

Introduction: All of mankind is born into the family of the ‘First Adam’ and lives under the curse and bondage of his deadly headship, and can only be delivered from his sway when born again into the family of Jesus Christ, the ‘Last Adam.’ Christ’s work as the ‘Last Adam’ is a cornerstone of the Reformation and our focus in Romans 5 in our notes this week. Let us turn to Romans 5:12-21 to see how grace wins us over from the dead family of the first Adam as we celebrate the Reformation this week.

Mon/Tues: read Romans 5:12 & 5:18. Scholars instruct us to take Romans 5:12 & 18 together as containing the main point of Paul’s argument, and then to take Romans 5:13-17 as a parenthesis. Our English Standard Version pew Bibles seem to take this approach, substituting a dash at the end of verse 12 for the parenthesis found in the King James. Just take the dash as a reminder that verse 13 begins a bracketed section down to verse 17. The ESV reads as follows:

ESV: ¹² *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned –* ¹³ *for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.* ¹⁴ *Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.*

¹⁵ *But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.* ¹⁶ *And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.* ¹⁷ *For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.*

¹⁸ *Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.*

James Philip in his commentary on Romans sums up the main point of these verses:

This, then, is the basic thesis: as death came through Adam, so life has now come through Christ. Underlying this statement is the concept of representation. Adam and Christ are not here regarded as simply historical individuals, and it is not in this capacity that Paul speaks of them; they are representative figures, and each stands for the whole race as a single body, the old and the new humanity respectively. When condemnation and death came upon Adam, they came upon him as the representative head of the race, and thus they came upon all men, in him. Conversely what Christ has done is also a representative work involving, and shared by, all who are in Him.

Meditate and Pray: Let us give thanks for the cosmic scale of Christ’s work in our place. His work *simply abounds* in grace – grace sufficient to cover the sins of all His people. Let us therefore resolve, by that same enabling grace, to put to death the deeds of the Old Adam, and live in the resurrection power of our new Head and Savior Jesus!

Wednesday: read Romans 5:12, 18 & John 17:9. Right off the bat, it is important for us to define the *apparently universal terms* which Paul uses in Romans 5:12-21. Time and again, he emphasizes that “all” fell with Adam under the sentence of death, and also that “all” now are

delivered into the reign of grace and into the life that comes upon “all” who are in Christ. Romans 5:18 is a good example:

¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for **all** men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for **all** men.

But Paul cannot mean that *all men* are saved. Even our Lord Jesus, who prayed for His enemies and for all who crucified Him, nevertheless refused to pray savingly for all men. Referring to the disciples and the church for which He prays, He says to His Father in John 17:9: “I pray for them (the church). I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.” Based on John 17:9, we must understand that Jesus’ reign of grace in Romans 5:18 issues from the salvation which comes only to those who are justified by faith. All those for whom Christ died will indeed be saved – but not those who fall outside of God’s saving purposes.

Meditate and Pray: Do you treasure the gift of life in Jesus Christ all the more – knowing that many are given over by God to their own sin? Because they refuse this salvation unto their eternal destruction, God “passes them over.” But the joy for those following Jesus is that He delivers them from the deceit and bondage which plagues all Adam’s race!

Thurs/Fri: read Romans 5:13-18. One might wrongly conclude from Paul’s argument that the salvation and new life which Jesus Christ gives His elect is somehow smaller and less massive in scale than the *universal* guilt of Adam’s first sin and the reign of death which overshadows all men born of him. But Romans 5:13-17 corrects this distortion by underlining the surpassing glory of Christ’s taking Adam’s place as our Savior and Head.

Though it is true that death has come upon all mankind (those who lived before the giving of the Law of Moses and those who lived under the Law – Romans 5:13-14), the gift of life through Christ is far superior to Adam’s sin. Why? Because Christ’s obedience supercedes and excels Adam’s disobedience, putting an end to ‘Adam the First’s’ reign of failure, and inaugurating His own new humanity as the Last Adam and the Head of the new creation.

Consider the argument of Romans 5:18 more closely. Adam’s ‘one act of transgression’ led to death for all. But Jesus Christ’s ‘one act of righteousness’ is able not only to provide forgiveness of sins for all who believe – but also to substitute a sinless, perfectly whole and completely fulfilled human life in place of all that Adam failed to be! A full gift of grace indeed!

Adam’s fall occurred *before* he accomplished anything for God’s glory, in the beginning of his life under the covenant of works in the Garden of Eden. That covenant of works depended upon Adam’s obedience to God’s command: “Do not eat of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, for on the day that you eat of it, you will die” – a simple command augmented by an abundance of blessing for Adam in a perfect paradise! But the words were barely out of God’s mouth, and Adam chose to reject them. Adam barely walked through one creation week before he readily and quickly chose death and disobedience. The horror of his rebellion was that it occurred when *all that had been given him in paradise was still fresh and new!* The dew of God’s blessing was still on every plant in Eden when the blasting hatred of Adam’s sin withered all that God had made good. Death came upon Adam precisely when he had so much to live for, and when the light of God’s goodness was just beginning to shine over his life! In his golden time, he chose the scrap metal of a life lived without God. What a monumental sin! No wonder

Romans 5:15 declares that “many died” through this one trespass of Adam! It was that monumental of a choice – enough in one sin to bring down the whole human race!

