have answered the question of how Adam's sin affects us. Since he was our representative, we share in his guilt and all of the bitter fruit of his sin.

Dr. Spencer: The Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it well. Question 16 asks, "Did all mankind fall in Adam's first transgression?" and the answer is given, "The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity; all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression." But, praise God, in his great love and according to his attribute of goodness, he provided us with a Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Marc Roby: And with that, I think we are out of time for today. Let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org, we'd love to hear from you.