But Christ Jesus shows His power by taking our flesh – so desiccated and scarred by centuries of hopeless death, misery and destruction – and making it new by His life of perfect obedience! He goes millions of miles past Adam (who was disqualified right out of the starting blocks) and runs the whole race in our weak and condemned nature. All men and devils opposed Him in His marathon of salvation. Every mile He carried the burden of all our guilt. He experienced the absolute dehydrating power of temptation and the blast of the hatred of all mankind. At the finish line on the Cross, there was no one cheering or urging Him on. Even His Father, at the very moment of His highest obedience, had to turn away from His Son as He bore our sin! *At the very time when He fulfilled all the righteousness which Adam failed to perform, our Champion was in utter darkness and forsakenness on Calvary!*

So there simply is no comparison between Adam’s disobedience and Christ’s active obedience in our place as the Sinless Man. He accomplished all that Adam failed to do in history, and lifted us far above what Adam could ever have accomplished by his obedience! No wonder Isaac Watts adds that beautiful verse to hymn # 441 in our hymnal, speaking of Christ’s healing and saving power:

*Where He displays His healing power,
Death and the curse are known no more:
In Him the tribes of Adam boast
More blessings than their father lost.*

Let us praise with new thankfulness Christ’s work in its superiority to Adam’s.

Sat/Sun: read Romans 5:18-21. We see this week the importance of Christ’s representative headship. Only He could stand in our place as the one sinless Man; only He could carry the weight of our infinite guilt as the all-powerful Son of God. If all of Israel rejoiced to have their David win the contest on their behalf against Goliath (1 Samuel 17:9, 51), we have a much mightier King who wins for us an everlasting kingdom and inheritance! He is truly God’s Last Word and our “Last Adam” who undoes all the damage of our first father.

For further reflection this weekend, consider the following exchange between Christian and Faithful, Christian’s fellow traveler on the journey to the celestial city in John Bunyan’s classic, Pilgrim’s Progress. Faithful recounts his encounter with his sinful forefather Adam as follows:

Christian: *Did you meet with no other assault as you came?*

Faithful: *When I came to the foot of the Hill called Difficulty, I met with a very aged Man, who asked me, What I was, and whither bound? I told him, that I was a Pilgrim, going to the Celestial City. Then said the old man, Thou lookest like an honest fellow; wilt thou be content to dwell with me for the wages that I shall give thee? Then I asked him his name, and where he dwelt? He said his name was Adam the First, and he dwelt in the town of Deceit. I asked him then, What was his work and what the wages that he would give? He told me, That his work was many delights; and his wages, that I should be his Heir at last. I further asked him, What House he kept, and what other Servants he had? So he told me, That his House was maintained with all the dainties in the world; and that his Servants were those of his own begetting. Then I asked how many Children he had? He said that he*

had but three Daughters: The Lust of the Flesh, The Lust of the Eyes, and The Pride of Life, and that I should marry them all if I would. Then I asked how long time he would have me live with him? And he told me, As long as he lived himself.

Christian: *Well, and what conclusion came the old man and you to at last?*

Faithful: *Why, at first, I felt myself somewhat inclined to go with the man, for I thought he spoke very fair; but looking on his forehead, as I talked with him, I saw there written, Put off the old man with his deeds.*

Christian: *And how then?*

Faithful: *Then it came burning hot into my mind that, whatever he said, and however he flattered, when he got me home to his House, he would sell me as a slave. So I bid him forbear to talk, for I would not come near the door of his House. Then he reviled me, and told me that he would send such a one after me, that should make my way bitter to my Soul. So I turned to go away from him; but just as I turned myself to go thence, I felt him take hold of my flesh, and give me such a deadly twitch back, that I thought he had pulled part of me after himself. This made me cry, O wretched Man (Romans 7:24)! So I went on my way up the Hill Difficulty.*

Meditate and Pray: Bunyan's words about the old man Adam speak to us of our sin nature apart from saving grace. Adam as a type of sin nature gave us his original sin and guilt. But we can pray for deliverance from him as follows: "Lord Jesus, no matter how the flesh of our former family ties to sinful Adam pull at us and painfully rend our bodies, give us faith to believe your words, that it is better for us to lose a hand or an eye if that is what it takes to get away from Adam, our predecessor in sin. Please help us to 'put off the old man with his deeds,' and to say no to the fair words of our sin nature, which always promises dainties but actually delivers enslavement. Thank you most of all, Jesus, that you are so honest with us, declaring to us that we indeed must die to self and live for you. You honestly speak to us of the Way of the Cross, and your words promising us pain in the way of discipleship are true and trustworthy. Thank you that you live in the town of Truth and Grace, and not in the town of Deceit. Make us lovers of the truth, and willing followers of your footsteps. We pray this in your name, Amen."